

Tine Breban and Kristin Davidse  
Department of Linguistics  
KULeuven  
tine.breban@arts.kuleuven.ac.be - kristin.davidse@arts.kuleuven.ac.be

### **The development of postdeterminer uses of adjectives: grammaticalization and semantic shift**

In the literature, a use of the adjective has been pointed out which does not describe qualities of entities, but which supports the reference function of the NP, like *famous* in ... *it was made from a skirt of Aunt Eunice -- I expect you've heard of the famous Aunt Eunice* (CB). Bolinger (1967: 19) characterized this use as “intensifier of the determiner”, while Halliday (1994: 183) analysed it as “secondary deictic”, or “postdeictic”, relabelled “postdeterminer” by Sinclair (1990: 70). However, recognition of postdeterminer uses remains elusive in many cases because the semantic import of this functional category has not been elucidated sufficiently with regard to the various types of adjectives that may discharge the postdeterminer function.

Breban (forthcoming) introduced a diachronic dimension to the postdeterminer category by positing for adjectives of general comparison such as *other*, *identical*, etc. that their postdeterminer uses derive from their attribute uses via semantic generalization and grammaticalization in the sense of Traugott (1989), viz. shift from descriptive to textual (reference-supporting) meaning.

In this paper we will extend Breban's grammaticalization hypothesis, both as a diachronic claim and as a general prediction of semantic shift, to some of the main classes of adjectives that have been claimed to fulfil postdeterminer uses. These classes include: fame/familiarity (e.g. *famous*), frequency (e.g. *regular*), location in time (*old*), likelihood (*possible*), obligatoriness (*necessary*), evidentiality (*obvious*), significance (*main*), completeness (*complete*).

First we will investigate, on the basis of data from the Oxford English Dictionary, the Helsinki Corpus and the Corpus of Late Modern English Texts, whether the postdeterminer uses of the adjectives just listed generally do postdate their attribute uses. Secondly, we will examine and compare examples instantiating the gradable attribute meaning and examples in which a postdeterminer use is postposed to a definite determiner. As the presence of a definite determiner embodies identifiability of the referent as a “presupposition” (Van Langendonck 1999), this environment can be expected to strongly foreground the semantic shifts that affect adjectives in their development towards ‘identification-supporting’ meanings. This will allow us to formulate adequate generalizations about the postdeterminer meanings of adjectives in all the various lexical fields, facilitating in turn the recognition of postdeterminer uses across semantic fields. For this data-driven conceptual analysis, we will work with our historical data as well as with synchronic data from the COBUILD Corpus (CB).

#### References:

- Bolinger, D. 1967. Adjectives in English: attribution and predication. *Lingua* 18: 1-34.  
Breban, T. forthcoming. The grammaticalization of the English adjectives of comparison: a diachronic case study. To appear in: R. Facchinetti and M. Rissanen (eds.) *Diachronic corpus linguistics*. Bern: Peter Lang.  
Halliday, M.A.K. 1994. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Arnold.  
Sinclair, J. 1990. *The Collins COBUILD English Grammar*. London: Collins.  
Traugott, E.C. 1989. On the rise of epistemic meanings in English: an example of subjectification in semantic change. *Language* 65: 31-55.  
Van Langendonck, W. 1999. Neurolinguistic and syntactic evidence for basic level meaning in proper names. *Functions of Language* 6/1: 95-138.