GRAMMATICALIZATION IN EARLY ENGLISH

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1. Definition and aim

Grammaticalisation was first defined by Antoine Meillet in 1912 as "the shift of an independent word to the status of a grammatical element", a process sometimes described as desemanticization (for criticism, cf. Traugott – Heine 1991: 4). In terms of classification into parts of speech the change may involve transfer from "major lexical categories" to "minor, grammatical categories", so that nouns, verbs and adjectives may become adverbs, auxiliaries, and prepositions (cf. McMahon 1994: 160).

According to a recent definition, grammaticalization is:

(1)   ... the process whereby the lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions, and, once grammaticalized, continue to develop new grammatical functions (Hopper – Traugott 1993: xv).

However, the significance of grammaticalization in the study of linguistic change goes far beyond the scope of the above definitions. The process appears to reflect the evolution in human speech from a sequence of purely lexical items, originally denoting concrete objects, through the shift of the lexical component to grammatical, which culminates in the rise of a string of lexical and grammatical words. The subsequent stages may involve cliticization, i.e. attachment of a grammaticalized item to a content word, and its fusion with the modified stem, ultimately resulting in the transformation of the original free word into an affix and, at the most advanced stage, an inflectional marker.

The above sequence of events can be schematically presented as a chain development like the following:

(2)   content item > grammatical word > clitic > inflectional affix (Hopper – Traugott 1993: 7)

The present attempt at identifying different paths along which grammaticalization operates makes use of the evidence from the history of English. Its aim is to verify whether more advanced forms of grammaticalized words belong to later periods and to establish to what extent such advanced forms coexist in a language with the less grammaticalized forms. Since the two items examined are the adjective *full* (< PGmc *full-az*) and the intensifier *very* (< OF *verrai* 'true'), yet another aim of the present contribution is to determine the causal connection between the decline of the auxiliary function of *full* as intensifier and the development of an analogous function of *very*, originally an adjective. The citations are selected from the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edition).

2. The adjective *full*

CGmc *full-a-* (IE *$p\!l$-n-ó-*) belongs to the most frequent stems in Germanic languages. Its original sense 'full, complete, containing abundance of' is evident from the early citations (c. 1000) adduced in the *OED*, like the one below,

(3)   *Hateþ ðonne heahcyning helle betynan, fyres fulle* (*Sal. & Sat.* 174 (Gr.))

which contains a typical nominal phrase *fyres fulle* (gen.) 'full of fire'.

The fates of that adjective best illustrate the evolution of a content word which undergoes grammaticalization. For instance, a "cline of lexicality", where "cline" is "a natural pathway along which forms evolve", can be exemplified as the following string:

(4)   *a basket full* (*of eggs* ...) > *a cupful* (*of water*) > *hopeful* (Hopper – Traugott 1993: 7)

It should be noted that items in (4) represent the same, evidently synchronic, plane since all the three forms coexist in contemporary English. But, curiously, Hopper and Traugott ignore the stage of a shift in the sense of *full* from adjectival to adverbial and the rise of the new intensifier, like in the phrases *ful gode* 'very good', *ful rice* 'very powerful', etc., where *ful* continues to be preposed with respect to the noun modified.

Evidently, when subject to a diachronic overview the semantic evolution of *full* goes even through more complex stages than the sequence (4) suggests. Adequately documented in English mediaeval literature, such stages are expected to represent a hypothetical, chronologically arranged string of changes from a minimal to a maximal degree of grammaticalization; cf.:

(5)   (a) (*muþ*) *full wœtres*   > (b¹) *ful(l) gode* 'very (good)' ||
       > (b²) *mouthfull* > (≈ full mouth)   > (c) *mouthful* >
       (d) *useful* [fʊl] (≠ full of use)   > (e) *useful* [f(ə)l]

The above pattern reveals two sequences of changes, the first, where the adjective *full* acquires as early as Old English the function of an intensifier (5a > b) after which the process discontinues (here symbolised by "||"), and the other, also initiated in Old English, where grammaticalisation transforms the relevant structures, ultimately yielding current forms such as *useful, wonderful*, etc. (5a > b² > c > d > e). Characteristically, the series of changes affecting the meaning of the original adjective *full* occur on three levels: syntactic, involving a shift in the position of *full* from preposed with reference to the item modified (5a > b) to postposed (5 b²-e), morphological (transformation of *ful(l)* into a suffix; 5 b²), and graphemic/phonological (simplification of double <ll> and reduction of the full vowel [ʊ] to [ə/-]; 5d > e).

In order to determine whether historical evidence confirms the ordering in (5), below are adduced samples of the early occurrence of forms representing the above stages. The original sense of *full* is evident from (6a) below:

(6a)   c1000 *Sele þonne cælic fulne to drincanne* (*Sax. Leechd.* II. 268)

with the phrase *cælic fulne* (acc.) 'a full cup'. This earliest sense of *full*, i.e. 'complete', has survived until our days. More interesting are instances where the literal meaning of the adjective became abstract, as in the following quotation from the 10th century:

(6b)   972 ... *þæt he beo... min fulla freo[n]d & forespreca.*
       (*Will of Ælflæd* in Birch *Cartul. Sax.* III. 603)

where *fulla* stands metaphorically for 'trusty, thorough'.

The first grammaticalized forms of *full* in the function of an intensifier, spelt with either double or single <l>, seem to have emerged in a very early period of English. This development is termed "divergence". It is a process

(7)   ... whereby a less grammatical form may split into two, one variant maintaining its former characteristics, the other becoming more grammatical (Hopper – Traugott 1993: 113).

The early instances of divergence so understood belong to Old English. For instance, King Alfred's translation of Boethius contains the following two sentences, the first with a single occurrence, the second with three occurrences of *ful(l)*, all functioning as intensifiers; cf.:

(8)   c. 888 *þa men þe habbaþ unhale eaʒan, ne maʒon ful eaþe locian onʒean*
       *þa sunnan. Maneʒe beoþ þeah æʒþer ʒe **full æþele** ʒe **full weliʒe** and*
       *beoþ þeah **full unrote***

                                             (Boethius xxxviii. §5 and xi. §1)

The sense corresponding to 'very' is also evident in the quotation from Byrhtnoth, a text written before the year 1000:

(9)   *He **ful baldlice** beornas lærde.* (Byrhtnoth, 311 (Gr.))

The sentences (8-9) contain the nominal phrases *ful eaþe* 'very easily', *full æþele* 'very noble', *full weliʒe* 'very rich', *full unrote* 'very unhappy', and *full baldlice* 'very boldly'. The employment of geminated and non-geminated spellings of *ful(l)* in the same text seems to indicate their free variation.

In spite of the rivalry with the French adjective *verai* 'true', which soon assumed the function of an adverb and became normalised as *very* in writing (see §3 below), the intensifier *ful(l)* continued into Late Middle English, and, although relegated to peripheral use, survived in 19th century literary style; cf. several samples from the 14-19th centuries:

(10a) c1380 *ʒee, **ful deer** breþeren* (Wyclif *Wks.* (1880) 309)

       c1570 *With golden lace **ful craftely** engined*
                                             (Thynne *Pride & Lowl.* (1841) 10)

       ?a1600 *That til oure lif is **ful profitable**, and to oure soule amendable*
                                             (*MS. Ashmole* No. 60. 5 (Halliw.))

       1741 *And I suppose too, she'll say, I have been **full pert***
                                             (Richardson *Pamela* I. 70)

       1869 *O, **full sweet**, and O, **full high**, Ran that music up the sky*
                                             (Ingelow *Lily & Lute* ii. 104)

or the phrases *full many* and *full well* used in archaising, poetical style; cf.:

(10b) 1750 ***Full many** a gem of purest ray serene* (Gray *Elegy* xiv)

       1820 *Old dames **full many** times declare* (Keats *St. Agnes* v)

       1853 *Philammon would have gone hungry to his couch **full many** a night*
                                             (Kingsley *Hypatia* xiv. 168)

       1875 *Those who can seem to forget what they know **full well**.*
                                             (Helps *Ess., Transact. Business* 73)

Needless to say, the position of the adjective *full* in the sense 'complete' was never weakened and at all times it coexisted with the intensifier, ultimately surviving the latter.

In agreement with (2) and (5) the subsequent stage in the evolution of *ful(l)* should involve cliticization, i.e. word-final attachment of a grammaticalized item to another word. But curiously, the derivative, i.e. a bound form with *ful*, is dated in the *OED* much earlier than the non-bound, grammaticalized intensifier *ful* in (8) above; cf.:

(11)   c700 *Manticum*: **handful** *beouuas* [*Corpus Gl.* beowes]
                                             (Epinal Gl. 645)

In Old English the suffix *-full* was attached to nouns, not to adjectives, one of the exceptions being *deorcfull* 'darkful', with double <ll>, which renders and imitates L *tenebrosus* in a mid-11th century text (*Liber Scintill.* lxi. (1889) 187). However, the earliest form of the compound *spoonful* contains a form with single <l> as early as the 13th century, while the form with the geminate comes only from the end of the 14th century, cf.:

(12)   c1290 *He nadde nouʒt a **spone-ful** ale* (S. *Eng. Leg.* I. 193)

       a1425 *Putte þerin a **sponeful** of comon salt*
                                             (tr. *Arderne's Treat. Fistula*, etc. 75)

while examples with geminated <ll> include:

(13)   c1380 *Pouder of seede of lanett a **sponfull**, and of love-ache a **sponfull***
                                             (in *Rel. Ant.* I. 52)

       c1475 *Thre **sponfull** of þe blak spyce* (Henryson *Poems* (S.T.S.) III. 152.

But another similar construction, *mouthful*, behaves more predictably, revealing forms with double <ll> relatively late, i.e. between the 15th and mid-17th centuries, cf.:

(14)   c1400 *A **mouth-full** of hoot water...* (tr. *Secreta Secret., Gov. Lordsh.* 77)

       1530 ***Mouthfull**, baufre* (Palsgr. 247/1)

       c1532 *In their **mouthfull** takyng refection*
                                             (G. Du Wes *Introd. Fr.* in *Palsgr.* 1017)

       1607 *... **Mouthfull** of Hay or Grasse?*
                                             (Rowlands *Diog. Lanth.* (Hunter. Cl.) 34)

       1608 *And at last, deuowre them all at a **mouthfull*** (Shakes. *Per.* ii. i. 35)

       c1645 *She took a **mouthfull** of claret ...* (Howell *Lett.* (1650) II. 25)

While geminated forms of *mouthful* are listed last in mid-17th century, those with single <l> first emerge in the 16th century. Evidently, before 1650 the clitic *-full* underwent further reduction of its semantic component and became a regular suffix; cf.:

(15)   c1530 *He asked for a* **mouthful** *of quick brimstone*
                        (*Hickscorner* in Hazl. *Dodsley* I. 179)

        1649 *God plucked them from their deceiving hopes, before they got*
        half a bellyful, yea, or a luck **mouthful** *of the world*
                        (*Last Sp. Visct. Kenmure* in *Sel. Biog.* (Wodrow Soc. 1845) I. 384)

        1692 *An Ass was Wishing for a* **Mouthful** *of Fresh Gras to Knab upon*
                        (R. L'Estrange *Fables* cccxvii. 277)

        1693 *To take a* **mouthful** *of sweet Country air*
                        (Dryden *Juvenal* iii. *ad fin.*)

It must be emphasised that part of the original semantic force is retained in items like *cupful, handful, houseful, mouthful, spoonful*, which is reflected in the pronunciation [fʊl] of the suffix, while more advanced grammaticalization occurs only in those items where *-full* is pronounced [fəl/fä] with a partial or total reduction of the vowel; as in *awful, careful, wonderful*, etc.

From the above it follows that the product of more advanced grammaticalization, the suffix *-ful*, now enjoys high frequency of use, while the intensifier *full*, which came into early use in the process of divergence, has failed to survive in Present-day English. It seems that in Mediaeval English the presence or lack of gemination in *ful(l)* cannot be treated as an unambiguous indicator of the early or the late form since both spellings are often used interchangeably.

As has been shown earlier, the intensifier *full*, whose position became drastically weakened in Middle English, was relegated to peripheral and special use in Early Modern English. Its elimination was obviously connected with the growing importance of the continuation of OF *verrai* in English (see 3 below).

3. The intensifier *very*

The evolution of *very*, the original adjective borrowed from French, offers another suitable opportunity to trace the shift from lexical to grammatical in English. OF *verai* (< L *vērus*), an adjective meaning 'true', was originally found in the Old French masterpiece *Chanson de Roland* (c. 1100). Following the deletion of *-e-* in the initial syllable the contracted form *vrai* became generally accepted in French a century later but failed to exert a modifying impact on the form *veray*, an early French loanword in English, which exhibited forms with the initial sequence *ver-* throughout Middle and Modern English. The earliest instances of the adjective *verai* can be traced back to the 13th century when it still retained the original sense of 'true'; cf.:

(16)   c1250 *Þet he was* **verray** *prest* (*Kent. Serm.* in *O.E. Misc.* 27 ...).

        a1300 **Warrai** *man and godd* **warrai** (*Cursor M.* 22729 ...).

        13.. *Wele haþ Gij don þat day, As gode kniȝt &* **verray**
                        (*Guy Warw.* 3568)

That usage continued into the next century, and the sense 'true' is evidenced, for example, in Chaucer's poetry, cf.:

(17)   1386 *He was a* **verray***, parfit gentil knyght* (C.T. G.P 72)

One should not overlook that in the Knight's description *verray* is separated from the following adjective by a comma, used as an evident warning signal to prevent the latter's interpretation as a grammaticalized form, a preposed intensifier modifying the following adjective. Another quotation, from the *Legend of Good Women*, offers an even more characteristic example of the use of *verray*; cf.:

(18)   c1385 *L.G.W. 1686 Lucretia, The* **verray** *wif, the* **verray** *trewe Lucresse*

where the adjective *verray* retains its sense, though modified to 'faithful', in the phrase *the verray wif*, but is simultaneously affected by incipient divergence, evident in *the verray trewe Lucresse*. In the latter the phrase it means 'genuinely', a sense not too distant from that of the intensifier 'very' (cf. Benson 1987: 1302). A similar meaning can be found in another late 14th century author, John of Trevisa, in a text coming roughly from the same period:

(19)   1387 *But for he was* **verray** *repentaunt he was exciled for Þe fey.*
                        (Trevisa *Higden* (Rolls) V. 329)

Because of specialisation of meaning, the adjective *veray* began to lose its semantic force in Late Middle English. Nevertheless the sense 'true, faithful' can be found, although with reduced frequency, in texts from the 16-19th centuries. However, its latest instances represent special styles; cf.:

(20)   1526 *All men counted Ihon, that he was a* **veri** *prophett*
                        (Tindale *Mark* xi. 32)

        1533 *Be this word he is* **veray** *God* (Gau *Richt Vay* 37)

        a1679 *The written Law is but seeming justice; the Law of Nature* **very**
        justice (*Rhet.* xvi. (1681) 39)

a1680 *Th' are very Men, not Things That move by Puppet-work*
(Butler *Rem.* (1759) I. 102)

Heavily marked stylistically are forms from the 19th century, including those representing American English; cf.:

(21)   1826   *Yes, it is madness; very, very madness* (Disraeli *Viv. Grey* iii. vi)
      1857   *Thence we went into Queen Mary's room, and saw that beautiful portrait – that very queen and very woman*
(Hawthorne *Eng. Note-Bks.* (1870) II. 329)

The evidence above suggests that grammaticalization of the adjective *verai* which resulted in the emergence of the standard intensified *very* occurred at the turn of Early New English. That development coincided with the decline of the old intensifier *ful(l)*.

4. Concluding remarks

The analysis of the data adduced in the present study allows one to formulate the following tentative conclusions:

(a)   Although the assumption that more grammaticalized forms appear in a language after less grammaticalized forms or content items cannot be seriously contested, this fact is not always reflected in the available historical evidence (e.g., forms with the clitic *-ful* are found in texts earlier than the intensifier *ful*), which means that grammaticalization is not obligatorily a continuous, linear process. As an alternative, it may involve a series of stages with dead ends.

(b)   The reduction of an original more complex spelling, like *full > ful*, may sometimes reflect an ongoing grammaticalization; cf. the use of the adjective *full* as the intensifier, frequently spelt with a single <l>, as opposed to the adjective which employs double <ll>.

(c)   The rise of a grammaticalized form may trigger the elimination of another functionally related form in the same language, as was the case with the intensifier *ful* ousted by *very*, an original adjective from French, which became an intensifier through grammaticalization.

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