Grammaticalization in the generative framework

According to Kurylowicz (1965:52), “grammaticalisation consists in the increase of the range of a morpheme advancing from a lexical to a grammatical and from a less grammatical to a more grammatical status”.

The grammaticalization process is characterized by the following properties (Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994): (a) it can lead to cliticization or affixation of the grammaticalizing item, (b) it is a gradual process, (c) it involves a meaning change (semantic bleaching) of the grammaticalizing item, and (d) it is a unidirectional process (i.e., lexical items can develop into grammatical items, but not vice versa).

The theoretical discussion of grammaticalization mainly takes place in the framework of functional linguistics. In the generative framework, the grammaticalization process can be captured in terms of the development from a lexical head to a functional head (Van Gelderen (1993); Haspelmath (1994); Roberts (to appear); Roberts & Roussou (2000)). Since functional projections are in the centre of interest, grammaticalization phenomena are potentially of great importance to the generative approach.

The existing generative analyses of grammaticalization phenomena are mainly concerned with morphosyntactic changes. In the literature on grammaticalization it has been shown that next to these morphological changes there are recurrent semantic pathways along which grammatical categories pass in the course of their historical development. These semantic dimensions can be detected even when the detailed morphosyntactic changes are rather different (Van Kemenade & Vincent 1999:22).

My aim in this talk is to investigate how the properties of `semantic bleaching' (c) and unidirectionality (d) can be explained in the generative framework.

In the first part of the talk, I will summarize several examples of grammaticalization found in the literature. These examples all involve further grammaticalization of items which have already grammaticalized to a certain extend and that can be taken to be generated in a functional projection. The purpose of this overview is to show that grammaticalization invariably involves raising of grammaticalizing items in the hierarchy of functional projections as proposed by Cinque (1999). In this hierarchy, the main TMA-categories are ordered in the following way:

(1) Mood_{assertive} \rightarrow Mood_{epistemic} \rightarrow Tense \rightarrow Modality \rightarrow Aspect

For example, aspect markers either originate from main verbs or they are derived from other aspect markers. It can be seen from (1) that aspect projections are dominated by all other functional projections. Since lowering is not permitted, it is excluded that tense morphemes grammaticalize into aspect morphemes. Tense markers may evolve through at least four different channels. They can be derived from aspect markers, adverbs expressing aspectual meanings, modality markers or other tense markers. These possibilities follow from the fact that the category Tense dominates both Modality and Aspect in (1). Furthermore, epistemic mood markers can originate as modality markers, and evidential mood markers as modality markers and tense markers. The reverse developments appear to be unattested. Again, these developments are in line with the hierarchy in (1), in which the category Mood dominates both Tense and Modality. My conclusion is that the unidirectionality of the grammaticalization process follows from a general ban on lowering.

In the second part of the talk, I will illustrate the grammaticalization process with two specific examples from Middle Dutch and Modern Dutch. First, I will argue that the restriction to leftward movement accounts for both synchronic and diachronic variation in the domain of Dutch modal verbs. Second, I will discuss the historical development of the Dutch infinitival marker te 'to'. I will show that te is a grammaticalized morpheme which developed from an irrealis modality marker into a Tense (Past) marker, thus `climbing' in the hierarchy of functional projections (cf. (1)).

I will conclude that the hierarchy proposed by Cinque (1999), which is based on synchronic data from a wide range of languages, is also valid in the diachronic dimension.
References