
Diachrony as a source of coding asymmetries

Livio Gaeta
 Università di Torino
livio.gaeta@unito.it

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While much discussion on the role of the coding asymmetries relies on synchronic factors such as the nature of processing or more general cognitive, e.g. perceptual, factors, in my paper I will focus on diachrony as a source of coding asymmetries. This is not meant to deny the relevance of the synchronic perspective, but the stress on diachrony may help us understand that a number of phenomena can be structurally accounted for, i.e. are the way they are, because of their origin from earlier structural environments.

First and foremost, coding asymmetries arise as a consequence of grammaticalization processes. Accordingly, the increase of expressivity of the derived form results from the stepwise process of reduction of earlier lexemes subsequently grammaticalized as morphological markers. To make just one example, the grammaticalization of the suffix *-erweise* to form adverbs in German *komisch* ‘funny’ → *komischerweise* ‘funnily’, which has taken place quite recently and displays an increasing productivity in the last century, restores a coding asymmetry which was present in Old High German, as testified by adverb formations like *snël* ‘quick’ → *snëllo* ‘quickly’, and was lost in subsequent times due to the general reduction of unstressed final vowels. Clearly, the increased expressivity aimed at by the speakers creating new formulas subsequently developed into grammaticalized structures, as suggested by Haspelmath (1999), explains the asymmetric coding since the more expressive formula also contains an additional semantic nuance which is subsequently expanded into a grammatical construction. While grammaticalization systematically ends up with asymmetric coding, exceptions can arise, namely anti-symmetric coding in which the base form is longer than the derived one, usually as a consequence of what has been called exaptation in Gaeta (2016), namely the refunctionalization of extant complex structures which turn out to be reused to convey a different meaning. Among others, the case of Tsakonian Greek future forms can be mentioned which go back to earlier presents, exapted into future forms in concomitance with the grammaticalization of new presents (cf. Haspelmath 1998). This example shows that grammaticalization is not (teleologically!) bound to give rise to asymmetric coding, but follows its

own way, sometimes creating an antisymmetric coding.

A second diachronic source of asymmetric coding depends on what Wurzel (1984) has called system adequacy, namely the tendency of a (morphological) system to develop internal consistency by increasing the strength of its system-defining structural properties, for instance enforcing the reach of extra-morphologically motivated inflectional paradigms. Accordingly, the attraction of the verb *brauchen* ‘to need’ towards the sphere of modals brings about the rise of asymmetric coding insofar as a new singular / plural opposition in the 3rd person of the present *braucht* / *brauch*[ŋ] > *brauch* / *brauch*[ŋ] is created adopting the typical inflectional model of the modals, e.g. *soll* / *soll*[ŋ] ‘must’. Notice that phonological erosion cannot serve as an explanation because the homonymic 2nd person plural form *braucht* is not affected by the change. Also in this case the increase of system adequacy is not necessarily bound to give rise to asymmetric coding, as shown by cases in which antisymmetric coding is created like in Milanese where the subtractive plural marking displayed by the feminine a-class of *scarpa* / *scarp* ‘shoe(s)’ is extended to cases formerly displaying a zero plural: **carn* / *carn* ‘meat(s)’ > *carna* / *carn* (cf. Gaeta 2015).

A third diachronic source of asymmetric coding relates to what has been called the principle of maximal differentiation in Di Meola (2002), whereby the layering of the same form in different functions due its grammaticalization into a new function is subsequently solved by developing a new shape for the new function. For instance, in Early Modern German the grammaticalization of the article as a relative pronoun gave rise to a process of formal differentiation from the article source morpheme. In particular, asymmetric coding characterizes the nominative / genitive form respectively of the masculine *der* / *dessen* and of the feminine *die* / *deren* or *derer* in pre- or postnominal position of the relative pronoun with respect the corresponding forms of the article *der* / *des* vs. *die* / *der*. In this case, the formal differentiation has remolded morphological material coming from the analogical matching with the so-called weak adjectives (cf. Bærentzen 1995).

Finally, a further diachronic source of asymmetric coding is borrowing, as shown for instance by the case of the German loan suffix *-ieren*, coming from the reanalysis of the inflectional ending of Middle French verbs like *galoper* ‘to gallop’ > *galopieren* ‘to gallop’. This brought into the German word formation system a new way for building denominal verbs like *Gast* ‘guest’ → *gastieren* ‘to give a performance as a guest’ besides the native conversions like *Zigeuner* ‘gypsy’ → *zigeunern* ‘to lead the life of a vagabond’.

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