The grammaticalization of K(case) phrases:

Roberts and Roussou (R & R) (2003) is the most recent account of grammaticalization within Minimalism, and they deal with three functional categories: I(nflectional)P(hrase), C(omplementiser)P(hrase) and D(eterminer)P(hrase). There is another functional category that has not yet been analysed, namely K(case)P(hrase), and in this paper I analyse the grammaticalization of this category within Minimalism. In my analysis I demonstrate three things: 1) R & R’s hypotheses regarding grammaticalization also apply to KPs 2) Vincent and Borjars’ (V & B) (2010) assertion that formalism and functionalism should not be seen as mutually exclusive is verified 3) synchronic analyses of syntactic theory can be applied in diachronic syntax, which verifies Saussure’s notion that synchronic linguistics is logically prior to diachronic linguistics.

Generative models of language change argue that language acquisition is the locus for language change where ‘re-analysis’ is the key step (Lightfoot (1999:chapter 3)), and R & R (2003) employ a cue-based model of language acquisition where the linguistic environment consists of ‘cues’. Hopper and Traugott (H & T) (1993:2-4) argue that there are three key steps in the ‘re-analysis’ of the grammaticalization of English going to > gonna: a) going to implies directional movement and futurity simultaneously b) the interpretation of going to denoting directional movement is undermined in the absence of an overt directional phrase c) futurity is the only possible interpretation of gonna. In generative grammar, these three steps are the ‘cues’ that lead to grammaticalization.

Lightfoot (1999, 2006) predicts that language evolution should be in the form of ‘random walks’ with no cross-linguistic trends, and this entails that the cross-linguistic distribution of ‘cues’ is random. Yet grammaticalization occurs cross-linguistically (Heine and Kuteva (2002)). R & R (2003:2-7) argue that grammaticalization involves ‘simplification’ (i.e. reduction of feature syncretisms), and as ‘simpler’ structures are favoured in language acquisition, grammaticalization can occur cross-linguistically. The grammaticalization of KPs occurs cross-linguistically, as they are attested both in Romance (Ledgeway (2010)) and English (Lightfoot (1999:chapter 5)). In terms of ‘cues’, a) both Romance de and English of denote spatial source and genitival functions simultaneously, and the latter (KP) are ‘simpler’ than the former (PP) since the latter are complements whereas the former are adjuncts, and in generative X'-theory adjuncts require an extra feature-place; both Romance ad and English to denote spatial direction and datival functions simultaneously, and the latter (KP) are also ‘simpler’ since they are complements and the former are adjuncts b) when the morphophonological case paradigms are eroded, the Agree relation between the prepositions (Romance de, ad, English of, to) and their nominal complements is weakened, and the ‘simpler’ interpretations come through c) these prepositions denote case functions in modern Romance and English. KPs therefore conform to R & R’s ‘simplicity’. They also conform to V & B’s assertion that formalism and functionalism are not mutually exclusive, since while they R & R’s ‘rededuction of feature syncretisms’, which are formalist factors (V & B (2010:280-283)), they also display close parallels in their ‘cues’, which are functionalist factors (V & B (2010:280-283)).

The genesis of KPs is also related to the rise of configurationality in Romance and English historical syntax, since both Latin (i.e. the ancestor of Romance) and Old English had a non-configural syntax (Ledgeway (2010), Lightfoot (1999:chapter 5)) whereas Romance and Modern English are both configurational. Non-configurationality models like Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG)
are incompatible with R & R’s ‘reduction of feature syncretisms’ since there is no way in which KPs are ‘simpler’ than PPs in LFG. Configurationality, which is the basis of Minimalism (Kayne (1994)), is therefore the prerequisite for grammaticalization, and this explains why functional categories are rare in non-configurational languages but common in configurational ones. My paper therefore also shows how different synchronic and typological analyses of syntax (non-configurational LFG vs configurational Minimalism) can be applied to explain diachronic trends of syntax, namely the rise of functional categories and grammaticalization.

Bibliography:


