

# Drawing Parallels Between Language Change Processes: Grammaticalization, Constructionalization and Phraseologization\*

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## Abstract

Over the last decades, the acknowledgment of the dynamic character of language has led to the focus on language evolution and change. Among the different streams of linguistics, Historical linguistics (morphosyntax), Construction Grammar and Phraseology have paid attention to these processes, studying grammaticalization, constructionalization and phraseologization, respectively. The three frameworks we are dealing with were quite different in origin, but through the adoption of cognitive, usage-based, pragmatic approaches they are tending to converge. In this paper we will outline the respective frameworks, their conception of language unit and the process of change, including its mechanisms and stages. In each section, we will include some applications in Catalan language. As we consider them to be complementary, since they account for different items of language, at the end we will suggest an integration of the three of them.

**Keywords:** constructionalization; conventionalization; entrenchment; grammaticalization; language change; phraseologization

**Resum.** *Paral·lelismes entre diversos processos de canvi lingüístic: gramaticalització, fraseologització i constructionalització*

En les darreres dècades, el reconeixement del caràcter dinàmic de la llengua ha promogut l'estudi de l'evolució i el canvi lingüístic. Entre els diversos corrents lingüístics que s'hi han dedicat, la lingüística històrica (morfosintaxi), la Gramàtica de Construccions i la fraseologia han parat atenció a aquests processos mitjançant l'estudi de la gramaticalització, la constructionalització i la fraseologització, respectivament. Els tres marcs teòrics eren ben diferents en origen, però amb l'adopció d'una perspectiva cognitiva, basada en l'ús i pragmàtica, mostren una tendència a convergir. En aquest article farem una revisió dels diversos marcs teòrics, la seua concepció d'unitat

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de llengua i el procés de canvi, incloent-ne els mecanismes i les fases. En cada part aportarem algunes aplicacions que se n'han fet en llengua catalana. Com que són complementaris perquè cadascun d'ells ret compte de diferents unitats lingüístiques, al final suggerirem una integració dels tres marcs teòrics.

**Paraules clau:** construccionalització; convencionalització; consolidació; gramaticalització; canvi lingüístic; fraseologització

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## 1. Introduction

Language is a complex, multilayered phenomenon. As a consequence, it has not been studied and conceptualized equally along history. The way we analyse it, and the components we take into account have a great impact on how we understand it. And the other way round: our conception of language determines the methods and theoretical frameworks we adopt to analyse it.

Despite not being homogeneous, there have been influential and widespread trends in linguistics along the years. For instance, Saussure's structuralism, with its cut-clear distinction between synchrony and diachrony, and between *langue* (language) and *parole* (usage), had a deep influence on European linguistics. Chomky's generative grammar, centred on revealing the system of rules that generates those combinations of words that form grammatical sentences, also represented a main trend. Both approaches have in common their focus on synchrony and on the "system" of language, which is thought to be arbitrary and unchanging.

Over the last decades, the acknowledgment of the dynamic character of language has led to the focus on language evolution and change. Among the different streams of linguistics, Historical linguistics (morphosyntax), Construction Grammar and Phraseology have paid attention to these processes, studying grammaticalization (Hopper & Traugott 2003; Heine & Narrog 2011, among others), constructionalization (Fried 2009, 2013; Traugott & Trousdale 2013; Coussé, Andersson & Olofsson 2018) and phraseologization (Sánchez-López 2015, 2020).

The three frameworks we are dealing with are quite different in origin, but they are tending to converge. Grammaticalization was the first to come into play and to focus on language change. This approach and Construction Grammar have in common that they were initially thought as morphosyntactic theories and are gradually being extended (by Traugott 2002, 2005 and Goldberg 2006, and following publications) to include (lexical) semantics and pragmatics. At first, grammaticalization was a diachronic approach and Construction Grammar a synchronic one, but a

Diachronic Construction Grammar (Israel 1996; Bergs & Diewald 2008; Barðdal et al. 2015; Fried 2009, 2013) has been gaining momentum in the last decades. Construction Grammar and Phraseology were born to deal with linguistic units beyond the word, initially in synchrony, but they may also have a diachronic implementation (see Sánchez-López 2015, 2020). From these three, Phraseology was the framework dealing with lexical items before the extension of Grammaticalization Theory and Construction Grammar.

Despite this convergence tendency, each of them has their own idiosyncrasies, which have their roots in the origin of the framework. To better understand their contributions and limits, we will have a closer look at their tenets, their conception of language and its units and their descriptions of change, focusing on its mechanisms and stages. We will also include some information about their application in Catalan language.

## 2. Grammaticalization

### 2.1. About the framework

Grammaticalization Theory emerges from the descriptive studies on the evolution of grammatical forms.<sup>1</sup> The term was coined by Meillet (1912), although Humboldt and Gabelentz had already been studying this kind of processes. He defined *grammaticalization* as “l’attribution du caractère grammatical à un mot jadis autonome”<sup>2</sup> (Meillet 1912: 131) and considered it, together with analogy, the way in which new grammatical forms emerge. After his works, grammaticalization was not in the foreground for a while since the mainstream linguistics was focused on synchrony.

From the 1980s on, it was studied again, at the beginning giving more weight to syntax and morphology.<sup>3</sup> Changes in syntax or form of grammatical elements were the most relevant issue and meaning was still secondary or totally ignored. Subsequently, new layers of the language phenomenon came into the equation. Semantics and pragmatics<sup>4</sup> were also to be considered, as well as the cognitive component. The notion of *usage-based* (proposed by Langacker 1987) came into play and was adopted by them “who were growing uncomfortable with sentence analyses based on the linguist’s private introspection” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 35). Therefore, the focus changed from *langue* to *parole*, from transformation rules to real utterances. Corpus linguistics played a significant role in the implementation of this new approach to language.

1. Hopper & Traugott (2003/1993) summarize the history of the notion, from the earlier research (ca. 1822 with Humboldt’s *Über das Entstehen der grammatikalischen Formen und ihren Einfluß auf die Ideenentwicklung*) to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The second edition (2003) includes references up to 2003.
2. In English: “the passage of an autonomous word to the role of grammatical element” (translation by Hopper & Traugott 2003).
3. Givón (1979) even preferred the terms “syntacticization” and “morphologization” over “grammaticalization”.
4. As early as 1982, Traugott already postulated the importance of semantic/pragmatic factors in grammaticalization.

By the turn of the millennium, new factors related to language use were incorporated into the study of grammaticalization. The influence of frequency, as well as the importance of context were highlighted (Bybee & Hopper 2002). Context is to be understood in the sense of juxtaposition, collocation of particular forms (strings). Krug (1998) even considered “string frequency” as a motivating force in change and the emergence of categories.

From the previous paragraphs, we can see that what started being “the study of grammatical forms, however defined, viewed not as static objects but as entities undergoing change” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 19) has a much more nuanced definition nowadays. For Hopper & Traugott (2003: 18), *grammaticalization* is “a term referring to the change whereby lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions and, once grammaticalized, continue to develop new grammatical functions”.<sup>5</sup> According to this conception of grammaticalization, the mechanisms responsible for it are reanalysis and analogy. While reanalysis is a prerequisite for change, analogy evidences the change by guiding the modification of the surface manifestation. The cause for these changes lies in the interaction between speaker and hearer,<sup>6</sup> that is, is driven by pragmatic factors. Hopper & Traugott (2003: 74-98) highlight metaphorical and metonymic inferring as motivation for grammaticalization.

After dealing with change in grammatical elements, Traugott focused on the semantic part of grammaticalization, pointing out its regularities (2002, with Dasher). In this book, they argue for an Invited Inferencing<sup>7</sup> Theory of Semantic Change (IITSC).<sup>8</sup> Afterwards, extended the theory to lexical items (2005, with Brinton). As a culmination of this development, she also applied the process of emergence and change to Construction Grammar (2013, with Trousdale).

## 2.2. Units of language

Grammaticalization focuses, at least initially, on morphosyntactic change. It can affect a single word, as well as a combination of them. To observe it, researchers

5. Besides the definition of the process, Hopper & Traugott (2003: 18) also conceive *grammaticalization* as “a research framework for studying the relationships between lexical, constructional, and grammatical material in language, diachronically and synchronically, both in particular languages and cross-linguistically”. This research framework includes the factors pointed out previously, which will be developed by Traugott in her subsequent works: *Regularity in Semantic Change* (2002; with Richard B. Dasher), *Lexicalization and Language Change* (2005; with Laurel J. Brinton) and *Constructionalization and Constructional Changes* (2013; with Graeme Trousdale).
6. The way language users are referred to also differs depending on our conception of language. While *Speaker-Hearer* is widespread, Traugott (2002) decides to introduce the terms *Speaker/Writer* (SP/W) and *Addressee/Reader* (AD/R), to evidence the oral/written nature of language and the important of the addressee. To include sign language users, we should add signer – addressee.
7. *Invited Inference* is a term borrowed from Geis & Zwicky (1971).
8. “The prime objective of IITSC is to account for the conventionalizing of pragmatic meanings and their reanalysis as semantic meanings. Differently put, historically there is a path from coded meanings to utterance-token meanings (IINs) to utterance-type, pragmatically polysemous meanings (GIINs) to new semantically polysemous (coded) meanings.” (Traugott & Dasher 2002: 35).

have to consider language strings. As we see from the previous definitions, the notion undergoes a slight change along time. While Meillet (1912) makes the difference between an autonomous word (a lexical one) and an item with grammatical character, Hopper & Traugott (2003) speak of lexical items and constructions serving grammatical functions. To this primary grammaticalization (lexical to grammatical), researchers add a secondary one, which involves a change of grammatical function. As an example of the first, we could cite Old Spanish adverb *ý* > bound form *hay*<sup>9</sup> or Latin *cantare habeo* > Catalan (and also Spanish) *Cantar-e* > *cantaré*.<sup>10</sup> As to the second, Catalan *Tanmateix* [ADDITION] > *TANMATEIX* [CONTRAST].<sup>11</sup>

Given that the theory embraces several types of languages, it does not explicitly discuss their building blocks. When analysing European languages, the classical terms *word*, *verb*, *adjective*, *adverb*, etc. are normally used. Nevertheless, the difference between lexical and grammatical item is essential since it defines the primary process. We can deduce it from some of the different changes undergone during the grammaticalization process: (i) Weakening or loss of lexical-referential meaning = increase of more abstract grammatical meaning = decategorization/recategorization; (iii) Lessening of autonomy = weakening or loss of morphosyntactic freedom; and (vi) Grammatical integration = paradigmaticization (as described by Company 2012: 688). While a lexical item is characterized by referentiality, autonomy and singularity, a grammatical item tend to have an abstract meaning, less freedom and belong to a paradigm.

### 2.3. Language change: Mechanisms and stages

Traditionally, reanalysis<sup>12</sup> (rule change) and analogy<sup>13</sup> (rule generalization) have been considered as the mechanisms leading to grammaticalization (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 39), and pragmatics (inferencing) as a relevant factor (2003: 71-98). Over time, the usage-based approach has gained importance and the observation of how a language is learned and used gives new clues to understand language change. Thus, grammaticalization is caused by pragmatic (and cognitive) factors involved in language use. This view implies that the communication situation and the hearer/speaker are to be considered. In this sense, we agree with Fischer (2011: 2) that reanalysis – when processing language – is in the eye of the beholder, that is, it is not a mechanism the hearer/speaker use, but the effect we see when we study language over time.

9. Example from Company (2012: 676).

10. Evolution similar to Spanish, which was studied by Company (1985).

11. Grammaticalization process studied by Martínez-Martínez (2018).

12. Langacker (1977: 57) defines it as a change in the structure of an expression or class of expressions which do not necessarily involve an immediate modification of their phonological form.

13. In Traugott (2011) “repetition” is added to the list. Repetition (frequency) plays a major role in language change, as in any learning process, since “practice or repetition allows you to become more fluent as you learn to anticipate and overlap one action with another and to reduce non-essential movements” (Bybee 2015: 9).

Basing on Historical Spanish Morphosyntax, Company (2012: 673) identifies multicausality and constant level interaction, where phonological, morphological, syntagmatic, and semantic-pragmatic causes go hand in hand. Previous language conventions affect new forms, and a change in any of these layers can have an impact on the others. She also acknowledges that change takes place during language use, in real syntagmatic contexts, in actual discourse and distinguishes between a macro-unit (the context) and a micro-unit (the actual discourses with their situations and actors). In addition, she recognizes the inferential nature of language change, which can be “textually or extratextually anchored” (2012: 687).

From a language perspective, “reanalysis is the reinterpretation of a form or construction with a consequent refunctionalization, or recategorization, of it” (Company 2012: 689). These consequences are due to the process of hearers-speakers using language and negotiating meaning. When they detect ambiguity, they need to recover transparency or isomorphism between form and meaning, and they make use of an inferential process, charging the forms with new semantic nuances (Company 2012: 689). When these phenomena “achieve special expressive effects become, over time, conventional grammatical structures lacking any pragmatic conditioning” (Company 2012: 675-676). In this sense, grammaticalization consists in “the conventionalization of tendencies or routines which have emerged from the discourse”.

Mechanisms, causes, factors and consequences concerning grammaticalization are difficult to take apart, because they depend on the position of the observer, and we are constantly moving from the cognitive to the social component of language, from the process to the real micro-changes involved, from the individual use of language to the social conventions governing it. As a simplification, we could state that the mechanism leading to grammaticalization is the conventionalization of previously context-dependent inferences. The factors involved are repetition (frequency), cognitive processes such as pattern building (segmentation and abstraction), analogical thinking (pattern reusing and creativity) and meaning making (inferencing, conceptual metaphor and metonymy, motivation) and contextual factors, such as the relation between hearer and speaker or the communication situation and its physical components. Phonological, morphological, syntagmatic and semantic-pragmatic changes can be framed as causes (if they belong to the system of language) or as consequences (if speaking about the grammaticalized item).

Company (2012: 680-686) also analyses the micro-innovations leading to change, which include the emergence of an innovative form, its spreading through linguistic and social contexts, its advance from very specific or marked contexts to unmarked ones and the advance from more favourable to less favourable contexts. These considerations match the Scenario of acquisition of new grammatical meanings in grammaticalization postulated by Heine (2002: 86) and Heine & Narrog (2011).

Heine (2002: 86) identifies four stages in the process of grammaticalization. According to him, in the initial stage, the context is unconstrained, and we can observe the source meaning. In a second stage, we find a bridging context (a specific context giving rise to an inference in favour of a new meaning), where the

target meaning is foregrounded. In the third stage, a switch context (a new context that is incompatible with the source meaning) can be identified. To this point, the source meaning is backgrounded. In the fourth stage, the target meaning no longer needs to be supported by the context that gave rise to it; it may be used in new contexts. It has been conventionalized.

#### *2.4. Application in Catalan Studies*

In the area of Catalan Studies, Grammaticalization Theory has been discussed by Cuenca (2001) and Pérez Saldanya (2007). It has found its application especially in the emergence of discourse markers as in Cuenca & Massip (2005), Robles & Bertomeu (2017), Bach Martorell (2017), Obis Monné (2017) Robles i Sabater (2017), Garachana (2019), and Martínez-Martínez (2017, 2020), but also in the analysis of the evolution of determinate verbs or constructions, as in Montserrat Buendía (2004), Antolí-Martínez (2012, 2019, 2023), Sentí i Pons (2013), Martines Peres & Montserrat Buendía (2014) and García Sebastià (2017).

### **3. Constructionalization**

#### *3.1. About the framework*

Construction Grammar is far from being a homogeneous framework (see González-García & Butler 2006; Goldberg 2006: 205-226; Traugott & Trousdale 2013: 1-8; Hoffman & Trousdale 2013 or Ungerer & Hartmann 2023). Among the different approaches falling under its umbrella, we consider Goldberg's (1995, 2006, 2019, forthcoming) to be the most compatible with Grammaticalization as described by Hopper & Traugott (2003), Heine & Narrog (2011) and Company (2012) since it is a descriptive, functional, cognitive, usage-based approach to language. In a sense, it could be considered as generative, because the schematic constructions serve as guidelines to produce language. But it is not transformational, since it bases on analysing surface structure and establishing schemas instead of positing and underlying level of representation and seeking for rules. In addition, it has a parallel to Traugott's evolution, since from a morphosyntactic model, it has advanced to be a language model, as evidenced by the statement: "it's constructions all the way down" (Goldberg 2006: 18). In this sense, all levels of grammatical analysis involve constructions, including morphemes or words, idioms, partially lexically filled and fully general phrasal patterns (Goldberg 2006: 5).

Unlike the mainstream "generative approach", Cognitive Construction Grammar considers that formal structures of language have to be studied together with their semantic and discourse functions, thus capturing the subtle aspects of the way we construe the world. It focuses on formal patterns and the meaning they convey. Every pattern is relevant, despite being semi-regular or cross-linguistically unusual. Instead of being treated as peripheral, exceptional patterns are captured by low-level constructions. Learners are not supposed to have knowledge that is specific to language ("universal grammar") but learn on the basis of the input together with general cognitive, pragmatic, and processing constraints (Goldberg 2006).



Goldberg (1995) adopts this approach to explain lexically unfilled constructions without resorting to an entirely lexically based approach to grammar. According to her, these constructions must be recognized to exist independently of the particular lexical items which instantiate them. In addition, they are not isolated items, but are related through an associative network via asymmetric normal mode inheritance links, with dominated and dominating constructions. Inheritance hierarchies play an important role in representing generalizations.

Constructions are not meant to pursue classical syntactic analysis, since an actual expression can typically involve the combination of at least half a dozen of them. They represent a usage-based model of grammar that aims to account for speaker's full knowledge of language including both instances (represented at a level of abstraction due to selective encoding) and generalizations. A "what you see is what you get" approach to syntactic form is adopted, since generalizations are better described by analysing surface structure instead of positing and underlying level of representation.

We can see the scope of the framework paying attention to Goldberg's publications, which range from the explication of the nature of argument structure (1995) to the nature of generalizations in language (2006) to creativity and the partial productivity of constructions (2019). The cognitive aspect of language gains in importance along these books, and in Goldberg (forthcoming: 1) she highlights that "a recognition that constructions pair form with function at varying levels of specificity and abstraction and the recognition that our knowledge and use of language are dynamic and usage-based" are the main tenets of the constructionist approach.

### 3.2. *Units of language*

According to this approach, language is made of constructions. They are conventional symbolic units (Langacker 1987; Croft 2005). They are said to be conventional because they are shared by a group of speakers. They are labelled as symbolic because they are a sign, a typically association of Form and Meaning. To determine the extension of a (language) unit, we should quote Goldberg (2006: 5):

Any linguistic pattern is recognized as a construction as long as some aspect of its form or function is not strictly predictable from its component parts or from other constructions recognized to exist. In addition, patterns are stored as constructions even if they are fully predictable as long as they occur with sufficient frequency.<sup>14</sup>

Constructions are present in all levels of grammatical analysis (Goldberg 2006: 5). They include<sup>15</sup> morphemes (-ing, -a), words (anaconda, *taronja* [colour]),

14. In this definition, Goldberg acknowledges that a compositional combination of units (constructions) can be entrenched, as long as it is very frequent.

15. We reproduce, in the first place, the examples from Goldberg (2006: 5) in English. In the second place, we add an example in Catalan. From these constructions, we can already see differences between languages. For instance, in inflectional languages such as Catalan, most verbs, nouns and adjectives are "complex words".



complex words (daredevil, *vistiplau*), complex words ([N-s] (for regular plurals), [Root-*essa*] (for feminine profession nouns in Catalan)), filled idioms (going great guns, *tenir melsa*) and partially-filled idioms (send <someone> to the cleaners, [anar-se'n (inflected)] *la mà* <a algú>). Obviously, they also comprise the more schematic ones, such as the covariational conditional (The Xer the Yer, *com més X, més Y*), the ditransitive (Subj V Obj1 Obj2, (*Subj*) *Pronoun Obj1 V Obj2* or (*Subj*) *V a Obj1 Obj2*<sup>16</sup>) or the passive (Subj aux VPpp (PPby), *Subj aux VPp (PP per)*<sup>17</sup>).

Given the previous definition, a unit (construction) would be the smallest non-compositional (non-combinatory) piece of language. However, they are difficult to ascertain due to their different levels of abstraction and their hierarchical links. Traugott & Trousdale (2013) deal with this issue specifying the notion of construction.<sup>18</sup> In the first place, they assign three dimensions to them: size, degree of phonological specificity and type of concept. Depending on the size, they can be atomic<sup>19</sup> (*red*), complex<sup>20</sup> (*on top of*) or intermediate (*bonfire*). Concerning specificity, they can be substantive (*dropout*), schematic (N) or intermediate (*V-ment - enjoyment*). As to the dimension of type of concept, they can be contentful<sup>21</sup> (*red*), procedural (subject-auxiliary inversion) or intermediate/hybrid (*way-construction*).

In the second, they discuss the factors of schematicity, productivity and compositionality. Schematicity and schemas<sup>22</sup> play a major role in their framework since they structure the network of constructions. In their view linguistic schemas are abstract, semantically general groups of constructions (Traugott & Trousdale 2013: 14). The degree of schematicity pertains to levels of generality or specificity and the extent to which parts of the network are rich in detail (Langacker 2009). They do not consider them as mental representations, but as subparts of the linguistic system that the linguist picks out for discussion and analysis. The different levels of schematicity determine the hierarchic relationships among constructions. Schemas are instantiated by subschemas and, at the lower levels, by micro-constructions. These micro-constructions, in turn, are instantiated by “constructs”, which are empirically attested tokens. The more abstract constructions sanction the more concrete ones.

Productivity concerns (partial) schemas and depends on their “extensibility” (Barðdal 2008), their “capacity” to sanction less schematic constructions, and the extent to which they are constrained (Boas 2008). Compositionality is not con-

16. Ditransitive order in Catalan varies depending of the use of a Noun or a Pronoun.

17. It is possible to build the passive in Catalan, but its use is exceptional.

18. Despite not adhering to a particular type of Construction Grammar, they acknowledge a high degree of compatibility with Cognitive Construction Grammar (Goldberg 2006) and with Radical Construction Grammar (Croft 2001) and state relying on Word Grammar (Hudson 2007) to complete the picture.

19. Monomorphemic. In highly inflected languages, most of the words are intermediate.

20. Made up of analysable chunks.

21. Unlike Goldberg, Traugott & Trousdale (2013) make a distinction between contentful (lexical) constructions and procedural (grammatical) ones. The former can be used referentially and are typically N, V or ADJ. The latter have abstract meaning that signals linguistic relations, perspectives, and deictic orientation (2013: 12).

22. According to Kemmer (2003: 78) schemas “are essentially routinized, or cognitively entrenched, patterns of experience”.

ceived in the traditional syntactical way, but from a constructional perspective, i.e. as the degree of transparency of the link between Meaning and Form. Analyzability is considered as a subtype of compositionality.

In addition to these dimensions and factors, the links among constructions are essential to describe the constructional network. Besides the relational links (polysemy, metaphorical extension, subpart, and instance links),<sup>23</sup> the inheritance links represent taxonomic constraints and allow for categorizations at various levels of generality. Each node inherits the properties of its dominating nodes. According to Goldberg (2003), expressions typically inherit from several constructions, which is labeled as *multiple inheritance*.

### 3.3. Language change: Mechanisms and stages

As we see from the previous characterization, in Construction Grammar we deal with different kinds of constructions, with varying degrees of abstraction, inserted in a constructional network. Given these factors and the subsequent changes in schematicity, productivity and compositionality the study of language change within this framework is much more complex than the one within Grammaticalization Theory. Traugott & Trousdale (2013: 22) define constructionalization as “the creation of form<sub>new</sub>-meaning<sub>new</sub> (combinations of) signs. It forms new type nodes, which have new syntax or morphology and new coded meaning, in the linguistic network of a population of speakers. It is accompanied by changes in degree of schematicity, productivity, and compositionality. The constructionalization of schemas always results from a succession of micro-steps and is therefore gradual. New micro-constructions may likewise be created gradually, but they may also be instantaneous. Gradually created micro-constructions tend to be procedural, and instantaneously created micro-constructions tend to be contentful”.

We have to bear in mind that they usually analyse long-term changes that take place over more than one generation, and that mark the emergence of a new period of English or even the evolution from Latin into the Romance languages. In the definition, they include the importance of conventionalization (coded in the network of a population) and of graduality (micro-steps). Besides the long-term created schemas, they detect some contentful micro-constructions, which can be instantaneously created such as loanwords (*sushi*), word-formations (modelled on a schema) (*Obamadom*), clippings (*tude*, *sitcom*, *motel*), acronyms (*NGO*) or conversions.<sup>24</sup>

Traugott & Trousdale (2013) base on the components of the construction postulated by Croft (2001: 18) to determine when a constructionalization has been

23. As proposed by Goldberg (1995).

24. Conversion, also called zero derivation, is a kind of word formation involving the creation of a word (of a new part of speech) from an existing word (of a different part of speech) without any change in form. It is considered as a result of a constructionalization process because it changes its syntactical patterns. It is very productive in English, e.g. *to Google*, *to dust*, but in Romance languages, this kind of derivation is not so fruitful because the equivalent process is made with suffixes or prefixes, e.g. *googlejar*, *espolsar*.

accomplished. In their view, it must include a neoanalysis of morphosyntactic form and semantic/pragmatic meaning. In constructional terms, it must include formal as well as meaning changes. Discourse and phonological changes are possible, but not compulsory. When these changes are undergone, a new node in the network is created.

Apart from this complex process, they also identify a constructional change, which affects one internal dimension of a construction, but does not involve the creation of a new node (Traugott & Trousdale 2013: 26). It is considered to precede or follow the process of constructionalization.

Traugott & Trousdale (2013: 35-38) consider that the mechanisms leading to constructionalization are neoanalysis and analogization. In essence, they coincide with those of Grammaticalization, but Traugott has fine-tuned them. Now, she distinguishes between the change-enabling processes, analogical thinking, and parsing, respectively, and the mechanisms, analogization and neoanalysis. The denomination of reanalysis has been changed because it implied that the speaker/hearer had made one analysis and then a second one, and the fact is that, given the needed time to change, the speaker/hearer is a different one. They acknowledge the graduality of the process, that it occurs while language is being used and that it is related to “human neuromotor, perceptual, and cognitive abilities” (Bybee 2001: 190). Despite considering the construct – and the rich pragmatic situation in which is used – the locus of change, context is just analysed as a linguistic category to assess change.

Traugott & Trousdale (2013) also discuss other factors that have usually cited as mechanisms. Frequency (proposed by Bybee 2003) is only seen as a condition for routinization and schematization, etc. Spreading activation is a neural mechanism linked to analogical thinking and parsing, playing thus a major role in constructional changes, but not being a mechanism in itself. Coercion (proposed by Ziegeler 2007, 2010) is not needed, according to them.

The complexity of a network with varying degrees of abstraction raises the question of at which level matches are made. They quote Barðdal (2008) to suggest that low type frequency can be associated with analogization if accompanied by semantic coherence and high token frequency, because they are likely to be entrenched and available as models. High type frequency constructions do not need a high degree of semantic coherence in order to be productive. That is, a more schematic construction serves as a model and a more concrete but very frequent can lead to analogization and then, become also productive. Therefore, Barðdal treats low and high frequency as poles on a productivity cline.

The stages of Constructionalization are similar to those proposed by Heine (2002) and Diewald (2002) for Grammaticalization.<sup>25</sup> Although in this case, they apply to grammatical constructions, as well as to lexical ones. The complexity of the constructionalization process and the conception that it only is completed when

25. Heine's and Diewald's proposals are similar. While Heine postulates an initial context, a switch context, a bridging context and the conventionalization, Diewald speaks of untypical contexts, critical context, and isolating contexts.

a new node is created, make that Traugott & Trousdale (2013: 198-230) frame these stages as pre- and post-constructionalization factors.

According to them, the emergence of a new construction can be identified in onset contexts, that are tiny, minor morphosyntactic readjustments owing to chunking, routinization and repeated selection of a particular set of constructs. This context includes pragmatics e.g. “invited inferences” (Traugott & Dasher 2002) or “context induced interpretation” (Heine, Claudi & Hünemeyer 1991). The new expression cannot be identified yet, but it may give rise to synchronic gradience in a system (Traugott & Trousdale 2010). New meanings do not immediately replace old meanings but there can be long periods where both coexists. Nevertheless, Traugott & Trousdale (2013: 60) do not consider this phenomenon as polysemy but as heterosemy.<sup>26</sup>

The creation of a new nodes and links is explained by innovation<sup>27</sup> (through parsing by the hearer), reuse and conventionalization (other hearers going a similar process). The innovation is usually due to: i) loosely associating an invited inference from a construct with the semantics of a construction that already exists in the constructional network, ii) preferring to use parts of the construct in a particular distributional niche, or iii) repeating part of a construct as a chunk (Traugott & Trousdale 2013: 91-92).

Trough repetition, a group of speakers agree to assign a conventional relationship between the form a newly analysed meaning. This leads to mismatch between the Form of the original construction and the new constructs, which can lead to changes in the Form. When this happens, a new micro-construction has been created. Changes do not stop at this point since the type-constructions may be expanded and reorganized as subschemas via analogical thinking. The form can be reduced due to frequent token use or the construction-types may disappear due to decreased use. After constructionalization, the influence of enabling contexts persist a can favour the spread across the system of new elements (see e.g. Timberlake 1977; Andersen 2001; De Smet 2012). In the grammatical constructionalization process, Traugott & Trousdale (2013) identify, as a first step, a reduction and an increased dependency, then an expansion, an increase in productivity and schematicity and a decrease in compositionality.

Analogously to Brinton & Traugott (2005), Traugott & Trousdale (2013) extend grammatical constructionalization to the lexical one. The emergence of lexical constructions is thus treated following the patterns observed in the grammatical ones. Firstly, they remark that lexicalization has been traditionally associated with loss of schematicity, productivity and compositionality, which is close related to their definition of the term. In (Brinton & Traugott 2005: 18), they define (diachronic)<sup>28</sup>

26. Term suggested by Lichtenberk (1991) to speak about diachronic association of a Form with two Meanings. Since the two meanings are likely to coexist in the same period, heterosemy leads to polysemy.

27. Although in a naïve way, this approach contains the essence of a more complex perception-abstraction-entrenchment-conventionalization process.

28. Brinton & Traugott (2005: 18) acknowledge that the term LEXICALIZATION has been synchronically used for the coding of conceptual categories.

lexicalization as “falling outside the productive rules of grammar”, which brings the “adoption into the lexicon”. In Traugott & Trousdale (2013), they adopt these two definitions by Blank (2001: 1603) “Lexicalization is a process by which complex word-formations and other syntagmatic constructions become syntactically and semantically fixed entries of the mental lexicon” as well as “a process by which complex words become simple words”.

As a result of this perspective, they analyse word-formation, phraseologization<sup>29</sup> and snowcloning to conclude that “lexical constructionalization cannot be equated with lexicalization defined as reduction because lexical constructionalization encompasses the growth of schemas (e.g. word-formation and snowclone patterns) and expansion of (sub)schemas as well as reduction” (Traugott & Trousdale 2013: 193). The growth of (sub)schemas implies the increase of schematicity and productivity, their loss implies their decrease. Lexical constructionalization is always associated with a loss of compositionality.

### 3.4. Application in Catalan Studies

In the area of Catalan Studies, Construction Grammar has been recently applied to analyse creativity (Ivorra Ordines 2020, 2021) and language teaching (Segura-Llopes 2016; Vacalebri Lloret 2019; Segura-Llopes et al. 2021; Sentí Pons & Martínez 2023). The framework has been also used to study language change (Montserrat 2014; Nkollo 2015; Antolí Martínez 2017; Martínez-Martínez 2018, and Garcia Sebastià 2020) and to prove idiolectal stability in forensic linguistics (Mojedano Batel, Alberich Buera & Kredens 2023).

## 4. Phraseologization

### 4.1. About the framework

Phraseology, as the previous frameworks, is not homogeneous, but it shows a particularity: its study has been specially bound to a language and a country of reference. In this paper we will adopt a Western European perspective, with focus on the Hispanic and German/Swiss tradition. Phraseology emerges at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the frame of stylistics<sup>30</sup> and its aim is to take account of the combinations of words from a lexical perspective. It has a great impact in Eastern Europe, but no great reception in Hispanic studies until the 1950s, when Casares (1950) resorts to it to justify the inclusion in his dictionary of the so-called *locutions* (expressions with a unitary meaning formed by more than one word). Its linguistic study in Spanish and Catalan began in the 1990s and experienced a boom at the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A very influential handbook by Corpas (1996) established the principles of the Hispanic phraseology. It consisted in a collection

29. Traugott & Trousdale (2013) do not use the term *phraseologization* but speak of the creation of idioms.

30. Bally (1909), with his works *Traité de Stylistique française I* y *Traité de Stylistique française II*, is considered as its initiator.

of the phraseological theory at the time that included collocations, idioms and phraseological utterances: formulae and proverbs. Since a modular and transformational view of language was hegemonical at that time, much effort was devoted to test its fixity (non-compositionality). Then it took a cognitive turn (see e.g. Ruiz Gurillo 2001) and metaphor and metonymy were applied to analyse its units. Pragmatics was added to the picture (see e.g. Timofeeva 2012, 2016) and implicatures, as well as discursive factors were considered. Sánchez-López (2015, 2018, 2020, 2021) brought up the diachronic dimension to account for its alleged “anomalies”.

#### 4.2. *Units of language*

Phraseological units are multiword lexical units, in Burger’s (2010: 15-32) words, they are language items characterized for their polylexicality and their fixity.<sup>31</sup> While he finds polilexicality easy to identify, he admits fixity is not so simple to prove. Therefore, he names visible features that can make it more tangible, such as generalized use,<sup>32</sup> psycholinguistic fixity (speakers conceiving it as a unit), structural fixity (with variations) and pragmatic fixity. In addition to the essential features, he also mentions idiomaticity as a secondary trait. He refers to “semantic idiomaticity”, i.e. the difference between phraseological meaning and the meaning resulting from the combination of its constituent parts.

As we can see from the definition, fixity hints towards conventionalization (generalized use), entrenchment (psycholinguistic fixity - stored as a unit) and stability of Form and Usage. Idiomaticity is operationalized in terms of non-compositionality, although it is usually associated with figurative, metaphorical, or imaging meaning (see e.g. Burger et al. 2007).

Idioms (referential multiword expressions) are the core of the discipline, but it also includes collocations, formulaic language, and other kinds of multiword units. It is interesting that some of these units are fruit of grammaticalization without reaching the univerbation (see Montoro del Arco 2006). On the other side, German shows a great tendency to univerbation (to write whole expressions, phrases, or compounds together), and the researchers had to reach a compromise to analyse as phraseology language items that are written in a sole word. English language retains a low number of inflectional traits, in contrast to Spanish and German. That has consequences in the analysis of idioms, since while in English the Form tend to be more fix, in Spanish and German tend to show grammatical variation, which can be represented as slots (see Montoro del Arco et al. 2008).

#### 4.3. *Language change: Mechanisms and stages*

Unlike Grammaticalization Theory and Construction Grammar, Phraseology is primarily a lexical theory. That means that it is focused on referential linguistic items. From a diachronic perspective, this is essential, since they are not signal-

31. *Polilexikalität* and *Festigkeit* in the original in German.

32. *Gebräuchlichkeit* in the original in German.



ling linguistic relations, perspectives or deictic orientation, they are pointing to the perceived reality and the way speakers frame it.

In Sánchez-López (2015, 2020), we study the emergence of phraseological units applying Grammaticalization Theory. Our conclusion is that grammaticalization and phraseologization are similar processes. While in the first we describe a lexical item or a sequence of items becoming a grammatical morpheme, in the second we analyse a phrase becoming a language unit. In other words, “phraseologization consists of all the changes affecting a free word combination until it becomes a frozen Phraseological unit (pure idiom)” (Sánchez-López 2015: 163).

These changes imply structural fixation, leading to polilexicity, i.e. to the emergence of a unit composed by more than a word. It also includes semantic fixation, which, depending on its degree, may lead to idiomaticity, understood as the emergence of a new, non-compositional meaning. And, last but not least, it involves the fixation of pragmatic aspects, thus reflecting the communication situation in which the PhU was created. This fixation may advance to the acquisition of new semantic and pragmatic values (for concrete examples and more details see Sánchez-López 2015, 2020, 2021a, 2021b).

According to Timofeeva (2016: 680), from a diachronic perspective, idioms are the result of an evolutionary process where a phrase undergoes conventionalization and, consequently, some inferential values that were previously context-dependent become encoded in its semantics.<sup>33</sup> In this sense, we could understand that the mechanism giving rise to idioms is the codification of inferential values.<sup>34</sup> Factors associated with the process match with those described for grammaticalization: repetition, cognitive processes involved in conversation and contextual factors.

The consequences are also similar to those described by Company (2012: 688) for grammaticalization but adapted to different levels. Instead of lexis and grammar, it affects to phrases and lexis.

With respect to the Form, the phrase becomes (iii) less autonomous, and its combinatory freedom becomes weakened or lost. (v) Its scope reduces and eventually its components get fixed. In some languages, it can undergo (viii) eroded and lose phonological weight. With regard to the Meaning, (i) a weakening or loss of the original component meaning occurs, which causes the emergence of a unitary meaning, causing it to eventually cease to act as a phrase. (ix) Layering emerges and the idiom may act as a secondary naming. (x) Divergence appears, the same phrase splits into different analysis, causing (xii) more polysemy. (xiii) Already extant meanings are renewed. It is subject to (xiv) lexicalization, understood in two

33. In the original: “Desde el punto de vista diacrónico, las locuciones se presentan como resultado de un proceso evolutivo en el que un sintagma experimenta la progresiva convencionalización de los valores inferenciales inicialmente dependientes del contexto que pasan a formar parte de su semántica”, translated by Sánchez-López. *Locución* has been translated by *idiom* and *sintagma* by *phrase* since they are most suitable equivalents in context.

34. In essence, that is Traugott & Dasher’s (2002) IITSC. But they see it as a mechanism for semantic change and we identify it as the main change in phraseologization. Neolanalysis and analogization may also play a role but are driven by the mismatch of the (compositional) Form and the (idiomatic) Meaning.



senses: on the one hand, the lexicon as well as dictionaries are enlarged because the form or construction, having new functions and meanings, needs more specifications into the lexicon, and the lexicographic entry must be enlarged (or included). On the other hand, there is lexicalization because of loss of transparency, or opacity, between the two faces of the sign or between the sign and its contexts of use, and the new reinterpreted sign must be specified into the lexicon.

Regarding its usage, (ii) it extends across contexts, becomes generalized and its use as a unit increases. (iv) Being free of contextual restraints, its frequency rises. Similarly to paradigmaticization (vi), the new function implies a new category, i.e., the new item functions as an adverb, and adjective, etc. Since (xi) the original non-compositional meaning (Form) usually persists when phraseologization progresses, the Image created by speakers to motivate the Phraseological Meaning facilitates the advancement to new contexts.

According to Howarth (2000: 216), a phrase goes through four stages to become an idiom. It starts being a free word combination, then becomes a restricted collocation, a figurative idiom and ends up being a pure idiom. Not every word combination reaches the fourth stage. As shown by Sánchez-López (2015, 2020), these phases are congruent with the scenarios of acquisition of new grammatical meanings postulated by Heine (2002: 86).

Similarly to grammaticalization, we can identify a phraseological change, i.e., the already formed idiom can adopt new meanings. Dräger (2012: 215) describes it attending to three levels: formal-structural level (driven by lexical or morpho-syntactic variation), semantic level (concerning denotation and connotation) and historical level regarding words, referents, or culture (leading to motivation or remotivation).<sup>35</sup> These changes are interrelated and any of them can affect the others.

The historical level points to the wording, pragmatics, and contextual factors that gave rise to the idiom. With the changes in language, meaning and culture, a speaker of a subsequent time may not recognize the relationship between them, thus trying to motivate it.

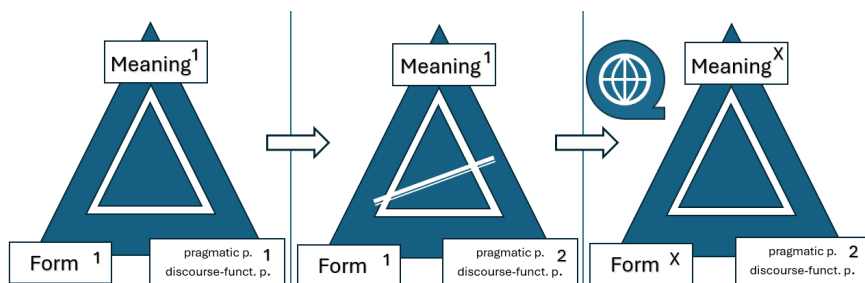


Figure 1. Process of remotivation and Phraseological Change.

35. The original in German reads: Phraseologischer Wandel auf: formal-struktureller Ebene, semantischer Ebene, wort-sach-kulturgeschichtlicher Ebene.

When the speaker does not recognize the link between the Meaning, the Form and the current situation, they tend to motivate it. According to Piirainen (2012: 48) motivation is a cognitive that consists in activating “certain knowledge structures to make sense of the use of a given idiom in the meaning conventionally ascribed to it. The relationship between the two conceptual levels, between the mental image evoked by the lexical structure and the figurative meaning, becomes comprehensible to them”. The result of the process is an Image connecting the lexical structure (the Form) and the (denominative) Meaning. This Image has traditionally been considered as figurative, metaphorical, or imaging meaning.

#### 4.4. Application in Catalan Studies

Since the first decade of the 21st century, Phraseology has found its place in Catalan Studies. The books by Salvador & Piquer (2000), Salvador & Climent (2006), the chapter by Lorente Casafont (2006) and several publications such as Ginebra Serrabou (2005a, 2005b, 2019, 2022, among others), Conca & Guia (2014), Oltra Ripoll (2016, 2018), Sancho Cremades (1999, 2010, 2018, 2021, among others), Robles i Sabater (2007, 2010, 2016, among others) Voellmer & Brumme (2017) and van Lawick (2006) show its importance.

From a diachronic perspective, we can cite the papers by Sánchez-López (2012, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2020, 2021a, 2021b and 2024), dealing with phraseologization and phraseological change of several idioms, such as *al peu de la lletra* ‘at the foot of the letter – literally’, *con pelos y señales* ‘with hairs and signs – in full detail’, *arrimar el hombro* ‘to put the shoulder – stick together/pitch in’ or *tapar-se el nas* ‘to cover one’s nose – unwillingly doing something’. Antolí Martínez (2024) and Martines Peres (2021) remark the importance of culture in the emergence of idioms with *cor* ‘heart’ and *tinya* ‘tinea nigra, ringworm’, respectively. González Blasco (2024), on his side, analyses the evolution of the idiom *De l’arbre caigut, tothom en fa llenya* ‘When the tree is fallen, everyone goes to it with his hatchet’. García Sebastià (2021 and 2022) deal with idioms about [MEDIOCRITY] and idiom neology, respectively.

### 5. Integrating the theories of language change

In the previous sections we have outlined the current theories of language change. They include individual grammatical items (grammaticalization), low compositional grammatical and lexical items (constructionalization) and non-compositional lexical items (phraseologization). Over time, they adopt a cognitive, usage-based<sup>36</sup> approach to language, which makes them show many parallels.

36. The usage-based approach conceives LANGUAGE “as a dynamic system of fluid categories and flexible constraints that are constantly restructured and reorganized under the pressure of domain-general cognitive processes that are not only involved in the use of language but also in other cognitive phenomena.” Its general goal is to develop a framework for the analysis of the emergence of linguistic structure and meaning. In order to understand the dynamics of the language system, usage-based linguists study how languages evolve, both in history and language acquisition (Diessel 2017).

### 5.1. *About the framework*

Language is a complex conventional device embracing social and individual, abstract and concrete, conceptual and referential elements. To understand its functioning in human communication, we need to pay attention to three key components: Form, Meaning and Context. As a mental representation, the Form acquires a schematic value, the Meaning corresponds to a Coded Meaning and the Context is stored as a Cultural Model. As linguistic behaviour in context, the slots in the Form are completely filled, the Meaning corresponds to a particular conversational meaning and the Context is a real perceived situation, with physical copresence. In addition to these two abstraction degrees, in Sánchez-López (2023a) we postulate an intermediate one, where the Form is partially filled, and a generalized/prototypical Meaning and Context apply. In this level, we can find “default value” fillers in the three instances, which are applied when not cancelled in discourse.

Far from being static, it is a dynamic system. All speakers may contribute to its change, given determinate circumstances. Great structural changes<sup>37</sup> are gradual and usually occur within several generations of speakers. Small creative modifications happen every day in conversation. A regular speaker can identify if an utterance is marked (not following the generalized rules<sup>38</sup>) or unmarked (following them). This consideration may change over time, since a new item can generalize, or even conventionalize. And the other way round, it can obsolesce and be perceived as an anomaly.

Language is a multilayered phenomenon. So far, we have seen it addressed from three intertwined perspectives: cognitive, social and scientific. The cognitive dimension of language is concerned with individual knowledge, is the reflection of an individual mind and is the locus of entrenchment and innovation. The social dimension of language involves the knowledge shared by a population of speakers and is the locus of generalization and conventionalization. The scientific dimension of language involves the ways in which researchers model language in order to describe it, account for its features and predict its behaviour.

According to these parameters, the cognitive dimension of language is well accounted for with the notion of construction and construction: a dynamic network of CONSTRUCTIONS, at varying levels of complexity and abstraction, which pair each form with a conventional range of functions (Goldberg 2006). Although the general conception of a network with nodes with a Form and a Meaning is suitable for explaining how language is stored, Construction Grammar is essentially a theory of morphology and syntax. Thus, the implications of this genesis are persistent in its new applications. The meaning is often referred to as *function*, the schematization of “contentful constructions” tend to be made on the basis of word classes such as V (verb), N (noun), schemas correspond with syntactical properties and subschemas with derivational or inflectional paradigms. In this sense, it covers the meaning of morphosyntactical structures. To account

37. Compulsory education and literacy have had a great impact on syntax, morphology and phonetics, so that great structural changes are not so probable as before.

38. *Rule* is used in the sense of convention, not of transformational rule.

for the abstractions of “lexical” meaning, the theory should be extended (see Sánchez-López 2023a, 2023b).

The social dimension of language can be seen as the external and collective expression of the cognitive one. Since the language network is learned or CONSTRUCTED on the basis of the linguistic input witnessed (together with general cognitive, pragmatic and processing factors) (Goldberg 2006), our use of language is simultaneously constraint by social conventions and part of their creation. Speakers belong to one or several socio-cultural groups, which is a key factor for learning their conventional model of language. It is important to remark that speakers have a sense of what is marked (does not match the generalized convention) and what is unmarked (perfectly matches it). This dimension is better captured as “a dynamic System of emergent symbolic units and flexible constraints that are shaped by general cognitive processes involved in Language use” (Diessel 2014).

The scientific or metalinguistic dimension of language is related to the categories that we build to describe it. *Verb*, *noun*, *object* or *construction* are not “objective” but construed classes. In the same sense, language change, reanalysis or analogization are in the eye of the beholder. They are useful categories to analyse language but are not perceived or performed by the speakers. At the utmost, they can detect “anomalies” affecting their schematic knowledge or the relation between Form and Meaning, but when acting as language users cannot see the change. Consequently, the speakers in the same socio-cultural group will not undertake a reanalysis or a conscious analogization. They will just parse utterances according to the relevant contextual factors and, in case of strangeness, resort to abstract, analogical thinking to solve the possible misunderstanding. The notation of Construction Grammar rendering substantive items and slots can be useful to analyse the strings involved in change, but the conception of a network is difficult to apply to language change. Because precisely the most outstanding of its features emerge when there are isomorphisms between form and meaning in a concrete use and speakers resort to remotivation/strategies to regain transparency.

## 5.2. Units of language

In relation to the physical word, language comes in form of whole conversations,<sup>39</sup> which can be divided into utterances. These utterances can, at their turn, be subdivided into smaller language chunks. The unit of language is the smallest chunk that maintains the relationship between Meaning and Form.<sup>40</sup> Following Croft (2001:

39. Written texts are also language realizations, but they imply a high degree of analysis. In the writing, parsing, and attaching a phonological realization to a word is already a mediated process. Bearing in mind a prospective reader and giving all the information that they need to overcome non-copresentiality requires specific abilities.

40. If we consider different degrees of abstraction, the more abstract, the larger (the more complex) a unit can be. In Sánchez-López (2023b) we discuss the topic thoroughly and posit a four-degree abstraction system basing on Traugott & Trousdale (2013), Traugott & Dasher (2002) and Ziem (2013).

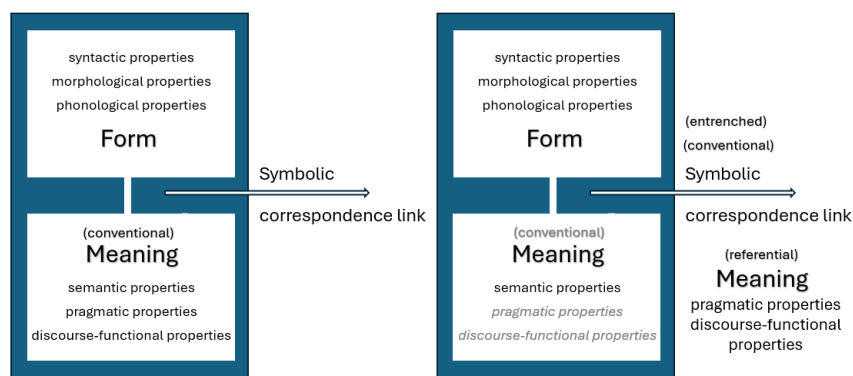


Figure 2. Model of the symbolic structure of a construction (Croft 2001: 18) and its modification to account for referential meaning and the dynamic nature of language.

18), the notion of Form includes syntactic, morphological and phonological properties and the notion of Meaning, semantic, pragmatic and discourse-functional properties. The unit also comprises a symbolic correspondence link.

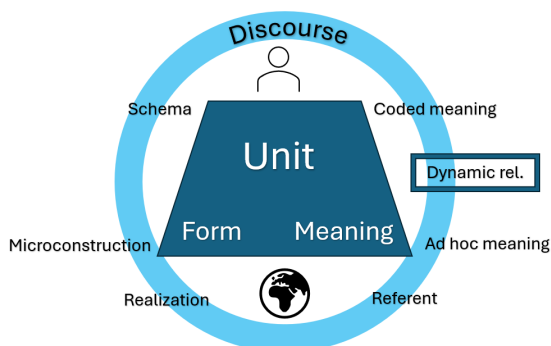
The model is exhaustive but clearly conceived from a morphosyntactic perspective. The Meaning is labelled as “conventional” and the pragmatic and discursive properties are just part of the conventional meaning. To account for referential units in a dynamic system, we should make an adaptation. All three parts of the unit are conventional, but precisely the link between Meaning and Form stands out for being it. It represents a key factor in language change, which is the conventionalization (usage by a group of speakers) or the entrenchment<sup>41</sup> (storage as a unit in the brain).

Even though grammar, semantics and pragmatics work together to construe meaning, contentful meaning has some differences respect to the procedural one. The main difference is that it is referential. That implies that, apart from the pragmatic and discursive properties that are encoded in the conventionalized meaning, it has to be coherent with the pragmatic and discursive situation in where the unit is used. In fact, the discrepancy between them has a great impact in its change (see Sánchez-López 2015, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2024).

A more accurate depiction of the language unit would be the following:

It encompasses the abstractions regarding the Form pole (realization, micro-construction, (sub)schema and schema) and to the Meaning pole (referent, ad hoc meaning, generalized meaning, coded meaning). Frames them into the discourse and identifies that they are hold together by a dynamic relationship. A change in any of these factors can lead to the change of all the others.

41. For an accurate definition of *entrenchment*, see Schmid (2007).



**Figure 3.** Model of the symbolic structure of a language unit, including abstractions on its grammatical and on its lexical poles.

### 5.3. *Language change: Mechanisms and stages*

Language change is a metalinguistic category to designate the changes undergone by a determinate item (or a bunch of them) from a point in history to another. Traditionally it consisted in tracing great changes, like phonetic shifts or changes affecting whole paradigms. With the adoption of the usage-based approach, it is studied gradually, using the most possible instances, which has brought to more applications and the revealing of slight changes. We agree with Bybee (2015: 11) that “understanding language change helps us to understand synchronic states, their structure, and the variation that is found in them”.

Reanalysis (or neoanalysis) and analogy (or analogization), as well as the notions of switch context, bridging context and conventionalization by Heine (2002) or Diewald’s (2002) untypical contexts, critical context and isolating contexts are useful tools to detect changes. The researcher can rely on them specially to identify changes in meaning. Unlike the form, it is not always easy to ascertain.

Language change happens during language use. Repetition, cognitive factors involved in language use (pattern matching, abstraction, parsing and analogical thinking, among others), pragmatic (inferencing) and contextual factors play a major role in it. The process is gradual and related with language producing and processing along time.<sup>42</sup>

At this point, we should consider the relation between concrete conversations and changes in the complex system of language. It has a cognitive, individual dimension and a social, conventional one. As speakers, we learn language from our interactions. We receive language material and attach meaning to it. This meaning is determined by semantic (coded meaning), pragmatic (inferencing) and contextual factors. Over time, when Form and Meaning are frequently repeated, they get

42. Traugott & Trousdale (2013) explain the creation of new nodes in language in a slightly naïve way, trying to directly bind individual conversations (and entrenchment) with conventionalization without considering their interaction.

entrenched (as a unit) in the mind of the speaker. This process requires a process of abstraction (categorization and conceptualization) since no situation is exactly the same as another one. We compute the relevant elements and establish patterns according to them.

In conversational interactions, we are not creating a code on ourselves, but are subjected to some rules. We learn them from our group since our utterances are sanctioned by their members. In the course of interaction, we can come across an innovation and, if it spreads, it can become generalized and, subsequently, conventionalized. It emerges as a marked or context-dependent phenomenon, becomes the interpretation by default and gets to be non-cancellable. Then, it is part of the system and is taught to the other members of the group. As speakers,<sup>43</sup> we are at the same time applying and modifying the conventions of language.

In this sense, we may simplify the process and say that, in the first place, change consists in the conventionalization of previously marked or context-dependent phenomena. In the second place, the inclusion of an old build unit in a new discourse may break the dynamic relation between Form and Meaning, if the speakers identify an incongruence, they will tend to motivate/analyze it through analogical thinking. The outcome is also a change.<sup>44</sup>

As seen in the previous sections, it has different nuances if we study the emergence and change of a procedural element or if we observe the emergence and change of a referential one (see also Sánchez-López 2023b). In the second case, culture – stored as a Cultural Model – have a great impact on it (as posited by Martines 2021 and Geeraerts & Grondelaers 1995, among others).

## 6. Concluding remarks

The study of change provides key knowledge on the nature and functioning of language. It shows that it has a cognitive as well as a social dimension, which interact in the language use. It comprises units of Form and Meaning, with a symbolic link that is entrenched in the mind of individuals and conventionalized in the group of speakers. Although grammar, semantics and pragmatics interact to construe meaning, the traditional distinction between lexical and grammatical items is useful since they schematize differently. The referential function of language is essential to account for its change and cannot be ignored.

43. Understood as “language users”: speakers, writers, signers/hearers, readers, receivers.

44. The complex network of abstractions posited by Traugott & Trousdale (2013), despite being stimulating and useful for synchronic studies is difficult to apply to change. For example, the creation of new micro-constructions on the basis of (sub)schemas is usually framed as “neologism”. Or the creation of new micro-constructions following the Ditransitive Construction are framed as “sentences”.



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