Marchello-Nizia, Christiane, Bernard Combettes, Sophie Prévost & Tobias Scheer (2020). *Grande Grammaire Historique du Français*. Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter.

The studies on the diachronic development of the French language display a rich and early tradition which has started in 1905 with the publication of Ferdinand Brunot's first volume of the monumental and unfinished *Histoire de la langue française des origines à 1900.*[1] Albeit fundamental, the existing works on the history of the French language lack largely a theoretical approach. Finally, the *Grande Grammaire Historique du Français* (GGHF), structured as a "grammaire du changement" (6), bridges this gap by offering a thorough historical description that relies on a solid theoretical background.

The GGHF is based on a balanced corpus that covers twelve centuries of written language, ranging from the *Oaths of Strasburg* (842) to Jean-Claude Izzo's novel *Total Khéops* (1995). The corpus represents the object *langue française* in all its variety as it is composed by texts representing various registers, both prose and poetry. Concerning the diatopic boundaries, the authors have privileged texts dialectically "non défini" (44), even though the *Anglo-normand* and the *Picard* are well represented. Such a fluid and well-representative corpus has enabled the authors to reach generalized results, though avoiding the use of the rigid statistical logics of corpus grammar. In fact, the qualities of texts are valorized, namely the dating, the domain and textual genre, the dialect and the textual form.

The concise yet dense *Introduction* of the GGHF (1-54) frames the methodologies and the paradigms implied in the work. The *Grammaire* shows a saussurian consideration of language as a dynamic system and it privileges "une démarche de type fonctionnaliste" (17) over the formal approach of generative grammar. According to the authors, functionalism better justifies how linguistic change occurs in the belief that "la variation et l'usage sont au coeur du changement linguistique" (17).

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[1] Other crucial contributions to the History of the French language are the following: Bourciez, E. (1889). *Précis de phonétique française*, Paris: Klincksieck; Darmesteter, A. (1889-1891). *Course de grammaire historique de la langue française* (4 vol.), Paris: Sudre; Kristoffer, N. (1899-1930). *Grammaire historique de la langue français*, (6 vol.), Kristiania/ Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel Nordisk Forlag; Meyer-Lübke. W. (1908-1921). *Grammaire historique de la langue français* (2 vol.), Heidelberg: Winter; Bourciez, E. (1910). *Éléments de linguistique romane*, Paris: Klincksieck; Sneyders de Vogel, K. (1919). *Syntaxe historique du français*, Groningen/The Hague: J.B. Walters; Lerch, E. (1925-1934). *Historische französische Syntax* (3 vol.) Leizpig: Reisland; Fouché, P. (1952-1961). *Phonétique Historique du Français* (3 vol.)*, Paris: Klincksieck; Gamillscheg, d'E. (1957). *Historische französische Syntax,* Tübingen: Niemeyer; Kukenheim, L. (1967-1968). *Grammaire historique de la langue française* by Louis (2 vol.), Leiden: Presses Universitaries; Picoche, J./Marchello-Nizia, C. (1989), *Historie de la langue française*, Paris: Nathan; Chaurand, J. (1999). *Nouvelle historie de la langue française*, Paris: Seuil.

As the diachronic approach to linguistic change is central in this work, the GGFH is not made by the simple juxtaposition of synchronic descriptions, but it analyzes language as a *continuum* in which each phase is valued as central and in connection to the previous and following ones. Thus, in the GGHF the periodization of the French language is refined in an attempt to provide a new linguistic chronology finally independent from cultural and literary criteria or tendencies. The authors identify seven different periods: the *très ancien français* (9th-11th century), the *ancien français* (12th-13th c.), the *moyen français* (14th-16th c.), the *français préclassique* (16th-17th c.), the *français classique* (17th-18th c.), the *français moderne* (19th-20th c.) and finally the *français contemporain* (21st c.). Albeit "linguistic development is […] seamless", [2] the separation of chronological stages in a language is essential both for practical and didactic purposes.

Another element of innovation is represented by the new domains explored by the GGHF. The *Grammaire* takes into consideration all major traditional areas debated in Historical Linguistics such as phonetics, morphology, morphosyntax, syntax, lexicon, and lexical semantics. In addition, it investigates the innovative areas of graphemics and punctuation, grammatical semantics, textuality, and pragmatics. The social and geopolitical history of the French language is also deeply analyzed in a special chapter dedicated to the *Histoire externe*.

In this review, both for personal interest and for the novelty of the topic, the chapter dedicated to grammatical semantics (*sémantique grammaticale*) will be addressed. More specifically, this section deals with the processes of grammaticalization and it demonstrates that morphosyntax is neither arbitrary nor autonomous, but it follows from semantics and lexical expression. In this perspective, instead of the traditional concept of 'semantic bleaching', the authors of the GGHR posit a new process that can be described as 'grammatical enrichment'. In this new theory, lexical sense is "descriptif" while grammatical senses are "procéduraux" or "instructionnels" (1484) as it gives instructions on how to decipher the descriptive sense of a referent or to understand the relationships between the different elements of the sentence.

As a consequence, the categories of lexicon and grammar are not strictly separated but they can be seen as different extremities of the same ladder. Since the majority of grammaticalization processes has a progressive nature, intermediate categories are usually created. This pattern is evident in the creation of French definite article from the Latin demonstrative *ille*. The examples from the corpus suggest that the loss of the denotative meaning is followed by a specialization of the new grammatical element. Before acquiring the status of definite article as it has in the *français contemporain* (21st c.), *le* is employed as a "démonstratif affaibli" or weak demonstrative (1484); by marking pragmatic definiteness, the article is used to introduce a unique referent in a specific context. Later on, in the *ancien français* phase (12th-13th c.), due to its frequency, *le* acquires gradually a

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[2] Penny, R. (2000). *Variation and Change in Spanish*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 5.

broader and general sense as it is specialized as a semantic marker. By the end of the 16th c., the definitive article has lost all its original deictic force and it is used in many more contexts. To sum up, the central idea is that semantic evolution underlying grammaticalization can be interpreted as a generalization of sense which often entails a process of abstraction. Grammaticalization thus consists in a series of micro-changes in which lexical and grammatical meaning are gradation shades rather than opposites. This view offers a new categorization of the parts of speech based on syntactical and semantical definition.

The GGHF succeeds at renovating and enhancing traditional categories and theorizations with the final goal of reaching a better and clearer understanding of linguistic change. The GGHF is destinated to be a fundamental working tool for philologists as well as an essential model for similar works in the domain of *Romania*.

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