

POSITIONING REANALYSIS AND REANALYSIS RESEARCH*

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ABSTRACT Reanalysis is recognized as a key concept of grammatical change across theoretical frameworks. Despite its widespread use, its role and nature are controversially discussed in current research. Introducing this special issue, our paper gives an overview of major positions that have been proposed, as well as of the papers in this issue. This will allow us to identify core elements of reanalysis as well as points of debate concerning, e.g., the definition of reanalysis and its subtypes, the role of ambiguity and different types of constraints, features such as directionality, abruptness/gradualness and the covert nature of reanalysis. Further issues include the roles of speaker and hearer, language acquisition, language contact, high and low frequency scenarios, and the relationship between grammaticalization, analogy and reanalysis. We will show that some of the controversies arise from differences in basic assumptions about linguistic structures and language change in general. We will argue that processes at the individual level and at the level of speech communities should not be confounded, and that reanalysis as hearer-induced innovation needs to be distinguished from reanalysis as ratification. Finally, we will highlight a range of perspectives for further research on reanalysis that can inform research on language change and related matters more broadly.

* This discussion paper was inspired by the workshop “Whither Reanalysis?” (Humboldt University Berlin, 1–2 March 2019). We would like to thank all participants of the workshop for their contributions and for the stimulating discussions. We would especially like to thank Elizabeth Traugott for her very helpful and insightful comments on this paper, and George Walkden, editor-in-chief at *Journal of Historical Syntax*, for patiently and expertly advising and helping us.

1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The concept of reanalysis is basic to historical linguistics. In contrast to other concepts which are strongly linked to particular theories, reanalysis is referred to in a broad range of approaches. It is applied to a wide variety of linguistic phenomena, ranging from morphology and syntax to the lexical level and phonetics / phonology.

In this paper, we will highlight some of the major issues that have emerged from the workshop “Whither Reanalysis?” (Humboldt University Berlin, 1–2 March 2019). Our aim is not so much to develop (and impose) a particular view of reanalysis. Rather, we would like to provide a structured synthesis of previous research on the matter, taking into account prior definitions and approaches. Above all, we will identify major controversies as well as open questions in order to show how the potential of the notion of reanalysis can be further developed. Aspects of these research perspectives are illustrated by the contributions to this special issue, which we will briefly present at the end of this paper.

The workshop, the special issue of JHS, and this paper were prepared by all four editors. Our dear colleague and friend Uli Detges died of a long illness on 7 February 2021. He was enthusiastic about the reanalysis project and participated in it fully until his passing – we had a videoconference meeting with him in his last week. He was a bright scholar who made key contributions to research on reanalysis and grammaticalization, among many other things. As everyone who met him academically will confirm, he was an inspiring and active conference leader and participant who asked intriguing questions in a candid and fair manner. Similarly, he was a very pleasant and fun colleague to have around. This volume is dedicated to his memory.

2 DEFINITIONS OF REANALYSIS

The notion of reanalysis is inherently ambiguous (see Walkden, this issue). On the one hand, reanalyses can be conceived of as particular events of innovation, occurring at a given moment in time. On the other hand, the term equally refers to the result of change at the level of the language system as such. This may explain why many of the available definitions tacitly or overtly combine two different sets of criteria, namely cognitive aspects on the one hand and structural factors on the other. This basic difference in orientations is at the heart of many controversies and misunderstandings. In this section, we distinguish between three main groups of definitions of reanalysis, depending on their focus on the linguistic structures concerned (2.1), on the (cognitive) perspectives of the individual language users (2.2), or their focus

on the spread of reanalysis in speech communities (2.3). Moreover, as we will see (cf. section 3), depending on the definition adopted, different subtypes of reanalysis have been distinguished in previous research. In our view, the basic assumptions of the various approaches are not necessarily incompatible. On the contrary, they can be considered to provide complementary perspectives that can inform a comprehensive view on reanalysis. This section thus also aims to disentangle the different assumptions made in order to identify more precisely the points of controversy.

2.1 *Definitions in structural terms*

The classical (and most widely accepted) definition of reanalysis is the following, proposed by Langacker (1977). According to this author, reanalysis is

“change in the structure of an expression or class of expressions that does not involve any immediate or intrinsic modification of its surface manifestation” (Langacker 1977: 58).

The notion of “structure of an expression” suggests that reanalyses usually involve syntactically or morphologically complex expressions, i.e., concatenations of smaller units whose internal boundaries and / or categorial status are altered as a consequence of the change. Langacker’s concept of reanalysis has mostly been interpreted in this way in further research, which has focused on cases of reanalysis that involve (morpho-)syntactic change in the sense of a change in the (morpho-)syntactic boundaries of the linguistic items involved (see e.g. Harris & Campbell 1995: 50). However, Langacker himself construes the notion of syntactic change in a broad way and not only deals with cases of resegmentation, but also includes cases of reformulation “in which boundaries are unaltered” (Langacker 1977: 79, see 3.2).

Moreover, Langacker’s definition implies that there is an ambiguous surface realization which corresponds to two different underlying interpretations (the old and the new one). His structural definition thus tacitly assumes that, from a cognitive perspective, reanalyses really are re-interpretations, i.e. change brought about by hearers or by language learners (see 2.2.1 and 2.2.2).

Later approaches have emphasised the importance of changes that do not involve morphosyntactic boundary shifts (see e.g. Hopper & Traugott 2003, Detges & Waltereit 2002). In a similar vein, Whitman (2000; 2012) stresses that syntactic rebracketing as a factor in syntactic change is less important than has usually been claimed in the literature. He provides more evidence for Haspelmath’s finding (1999) that categorial relabeling without rebracket-

ing exists (but see Weiß, this issue, who argues that at the syntactic level, the reverse, i.e. rebracketing without relabeling, hardly occurs).

An important issue here is what counts as a changed structure, or more specifically, what kinds of linguistic structures are eligible for reanalysis. This matter is closely related to general theoretical assumptions, and it points to the question of basic features and subtypes of reanalysis that will be discussed in sections 3 and 5.1. At the same time, it can be argued that the structural definition loses coherence when less straightforwardly subcategorised “structural” changes are included as well (as already observed by Langacker 1977: 79).

2.2 *Definitions in cognitive and interactional terms*

In addition to the structural definition of reanalysis discussed in 2.1, Langacker indirectly refers to the cognitive dimension of reanalysis:

“Reanalysis may lead to changes at the surface level, [...] but these surface changes can be viewed as the natural and expected result of functionally prior modifications in rules and underlying representations.” (Langacker 1977: 58)

This additional characterisation of reanalysis as involving “modifications in rules and underlying representations” has been developed by other authors from different theoretical frameworks, and different proposals as to the existence and nature of the underlying representations have been made (see e.g. Weiß 2018 who argues for the necessity of underlying structures from a generative perspective or Kemmerer 2019 who gives an overview of research on grammatical categories from a neurolinguistic perspective). Below we will first comment on proposals to characterise reanalysis by the logical operations involved, i.e., with a focus on cognitive aspects (2.2.1), and then present proposals that focus on the question of how reanalysis takes place in communication (2.2.2).

2.2.1 *Reanalysis as innovation based on abduction*

In his seminal 1973 paper, Andersen discusses abduction and deduction as basic logical operations in order to characterise different types of language change. For him, language acquisition is central to understanding language change:

“In acquiring his [sic] language, a learner observes the verbal activity of his elders, construes it as a ‘result’ – as the output of a grammar – and guesses at what that grammar might be.” (Andersen 1973: 776)

Andersen couches his model in the Peircean concept of abduction (however, according to Deutscher 2002, this view is not consistent with Peirce’s own thinking). Andersen assumes that language acquisition involves both abductive and deductive reasoning, which can give rise to different types of innovation and language change (evolutive and adaptive change). The operation of abduction, which is central to reanalysis, is represented by the left arrow in Figure 1. Based on observation of the available data (Output 1) and what Andersen calls “laws of language”, the learner formulates a grammar (Grammar 2) which will produce this output (Output 2). However, whether this “grammar actually is identical to or different from that (those) of his models has no practical relevance in the speech community, which can only be concerned with observable usage” (Andersen 1973: 789). As Anttila (1989: 197) puts it, “[e]verybody has to abduce his [sic] own grammar from the output of other grammars; in this situation ambiguities can be newly resolved.”

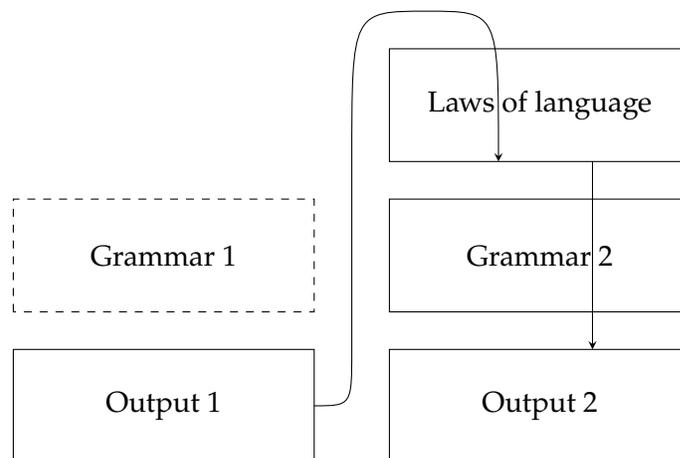


Figure 1 Abduction and deduction in the acquisition of language (Andersen 1973: 778)

Following Andersen’s approach, reanalyses can be seen as the result of the non-replicability of individual grammars: based on a particular output, learners build a grammar, and if this grammar diverges from the previous grammar, reanalysis has taken place. The usefulness of this model and the notion of abduction have been underlined in various approaches (see e.g. Hopper &

Traugott 2003: 41). Some authors have stressed that the notion of re-analysis is not terminologically adequate, as it presupposes that a previous analysis exists. What happens in the learner, in contrast, is that a new analysis is chosen for a particular output signal. Therefore, neo-analysis has been proposed as a more adequate term (Andersen 2001; see also e.g. Traugott & Trousdale 2010; 2013; Petré & Van de Velde 2018). Hansen (this issue) proposes to distinguish neo-analysis and re-analysis as two subtypes of reanalysis, “according to whether or not the hearer’s mental grammar already includes an existing analysis of the construction which is reanalyzed”.

Certain controversies that have arisen are linked to additional assumptions made in different theoretical frameworks, the most important ones concerning the question of what is included in “grammar”, how the “laws of language” are interpreted, and who the relevant “learners” are.

In the generative tradition, where Andersen’s view has been widely accepted (see e.g. Lightfoot 1979; 1997; 2006; Roberts 1993; 2001; 2007; Roberts & Roussou 2003), the “laws of language” can be interpreted in the sense of Universal Grammar, and language acquisition during (early) childhood has been considered decisive for language change. Moreover, research has strongly focused on reanalysis in (morpho-)syntax, and reanalysis has been interpreted as a primarily syntactic change.

These assumptions have been questioned in functionalist approaches. Hopper & Traugott (2003: 44) claim that “it is becoming increasingly widely accepted among sociolinguists and researchers on language acquisition that people continue to develop language skills throughout their lives, and also to innovate” (see also Croft 2000: 53–59). “All language users” are thus assumed to be potential agents of change (see also Kuteva 2002: 133).¹

Moreover, it has been argued that despite its structural implications (see 2.1), reanalysis is first and foremost driven by semantics in adult usage (see e.g. Hopper & Traugott 2003). In the same vein, Detges & Waltereit (2002) maintain that “reanalysis is not primarily syntactic but semantic” (Detges & Waltereit 2002: 154). Even though this view is shared today by many authors, there is considerable disagreement as to the nature and delimitations of the constraints, principles or mechanisms involved (see 5.1).

In addition, some authors have extended the remit of reanalysis to non-sequential items (see e.g. Waltereit 1999). However, it is controversial which levels of linguistic analysis should be included (see 3.1). Finally, Cognitive Linguistics assumes more flexible and more general principles of cognition

¹ For reasons of simplicity, we will refer to language acquisition and adult usage in the remainder of this paper. We are aware that the picture is much more nuanced, but we want to abstract from the role of specific age groups in language change here.

that are not exclusive to language, but also guide other processes of perception.

2.2.2 *Reanalysis in usage: Reanalysis as hearer-induced innovation and reanalysis as ratification by the hearer*

It is widely assumed, tacitly or explicitly, that reanalyses are brought about by hearers. This characteristic is illustrated by discussions of cases such as the following:

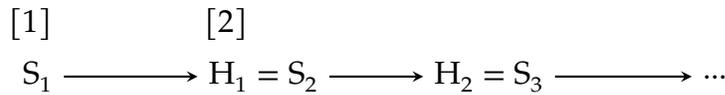
“[i]n reanalysis, the hearer understands a form to have a structure and a meaning that are different from those of the speaker, as when [*Hamburg*] + [*er*] ‘item (of food) from Hamburg’ is heard as [*ham*] + [*burger*]. Sooner or later someone substitutes the word *cheese* or *beef* for *ham*; but this substitution is merely the symptom of a change that has already occurred silently. The reanalysis itself is covert until some recognizable modification in the forms reveals it.” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 50)

Reanalysis is thus presented here as a new interpretation, diverging from previous use, which is chosen by a particular hearer in a situation of communicative exchange, and it is this introduction of a new interpretation in the hearer’s mind that represents the decisive step for the change under investigation. In other descriptions, however, reanalysis is seen as a basic step in grammaticalization or language change in general, characterised as the ratification of a previous innovation. As argued by [Waltereit \(2018\)](#), the two interpretations of reanalysis need to be carefully kept apart. Moreover, concerning the notion of ratification, it is important not to conflate the level of the individual speakers where innovations are *ratified by the individual hearer* and *adopted* in further individual utterances, and the level of the speech community where innovations are *diffused* or *propagated*, so that they are *ratified within the speech community* (see also [Walkden](#), this issue, and [Winter-Froemel 2008](#)).²

Focusing on the level of the individual speakers (on the community level, see 2.3 below), in order to sharpen the distinction between hearer-induced reanalysis as an innovation and reanalysis as ratification by the hearer, it is useful to focus on the ways the relevant processes take place in actual situations of communicative exchange. In this respect, it can be argued that speaker-induced innovations and hearer-induced innovations represent two fundamentally different scenarios, as illustrated by Figure 2. The Figure shows a

² See also Croff’s distinction between actuation and propagation, where actuation is “the very first time that a novel form/function pairing is produced” ([Kuteva 2002](#): 165).

Scenario 1: Speaker-induced innovation [1] and reanalysis-as-ratification-by-H [2]



Scenario 2: Hearer-induced innovation [3]



Figure 2 Two scenarios of innovation
(adapted from Winter-Froemel 2012a: 158–159)

series of communicative interactions between a speaker and a hearer (situation 1: $S_1 \rightarrow H_1$, situation 2: $S_2 \rightarrow H_2$, etc.) forming a sequence, i.e., the hearer of the first situation of exchange is envisaged as being the speaker of a subsequent situation of exchange ($H_1 = S_2$).

Two examples that have been widely discussed in the literature can serve to illustrate the two scenarios. The grammaticalization of the French future construction *aller* + infinitive represents a case of speaker-induced change based on expressivity (Detges 2001: 145–177, see also Hansen, this issue). The speaker uses the construction in the original meaning (MOVEMENT: ‘I go and visit her’) in order to express an INTENTION (‘I intend to visit her’). This choice can be assumed to be motivated by expressivity, or more specifically by an authentication strategy. The speaker expresses her intention to perform the action in the near future by presenting herself as already being on the way of performing the action (similar authentication strategies can motivate the subsequent change from INTENTION to FUTURE meaning as well as uses of PRESENT tense for FUTURE meaning, cf. Detges 2001).

French *Je vais lui rendre visite*. MOVEMENT: ‘I go and visit her.’
 > INTENTION: ‘I intend to visit her.’
 > FUTURE: ‘I will visit her.’

The innovative use of the MOVEMENT construction to express an INTENTION is thus motivated by pragmatic strategies followed by the speaker to enhance the pragmatic strength of her communicative turn. Especially if the original interpretation is literally false (i.e., if the speaker is *not* already on her way, or if no literal movement is involved), this usage will thus be perceived as a

pragmatically motivated “innovative” usage [1], which needs to be accepted as being communicatively valid even though the speaker is not literally moving. This ratification represents an individual act of the hearer [2]. In contrast to the speaker’s innovation, which is directly observable in the verbal exchange between S and H based on the speaker’s utterance, the hearer’s ratification of the innovative use is tacit, i.e., it takes place in cognition (Figure 1 in 2.2.1 could be seen as a representation of what happens in the hearer’s mind).

Hearer-induced innovations can be illustrated by the evolution of *ti* as an interrogative particle in Québec French (see among others [Detges & Waltereit 2002](#)). This change has been explained as a reanalysis in which the hearer reinterpreted the phonic sequence [ti] as an interrogative particle in particular *liaison* contexts where a 3SG or 3PL verb ending in *-d* or *-t* is followed by a 3SG or 3PL pronoun (*il, ils*) that agrees with the full subject NP.

Québec French

<i>Pierre_i vient-il_i? [-ti]</i>	>	<i>Pierre vient-ti? [-ti]</i>
Pierre come:3SG-3SG:MASC		Pierre come:3SG-Q

In contrast to the preceding example of speaker-induced innovation, this hearer-induced innovation cannot be directly observed (see also Hopper’s & Traugott’s description of the *hamburger* example above). It can thus be argued that reanalysis as a hearer-induced innovation goes back to strategies of understanding, the first step taking place in the hearer’s mind only, so that there is a divergence between the conventional use (that can be assumed for the speaker S_1) and the hearer H_1 ’s new interpretation. This new interpretation may of course become visible in later uses of the reanalysed construction (e.g., in questions like *Marie vient-ti?*, where no male antecedent is available, or in further lexical innovations such as *cheeseburger*; on different scenarios of actualisation, see Winter-Froemel, this issue).

2.3 Reanalysis as ratification in the speech community

The views discussed in 2.2 have mainly focused on cognitive processes in individual language users and on individual situations of communicative exchange. In addition, reanalysis has also been approached at the level of the speech community.

Two notions that are closely connected to individual vs. speech community are innovation and diffusion. Innovation is typically seen as a novel use

by an individual (speaker or hearer) whereas diffusion concerns the spread of the innovation throughout the speech community (e.g. [Weinreich, Labov & Herzog 1968](#); [Milroy & Milroy 1985](#); [Croft 2000](#); see also Walkden, this issue). A major question is thus whether reanalysis is defined as a punctual event in usage, or as a change at the level of the speech community brought about by the diffusion of an innovation and leading to a change in the linguistic convention (see e.g. [De Smet 2009](#)). Winter-Froemel (this issue) proposes to distinguish terminologically between neoanalysis as an innovation and reanalysis as a phenomenon at the level of the speech community.

Ratification of innovations as a necessary step in change has been assumed in various approaches:

“Reanalysis [...] occurs in any kind of functional change” ([Detges & Waltereit 2002](#): 190)

“Reanalysis is the most important mechanism for grammaticalization, as for all change” ([Hopper & Traugott 2003](#): 39)

“As we have defined it, reanalysis refers to the replacement of old structures by new ones.” ([Hopper & Traugott 2003](#): 63)

The relevance of innovation and diffusion, and of the level of the individual speakers vs. the level of the speech community can be seen as a major issue in current discussions of language change. The distinction between these aspects is then again relevant for the question of whether reanalysis is conceived of as an abrupt phenomenon or whether it can be described as a gradual change, that is, as a progression of small changes (acts of adoption) that lead to an overall change in the community (cf. [De Smet 2009](#); [2014](#); Favaro, this issue, and section 5.4 of this paper).

From a methodological point of view, the different aspects of reanalysis need to be studied in fundamentally different ways. Whereas diffusion can at least to a certain extent be observed in corpora (but various caveats need to be made here as well), diachronic approaches to reanalysis as a hearer-based innovation can normally only be based on a reconstruction of plausible innovation scenarios. Also, to our knowledge, it has not been possible so far to determine at what specific moment a hearer or reader has ratified an innovation.

Finally, from a theoretical perspective, the question arises whether the different notions of reanalysis are guided by the same constraints, principles or mechanisms (on the controversial notion of mechanism, cf. 5.1 and Walkden, this issue), and whether they can still be meaningfully described under

one general notion. For example, while reanalysis as ratification (at the individual level or at the level of the speech community) a priori appears to be compatible with different formalist or functionalist frameworks, reanalysis as a particular subtype of hearer-induced innovation which is different from other types of speaker-induced innovation appears to be a more controversial category. In our view, the conceptual distinctions proposed here (hearer-induced innovation, individual ratification, community ratification) provide a further step to refine previous discussions of these issues.

3 SUBTYPES OF REANALYSIS

A first way to distinguish between different subtypes of reanalysis is to look at the different levels of linguistic analysis concerned (3.1). Other subtypes of reanalysis that have been distinguished in previous research are based on either structural (3.2) or cognitive and semiotic (3.3) criteria (cf. the structural and cognitive definitions of reanalysis in 2.1 and 2.2). Based on various parameters discussed in this paper, still other subtypes of reanalysis could be identified and delimited from each other in further research, e.g., based on major agents and types of surrounding conditions (e.g., adult speech, language acquisition, language contact or creolisation settings, see 6.2).

3.1 *Reanalysis at different levels of linguistic analysis*

Andersen's cognitive definition (see 2.2.1) makes no a priori assumptions as to the nature of the items eligible for change. For the syntactic and morphological level, reanalysis is about the assignment of morphosyntactic structure to the surface manifestation of linguistic expressions (see 2.1). Literature on reanalysis in syntax includes, among many others, Langacker (1977), Timberlake (1977), Lightfoot (1979; 1997), Hopper & Traugott (2003), Harris & Campbell (1995) and De Smet (2009; 2014). Authors who have worked on reanalysis in morphology are, among many others, Wurzel (1992), Haspelmath (1998), and Fertig (2013). Reanalysis in syntax and its interfaces is illustrated e.g., by the evolution of *-ti* in Québec French (see 2.2.2).

Reanalysis may concern sequentially ordered expressions, but likewise, they may also be non-sequential (Andersen 1973: 769), e.g., phonetic variants that become reanalysed as phonemes in their own right (Andersen 1973: 771). In phonology, reanalysis thus mainly concerns the (mis)assignment of phonological representations to the speech signal, which is inherently "noisy". Relevant work in phonology includes e.g. Langacker (1977), Blevins (2004), and Labov, Rosenfelder & Fruehwald (2013).

Like sounds and phonemes, meanings are not sequential items. Some authors (Langacker 1977; Detges & Waltereit 2002; Eckardt 2012) therefore extend the remit of reanalysis, and also apply the concept of reanalysis to change in the lexical semantics of simplex words (e.g. Latin *focus* ‘fireplace’ > ‘fire’), provided that the change in question is the outcome of a reinterpretation by a hearer. However, this view is only shared by a minority of scholars in the field (see also e.g. Winter-Froemel 2018; Winter-Froemel, this issue, and Detges Forthcoming).

3.2 Structural criteria: Subtypes of resegmentation and reformulation

Langacker (1977) distinguishes three types of reanalysis as “resegmentation”, boundary loss, boundary shift, and boundary creation:

Boundary loss
le chien (French) > *lisyen* (Seychelles Creole)
 ‘the dog’ > ‘dog’

In this example, the boundary between the French article and the noun got lost, and the contemporary Seychelles Creole form is accordingly a noun without article.³ The following example, from Detges & Waltereit (2002: 152–153), is for boundary shift. (a) shows the structure before reanalysis, (b) after (cf. Lapesa 2000: 808–817).

Boundary shift
 Spanish

(a) $[[se \quad vend-e_i]] \quad [cerveza_i] \quad en \quad el \quad patio$
 REFL sell-3SG beer in DEF:ART.M courtyard
 ‘Beer is being sold in the courtyard.’

(b) $[se_i \quad [vend-e_i \quad cerveza]] \quad en \quad el \quad patio$
 one sell-3SG beer in DEF:ART.M courtyard
 ‘One sells beer in the courtyard.’

Cases of (morpho-)syntactic boundary shift have also been discussed under the notion of rebracketing in previous research. Mere rebracketing as in the traditional example of $[[hamburg][er]]$ to $[[ham][burger]]$ is now a controversial concept in research on syntactic change (see Whitman 2012 and Weiß, this volume).

³ Note though that Seychelles Creole has *sa*, which shows some characteristics of a definite article, but does not seem to be fully grammaticalized (cf. APiCS, feature 9 for Seychelles Creole).

As regards boundary creation, Langacker (1977: 75–77) gives one (reconstructed) example, from the Uto-Aztecan language Taharumara. He says that in that language, the previously monomorphemic reciprocal pronoun *?anagu* was reinterpreted as bimorphemic *?a-nagu*, which in turn motivated the 3sc personal pronoun *binoy* to develop the 3pl variant *?abinoy*. In other words, *?a* was interpreted as a plural marker. This would look like a folk etymology: as Langacker says, reciprocity inherently implies plural reference. If he is right, then the segment *?a* of the monomorphemic reciprocal marker *?anagu* was, in a folk-etymological process, reinterpreted as a plural morpheme and subsequently used to mark plurality with other pronouns.

In fact, it seems plausible that for boundary creation in general, some folk-etymological process must play a role: the new segmentation establishes new links to other expressions of the linguistic system, so that the reanalysed expression becomes more motivated. In “classical” reanalysis, the boundary creation is brought about by the hearer and guided by strategies of understanding (see Langacker’s Taharumara example). But there are also cases where boundary creation is deliberate, e.g., when the speaker intends to convey effects of verbal humour or to enhance the memorisation of a certain expression in marketing contexts. One example for this is the recent coinage, by the French fashion industry, of the *pantacourt* ‘capri pants’. It has been created, as wordplay with the simplex *pantalon* ‘trouser’ as a model, as if *pantalon* [pātalō] really consisted of two morphemes *panta* [pāta] and *lon(g)* [lō] ‘long’. Using this model, *pantacourt* then means ‘short trousers’. After all, capri pants are a little shorter than standard trousers.

Alongside these reanalyses that imply structural changes, there has been a strand of thought about reanalysis that does not require structural change, i.e., reanalyses without linear / syntagmatic ramifications. Already Langacker (1977) speaks of “reformulation” under the general heading of reanalysis. Admitting that “reformulation is not so straightforwardly subcategorised as resegmentation” (Langacker 1977: 79) because of the greater complexity of the semantic domain, he proposes three subcategories of reformulation that mirror the subcategories of resegmentation, in decreasing order of quantitative relevance: 1) semantic shift, 2) semantic loss (or the loss of semantic elements), 3) semantic addition (or the addition of semantic elements). Moreover, there can also be reformulations that lack semantic consequences. Reformulation may or may not involve resegmentation, i.e., the shift, creation, or loss of morpheme boundaries that is traditionally thought of as reanalysis.

Semantic shift is illustrated by the metaphorical use of *tree*, *branch*, and *node* in linguistics (Langacker 1977: 83). Note, however, that the figurative usage described by Langacker is not necessarily hearer-induced like the stan-

standard examples of reanalysis discussed in the literature, but should probably be interpreted as an innovation introduced by the speaker (see also below, 6.1). Clearer examples of reanalyses arising from hearer-induced semantic reinterpretations that have been described in the literature are Latin *focus* ‘fireplace’ > ‘fire’, Latin *testimonium* ‘testimony’ > French *témoin* ‘person giving testimony’ (see also English *witness* ‘testimony’, ‘person giving testimony’; cf. Koch 1999: 155–156; 2004: 16–17; Detges & Waltereit 2002: 164–165; Winter-Froemel 2012b: 70–76).

Semantic loss and semantic addition, in turn, seem to concern typically elements with only redundant semantic value or a purely syntactic function. Semantic loss can be observed in cases of boundary loss, semantic addition in cases where elements that do not have or have lost their meaning or syntactic function are reinterpreted and assigned a new function. Langacker also includes figurative uses becoming “frozen”, i.e., the speakers gradually losing the awareness of the original literal meanings as a potential case of semantic loss. In this latter case, the reanalysis (or more specifically, the reformulation) thus represents a gradual phenomenon, which differs again from the other examples given.

3.3 Cognitive and semiotic criteria: Reference and transparency

While Langacker’s classification has focused on structural features of reanalysis, a classification based on the cognitive processes involved has been proposed by Detges & Waltereit (2002).

Their functional approach implies that reanalysis is a general mechanism that can apply to phenomena at any level of linguistic description and may include also purely semantic reanalysis (see above, 2.2.2). The authors suggest that reanalysis usually occurs for one of two possible motivations which both are based in semiotic assumptions made by hearers:

- (i) the assumption that the conventional semantics associated with the sound chain corresponds to what seems to be meant in the situation (*the principle of reference*),
- (ii) the assumption that sound-meaning pairings are consistent in the language (*the principle of transparency*).

Whereas the principle of reference is the more important principle and concerns the relation of meaning and reference (broadly understood), the principle of transparency concerns the link between form and meaning (Detges & Waltereit 2002: 159).

One example for the principle of reference is the agglutination of articles in creole languages. For example, French *le chien* 'the dog' turns to *lisyen* 'dog' / 'the dog' in Seychelles Creole. In Langacker's terms, this would be boundary loss.

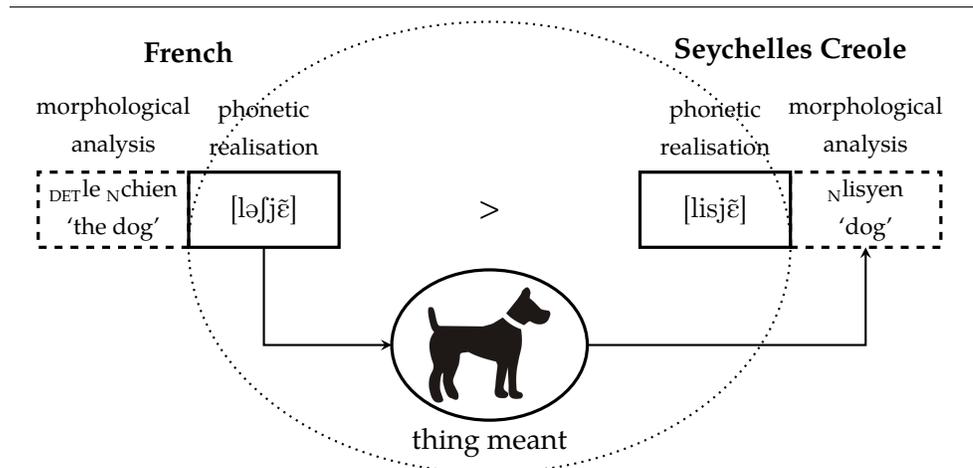


Figure 3 The principle of reference (Detges & Waltereit 2002: 156)

The principle of reference does not require any knowledge of the language in question. Regarding the principle of transparency, though, the assumption of consistency in the sound-meaning-pairing of a given language does, of course, require knowledge of that language. For example, the Italian loanword *l'alicorno* 'the unicorn' turned *la licorne* in Middle French. This is a case of boundary shift: the *a* of *alicorno* was assumed to be part of the determiner (*la* with a feminine noun) rather than part of the noun stem. This assumption was most probably based on the observation that in (Middle) French, *la* represents the unmarked realisation of the feminine article (the elided variant *l'* also exists, but is restricted to nouns with a vocalic initial). In addition, the fact that the reanalysis occurs in a context of lexical borrowing can also be assumed to have favoured the reanalysis (see also e.g., the reanalysis of English *a napron* > *an apron*, this item having been borrowed from French; on reanalysis in language contact situations, cf. Winter-Froemel 2018). Thus, this particular subtype of reanalysis is based on analogical thinking in a broad sense (on reanalysis and analogy, see also 7.2). In contrast, reanalyses primarily based on the principle of reference do not involve analogy.

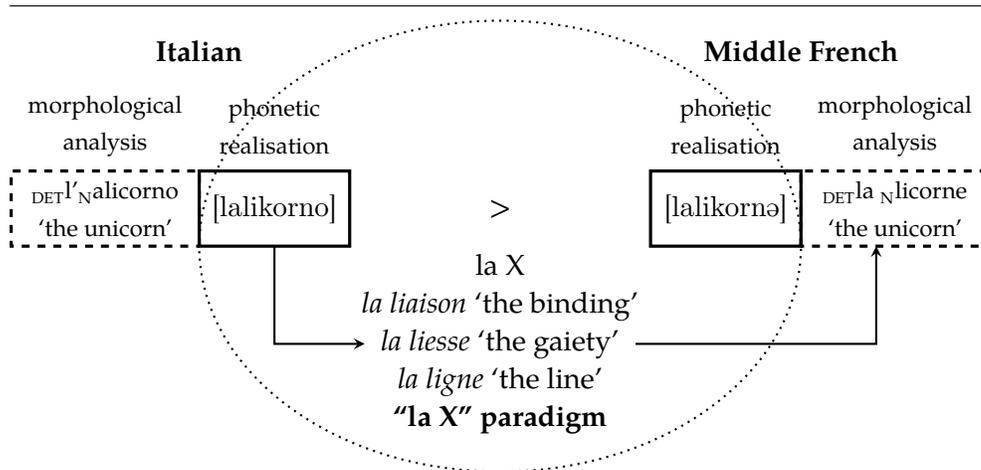


Figure 4 The principle of transparency (adapted from Detges & Waltereit 2002: 159)

4 INTERIM SUMMARY

4.1 Common assumption: Reanalysis is a change that is not directly observable in the realisation of the utterance

One interesting feature of reanalysis is that it is a concept used across a wide range of frameworks, in phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicology and semantics. It is described as change that is not directly observable in the realisation of the utterance, also described as the “surface level”. When something is referred to as reanalysis, there is thus the assumption of an underlying, not directly observable structural level where the change happens. While assuming such an underlying level seems to be quite uncontroversial, scholars have diverging views of what this level looks like. Consequently, despite its pervasiveness, researchers vary a lot in their use of the term, and their definitions of reanalysis depend on assumptions made about linguistic structure more widely. Many of the current controversies about reanalysis can be shown to arise from more general points of disagreement. Spelling out these underlying theoretical assumptions can thus help us to identify more clearly to what extent previous definitions of reanalysis are compatible or not.

4.2 Is reanalysis syntactic or semantic?

As pointed out in 3.2, Langacker (1977) compared reanalysis in the narrow sense with what he called “reformulation”. Later approaches in morphology and syntax have mainly analysed cases of structural resegmentation. How-

ever, cognitive approaches focusing on grammatical or lexical change have described reanalysis as a primarily semantic phenomenon (see 2.2.2).

Related to the priority given to the syntactic vs. semantic dimension of reanalysis, further divergences in previous approaches to reanalysis can be observed. These concern the subtypes of reanalysis, defined according to either structural criteria or cognitive and semiotic principles, as well as basic patterns of and motivations for change.

4.3 *Is reanalysis inherently syntagmatic, or does it also include paradigmatic reinterpretations?*

Following Langacker's (1977) focus on resegmentation / rebracketing, the literature has for a long time associated reanalysis with syntagmatic change, that is, primarily with change occurring at the level of syntax and morphology. However, certain types of non-syntagmatic change, especially in phonology, have been commonly subsumed under the notion of reanalysis. The main reason for this was that these were cases of hearer-based sound change arising from misassignments of the inherently "noisy" speech signal to an underlying phonological representation (see 2.2.1). Only recently has the concept of reanalysis been extended to the realm of lexical semantics, including change in the semantics of simplex words (see 2.2.2). But even for the domain of syntax and morphology, it has been shown that non-syntagmatic reanalyses, that is, cases of categorial relabeling not accompanied by resegmentation, are far more common than has been generally believed (see 2.1).

4.4 *Is reanalysis a change in the language system, or is it a phenomenon in discourse?*

Langacker's (1977) seminal work on reanalysis mainly focused on change in the language system (see 2.1). On this view, reanalysis is a type of change which the researcher can observe by comparing older vs. more recent stages of the language; in contrast, innovation scenarios and motivations for structural change are backgrounded in this approach.

Other researchers put the focus on reanalysis as a phenomenon in discourse (see, e.g., 3.3). In this context, reanalysis is seen as a specific type of linguistic innovation, which may eventually lead to language change.

Moreover, certain scholars view reanalysis as large-scale change which takes place at the level of the speech community adopting a new usage (see 2.3). Another issue at stake in this debate is a more general controversy about the agents of language change and the relative importance of language acquisition and adult language use for language change (see 2.2 as well as sections 6 and 7).

5 FEATURES OF REANALYSIS

5.1 *Constraints, principles or mechanisms of reanalysis*

As discussed in 2.1, Langacker’s definition of reanalysis includes a broad range of phenomena of structural change:

“The underlying level (or levels) relevant for syntactic reanalysis may consist of any aspect of morphological, syntactic, or semantic structure, i.e. anything more abstract than the surface level [...]” (Langacker 1977: 62)

A basic issue which arises from the different approaches discussed here is whether there are constraints, principles or mechanisms that restrict which kinds of structures can be reanalysed, how they can be reanalysed, and in which kinds of contexts and scenarios. These aspects point to different domains where such constraints can be located: the structure of the linguistic expressions (5.1.1), and their semantic and pragmatic meanings, which can be approached from the perspectives of cognition and communication (5.1.2). Related to the latter aspect, the question arises to what extent reanalysis is constrained by context (5.1.3).

5.1.1 *Structural constraints and principles*

Langacker’s definition of reanalysis discussed in 2.1 contains a very general structural constraint: reanalysis is described as a change from structure A to structure B in which both structures yield one and the same surface manifestation. This surface manifestation can be interpreted as the concrete realisation of any linguistic item in discourse, which is based on an abstract representation of the item in the linguistic system in the sense of the speaker’s mental representation, including grammar, the lexicon and phonology.

Based on the observation of the heterogeneity of phenomena that can be described as reanalysis (cf. sections 2 and 3), it has been proposed that there are “no constraints on reanalysis itself” (Detges & Waltereit 2002: 191; see also Detges 2019, who suggests that “Anything can be a pragmatically relevant effect is eligible for reanalysis”).⁴ Other approaches have argued that very general principles such as economy are the driving force behind reanalysis (e.g. van Gelderen 2004, see also Weiß, this issue).

Although in principle there may be no constraints on reanalysis as such, still the question arises whether more local, domain-bound constraints may

⁴ For studies that focus more on emergentism, see e.g. Auer & Pfänder (2011).

hold. In addition to the general requirement formulated by Langacker, it can thus be asked whether there are further restrictions as to what kinds of structures A may be reanalysed, and as to what kinds of structures B represent possible outcomes of reanalysis.

From a syntactic point of view, if we assume the underlying structure to behave according to established principles of syntactic theory (cf. [Chomsky 1995](#) among many others), what does this mean for reanalysis? Do these general principles always match the processes of reanalysis we encounter throughout the languages of the world? What are general properties and tendencies of reanalyses within the syntactic realm, and what evolutionary steps can be predicted (see e.g., proposals of principles such as Head Preference and Late Merge, [van Gelderen 2004; 2011](#) and the phenomena discussed by Alexiadou, this issue)? Similarly, we can ask to what extent general constraints and principles in phonology or semantics influence possible outcomes of reanalyses.

Abstracting away from these domain-specific observations, we can observe that different kinds of constraints are potentially concerned here. Firstly, there may be restrictions with respect to the structures A and B. For the boundary loss that can be witnessed in the evolution of, e.g., English [$\text{cup}_N\text{board}_N$] $_N$ > cupboard_N (see [Detges & Waltireit 2002](#): 157) the new structure B corresponds to a morphosyntactic pattern that already exists in the grammar. In that sense, we may say that the reanalysis is constrained by the system of the particular language.

For the boundary shift in Spanish *se vende* (see [3.2](#)), in contrast, a new morphosyntactic element is introduced. In that sense, reanalysis leads here not only to a change in the lexical entry of a particular item, as in the case of English *cupboard*, but to a new grammatical construction.

There is also a second type of constraints, which concern the relation between the structures A and B, that is, possible (and impossible) pathways of change. This type of constraints is highlighted in research on sound change and semantic change as well as grammaticalization research, with the directionality of the changes concerned being an important related and controversial issue (see [5.3](#)). According to [Detges & Waltireit \(2002: 154\)](#), reanalysis is typically characterised by relations of contiguity and taxonomic relations. The privileged role of these relations, which has also been confirmed for reanalysis in lexical borrowing ([Winter-Froemel 2018](#)), is closely related to cognitive and communicative aspects of reanalysis.

5.1.2 *Cognitive and communicative constraints and principles*

Another domain where constraints, principles or mechanisms of reanalysis can be searched for is cognition, that is, the speakers' construal of the referential meaning of the utterance, their perception and conceptualisation of the referent.

Assuming that "(1)language change reflects the pressure to achieve linguistic optimality" (Langacker 1977: 128), Langacker distinguishes between different aspects of optimisation, yielding signal simplicity ("economy in regard to production of the physical speech signal", Langacker 1977: 128), perceptual optimality (the central mechanism being periphrastic locution, defined as "the creation of new periphrastic expressions", Langacker 1977: 128), constructional simplicity (the replacement of marked categories by less marked or more common ones, or the reduction of intrinsic complexity of constructions), and transparency. The latter concept is interpreted in the sense that every surface unit is associated with "a clear, salient, and consistent meaning or function", and "every semantic element is realized by a distinct and recognizable surface form" (Langacker 1977: 129). Taken together, these aspects thus represent basic cognitive principles of reanalysis.

In later research, further reflections on cognitive and communicative constraints and principles have been added. With respect to the semantic side of reanalysis, Eckardt (2012: 200) argues that semantic reanalysis rests on the "incidental 'closeness' between words and possible content" and is often driven by the "Avoid Pragmatic Overload" principle. Much in the same vein, De Smet (2009: 1728) argues that reanalyses result from semantic change; but he specifically stipulates that the reanalyses themselves are brought about by analogical change. Detges & Waltereit (2002) hold that structural reanalyses – syntactic as well as morphological – are initiated by a small set of mechanisms of semantic change (metonymic and taxonomic, see 5.1.1 and below). Moreover, they highlight the decisive role of semantics (together with the situational context, see 5.1.3) in reanalysis:

"Reanalysis arises through language use, not as a consequence of system requirements. The old and the new syntactic structure are not linked by systematic syntactic relations [...]. Rather, the relation between the two structures is based on their use in the same type of situation." (Detges & Waltereit 2002: 154)

A generally accepted basic requirement that needs to be met in reanalysis is referential identity (Detges & Waltereit 2002): the interpretation before and after reanalysis need to be compatible with what seems to be meant in the

situation where the reanalysis occurs. In other words, the new interpretation that is introduced needs to identify a salient and plausible referential meaning. In that respect, reanalysis fundamentally differs from cases of misunderstanding or explicit disambiguation, where the communication partners have different interpretations of the utterance, and where the divergence between the respective interpretations puts at risk the successful transmission of information (Winter-Froemel 2019).

The requirement of referential identity is expressed by the principle of reference, the “default” principle in reanalysis (Detges & Waltereit 2002: 160). The approaches mentioned imply a broad concept of semantics, which includes not only truth-conditionally relevant referential information or content-level use according to Hansen (2008), but all semantic functions that are relevant for the communicative exchange, i.e., context-level use (Hansen 2008). The rise of discourse markers illustrates the passage from content-level to context-level use (see also the notion of “principle of relevant usage” proposed by Detges Forthcoming, to rename the “principle of reference”).

Moreover, according to Detges & Waltereit (2002), some cases of reanalysis are additionally characterised by the principle of transparency (for the definitions of both principles see 3.3). Whereas the principle of reference is operative in all contexts, the principle of transparency is favoured by low-frequency contexts (Detges & Waltereit 2002: 155–162, Detges Forthcoming, cf. 6.3). The reanalyses resulting from the principle of reference include, e.g., cases of pragmatic overload (Eckardt 2009; 2012), while the changes resulting from the principle of transparency encompass De Smet’s (2009) analogical change.

The principle of transparency refers to the form of the utterance and structural patterns of the particular language system (see 5.1.1). In that sense it depends on language-specific structures, and it can be interpreted as a general tendency for marked or low-frequency structures to become aligned with less-marked or more frequent structures or patterns. This aspect can also be linked to the different aspects of code optimisation described by Langacker.

For the principle of reference, in contrast, very general semantic requirements need to be satisfied in order to guarantee referential identity. Detges & Waltereit (2002) have argued that reanalysis is limited to a closed set of semantic relations: metonymic relations, taxonomic relations (super- or subordination), and semantic identity (see also Detges Forthcoming). For instance, in the reanalysis of the lexical item Latin *focus* ‘fireplace’ > ‘fire’, we can observe a metonymic figure-ground shift between the old and the new meaning. For reanalysis in lexical borrowing, relations of subordination appear to play an important role alongside metonymic relations. This is illustrated e.g., by

the reanalysis of English *people* in a more specific meaning ‘celebrities’ when the item was borrowed into French (see e.g. [Winter-Froemel 2011](#): 402–412).

Metonymic shifts in grammatical change can be frequently observed in grammaticalization, when expressive speaker-based innovations are ratified by the hearers and the speech community (see [2.2.2](#) and [2.3](#)). They are illustrated e.g., by the reanalysis of the element Latin *passum* ‘step’ which becomes an element of emphatic negation (‘I don’t go at all’). For this development, negative-polar utterances such as Latin *non vado passum* ‘I don’t even go a step’ can be assumed to be decisive.

In the further evolution from emphatic negation to unmarked negation in French, there is then a relation of superordination: in the further course of this change, the semantic feature of a ‘high degree of relevance’ is deleted, and French *ne ... pas* becomes an unmarked expression of negation ([Detges & Waltereit 2002](#): 185, [Hansen & Visconti 2012](#): 461–463).

In many cases of agglutination or deglutination, we can finally observe a relation of semantic identity between the old and the reanalysed meaning. If the reanalysis is limited to a boundary shift, the semantic units contained in the utterance remain the same before and after reanalysis, e.g., English *a napron* > *an apron* (indefinite article + noun), Italian *l’alicorno* > French *la licorne* ‘the unicorn’ (definite article + noun; see [Detges & Waltereit 2002](#): 159).

5.1.3 Contextual constraints

The discussion in [5.1.2](#) has highlighted the fundamental importance of context in reanalysis (see also Hansen and Winter-Froemel, this issue; for a discussion of the notion of context absorption in grammatical change, see e.g. [Kuteva 2002](#)). More specifically, at least two kinds of contexts can be shown to play a key role here. Although different terms have been proposed to label these contexts, the various approaches largely agree on the basic features of both.

The first relevant context is the utterance context in which the reanalysis takes (or can be assumed to have taken) place. All standard definitions indicate that reanalysis is, at a first stage, covert, that is, one and the same utterance (at the surface level) allows for different (underlying) interpretations. This can be described by the notion of a “bridging context”, which has been introduced by [Evans & Wilkins](#) to describe processes of semantic change in general:

“It has become a standard assumption that semantic change from meaning A to B normally involves a transitional phase

of polysemy where a form has both meanings [...]. Less often articulated is that this phase of polysemy [...] is typically preceded by a phase where meaning B is only contextually implicated but not yet lexicalized as a distinct sense (cf. Traugott 1989). That is to say, meaning B often comes into existence because a regularly occurring context supports an inference-driven contextual enrichment of A to B. In these contexts, which we term BRIDGING CONTEXTS, speech participants do not detect any problem of different assignments of meaning to the form because both speaker and addressee interpretations of the utterance in context are functionally equivalent, even if the relative contributions of lexical content and pragmatic enrichment differ. Subsequently this contextual sense may become lexicalized to the point where it need no longer be supported by a given context.” (Evans & Wilkins 2000: 549–550)

The concept of bridging contexts is also mentioned in many other approaches (e.g. Heine 2002; see also Marchello-Nizia 2006: 260–261, who speaks of “ambiguous contexts” here). Diewald (2002), in contrast, introduces a further distinction between “untypical” and “critical contexts” in her analysis of grammaticalization processes, with the untypical contexts representing contexts in which the expression has not been used before, and the critical contexts being the contexts that actually trigger a certain grammaticalization process by inviting an alternative interpretation and by becoming predominant in the use of the expression (Diewald 2002: 103, see also Traugott 2012a).

In addition to the context(s) which are decisive for the actual reanalysis to happen, there is another type of context which is central to reanalysis: the context in which the reanalysis becomes (at least potentially) perceptible for the speakers and for the linguist. These contexts have been termed “switch contexts” (Heine 2002: 85), “isolating contexts” (Diewald 2002: 103) or “new contexts” (Marchello-Nizia 2006). They are characterised by the old interpretation no longer being plausible for semantic or structural reasons.

A basic methodological issue here is that corpus linguistic studies cannot directly access hearers’ interpretations. This is linked to the theoretical debate on the role of bridging contexts or critical contexts after the innovation has taken place (see Eckardt 2006; Traugott 2012b): can these categories still be meaningfully interpreted once the new usage is already documented in the speech community, and should uses in bridging or critical contexts still be counted in corpus linguistic studies after innovation?

Eckardt (2006) has identified another basic challenge: Why do certain reanalyses occur in particular contexts and languages (e.g., future tense inter-

pretations for GO-verb constructions), but do not happen or spread in other languages, where analogous reinterpretations of similar utterances would also be possible? If bridging contexts or minor steps within a cascade model are assumed (cf. De Smet 2014 among others, see below, 5.4), the question also arises whether we can identify domain-wise or more general properties of these minor steps or contexts.

Moreover, while some approaches have mainly focused on the linguistic co(n)text (see e.g. Traugott 2012b), others have emphasised aspects of the situational context (see e.g. Detges & Waltereit 2002).

The importance of context for processes of reanalysis thus represents another issue which raises both theoretical and methodological questions that need to be discussed in further research.

5.2 *Reanalysis and ambiguity*

The relationship between reanalysis and ambiguity is one of the most controversially debated issues in current research. Various papers in this issue refer to the concept of ambiguity (see De Smet & Markey, Hansen, Winter-Froemel, and Weiß, this issue), but take different views with respect to its importance for defining and describing reanalysis. Some definitions of reanalysis explicitly include the feature of ambiguity:

“An abductive innovation (i.e., reanalysis) in the evolution of a single phonological system can be entirely explained as motivated by ambiguities in the corpus of utterances from which the system has been inferred.” (Andersen 1973: 780)

“reanalysis depends upon a pattern characterized by **surface ambiguity or the possibility of more than one analysis**” (Harris & Campbell 1995: 51, emphasis orig.)

On the other hand, the importance accorded to ambiguity in reanalysis research has been criticised. For example, De Smet argues that “the assumption that reanalysis works through ambiguity is logically flawed” (De Smet 2009: 1728). Taking a closer look at this discussion, several controversial issues can be identified. A first question is when ambiguity may appear in processes of reanalysis.

Waltereit (1999) already argued that the assumption of (structural) ambiguity as a prerequisite for reanalysis is fallacious since it is only once reanalysis has taken place that the structure becomes ambiguous. In a similar

vein, some approaches consider that ambiguity is only a result of reanalysis, occurring after the innovative act of reanalysis (see also Hansen, this issue):

“[...] reanalysis does not require a previous structural ambiguity. Such structural ambiguity is *created* by reanalysis.” (Detges & Waltereit 2002: 170)

“an ambiguity that strictly speaking exists only in retrospect – that is, after the change has taken place [...]. Put differently, the ambiguities that are supposed to motivate reanalysis are really the result of reanalysis, as they can only arise if the target structure of reanalysis already exists.” (De Smet 2009: 1729)

Other approaches, in contrast, consider that ambiguity can act as a trigger of reanalysis (see e.g. Timberlake 1977: 148; Weiß, this issue). These approaches stress that even if the importance of ambiguity may diminish in the course of the diffusion of the reanalysed structure, the first step of the change usually involves some kind of ambiguity. This view is also expressed by the standard definitions assuming a “surface ambiguity” for the initial stage of change.

The question at issue is linked to the theoretical description of language change in general, and it can be rephrased by referring to the different stages of language change: Does ambiguity represent a feature of reanalysis at the stage of innovation, is it active during adoption and diffusion, or can it only be observed at the stage of conventionalisation, when the process of reanalysis is concluded and the new structure has been established in the language system?

A related issue is whether some kind of ambiguity is necessary or optional in reanalysis. As shown above, various definitions of reanalysis include ambiguity as a basic feature of reanalysis at the innovation stage (see also Marchello-Nizia’s 2006 “ambiguous contexts”, see 5.1.3). Based on this assumption, Winter-Froemel (this issue) stresses the role of ambiguity even more explicitly by defining reanalysis as a combination of two basic subtypes of ambiguity, semasiological and onomasiological ambiguity.

Other approaches, in contrast, assume that the critical contexts at the innovation stage may involve ambiguity, but stress that ambiguity does not represent a necessary condition for the change (see e.g. Diewald 2002; Traugott 2012a; Detges Forthcoming).

The theoretical status of ambiguity is linked to how we delimit the domain of reanalysis from other types of language change, e.g. folk etymology. Previous research has described cases of folk-etymological change that involve not only a semantic reinterpretation, but also formal changes. For instance,

Portuguese *vagabundo* ‘vagabond’ has evolved into *vagamundo*, which can be interpreted as a V + N compound formed with *vag-* ‘stroll’ + *mun-do* ‘world’, so that a semantic transparency is obtained (see [Detges & Waltereit 2002: 160](#)). At the morphological and lexical level, there is no ambiguity here, neither in innovation nor after the change has been concluded. It could be assumed, however, that the phonetic similarity of the voiced bilabial consonants [b] and [m] plays an important role for this change, and that the phonetic realisation of the utterance could be perceived as being potentially ambiguous.

The controversies about the role of ambiguity in reanalysis crucially hinge on the concept of ambiguity itself. There are various research traditions that adopt fundamentally different views on ambiguity, the most important ones being the tradition of truth-conditional semantics, and more recent pragmatic and interdisciplinary approaches. While the first tradition sees ambiguity as a truth-conditionally relevant coexistence of clearly distinct, conventional meanings of a certain expression which is directly perceived by the speakers, more recent approaches have argued for a broader understanding of ambiguity. This broader view of ambiguity includes cases where several conventional or non-conventional, situation-dependent meanings coexist and where this coexistence of interpretations is not necessarily perceived by the speakers ([Bauer, Knape, Koch & Winkler 2010](#); [Winter-Froemel & Zirker 2015](#); [Winter-Froemel 2019](#); [Detges Forthcoming](#); see also [Winter-Froemel, this issue](#)). The speaker and hearer may thus each perceive only one interpretation of the utterance, but not the same; in these cases, the ambiguity is therefore only observed by the linguist.

Depending on the definition of ambiguity and possible subtypes thereof, the role of ambiguity for reanalysis will of course be evaluated differently. The approaches that have questioned the importance of ambiguity for reanalysis tend to adopt a narrow definition based on the truth-conditional view. In the approaches which assume that ambiguity is an essential feature of reanalysis, in contrast, a broader approach to ambiguity is generally taken. At least some of the controversies could thus be resolved by a closer investigation and more fine-grained discussion of the subtypes of ambiguity concerned in different scenarios of reanalysis.

Moreover, the notion of ambiguity has also been used to develop a typology of phenomena of interpretative divergences, distinguishing between different scenarios and subtypes of ambiguity (failure of understanding, misunderstanding, strategic misunderstanding, irony, verbal politeness / indirect speech acts and reanalysis, see [Winter-Froemel 2019](#)).

Finally, a methodological remark on the relation of ambiguity and reanalysis can be added. If we assume that at the initial stage of reanalysis

there is a surface ambiguity, it needs to be acknowledged that (at least for the corpus-linguistic methods that are currently used in reanalysis research) the scenarios for reanalysis are not directly identifiable, as the old interpretation is always possible for the initial scenarios (see the definitions of bridging contexts / critical contexts / ambiguous contexts discussed in 5.1.3). The reanalysis will only be inferred from later unambiguous uses of the reanalysed item or construction which are not compatible with the original interpretation or structure (the switch contexts / isolating contexts / new contexts, see 5.1.3). This means that the innovation scenarios are necessarily speculative; in this sense, only a potential ambiguity (and a potential for reanalysis) can be postulated for the innovation scenarios (see e.g. Giacalone Ramat & Sansò 2011; Wolfsgruber 2019 and Winter-Froemel, this issue).

5.3 Directionality

Reanalysis has been viewed as basically non-directional and in principle reversible, as opposed to grammaticalization, which is mostly described as inherently directional (cf. Haspelmath 1998; 2004; Lehmann 2004; cf. Traugott & Trousdale 2019; but see Norde 2009 for a discussion of degrammaticalization). This does not exclude, however, that some cases of reanalysis show a directionality: where reanalysis and grammaticalization are combined, for example, the changes can be assumed to be directional and irreversible. The question of directionality is thus closely linked to the question of the relation between reanalysis and grammaticalization. However, the role of reanalysis within language change and grammaticalization processes in particular has received different interpretations (see 7.1 for more details). If grammaticalization is defined as a process in which a certain linguistic structure evolves into a (more) grammatical one (see Kuryłowicz 1965), it is necessarily unidirectional. Reanalysis is not as straightforwardly associated with unidirectionality. As Heine & Reh (1983: 96–97) put it:

“The nature of reanalysis is more difficult to define. As the examples in the following sections will show, it may have pragmatic structures as its input and syntactic structures as its output, but opposite evolutions are also possible. Furthermore, while it tends to turn semantically and syntactically complex structures into less complex structures, there are cases where the output is more complex than the input.”

It has also been claimed that reanalysis does show directionality which can be linked to more general strategies of understanding (cf. Detges & Waltereit

2002). Other possible aspects that could motivate a certain directionality are the role of e.g., speaker / hearer constellations (see 6.1, 6.2) and evolutionary phases of bridging contexts (see 5.1.3). The study of these aspects, and of the general question of the (non)directionality of reanalysis, thus provides important perspectives to be explored in further research.

In this context, recall the distinction between reanalysis as a hearer-induced innovation and reanalysis as ratification (see 2.2.2 and 2.3). Whereas for hearer-induced innovations, opposite directions of change have been observed (e.g., boundary loss / boundary creation, semantic loss / semantic addition, see 3.2)⁵, so that a priori, reanalysis appears to be non-directional, the situation is different for reanalysis as ratification. For many cases of ratification that have been discussed in the literature, there is a directional pattern of change: for rhetorically overused expressions, the pragmatic force tends to weaken over time (see e.g. Detges 2001; see also Keller's 2003 observations on changes illustrating Mandeville's paradox): additional pragmatic (polite, expressive, euphemistic or dysphemistic) meanings get lost during the diachronic evolution of the expressions, so that they adopt a more general meaning. This is a well-known pattern illustrated e.g., by the evolution of negation markers, where additional emphatic meanings ('not at all') often get lost (see Jespersen 1917; Detges 2019; Hansen & Visconti 2012; Walkden & Morrison 2017; see also 5.1.2). Many cases of grammaticalization show similar evolutions. It should be noted though that if reanalysis as ratification is assumed to be a stage of all types of language change, the question of the directionality of reanalysis boils down to the question of the directionality of language change as such.

Moreover, concerning reanalysis as a hearer-induced innovation, further research on directionality appears to be needed: for reanalyses following the principle of transparency and thus involving analogy (see 7.2), Detges (Forthcoming) argues that they mainly occur in low frequency contexts. His findings suggest that a certain directionality in the sense of an evolution towards less marked, highly entrenched structural patterns can be expected for this subtype of reanalysis, whereas reanalyses that are only based on the principle of reference are driven by a high frequency of the relevant implicature.

⁵ See also metonymic reanalyses at the lexical level, such as illustrated by semantic shifts between verb meanings expressing disposal, e.g. LEND VS. BORROW, HIRE VS. LET, where opposite evolutions can be observed (French *louer*, Italian *affittare*, Portuguese *alugar* 'let' > 'hire', Italian *noleggiare*, Spanish *alquilar* 'hire' > 'let', see also English *rent*, *hire*, French *emprunter* 'lend', 'borrow', where the two interpretations stably coexist, cf. Blank 2001: 85). For taxonomic reanalyses at the lexical level, in contrast, different paths of change probably have to be assumed for super- and subordination (see Detges Forthcoming), which suggests directionality.

5.4 *Abruptness or gradualness of reanalysis*

When looking closely at reanalysis and its features, another issue is whether reanalysis can be conceived of as being abrupt or gradual. This is closely associated with the role assigned to reanalysis within a *reanalysis – actualization – spread* sequence as proposed by Timberlake (1977) among many others (cf. 5.5 and the distinction between reanalysis as an innovation and reanalysis as a change in the usage of the speech community, cf. 2.2.2 / 2.3). The way in which reanalysis is integrated in larger processes also has consequences for its relationship with directionality (see 5.3).

As already pointed out in sections 2 and 3, questions that arise here are whether investigations of reanalysis should privilege the level of individual speech events or processes of change at the community or population level (see also Walkden, this issue), and whether we can posit a clear-cut distinction between reanalysis as a covert step and actualization as a detectable one (see also the distinction of relevant contexts in 5.1.3).

A variety of possible positions regarding the abruptness or gradualness of reanalysis have been taken in the literature. Haspelmath (2004) considers reanalysis to be abrupt, in contrast to grammaticalization, which represents a gradual phenomenon. As already mentioned, Detges & Waltereit (2002) see reanalysis as being abrupt but accompanied with gradual formal processes (e.g., phonological fusion, see developments such as *sheep herd* > *shepherd*, *cupboard* [kʌpbɔ:d] > [kʌbbəd]). De Smet (2012: 630) argues for “a cascade of minor shifts [...]”. Thus, for De Smet, the initial distinction between reanalysis and actualization seems less important, and he sums up three arguments that favour gradualness in reanalysis:

“In sum, then, there are at least three arguments against abruptness in reanalysis. First, the assumed abruptness of reanalysis does not explain the gradualness of actualization and, more generally, may downplay the gradience found in synchronic grammar. Second, if frequency effects offer a likely explanation for certain structural changes, particularly instances of rebracketing through fusion, it is also plausible that those changes proceed gradually, not just with gradual formal fusion but also with gradual loss of underlying compositionality. Third, the abruptness of reanalysis is contradicted by hybrid forms, which show that the behaviour of a reanalyzed item continues to be influenced by its previous uses. All three arguments point to the existence of some form of structural indecision – that is, they suggest that there are intermediate points between

the postulated beginning and end point of syntactic reanalysis.” (De Smet 2014: 33)

At closer investigation, these arguments concern different phenomena, though: while the first two arguments clearly refer to diffusion processes, i.e., to the level of the speech community, the third argument can be interpreted as pointing to occurrences of hybrid forms in individual speech and their potential influence on individual usage. Similarly, whereas grammaticalization is generally defined as a long-term evolution pattern of expressions within a speech community, reanalysis is often approached at the individual level. It is therefore not surprising that a distinct behaviour regarding abruptness / gradualness is assumed for both categories. For diffusion processes at the population level, a gradualness suggests itself, and at least for innovations that compete with existing expressions or constructions, degrees of diffusion can be measured by the relative frequencies of the competing variants.⁶ For innovative uses at the individual level, some kind of deviation from the existing linguistic convention, and thus an abrupt innovation event, can be assumed. This view does, however, not completely exclude the possibility of hybrid forms or constructions, as the individual speaker might be influenced by older stages of the structure in question that continue to exist. Some (probably more syntactic than other) structures in a language might be more prone to exhibiting such a behaviour than others. Findings in Wolfsgruber (2017; 2019; 2021), for instance, suggest that a more detailed look at passive reflexive constructions that are reinterpreted as impersonal active constructions in the history of the Romance null-subject languages reveals a more fine-grained path that also hints at changes that are to be situated in a grey zone between “change in the underlying structure” and unambiguous signs of actualization of the reanalysed structure (see also Monge 1955 and Giacalone Ramat & Sansò 2011 in this line among others).

As briefly outlined above, this raises the question whether some linguistic areas are more likely to exhibit the traits of real abruptness, or at least a real abrupt first step (e.g., phonological and semantic change) than, for example, syntactic change. After all, the latter involves a more complex underlying structure and thus is probably more prone to less clear-cut boundaries between the different steps involved. A much needed and novel study that relates to this issue in that it investigates reanalysis below the word level is found in Alexiadou (this issue).

⁶ Beyond this social interpretation of diffusion within the speech community, it also appears possible to link this concept to the notion of entrenchment and to interpret the “diffusion” of an innovation from a cognitive perspective as an increase in the degree of entrenchment of a certain expression or construction.

5.5 *Covert reanalysis and overt actualization*

The question of reanalysis being an abrupt or a gradual phenomenon is deeply interwoven with the relationship between reanalysis and actualization (see 5.4) and the supposedly covert nature of reanalysis. In approaches that differentiate between reanalysis, actualization and diffusion (see [Timberlake 1977](#) among others), reanalysis is the initial step in which the hearer associates a new underlying structure to a surface configuration. This is then followed by actualization where first signs of the change in the underlying structure can be detected in the surface configuration, because the latter has suffered visible changes from the covert reanalysis. The final step is then the diffusion of the reanalysed structure within the speech community (cf. [Madariaga 2017](#) for a recent overview and 2.3).

The question that has arisen within these distinctions is whether we can posit a clear-cut boundary between reanalysis as a covert step, i.e., as being untraceable and unobservable, and actualization as a further step with noticeable differences that reveal that some kind of change in the underlying structure has occurred in the first place. It has been argued that even if this distinction may be difficult to operationalise in concrete diachronic studies, it is nonetheless a basic theoretical distinction needed in order not to conflate distinct phenomena (see Walkden, this issue and the discussion in 2.2.2 and 2.3).

6 BASIC AGENTS AND SCENARIOS OF REANALYSIS

6.1 *The roles of speaker and hearer in reanalysis*

Reanalysis is generally considered to be a hearer-based phenomenon that occurs when the utterance of another speaker is interpreted, e.g., [Detges & Waltereit \(2002: 151\)](#) characterise reanalysis as “essentially a hearer-based procedure”. Eckardt’s (2006; 2009) *Avoid Pragmatic Overload* principle is also focused on the role of the hearer but as seen from the speaker, as an anticipation of pragmatic overload.

Both descriptions cannot be applied to playful reinterpretations that have most probably been deliberately created by speakers intending to convey certain pragmatic effects (see e.g., the *pantalon / pantacourt* example in 3.2). Although these ludic innovations share some basic features with classical cases of reanalysis, they arise in pragmatically different innovation scenarios: they can be assumed to originate in scenarios of change from above, whereas other classical cases of reanalysis discussed in this paper appear to occur in scenarios of change from below (cf. e.g. [Labov 2001](#)). The question thus arises

whether the playful reinterpretations should be included in a (narrow) definition of reanalysis.

When looking at basic speaker / hearer dynamics, we enter the realms of general mechanisms of interaction and semantic and pragmatic inference (cf. [Ehmer & Rosemeyer 2018](#) among many others). Semantic and pragmatic inference is especially relevant for reanalysis because the gap between what is uttered and how the utterance is interpreted or reacted to can be viewed as the basic scenario of reanalysis. However, as noted by Eckardt, inference alone cannot be the trigger for reanalysis since in almost every interaction there are also inferences that do not lead to reanalysis:

“The urge to reanalyse cannot be stimulated by the mere occurrence of pragmatic inferences alone. Pragmatic inferencing happens all the time. Practically all investigations in discourse semantics show that virtually no sentence is ever understood solely on the basis of the literal contribution of its words alone. Neo-Gricean accounts of pragmatic inferencing, for instance, distinguish between conversational and conventional implicatures. We know that even conventional implicatures can remain for centuries what they are: conventional additional messages rather than part of the literal meaning of a sentence. In spite of the omnipresence of conversational and conventional pragmatic implicatures, the vast majority of communication does not give rise to reanalysis and meaning change. [...] We may therefore conclude that sentences that do give rise to reanalysis need something in addition to a conventionalized pragmatic inference.” ([Eckardt 2006](#): 10)

It also needs to be investigated in more detail to what extent different cases (or subtypes) of reanalysis can be interpreted as being predominantly hearer-induced, or are crucially determined by interactional aspects as well, as in the case of reanalysis as ratification of previous speaker-induced innovations (see [2.2.2](#)).

Moreover, when looking at the roles of speaker and hearer, the nature of the available data material also plays a crucial role. [Ehmer & Rosemeyer \(2018\)](#) point out that diachronic studies often base their assumptions and focus upon the role of the speaker, as the data often do not provide tangible speaker / hearer interactions. They emphasise, however, that studying language change from the perspective of the hearer has several advantages. It allows us to account for changes in which there is a possible divergence between the speakers’ intentions and the outcome, and to include changes aris-

ing from inferences that have not been intended. Furthermore, by taking into account the perspectives of the speaker and hearer, it is also possible to capture the coexistence of different interpretations that are presumably present in bridging contexts more adequately (cf. Ehmer & Rosemeyer 2018: 543–544).

6.2 *Language acquisition, adult speech, and language contact scenarios*

Reanalysis and more widely language change have often been associated with L1 acquisition, and ambiguities that may arise when processing input in L1 acquisition are believed to be one main factor for triggering reanalysis (see 2.2.1 and Weiß, this volume). Generative syntax originally focused on L1 acquisition and the I-language. Note, however, that studies on historical language structures mainly draw from E-language sources, as no person e.g., speaking and acquiring Old French can be directly observed. Another well-known methodological problem is that the competence reconstructed from historical texts needs not to be identical with writers' competence (cf. Weiß 2005). Synchronic syntactic studies have recently shown an interest in language acquisition from biolinguistic and anthropological perspectives. Ultimately, within generative frameworks the importance attached to language acquisition and change by both diachronic and synchronic studies seems to be converging at the levels of both methods and specific research questions (cf. Hauser, Chomsky & Fitch 2002; Fitch 2007; van Gelderen 2011).

Sociolinguistic studies have shown that speakers continue to develop language skills throughout their entire lives, which also entails that new analyses can be found after L1 acquisition is normally completed (cf. 2.2.2). If reanalysed structures can still be influenced by their original configurations (De Smet 2014: 33, cf. 5.4), the question arises how L1 acquisition and adult speech interact with one another in reanalysis.

Cognitive approaches tend to stress that it is adult speakers who are the major agents of language change, and assume that language change in general is mainly brought about by the speakers based on their cognitive and communicative needs and interests (e.g., expressivity, strategies of persuasion, politeness, “laziness” / economy, etc.). In this respect, reanalysis as being brought about by hearers in an unconscious and unintentional way represents a particular subtype of change that fundamentally differs from other kinds of speaker-induced change motivated by conscious pragmatic strategies.

There are thus different positions as to where the abductive pattern of reanalysis is relevant for language change, and what its relative importance is within a general theory of language change (see also 2.2.1).

Moreover, the general importance of language contact phenomena has been emphasised, and sociolinguistics has stressed that homogeneous speech communities represent a construct far from reality, as populations are generally much more strongly mixed than it was long assumed. The theoretical and methodological implications of this observation have not yet been fully explored though.

A special kind of multilingual setting that has been addressed in reanalysis research are creolisation processes (see e.g. [Detges 2000; 2003; De Bruyn 2009; Lefebvre 2009](#)). Very broadly speaking, in creole formation, a new language is created in a situation of intense language contact consisting of various L1 languages, local contact languages and usually a dominant lexifier language from which much of the lexical material is borrowed. As the creole speakers' knowledge of the lexifier language is generally limited, creolisation can be an interesting test case for reanalysis. The processes and the languages involved as well as the internal processes of pidgin and creole formation are much more complex though, and the controversies concerning major issues cannot be laid out here with due precision (see e.g., discussions of [Bickerton 1975; Mufwene 1996; Lefebvre 2009; Blasi, Michaelis & Haspelmath 2017; McWhorter 2018](#)). It has been suggested that reanalysis may not only work at the perimeter of grammaticalization, but that we also have to consider other processes, such as replica grammaticalization (cf. [Heine & Kuteva 2002](#)), calquing or "local relexification" copying and convergence alongside reanalysis (cf. [De Bruyn 2009; Kriegel, Ludwig & Pfänder 2019; Haspelmath & Michaelis 2020](#) among many others). Again, the question arises of how these processes are related and how (if at all) they interact. Moreover, these processes may be more or less prominent in different stages in creolisation processes.

In addition to the particular contact settings in creolisation scenarios, there are also first investigations into reanalysis in language contact within adstrate settings. The main agents of reanalysis concerned here are adult speakers, possessing a certain degree of knowledge of the source language (with strong variation within the community of recipient language speakers being possible though). [Winter-Froemel \(2018\)](#) shows that semantic reanalysis in lexical borrowings can be assumed to be far from exceptional. In some cases, it may even be possible to identify concrete utterances which represent plausible innovation scenarios (as e.g., for English *flipper* 'fin', which has been reanalysed in the sense of 'pinball game' and 'pinball machine' in various European languages, see [Winter-Froemel 2012b](#)).

6.3 *Reanalysis and frequency*

While studies on language acquisition, language processing and language change have widely addressed the role of frequency, there is relatively little work on its role for reanalysis in particular. Some of the perspectives that have been explored include, for example, [Detges & Waltireit \(2002: 155–162](#), see also [Detges Forthcoming](#)), who argue that the principle of transparency is connected with low token frequency. This suggests that frequency data may help us make hypotheses about particular cases and scenarios of reanalysis as described in 3.3.

Recent statistical methods offer new possibilities to investigate frequency-related issues, e.g., in order to determine whether there are relevant thresholds that can be quantified (see also Winter-Froemel, this issue). Based on a quantitative analysis of the evolution of the English noun *key* into an adjective, [De Smet \(2016\)](#) shows that innovations are more likely for highly frequent expressions. He interprets usage frequency as a proxy to entrenchment (cf. [Langacker 1987](#)) and argues that a strong entrenchment of a certain pattern will facilitate analogical extension to new contexts. De Smet & Markey (this issue) emphasise that ambiguous uses may remain highly frequent during the actualisation stage and thereby foster the spread of innovations.

7 DELIMITING REANALYSIS FROM OTHER TYPES OF CHANGE

As we have seen, both the definition and the extension of the notion of reanalysis are far from clear. This explains why it seems so difficult to pin down the relationship between reanalysis and other types of change. Already Langacker writes:

“Not all diachronic developments in the domain of syntax involve reanalysis as I will define this term, but this is clearly a major mechanism of syntactic evolution which we must understand in depth if we wish to understand how and why syntactic change occurs.” ([Langacker 1977: 57](#))

Among the syntactic changes analysed by Langacker himself, approximately 25% represent reanalyses in his sense according to his counts ([Langacker 1977: 57](#)).

A number of authors have discussed the relationship of reanalysis to other major concepts of language change. For example, [Harris & Campbell \(1995\)](#) assume that reanalysis is a basic mechanism of language change alongside extension and borrowing. [Koch \(1999\)](#) has argued that metonymic innovation through inference, which accounts for lexical reanalyses, is fundamen-

tally different from metonymy that arises in contexts of imprecision and expressiveness. Winter-Froemel (2012a) distinguishes between reanalysis and speaker-induced changes motivated by expressivity and indirectness. Recently (as has also been the case with grammaticalization), some authors have asked whether reanalysis really is a mechanism in its own right or if it is epiphenomenal to other, more important mechanisms (cf. De Smet 2009; Walkden, this issue, see also 7.2).

The following subsections will focus on two concepts whose relation to reanalysis has been intensely debated: grammaticalization (see 7.1) and analogy (see 7.2).

7.1 *Reanalysis and grammaticalization*

In the controversial debate on the relationship between grammaticalization and reanalysis, almost any conceivable conclusion has been drawn so far (see also De Smet 2014: 28–29).

While Heine, Claudi & Hünnemeyer (1991: 219) hypothesise that “grammaticalization and reanalysis appear to be inseparable twins”, Lehmann (2004; cf. Traugott & Trousdale 2019) argues that both mechanisms are independent from one another. Moreover, Haspelmath (1998; 2004) claims that grammaticalization is the more important phenomenon of the two. This view is indirectly shared in recent work by scholars who regard reanalysis as secondary to other mechanisms of change (above all analogy), but continue to view grammaticalization as a mechanism in its own right (Garrett 2011; Kiparsky 2012).

Another position shared by many researchers is that reanalysis is the more general and hence more fundamental mechanism of the two. According to this view, reanalyses occur during grammaticalization processes, but also in other kinds of change. Hopper & Traugott (2003: 39) see reanalysis and analogy as the two basic mechanisms of grammaticalization, and argue that “(u)nquestionably, reanalysis is the most important mechanism for grammaticalization, as for all change” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 50, see also Eckardt 2012). Some scholars view grammaticalization “as an instance of up-wards reanalysis” in the syntactic tree structure (e.g. Roberts & Roussou 2003: 205) or as reanalysis linked to “feature economy” (van Gelderen 2010; 2011).

Newmeyer (2000) argues that grammaticalization is an accidental overlap of semantic change, phonetic reduction and morphosyntactic reanalysis, thereby denying grammaticalization an existence of its own (see also Campbell 2001: 151, 144, cf. Traugott & Trousdale 2019). In some recent work, reanalysis seems to share this fate in that it is increasingly considered as epiphenomenal to other mechanisms of change (cf. 7.2).

Arguing from a cognitive-pragmatic viewpoint, [Detges & Waltereit \(2002\)](#) point out that any kind of change is ultimately ratified by hearers who replace an earlier interpretation / analysis A by a new analysis B (see also [2.2.2](#)). Grammaticalization, by contrast, is a special type of change that is usually triggered by certain types of speaker strategies. Accordingly, grammaticalization and reanalysis do not belong to the same level of abstraction. And yet, as has been argued in [Detges \(Forthcoming\)](#), the view that reanalysis is a very general and fundamental type of change does not turn it into a meaningless concept.

The various descriptions show that whereas grammaticalization refers to a multi-step process of change, reanalysis can also be a “local” reinterpretation introduced by an individual speaker. The different positions as regards the relation between grammaticalization and reanalysis are thus also linked to the different coexisting conceptions of the latter notion (see also the discussion in [section 2](#), the comments on abruptness and gradualness made in [5.4](#), and the different readings of reanalysis as discussed by Walkden, this issue).

7.2 *Reanalysis and analogy*

Since the neo-grammarians, analogy has been a fairly uncontroversial mechanism of change. While reanalysis has traditionally been approached mostly as a syntagmatic phenomenon (but see the discussion in [sections 2 and 3](#), where we have shown that paradigmatic cases have been included as well, albeit more sporadically), analogical change in the traditional view operates at the paradigmatic level ([Traugott & Trousdale 2019](#)). [Hilpert \(2017: 92\)](#) argues that reanalysis and analogy work in tandem: “Reanalysis brings about the creation of a new structure, analogy brings about the spread of this new structure to new environments, which may in turn trigger further processes of reanalysis, and so on.”

Whereas analogy in the original neo-grammarian view focuses on small, locally restricted changes ([Traugott & Trousdale 2019](#)), the notion of analogical change has increasingly come to also include processes like rule extension and rule generalisation ([Pooth 2016](#); for discussion, see [Traugott & Trousdale 2019](#)), including the analogical generalisation of morphosyntactic rules ([Garrett 2011: 52](#)). This paved the way for associating analogy with reanalysis.

Assuming that the diffusion of innovations represents a complex, multi-step process, [De Smet \(2009: 1728\)](#) argues that “reanalysis can be decomposed into more basic mechanisms of change”, namely “‘category-internal change’ resulting from semantic change, ‘categorical incursion’ through analogy, and ‘automation’”. He describes analogy as follows:

“[...] one underlying mechanism is analogy or *categorial incursion*. Categorial incursion is non-gradual and it therefore closely matches the leap-like nature attributed to reanalysis. Like reanalysis, it may operate through ambiguous surface sequences that allow an alternative interpretation. The main difference is that the new interpretation is licensed by another construction that already exists at the time the change takes place. That is, a new analysis is assigned to a surface sequence but merely recategorizes that sequence as a member of an already established category.” (De Smet 2009: 1748)

Detges & Waltereit (2002) partially agree with this view. Specifically, they hold that their “principle of transparency” (i.e., the less important one of two principles guiding reanalyses, see 3.3) is akin to analogy in that it presupposes that identical (or similar) content should be expressed by identical (or similar) form and vice versa. By contrast, the second (and more important) principle formulated by Detges & Waltereit, the “principle of reference” has nothing to do with analogy.

8 CONTRIBUTIONS IN THIS ISSUE

George Walkden, in *Against mechanisms: Towards a minimal theory of change*, takes issue with the concept of reanalysis. Firstly, he shows that “reanalysis” is used in the literature in five different senses, without authors necessarily being aware of the ambiguity: as a taxonomic category of change, as an individual change event, as a mechanism of change, a cause of change, and finally as a result of change.

In the second part of his chapter, he argues for a minimal theory of change where language change does not need any “laws” or “mechanisms” specific to it. Rather, observations and generalisations about language change should be derivative of (i) a (synchronic) theory of language in the individual and (ii) a general theory of variation over time in human populations. Crucially, this latter theory should be independent of language. One of the most important consequences of Walkden’s approach is that what has gained currency in historical linguistics as “mechanisms of change”, like reanalysis, grammaticalization, analogy and others, cannot have explanatory status any more. It does not mean that the label “reanalysis” needs to be entirely discarded. However, under Walkden’s approach, it can only be used descriptively for individual change events.

In her paper *In defense of a pragmatic view of reanalysis*, Maj-Britt Mosegaard Hansen also presents basic theoretical reflections on reanalysis. She argues

that reanalysis as a hearer-driven and pragmatically guided change represents an empirically and conceptually relevant concept of grammatical change. She develops a constructionalist and interactional approach of reanalysis in which, based on the question of whether the hearer already has an analysis of the relevant construction in her mental grammar or not, she distinguishes between “neo-analysis” and “re-analysis”. Hansen further argues that reanalysis is triggered in bridging contexts in which the meaning is not sufficiently constrained, and that a high frequency of use is not necessarily required for reanalysis. These reflections are illustrated by discussions of Danish *forfordele* ‘to give someone *less / more* than their fair share’ and the French future-tense construction *aller* (‘go’) + INF.

Esme Winter-Froemel, in *Reinvestigating ambiguity and frequency in reanalysis: A two-step methodology for corpus-linguistic analyses based on bridging use exposure*, proposes a methodology for assessing and tracking the progress of reanalysis in diachronic corpora. Key for this is the distinction between reanalysis as a community-level type of language change and “neanalysis” as a new parse at speaker level where, in a specific utterance, a new bracketing produces a reading that comes close in interpretation to the old bracketing.

Winter-Froemel further argues that the notion of ambiguous bridging uses can be operationalised for diachronic corpus studies. She distinguishes conventional (old) uses of the reanalysed structure; ambiguous uses where both the old and new interpretation are plausible (cf. Heine’s bridging contexts); and new uses where only the neo-analysed reading is possible. With this machinery in place, she presents two French diachronic case studies: the reanalysis of the French structure *poule d’Inde* ‘turkey’ (literally ‘chicken from India’) as (*poule*) *dinde* ‘turkey’, and the reanalysis of the participle *pendant* ‘hanging’ to the preposition *pendant* ‘during’. The findings suggest that ambiguity plays a decisive role for the changes observed, but that the relative proportion of bridging uses is more important than their absolute frequency alone.

In *The spark or the fuel? On the role of ambiguity in language change*, Hendrik De Smet and Marie-Anne Markey present a case study on the evolution of the English preposition *over* to an adnumeral marker that leads to general conclusions about the role of ambiguity in reanalysis. Based on an investigation of the Hansard Corpus, containing transcripts of debates in the British Houses of parliament from 1803 onwards, the authors observe that ambiguous uses and non-ambiguous adnumeral uses emerge nearly at the same time. They argue that these findings are difficult to explain within a traditional reanalysis-and-actualization model. Instead, they propose to analyse the change of *over* as a categorial incursion driven by analogy. At the same time, they observe a high

proportion of ambiguous uses during the early diffusion of *over* after the first adnumeral uses. They argue that ambiguous uses therefore played an important role in the history of *over*, but that their role needs to be reconsidered: rather than acting as a trigger of change, ambiguity can be assumed to have fuelled the change towards the adnumeral marker.

In *Where does reanalysis start? Discourse inferences and meaning variation in the semantics of focus particles*, Marco Favaro provides a case study which offers reflections on the nature of reanalysis. More precisely, he suggests studying reanalysis as a series of very small steps of change, which reduces the importance of empirically separating a stage of speaker- or hearer-led individual new analyses from a stage of propagation in the community. He looks at Italian focus particles and their developments to illocutive particles, specifically *anche* and *pure* 'too', and *solo* 'only'. Whereas *anche* and *pure* have recognized illocutive uses, this is not the case for *solo*.

In a questionnaire, the author presents examples to subjects on which they comment. Results show that there is a "cloud" of emergent meanings that makes the distinction between propositional and contextual meanings, very clear in selected examples, difficult to draw in practice.

In *Reanalysis of morphological exponence: A cross-linguistic perspective*, Artemis Alexiadou explores the intricate relationship between the three categories Aspect, Voice and verbalizing (e.g., inchoative -v-) morphology. In syntactic theory, these three categories are normally viewed as distinct functional heads and each head can have distinct realizations. However, cross-linguistically, the fusion of Aspect and Voice is a common phenomenon. The combined analysis of Greek, Hungarian and English data reveals a comprehensive perspective on the re-analysis of sub-components of words, their new functions and how these tie in with their structural positions.

Helmut Weiß dedicates his study *Reanalysis involving Rebracketing and Relabeling – a special type* to a type of reanalysis that includes first relabeling (a category shift) and then rebracketing (restructuring). By looking into structures that have undergone these processes, Weiß shows that this type of reanalysis is a kind of its own and cannot be subsumed under other mechanisms of change. Moreover, the study reveals that structural ambiguity seems to be of essence in triggering these processes. In this analysis, semantic change (if present) seems rather a by-product than being involved within the pivotal moments of change. The study also pins down the link between relabeling and rebracketing and whether they can occur separately. Finally, Weiß scrutinizes their role in language acquisition and their relationship to grammaticalization.

9 CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

At the end of this overview, it emerges that reanalysis is not a unitary concept. On closer investigation, reanalysis has turned out to be a cover-term for a number of distinct phenomena. However, all of the approaches discussed here acknowledge that reanalysis is a change that is not directly observable in the realisation of the utterance but takes place at some underlying or abstract structural level. There is also a broad consensus that reanalysis is hearer- or learner-based. These ideas constitute the core of the notion of reanalysis. The various definitions of this concept then have a partly different focus. Therefore, they can be seen as being to some extent complementary. At the same time, we have identified a set of issues that are highly controversial, some of them concerning very basic assumptions about linguistic structures and language change in general. These issues concern among others the existence and importance of structural, cognitive and contextual constraints, the relationship between reanalysis and ambiguity as well as between reanalysis and other subtypes of change such as grammaticalization and analogy.

We hope that the theoretical and terminological distinctions introduced in this paper, e.g., the distinction between reanalysis as a hearer-induced innovation and reanalysis as ratification, and the distinction between reanalysis as an event at the individual level and reanalysis as a process at the level of the speech community, contribute to sharpen the concept of reanalysis and stimulate further discussion. The progress of both the theoretical discussions and the methodologies of investigations into language change show a broad range of avenues to further explore its potential. These may include neuro- and psycholinguistic aspects, the role of frequency in reanalysis and closer examination of the role of context, language contact, register, and local varieties. Further research on reanalysis may indeed provide a better understanding of the dynamics of speaker groups and social networks in language change more generally.

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