

# Historical change of word classes\*

Matthias Gerner

City University of Hong Kong

This paper isolates four parameters that guide the historical change of word classes: the quantificational parameter, the directional parameter, the preservative parameter and the temporal parameter. These parameters are involved in the organization of seven case studies in East Asian languages. Based on these case studies I define four diachronic tendencies that apply to East Asian languages and perhaps beyond: (1) the greater the size of the target word class, the lower the number of new acquired meanings; (2) if a word class engages on a path of change, then the greater its size, the more likely it is that the process of change in which it engages will be lexicalization; (3) in a typical process of grammaticalization relatively more meanings are generated than in a typical process of lexicalization; (4) processes of grammaticalization represent temporally short processes more often than processes of lexicalization.

**Keywords:** word class, grammaticalization, lexicalization, diachronic universals, Tibeto-Burman, Kam-Tai, Miao-Yao

## 1. Introduction

In this paper, I lay the groundwork for crosslinguistic work on diachronic universals related to word classes and identify specific tendencies at work when multiple forms move together along a path of linguistic change. The proposed scheme is designed as a general and universal system, but I draw data from three families in East Asia: Tibeto-Burman, Kam-Tai and Miao-Yao (or Hmong Mien). In future typological work, I aim at feeding additional data into the system from a representative set of languages.

To my knowledge, no study in historical linguistics has ever quantified individual word class changes. In the past, two lines of research pursued the evolution

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