Introduction

Lexicalization provides language with fresh referential and predicative content by recruiting new members for the ‘lexical’ inventory. Grammaticalization provides language with predictable utility by recruiting new members for ‘grammatical’ functions. Paradoxically, these two processes sometimes seem so opposite that they start to look identical in places. In fact, some scholars have argued that the two are veritable mirror images of each other; be this as it may, our view of their reflections up until now may as well have been in funhouse mirrors or “through a glass darkly” compared to the remarkable clarity and depth of insight Brinton and Traugott (B&T) have brought to the related issues in this concise volume.

My experience with this book moved from refreshment to refreshment. First came a discovery that the book is part of a new research survey series seeking to provide “…concise, single authored, non-textbook reviews of rapidly evolving areas of inquiry” analogous to those available for researchers in the natural sciences—a big step in the right direction. Next, came a discovery that, in spite of the narrowly constrained title, the book provides an overview of both the lexicalization and the grammaticalization literature—two for the price of one. After these two surprises, came a discovery that the book seeks to synthesize both lexicalization and grammaticalization into a unified model—a lot of good news, considering I was still only reading the back cover. After opening the pages, of course, the refreshment continued.

Essentially, the first three chapters of the book provide reviews of the literature related to research on lexicalization and grammaticalization, and the last three chapters seek to bring clarity, synthesis and focus to the field. More specifically, chapter one, entitled “Theoretical contexts for the study of lexicalization and grammaticalization,” sets the pace of the book by summarizing a vast body of literature and theoretical approaches relevant to the discussion. Chapter two, “Lexicalization: Definitions and Viewpoints,” hones in on the various definitions of lexicalization that have emerged over the past several decades by condensing even more of the available literature. Chapter three, “Views on the relation of lexicalization to grammaticalization,” examines the two processes in terms of how linguist have perceived the pair to overlap and/or contrast with each other. Chapter four, “Toward an integrated approach to lexicalization and
grammaticalization,” promotes exactly what it promises. Chapter five, “Case studies,” applies the preceding chapter’s progressive vision to a number of sticky, previously unsettled, issues in the historical development of English. Finally, chapter six provides a summary of ground gained and proposes future pathways for related research.

In Pursuit of Grammaticalization and Lexicalization

B&T’s first three chapters alone provide a significant service to the linguistic community. The authors are able to gracefully acknowledge competing theoretical viewpoints and summarize opposing claims with fairness. At the same time, they still manage to be cleanly decisive in mapping out an approach that will be the most productive and meaningful for a practical understanding of grammaticalization and lexicalization.

First, they decide that although both generative and functionalist approaches usually assume the presence of a grammar-lexicon distinction necessary for the study at hand, a functional-typological approach is better suited for the task since the latter admits the influence of socio-communicational factors on language change. Second, they decide that although synchronic approaches have employed the term ‘lexicalize’ to explain links between logical structure and syntax, they find it more helpful to think of lexicalization and grammaticalization in diachronic terms that assume gradual variation and change. Third, although they recognize the value of identifying such oppositions as lexicon and grammar, and open and closed classes, they hold that the distinctions between such oppositions must be defined in gradient terms. In summary then, B&T’s approach to their subject is functionalist in orientation, diachronic in focus, and gradient in application.

In chapter two, B&T essentially define lexicalization as the creation of new lexical entries through processes of fusion and separation—both of which may be characterized as processes of institutionalization. Fusion involves an increasing degree of dependency and includes such processes as univerbation, fused compounds, demorphologization, and idiomaticization. **Univerbation** finds expression in such apparently analyzable lexical items as ‘wherewithal’, ‘dyed-in-the-wool’, and ‘nuts-and-bolts’. **Fused compounds** are those which have coalesced to the degree that their two constituent parts are no longer distinguishable. In some cases one root may still be recognizable (e.g., ‘cobweb’ and ‘mildew’); in other cases, neither root is recognizable. Take, for example, ‘lord’ (from Old English hlaf ‘loaf’ + weard ‘guardian’) and ‘orchard’ (from Old English wyrt [or from Latin hortus] ‘herb’ + geard ‘yard’). **Demorphologization** occurs when a formerly morphological construction fuses to the degree that it’s grammatical marker can no longer be analyzed morphologically—only phonologically and lexically. The word ‘awake’ for example once contained grammatically productive morphemes (Old English on + wacan), but the word can no longer be given such an analysis. **Idiomaticization** involves the highly productive process of novel clause-level constructions that can no longer be thought of in terms of their constituent parts. The expression ‘shoot the breeze’ provides one example.

Separation, on the other hand, involves a decrease in fusion and an increase in autonomy. The least controversial process of lexical separation is **decliticization**, in which a bound morpheme
achieves lexical status. Clear cases of decliticization include *ism, hood, and ex*—found as bound morphemes in words such as ‘socialism’, ‘neighborhood’, and ‘ex-husband’, respectively.

Both lexical fusion and lexical separation are, in fact processes of **institutionalization**, a word which B&T define as “the spread of a usage to the community and its establishment as the norm” (p. 45). The process of creating Institutionalized, or “frozen” forms has also been referred to in the literature using other names such as “routinization,” “petrification,” and “canonization.”

In Chapter 3 B&T outline perceived similarities and differences between grammaticalization and lexicalization that have surfaced in the literature. Two of the most important similarities between the pair are identified in the chapter as “fusion” and “unidirectionality.” Both grammaticalization and lexicalization involve fusion of morpheme boundaries, or a movement from less bound to more bound, but the exact characterization of this process sometimes leads linguists to such highly conflicting conclusions that grammaticalization and lexicalization become confused with each other. Unidirectionality in lexicalization and grammaticalization refers to the unlikelihood of a given lexicalized or grammaticalized form reverting back to its original non-bound state. Note that this definition does not preclude reanalysis of one or more components as an alternate form different from its original usage. Very few counterexamples have been noted in the literature against this strong tendency in both processes. In fact the only true counterexample in a grammaticalization context presented in the literature seems to be a form of hypercorrection in a community-internal ideological setting (Burridge 2002).

Regarding perceived differences between the two processes, some linguists have argued that the two are different in the same way that mirror images are different. On this account lexicalization might simply be referred to as de-grammaticalization. B&T hold, however, that this definition of lexicalization is not sufficiently broad and not well enough defined. Although de-grammaticalization exists as a type of lexicalization, it only accounts for a narrow class of lexicalization possibilities. If the two are defined as distinct, unrelated processes (e.g., by defining one as abrupt and the other as gradual), other problems arise. Attempting to conceive of the two fusional processes in terms of derivation versus inflection along a diachronic cline (moving through time from derivation to inflection) is also problematic.

**In Pursuit of Synthesis and Focus**

In the second half of the book, B&T continue to offer clear-minded guidance by blending disparate strands, updating old definitions, revising assumed models, and bringing sharper contrast to nebulous grey-zone problems. The fourth chapter alone is worth the price of the book for anyone interested in a state-of-the-art, practical understanding of these two processes. B&T provide updated definitions of both grammaticalization and lexicalization in chapter 4. They then go on to lucidly summarize ways in which the two are parallel and other ways in which they are nearly diametrically opposed to each other.

The table at the end of chapter 4 provides a fairly representative summary of the chapter’s content and the book’s key argument as a whole. Essentially, both lexicalization and grammaticalization can be defined as gradual, unidirectional processes. Both processes involve metaphor and/or metonymy, and both processes involve coalescence (the fusion of morpheme
boundaries) and demotivation (the process of becoming more idiomatized and less composite). The two processes can be said to differ in a number of other ways, however. While grammaticalization moves toward typological generality and is more likely to be replicated cross-linguistically, lexicalization moves toward typological specificity and is more likely to remain language-specific. While grammaticalization bleaches items of meaning content, lexicalization provides additional concrete meaning to items that were not previously so endowed. While grammaticalized items are used with frequency and are often highly productive, lexicalized items are more bounded in their usage and less productive.

Chapter 5 applies the newly formulated insights of chapter 4 to related problem areas in English analysis including present participles, multiword verbs, composite predicates, adverbs formed with –ly, and discourse markers. B&T are able to draw numerous helpful distinctions in the process.

After providing a summary of the entire book, chapter 6 moves on to present research questions precipitated by the new insights and distinctions formulated in the preceding chapters. First the authors note the need to expand the available language base. Especially in need of description in B&T’s opinion are lexicalization processes among Asian languages. Other research issues they bring up include the formulation of possible changes and impossible changes within lexicalization and grammaticalization, the nature of transitions from one category to another—including a definition of the linguistic resources used in the process, characterizing lexicalization and grammaticalization in tandem with larger typological shifts occurring within a given language, overlap with discourse types and genres, and further considerations of language contact situations in terms of lexicalization and grammaticalization.

General Evaluation

B&T’s new work can likely be held up as the most comprehensive and successful attempt thus far at establishing a unified approach to lexicalization and grammaticalization, but theirs is not the only recent proposal for a unified approach. Lightfoot (2005), for example, sets out to accomplish the selfsame task, with a slightly different focus, in a study not cited by B&T (due, no doubt, to overlapping publishing times). Like B&T, Lightfoot speaks of “…the inherent flexibility and fluidity between lexicalization and grammaticalization…” (2005:585) and affirms a gradient approach to the lexicon/grammar distinction itself. In addition, Lightfoot cites the studies of numerous other scholars (many of whom are also referenced by B&T) who also happen to be intent on bringing synthesis to the problem. Anttila (1985) seems to have been the first to articulate an interaction between the two in the mid-80s, and Christian Lehmann seems to be regarded as one of the pioneers in the task of working to reconcile the two—a task that had not been given much attention at all until the 1990s according to Lightfoot (2005:587). Lehmann’s seminal articles on the topic are cited in these sources as Lehmann (1989 and 2002). That said, B&T’s contribution can be appreciated all the more as a timely piece of scholarship.

The table at the end of chapter 4 (table 4.4) provides a summary of the chapter content and might be taken as the condensed centerpiece of the book. On closer inspection, though, comparing the table content with the chapter content, the authors seem to be defining lexicalization with a bias toward grammaticalization. Most of the items at the bottom of the chart are defined positively in
terms of grammaticalization but negatively in terms of lexicalization. According to B&T’s prose analysis in chapter 4 and elsewhere, these entries might just as well be defined positively from the perspective of lexicalization, so we might well question this choice. Furthermore, according to B&T’s definition, although lexicalization is obligatorily ‘+ Fusion’, grammaticalization is usually, but not always, characterized by a fusion of morpheme boundaries. This slight distinction might have been easily marked in their chart as ‘(+ Fusion)’ or as ‘± Fusion’, but instead they generalize it to ‘+ Fusion’. A further inconsistency in the summary chart is the nature of item i, ‘Subjectification’. Although B&T claim this for some cases of grammaticalization it cannot be applied to all cases. Furthermore, the authors also claim that this can sometimes be a feature of lexicalization as well. With this in mind, due to the somewhat more ambivalent nature of this feature, it does not seem to fit in the summary chart to the same degree as the other entries.

I affirm B&T’s comment in their closing chapter regarding the need to expand applications of their approach to a broader language base in order to test its descriptive power. B&T perceive the need to be especially great for further lexicalization research on Asian languages. Indeed, with the exception of a brief passing comment on a Lahu morpheme, no other examples were offered from the vast Sino-Tibetan language family in B&T. Good examples of even lexicalization research already exist in the Asian language literature, however. Take demorphologization as a process of lexicalization for example. Proto-Tibeto-Burman causative prefixes (Matisoff 2003:90–92), and the causative prefix *s-, especially, were once highly productive for deriving causative verbs from normal activity predicates. In most modern-day Tibeto-Burman languages, however, this morpheme has coalesced to the degree that it can no longer be distinguished from normal consonant initials. Most Ngwi (Loloish) languages, for example, retain traces of the original prefix in fossilized voiced-voiceless contrasts, but the actual process is no longer productive, and in many cases, the fossilized forms have been replaced with other lexical items or their evolved lexical values are merely analogous to a causative interpretation by present day (cf. Matisoff 1976, Wang 1998, Sun 1999).

In terms of overall presentation and formatting, I think the book is nicely crafted. It is also well-equipped with two thorough indices (a general index and a language index). One shortcoming of the book, however, is found on its cover. Here we have an example of a book whose front cover does disservice to its content by failing to reflect in its title a true sampling of the complexity and possibility contained in its pages. At the very least a reference to grammaticalization should have been incorporated into the title, or a subtitle, in order to allow its potential readership to know at first glance that the treatment would not simply be a narrow presentation of lexicalization as if it could be adequately conceived of apart from grammaticalization. Perhaps the book would have been more aptly titled, for example, A review and synthesis of the lexicalization-grammaticalization opposition. This rather small detail seems a sizable misfortune.

Obviously, the content of the book matters most, and in this regard, another strength that should be underscored is the authors’ insistence on using diachronic and gradient frameworks. The fact that mainstream linguists like B&T, working on current issues like the lexicalization-grammaticalization opposition, are incorporating historical linguistics as a key component of their analysis is very encouraging. Charles-James N. Bailey, known for his exasperation over purely synchronic linguistic models, has stated that the practice of doing linguistics without a
time-based component is like “…trying to chop logs with an axe that has no handle or like trying to eat broth with chopsticks” (Bailey 1982:12). Perhaps more and more leading linguists are coming to share his view.

If not apparent from what I have written so far, let me affirm the value of this book for field linguists and (insofar as the two can or should be separated) theoretician alike: lexicalization and grammaticalization are pervasive processes; both are broadly applicable; both are highly informative; both are, now at least, known to be interrelated beyond reasonable doubt; and B&T’s work both summarizes and establishes the state-of-the-art for both these productive processes. In closing, let me affirm once more the boon that is this book. If the concise, intelligible summary of a vast body of technical literature comprises an enormous service to a community of linguists stretched all too thin by the isolating effects of micro-specialization, then the cogent, mindful blending of these disparate elements into a systematic approach constitutes a service worthy of broad attention.

References


