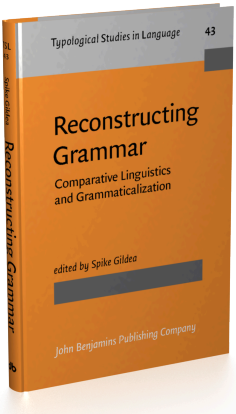
Typological Studies in Language
43

Preface

https://doi.org/10.1075/tsl.43.01pre



Pages vii–xiv of
Reconstructing Grammar: Comparative Linguistics and Grammaticalization
Edited by Spike Gildea
[**Typological Studies in Language**, 43] 2000. xiv, 267 pp.

© John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way. For any reuse of this material written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: www.copyright.com).

For further information, please contact rights@benjamins.nl or consult our website at benjamins.com/rights

Preface

Most of the papers in this volume draw exclusively on data from indigenous languages spoken in North and South America; two papers draw in part (Givón) and in whole (Heine) on data from languages spoken in Africa. Although the prefatory comments that follow refer explicitly only to languages of the Americas, they hold true for minority languages spoken in Africa (and most other parts of the world) as well.

The languages of the Americas show great typological and genetic diversity, and although they are far from exhaustively described, for some linguistic families sufficiently detailed information is available to have allowed comparative reconstruction of sound systems and lexicon. While grammatical study of these languages has contributed somewhat to typological and theoretical linguistic databases, the origins of many of the diverse grammatical patterns remain unknown. Comparative linguists often do not address morphosyntactic patterns in their comparisons, or do so in only the most general of terms. In the absence of regular laws of grammatical change — comparable to regular laws of sound change — it is difficult for a traditional comparativist to clearly identify cognates: for example, can an instrumental nominalizer and an infinitive really be considered semantically similar enough to be potential cognates? What about a nominalizer and a tense marker? What about an adverbializer and a tense marker? What about a free lexical item and a tense marker? The list goes on. In the past, some have even suggested that grammar cannot be reconstructed, thereby declaring the impossibility of really knowing anything about the grammatical past of those languages which were not documented historically (and for which the process of change is thus not attested in actual historical data).

However, within grammaticalization theory — much of which was originally based on attested historical change — linguists have identified many consistent patterns in the evolution of grammar, including the almost universal directionality from independent, concrete lexical item to bound, abstract grammatical morpheme. This allows us to identify likely cognates and, from among these, to

identify which is the likely source and which are innovative forms. We have also learned a great deal about the mechanisms of change, including reanalysis, analogical extension, and contact-induced grammatical change, and we can now recognize the sorts of modern grammatical patterns indicative of each process. This makes it possible for us to approach comparative data with real hope of reconstructing the sources of the great diversity seen in modern languages.

Interestingly, the case studies which form the database for grammaticalization theory have usually relied on either attested historical data or on internal reconstruction. In the process of internal reconstruction, the historical linguist identifies a likely source for a given grammatical morpheme, usually a free lexical item with similar phonological shape and a concrete meaning which plausibly contains the seeds of the more abstract grammatical meaning of the morpheme in question. Evidence for plausibility is usually provided by analogy to some attested case in which a similar source form evolved into a semantically similar grammatical morpheme.

But an additional (and sometimes more important) test of plausibility is the reconstruction of a series of stages through which the formerly free lexical item evolved to become the bound morpheme attested today — that is, one must o er a plausible scenario for *how* the evolution actually occurred. Again, in the absence of attested historical data showing which stages existed in a prior epoch of the language in question, one must become a typologist to motivate the evolutionary scenario. The usual recourse has not been to find an entire analogous chain of stages in some attested historical case-study (such data are not readily available), but rather, for each individual stage, to identify a language in which an analogous construction exists. Thus, a chain of unrelated analogous constructions can be pieced together to illustrate what the evolutionary scenario might have been in the original language under investigation (and by analogy, one might assert that each of the languages which provides an analogous construction for the chain must be at its di erent, respective stage of a parallel historical evolution). Insightful examples of the use of these methods on a broad scale can be found in works such as Heine (1993) and Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca (1994). Comparative data has not usually been used at any point in the process.

My own work in reconstructing the history of Cariban grammar began with exactly this procedure: when I began studying the Panare language, even with my minimal understanding of the grammar of other Cariban languages, it was clear that a great deal of grammatical change had taken place somewhere to make Panare look so di erent from, for example, Carib of Surinam and Hixkaryana. Utilizing the methods of internal reconstruction, I argued that the innovative clause types were the ones in Panare, and that they had come about

via reanalysis of nominalizations into main clause tense and aspect (Gildea 1989a-b, 1993a-b). The internal evidence from Panare hinted at which patterns in other languages might be innovative and which conservative, but could not be conclusive for any language except Panare. Even for Panare, critics of the reconstruction questioned whether any conclusions could be drawn without bringing comparative evidence to bear as well (e.g. Derbyshire 1991; Álvarez 1995, 1996).

Attempts to argue with skeptics were further complicated by the fact that judgements about the plausibility of internal reconstructions are heavily theory-dependent (cf. Givón's contribution to this volume) and therefore require the skeptic to assimilate a large and growing body of literature on grammaticalization in order to properly evaluate the argumentation. And not all of those who read through the grammaticalization literature come away fully convinced that grammatical reconstruction itself is plausible: the posited stages of grammaticalization can be seen as mere hypotheses, plausibility judgements too dependent on intuition and poorly-defined notions like "similar" and "analogous".

Nonetheless, my original internal reconstruction made several predictions about the nature of posited source constructions in pre-Panare, and suggested directions of further change that might be expected in more innovative languages than Panare. When I gathered the available comparative data, I found exactly the predicted source constructions to be widespread throughout the family, and the anticipated further changes attested in a few languages (Gildea 1992, 1998). The existence of these comparative patterns constituted a reality check on the internal reconstruction and made it vastly more reliable in the eyes of skeptics. Further, the comparative patterns disconfirmed some of my earlier hypotheses about Panare grammar, and by revealing source morphology and constructions which had been lost in modern Panare, greatly enriched the grammaticalization scenario (e.g. the innovative progressive, reconstructed to the wrong source in Gildea 1989a, repaired in Gildea 1998 [ch. 12, especially cf p. 205, note 3). In sum, combining the methods of internal reconstrucion with comparative study of grammatical patterns yielded more satisfying results than internal reconstruction alone, both in my own eyes and in the eyes of skeptics.

The papers in this volume represent an attempt to bring together researchers working in grammaticalization theory, comparative linguistics, or both, with the database focused (as much as possible) on the indigenous languages of North and South America. These papers were presented in preliminary form at the Seventh Rice University Symposium on Linguistics, held at Rice University in Houston, Texas, March 26–29, 1997, entitled *The Interface Between Comparative Linguistics and Grammaticalization Theory: Languages of the Americas*. Participants in

the symposium addressed the issue of how to reconstruct grammatical patterns in languages with little or no attested historical data, in particular focusing on the perceived benefits of using comparative data in this endeavor. The contributions by Aikhenvald, Chafe, Gildea, Heine, Meira and Mithun draw upon comparative data to reconstruct grammatical patterns in a way which apparently could not have been done in the absence of a comparative database; in contrast, the contribution by Givón o ers a spirited defense of internal reconstruction and the contribution by Greenberg reminds us that even comparative reconstruction does not arrive at the level of real "proof".

In the remainder of this preface, I summarize the contributions of each chapter to the overall theme of the symposium; of course, each contains its own theoretical discussions, which are germane to additional issues in both historical and synchronic typology.

Aikhenvald looks at language change in both genetic and areal context: Tariana (Arawakan) shows two distinct types of grammaticalization, one in which serial verb constructions yield innovative auxiliaries, the other in which verb compounding leads to innovative new aspectual and switch reference verbal morphology. Comparative work shows that the serialization is common in the Arawakan family, but that the compounding is unique (in Arawakan) to Tariana. Inspection of other languages spoken in the area reveals that compounding is an areal phenomenon, and the Tariana compounding appears to have been created under the influence of Tukano, the sociolinguistically dominant language of the region. A final issue which arises is that Tariana may be in the midst of the accelerated change which sometimes accompanies language obsolescence, such that the borrowed changes might be very recent arrivals, and are perhaps more productive than might otherwise be expected.

Chafe introduces the term 'florescence' to describe the sort of elaboration which takes place in two separate grammatical subsystems in Iroquoian. From a posited Proto-Iroquoian-Caddoan system that distinguished only Agent/Patient for nonspecific third persons (leaving specific third persons unmarked), third person verbal prefixes flowered into a system of 3 genders and 3 numbers for specific third person agents and 3 genders and 2 numbers for specific third person patients. The second area of florescence was in noun incorporation, which, from arguably more modest beginnings in Proto-Iroquoian, became incredibly productive in the northern Iroquoian branch of the family. As Chafe argues, however, it appears that this productivity does not arrive at grammatical licence to incorporate any noun into any verb — apparently each combination is treated by speakers as a separate lexical item, so despite the great productivity of the

system, it does not constitute a case of grammaticalization *per se*, but rather of prolific lexicalization (a theme which arises again in Meira's contribution).

Gildea reconstructs the constituency relations that give rise to five di erent patterns of constituency in the verb phrases of modern Cariban languages. The most productive source is the Genitive-Noun relation, in which the noun is etymologically a nominalized verb and the possessor (the Genitive) is a notional argument of the verb root that has been nominalized. Di erent sorts of nominalizations are possessed by di erent notional arguments, so that after the nominalizations are reanalyzed as main clause verbs, the reanalysis yields SV/OV (absolutive-V) verb phrases, OV verb phrases, and in one construction, an AV verb phrase. One modern ergative clause type shows no evidence for a verb phrase; the inflected form of the verb in this clause type evolved from an unpossessible participle form of the verb. And finally, modern reflexes of the Proto-Carib verbal system indicate that we must reconstruct an OV verb phrase when A is third person, but no arguments internal to the verb phrase when A is not third person. This range of patterns and their sources could not have been discovered in the absence of comparative data, but it must be said that the individual reconstructions could as well have been done by internal reconstruction as comparative, especially in the absence of intermediate stages in the reanalyses.

Givón explicitly embraces internal reconstruction and provides theoretical arguments in favor of taking internal reconstruction seriously even in the absence of comparative data. He suggests that comparative reconstruction is not better, but simply di erent, and that most important hypotheses about grammatical change in any given language can already be formulated on the basis of data internal to that language (an assertion which is consistent with my own experience). Thus, Givón eschews any data from related languages as he tackles his own "Mount Everest of Internal Reconstruction": the layers of grammaticalization that have formed the complex verbal morphology of Tolowa (Athabaskan), with 15 prefix slots and one su x slot. As he concludes, his reconstruction is "the best hypothesis compatible with the synchronic facts of the language, with Tolowa's typological situation, and with what is known about universals of syntactic change and grammaticalization." Yet even from the top of the mountain, Givón recognizes "It may well be that comparative evidence… may force us to modify this complex hypothesis in whole or in part." If future comparative reconstruction is done on the Athabaskan verb complex, it will be interesting to see how well the hypothesis based on internal reconstruction holds up.

Greenberg argues against the position of the skeptic, the one who always wants more "proof" before accepting a hypothesis as interesting. He argues that what

counts as “proof” in historical linguistics has changed dramatically over the years, and that we should therefore take with a grain of salt the current fashion in favor of fairly conservative methodology. While he explicitly addresses issues of genetic relatedness rather than reconstruction of grammar, his argument is relevant to the current collection in two ways: first, if the goal of science is to seek “proof”, then comparative linguistics is su ciently short of the standard that the di erence between Givón’s internal reconstruction and any comparativist’s comparative reconstruction will be insignificant, as neither will ever reach the standard of “proof”. But second, if the goal of science is to use the tools at hand to create the best picture possible of an object of study, then even though our reconstructions of grammar will never be more than hypotheses, they can nonetheless be very interesting hypotheses, worth the trouble of developing and testing to whatever extent possible. By this reasoning, internal and comparative reconstructions would both be equally valid undertakings (although not necessarily equally reliable!).

Heine, invited as an outside participant to this symposium otherwise solely of Americanists, provides a nice case-study of grammaticalization chains across related languages. Portmanteau morphemes indicating person, number and gender show di erent clausal distribution in the languages of the Khoe (Khoisan) family, occurring variously as nominal clitics, free pronouns, nominal modifiers or within the verb phrase. As Heine shows, the chain begins with a marker only of specific third person pronouns, then becomes obligatory on third person pronouns and begins to occur optionally with demonstrative attributes, and finally arrives at a stage where the markers are obligatory with all pronouns and demonstrative attributes, and occur optionally with numeral attributes. As Heine explains, such cross-linguistic chains are interesting both because they allow us to more easily understand synchronic patterns in the related languages (i.e. “why” the languages that mark numeral attributes also mark demonstrative attributes), and also because they allow us to hypothesize certain historical reconstructions that are “beyond the scope of alternative methods of historical analysis” — simply put, looking only at the most advanced language in the chain, we might have guessed the source of the morphemes, but we could not have deduced the order in which they began occurring on di erent parts of speech.

Meira discusses the evolution of an apparent Split-S system in several languages of the Cariban family. The systems are synchronically perplexing because, although verb morphology clearly identifies two categories of intransitive subjects (S_A and S_O), none of the expected semantic features of such systems can be found in any of the languages in question (i.e. these are clearly not agent-patient or

active-inactive systems). Why would such a system have evolved in the absence of a motivating function? Using the methods of internal reconstruction, Meira shows that the source of most S_A verbs is a morphological detransitive, which derives reflexive, reciprocal, and middle-type verbs from transitive verbs; for unknown historical reasons, the detransitive morpheme requires that S be indicated with the same (or similar) morphology as the A of transitive verbs. Following a typologically well-attested path, many of the reflexive verbs undergo semantic change, becoming a new series of middle verbs and replacing etymologically prior underived intransitive verbs. As this lexical innovation moves through the lexicon of each language, at some point it becomes su ciently frequent that there appears to be typical, productive agent-patient or active-stative system. But as Meira shows, this is simply an illusion created by the S_A-like morphology which arrives as a travelling companion with the innovative middle verbs.

Mithun considers the contribution of comparative data to the question of how inflectional morphemes might change their order in the verbal complex, being "externalized" to a position outside of derivational morphemes. Mithun's two case-studies come from morphology organized in typologically distinct ways, the templatic type organization of Iroquoian and the layered type organization of Eskimoan. In Yup'ik (Eskimoan), certain derivational su xes (nominalizers) were reanalyzed as inflectional su xes; those derivational morphemes which normally followed these a xes were then "outside" of the inflectional marker. In the layered morpheme structure of Yup'ik, the nominalizers always had the option of occurring at the end of the complex of derivational morphemes, immediately preceding person-marking su xes; similarly mood markers frequently occurred first in the complex of inflectional su xes, just following the derivational complex and just preceding the person-marking su xes. Once the nominalizers were reanalyzed as mood, they simply stopped occurring earlier in the derivational complex and were reanalyzed from the last position in the derivational complex to the first position (joining prior mood markers) in the first position in the inflectional complex. In Cherokee (Iroquoian), an old causative/instrumental nominalizer was reanalyzed as an infinitive (perhaps under the influence of contact with Muskogean or Caddo). The problem is that while instrumental is an inner derivational su x in the templatic-type morphology of Cherokee, the infinitive is an outer inflectional su x. The mechanism for the apparent "jump" again appears to be fortuitous adjacency: all the derivational su xes which occur between the instrumental and the inflectional su es are optional, and thus the innovative function (the infinitive) would have frequently been adjacent to the other inflectional su xes, providing the opportunity for

reanalysis of the same forms into two di erent categories, the conservative internal derivational a x and the innovative external inflectional infinitive.

This collection showcases interesting descriptive and comparative work, all of which is based on field work by the researchers in question. One hopes that in future research, more linguists will consider the benefits of bringing both a comparative perspective and an understanding of grammaticalization to their field work.

References

Álvarez, José. 1995. “Split ergativity and NP/pronominal a x complementarity in Taurepán Pemón (Cariban)”. Presented at Summer Meeting of the Society for the Study of Indigenous Languages of the Americas, Albuquerque, NM, July 8–9.

Álvarez, José. 1996. “Construcciones progresivas en pemón e panare: ¿Nominalización o reanalisis?” Presented at IX Jornadas de Lingüística ALFAL-AsoVAC, Barquisimetro, November 17–23.

Bybee, Joan, Perkins, Revere and Pagliuca, William. 1994. *The Evolution of Grammar: Tense, aspect and modality in the languages of the world*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Carlson, Robert (ed.). 1989. *Proceedings of the Fourth Meeting of the Pacific Linguistics Conference*. Eugene, OR: Department of Linguistics, University of Oregon.

Derbyshire, Desmond C. 1991. “Are Cariban languages moving away from or towards ergative systems?” In Robert A. Dooley and J. Stephen Quackenbush (eds). 1–30.

Dooley, Robert A. and Quackenbush, J. Stephen. 1991. *1991 Work Papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota Session*, vol. 35. Dallas, TX: SIL.

Gildea, Spike. 1989a. Simple and Relative Clauses in Panare. University of Oregon, M.A. thesis.

Gildea, Spike. 1989b. “Structural correlates to functional change: A Panare nominalizer ‘surfaces’ as main clause aspect”. In Robert Carlson (ed.). 165–189.

Gildea, Spike. 1992. Comparative Cariban Morphosyntax: On the genesis of ergativity in independent clauses. University of Oregon, Ph.D. dissertation.

Gildea, Spike. 1993a. “The development of tense markers from demonstrative pronouns in Panare (Cariban)”. *Studies in Language* 17:53–73.

Gildea, Spike. 1993b. “SOV to VS in Panare: A historical explanation”. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 59:44–63.

Gildea, Spike. 1998. *On Reconstructing Grammar: Comparative Cariban morphosyntax*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Heine, Bernd. 1993. *Auxiliaries: Cognitive forces and grammaticalization*. New York: Oxford University Press.