

Connecting language change and non-language mechanisms: English and German speakers' use of existential constructions against the backdrop of cognitive grammaticalization theory

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In this paper, I will argue that it may be the very common non-language (cognitive) mechanisms of inferencing, chunking, priming, and analogical thinking that account for the different grammaticalization paths that English and German existential constructions follow and the extent to which they follow through with their paths. In keeping with the theory of complex adaptive systems, the parameters functioning in the ever-widening domain of grammaticalization are viewed here in terms of domain-general psycholinguistic processes and from the point of view of the speaker (see the works by Beckner, Bybee, Ellis, Fischer, Hopper, Traugott, among many others). I will illustrate this view with examples of change from the history of English and German existential constructions with a locative adverb, which have been interpreted as instances of grammaticalization in Pfenninger (2009, 2013). I intend to have a fresh look at those grammaticalization processes; the main question is: how much of what seems to happen in the development of existentials is really grammaticalization or linguistics at all, and how much is domain-general? The comparison of the grammaticalization paths of English and German existentials shows that grammaticalization is affected on all sides by contemporaneous structures that are similar to the one undergoing change in both form and function (Fischer 2008: 341). In turn, grammaticalization can also tell us about the nature of language (see Bybee 2008).

While the potential of relating the above-mentioned psycholinguistic mechanisms to grammaticalization processes has already been pointed out in the recent (psycholinguistic/grammaticalization) literature (e.g. Beckner & Bybee 2009; Bybee 2002, 2008; Bybee & Beckner submitted; Ellis 2002; Fischer 2007, 2008; Jäger & Rosenbach 2008; among many others), so far there are no psycholinguistic approaches which have explicitly linked these processes with the development of a specific language change phenomenon in two different languages. Particularly the (aborted) grammaticalization path of the German existential *da*-construction still stands on relatively weak empirical pillars compared to the English existential *there*-construction. As a result of the gradualness of this type of language change, and the fact that in any particular language the linguistic structure under investigation might be anywhere on its path, there is a severe lack of cross-linguistic comparison in this field.

Keywords: grammaticalization; existential constructions; German; English, chunking; analogy

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