



Semantic Shifts

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Semantic Shifts: From lexicon to grammar. Diachronic and typological perspectives

Minor lexical categories as sources and targets of semantic change

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The first studies on semantics (e.g. Paul, ⁴1920, 1980; Bréal, 1897) were exclusively concerned with etymology and semantic change. It was not until a few decades later that the distinction between diachronic semantics and synchronic semantics became established under different labels, even if historical perspectives were still dominant (cf. Ullmann, ³1967, Rastier, 1987). While the synchronic studies on meaning were largely formulated in terms of lexical fields (cf. Trier, 1931) and structural relations (cf. Lyons, 1963; Cruse, 1986), the semantic changes observable for members of major lexical categories (N, V, Adj, Adv) were essentially couched in terms of types of change going from a basic meaning into opposite directions. The most important types distinguished were changes in extension (narrowing – widening), changes in evaluations (amelioration vs. pejoration), accretion vs. loss of meaning and changes in abstractions (abstraction vs. concretization). Moreover, the rhetorical strategies of metaphor and metonymy were also identified as giving rise to semantic change (cf. Leisi, 1973). It was not until ‘grammaticalization’, i. e. the development of lexical items to grammatical markers, was delineated as a field of study or ‘theory’ that the perspective on changes of meaning was widened considerably, so that semantic change became an important part of historical linguistics, especially since it also includes a typological perspective. The results of this development can be summarized as follows:

- The focus of diachronic studies of meaning shifted from major lexical categories to so-called minor ones, i.e. pronouns, connectives of various types, focus markers, discourse markers, etc.
- In the domain of minor lexical categories general tendencies of change, of sources and targets of change from lexicon to grammar, were discovered and formulated, which furthermore seem to be quite similar across languages (cf. Heine & Kouteva, 2002; Traugott & Dasher, 2002).
- New explanations for semantic changes became possible, in addition to psychological mechanisms and the standard ones due to economy and expressibility.

The focus of my talk are general semantic changes in the development of minor lexical categories, such as demonstratives, focus markers, connectives and adverbs of various kinds, intensifiers as well as reflexive and reciprocal markers. Based on a variety of previous studies on these lexical domains (e.g. Koenig, 2015), my lecture will analyze the pervasive semantic developments from lexicon to grammar, their sources and targets, their renewal and reinforcement, as well as their role for the structure of modern languages. The data will primarily be taken from Indo-European languages, with occasional excursions into the structures of Japanese, Chinese, Finnish and other languages. The methodology used includes the use of historical texts and dictionaries, comparative

reconstruction, introspection, paraphrase, componential analysis and experimental semantics, without neglecting the basic insight of structuralism with regard to the unity of the sign, as comprising both a *signifiant* and a *signifié*. The major body of the talk is closely related to recent and current work in grammaticalization, but the parameters and forms of change considered are primarily semantic ones (bleaching, conventionalization of conversational implicatures, bridging contexts, development of semantic prosodies, etc.).

The lecture will reveal a wide variety of similarities in the semantic changes observable across languages and thus provide insights into the nature of semantic change itself.

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