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Lexicalization and language change (review)

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REVIEWS

Lexicalization and language change. By LAUREL J. BRINTON and ELIZABETH CLOSS TRAUGOTT. (Research surveys in linguistics.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. xii, 207. ISBN 0521540631. \$39.99.

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The 'Cambridge research surveys in linguistics' is a relatively new series intended to provide non-textbook reviews of linguistic areas of significant interest. The study of lexicalization is a paradigm example of such an area of inquiry, conceptualized as it is in a myriad of (often contradictory) ways. Few people are as qualified to tackle this definitional disorder as Laurel Brinton and Elizabeth Closs Traugott, both of whom have published extensively on the subject. In *Lexicalization and language change* they present a comprehensive summary of earlier research on lexicalization and grammaticalization, as well as a cogent framework of their own, encompassing both lexicalization, grammaticalization, and their respective reverse processes. This makes the book an indispensable reference work for anyone interested in lexical and grammatical change.

Ch. 1 is a brief introduction to the contexts of the field of study, that is, previous approaches to grammar, lexicon, language change, lexicalization, and grammaticalization. Treating lexicalization in relation to grammaticalization is wise, since the two are like love and marriage: in some studies they are identified as mutually exclusive, while in others they are not properly kept apart, with the same examples being classified as now lexicalization, now grammaticalization. Outlining the theoretical preliminaries, B&T take the functional-typological approach, which, as opposed to generative linguistics, is primarily concerned with language use and how this shapes the grammars of particular languages. It implies a gradient view on language change, since it does not consider universals of language to be autonomous, language-independent absolutes. Rather, it deals with (crosslinguistically regular) tendencies. This gradient approach is pervasive throughout the book, including B&T's views on concepts of grammar and lexicon. In the subsequent sections, B&T outline synchronic and diachronic perspectives on both lexicalization and grammaticalization, and they present the diachronic issues that form the central questions for the remainder of their work.

Ch. 2 provides an extensive review of earlier definitions of lexicalization. Traditionally, lexicalization has been treated as word formation in the broadest sense, including compounding (*blackboard*), derivation (ranging from the purely semantic, such as *un-*, to forms with grammatical meaning, such as agentive *-er*), conversion (category shift, e.g. from N to V (*to calendar*)), and clipping (*phone*). There is also a brief discussion of institutionalization—the conventionalization of new forms resulting from word formation.

Diachronically, lexicalization has been dealt with, somewhat confusingly, in the sense of both fusion and separation. Lexicalization as fusion involves a complex structure becoming simpler, with or without (considerable) semantic change, for example, the development from syntagm to lexeme (*mother-in-law*) or from complex to simple lexeme (*lord* < OE *hlafweard* 'loaf guardian'). The latter type may also give rise to derivational morphemes such as adjectival *-ly* (from OE *lice* 'body, likeness'). Lexicalization as separation concerns the emancipation of bound morphemes into free morphemes (*isms*).

In Ch. 3, B&T discuss the overlap between lexicalization and grammaticalization in earlier studies, showing that examples involving fusion, such as *today* (< OE *to* + *daege* 'at day.DAT') have been considered lexicalization by some, grammaticalization by others. Possibly the most controversial examples are derivational morphemes such as *-hood* (< OE *had* 'state, rank'), not only because they involve fusion, but also because suffixes such as *-hood* lose their original referential content, a process of 'bleaching' otherwise associated with grammaticalization. B&T convincingly argue that the observed similarities between grammaticalization and lexicalization are motivated by the fact that both can be seen as the result of the intricate interplay between speaker production and hearer perception. In the next sections they discuss the relation between grammaticalization, lexicalization, and degrammaticalization at some length, and in the last

section of this chapter they return to the status of derivation and its relation to inflection, both from a synchronic and a diachronic point of view.

Having reviewed the vast literature on lexicalization, grammaticalization, and the relations between the two, B&T finally present their own approach in Ch. 4. This is the central chapter of the book, in which B&T aim to develop an integrated model, capturing both lexicalization, grammaticalization, and their respective reverse processes: delexicalization (or antilexicalization) and degrammaticalization (antigrammaticalization). B&T define the lexicon as ‘an inventory of both ‘lexical’ and ‘grammatical’ units’ (89), and hence both lexicalization and grammaticalization involve ‘adoption into the inventory’ (90). They furthermore present a theory-neutral view on grammar, which according to them ‘is dynamic, allows for constructions, gradience, and degrees of productivity’ (91). This implies that there exists a continuum between open and closed classes, between obligatory suffixes (inflections) and suffixes that change the semantics of lexical items relatively free from morphosyntactic constraints (derivational affixes such as *un-*), and between free forms and bound forms. B&T identify similar three-stage clines for degrees of lexicality and degrees of grammaticality, which can be seen to reflect both synchronic variation and diachronic change. B&T go on to discuss similarities and differences between grammaticalization and lexicalization, showing that the same processes may be involved, but with different effects. For example, coalescence is found in both grammaticalization and lexicalization. In grammaticalization this may eventually result in zero forms, but in lexicalization it never does. B&T conclude the chapter with a chart containing twelve processes, six of which are said to be typical of both grammaticalization and lexicalization, while an additional six are exclusive to grammaticalization.

Ch. 5 is entirely devoted to ‘gray area’ case studies, all from the history of English, which are notoriously difficult to capture in terms of grammaticalization or lexicalization. These are present participles, multiword verbs (both phrasal verbs such as *nod off*, prepositional verbs such as *frown on*, and phrasal-prepositional verbs such as *send away for*), adverbs formed with *-ly*, and discourse markers.

In Ch. 6, B&T conclude their findings and suggest directions for future research. A twenty-four-page reference section, where I have found no major omissions, and three indices (among them a very helpful index of words and forms) conclude the book.

Lexicalization and language change does exactly what it promises: it offers an exhaustive overview of previous work and presents a clear and workable model of its own. Its principal merit lies in the integrated approach to both phenomena in Chs. 4–6, which successfully captures the observed differences and similarities between lexicalization and grammaticalization that have been discussed in the preceding chapters.

Nevertheless, a few criticisms are also in order. To begin with, the title of the book does not cover its contents. The book is as much about grammaticalization as it is about lexicalization, and hence a title such as ‘Lexicalization and grammaticalization: An integrated approach’ would have been more appropriate. Another editorial shortcoming is the table of contents, where level-three headings have been omitted.

A more fundamental problem concerns the density of the encyclopedic first chapters, which make these the less reader-friendly part of the book; without some prior knowledge of research in the field these chapters will probably be difficult to follow. To some extent, this is the inevitable result of the terminological proliferation and confusion in earlier work on grammaticalization and lexicalization. But it is also due to the fact that B&T merely summarize earlier works without immediately evaluating them. In many cases, it would have been helpful if B&T had hinted at their own points of view in controversial matters. For example, in Ch. 2 (47–60) B&T observe that lexicalization has been associated both with fusion and with increase in autonomy (clippings and conversions); this is utterly confusing, but we have to wait until p. 98 to learn that in B&T’s definition, lexicalization always involves fusion, and hence that clippings and conversions should not be considered lexicalization in their view. Obviously, then, ‘adoption into the inventory’ is not restricted to lexicalization and grammaticalization. This is not necessarily a problematic position—on the contrary, I agree with B&T that the conception of lexicalization as an all-compassing process obscures differences in type and function and the processes by which these

come about (108), but it would have been helpful if this had been stated explicitly somewhere in Ch. 4. Instead it has to be inferred from the text.

A related problem is that the discussion of some topics is scattered throughout the book, which makes it difficult to distill B&T's view of them. This is true, in particular, of derivation, admittedly a major stumbling-block, as B&T readily admit in their preface. Derivation has been treated as both lexicalization and grammaticalization in the literature, in some cases even by one and the same author (e.g. Lehmann 1989), so B&T's book would seem to offer the perfect forum for tackling this problem once and for all; but due to the fragmentary and not entirely consistent treatment of it, its status remains unresolved. Derivation is discussed in various sections, but it is not always clear whether B&T are referring to the derivational suffix per se (e.g. *-wise*), the derived form as a whole (e.g. *clockwise*), the word-formation process (*clock* > *clockwise*), or the historical development of the suffix (in this case, from a noun meaning 'manner'). It is evident that B&T regard the derived forms as a whole as lexicalization, and the word-formation process as preceding lexicalization. What is not evident, however, is how they view the suffix itself, or its historical development. According to their own chart on p. 110, (the development of) a derivational suffix has positive scores for all grammaticalization characteristics with the exception of subjectification (but then it is doubtful whether subjectification really is a characteristic of all types of grammaticalization anyway, a problem that cannot be discussed here). For example, they are semantically bleached and decategorized (i.e. they lose morphosyntactic characteristics such as inflection), and they become fused and (often) phonologically reduced. And crucially, like grammaticalized items, but unlike lexicalized items, they are often productive and frequent. I think this can be solved by distinguishing between the derivational affix (grammaticalization) and the derived form (lexicalization). Thus, when Himmelmann (2004:28) is uncertain whether derivation is an instance of grammaticalization, lexicalization, or possibly 'a process *sui generis*', I would say that it is a process *sui generis*, in the sense that it is BOTH lexicalization and grammaticalization (see Lightfoot 2005 for a somewhat similar argument).

A final comment is that the strong focus on English (with occasional reference to other, mostly Indo-European, languages) 'for reasons of time and resources' (x) creates the risk that B&T's theoretical model may not be universally applicable. It is not inconceivable that the relevance of fusion and coalescence is less evident in isolating languages, which 'do not allow yesterday's syntax to become today's morphology' (Ansaldo & Lim 2004:345). To their credit, however, B&T make no universalistic claims; instead they hope that 'despite these limitations of coverage' the book 'will provide guidance and inspiration for those who wish to pursue the matter further' (x). My comments above on the status of derivation are to be understood in exactly this way. To my mind, B&T's work is an admirable achievement, which should form the point of departure for any work on lexical and grammatical change for years to come.

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