

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE HISTORICAL CHANGE OF WORD GROUPS IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN LANGUAGES

MATTHIAS GERNER
City University of Hong Kong

Abstract. In this talk, I intend to develop a framework for the grammaticalization/lexicalization of word groups and identify an array of specific theoretical problems that arise when multiple forms embark in coordination on a path of linguistic change. The proposed scheme is designed as a general and universal system, but illustrative data will only stem from three language families in East Asia on which I had the opportunity to publish case studies: Tibeto-Burman, Kam-Tai and Miao-Yao (or Hmong-Mien). In future typological work, I aim at feeding additional data from a representative set of languages into the system.

In this paper, a *word group* is understood as a set of clitics, independent words or multi-word expressions that minimally consists of one element. I define the notion of *word group change* as a historical change whereby all members of the word group undergo coordinated semantic change (in addition to potential sound changes). If the group has only one element, the definition boils down to the classical notions of grammaticalization and lexicalization. The idea of coordinated semantic change does not require all members to advance at the same time and at the same speed, but rather that the changes of all members are interrelated in some way.

There are three basic parameters that orchestrate the historical evolution of word groups, a quantificational factor, a directional factor and a preservative factor. The quantificational parameter states a relationship between the elements of the word group and the number of acquired meanings. The directional parameter pertains to the direction of the changes, either grammaticalization (toward the grammar) or lexicalization (toward the lexicon). The preservative parameter links up to the continuation/discontinuation of the original meanings of word group members.

The typology will cover the following types of word group change each of which will be exemplified with empirical studies in Southeast Asian languages published in previous years

Structure / Phenomena	Attested Language Family
Unique word group changes	
Unigrammaticalization	
<i>Discontinuous</i> : Nominal Classifiers → Singular / Plural Classifiers	Kam-Tai
Unilexicalization	
<i>Continuous</i> : Causative Prefix → Class of Simplex / Complex Verbs	Tibeto-Burman
Polysemous word group changes	
Polygrammaticalization	
<i>Continuous</i> : Verb ‘touch’ → (a) Deontic modal auxiliary; (b) Passive marker; (c) Resultative marker	Kam-Tai
<i>Discontinuous</i> : Verb ‘say’ → (a) Quotative marker; (b) Epistemic modality marker	Tibeto-Burman
<i>Discontinuous</i> : Nominal Classifiers → Size & Speaker-role classifiers	Miao-Yao
Polylexicalization	
Variable word group changes	
Variable Grammaticalization	
<i>Continuous</i> : Demonstrative Pronouns → Definite Articles → Topic Markers	Tibeto-Burman
Variable Lexicalization	
<i>Discontinuous</i> : Partially lexicalized (derivative) affixes	every

Table: Prominent word group changes in East Asia