

From cross-reference to agreement within the possessive noun phrase

Most studies on the diachronic development of agreement take only the clause, i.e. subject/object-verb relations, into account (e.g. Givón 1976, Siewierska 1999, Ariel 2000). However, agreement also obtains within other domains, an important one being the possessive NP. Free possessive pronouns may develop into bound agreement markers much in the same way as subject/object pronouns do: they gradually lose their referential force and formal independence, resulting in bound redundant expressions of grammatical features like person, number and gender. A presumed major factor in this development is the presence of an (in)alienability opposition; markers coding inalienable possession are typically assumed to be shorter, more cohesive, less referential and therefore older than alienable markers (e.g. Haiman 1983, Nichols 1992: 117-122, Dahl & Koptjevskaja-Tamm 1998, Haspelmath 2008). The present paper investigates whether this is indeed so by focusing on the referential potential and formal realization of possessive person/number/gender markers (henceforth referred to as ‘png markers’) in a typological sample of forty languages.

The historical evolution of possessive png markers is hypothesized to follow the clines in (1) and (2) below. The cline in (1) relates to the newly developed four-part typology of png markers by Hengeveld (2012), which classifies a marker on the basis of two parameters: its referential potential on the one hand, and the excluded, optional or obligatory presence of an additional (pro)nominal co-referent within the possessive NP on the other.

(1) Cross-reference/agreement cline

Unique Referential marker

> Appositional Referential marker

> Contextual Agreement marker

> Syntactic Agreement marker

(2) Formal cohesion cline

word

>

clitic

>

inflectional affix

>

fusional form

It is demonstrated that an inalienable png marker never moves further rightwards on the clines than an alienable png marker, and vice versa. For instance, when alienable possession involves a clitic marker, inalienable possession involves any type of marker but a word. Hence, inalienable markers may be referential only if alienable markers are minimally of the same (or of a greater) referential value, and alienable markers may be non-referential only if inalienable markers are non-referential to the same or a greater degree. Furthermore, unlike frequently claimed (e.g. Bybee et al. 1994: 20, Dahl 2001: 28), it is demonstrated that the two grammaticalization processes do not necessarily run in parallel. Interestingly, the data also show that none of the png markers investigated reach the final stage of Syntactic Agreement marker.

These findings are argued to be motivated by a functional asymmetry underlying the expression of possession: whereas inalienable possessors are semantically evoked by their possessees, as the latter denote inherently relational concepts like kinship terms and body parts, alienable possessors are not. As a result, the possessed status of an inalienable noun is more predictable to language users than that of an alienable one, which is reflected in

relatively redundant marking of the former. Presumably, this predictability becomes so high as to license the omission of the png marker over time, rather than governing its development into Syntactic Agreement.

References

- Ariel, Mira. 2000. The development of person agreement markers: from pronouns to higher accessibility markers. In Michael Barlow & Suzanne Kemmer (eds.), *Usage-based Models of Language*. Stanford: CSLI Publications, 97–260.
- Bybee, Joan, Revere Perkins & William Pagliuca. 1994. *The Evolution of Grammar*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dahl, Östen & Koptjevskaja-Tamm, Maria. 1998. Alienability splits and the grammaticalization of possessive constructions. In Timo Haukioja, (ed.), *Papers from the 16th Scandinavian Conference of Linguistics*. Turku: University of Turku.
- Dahl, Östen. 2001. Grammaticalization and the life cycles of constructions. *RASK - Internationalt tidsskrift for sprog og kommunikation* 14: 91-134.
- Givón, Talmy. 1976. Topic, pronoun and grammatical agreement. In Charles Li (ed.), *Subject and Topic*. New York: Academic Press, 151-188.
- Haiman, John. 1983. Iconic and economic motivation. *Language* 59: 781-819.
- Haspelmath, Martin. 2008. Frequency vs. iconicity in explaining grammatical asymmetries. *Cognitive Linguistics* 19.1: 1-33.
- Hengeveld, Kees. 2012. Referential markers and agreement markers in Functional Discourse Grammar. *Language Sciences* 34.4: 468-479.
- Nichols, Johanna. 1992. *Linguistic diversity in space and time*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Siewierska, Anna. 1999. From anaphoric pronoun to grammatical agreement marker: why objects don't make it. *Folia Linguistica* 33.2: 225–251.