

Grammaticalization in Southeast Asia

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Languages known as isolating – i.e. languages in which inflectional and derivational morphological processes are absent or extremely limited – have been considered to pose a challenge to the theoretical status of grammaticalization studies. If, following Bisang (2008), isolating and tonal languages do not show grammaticalization tendencies, we would need to consider grammaticalization as a type-specific diachronic process. This would imply that grammaticalization is actually influenced by typology and is not a universal tendency in Language. Another way of approaching the issue is to suggest that only a subset of grammaticalization patterns can be found in isolating and tonal languages, as claimed by Ansaldo & Lim (2004) for the case of suprasegmental features. Clearly the major languages of mainland Southeast Asia, including Sinitic, Tai and Mon-Khmer, offer an important challenge for grammaticalization theories, and indeed for even deeper and wider hypotheses about the nature of language change and language type. This talk reviews our current knowledge of the field and spells out some future directions for research.