

Paths in the Forest of Reference

Aims and claims

The aim of this paper is to provide a general (language-independent) and unified model as to how person markers can grammaticalize in non-possessive uses and how it can be related to the grammaticalization of definite articles. The central claim is that these linguistic elements follow different paths in the “forest” of semantic and pragmatic concepts, which serves as the scene of their grammaticalization. The hypothesis will be comparatively tested on datasets drawn from various Uralic languages in which (at least a certain degree of) the phenomenon has been reported.

Background and open questions

A recently published, comprehensive chapter on definiteness in Uralic languages (de Smit & Janda 2023, with a rich collection of references in the topic) summarizes and illustrates all the possible means that can indicate definiteness. The picture still remains blurred, however, as the languages under discussion make use of these strategies in quite different ways. Moreover, the distribution of the same strategy may show a significant variation between languages. Unfortunately, there are also contradictions (as also reported in de Smit & Janda 2023) and descriptive gaps in the previous literature as to what extent these strategies are used in the individual languages and how their proper semantics can be characterized.

This paper focuses on the non-prototypical (i.e. non-possessive) use of person suffixes, frequently likened to definite articles. Whether such an extended use of the suffixes can be matched to fully grammaticalized determiners was challenged in many ways in the past decades (e.g. Fraurud 2001, Nikolaeva 2003, Gerland 2014, Simonenko 2014), a returning argument against it being the lack of obligatoriness. It has also been observed that the scope of the use of such person markers is not identical to articles. Furthermore, studies on person markers as determiners are often concerned with the analysis of information structure and tend to arrive at a conclusion that these elements have a discourse-structuring function rather than a truly grammaticalized marking of referentiality.

Division in labor and diagnostic contexts

According to the approach proposed here, the apparent non-obligatoriness and the distributional differences that are found in the individual languages can be accounted for without expelling the grammaticalization-theory. Note that alternative means of definiteness-marking may also be active in a language, more strategies can be combined a principled way, and the ratio of their actual scope may change over time. (E.g. the use of the definite article was different, i.e. much more restricted in Old Hungarian than it is in present-day Hungarian, cf. Author 2013). Therefore, any investigation of potentially grammaticalized person markers should not be carried out without a close inspection of the system of demonstratives, on the one hand, and of all other devices (such as DOM or objective conjugation patterns) the given language makes use of, on the other hand. The true diagnostic contexts that reveal whether a person suffix is grammaticalized and as such, is obligatory are the contexts in which there is no other anchoring device in operation.

The model

Definiteness encodes referential identification, or better to claim, in terms of Lyons (1999), that definiteness is the grammaticalization of referential identifiability. Discourse referents can be identified through four different strategies, as has been claimed *inter alia* by Himmelmann (1997), and Lyons (1999), principally based on Hawkins (1978). These strategies are anaphoric use, associative-anaphoric use, situational use and larger situational

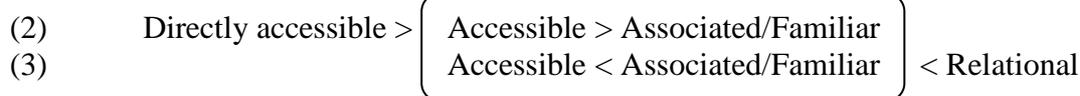
use. Adding a fifth strategy, the associative-situational use (proposed by Author 2017), allows us to construct a more fine-grained model both from a diachronic and from a comparative perspective. According to the proposed model, both the definite article and the person suffixes used as determiners are claimed to emerge as a new grammatical category by spreading from one context to another in which the source category was impossible to use before. The so called bridging contexts are crucial in this process. The only difference is that the direction of spreading shows the mirror image if we compare the path of 'demonstrative-to-article' to the path of the 'person marker-to-determiner'.

Demonstratives originally encode direct accessibility pointing to a referent in the physical context of the interlocutors, but often develop into a marker of simple accessibility encoding that the referent is present in the discourse. The crucial step of the reanalysis is when the original demonstrative appears in associative-anaphoric contexts, where reference is only identified with the help of our background knowledge about the exact relation of a newly appearing expression to a previously mentioned, thus already established discourse referent. (This process has been described and analyzed for several languages, for a recent summary cf. Skrzypek, Piotrowska & Jaworsky 2021). Person markers, originally used to establish relation between entities, follow a different path and start in associative contexts. Grammaticalization takes place when they are used in non-associative contexts to encode direct anaphoras or inherently unique referents, cf. (1).

(1) Strategies for referential identification and a possible change in their markers

	Stage 0	Stage 1	Stage 2
associative-anaphoric use	POSS	POSS	POSS
anaphoric use	DEM	DEM / POSS	DEM / POSS
associative-situational use	POSS	POSS	POSS
situational use	DEM	DEM	DEM / POSS
larger situational use [+U]	∅	∅	POSS

This means that person markers develop into a determiner when they are able to encode familiarity through association, and may further change to mark that the referent is simply accessible in the discourse. Combining the two paths, the path of 'demonstrative-to-article' (2), and the path of the 'person marker-to-determiner' (3), in a common schema (see below) will nicely illustrate that the strategies start from opposite directions, but enter the same semantic field in order to function there as new grammatical exponents.



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