Review of Elly van Gelderen (ed.), *Cyclical change* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009)

Examples of putative linguistic cycles have been discussed since the very beginnings of modern comparative linguistics, as van Gelderen emphasizes in the introduction to this volume, citing works by Bopp and Tooke among others. In these works, discussion of cycles often went hand in hand with an organicism that was vigorously rejected by their successors, the Neogrammarians, and by most subsequent historical linguists, in favour of uniformitarian assumptions (see Morpurgo Davies 1998: 229–233).[1] Nevertheless, cycles have continued to appeal to linguists ever since, even if, as van Gelderen suggests, there was little concerted effort to address them in the linguistic theorizing of the 20th century. This book is an attempt to remedy the situation.

1. Overview

Predictably, the first and most thematically unified of the book's four parts deals with the original best-known cycle in the syntactic literature: Jespersen's cycle. Jack Hoeksema's chapter attempts to break the cycle down into its component parts, and its broad overview of the cycle makes it a fitting opener. Hoeksema covers a range of topics, focusing particularly on the change from NPI to negative quantifier in taboo expressions such as English *shit* and *fuck all*, but also discussing the subsequent development into an (adverbial) negator. In addition, he expresses scepticism regarding the NegP hypothesis and van Gelderen's Head Preference Principle.

The subsequent chapter, by Johan van der Auwera, also sets out to show

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[1] Through the works of Schleicher and Max Müller this conception was influential upon Darwin, who himself mentioned cyclical linguistic change in his discussion of the fact 'that conjugations, declensions, etc., originally existed as distinct words, since joined together' (1871: 61). For discussion of the parallels between language and organism in Darwin, see Alter (2008).

that Jespersen's Cycle is not a unitary phenomenon, this time by highlighting the different grammaticalization pathways that may be involved – eight in total. Of particular note is the exegesis of Jespersen (1917), whose account van der Auwera aims to better by covering more of the attested possibilities. The discussion centres around French *ne … pas*, one of the better-studied instances of the cycle, though the range of typologically diverse languages adduced in addition is impressive. It is argued that Jespersen's original conception, in which it is the weakening of preverbal *ne* that causes the introduction of the bipartite construction, is wrong, and that the bipartite construction originates as an emphatic variant that then undergoes semantic bleaching. The account of van der Auwera is thus a "push-chain" rather than a "pull-chain" approach to the cycle, in the terminology of Breitbarth (2009). The chapter's main contribution is to highlight that, despite many apparent similarities, the items claimed to have undergone the cycle instead often followed subtly different trajectories.

The shorter contribution by Olena Tsurska is a case study of the negative cycle in the history of Russian. This is the first chapter to be explicitly couched in a theoretical framework, adopting a Minimalist conception of feature-checking, modified to permit multiple and reverse agreement. Tsurska shows that this account, based on Zeijlstra (2004, 2008), allows a simple and elegant approach to the change from non-strict to strict Negative Concord observed in Russian: the marker of sentential negation changes from [iNeg] to [uNeg] in accordance with van Gelderen's Feature Economy. In the process she takes issue with an earlier account by Brown (2003) in which it is instead the n-words that become more negative over time, shifting from [uPol] to [uNeg].

Theresa Biberauer's chapter returns to the theme picked up by Hoeksema and van der Auwera: that Jespersen's Cycle is not as straightforward as envisaged by Jespersen (1917) and others following him. Colloquial Afrikaans, which at first sight is a well-behaved bipartite negation language (stage 2 or 3 of the cycle, depending on one's classification; see chapter 3), nevertheless exhibits no weakening of the original negator, and does not appear to be progressing towards the expected next stage of the

cycle. Furthermore, Biberauer shows that different parts of a single language may be at different stages: while bipartite negation ($nie_1 \dots nie_2$) is the norm for both clausal and non-clausal negation in colloquial Afrikaans, standard Afrikaans exhibits bipartite negation obligatorily in the clausal domain but optionally if at all outside this domain. Given this state of affairs, focusing on clausal negation alone – a common practice in the literature, as in chapters 3 and 4 – becomes less defensible, and at any rate will give an incomplete picture. Under Biberauer's analysis, the exceptionality of Afrikaans follows from the fact that nie_2 is a "high" (C-domain) element and has, in fact, taken a different path which makes it ineligible for main-negator status. If this approach is on the right lines, it highlights the importance of taking constituent structure into account for Jespersen's Cycle as well as linear ordering of elements.

After this sizeable negation-focused starter, the rest of the volume is something of a smorgasbord, unified only by dealing with cyclic developments.[2] The chapter by Diane Vedovato analyses the "bizarre" (p143) partial paradigm of weak pronouns in modern Italian, which occupy an uneasy middle ground between strong and null alternatives, from a diachronic perspective, as instances of a "broken cycle". Their retention is due to prescriptive pressure against the use of their strong counterparts *lui*/*lei*/*loro* in subject position. If correct, this hypothesis leads to the interesting supposition that grammaticalization, measured here in terms of reduction in structure, is the "norm" over time, while countervailing developments are likely to be explained in terms of the intervention of sociocultural factors. This ties in with discussion of degrammaticalization, which when attested has frequently been associated with social pressures such as taboo (see e.g. the discussion of Pennsylvania German *wotte* in Burridge 1998).[3] Notably, in addition, Vedovato presents results suggesting (section 5.1) that weak pronouns in modern Italian are not as weak as null variants, insofar as their use in subject position in

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2 Giving the remaining sections titles such as 'Pronouns, agreement, and topic markers' and 'Copulas, auxiliaries, and adpositions' is a bold, but ultimately unsuccessful, attempt to make the chapters contained within them seem slightly more unified than they actually are.

3 An analogy can here be drawn with a ball rolling down a slope: the ball will continue to move downhill, unless someone kicks it back up towards the top. Compare also Lass's (1997: 290–304) discussion of 'epigenetic landscapes'. Caution needs to be applied, however; as repeatedly emphasized by Lightfoot (e.g. 1979, 1999) and others, the continuity of a language across generations is a convenient fiction, and any such picture needs to take into account the fact that each generation of acquirers creates their language afresh.

subordinate clauses favours an interpretation where they are not coreferential with the subject of the main clause (obviation), unlike the null subject.

Kyongjoon Kwon's chapter, on the development of certain copula forms into pronouns in Old North Russian, is a joy to read – theoretically and philologically informed, and managing to avoid overwhelming the reader with unfamiliar data despite dealing with an unfamiliar language. Kwon presents a range of arguments, both synchronic and diachronic, for his conclusion that first and second person copula forms have become strong pronouns. He notes that his data have potential parallels in the history of Turkish and Hebrew, and that they run counter to a widely recognised cycle whereby pronouns develop into grammatical markers, including copulae (as illustrated in the chapter by Lohndal). The chapter finishes with discussion of the status of Old Russian as a language with null referential subjects only in the third person. More could have been made of this point: examples of such languages are rare, and the only others of which I am aware in the generative syntactic literature are Shipibo (Camacho & Elías-Ulloa 2010) and certain early Northwest Germanic languages (Rosenkvist 2009). Indeed, Vainikka & Levy (1999), cited by the author, explicitly claim that such a language should not exist.

With Cecilia Poletto's chapter we return to Italian, this time focusing on the development of two left-peripheral particles, *e* and *sì*. Poletto's claim is that the change in distribution of these particles follows directly from the loss of the V2 property in the language. Though it is written in cartographic terms, this gives the paper a structuralist feel: claims such as "it is the whole system that changes, not a single item or construction" (p187) and "reanalysis must always be the effect of a more general restructuring of the whole system" (p204) are reminiscent of the structuralist *système où tout se tient*. The particle *e* in Old Italian, primarily a conjunction, is analysed as a hanging topic marker in certain instances; in Modern Italian it remains a conjunction, but can only serve as a topic marker in certain clause types. For *sì*, on the other hand, an analysis is proposed in which it is "an element indicating the relation between the clause and the context" (p195), located in the Information Focus field. The

total loss of left-peripheral Information Focus causes *sì* to jump ship to Contrastive Focus, and the loss of the CP layer in neutral declarative clauses reduces the contexts in which *e* as topic marker is available.

Terje Lohndal's chapter returns to copulae, recasting the well-known pronoun > copula development in terms of van Gelderen's approach. Lohndal marshals the typological literature on the development of copulae in order to argue that the changes involved can be seen as a consequence of the Head Preference Principle (demonstrative, pronoun or existential > copula) or the Late Merge Principle (full verb > copula > auxiliary). The development of preposition > copula is less straightforward, though Lohndal attempts to account for this in terms of featural economy and the loss of the preposition's iCase feature - a proposal which raises as many questions as it answers, as Lohndal acknowledges.[4] However, since changes from copula to preposition are also found, the problem may be illusory. In any case, overall Lohndal's demonstration of the empirical coverage of his approach is impressive. Notable is that, like van der Auwera and Biberauer, Lohndal observes that, within what superficially seems like the same cycle, the fine-grained trajectories followed by individual items may differ.

The chapter by Remus Gergel is that rarest of beasts: a diachronic paper making sophisticated use of the analytic apparatus of formal semantics. Gergel shows that modern English *rather* has developed from the comparative form of the adverb *hraþe* 'quick, soon, early'. He analyses this comparative form as quantifying over degrees on a temporal scale. This is then reanalysed as quantifying over degrees on a contextually-given scale of situations ordered by desire. The reanalysis is driven by pragmatic overload (Eckardt 2006), and leads to *rather* losing its LF-movement and becoming first-Merged above AspP. Gergel observes that a similar change is in progress with modern English *sooner* and *as soon*, as well as with German *eher*. The theoretical contribution of the paper is the suggestion that cyclical developments in semantic change may be similar to cyclical developments in syntactic change, for instance in involving a

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4 Interestingly, Vincent & Börjars (2010) argue that instances of "lateral grammaticalization" of this type pose a problem for formal approaches to grammaticalization.

transition from Move to Merge – though Gergel warns against conflating semantic and syntactic change entirely.

Clifton Pye, in his chapter, presents evidence for a cycle of aspect marker development in the Mayan language family. He argues that the (complex) verbal complex in these languages cannot be accounted for under a monoclausal analysis, and that instead aspectual elements select for a complement clause containing the verb stem. In the cycle Pye proposes, a lexical verb marking an aspectual distinction (stage 1) becomes grammaticalized, losing its own aspect marking and becoming stative in the process. The verb then loses inflection and is subject to erosion of the root as well as semantic generalization (stage 2), though is not yet fully prefixal, since certain elements may intervene between it and the lexical verb stem of its complement. Eventually aspect markers may disappear entirely (stage 3), instantiating what one might call the ultimate featural economy, namely the absence of any feature whatsoever. As well as providing synchronic evidence of each stage from different modern languages of the family, Pye shows that in the history of Yucatec all three stages can be seen.

The last paper in the core of the volume is by Cathleen Waters and examines change in prepositions in the history of English. Adopting and adapting Svenonius's (2010) analysis of spatial prepositions, she focuses on the subclass labelled Projective (e.g. *above*, *inside*, *in front*). It is shown that English contains synchronic evidence of three stages of a preposition cycle. The first stage is represented by *in front*, which Waters argues, following Svenonius, is the lexicalization of two separate heads, Loc and AxPart, in the prepositional domain (front having already lost its full-nominal status – a process not dealt with in this paper). In Stage 3, the endpoint of the cycle, what was once two separate heads has been reanalysed as a noncompositional form lexicalizing the higher of the two, Loc. *Above* (*of*) (from *a + bufan*) instantiates this stage. Stage 2 is a period of variability between 1 and 3; *inside* and *outside* (*of*) instantiate this stage.[5] The cycle can be renewed through the innovation of new

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5   As a speaker of British English, I find **inside of* and **outside of* ungrammatical, suggesting that my variety has already reached stage 3 of the cycle.

AxParts from nouns or adverbs. Intriguingly, another means of renewal is the addition of a Particle above the Loc head, as in up above, a structure which can then be reanalysed as a Loc head followed by an AxPart.[6] More than any other paper in this volume, this one makes it clear that it is not languages that undergo cycles, but items or constructions in those languages, and that a language may exhibit several stages of a cycle simultaneously in different items (see also Biberauer's chapter). The traditional obsession with sentential negation in Jespersen's cycle, which a language usually only expresses in one way, may have contributed to obfuscating this obvious point.

The volume ends with an exciting new direction for research into cyclical change. Hancock & Bever report on an experiment designed within the Artificial Language Learning paradigm to induce syntactic change and study its propagation. Interest in experimental replication of the conditions for grammatical change has been great in recent years (cf. also Cournane 2011), and it is easy to see why: the development of laboratory phonology has revolutionized the study of sound change, effectively solving Weinreich, Labov & Herzog's (1968) "actuation problem" and blowing out of the water the Neogrammarian stance that sound change is unobservable. The experimental study of syntax has the potential to do the same for historical syntax. Hancock & Bever's chapter, however, is mostly programmatic, and has little to offer in the way of results as yet, as the authors acknowledge. Still, their careful discussion of the advantages and drawbacks of the ALL paradigm is an important prolegomenon to future work in the area, and it will certainly be instructive to see the "situated" approach they propose put to the test.

2. Evaluation

The great strength of this volume lies in its exploration of linguistic cycles across a wide range of areas of grammar. If the existence of linguistic cycles follow from more general principles, as van Gelderen and others

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6   Waters claims that this is not an instance of a higher element moving down the tree, but rather is "a reinterpretation of a whole structure". Since reinterpretation, or reanalysis, is the mechanism behind upward grammaticalization, too, it is difficult to see a principled difference between the two cases. This example may, then, constitute a counterexample to the generalization that all grammaticalization can be conceptualized as upward reanalysis.

have argued, then there should be evidence for them in almost every domain of grammar, not only in negation, for instance. The papers in this volume, especially in the second and subsequent sections, go some way towards demonstrating that this is in fact the case.

A further strength of the volume is in its careful scrutiny of apparently cyclical processes, showing that such processes are not as straightforward as a naïve reading of e.g. Jespersen might lead one to believe. The chapters by van der Auwera, Biberauer, Vedovato, Poletto and Lohndal are particularly instructive in this respect. Together they show that cyclical changes may "stall" at an intermediate stage; that the mapping from source items to target constructions may be many-to-one or one-to-many as well as one-to-one; that, viewed closely, what looks like a single cycle might in fact be a collection of similar cycles; and that under certain conditions items may "break the cycle" and pursue their own idiosyncratic path instead.

A third strength of the volume is in putting formal approaches to grammaticalization, such as that of van Gelderen herself, to the test, and confronting them with a wide range of data from different languages. Since the principles claimed to underlie grammaticalization are by-and-large extremely general, the broad predictions that they make should be investigated equally generally, and many of the papers in this volume (e.g. those by Tsurska, Lohndal and Waters) are a step in this direction.[7]

Of course, the volume isn't perfect: for a start, there are numerous typos and/or non-native-speakerisms that a thorough copy-edit should have been able to catch: "67.3%" for "7.3%" (p22), "sublable" for "sub-label" (p85), "did not existed" for "did not exist" (p176), "remained" for "remainder" (p216), "strenghtening" for "strengthening" (p306). Some authors get away with sloppy referencing: Vedovato refers to "some recent literature" (p142), and Poletto refers to "old and recent work" by Benincà (p189). Furthermore, speculative phrasing abounds: Hoeksema, for instance,

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7   It should be noted that a Merge-over-Move preference is required in order for the Late Merge Principle to work. Lohndal's paper attempts to defend the notion, but there are good empirical and conceptual arguments against it, at least as a principle of synchronic grammatical organization. See e.g. Castillo, Drury & Grohman (2009) and Motut (2010), as well as Chomsky (2004). Future work needs to engage seriously with these arguments.

indulges in "I cannot help but think that" (p21) and "One might suppose" (p31). These points of detail aside, however, there are a couple of more serious weaknesses to the volume.

Firstly, as a source of historical data the book is likely to disappoint. Some chapters contain no such data, or very little. Where more historical data is presented, e.g. in the papers by Kwon and Pye, this by and large does not include quantitative information. Of the two that do (Hoeksema and Poletto), neither contains the sort of sophisticated Penn-style quantitative analysis that has been the hallmark of increasing rigour in diachronic syntactic research in the 21st century. Poletto (pp202–203) analyses a sample of Machiavelli's *Il Principe*, but does not present much information about the sample, and nor does she justify her choice of text. Hoeksema, meanwhile, asserts that "we usually lack good corpus data" for historically attested languages (p27); at least for Indo-European, the proliferation of quantitatively-informed theoretical studies of Jespersen's Cycle in recent years (e.g. Wallage 2005, Jäger 2008, Breitbarth 2009) casts doubt upon this claim. Where the depth and breadth of analysis is this volume's strength, then, its paucity as regards historical data must be counted as a weakness.

Another criticism relates to its situation within the research context. Most of the papers in the volume take a mainstream generative approach to syntactic change, of the kind familiar from two decades of DiGS conferences. Yet within this approach the very existence of cycles of change is potentially problematic. Lightfoot (e.g. 1979, 1999), for instance, has long been sceptical of any generalizations about the directionality of change, a stance which in more recent work he has seen no reason to modify (see e.g. Lightfoot to appear). The approach to grammaticalization taken by van Gelderen, and assumed by many of the contributors to this volume, relies on general principles for which the natural assumption is that they apply equally to all instances of language acquisition. Yet, as Hale (1998: 8) observes, the claim that such "constant" factors are causal in change is highly problematic: if van Gelderen's principles applied equally to the previous generation's acquisition, why did the change not occur for that generation? Most of the papers in the volume

steer clear of this uncomfortable question, the exception being Lohndal, who in a footnote (p215) makes the incisive observation that "unless the external data is such that the principle can kick in, it won't". More work is needed to explore the interaction between the exact distribution of this data (the second of Chomsky's (2005) three factors) and the acquisition algorithm.

Rather than crippling defects, however, these criticisms represent areas in which more research should be carried out. Another interesting direction is the "renewal" of cyclical developments: what introduces the elements that feed grammaticalization chains? As Kwon (p174) observes, if a change is truly cyclical, then not every stage of it can be explained with reference to principles of economy alone. In her introduction, van Gelderen briefly suggests that an "urge of speakers to be innovative" is also involved (p9). More light clearly needs to be shed on this plausible suggestion, though formal syntax may not be the right arena in which to explore it.

In conclusion, this is a valuable and unique volume which provides plenty for the linguist intrigued by cyclical change to get his/her teeth into. One can only hope that it will spur on further investigations in this vein.

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