

The Linguistic Cycle: Grammaticalization as Economy

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In this paper, I will review two basic Economy mechanisms with which a Minimalist syntax accounts for the linguistic change that is most often referred to as grammaticalization. These two principles are the Head Preference Principle and the Late Merge Principle (see van Gelderen 2004 and also Robert & Roussou 2003). Changes 'caused' by these principles lead into what Hodge (1970) and others have called the linguistic cycle. To give a quick example of the cycle and the principles, take the well-known English change in negatives. In Old English, a negative DP *na wiht* 'no creature' is reanalyzed as a Specifier (through Late Merge, as I will explain) and subsequently as a head *not* of a NegP, as in Fig 1.

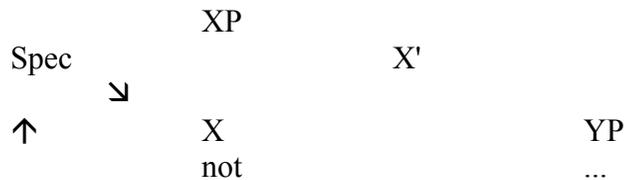


Figure 1: The Linguistic Cycle

Because heads are susceptible to having other heads move through them, they in turn disappear and the cycle starts again.

After this introduction, I identify several similar cycles, concerning Negatives in Finno-Ugric, Clauses in Norwegian dialects, Aspect in Germanic and Athabaskan, Agreement in English, French, and Creoles, and Articles in Scandinavian and Farsi. I then articulate two additional principles to account for why it is that heads grammaticalize to become zero and why lexical phrases can be incorporated as specifiers (and start the cycle again) other than by Late Merge.

As a final part of the paper, I focus on the status of these Principles. I argue that they are part of UG and help learners construct a grammar. Similar to principles such as c-command, they remain active in the internalized grammar and therefore also aid speakers in constructing sentences. They are different in that they aren't absolute: if there is evidence for a pronoun to be both a phrase and a head, the child/adult will analyze it initially as head unless there is also evidence in the grammar (e.g. from coordination) that pronouns also function as full DPs. The cue is therefore essential, and I provide some statistical data on the head-status of Modern English personal and relative pronouns, as well as some evidence from acquisition data that children are in fact analyzing these as heads. The reason that the ultimate change is slow is that there are external factors that favor phrases over heads (e.g. prohibition against stranding prepositions, the rule of using relative *who/m* over the head *that*).