HOFMANN SEBASTIAN GRAMMATICALIZATION AND ENGLISH COMPLEX PREPOSITIONS. A CORPUS-BASED STUDY

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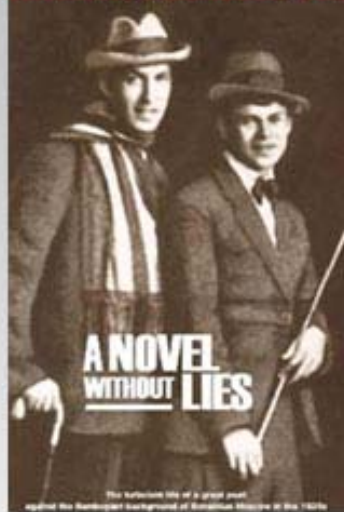
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HOFMANN SEBASTIAN
GRAMMATICALIZATION AND
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214 pp.

Sebastian Hofmann's monograph is built around two themes: the grammatical status of complex prepositions (Chapter 3) and the applicability of grammaticalization theory as a framework for their analysis (Chapters 4, 5). Complex prepositions, narrowed down to preposition-noun-preposition or PNP-constructions, are an excellent choice (although Hofmann somewhat simplifies his task by choosing sequences whose noun component is not "any noun" but a singular one without *a(n)/the*, presumably as a sign of advanced decategorization). They extend the existing repertory of simple prepositions quite significantly both in quantity and quality and if Hofmann's (and other authors') effort to have them "officially recognized" succeeds, it may possibly contribute to a more sweeping recognition of multi-word forms in other word classes. The monograph is also interesting from the methodological point of view: it may be seen as a dialogue between two different paradigms of linguistic thinking: rule--based argumentation in the generative grammar mould (represented by Seppänen et al. using constructed examples) and Hofmann's

empirical, usage-based and quantitative, approach relying on extensive corpus data.

The focus on grammaticalization inevitably calls for both diachronic and synchronic corpus data and accordingly Chapter 2, Data collection and research methodology, introduces and analyzes the synchronic source of data (the BNC) and the diachronic ones (the Gutenberg Corpus, a selection of 242 texts from the Gutenberg Project, and the OED). A lot of effort goes into the defence of using OED quotations as a corpus. By applying the program Perl scripts the author compiles a frequency list of PNP-constructions, the top 30 of which (Table 2.4, p. 23) are the main subject of study, the remaining 132 low-frequency ones and their claim to grammaticalization are discussed in chapter 8.

As has been mentioned, Chapter 3, Complex prepositions: indivisible units or free constructions?, is, in a way, crucial for the whole monograph. After a brief historical survey of the treatment of the complex preposition in grammars (starting with the 18th century), it addresses the issue of whether complex prepositions are to be recognized as a grammatical class (an indivisible syntactic unit) or whether they are merely frequent free constructions or phrases as claimed by Huddleston (1988; for the sake of completeness he does so already in 1984), Huddleston-Pullum (2002) and especially Seppänen et al. (1994)[1]. In other words,

the very existence of complex prepositions is defended here.

Seppänen et al. use constructed sentences (checked by native speakers) with PNP-constructions to show that the second preposition can be moved into a different position. They conclude that PNP-constructions fail four constituency tests (fronting, coordination, ellipsis and interpolation), that there is indeed a constituent boundary between PN and P and consequently that complex prepositions are not grammatical units. Hofmann counters by providing corpus data indicating that only 4 per cent of instances of PNP-constructions fail the (coordination) test and, given the additional evidence found in spoken corpus data (position of hesitation markers), claims that "these units are stored in the memory as whole entities rather than individual segments".

There is an interesting parallel here with the checklist semantics approach and the prototype approach to the assessment of a lexical unit's extension. While the former will exclude referents for not meeting all criteria, the latter operates with gradience and criteria fulfilment is measured by "the frequency of occurrence". Also, regardless of the tests and of whether we choose to regard PNP-constructions as grammatical units or not, the fact remains that they stand in paradigmatic relation to primary prepositions, i.e. are functionally equivalent with them.

Hofmann further supports the claim of the unit-like character of PNP-constructions by diachronic evidence. In Chapter 4, Grammaticalization and complex prepositions, he applies the key concepts of grammaticalization theory and shows that many of the complex prepositions follow the predictions of the theory (and suggests ways of handling the inconsistencies). Using *in view of* as a prototypical case of a free sequence evolving into a grammaticalized indivisible unit, he exemplifies processes characteristic of grammaticalization (semantic attenuation, generalization, subjectification, decagetorization and reanalysis). Chapter 5, Complex prepositions: a diachronic overview, takes the investigation a step further and reviews the origin of all 30 most frequent complex prepositions (Table 5.1), focusing on several typical or remarkable items before 1500 (e.g., *in place of*, *by way of*), between 1500–1700 (e.g., *on behalf of, in common with*) and after 1700 (e.g., *in front of, in line with*). Regardless of the period the three groups display some features in common, a shift from concrete to abstract and an increased level of subjectification (subjective stance). One particular aspect – the gradualness versus abruptness of the grammaticalization processes – is given special consideration. There are cases "when the modern usage of a considerable number of complex prepositions appears to arise without any prior development whatsoever" (p. 94) with analogy being apparently an important factor.

In the following parts, Hofmann focuses on synchronic analysis to illustrate the contemporary use of complex prepositions. Chapter 6, Complex prepositions in Present-Day English, presents the distributional characteristics of the 30 complex prepositions in the text domains of the BNC and, more importantly, in 10 genre categories wherein these items are more/least frequent. The genre categories do not seem to have a limiting influence on the distribution (three of the genres, Academic prose: politics law education, Official/governmental documents//leaflets, and Commerce& finance, econom-

ics, include all 30 prepositions), though most of these prepositions are preferred in formal contexts. This is explained by the complexity principle (more explicit, i.e. generally bulkier, structure is favoured in cognitively more complex environment).

The following detailed statistical analysis of four items – *in relation to, in search of, in spite of* (contrasted with *notwithstanding* and *despite*) and *on top of* – shows their distribution over the text domains to be uneven, documents stylistic preferences and other features. Chapter 7, In terms of: a new discourse marker, is a case study of this most frequent PNP-construction in the BNC. After tracing its development (c. 1380, OED; flourishing particularly from the beginning of the 20th century), it provides a detailed analysis of its present-day usage, especially in spoken language, the idiolectal differences in its use and its role as a discourse marker (floor-keeping hesitation marker, hedging signal) seen as a further stage of its grammaticalization by Hofmann and a further proof of its becoming welded into a single unit.

Having dealt with the 30 most frequent complex prepositions, Hofmann turns to the remaining 132 ones, which calls for an interesting remarshalling of arguments. While Chapter 3 provides "evidence for the existence of the class of complex prepositions with the help of quantitative data" (p. 59), Chapter 8, Are a low-frequency complex prepositions grammaticalized?, attempts to explain why the same kind of PNP-constructions should be regarded as grammaticalized although their frequency of occurrence is extremely low. Basically, two main arguments are put forward (apart from stylistic reasons, existence of a more common variant, etc.): relative frequency (a low-frequency item

may be a preferred choice of expression in spite of its absolute low frequency and thus become conceptually salient and entrenched as an individual entity) and analogy (formal parallelism) to more frequent, structurally similar PNP-constructions. Analogy was, in fact, mentioned as a means of abrupt grammaticalization of these sequences in Chapter 5. It may not, perhaps, be out of place to say that this observation is nothing new. It has been pointed out before by several authors quoted by Hofmann (e.g., Quirk-Mulholland, 1964[2]).

In the concluding chapter Hofmann provides a number of suggestions for further research, such as expanding the range of complex prepositions to be examined, a more detailed investigation of their genre-specific uses and discourse-pragmatic functions, an exploration of the concept of grammaticalization by analogy, of the interlanguage influences (effect of French complex prepositions on English), and others. Finally, Appendix I contains a detailed description of the texts of the Gutenberg corpus and Appendix II David Lee's classification of genres adopted in the analysis.

Hofmann's monograph is without doubt an excellent and much-needed contribution to the study of prepositions in general and complex prepositions in particular. It explores the subject with great skill and confidence (just one small technical error: Table 2.3 on p. 35 should read Table 2.4) and brings to bear on it the advantages of up-to-date methodology. I have just one reservation. In contrast to the author's lengthy discussion of the sources (most of Chapter 2), his delimitation of the key concept of complex preposition is somewhat perfunctory. In the last section of this chapter, he swiftly moves

from a list of potential complex prepositions (Figure 2.2) to 30 most frequent complex prepositions (Table 2.4) without giving any explicit criteria whereby he distinguishes potentials from actual prepositions. Although we are told that PNP-constructions "are generally considered to function as heads of prepositional phrases" (p.1), and their prepositional function is apparently taken to be sufficiently defining, there are pitfalls. Specifically I have a problem with the sequence *in need of*, partly for reasons mentioned by Hofmann himself (it appears to form an extended lexical item with *to be*; pp. 78–9), partly because typical uses of *in need of*, are not, to my mind, easily reconcilable with its assumed prepositional function: *his solo career has often seemed in need of surgery* (Cs; syntactic adjective meaning "needful of"); *the extent of their progress has left everyone panting and in need of a breather* (Co; parallelism with the present participle "panting"); *another magazine looking a little in need of revitalisation* (modification by an adverb). Conversely, *in need of* does not appear with its complement in adjunct function. It short, it may be worth stating explicitly when PNP sequences can be said to function as prepositions and when they cannot.

Aleš Klégr (Prague)

Notes

[1] HUDDLESTON, R. (1984): *Introduction to the Grammar of English.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

HUDDLESTON, R. (1988): *Grammar of English: An Outline.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

HUDDLESTON, R. – PULLUM, G. K. (2002): *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

SEPPÄNEN, A. – BOWEN, R. – TROTTA, J. (1994): On the so-called complex preposition. *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 29, 3–29.

[2] QUIRK, R. – MULLHOLAND, J. (1965): *Complex prepositions and related sequences. English Studies* (Supplement: Festschrift for R. W. Zandvoort) 45, 64–73.

ONDŘEJ PEŠEK (ED.)
OPERA ROMANICA 3: LANGUE ET SOCIÉTÉ. DYNAMIQUE DES USAGES. XXVIIᵉ COLLOQUE INTERNACIONAL DE LINGUISTIQUE FONCTIONELLE
České Budějovice, Jihočeská univerzita v Českých Budějovicích, 2004, 359 p.

El tercer número de Opera romanica contiene las actas del 27° Coloquio internacional de lingüística funcional que tuvo lugar en la Universidad de la Bohemia del Sur en České Budějovice de 23 a 28 de octubre 2003. Para el coloquio anual de la S.I.L.F. fueron elgidos dos temas: *Lengua y sociedad* y *Dinámica del uso*. Las comunicaciones en las actas están divididas según los temas; otras comunicaciones, individuales, están divididas en seciones: *léxico, semántica; fonética y fonología; sintématica y sintaxis; enseñanza de lenguas, traductología*. El volúmen empieza con el informe de la asamblea general de la S.I.L.F.

Lengua y Sociedad. **Jean-Pierre Goudaillier** (Universidad René Descartes-Paris 5) analiza expresiones lingüísticas de la violencia social y reactiva, señalando la