Genetic and areal motivations in grammaticalization:
The Papuan languages of Timor-Alor-Pantar

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Similar grammaticalization patterns found across languages do not come about by chance: it is commonly assumed that universal tendencies in human language structure and evolution constrain the pathways and possible outcomes of grammaticalization, irrespective of genetic or areal affiliation (Narrog and Heine 2011). At the same time it is also recognized that similar patterns of grammaticalization found within and across language families may have non-universalistic, socio-historical motivations that go back to genetic or areal relations. However, how historical and universalistic factors interact in grammaticalization is not well-known. This talk investigates grammaticalization from a historical perspective, by studying patterns that are characteristic for one family (A), and comparing them to patterns found in a different family (B) spoken in the same area. This historical perspective assumes that similarities across the languages of family A arise because A has an indigenous, inherited set of structural characteristics that conspire to allow a particular grammaticalisation process to occur across the family; while similarities between family A and family B arise because of contact-induced pressure to replicate structures or meanings from B into A or vice versa.

In this talk family A is the Timor-Alor-Pantar (TAP) family of ~25 Papuan languages spoken in eastern Indonesia (Klamer 2014, Schapper 2014). Family B are Austronesian languages spoken in the same area, comprising both Indonesian (as the dominant national language) as well as local minority languages of the Central-Eastern Malayo-Polynesian (CEMP) subgroup of Austronesian.

The first grammaticalization process to be disscussed concerns the nominal domain. Across the TAP family, we find numeral classsifiers originating from part-of-whole nouns. I will argue that the grammaticalization of numeral classifiers was not only internally motivated (by e.g. the structure of the NP), but also modelled after the numeral classifier function that speakers borrowed through contact with Austronesian languages.

The second process I discuss concerns the verbal domain. Across the TAP family, we find valency-changing verbal prefixes which arose out of a verb in a serial verb construction. Source forms of these prefixes still live on as light verbs, postpositions, oblique markers or verbal particles. As oblique markers and particles they function to encode (non-core) participants of events (e.g. locations, instruments, goals), as verbal prefixes they increase the valency of the verb with one. The extra participant/argument introduced by these "ex-verbs" can have a wide range of semantic roles, and the verbal lexical content of the source form has been bleached. I will argue that the grammaticalization of verbs into markers/particles and verbal prefixes in the TAP family is determined by family-internal typological features, such as their OV constituent order. The role played by family-specific typology can be seen when we compare the outcomes of verb grammaticalisation in TAP with the outcomes of similar types of grammaticalization in Austronesian languages of the area, which generally have VO constituent order. Investigating grammaticalization processes from the perspective of a family allows us to examine the role of family-internal and family-external motivations in the evolution of grammatical items, as a step towards disentangling universalistic from historical factors in grammaticalization.

References

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