

Cycles and reanalysis in inherent and contact-induced changes: Against a declarative analysis of depictive manner complements

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Cyclic changes are well-attested in the syntactic history of languages: they constitute paths that can, in principle, lead to the emergence of innovative patterns again and again. In this respect, van Gelderen (2009) identifies various paths that differ from each other not only in terms of the syntactic position of the element before and after the change but also in terms of the features involved. The process that my talk will focus on concerns the (purported) reanalysis of *wh*-based manner adverbs into declarative complementisers, as has been raised in connection with English *how*. Counterarguments have been raised in the literature from the perspective of synchronic syntax (Legate 2010) and semantics (Umbach, Hinterwimmer & Ebert 2023). I will examine the issue from the perspective of grammaticalisation and show that the cyclic reanalysis into a declarative complementiser is not tenable from this perspective either. I will concentrate on three major points: (i) the inherent problems of the purported reanalysis process, (ii) the syntactic parallels with regular similative clauses, as shown by German, and (iii) the distributional parallels with complementisers deriving from verbs of saying, as in Jamaican Creole.

The phenomenon is illustrated in (1):

- (1) They told me [**how** the tooth fairy doesn't really exist].
'They told me that the tooth fairy doesn't really exist.' (Legate 2010: 121)

In (1), the *how*-clause appears to be equivalent to its *that*-clause counterpart in the translation: in other words, the original manner interpretation associated with *how*-clauses is not evidently present. For cases like (1), van Gelderen (2009, 2015) assumes that a reanalysis into a complementiser has taken place, meaning that while *how* as a manner adverb regularly moves up from the VP to [Spec,CP], it is base-generated as a C head in (1), in line with the general economy principles favouring the high base-generation of an element in a head position rather than movement as a phrase. These principles are formulated as Feature Economy in the model proposed by van Gelderen (2009).

Nye (2013) also assumes base-generation in C, but with the important difference that it cannot be considered a declarative complementiser proper (see also Umbach, Hinterwimmer & Ebert 2023). Importantly, *how* and *that* are not interchangeable in several contexts:

- (2) a. *It was conceded [**how** the tooth fairy doesn't exist]. (Legate 2010: 124)
b. It was conceded [**that** the tooth fairy doesn't exist]. (Legate 2010: 124)

Legate (2010) assumes that the CP headed by *how* is embedded into a DP in the matrix clause, given that the syntactic distribution of *how*-clauses patterns with DPs. Semantically, the construction presupposes the existence of some discourse referent that is specified by the complement clause (Umbach, Hinterwimmer & Ebert 2023). Under this view, the structures of *that*-clauses and *how*-clauses differ, as shown in (3) for clauses like (1):

- (3) a. [_{VP} tell [_{CP} that [_{TP} ...]]]
b. [_{VP} tell [_{DP} Ø [_{CP} how [_{TP} ...]]]]

The manner depictive *how*-clause functioning as a verbal complement in (3b) is thus merely an illusion.

The first argument in favour of this distinction comes from the nature of the purported cyclic change itself. A prototypical case of cyclic reanalysis is the relative cycle (see van Gelderen 2009), in which an original relative pronoun (moving to the [Spec,CP] position) is reanalysed into a complementiser, thereby making it possible for novel relative pronouns to appear in addition to the complementiser in [Spec,CP], so that the cycle can start again. This can be observed in the history of English: the original relative complementiser *þe*, which constituted the most frequent pattern in Old English (either on its own or in combination with a relative pronoun, see Traugott 1992, Ringe & Taylor 2014), was gradually replaced by the original pronoun (neuter, singular, nominative/accusative) *that*, which is attested as a complementiser from Middle English onwards (see van Gelderen 2009). This change counts as completed since *that* effectively replaced *þe* across contexts, leading to the complete loss of *þe*. In other words, no split pattern in the form of (2) arises, which is the natural consequence of the relative complementiser *that* ultimately having the same features as *þe*, once the original phi features were lost (see Bacskai-Atkari 2020). The split pattern in (2) demonstrates that *how* does not have the same feature distribution as *that*: while the two

patterns are synonymous in certain contexts (which also means that there is no perfect split in the sense of complementary distribution), they cannot be considered equivalent and the novel pattern has not superseded the older one. The situation is reminiscent of the distribution of the canonical declarative complementiser *da* and the *wh*-based *što* in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian: while the former has a wider distribution, *što* is restricted to introducing factives (Arsenijević 2020). This kind of distribution is expected on the basis of economy: it is not expected that a single system should contain two fully grammaticalised declarative complementisers at the same time. Therefore, the reanalysis of *how* as a complementiser cannot be considered the completion of a declarative cycle.

The second argument in favour of the structural contrast shown in (3) concerns the syntactic attachment of the *how*-clause (in non-interrogative contexts). Unlike English *how*, German *wie* is also attested as a similitive and equative complementiser (since Early New High German, see Jäger 2018, also on the status of *wie* as a complementiser). As shown by Umbach, Hinterwimmer & Ebert (2023), the similitive meaning of *how* and *wie* is constant across contexts, the differences in the interpretation arising in their combination with other elements in the structure: that is, the similitive meaning is also present in the depictive manner complement cases. Similitive clauses are attached to a matrix correlative element that is either overt or covert:

- (4) Die Krähe ist (so) [wie die Eule].
 the.F crow is so how the.F owl
 ‘The crow is like the owl.’

In this case, the matrix correlative element is optional and it imposes selectional restrictions on the head of the complement CP. The structure can be represented as follows (Jäger 2018, Bacsikai-Atkari 2023):

- (5) [_{VP} ist [_{ComprP} (so) [_{CP} wie [_{TP} ...]]]]

In this case, the similitive complex is a predicate in the matrix clause; the matrix correlative element expresses comparison (marked here as ComprP), which also leads to the interpretational difference from cases like (3b). In other words, the attachment of depictive manner complements via a matrix XP that establishes the referential interpretation of the subclause is the rule, not the exception. While an extension from a similitive use such as (4) to a manner depictive such as (1) may indeed involve the stepwise bleaching of the similitive meaning of the matrix element, as well as its recategorization into D (see Umbach, Hinterwimmer & Ebert 2023 on the stages present in English versus German), this does not change the presence of such an XP in the syntactic attachment of the subclause.

The third argument in favour of the split shown in (3) comes from the observation that similar splits arise in other diachronic scenarios as well. In Jamaican Creole, the complementiser *seh*, based on the lexical verb ‘say’, is attested alongside *that* (Patrick 2008, van Gelderen 2009), as shown in (6):

- (6) Him all swear [seh him was going to tell me].
 ‘He even swore that he was going to tell me.’ (Patrick 2008)

For cases like (6), van Gelderen (2009) assumes a reanalysis from V to C. Patrick (2008) suggests a similar path, with the addition that the process has evidently not been completed entirely, as *seh* has a more restricted distribution than *that*: it occurs only after predicates of speech, thought, perception or emotion. For this reason, it is referred to as a quotative complementiser by Güldemann (2005). The distribution between this more specialised complementiser and *that* is therefore highly reminiscent of the scenario sketched in (3) above: *seh* cannot be considered a declarative complementiser equivalent to *that*, even though in some contexts they can produce synonymous results. The reanalysis from V to C is also not without problems in the given case, as the V-to-C grammaticalisation path is not attested in English otherwise and downward grammaticalisation would go against general tendencies of morphosyntactic change. Instead, Güldemann (2005) suggests that Jamaican Creole *seh* (as well as its counterparts in other Atlantic creole varieties) is a direct contact effect with the West African substrate languages, that is, without a language-internal grammaticalisation process. The importance of contact is also evidenced by the fact that similar complementisers are reported only from other creole varieties of English, such as British Creole (Sebba 2008) and Liberian Settler English (Singler 2008). In other words, splits like (3) arise not only due to the semantic bleaching of already existing configurations in a system but also due to contact-induced innovation, suggesting that the more specialised meanings are not merely by-products but reflect genuine grammatical distinctions.

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