
What's wrong with reanalysis?

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Diachronic reanalysis as a mechanism for change has frequently been assumed, but seldom ever investigated critically. This author examines one common version of it introduced in Harris & Campbell (1995) and further expounded on in Campbell (2001). The change of the motion sense of 'going to' into a future tense marker as discussed in Campbell (2001) is used as the primary backdrop from which to voice certain objections concerning their version of reanalysis. One objection is that *reanalysis* cannot be differentiated from Harris & Campbell's *exploratory expressions* and *extension* and therefore cannot be its own distinct mechanism as the authors claim. A second objection pertains to the unprincipled repackaging of change in pragmatic usage to change in the underlying grammar. A third objection is that, if one takes an emergentist approach to grammar, *reanalysis* serves no useful purpose.

1 Introduction

The position that will be put forward is that there is no such thing as diachronic reanalysis. Though reanalysis has in the past and to date been widely advocated, there are many versions of it that differ in many fundamental ways. The current critique therefore is centered primarily on Alice Harris and Lyle Campbell's version of reanalysis conveyed in *Historical syntax in cross-linguistic perspective* (Harris & Campbell 1995) and in Lyle Campbell's article "What's wrong with grammaticalization" (Campbell 2001, *Language Sciences* 23), since arguing against all versions of reanalysis at once would make the task considerably more complex.

Harris and Campbell argue that there are three distinct stages of language change; exploratory expressions, reanalysis, and extension.

- *Exploratory expressions* are expressions produced through the "ordinary operation of the grammar". These are prior to any reanalysis, but they may lead to one.

- *Reanalysis* is a change in underlying structure that does not exhibit any change in

surface structure. The *reanalysis* does not replace the former structure, but produces a second analysis side by side with it, referred to as a multiple analysis approach.

•*Extension* is a change in the surface manifestation without any modification of the underlying structure.

Part and parcel of the distinction between these mechanisms is the claim that they develop chronologically with exploratory expressions first, reanalysis second, and extension third.

(1) *exploratory expressions* > *reanalysis* > *extension*

The crucial importance of this chronology is conveyed quite explicitly by Harris & Campbell (1995) on p.93. It is this chronology which is treated here as an evaluation metric. The logical possibility of the circumstance in which any concept of *reanalysis* would have to be chronologically undifferentiated from the other two stages is what shall be argued in favor of, and should also be considered the null hypothesis which holds that *reanalysis* does not exist.

2 Gradualness

Before proceeding, it is probably useful to introduce an argument from another *reanalysis* critic, Martin Haspelmath, who did not rely any differentiation arguments. I quote this indirectly through Campbell (2001) in order to capture

(Campbell 2001, 147) Commenting on Haspelmath:

Finally, calling upon his criterion of gradualness (limited in his account to grammaticalization only, where reanalysis is asserted to be abrupt), Haspelmath merely asserts that “the changes in question [verb to preposition or complementizer] are gradual rather than abrupt. Verbs do not turn into prepositions and complementizers overnight, but lose their verbal properties and acquire the properties of their new word-class step by step” (Haspelmath, 1998, p. 63; see Heine et al., 1991, p. 65 for background to Haspelmath’s view on gradualness; see also Haspelmath, 2000, pp. 3-4). But once again the test fails. It fails most seriously because there is no such distinction, and the implementation of reanalyses need not be abrupt, but rather typically is gradual in just the way Haspelmath imagines for grammaticalization (see Harris and Campbell, 1995, pp. 48-49).

But *reanalysis* is gradual here only because Campbell is lumping together *reanalysis* with *extension* which is contrary to the main thesis of Harris & Campbell (1995) which holds that they must be considered distinct mechanisms. This is nothing more than sleight of hand, since on p.145 Campbell himself quotes Haspelmath saying that “grammaticalization and analogical extension [Harris and Campbell’s “extension”]

account for the large majority of syntactic changes". Clearly, as with myself, Haspelmath has no problem with *extension*.

Reanalysis is not gradual in Harris & Campbell's own description of it:

(Harris & Campbell 1995, 49)

"As we understand it, reanalysis itself is a discrete process, though the actualization process through which it meshes with the grammar is more gradual. Thus syntactic change has both discrete and gradual aspects."

It is important to note that the primary difficulty with Haspelmath's argumentation is that *reanalysis* is not directly observable and is difficult (impossible) to disprove, but only because it is ad hoc.

3 Differentiation of change mechanisms

We turn now to the differentiation arguments. Campbell, in his (2001) article, illustrates reanalysis in the following way, he says:

(Campbell 2001, 142)

The *be going to* 'future' grammaticalization example (cited above) illustrates reanalysis (see Hopper and Traugott, 1993, pp. 2-3, 61-62). It began with a directional verb in a purposive clause, as in [1]:

[1] *I am going to marry Bill.*

I am going _{Verb of Motion} to marry Bill.

There was then an inference of futurity from purposives: if I am traveling in order to marry, the marriage will be in the future. The purposive *be going (to)* was reanalysed as a future auxiliary with a verb of activity, as in [2]:

[2] *I am going to marry Bill.*

I [am going]_{Future Auxiliary} marry Bill.

Notice that [1] is still fully grammatical also in the directional/purposive sense. Though a reanalysis produced [2], the surface manifestation remained unchanged- [1] and [2] are identical in form, but not in internal structure or meaning.

However, the *-ing* progressive was always capable of denoting futurity (see Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca 1994, 292) a circumstance which persists in to the present, as demonstrated by (2) and (3):

(2) I'm leaving (tomorrow).

- (3) We're building a barn (tomorrow).

From this standpoint then, a future interpretation is not the result of a reanalysis, but is actually a result of what Harris and Campbell refer to as an 'exploratory expression' which operates prior to reanalysis.

(Campbell 2001, 142)

Further developments in the *be going to* example (just mentioned) illustrate extension. After reanalysis, there was an extension so that *be going to* in its future sense could appear with other verbs, not just limited to those which could appear as complements in the purposive and motion verb constructions, which was formerly the situation. Hopper and Traugott say of this:

The reanalysis is discoverable, that is, is manifest, only when the verb following *be going to* is incompatible with a purposive meaning ... *I am going to like Bill, I am going to go to London*. In other words, the reanalysis is discoverable only because the contexts in which *be going to* can occur have been generalized, or analogized [extended], to contexts that were unavailable before (Hopper and Traugott, 1993, p. 3; see also p. 61).

However, the 'going to' construction was also pre-adapted to double up with other verbs, once again with a necessary future interpretation. Consider, for instance, (4) and (5) below:

- (4) I'm leaving to go to Toronto.
- (5) a. Why are you going?
b. I'm going (in order) to go visit a friend.

Example (4) demonstrates that the coupling of verbs was not specific to the grammaticalization, or as Campbell would have it, the *reanalysis* of 'going to'. Example (5) demonstrates that the doubling up of the verb 'go' with both verbs retaining a motion sense. A motion sense would have been similarly possible anytime an intermediate destination could be construed. Thus, the coupling of the construction with other verbs, which Campbell regards as an *extension* (which occurs only after reanalysis), should be considered once again an *exploratory expression*, since it makes use of already existing grammatical possibilities. Furthermore, the difference between the motion and future interpretations rests on the degree to which the relevance of the motion interpretation is bleached, as previously pointed out by Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca:

(Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca 1994, 292)

... the construction can spread gradually from cases where the spatial is

important to cases where both temporal and spatial is important and finally to cases where only the temporal is relevant.

Example (6) is provided to illustrate what a partial bleaching would be like (see also Langacker (1998, 79) for something along similar lines):

- (6) a. So, where might you two be off to in Las Vegas at 4am?
b. We're going to GET MARRIED!

The (b) sentence requires an understanding that motion is involved, but it is presupposed by the question asked and therefore its communicative value is diminished and potentially factored out to some degree. The motion sense in (6b) therefore is important to the extent that it is necessary for creating a proper mental model of the state of affairs, but it is unimportant to the extent that it is not newsworthy. I see no reason that spreading across cases with varying information values such as this could not be regarded as either an *exploratory expression* or an *extension* since it could be seen as either innovative or compliant with the surface grammar at the same time. The problem is complicated by how Harris and Campbell refer to semantic bleaching. They say on page 92 that:

(Harris & Campbell 1995, 92)

Grammaticalization is often associated with “semantic bleaching,” and this “bleaching” is the result of reanalysis or, perhaps better said, it is the essence of the reanalysis itself.

By associating semantic bleaching with *reanalysis* we are left here again with little reason to differentiate any of the three mechanisms in the bleaching of ‘going to’.

4 The issue of pragmatics

One potential way of differentiating pre-*reanalysis exploratory expressions* from post-*reanalysis extensions* would be by determining whether it was a matter of pragmatics or whether multiple grammatical analyses were involved. However, this is a matter that rests in the eye of the beholder.

Consider the following claim by Campbell for reanalysis which I would deem to be a matter which rests solely within pragmatics. He says that:

(Campbell 2001, 144)

In the case of *demonstrative* > *definite article* and of *numeral* ‘one’ > *indefinite article*, the underlying structure of the syntactic construction (the grammatical category) has changed, but the surface manifestation is not modified (precisely as in the standard definition of reanalysis, cited above).

This is the standard fodder of pragmatics. Since all that exists in the early stages of such changes is nothing more than a change in the nature of the pragmatics characterized by a change in the context of usage, we would have just as much reason to identify such early changes as being due to exploratory expressions as we would have to identify the changes with *reanalysis* and post *reanalysis extension*. Furthermore, why does one have to presume a change in underlying structure at all? Pragmatics alone is all one needs. *Reanalysis* is not only ad hoc, but it is superfluous since it applies before any surface manifestation in the grammar and because of this it can do nothing to enable a correct interpretation. In other words, *reanalysis* provides more of a riddle than an answer.

Thus the problem is where Harris & Campbell identify the characteristics of multiple analyses, I identify the characteristic of defeasibility. And defeasibility has long been considered a hallmark indication that something is pragmatic in nature. The issue is parallel, for instance, to the issue of whether there are two words for ‘and’, one which conveys temporal sequence and one which does not, versus whether there is a single word which allows for different pragmatic interpretations. A multiple analysis approach, as I see it, implicitly adopts what is equivalent to a homonymy solution when polysemy or, better yet, vagueness would prove to be the more likely extensional mechanism.

5 Underlying representations?

The final issue to address is that Harris & Campbell’s *reanalysis* makes certain presumptions about synchronic theory that some, especially those that Campbell (2001) is directing his criticism to, would find unpalatable. Campbell’s article takes the position that grammaticalization is not a mechanism of change, but that *reanalysis* is. Later he also takes up the issue of **emergent grammar** advocated by many of the same people who were also grammaticalization enthusiasts. He concludes that:

(Campbell 2001, 157)

While there is nothing inherently wrong with this different outlook, it seems unnecessary to equate it with “grammaticalization”.

Be this true or not, he fails to show why any of the advocates of emergent grammar outlook (and I count myself as one) should be comfortable with *reanalysis*. Harris & Campbell (1995, 50) state that one of the things their theory is based upon is:

Harris & Campbell (1995, 50)

a set of **syntactic constructions** which are part of universal grammar, in the sense that they are always available to be drawn on for alternative expression.

It is certainly the case that not only is this presumption by Harris & Campbell crucial for the concept of *reanalysis* it is also, in fact, its reason for being. It is equally certain that emergent grammarians would reject this view outright. The position of exemplar

theorists, cognitive grammar theorists, theorists subscribing to a usage-based model, and all other miscellaneous emergentists is that there are no underlying forms, universal or otherwise. Given this, how can there be any reanalysis of underlying forms if one does not believe that there are underlying forms? In similar fashion, Harris & Campbell's claim that there are syntactic constructions which are always available for alternative expression is a view which relies heavily on the existence and operational necessity of a code and cannot have any value in theories which explicitly deny the traditional code model view of language, such as; Relevance Theory, Deictic Center Theory, and various social accommodation approaches.

6 Conclusions

We are left then with the conclusion that there serious problems with the concept of *reanalysis*. There have been three major criticisms offered:

- a) There are problems differentiating between *exploratory expressions*, *reanalysis* and *extension*. Since reanalysis acts on underlying forms and cannot be observed, if these distinctions do not hold, reanalysis becomes completely ad hoc.
- b) Embracing multiple analyses creates a variety of awkward repercussions concerning how we regard pragmatics and confuses even more the question of when *reanalysis* occurs.
- c) *Reanalysis* presumes certain theoretical biases that the people that Campbell (2001) addresses do not share. Two among these, which are of major importance, are the existence of underlying forms and the veracity of the code model for language.

On the positive side, a potential program has been illustrated along the way which commits to seeking change mechanisms within pragmatics. This approach might be said to fit in well with a usage-based model of language. It is certainly consistent with the approach taken by myself in McDaniels (2002) in which I made a claim that I wish to reiterate now, namely that change occurs by way of performance not competence.

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