

## **'Lateral' grammaticalization: Chinese copula *shi***

Keywords: syntax, diachronic change, typology and comparative studies, grammaticalization

In this paper, I propose to analyse the frequency effects which underlie the change of Chinese *shi* from a subject determiner (D) to a copula verb (T). Simpson and Wu (2002) and Wu (2004) define 'lateral' grammaticalization as the re-analysis of one functional category (D) to another (T), and Tse (2013a, b) applies the Minimalist approaches to grammaticalization (Roberts and Roussou (R&R) (2003), van Gelderen (2011)) to Chinese *shi* and argues that while *shi* undergoes 'structural simplification', since it loses its *Agree* relation with the topic and its interpretable phi-features ([i-phi]) as a determiner become uninterpretable ([u-phi]) as a copula verb, which conform to R&R's (2003:201) 'simplicity' (loss of 'feature syncretisms' and syntactic dependencies) and van Gelderen's (2011:17-20) 'feature economy' (the presence of uninterpretable features in lieu of interpretable features) respectively, *shi* does not display R&R's (2003:200) 'upward feature analysis', since *shi* as a copula verb ends up holding interpretable T(ense) features ([i-T]) that are not in the original equational construction but are newly re-analysed in its genesis as a copula verb (Tse (2013b:105-106)). Chinese *shi* and similar copula verbs derived from subject determiners therefore form minimal pairs with subject agreement markers derived from subject determiners e.g. French *il* > *i-* (Lambrecht (1981), cf R&R (2003:175-192), van Gelderen (2011:chapter 2)), which also undergo 'structural simplification' for the same reasons above but crucially have a main verb (T) in the original construction which acts as a probe ([u-phi]) for the subject. The genesis of subject agreement markers therefore displays 'upward feature analysis', since the subject determiner loses its *Move* relation with SpecT and is shifted upwards from Specv to T where it renews rather than gains the interpretable T features (R&R (2003:178-189), van Geldern (2011:chapter 2)). Tse (2013a:96-111, 2013b:106-107) notes that while there is regularly 'phonological weakening', 'univerbation' and 'semantic bleaching' in grammaticalization ('upward feature analysis'), these phenomena do not occur in 'lateral' grammaticalization ('lateral feature analysis') e.g. Chinese *shi*, which is still stressed and toned (tone 4) in modern Chinese. It is argued that weakening of phonological, morphological and semantic substance is due to an exponential rise in frequency of functional elements (Bybee et al (1994), Bybee (2003, 2006)), and a comparison of historical frequencies between Chinese *shi* (Li and Thompson (1977), Feng (1993, 2003)) and French subject agreement markers (*i-* < *il*) (Lambrecht (1981)) reveals that while the latter becomes obligatory in subject-verbal predicates and hence rises in frequency, the former is only used in predicational constructions and does not have the same rise in frequency as it is not obligatory on all verbs. The inverse proportion between substance and frequency can therefore be maintained, and the lack of weakening in Chinese *shi* can also be accounted for.

### **References:**

Bybee, J. L., Perkins, R. D., Pagliuca, W. (1994): *The Evolution of Grammar: Tense, Aspect, and Modality in the Languages of the World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bybee, J. L. (2003): 'Mechanisms of change in grammaticalization: the role of frequency', in Joseph, B. and Janda, R. D. (eds), *The Handbook of Historical Linguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 602-623.

Bybee, J. L. (2006): 'From usage to grammar: the mind's response to repetition'. *Language* 82.4:711-33.

Feng, S-L (1993): 'The Copula in Classical Chinese Declarative Sentences'. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 22(2):277-311.

Feng, S-L (2002): 'Prosodic structure and the origin of *ba* Construction', in Triskova, H. (ed), *Tone, Stress and Rhythm in Spoken Chinese*, *Journal of Chinese Linguistic monograph* 17:119-168.

Feng, S-L (2003): 'Gu Hanyu panduan ju zhong de xici'. *Research in Ancient Chinese Language* 58(1):30-36.

Lambrecht, K. (1981): *Topic, Antitopic, Verb Agreement in Non-Standard French*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Li, C. N. and Thompson, S. A. (1977): 'A Mechanism for the Development of Copula Morphemes', in Li, C. (ed) *Mechanisms of Syntactic Change*, Austin and London: University of Texas Press, p. 419-444.

Roberts, I. and Roussou, A. (2003): *Syntactic change. A Minimalist approach to grammaticalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Simpson, A. and Wu, Z. (2002a): 'From D to T – determiner incorporation and the creation of tense.' *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 11:169-202.

Tse, K. (2013a): 'Grammaticalization and 'lateral' grammaticalization, formalism and functionalism', in *Working papers of the University of Geneva, GG@G, SWIGG 12*.

[http://www.unige.ch/lettres/linge/syntaxe/journal/Volume8/6\\_Tse\\_2012.pdf](http://www.unige.ch/lettres/linge/syntaxe/journal/Volume8/6_Tse_2012.pdf)

Tse, K. (2013b): 'What is 'lateral' grammaticalization?', in *Languages at the University of Essex (LangUE), Proceedings for LangUE 2012*.

[http://www.essex.ac.uk/langling/documents/langue/langue\\_2012\\_proceedings.pdf](http://www.essex.ac.uk/langling/documents/langue/langue_2012_proceedings.pdf)

Wu, Z. (2004): *Grammaticalization and Language Change in Chinese: a Formal View*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.