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Degrees and dimensions of grammaticalization in Chitimacha preverbs

Abstract

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It is well known that grammaticalization (whereby lexical items develop into grammatical ones; Meillet 1912; Hopper & Traugott 2003:2) is a composite phenomenon, consisting of a number of micro-level changes that give rise to broader patterns (Lehmann 2002:108–153; Norde 2009:120). While a form might exhibit a high degree of grammaticalization in terms of desemantization, for example, it may also have undergone little to no grammaticalization in terms of syntactic reanalysis or phonetic reduction. To study the degrees and dimensions of grammaticalization, then, I adopt a multidimensional approach, which assumes that there is more than one way for a construction to exhibit grammaticalization, and that these dimensions of grammaticalization can therefore be analyzed independently of each other (though they may strongly covary).

Using a corpus of 87 texts in Chitimacha (ctm) recorded by Morris Swadesh with the last two speakers in the 1930s (Swadesh 1939), I show how these differences in the degree and dimensions of grammaticalization result in vastly different synchronic behaviors for the system of preverbs in the language. Though preverbs in Chitimacha clearly constitute a unified class with certain core functions, their individual behaviors are diverse and multi-functional, even for forms which share the same grammaticalization pathways. While this type of synchronic polyfunctionality and distributional differences are often explained as the result of functional divergence and semantic persistence in grammaticalization (Hopper & Traugott 2003:94–98, 118–121), such a description would be insufficient to account for the state of affairs for Chitimacha. Only when the degree and dimension of grammaticalization are accounted for does the synchronic behavior of Chitimacha preverbs become explainable.

References

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