Category change from a constructional perspective: Introduction

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1.   Linguistic categories: discrete or gradient?

The classification of the lexicon into categories (in the sense of 'word classes' or 'parts of speech') has been a fundamental matter of concern in linguistics since ancient times and still forms the center of interest in recent publications (e.g. Baker, 2003; Panagiotidis, 2014; Simone & Masini, 2014; Vogel & Comrie, 2000). However, the criteria for defining and delimiting the different categories have shifted according to trends in linguistic theory (Hopper & Thompson, 1984). Langacker (1987, p. 2) correctly states that "[E]very linguist relies on these concepts but few if any are prepared to define them in an adequate, explicit, and revealing way". Classifications based on a fixed set of formal and semantic properties, have significant shortcomings, since morpho-syntactic behaviour turns out to be highly language-specific (Croft, 2001; Haspelmath, 2007, Evans & Levinson, 2009). Furthermore, there is no one-to-one mapping between linguistic categories and semantic concepts (in the sense of Langacker, 2002). Sapir (1921, pp. 123-126) already observed that not all verbs are inherently concerned with actions, nouns with things or persons, or adjectives with qualities. In many languages, qualities are expressed by verbs (in inchoative contexts this is possible in English too: *it reddens*). Similarly, nouns like *height* refer to a quality, and nouns like *fall* refer to an action. For Croft (2001, p. 46), this ultimately implies that "syntactic categories are derivative of — in fact epiphenomenal to — the representation of grammatical knowledge". On this view, categories

can be defined in two ways: either construction-specifically, as "the class of fillers of a particular role in a single construction", or cross-constructionally, as the "class of fillers that has an identical distribution across the relevant roles for all constructions in a language, or at least some specified set of constructions in the language" (ibidem). In other words, a construction-specific category is the class of words that can occur in the empty slot in a specific constructional schema such as the definite NP construction [*the __*]NP (e.g. *box, woman, rich, poor* but not *perfectly*, *your*). A cross-constructional category is a group of words that typically occur in the same constructions, e.g. count nouns occur in the definite NP construction just given, but also in the plural construction, the binominal compound construction, and so on.

Alternatively, studies building on the Neogrammarians' view (e.g., Paul, 1891) and/ or insights from prototype theory (e.g., Rosch, 1975), such as Lakoff (1987), Geeraerts (1997), Ramat (1999) and Bauer (2005), claim that lexical categories should not be seen as monolithic unities but as (structured) bundles of (formal, functional and semantic) features. This is the mainstream position in current versions of functional-cognitive linguistics and two major implications may be drawn from it. On the one hand, certain lexical items may be more prototypical members of a particular lexical category than others ('subsective gradience' in the sense of Aarts et al., 2004; Aarts, 2007). On the other hand, lexical items may combine properties of different categories ('intersective gradience', ibidem). Note however that these observations do not necessarily imply that categories have 'fuzzy' boundaries. Newmeyer (1998, pp. 165-208) defends the generative view that categories are discrete, and that particular items may belong to more than one category. From a diachronic perspective however, it makes more sense to adopt the view of gradient categories, because intersective gradience explains why shifts from one category to another occur so frequently: synchronic gradience may thus reflect diachronic gradualness (Geeraerts, 1997; Traugott & Trousdale, 2010; for a processing-based account of gradualness in change see De Smet, 2016).

2.   Category change

Category change, broadly defined as the shift from one word class to another, is inherent to different processes of change, yet a comprehensive typology of these processes and their defining features is missing to date (see also Van Goethem, 2017). Processes of category change without any formal marker, such as conversion and transposition (i.e., the process by which a lexical item is inserted in a position intended for items belonging to another lexical category), are often treated on a par, as rightly observed by Valera (2004, p. 32): "Many pairs affected by processes other than conversion have been described as conversion, no doubt because the effects of those processes are the same, that is, because they result in unmarked word-class change". Apart from minor processes of category change, such as back-formation (e.g. *babysitter*$_N$ > *baby-sit*$_V$), and accidentally category-changing processes such as reduplication (e.g. *gishiri:*$_N$ 'salt' > *gishiri-gishiri*$_A$ 'salty' in Hausa (Inkelas & Zoll, 2005)) and ablaut (e.g. *spreek*$_V$ 'to speak' vs *spraak*$_N$ 'speech' in Dutch), the most important category-change processes include the following:

a.   derivational affixation, e.g. *happy*$_A$ > *happi-ness*$_N$

b.   conversion: Dutch *gek*$_A$ 'crazy > *gek*$_N$ 'fool'

c.   transposition: French *Elle est d'un courageux* 'lit. She is of a brave; She is very brave, cf. Kerleroux, 1996; Lauwers, 2014)

d.   reanalysis: *the key*$_N$ *to success* > *a key*$_{N/A}$ *point* > *Customer satisfaction is very key*$_A$ *to us*, cf. Denison, 2001, 2010; De Smet, 2012).

Whereas derivation by affixation and conversion are morphological and context-independent processes, transposition is by definition dependent on a specific syntactic context. However, the boundary between the processes is not absolute, as suggested by cases such as *Elle est d'un calme!* 'lit. She is of a calm; She is very calm' (Kerleroux, 1996), in which the nominal nature of *calme* can be accounted for by both conversion and context-internal transposition. Category change can also be linked to processes of univerbation involving structural reanalysis (Denison, 2010), e.g. the use of English *far from* as an adverbial downtoner as in *The life of a beauty queen is far from beautiful* (De Smet, 2012), or the development of the Middle High German pronoun *neizwer* 'somebody' out of the sentence *ne weiz wer* 'I don´t know who' (Haspelmath, 1997, p. 131). Another type of category change involving reanalysis is one in which an item shifts category in the wake of the category shift of another item, e.g. the shift of Swedish adverbs in *-vis* to adjectives when the head of a VP is nominalized (*Samhället förandras gradvis*ADV 'Society changes gradually' vs *Den gradvisa*ADJ *förändringen av samhället* 'The gradual change of society'). Finally, category change by means of reanalysis may be part of a grammaticalization process, i.e. "the change whereby lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions and, once grammaticalized, continue to develop new grammatical functions" (Hopper & Traugott, 2003, p. 18), such as the reanalysis of English *to be going to* from main verb to future auxiliary (*I am going to the train station vs I am going to be a star*).

The different types of category shift mentioned above can be arranged on a continuum, from abrupt to gradual and from context-independent to context-sensitive. While the A > N conversion of for instance Dutch *gek* 'crazy; fool' is abrupt and context-independent, N > A shifts are often the result of a gradual process, starting out in a specific syntactic environment (the 'bridging context', cf. Heine, 2002). This has for instance been shown in the case of the emergence of the adjectival uses of English *key* (*This is really a key point*), which emerged in

the attributive position and gradually expanded to other typically adjectival contexts, such as the predicative one (Amiot & Van Goethem, 2012; Denison, 2001, 2010; De Smet, 2012; Van Goethem & De Smet, 2014).

Another distinguishing criterion between the different category-change processes is directionality. Whereas in earlier work (e.g. Lehmann, 1995 [1982]; Haspelmath, 2004) the view prevailed that only changes from major to minor categories are possible, research on degrammaticalization (Norde, 2009) has shown that changes from minor to major word classes, albeit less frequently attested, are possible as well. In addition, specific items have been shown to change category more than once in the course of their histories, in alternating stages of grammaticalization and degrammaticalization. One example is the degrammaticalization of the Dutch numeral suffix -*tig* '-ty' into an indefinite quantifier meaning 'dozens', followed by grammaticalization into an intensifier meaning 'very' (Norde, 2006). Another example is the autonomous (adjectival/adverbial) use of Dutch intensifying prefixoids (Booij, 2010, pp. 60-61), such as Dutch *reuze* 'giant', which underwent multiple category changes (Van Goethem & Hiligsmann, 2014; Norde & Van Goethem, 2014, forthc.), first from noun to intensifying affixoid (*reus*$_N$ 'giant' > *reuzegoed* 'very good/well') (grammaticalization) and later on into an adjective/adverb (e.g. *reuze*$_{ADV}$ *bedankt* 'thanks a lot') (degrammaticalization). Finally, category shift may be 'non-directional', in the sense that the input and output categories may be of the same level, e.g. in shifts from one major word class to another (such as the shifts from N to A and vice versa exemplified above), or the transference of nominal case markers to verbal tense – aspect markers, such as the shift, in Kala Lagau Ya, from dative marker –*pa* to (verbal) completive marker (Blake, 2001).

Category change has been mostly studied as part of other changes. In theorizing about grammaticalization and lexicalization, which featured prominently on the linguistic agenda in the 1990s and the 2000s, category change was generally considered an inherent part of

grammaticalization or lexicalization changes which by definition involve shifts in the status of lexical or grammatical morphemes (cf. Lehmann, 1995 [1982]; Hopper & Traugott, 2003; Brinton & Traugott, 2005). However, in spite of the considerable merits of these works, recent studies have pointed out that the morpheme-based approach of the grammaticalization framework is insufficient to account for all properties of category change. Since then, focus has shifted to the relevance of constructions and context to language and language change. The application of insights from Construction Grammar (cf. Goldberg, 1995; Croft, 2001; Hoffmann & Trousdale, 2013) to language change (Bergs & Diewald, 2008; Fried, 2009; Hilpert, 2013; Traugott & Trousdale, 2013) has recently gained a lot of interest should be interpreted in this context.

3.   This volume

The central aim of this volume is to rethink the notions of category and category change from a diachronic Construction Grammar perspective, in order to explore whether category change can be explained more accurately by analysing it as an instance of "constructionalization" (Bergs & Diewald, 2008; Traugott & Trousdale, 2013), which involves "a sequence of changes in the form and meaning poles of a construction, whereby new formal configurations come to serve particular functions, and to encode new meanings" (Trousdale & Norde, 2013, p. 36). More specifically, the papers in this volume address one or more of the following research questions:

(1) Are categories grammatical primitives, or are they defined by the constructions they occur in (cf. Croft, 2001, pp. 46-47)?

(2) What is the status of category change in a diachronic construction grammar framework (e.g. Traugott & Trousdale, 2013) and how can the different types outlined above be accounted for?

(3) How can the notions of gradualness and context-sensitivity be modelled in a constructional framework? Does the gradualness of some category shifts imply that categories synchronically form a "continuous spectrum" (Langacker, 1987, p. 18) or does it merely mean that a given item may belong to two or more categories whereas "the categories in question can nevertheless be clearly delimited" (Aarts, 2007, p. 242)?

(4) Is category change a change in form which together with a change in meaning constitutes constructionalization and if so, is it the shift itself or changes in morphosyntactic properties (e.g. decategorialization) that are associated with it?

(5) How does the distinction between lexical and grammatical constructionalization relates to the different types of category change (abrupt vs gradual, morphological vs syntactic, context-independent vs context-sensitive, word-level vs construction-level)?

(6) Which role can be assigned to the notion of 'category' in constructional networks?

Many of the papers in the present volume are thus concerned with the question of whether category change can be fruitfully analysed as the emergence of a new construction, i.e. a new form-meaning pairing. After all, the shift from one category to another involves formal changes because the item has to adopt the morphological and syntactic properties of the new category it belongs to, and this is logically reflected at the functional-semantic level too. Other papers however, show that constructionalization is not involved in all types of category change. Geert Booij and Jenny Audring, for instance, focus in their contribution on semantic coercion in syntactic and morphological constructions which does not (necessarily) lead to the creation of an item belonging to a new category. Conversely, in his contribution on preverbs in Chitimacha, Daniel Hieber states that constructionalization may not only result in category change but even in category genesis, i.e. the creation of previously non-existing categories. The emergence of a not pre-existing, and hybrid, category is also at the heart of Muriel Norde and Caroline Morris'

contribution on the diminutive prefixoid construction in Dutch. Furthermore, several papers show that the constructionist approach offers the advantage of accounting for the variety of input categories of the shifts, ranging from morphemes (cf. the study by Malte Battefeld, Torsten Leuschner & Gudrun Rawoens on evaluative morphemes in German, Dutch and Swedish, and by Nikos Koutsoukos on the shift of the suffix *-idz(o)* in Griko on the contentful-procedural cline) to multi-word units (cf. the study on the emergence of downtoner uses for Dutch *ver(re) van* 'far from' by Kristel Van Goethem, Gudrun Vanderbauwhede & Hendrik De Smet). The impact of context-sensitivity on the diachronic development of a new category is highlighted in Lauren Fonteyn & Liesbet Heyvaert's treatment of English gerund constructions and in David Denison's paper on the status of *long* in idioms such as *I won't be/take long*. Evie Coussé's article demonstrates the close relation between category change (in grammaticalization) and the process of host-class expansion (in the sense of Himmelmann, 2004). Finally, Graeme Trousdale's commentary at the end of this book synthesizes the commonalities and different viewpoints that can be found across the contributions to this book. His focus is on the creation of new categories and the restructuring of existing categories seen from the perspective of Construction Grammar.

Taken together, the different contributions in this volume provide convincing evidence of the benefits of a constructional approach to categories and category change. The units undergoing category change may vary in complexity and schematicity, in the same way as 'constructions' do. In addition, Construction Grammar provides a valuable account for particular features involved in certain category-change processes, such as context-dependency, gradualness (possibly resulting in defectiveness), and possible counter- or non-directionality of the change, given the fact that constructionalization does not presuppose unidirectionality in language change.

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