

Grammaticalization in Socio-historical Perspective: Social Conduits and Vectors of Diffusion of Linguistic Change

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More attention has been paid to the internal linguistic drivers of grammaticalization than to the social embedding of the process. This neglect has left a number of important conduits of the diffusion of linguistic change less well explored. My talk will adopt a corpus-based sociohistorical linguistic approach to document the grammaticalization of a syntactic construction that arose during the 15th century. Although it was once part of standard English and used across the social spectrum, it became increasingly confined to vestigial and enclave dialect communities after it was transported to North America. By using a variety of data sources, it can be established that the construction was in the repertoires of individuals among the founding population of early colonists, who brought their diverse dialects to colonial America. Its users were positioned at various levels of the nascent social hierarchy and emerging regional differentiation, including for instance, transported convicts as well as members of socially prominent families from England, Scotland and Ireland.