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Grammaticalization and Iconicity: Two Interacting Processes

1. Introduction

The subject of this study is the interaction of grammaticalization processes – whereby meaningful linguistic elements become less meaningful – with iconic processes– whereby linguistic structures acquire meaning. Processes, therefore, which are each other’s opposites as it were. In this paper I will be looking at a rather different type of grammaticalization from the usual, i.e. one that concerns not a lexical item that loses its lexical meaning and slowly acquires a purely grammatical function, but one in which a meaningful *position* loses meaning.

The usual type of grammaticalization can best be illustrated by the development of the Latin noun *mens* ‘mind’ into an adverbial marker in the later Romance languages (cf. Hopper and Traugott 1993: 130-31). We can roughly distinguish the following stages:

- (1) 1. (Latin) *humile mente*: ‘with a humble mind’
2. a.(Old French) *humble(-)ment*: ‘in a humble(-)way’
b. *lentement*: ‘in a slow-way’
c. *humble e doucement*: ‘in a humble and gentle-way’
3. *humblement*: ‘humbly’
humblement et doucement: ‘humbly and gently’

At stage (1), the Latin feminine noun *mens* (ablative *mente*) could be used with adjectives to indicate the state of mind in/with which something was done. At a next stage, the phrase acquired a more general meaning (2a), and *mente* came to be used also with adjectives not restricted to a psychological sense (2b). However, *mente* retained some of its independence in that, in a conjoined adjectival phrase, the morpheme did not need to be repeated (2c). Finally during stage (3), the noun fully developed into a inflexional morpheme, the only remnant of the original construction being the feminine <e> ending after the adjectival stem, which now serves mainly as a kind of epenthetic vowel to ease pronunciation.

The type of grammaticalization, which I will consider here, involves cases where there was variation in the position of a lexical element. This variation was at first meaningful, but slowly the position of the lexical element becomes grammaticalized or conventionalized

and finally fixed in one place, thereby losing the meaning which the earlier variants conveyed. I will also show that in this process, as in the more ‘normal’ grammaticalization cases, iconic factors play a role as well.

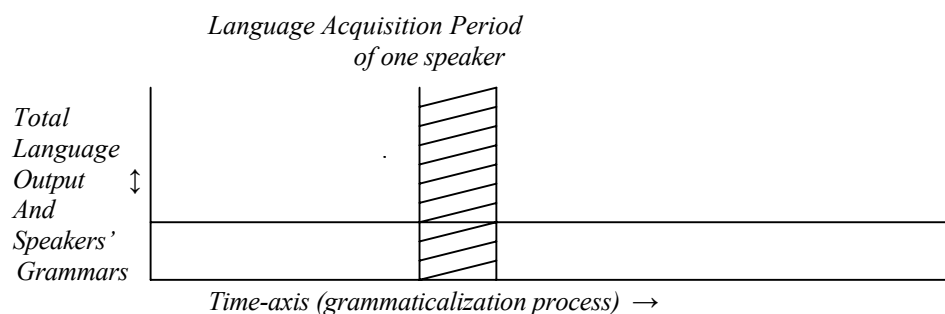
I will briefly describe the concept of iconicity here, for a more elaborate discussion, I refer the reader to Fischer and Nänny (1999). Generally, iconicity refers to any case in which a linguistic form (in semiotic terms a ‘sign’) in some degree resembles the object or concept it refers to (the ‘signatum’), as in the well-known case of onomatopoeia (e.g. the sign ‘cuckoo’ resembling in its sound the sound that the animal referred to makes). This is called ‘imagic’ or direct iconicity, which is fairly rare in language. Far more common is a more abstract form of iconicity, called ‘diagrammatic’ iconicity. Here the *relation* between two or more signs resembles the relation between the signata, as in Caesar’s famous dictum *veni, vidi, vici*, where the temporal or linear order of the signs reflects the temporal order of the events of ‘coming’, ‘seeing’ and ‘conquering’, which are the signata. Another type of diagrammatic iconicity is one of ‘distance’: two signs placed at a distance from one another in the clause representing conceptual distance in reality. Or more abstractly still, the use of an *additional* morpheme to express the plural (as, for instance, *-(e)s* added to the stem in English) iconizing that the signatum is also *more* than one.

2. What is involved in grammaticalization?

Before we move on to the actual subject of this paper, something more must be said about the way grammaticalization is studied. Grammaticalization can be investigated from two different points of view. On the one hand, one can consider it from the point of view of the language, of language as a changing object in time; this would be a historical or diachronic approach. On the other hand one can also view the process of grammaticalization, or rather the changes that take place in this process, from the point of view of the language learner who is not aware of what has gone before, because his grammar is based on the ‘synchronic’ output he hears around him. It seems to me that both approaches are necessary in order to understand more about grammaticalization. I realise of course that in the real world it is not possible to neatly separate out these two aspects, because synchrony and diachrony are inextricably linked. A speaker is surrounded by different generations of speakers, by different sociolects, different dialects, different styles, in other words he is surrounded by variation, which is usually the feeding ground for any change and therefore contains the seeds of change. It is, as it were, an inherent form of diachrony. But for methodological reasons it has proved to be fruitful to separate the two strands (as the structuralists have done). And even though the tendency

within linguistics nowadays is to narrow the gap between synchrony and diachrony (which I believe is a good thing), it may be useful to look at grammaticalization more strictly from the learner's point of view, because the emphasis so far has been quite clearly on, what Lightfoot (1999) has called 'aggregate' language change (and also on typological similarities, which, like the historical approach, is language-based and not speaker-based). One could schematize the two different approaches as follows:

(2)



This figure shows that from a grammar-change or learner's point of view it is not the shaded, horizontal area that is responsible for the change (this is the area of utmost importance to grammaticalization theorists who are interested in aggregate language change), but the slanted, vertical area. When one looks at grammaticalization this way, basic tenets of grammaticalization, such as unidirectionality, clines and chains make less sense. The figure shows too that the whole of the grammar is important to explain the developments (the slanted area), but this area is often ignored in traditional grammaticalization studies, where only the construction in question is narrowly observed over a period of time (the shaded area).

I have myself in the past looked at two cases of grammaticalization in the history of English, the development of *have to* into a semi-modal verb (cf. Fischer 1994) and the development of the preposition *to* into an infinitival marker (Fischer 1997). I looked at these cases because I had noted that the developments were not the same in English as they were in other Germanic languages or in languages where a similar development had been noted, hypothesizing therefore that it may have been the synchronic circumstances of the state of the grammar at particular moments in the history of English that may have caused English to develop differently. Differently from, for example, German and Dutch, as far as *to* is concerned, and from the Romance languages and again German and Dutch as far as the grammaticalization of possessive *have* is concerned. In both cases I found that there were indeed special circumstances in English (given under [3-4]) that changed the route of the grammaticalization process.

- (3)a *factors influencing the development of **have to***
- (i) *general:*
 - (a) bleaching of possessive *have*
 - (b) regular presence of modal meaning when *have* followed by NP + infinitive adjunct
 - (ii) *specific:*
 - (a) change in word order from basic SOV to SVO, leading to
 - (b) surface adjacency of *have* + *to*-infinitive
 - (c) changes in the system of core-modals leading to gaps elsewhere
- (4) *factors influencing the status of **to** before the infinitive*
- (i) *general:*
 - (a) change from preposition with full lexical meaning to bleached infinitival marker
 - (ii) *specific:*
 - (a) the *to*-infinitive became more and more verbal in English (replacing *that*-clauses since ME)
 - (b) the rise of ECM constructions with *to* (helped along by influence from Latin) due to the word order change from SOV to SVO (cf. Fischer *et al.* 2000: ch. 7) causing *to* to develop into a shift-of-tense marker
 - (c) the rise of split infinitives

While looking at the circumstances under which the grammaticalization eventually took place, I noted, however, that not only the contemporary shape of the grammar played an important role but also more general iconic or perceptual principles, which are by their very nature synchronic because they are part of every speaker's cognitive make-up. In the case of *have to*, for instance, it was an adjacency of *have* and the *to*-infinitive – which had resulted from an earlier word order change – that was very likely the trigger for the development into a semi-modal. There is no space to go into the details here (I refer the interested reader to Fischer 1994), but it is remarkable that the grammaticalization of *have to* was not a slow gradual process (stretched out over 600 years) steered by semantic factors (as is the usual explanation) but a process that started only after the Middle English period, after the word order had changed from basic SOV to SVO, which caused the adjacency of *have* and the *to*-infinitive. This word order change did not take place in German or Dutch, which languages indeed did not develop cognates of *have* into modals. Evidence that the change only took place after the adjacency development is the fact that all the true characteristics of modal auxiliaries only become visible when adjacency has become the rule. Thus, the constructions given under (5) only appear in the early Modern period,

- (5)
- a *I have to have a car in order to ...*,
 - b *I have to work now*
 - c *it has to be true that ...*

(5a) contains a double *have*, making it clear that only one of the verbs can convey the old meaning of ‘possession’. (5b) shows the combination of *have* with an intransitive infinitive, which only became possible once *have* no longer expressed possession because possessive *have* needs an object (on which the infinitive originally depended). (5c) shows that *have to* has even acquired epistemic meaning, a quite usual development with modal verbs. The examples under (6) show in turn that the same types of clauses do not occur in either German or Dutch, which is further evidence that the same grammaticalization did not occur there.

- (6) a * Ik heb een auto te hebben om ... / Ich habe einen Wagen zu haben um ...
 b * Ik heb nu te werken/ Ich habe jetzt zu arbeiten
 c * Het heeft waar te zijn dat .../ es hat wahr zu sein dass ...

We see that the adjacency factor, which is an iconic matter, is crucial in the whole process (note that in the Dutch and German examples in [6], *hebben/haben* and the *te/zü* infinitive are not adjacent since a complement, or adverbial phrase, intervenes in these SOV languages). The process of grammaticalization is not a unidirectional, inevitable grammatical development but one steered both by the special circumstances of the grammar of the language in question and by iconic factors. Bolinger (1980: 297) already noted the importance of adjacency in the case of main verbs and infinitives, and Givón (1985: 202) proposed the iconic ‘metaprinciple of proximity’,

- (7) The closer two concepts are semantically or functionally, the more likely they are to be put adjacent to each other lexically, morphotactically or syntactically

which would also account for what happened here but in reverse fashion so to speak. It is well known that form can influence meaning too and in the above case the development that took place in English is quite natural because *have* did already have modal meaning in some Old English structures (as I showed in Fischer 1994), and a double verb construction where the first V functions as Aux was well established as a *form* in English by this time.¹

Similarly, I found (as reported in Fischer 1997) that in the development of *to* before the infinitive in English, the usual grammaticalization path whereby the preposition *to* becomes an infinitival marker was blocked in English by both iconic factors and the shape of the contemporary grammar (see (4)). The iconic principle of ‘isomorphism’ (cf. Haiman 1980) played a role, in that the infinitive marker *to* came to resemble more closely its original ‘ancestor’, the preposition *to* again, so that its phonetic reduction, which was already underway, was stopped following the iconic ‘principle of quantity’, cf. Givón (1995: 49),

- (8) a larger chunk of information will be given a larger chunk of code or on a more abstract level, less predicatable or more important information will be given more coding material.

To conclude this brief discussion of two ‘normal’ (i.e. lexical) grammaticalization cases, I have emphasized for both these cases that grammaticalization is not an inevitable, unidirectional development that continues inexorably once it has started, as many grammaticalization theorists have maintained, but that it is very much shaped by iconic principles and the contemporary shape of the grammar of the languages involved.

3 A different type of interaction between iconicity and grammaticalization

As already indicated, in this study I would like to concentrate on another kind of interaction between grammaticalization and iconic principles, not a case where iconicity influences the process of grammaticalization (more correctly, where iconic principles are active in the re-analyses that can be seen as part of a grammaticalization process), as in the cases described in section 2, but rather where grammaticalization interferes as it were in an iconic situation. This involves not the grammaticalization of a particular lexical element as in the case of *to* and *have to* but the grammaticalization of a structural position in the clause, or, in other words, the establishment of a new rule of grammar. This is similar to what sometimes has been termed grammaticization, but what I would like to emphasize is that this case is very similar to standard grammaticalization in that an earlier meaningful element (but in this case not a specific lexical element but a specific position), becomes conventionalized, generalized, thereby losing the specific meaning that it had.

The case I have been working on recently (see Fischer 2000, 2001) is the position of adjectives in Old English. In the Old English period adjectives were more flexible as far as position is concerned so that they could appear both before and after their head noun. This position was, however, not free, as some earlier linguists suggested (for example, G.L. Brook in his Old English grammar said that Old English word order was freer because inflexions could indicate what belonged where). On the basis of my own investigations, in which I have used a tagged version of the Old English part of the Helsinki Corpus,² I found that quite a number of factors were at work that were decisive for adjective placement, and that the common denominator of these factors was iconic in nature. In other words that the position itself was meaningful.

The bulk of my findings can be found in tables 1 and 2 (taken from Fischer 2000). I

[place tables 1 and 2 about here]

have considered all those data, where either a postnominal adjective was used or where two or more adjectives were used in succession because in that case postnominal position has been found to be frequent. Comparing the Old English situation with the situation nowadays, it is clear that the postnominal adjective has become a rarity. It seems then that at some point adjective position grammaticalized, i.e. became fixed, to prenominal position. The change-over presumably took place in the Middle English period, which data I have not been able to study yet. However, that the position became eventually fixed is clear, and what I would like to show is how the iconic factors that were decisive for position in Old English, were slowly overtaken by new developments taking place in the grammar which led to a preference for prenominal position (which was in Old English already the most frequent anyway), thereby going against the earlier iconic principles on which adjective position was based.

In order to make these developments clear, I will first show how in general, using Bolinger's insights, word order can be iconic. Secondly, I will show how the facts of Old English indicate that adjective position was indeed iconically motivated. Thirdly, I will briefly mention (this part still needs to be worked out) what general changes in the grammar of English came to destroy iconic word order replacing it by a fixed adjective position; and finally I would like to point out how even this new structure of the internal order of the noun phrase (NP) obeys iconic principles, but now iconic from a different point of view.

Bolinger (1952, 1972:31) writes: "the linear geometry of the sentence imposes certain relationships upon the elements that compose it." The principle that he uncovers is perceptual in that whatever comes first in a linear sequence determines to some extent how the next element is to be interpreted (p.32). The reality of such perceptual principles can of course only be discovered in cases of contrast, i.e. in cases where more than one position is possible and where the difference can be explained iconically. This is the case with adjectives in Modern Greek, and also in Spanish (Bolinger's examples are from Spanish), but much less so in Modern English because adjectives are on the whole fixed to prenominal position.

Bolinger schematizes his idea as follows:



The diagram expresses that the element that comes *first* (A[djective] or N[oun]) modifies the rest, so in Spanish *un hermoso edificio* (A-N), refers to a building that has beauty as an inbuilt characteristic; in other words the topic of the sentence is a ‘beautiful building’. When the adjective follows - *un edificio hermoso* - the adjective is added to the noun, and narrows down its field: the topic, ‘building’ is now *contrasted* with other buildings that are not beautiful.

In other studies of the position of the adjective in languages where it is variable, such as in Modern Greek and Italian, further factors are noted that are closely related to Bolinger’s idea of perceptual order, which to me were useful in order to find out whether the Old English variation with adjective position was similarly iconic. Thus Stavrou (1996) notes that in Modern Greek “the prehead AP denotes a pre-existing (...) or defining property, whereas the post-head one asserts the (perhaps temporary) possession of a property.” Furthermore, postposition of the adjective is really only possible with indefinite noun phrases in Modern Greek,

- (10) *Katharise ena milo kokino*
 He/she peeled a apple red
 **Katharise to milo kokino*
 He/she peeled the apple red (Stavrou 1996:80)

Postposition with a definite noun phrase only occurs when the postposed adjective functions as a so-called ‘object complement’ or small clause, i.e. the adjective is then governed by the verbal predicate and not by the NP head, as in

- (11) *theli ti bira pagomeni*
 he/she wants the beer cold (Stavrou 1996:86)),

Because of the difference between definite and indefinite NPs, expressed in (10), Stavrou further links the differences expressed by adjective position with basic semantic differences between definiteness and indefiniteness.

Vincent (1986) has considered the position of the adjective in Italian. His article provides a very useful overview of the most important studies that have appeared on the position of the modern Romance adjective, and how this applies to Italian. Although a great variety of descriptive terms can be found to differentiate between the two possible adjective positions, Vincent shows that a common denominator can be found for each position in terms of theme/rheme:

- (12) L'aggettivo preposto, essendo parte inseparabile della testa, non può avere un valore indipendente, mentre l'aggettivo postposto è sempre rematico rispetto al nome che modifica, anche se la sua posizione sintattica gli conferisce il ruolo di rema secondario.
 ('The preposed adjective, being an inseparable part of the head, cannot have an independent value, while the postposed adjective is always rhematic with respect to the noun that it modifies, even though its syntactic position confers upon it the role of a secondary reme) (Vincent 1986: 192, translation mine)

He further shows how the structure of the Adjective-Noun phrase resembles in linear terms the structure of existential clauses, which have only a rheme, while that of the Noun-Adjective phrase resembles a predicative clause, which has a theme as subject and a rheme as complement, suggesting the similar order theme/rheme for the Noun-Adjective phrase, and their independent 'value' with respect to one another. So ADJ-NOUN has one information unit, so to speak, and NOUN-ADJ two. His suggestion then resembles the suggestion given for the difference in adjective position in Modern Greek, namely that the postposed adjective functions as a type of *secondary predicate*, conveying additional 'rhematic' or 'new' information. Moreover, the notion of theme/rheme corresponds closely to the difference between definiteness (already 'given' information) and indefiniteness (new information) that Stavrou suggested.

Looking now at Old English, it is interesting, to say the least, that the two morphological types of adjectives used there, the so-called strong and weak adjectives (see table 3 for an overview of these forms), are closely linked with (in)definiteness (cf. Brunner 1962: 53-4), in that weak adjectives generally only occur preminally in definite NPs, and strong adjectives only after an indefinite determiner (which is generally zero). This in turn is linked to word order in that the postposed adjective is generally strong (there are only two exceptions in table 2) even when a definite determiner precedes the noun (cf. Mitchell 1985: §126),

- (13) *Done ilcan ceaddan iungne* (acc. sg. masc. str.) (Chad.1.184)³
 the same Chad young

In other words the strong (and therefore also the postnominal adjectives) are associated with indefiniteness and rhematic information, see (14).

- (14) *weak adjectives in Old English* → definite, thematic, always prenominal
strong adjectives in Old English → indefinite, rhematic, pre- and postnominal

The suggestion that the postposed adjective functions like a secondary predicate, as both Vincent and Stavrou have suggested for Italian and Modern Greek respectively, also applies to Old English in that the postposed adjectives can be shown to be much more verbal than the preposed adjectives, which behave as if they are in fact part of the noun they modify

(Spamer 1979 indeed calls the weak adjectives ‘adjuncts’, behaving as if they ‘were the first part of a compound noun (p. 242)). It is interesting to observe for instance that strong adjectives do not normally follow each other. When more than one adjective is used, they are either placed around the noun, or connected by *and*. This is comparable to predicative adjectives in modern English, which also need to be connected by *and* as in ,

- (15) The girl was young and beautiful
 *the girl was beautiful young

Tables 1 and 2 show that two adjectives in a row do not occur often, and when they do they are of a special kind (as I have shown in Fischer 2000: 172-174), in that the second adjective mostly refers to either a material or a nation, as in *æscenne* ‘of ashwood’ (Læceboc1 13.10.1), *beren* ‘of barley’ (Læceboc1 19.4.1), *rigenre* ‘of rye’ (Læceboc3 159.1.1), *sylfrenum* (Documents4, 2a, 1.21)) or to a nation, as in *brettisc* (ChronA Early 1.501.1), *englisc* (Documents4, 2a 1.41)). In other words they are denominal adjectives, which are not true adjectives in that they cannot be modified (cf. * *a very stone wall*, **a very German car* ⁴). So instead one finds adj + and + adj + noun order, and these are very frequent. Table 2 also shows that I have found only two instances of two strong *postnominal* adjectives occurring in a row; they are the following:

- (16) a Do þonne on wæter ... *wingeardes twigu ufeward merwe* (Lch II 12.1.5)
 Do then in water ... vineyard’s branches upwards tender
 ‘then put the tender ends of vine-twigs in water’
- b Eft genim þa reade netlan ufewardæ hæbbende sæd (Lch II 8.1.6)
 Next take the red nettles upwards having seed
 ‘next take the seedbearing top part of red nettels’

It is probably no accident that in both cases it concerns the same type of adjective, i.e. *ufeward*, and that in both cases the second adjective ‘explains’ the meaning of *ufeward*, i.e. one has to pick the top part of the plant because that is the soft or the seed-bearing part. In other words, the second adjective in fact does not convey new information, but can be seen as part of the first. Other evidence telling us that the Old English strong adjective is predicative or verbal in nature, unlike the weak adjective, is provided by the following findings:

- (17) *Evidence for the verbal nature of strong adjectives:*
- (a) modification with Prepositional Phrases
 - (b) frequency of past participles in postnominal position
 - (c) modification with adverbs such as *swipe* and *swa*
 - (d) their use as ‘subject/object complement’
 - (e) incorporation of negative element
 - (f) discourse manipulability and distinctness in inflexional endings
 - (h) a number of adjectives (e.g. those in *-ward*) show differences in behaviour

- (20) *and besætt þone castel abutan mid swiðe mycele here fulle six wucan*
 (Chron2.1087.54)
 and besieged the castle all-around with [a] very large army [for] full six weeks

Also very frequent are postnominal participial adjectives with a prepositional phrase, which is not surprising since they are highly verbal,

- (21) *selle him þonne ... etan ... pisan ofthænda and gesodena on ecede ...* (Lch2.2.2.1)
 let him then eat peas overmoistened and boiled in vinegar ...

Note also some interesting developments in Present-day English, which would have been impossible structures in Old English: ‘a suitable for nothing person’, ‘a larger than life experience’.

ad (b) *Frequency of participles in post-nominal position*

Past and present participles are significantly more frequent in postnominal position than non verbal adjectives, which is not surprising if postnominal adjectives are indeed closer to verbs. When two adjectives occur in a NP where one is a participle, it is usually the participle that is placed behind the noun as in

- (22) *ne scyle nan mon siocne monnan and gesargodne swencan ac hine mon scel lædan to þæm læce ...*
 (Bo4.38.123.32)
 no one must let a sick, wounded man work but one must take him to the doctor

Ad (c) *modification with adverbs*

One of the more interesting observations is that the prenominal weak adjective is not common with adverbs such as *swiþe* and *swa* (and other less frequently occurring adverbs such as *niwan* in (23)), while they very commonly modify verbs and strong or predicative adjectives, which are close to verbs.⁶ In Fischer (2000: 68-69) I have shown that, whereas a phrase like ‘a very old man’, or ‘the man is very old’ is extremely common in Old English, a phrase like ‘the very old man’ does not occur at all in the complete body of material that we have of Old English. This is remarkable because the phrase is not at all rare in a comparable corpus of Present-day English texts. There are also some interesting uses of *swa* with a postnominal adjective, which seem to emphasize the temporariness of the adjectival property concerned:

- (23) *þonne se swile gewyrsmæd tobyrst nim gate meoluc swa wearme niwan amolcene sele drincan*
 (Lch2.20.1.1)
 when the swelling festering bursts, take goat's milk thus warm, newly milked, give (it) to drink ...

In (23) *swa wearme* clearly indicates that the milk must be given while it is *still* warm.

Needless to say there are no occurrences in Old English with a weak adjective modified by more elaborate adverbs or adverbial phrases. In Present-day English, however, we do come across such examples (Markus 1997, from whom the examples are taken, gives figures based on corpus research):

- (24) a by no means irresponsible action
the normally timid soldiers
she is a brave enough student to attend the course

Ad (d) *Use as secondary predicate*

An example like (23) also makes clear that the difference between an adjective that is linked to the NP and a small clause (or object complement) in which the adjective functions as a secondary predicate separate from the NP, is much more difficult to make in Old English. It is quite possible to interpret *swa wearme* in (23), for instance, as a small clause. In Present-day English the phrase in (23) would normally be translated as ‘take warm, newly milked goat’s milk’, as if indeed the adjective is attributive, whereas the grammatical function of the adjective may well be more correctly translated by a small clause ‘take it (while still) warm’. Other such examples are given in (25),

- (25) a gif hwa *his rihtæwe lifigende* forlæte and on oðran wife on unriht gewifige
(LawNorthu.64)
if anyone leaves *his lawful-wife living* and marries another woman unlawfully
- b eft wið gefigon *sceapes hohscancan unsodenne* tobrec gedo þæt mearh ...
(Lch1.2.23.6)
then against cimosis (?) break (*a sheep’s leg uncooked*) into pieces, put the marrow ...
- c wiþ bryce *fearres gor wearm* lege on þone bryce (Quad. 743)
against a fracture place *oxen dung warm* on the fractured limb
- d gif mon *twyhyndne mon unsynnigne* mid hloðe ofslea (LawAf 1.29)
if one kills (*a two-hundred shillingworth man innocent*) with a troop-of-robbers

In an example like (25c), a translation into Present-day English with a small clause seems still feasible, but this is hardly the case in (25a, d), where one must either use an attributive (stressed)⁷ prenominal adjective or make use of a relative clause following the noun. It is quite possible that the grammaticalization of adjective position to a fixed place in Present-day English has also led to a more restricted use of these ambiguous small clauses. It seems that in Present-day English small clauses consisting of an adjective only, are most usual when they express result, as in *to paint the door green*.⁸

even the adjective used postnominally is weak. It also looks as if the weak and strong forms of *self* are also not always according to the norm. In (27a) *selfa* is postnominal but weak; it presumably has no stress since it plays no further role in the discourse (it is not manipulable). In (27b) *self* is strong, but here it is salient because it contrasts with *oðre*:

- (27) a be þam *drihten selfa* cydde in þam godspelle
 (GDPref and 3[C] 26.231.10)
 as the *lord himself* showed in the gospel
 b huru ðæt *he self* do swa swa he oðre lærð (CP 60.453.14)
 indeed that *he himself* should do just as he teaches others

There are other cases of postnominal adjectives, which do not seem to convey new information and it is for this reason that they may be, exceptionally, weak. (28a) is from a saint's life, where a 'clean maiden' has almost become an idiomatic phrase, a term used for any female martyr. Examples (28b) and (c) seem to be instances where the postnominal adjectives do no more than elaborate the prenominal weak ones, adding no new information:

- (28) a god ælmihtig heo cwæð ic eom þin *þeowa clæna* (Marg. 338)
 God almighty, she said, I am *your servant pure*
 b þis sint tacn *þæs hatan magan omihtan ungemetfæstlican* and þæs ofercealdan
 (Lch2.16.1.1)
 these are symptoms *of the hot stomach inflammatory, excessive* and of the overcold
 c ... be þære gelicunge þæs magan þe þa *yfelan wætan sceorfendan and scearpan hæfð*
 (Lch2.1.1.17)
 ... by the pleasure(?) of the stomach which has *the evil humours rough and sharp*

Another interesting contrast may have been intended in the following examples, but the differences are subtle because we have to rely for their interpretation on context, and it may have been the case that the endings were no longer always sharply differentiated:⁹

- (29) a ða wolde egeas *sum wælhreow*[STR] *dema* his bodunge adwæscan and þa cristenan geneadian to þam deofellicum bigencgum (ÆCHom. I, 38 586.31)
 then Egeas, *a certain cruel judge* wanted to destroy his preaching and force the Christians to (do) those devilish rituals
 b þa wann him ongean *sum wælhreow* [STR] *heretoga* maxentius gehaten mid micclum þrymme wolde him benæman his lifes and his rices (ÆCHom. II, 19 174.7)
 then fought against him *a certain cruel general*, called Maxentius, with a big force (he) wanted to deprive him of his life and his kingdom
 c þa wæs geset *sum wælhreowa*[WK] *dema* agricolaus geciged on anre byrig sebastia gehaten on þam lande armenia. Se foresæda *dema* wæs swiðe arleas ... (ÆLS[Forty Soldiers]9)
 then there was appointed *a certain cruel judge*, called Agricolaus, in a place called Sebaste in the country of Armenia. This before-mentioned judge was very wicked

In the first two examples a strong adjective is used, the adjective which is the rule with indefinite NPs. It is clear from the context that the information given by the adjective is

relevant and salient because the continuation of the clause indicates that further information is built upon this knowledge. In the third example, which has a weak adjective, the case is rather different. Here it seems that ‘cruel’ is used as a qualifier, a generalizing adjective. The context then goes on to mention that this judge is *arleas*, giving this as *new* information. It is striking that in the first two examples the cruelty of the person is exemplified in his subsequent activities, whereas in the third example the suggestion is that cruelty is an inherent part of his personality. It is difficult to be certain about what these subtle differences mean, but it may be interesting to mention that there is a similar difference in Dutch. In Dutch, a weak adjective (which has an *-e* ending) in an indefinite NP seems to emphasize an inherent quality of a person: *een wrede rechter* ‘a cruel judge’, *een grote man* ‘a big man’, while a strong adjective in the same position emphasizes a particular quality, true only for a particular occasion: *een wreed rechter* ‘a judge who acts cruelly’, *een groot man*, ‘a great man’. Similarly in the second example of (32),

(32) Hij is een *groot* [STR]man in what hij voor het land heeft gedaan
He is a great man concerning what he has done for the country

*Hij is een *grote* [WK]man in what hij voor het land heeft gedaan

the weak adjective *grote* can only refer to his physical stature, and this explains why the continuation of the clause is impossible. Note that in Dutch it is only the adjective without *-e* (the original strong form) that is used in predicative position:

(33) Hij is groot
*Hij is grote
He is big/great

In other words, it looks as if in Dutch the same difference between a weak and a strong adjective is used when one wishes to express a difference between inherent quality and a temporary activity.

In a similar way one finds in Old English the phrase *an/sum blinda*[WK] *man*, with an unexpected weak adjective (as we have seen above, after an indefinite article the adjective is generally strong in Old English), when the context makes clear that the reference is to blind people in general, whereas a strong adjective is found when the topic concerns a man, who happens to be blind.

Ad (h)

The use of the same adjective but with different meanings needs really no comment because it is well-known, but it may be worth emphasising once more that the postnominal adjective has

clearly an adverbial quality, which is not true for the same adjective used prenominal, compare (34) with (35),

(34) forðan ða eagan bioð on ðam lichoman foreweardum and ufeweardum
(CP 1 1.29.13)
therefore the eyes are on *the body at the front and at the top*

(35) if we hine biddað mid *innewardre heortan* (ÆHom 39)
if we pray him with *(a) sincere heart*

But there are also other interesting minimal pairs. One of them is *grene*,

- (36) a Gif man scyle mucgwyrt to læcedome habban þonne nime þa *readan*[WK] wæpnedman 7 þa *grenan*[WK] wifmen to læcecrafte (Med3[Grattan-Singer] 178.25
if one must have mugwort as a medicine then take the red for men and the green for women
- b Wiþ bite wyrc sealf, nim þas wyrte, ... *sio greate banwyrte*, acleaf, wegbræde, ..., *read clæfre*,
(Lch II 8.1.1)
Against [a] sting make [an] ointment, take these herbs, ... the great knapweed (?), oak leaf, red clover
- c Hafa þe ær geworht clam of beor dræstan & of *grenre mucgwyrt* (Lch II 38.1.3)
Have (you) first prepared [a] poultice of bear droppings and of green mugwort
- d Gyf ðu *hy grene*[STR] næbbe, genim hy dryge (Lch I[Herb] 30.2
if you do not have *it green* (fresh), use it dried
- e nym *betonican swa grene*[STR] (PeriD 63.45.24)
take *betony still green* (fresh)

Grene or *read* is in a prenominal position when the adjective indicates a type of plant, producing with the following noun a type of compound (see [36a, b and c]). In postnominal position (as in [d] and [e]), *grene* does not refer to the colour of a type of plant but to the temporary state of the plant.

I think from this evidence, it can safely be concluded that Old English postposed, strong adjectives are different from weak adjectives in that they convey salient or new information about the noun they modify. Their frequently postposed position is, therefore, appropriate from the iconic or perceptual point of view. Weak adjectives, being attributive and thematic, typically occupy prenominal position, thus blending with the definite noun they modify, forming one theme, or compound.

Although in general weak adjectives are not placed after the noun in Old English because they are never rhematic, it was possible to place strong adjectives before the noun in indefinite phrases, presumably because the communicational saliency of these adjectives could also be expressed by giving them extra stress. Langacker (1997: 22) indeed states that this is another iconic type:

The focus is a conceptual constituent. It is not a classical constituent based on valence links, but rather one reflecting an abstract similarity, namely degree of interest or informativeness. The grouping formed on this basis cross-cuts classical constituency, symbolized by linear contiguity. The focus is however symbolized phonologically, namely by a phonological grouping based on unreduced stress. This symbolic relationship is clearly iconic, as stress level (salience in regard to amplitude) bears a natural relationship to degree of interest (discourse salience).

This must have provided a way in, so to speak, for the development of a fixed adjective position, since with the help of stress both thematic and rhematic adjectives could now occur before the noun. Further, general factors that were probably conducive towards fixed pronominal adjective position are:

- (38)
- (a) Overall frequency of this position
 - (b) Word order becoming more and more fixed after the Old English period in all other respects
 - (c) Loss of weak and strong forms due to loss of inflexions possibly making phonological salience more important in pronominal position
 - (d) At the same time (because of this loss) the need for a determiner system (which developed in ME)

Fixed adjective position at the same time led to the building up of adjectives pronominally, and to predicative adjectives behaving syntactically more like attributive ones. So we see a slow development towards attributive adjectives being combined with an adverb, even with a Prepositional Phrase, and due to both the adverb there, and possibly a new iconicity perceived in the new word order, the development of a clear hierarchy of pronominal adjectives such that *a dirty old man* is no longer the same as *an old dirty man*, and *lovely long legs* is different from *long lovely legs*. In the *lovely long legs* and *a dirty old man*, the first adjective perceptually ‘governs’ the rest of the NP and in fact comments on it (Adamson [2000] has called this a process of subjectivization), whereas in the example with the other order (*long lovely legs*, *old dirty man*), both adjectives equally qualify the noun. In Old English this latter difference would have been expressed by either the use of *and* or the use of position, as in ‘long and lovely legs’, ‘long legs (and) lovely’, or ‘legs long and lovely’. What we see then in the phrase *lovely long legs* is the emergence of a new perceptual or iconic order within the NP.

4. Some concluding remarks

In this paper I have wished to make a number of points. First of all it is important to realise that in grammaticalization studies one cannot ignore the learner’s point of view, one must take

into account not just the diachronic development of a particular construction, but also the synchronic circumstances under which the development takes place. It is clear that these synchronic circumstances may interfere with a 'regular' path of grammaticalization.

Secondly, the study provides additional evidence of a philological nature. By carefully investigating the position of the adjective in Old English, it was found that the variation in this position is not haphazard (as was the received idea) but is patterned and that the pattern can be explained. Thirdly, and this follows from the above two points, the investigation shows, on the one hand, that the use of a particular linguistic theory can provide us with new ideas about Old English syntax, but, on the other, that philological investigations can correct hypotheses put forward by the theory. In other words, philology and linguistic theory are both necessary and complement one another.

Table 1: All instances of Adjective-Noun order (without the connector *and*) involving more than one adjective in the tagged Helsinki prose corpus of Old English

Deter- miner	Quanti- fier	Quanti- fier	Adject- ive	Adject- ive	Adject- ive	Partic- iple	Noun	Total
-	x		X				x	220
-	x	x					x	15
-	x	x					x	77
-	x	x	X				x	11
-	x	x				x	x	1
-			X	x			x	8
-	x		X	x			x	2
-			X	x	X		x	1
+	x	x					x	0
+	x	x	X				x	0
+	x		X	x			x	0
+	x		X				x	0
+			X	x			x	10
+			X	x	X		x	1 (1?)
+			<i>Agen</i>	x			x	3
(+)			<i>Ylca or sylf</i>	x			x	13
(+)			<i>Mycel</i>	x			x	11

Table 2: All instances of Noun-Adjective order (except when the first postnominal adjective is preceded by *and*, these figures are in brackets) involving more than one adjective in the tagged Helsinki prose corpus of Old English

Determiner: Present	Quantifier	Numerical	Adj.	Adj.	Noun	Qu	Qu	Adj.	and Adj.	Adj.	Total
- (+)					X			X			102
-					X			<i>ælmhtig leof</i>			45 3
+					X	x					74
+					X			<i>an</i>			58
-					X			<i>genoh</i>			8
- (1 exc)					X			x	x		11
-					X			x		x	1
-	x				X	x					2
-	x				X			x			16
-	x				X			x	x		3
(-)	x		x		X				x		1)
-	x				<i>þing wiht</i> etc			genitive adjective			29
-		x			X			x			9
-		x			X			x		x	2
+			x		X	x					5
+			x		X	x	x				1
-(+,3x)			x		X			x			35
-			x		X			x	x		5
+			x		X			x (weak!)	x (w!)		2
+			x		X			x (weak!)		x (w!)	1
-			x		X			x		x	1
(-)			x		X				x		7)
-			x	X	X	x					1

Table 3 *Strong and Weak adjectives in Old English*

(a)	declension of strong adjectives			(b)	declension of weak adjectives		
	masc	neuter	fem		masc	neuter	fem
<i>nom.sg</i>	-	-	-/-u	-a	-e	-e	
<i>acc.sg</i>	-ne	-	-e	-an	-e	-an	
<i>gen.sg</i>	-es	-es	-re	-an	-an	-an	
<i>dat.sg</i>	-um	-um	-re	-an	-an	-an	
<i>nom.pl</i>	-e	-/-u	-a/-e	-an	-an	-an	
<i>acc.pl</i>	-e	-/-u	-a/-e	-an	-an	-an	
<i>gen.pl</i>	-ra	-ra	-ra	-ra/-ena	-ra/-ena	-ra/-ena	
<i>dat.pl</i>	-um	-um	-um	-um	-um	-um	

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Notes

¹ Witness the following Aux-V constructions, which were all current by the late Middle English period (all examples are taken from Chaucer):

- (1) *That hem **hath holpen** whan that they were seeke* (perfect auxiliary)
- (2) *For every foul cryeth out to **ben ago*** (perfect auxiliary)
- (3) *And ben assented that I shal **be sleyn*** (passive auxiliary)
- (4) *As Canacee **was pleyying** in her walk* (progressive auxiliary)
- (5) *I **gan beholde** upon this place* (inchoative auxiliary)
- (6) *And thus he **dide** doon sleen hem alle three* (dummy 'do')
- (7) *The worme of conscience **wylle aryse*** (future auxiliary)
- (8) *Though that I never hir grace **may deserve*** (modal auxiliary)

In Old English only the passive construction (3) and the construction with a modal verb (8) were current.

² The corpus I have used is the prose part of the Old English section of the Helsinki Corpus, which has been tagged at the Free University of Amsterdam by Frank Beths and Ans van Kemenade, and with the help of Willem Koopman of the University of Amsterdam.

³ I have used the reference system as given in Healey and Venezky (1980), which is also employed in the machine readable version of the *DOE*. To save space I have not given a gloss and translation in each case. I have been careful to give a literal translation of the noun and adjective phrases in question, while I have felt free to translate the rest of the sentence somewhat less literally when necessary for comprehension.

⁴ Of course 'German' can be modified when one refers not to the fact that the car is made in Germany, but to a quality that German cars may be said to have.

⁵ Markus (1997) notes in his study of adjective position in Present-day English that adjectives that are themselves modified by PPs begin to occur more and more frequently before the noun. It seems to me that this

development may be due to the fact that adjective position became grammaticalized to prenominal position, whereby the iconic function of position was lost but taken over by phonological iconicity. It may also be for this reason that so-called infinitival relatives (as in *This is an easy violin to play on*) did not yet occur in Old English, where the adjective *easy*, being clearly predicative, would still occur after the noun. It seems to me therefore that the rise of what are now called infinitival relatives must be looked for in the fixing of the adjectival position, and that in fact infinitival relatives did already occur in Old English only in a different shape (pace Dubinsky [1997], followed by Miller [forthcoming 375 ff], who believe there was a grammar change here involving null operators).

⁶ Again Markus (1997) shows that in Present-day English modification by *so*, *still*, *enough* of prenominal adjectives has become quite common. This again seems to indicate that adjective position has become grammaticalized preminally, see also note 3.

⁷ At the end of this section I discuss how the rhematic nature of the strong adjective can also be shown iconically by means of stress rather than position. Stress becomes the only iconic possibility in Modern English once adjective position is fixed before the noun.

⁸ This explains why the rather unusual adjective position in the first line of Seamus Heaney's poem, 'Storm on the Island' (from *Death of a Naturalist*, Faber & Faber),

We are prepared: we build our houses squat

which the poet has put there no doubt to give extra weight to the adjective, can yet be interpreted quite easily as a resultative.

⁹ This is certainly true for late Old English texts, where especially the endings *-an* and *-um* were often interchangeable.