

A Quantitative Perspective on Grammaticalization: The Case of Deverbal Prepositions in English

Tomoaki Hayashi
Kindai University
tomoakihayashi@kindai.ac.jp

Keywords: grammaticalization, semantic bleaching, layering

Previous research on grammaticalization has made qualitative analyses including English “deverbal prepositions”: *concerning*, *considering*, and *regarding* (Akimoto 2014: 179-191). Despite their contributions in clarifying the complicated process of grammaticalization, most studies have mainly focused on observations of each item, due to the different degrees of (i) categorical change and (ii) semantic change involved (cf. Koma 2001: 73-75). Here this study aims to make a comprehensive analysis by focusing on the “synchronic result” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 124) of grammaticalization, “layering” (the co-existence of the older/newer items such as future *will* / *be going to* / *be + ing* / *be + to* (Hopper 1991: 22-24)). We aim to capture the varying degrees of change exemplified by *considering*, *concerning*, and *regarding*, all of which have emerged out of “thinking verbs” and have more or less similar meanings (Akimoto 2014: 190).

The theoretical background of the present study concerns “unidirectionality” of grammaticalization focusing on “deategorialization” and “semantic bleaching”. Decategorialization is “a loss of the optional markers of categoriality” (Hopper 1991: 30). Hopper (1991: 31) provides the following example,

(1) *Considering* its narrow beam, the boat is remarkably sea-worthy.

The *considering* used in (1) gains prepositional property and loses the verbal property, subject agreement: the (understood) subject of the main-/subordinate-clause is not identical (Hopper 1991: 31). Akimoto (2014: 179-191) also points out that such examples termed “dangling participles” have intermediate properties between verbs/prepositions. Of particular note is the fact that the later stages of grammaticalization also entail semantic bleaching, “loss of semantic content” as observed in the one of locational meanings in the future marker *be going to* (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 94).

The procedure of this study is as follows. First, we collected 100 examples of the use of *considering*, *concerning*, and *regarding* from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). Second, we analyzed these examples in terms of decategorialization and semantic bleaching. Each item is classified depending on the categorical behavior: participles (as in (2ab)), prepositions, dangling participles, conjunctions (2c), and others including adverbs, progressives, and gerunds.

(2) a. It was amazing, the ease I could control him with, especially *considering* his weight.
b. For companies *considering* suing to recover the costs of making their systems compliant, ...
c. *Considering that* they grow on marginal sites and require no maintenance, ... (COCA)

The result indicates that in around 20% of the collected examples, grammaticalized items (dangling participle, preposition) are present in spite of the fact that their historical development varies: *considering* was established in 14th century, *concerning* in 16th, and *regarding* in 18th (Görlach 1991: 109). Also, viewing from a synchronic perspective, *considering* is accompanied by semantic bleaching (cf. Ando 2005: 622), whereas *concerning* and *regarding* are not.

In conclusion, the present study has examined *considering*, *concerning*, and *regarding* in relation to layering. We noted that the observed “relational” deverbal prepositions grammaticalized out of thinking verbs exhibit striking similarities in degrees of semantic bleaching. The discussions made here imply that the unified quantitative perspectives also give us a “panchronic” viewpoint (Heine *et al.* 1991), the integration of synchronic and diachronic nature of grammaticalization.

Selected References

- Akimoto, M. (2014). *Zouho Bunpouka to Idiomuka*. Tokyo: Hituzi Shobo.
Ando, S. (2005). *Gendai Eibunpou Kougai*. Tokyo: Kaitakusha.
Görlach, M. (1991). *Introduction to Early Modern English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Heine, B., U. Claudi & F. Hünemeyer. (1991). *Grammaticalization: A Conceptual Framework*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Hopper, P. J. (1991). On Some Principles of Grammaticization. In E. C. Traugott & B. Heine (eds.), *Approaches to Grammaticalization 1*: 17-35. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
Hopper, P. J. & E. C. Traugott. (2003). *Grammaticalization (2nd edition)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Koma, O. (2001). Shuuhun teki zenchishi (setsuzokushi) *save, saving* no bunpouka. In M. Akimoto (ed.) *Bunpouka: Kenkyuu to Kadai*, 73-95. Tokyo: Eichosha.