



## Grammaticalization of personal pronouns

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### Abstract

Grammaticalization theory deals with regularities of grammatical change. The theory has been used to describe and explain a wide range of linguistic phenomena. There has been some tremendous work on the development of person agreement markers, unfortunately most of the articles neglected the aspect of how personal pronouns arise. This could be owed to the reason that personal pronouns differ in their diachronic behavior presenting a challenge to grammaticalization theory. In this paper, the diachronic sources of each of the main categories of personal deixis were investigated based on a cross-linguistic perspective. The paper has also addressed the question of how, or to what extent, the development of personal pronouns is covered by grammaticalization theory.

**Keywords:** English, grammar, nouns, pronouns, sentence, syntax

### Introduction

Grammaticalization is a process leading from lexemes to grammatical formatives. The term 'grammaticalization' was first coined by Antoine Meillet in 1912, and is applied to the concept for which it is still used today (Lehmann, 2002) [12]. A number of semantic, syntactic and phonological processes interact in the grammaticalization of morphemes and of whole constructions. A sign is grammaticalized to the extent that it is devoid of concrete lexical meaning and takes part in obligatory grammatical rules.

The idea that grammatical formatives evolve from lexemes, that affixes come from free forms, was first observed in '*Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*' a work written by French philosopher Étienne Bonnot de Condillac in 1746 (Lehmann, 2002) [12]. He explained the personal endings of the verb through agglutination of personal pronouns and maintained that verbal tense came from the coalescence of a temporal adverb with the stem.

Grammaticalization theory has been used to describe and explain a wide range of linguistic phenomena. While there have been some tremendous work on the development of person agreement markers, unfortunately most of the articles neglected the aspect of how personal pronouns arise. Reason attributed to this neglect was cited by (Heine, 2010) [8, 9] as follows

*"Markers for personal deixis belong to the most conservative parts of grammar, that is, they are diachronically fairly stable, as is suggested by the fact that in many cases they can be traced back etymologically to or even beyond the earliest stages of reconstructable language history."*

This paper investigates the diachronic sources of each of the main categories of personal deixis based on a crosslinguistic perspective. Additionally, it has also addressed the question of how, or to what extent, the development of personal pronouns

is covered by grammaticalization theory. Finally, the paper will highlight some general findings presented and draw attention to areas where more research is required.

### Personal pronouns

Every language in this world has a set of pronouns that are in most of the cases diversified and complex especially in societies characterized social casts and status such as those observed in Asia like India, Japan and in African continent (Heine & Song 2010) [8, 9].

In personal pronouns, the boundaries between personal pronouns and other kinds of person markers are watery. In a previous study, Siewierska (2004) [13] rightly points out that 'different instantiations of the category of person are best viewed as defining both a diachronic and a synchronic cline in regard to their formal and functional properties'. Unfortunately, there is so far no diachronic reconstruction of this cline based on crosslinguistic data. Whether or not a given element conforms in every respect to our definition is not a matter of major concern in this paper.

There has been an existence of controversies on the grammatical status of personal pronouns. Thus the parameters of grammaticalization consider that: Personal pronouns are usually shorter than nouns and verbs. Again, unlike nouns, personal pronouns have a schematic meaning that can be described fairly exhaustively in terms of a few elementary conceptual distinctions, most of all relating to personal deixis and number (desemanticization). Additionally, personal pronouns have a more restricted categorial potential than lexical categories, frequently lacking e.g. the ability to take modifiers or inflectional and derivational affixes (deategorialization). If a singular and corresponding plural form is suppletive then this is more likely to apply to the first than to the second or third person as rightfully shown by Heath (2004) [5]. The majority of the languages of the world show person marking on the verb (Heine, 2010) [8, 9].

There are two contrasting positions on the typological status of person markers. At one end there are those who maintain that 'I' and 'you' are universal in some sense, and that grammaticalized expressions for them are to be expected in any language. This is a view that surfaced in crosslinguistic surveys of the mid-20th century. Thus, Forchheimer (1953) <sup>[3]</sup> maintained that 'the distinction of speaker, addressed, and neither speaker nor addressed is universally found' and Greenberg's (1963) <sup>[4]</sup>. It has also been assumed universally that the presence of three persons and two numbers to be characteristic of pronominal categories in all languages. At the other end, researchers such as Muhlhauser and Harre (1990) <sup>[11]</sup> have expressed their doubts on whether these deictic concepts are really universal while Cysouw (2003) <sup>[2]</sup> concludes that every language can mark person in some way, but whether every language has a category of person remains unproven.

### Grammaticalization

Since the development of grammatical forms is not independent of the constructions to which they belong, the study of grammaticalization is in the same way concerned with constructions, and with even larger discourse segments (Hopper & Traugott 2003) <sup>[10]</sup>. One main motivation for grammaticalization consists in using linguistic forms for meanings that are concrete, easily accessible, and/or clearly delineated to also express less concrete, less easily accessible and less clearly delineated meaning contents (Heine, 2010) <sup>[8, 9]</sup>. A wide range of criteria were used to identify grammaticalization (Hopper & Traugott 2003) <sup>[10]</sup>. A number of notions have been proposed, such as syntacticization, morphologization, obligatorification, subjectification, etc., and several alternative frameworks offer convenient tools for describing grammaticalization phenomena.

It was believed that there is range of processes that were considered to be cases of grammaticalization viz as: Extension, Desemanticization, Decategorialization and Erosion. Each of these parameters concerns a different aspect of language structure or language use. The ordering of these parameters reflects the diachronic sequence in which they typically apply. Grammaticalization tends to start out with extension, which triggers desemanticization, and subsequently decategorialization and erosion. Erosion is the last parameter to come in when grammaticalization takes place, and in a number of the examples to be presented below it is not involved.

### 1. Extension

In extension, linguistic expressions are extended to new contexts that invite the rise of grammatical functions in a context-induced reinterpretation. Of all the parameters, extension is the most complex one. This is because it possesses socio-linguistic, a text-pragmatic, and a semantic component. The sociolinguistic component concerns the fact that grammaticalization starts with innovation or activation, whereby some speaker or a small group of speakers proposes a new use for an existing form or construction, which is subsequently adopted by other speakers, ideally diffusing throughout an entire speech community (Heine, 2010; Croft 2000) <sup>[8, 9, 1]</sup>. The text-pragmatic component involves the extension from a usual context to a new context or set of

contexts, and the gradual spread to more general paradigms of contexts. The semantic component finally leads from an existing meaning to another meaning that is evoked or supported by the new context.

### 2. Desemanticization

This concept is also called 'semantic bleaching' and is the loss or generalization in meaning of the content. Heine *et al.* (1991) <sup>[7]</sup> had shown that desemanticization is frequently triggered by metaphoric processes. For example, a paradigm case of grammaticalization involves a process whereby body part terms such as 'back', 'breast', etc. are reinterpreted as locative adpositions such as 'behind', 'in front', respectively in specific contexts. In metaphorical transfer, concepts from the domain of physical objects (body parts) are used as vehicles to express concepts of the domain of spatial orientation (extension), while desemanticization has the effect that the concrete meaning of the body parts is bleached out, being reduced, or giving way, to some spatial schematics.

### 3. Decategorialization

This is loss in morph syntactic properties characteristic of lexical or other less grammaticalized forms. Generally, decategorialization tends to be accompanied by a gradual loss of morphological and syntactic independence of the linguistic item undergoing grammaticalization. A linguistic expression that has been desemanticized, e.g. from a lexical to a grammatical meaning, it tends to lose morphological and syntactic properties characterizing its earlier use but being no longer relevant to its new use. Decategorialization entails in particular the changes such as loss of ability: to be inflected, to take on derivational morphology or to take modifiers (Heine, 2010) <sup>[8, 9]</sup>.

In agreement to above changes, nouns undergoing decategorialization tend to lose morphological distinctions of number, gender, case, definiteness, the ability to combine with adjectives, determiners, etc., to be headed by ad-positions, they lose the syntactic freedom of lexical nouns, and the ability to act as referential units of discourse.

On the other hand, verbs undergoing decategorialization tend to lose their ability to inflect for tense, aspect, negation, etc., to be morphologically derived, to be modified by adverbs, to take auxiliaries, to be moved around in the sentence like lexical verbs, to conjoin with other verbs, to function as predicates, and to be referred to by e.g. proverbs. Finally, they change from open-class items to closed-class items.

### 4. Erosion

Erosion is also described as phonetic reduction, it is the loss in phonetic substance. Due to the effect of grammaticalization on lexical terms, a linguistic expression tends to lose parts of its morphophonological substance. Erosion can be morphological or phonetic. In the former case it leads to the loss of entire morphological elements, and in the latter to the loss of phonetic properties (Heine & Reh 1984). Phonetic erosion involves any could results due to: loss of phonetic features or segments, including loss of full syllables, loss of suprasegmental properties, such as stress, tonal distinctions, or intonation as well as loss of phonetic autonomy and adaptation to adjacent phonetic units

## 5. Conclusion

Grammaticalization theory has been used to describe and explain a wide range of linguistic phenomena. Since the development of grammatical forms is not independent of the constructions to which they belong generalizations on the conceptual domains that appear to provide the major cognitive templates for the development of personal pronouns has been a subject of concern in this paper. Thus the paper discusses a number of simplifications of the phenomena examined. These phenomena are the product of a multitude of communal acts of language use extending over long periods of time. They are based on hypotheses on how people interacted in the past, rather than on 'facts' that are readily accessible to the student of language use.

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