

## Diagnosing grammatical change in English

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The question this paper seeks to answer is how grammatical change can be identified, with a focus on a single language, English. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the descriptive adequacy of diagnostics for grammatical change that have been proposed in the literature, especially in studies of grammaticalization.

Grammaticalization research has been one of the most productive areas in the study of language change in the past decades with many studies focusing on English. It may seem that the question of diagnostics has long been answered in the highly influential publications that marked the beginning of grammaticalization research. Lehmann's (1982, 1985) parameters and Hopper's (1991) principles, in particular, have been widely applied to substantiate semantic argumentation. However, there are several reasons for asking this question again. Firstly, even though individual diagnostics have been criticised (e.g. Lehmann's parameter of condensation or scope reduction by Tabor & Traugott 1998, Roberts & Roussou 2003), the diagnostics have never been systematically assessed as fit for purpose. Reference works use the same posterchild examples, such as the development of *going to* from a fully lexical verb into a future marker, to illustrate the range of diagnostics. In individual studies, diagnostics are often applied in an 'à la carte fashion' (Norde 2012: 75) rather than systematically as a full set. Secondly, the early diagnostics were developed in typological work and typically identify degrees of grammaticality in languages that mark grammatical meaning morphologically. Lehmann's parameters, for example, all measure loss of autonomy on different dimensions. The fit of application to English may not be straightforward. English has a – relatively speaking – well-documented historical record allowing diachronic empirical investigations. English has in its documented history moved from synthetic to analytic marking of grammatical meaning. Grammatical markers in later stages of English are unlikely to evidence loss of autonomy in the same way as morphological markers, if at all. Finally, since the diagnostics were formulated, new empirical resources have become available with the number, variety and size of historical corpora increasing. Many studies have taken advantage of these new resources.

It is not only worthwhile to revisit the issue of diagnostics, it is timely to do so now. On the one hand, a large enough body of case studies of grammaticalization in English has accumulated to undertake systematic assessment. On the other hand, an influential recent development is the incorporation of construction grammar as a framework for modelling of grammatical change (e.g. Hilpert 2013, Traugott & Trousdale 2013). Construction grammars hold that linguistic items are symbolic form-function pairings. In diachronic construction grammar, changes to function/meaning and form have equal weight and any new construction will have undergone both semantic and formal changes. There is thus a need for fit-for-purpose diagnostics to study this formal side of grammatical changes.

This paper takes a two-pronged approach. Firstly, I conduct a theoretical investigation of different potential diagnostics described in the grammaticalization literature. I include the 'traditional' criteria proposed by Lehmann (1982, 1985), Hopper (1991), as well as more recent proposals by Himmelmann (2004) and Bybee (2003, 2006). The purpose of the investigation is three-fold: (1) to exclude criteria that cannot be used as diagnostics in empirical studies, e.g. Hopper's principle of layering refers to the fact that different items express the same grammatical meaning in a synchronic slice of the language, which does not tell us anything about grammatical change affecting a particular item but about the expression of grammatical meaning in a language; (2) to discuss definitions, including possible different interpretations of and criticisms levelled against individual diagnostics; (3) to establish what types of empirical data are needed to test different diagnostics, e.g. morphophonological reduction can be

evidenced by a single example, but other diagnostics depend on negative evidence or on quantification of data. This information is important as it allows diagnostics to inform the design of empirical studies.

The second approach involves an empirical investigation in the form of a survey of formal evidence identified in case studies grammaticalization in English (Breban & De Smet 2012). In order to establish an unbiased sample, we used a bibliographical data base search. The LLBA was searched for all articles that were published in peer-review journals with 'grammaticalization' or variant term in their title, abstract or descriptors in the period 1990-2010. We checked for each article whether the semantic definition of grammaticalization was equivalent to the standard definition of Hopper & Traugott (2003). Articles describing the same change were taken together resulting in a sample of 32 changes to be surveyed. All articles were read through and any formal evidence was noted. We relied on descriptions rather than diagnostic labels. Where necessary, observations were checked against historical data or other studies not included in the sample (e.g. book-length studies). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the survey shows that only very few of the traditional diagnostics are attested. There is small set of diagnostics that recur frequently: internal fusion e.g. *in stede of* > *instead* (Lehmann 1982), collocational expansion (Bybee 2003, Himmelmann 2004), as well as changes in syntactic behaviour, e.g. agreement or modification patterns. These changes involved both reduction of possibilities (Hopper's (1991) decategorialization) as well as the acquisition of new ones (cf. Denison's (2006) loss and gain model). I conclude by combining the theoretical and empirical observations in an overview of attested diagnostics and advice for their operationalisation.

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