SYNCHRONY VS. DIACHRONY: CONTRADICTION OR NOT?

Paul (1975/1880: Chapter 19) postulates what is known today as the **grammaticalization** continuum: syntactic word group (= A) > compounding (= B) > derivation (= C) > inflection (= D). The **gradual** (= non-discrete) nature of this diachronic process is repeatedly emphasized by Paul: "Der Übergang von [A zu B] ist ein so allmählicher, dass es gar keine scharfe Grenzlinie zwischen beiden gibt" (p. 328). "Auf die gleiche Weise wie die Ableitungssuffixe [= C] entstehen Flexionssuffixe [= D]. Zwischen beiden gibt es ja überhaupt keine scharfe Grenze" (p. 349).

This process of grammaticalization exemplifies what Paul calls *Komposition* (= in English, perhaps, 'condensation'), i.e. the "original **non**-analogical innovation" (= *"die ursprüngliche **nicht**analogische Schöpfung"*; emphasis added): "Die eigentlich **normale** Entstehungsweise alles Formellen in der Sprache bleibt daher immer …, die **Komposition**" (p. 325; first emphasis added).

De Saussure's (1916: 242-245) term for *Komposition* is *agglutination*. Our standard examples of grammaticalization were used already by Paul and de Saussure, starting with *amare habeo > (j')aimerai* and *hoc die > hodie >* Italian *oggi*, Spanish *hoy*, French *(aujourd')**hui***.

Diachrony is, and must be, reflected in synchrony: At any given moment, the gradualness of (diachronic) **process** (= change) is reflected as the gradualness of (synchronic) **structure**. This looks like a necessary truth. And yet, it has rather surprising consequences. If grammaticalization exemplifies prototypical change, gradualness can be generalized to change in general; and if change is reflected in structure, it follows that, to the same extent, **qualitative structure does not exist** (with 'qualitative' = 'non-discrete' = 'non-gradual').

A **contradiction** follows, together with the following statement about the status of linguistics in the 1930's: "It was considered a decisive accomplishment to show the existence of **qualitative structure** in the sphere of human life … The basic units of **phonology** and **morphology** were salient exhibits of this cause" (Hymes & Fought 1981: 175; emphasis added).

 As Aristotle notes in his *Metaphysics* (1005b, 10-25), it is the first principle of scientific thinking that contradictions cannot be tolerated (cf. also

Itkonen 2003: 15-16). How should this particular contradiction be resolved? There are several options. Let us single out the following three.

First, we can deny the premise: Grammaticalization does **not** exemplify prototypical change.

Second, we can 'mitigate' the conclusion: qualitative structure is ontologically real in the 'core' of (e.g.) phonological and morphological systems, whereas the 'periphery' exhibits gradualness.

Third, we can accept both the premise and the conclusion, by assuming that qualitative-synchronic structure is **not** ontologically real, but 'only' an **idealization**. This is what Hugo Schuchardt claimed in his 1917 review of de Saussure (1916): "Ruhe und Bewegung bilden wie überhaupt so bei der Sprache keinen Gegensatz [= 'contradiction']; nur die Bewegung is wirklich, nur die Ruhe ist wahrnehmbar." On this interpretation, the primacy of synchrony vis-à-vis diachrony is based on the fallacy of *transitus ab intellectu ad rem*: "De Saussure betrieb keine Ontologie, sondern Methodologie" (Coseriu 1974/1958: 21). Similarly Itkonen (2010): "From the ontological point of view diachrony is primary whereas from the methodological [or epistemological] point of view synchrony is primary."

Fourth, we can accept the ontological reality both of the premise and of the conclusion, by reinterpreting 'qualitative structure' as the **dichotomy** constituted by the two extremities of various **continua**. Hence, as if by miracle, we end up having **both** gradualness **and** non-gradualness. This solution was proposed already by Itkonen (1978):

"Take the distinction between young and old: It would be equally absurd to claim that since **some** people are neither young nor old, **all** people are neither young nor old, or that in reality there are only young people and old people. I hope to avoid both of these fallacies. All distinctions concerned are relative [= gradual], but at the same time they have huge numbers of absolutely clear cases in their favor. Both aspects of these distinctions may be legitimately explored. I for one feel that, in the instances to be explored in this study, the end points of a continuum are more important than its middle section" (p. 109).

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Appendix: Defects of the Neogrammarian Legacy

The Neogrammarian doctrine of linguistic change is generally summarized as a conflict between **two** antagonistic forces, namely **sound change** (= *Lautgesetz*) and **analogy**. But we have just seen that this cannot be right, because Hermann Paul, the leading Neogrammarian, claims that there is also a **third** force (or principle), namely *Komposition*, which in fact represents the **normal** way that languages change. This is serious enough; but there is more. Paul characterizes *Komposition* as "non-analogical". Now, *Komposition* in practice equals what is today called 'grammaticalization'; grammaticalization has two components, namely reanalysis and extension; and **both** of them have been shown to be based on analogy, although in slightly different ways (cf. Itkonen 2002). Clearly, there is some need for rethinking.

Both Paul and de Saussure assume a clear contrast between *Komposition/agglutination* and analogical change: metaphorically speaking, the former exemplifies a steady 'forward movement' whereas the latter exemplifies a 'sideways movement': new **compounds** need not gradually emerge from word groups, but can be analogically (and suddenly) created based on models provided by

existing compounds; similarly, new **derivations** either gradually emerge from compounds or are suddenly created by analogy; and again, the same is true of how new **inflections** come into being.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that, just by looking at a linguistic unit, it is impossible to tell whether it has been produced by *Komposition* or by (traditional) analogy: "Wir können von keiner einzelnen indogermanischen Form wissen, ob sie aus einem syntaktischen Wortkomplex entstanden ist oder ob sie eine Analogiebildung nach einer fertigen Form ist" (Paul 1975/1880: 350). "Dès que l'information historique est en défaut, il est bien difficile de déterminer ce qui est l'agglutination et ce qui relève de l'analogie" (De Saussure 1962/1916: 245).

Paul correctly emphasizes the role that **reanalysis** (= reinterpretation) plays in *Komposition*/grammaticalization. The transition from word group (= A) to compounding (= B) requires that "the underlying syntactic connection can be interpreted as the expression of a unitary notion" (p. 329). Similarly, derivational morphemes (= C) emerge only when the speaker no longer "feels" that they are originally connected with simple words of the stages A and B (p. 347). The same is true, mutatis mutandis, of the emergence of inflection (= D). De Saussure, by contrast, regards *agglutination* as a "mechanical process" which, unlike analogy, involves no "intellectual activity" (p. 244). On this particular issue, Paul is right and de Saussure is wrong.

But Paul (1975/1880) has problems of his own. First, if he really thinks that *Komposition* represents the **normal** type of change, it makes no sense at all for him to introduce this notion in Chapter XIX, i.e. in the fifth-to-last chapter of the book. Second, his discussion of *Komposition*/grammaticalization is seriously lopsided: 20 pages are devoted to compounding, 3 to derivation, and only 1 to inflection. Third, he disastrously uses the same term, i.e. *Komposition*, both for grammaticalization in general and for its first stage, i.e. compounding; for more discussion, cf. Sect. 1 of Itkonen (2011).