

On the Application of Grammaticalization in English Grammar Teaching

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 05 Nov 2025; Received in revised form: 03 Dec 2025; Accepted: 10 Dec 2025; Available online: 16 Dec 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).</p> <p>Keywords – grammaticalization, English grammar teaching, application, activity design</p>	<p><i>Grammaticalization is a key concept in linguistics, focusing on the dynamic process through which substantial lexical words gradually transform into abstract grammatical morphemes, or the shift from peripheral to core grammatical functions. Based on its definition, this paper investigates the profound significance, implications, and the practical value of grammaticalization theory in the teaching of English grammar. The study commences by tracing the origins and definition of grammaticalization, then synthesizes and reviews the domestic and international research on the topic, including the applied strategies in the context of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL) and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). The paper focuses on deriving methodological insights for teaching English as a foreign language. The application of grammaticalization theories relies on diachronic explanations to clarify the puzzles and confusions by revealing the logic and motivations underlying the seemingly fragmented grammatical items and incoherent expressions, thus reducing the reliance on rote memorization. Furthermore, the functions of the theory in English grammar teaching are elucidated in detail, particularly its role in constructing interconnected grammatical networks that illustrate the developmental pathways of the grammatical structures. Grammaticalization theory also provides a robust framework for teachers to diagnose and explain errors stemming from negative transfer of the mother tongue in language learning. Additionally, in pragmatics and discourse analysis, grammaticalization theory can uncover the pragmatic origins of many grammatical forms, thereby facilitating the development of students' pragmatic competence and fostering their cross-cultural communicative awareness. Finally, after proposing possible activities to be employed in classroom, the paper suggests directions for future pedagogical research.</i></p>

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The origin and definition of grammaticalization

Grammaticalization, a key concept in linguistics, can be traced back to ancient times. Shen (1994) argues that grammaticalization belongs to the research field of historical linguistics, specifically morphosyntax or morphology, and closely related to language evolution. It is widely acknowledged that the earliest research emerged in the Yuan Dynasty of China. It was the Chinese scholar who first noted that the functional words were once all content words in ancient times, an observation which actually touched upon the essence of grammaticalization—the semantic bleaching of lexical meaning.

In the West, the linguists Bopp (1816) and Humboldt (1825) respectively commented on the concept of “grammaticalization”. The French linguist Meillet (1912) was the first to introduce the term “grammaticalization” in his work “*L'évolution des formes grammaticales*”, and expressly stated that it was the process in which autonomous words transformed into function words and acted as grammatical elements.

There emerge more systematical and in-depth research when it comes to modern linguistics. Hopper & Traugott (2003) explicitly defined it as “the process whereby the lexical items and constructions come into certain contexts to serve grammatical functions, and once grammaticalized, continue to develop new grammatical functions” (F37). This process involves a series of regular evolutionary characteristics, such as desemanticization, extension, decategorization, erosion, and subjectification (Heine & Kuteva 2002; Hopper & Traugott 2003). Desemanticization refers to the weakening or loss of the concrete lexical meaning, with the items serving mainly as grammatical markers, such as *including*. Extension concerns the expansion of the contexts in which grammaticalized constructions can be used. Decategorization involves the loss morphosyntactic features of the original word class, such as number

and case for nouns, or tense and aspect for verbs. Erosion refers to the simplification or weakening of phonetic forms. And subjectification indicates that the meaning of the grammaticalized constructions becomes more and more dependent on the attitudes and beliefs of the speech context. A case in point is the grammaticalization of the verb “把” (bǎ) in Chinese. Its original meaning was “to hold, to keep, and grasp”, as seen in phrases like “把手” (bǎ shou), and “把握” (bǎ wò). It gradually evolves to be a grammatical marker indicating the “disposal” meaning, forming the “bǎ” construction, such as in the phrase “把书拿来” (bǎ shū ná lái, bring me the book). In English, one typical example is the construction indicating the future time--“be going to”, which has fully grammaticalized from a verb phrase indicating spatial movement (e.g. I am going to school) into an auxiliary verb construction expressing future time (It is going to be a hot day).

1.2 Significance of the study for language teaching

The study of grammaticalization holds profound significance for linguistics and language teaching, since it examines how lexical items and constructions evolve into functional ones. Theoretically, grammaticalization is not merely a historical process, but offers an insightful window into the nature of language change, and the dynamic interplay of cognition and communication. Exploring this process, the underlying mechanisms of language evolution could be uncovered, revealing that languages are constantly changing in response to social, cultural and also cognitive pressures rather than remaining static all the time. Through the study of grammaticalization, we can trace, for example, how words like “will” in English, with original meaning “desire”, gradually become markers of future tense. Delving into the inside of the change process, the pathways of linguistic change could be revealed and thereby made predictable. This facilitates the tracing work of the historical development of modern languages and also the better understanding of proto-languages, uncovering the universal tendencies in

morphological and syntactic shifts. Such historical insights are invaluable for preserving linguistic diversity and understanding the forces that drive language change: death or revitalization. Furthermore, grammaticalization demonstrates how human minds economize effort by simplifying complex expressions into grammatical markers, reflecting cognitive principles like automation and chunking, offering a bridge to cognitive science and psychology.

Practically, the implications of grammaticalization extend to applied linguistics, specifically to language teaching. Understanding these patterns of grammaticalization can facilitate the development of educational strategies that present grammar in a more intuitive manner. Traditional grammar instruction often depends on prescriptive approaches, presenting grammatical rules as static and isolated truths. Such approaches center on rote memorization and repetitive drills. Consequently, students end up knowing the rules and usages but without understanding the rationale underlying them, resulting in confusion when confronted with exceptions. An understanding of grammaticalization however, offers a transformative alternative. Its theories provide a novel, dynamic and cognitive perspective for grammar instruction. Instead of presenting grammar rules as rigid, instructors can explain the diachronic development to help students comprehend their fluidity, making grammar learning more engaging. This approach thereby enriches the theoretical frameworks of applied linguistics and offers practical tools for pedagogy.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies of grammaticalization, dating back to one century ago, have evolved and developed from a subfield of historical linguistics to an interdisciplinary research domain. The findings can provide a solid foundation for teaching practice. Related research and findings have emerged and gained recognition both domestically and internationally. The research findings mainly fall

into three categories. Diachronic descriptive research traces in detail the origins and evolutionary stages of individual grammatical items, offering the most direct sources for teaching. Theoretical construction research explores the motivations, mechanisms, principles and pathways of grammaticalization, providing a macro theoretical framework and explanatory tools for teaching. Contrastive and acquisition-oriented research compares grammaticalization pathways across languages and examines the challenges encountered by second-language learners.

2.1 Research abroad

Since Bopp (1816) and Humboldt (1825), researchers have expounded their understandings of grammaticalization. The French linguist, A. Meillet (1912), first proposed the term. Earlier research mainly focused on the diachronic description of individual cases, such as the study of grammatical etymology within the Indo-European language family. It was Givón, Bybee, Perkins, Pagliuca, Hopper, Traugott, and Heine who pushed the study of grammaticalization to its climax (Sun 2011).

T. Givón (1979) puts forward the famous proposition – “Today’s morphology was yesterday’s syntax”, revealing the evolutionary path from syntax to morphology. Bybee, Perkins, & Pagliuca (1994) publish their landmark work in the field of grammaticalization studies: *The Evolution of Grammar: Tense, Aspect, and Modality in the Languages of the World*, which systematically explores the evolutionary processes of tense, aspect, and modality markers based on extensive cross-linguistic evidence. Their research touches on the key concepts of grammaticalization: namely, grammaticalization paths – the transition from “concrete” to “abstract” meaning and from “free” to “bound” forms – which support the principle of unidirectionality. In this book, cognitive and pragmatic mechanisms are emphasized, thereby demonstrating the universality of grammaticalization pathways while acknowledging language-specific variations, and extending the ideas proposed by Givón and others through

empirical data and linguistic typology. With the primary goal to document and compare the common pathways of grammatical change across the world's languages, Heine & Kuteva (2002), offer a much broader, but less detailed survey of grammaticalization pathways across all grammatical categories (case, pronouns, complementizers, etc.), arguing that grammaticalization is essentially a process of conceptual transfer from a concrete, physical source domain to an abstract, grammatical target domain. Thus, it not only complements Bybee et al. (1994), but also validates Givón's (1979) famous dictum "Today's morphology is yesterday's syntax" with numerous examples drawn from a wide variety of languages.

In their *Grammaticalization*, a work universally regarded as the cornerstone textbook, Hopper and Traugott (2003) trace the development of grammaticalization ideas from the 19th century to the end of the 20th century, explicitly stating the definition of the core concept--grammaticalization, clarifying the main controversies in the research field, and systematically expounding the principles, cognitive and pragmatic mechanisms (reanalysis, analogy, desemantization, extension and erosion) and unidirectionality of the evolving process. They propose the "grammaticalization cline," which depicts the most common unidirectional path of grammaticalization, content word > function word > clitic > inflectional affix, not vice versa.

In recent years, the developments in cognitive linguistics, pragmatics and contact linguistics have further enriched the research on grammaticalization. Langacker (2009), a core representative of cognitive grammar, expounds how grammatical structures evolve from concrete forms through usage and cognitive entrenchment, emphasizing that grammaticalization is a process of abstraction and subjectification. In pragmatics, focus is placed on the initiating role of "pragmatic inference" and "invited inference" in the evolution of meaning.

2.2 Domestic research

The study of grammaticalization has a profound

tradition, with its early concerns traced back to the origins of function words. It is widely acknowledged by Western scholars that the definition of grammaticalization was proposed by Chinese scholar in the 13th century. Since the 1980s, following the introduction of the theory of grammaticalization into the research of Chinese grammar, it has been considered as a fundamentally explanatory theory fundamentally, with the focus on how languages acquire grammar, examining the patterns, mechanisms and motivations behind linguistic evolution (Sun 2011).

Modern research has flourished through the joint efforts of scholars such as Shen Jiaxuan, Liu Jian, Cao Guangshun and Wu Fuxiang. They have actively introduced the international research developments. Meanwhile, they have deeply investigated rich grammaticalization phenomena in Chinese, tracing the origins of the core grammatical markers such as "了" (le), "着" (zhe), "过" (guò), "把" (bǎ) and "被" (bèi). Shen (1994) points out a shift in research focus from diachrony to synchrony, and explores the possible reasons for the change. He argues that language contact and other social factors should be included in the study of motivations for grammaticalization, and that integrating diachronic and synchronic approaches is essential for advancing the study of Chinese grammar (1994: 17). Liu, Cao & Wu (1995) utilize extensive historical examples from Chinese, to first systematically propose the four main factors triggering the grammaticalization: changes in syntactic position, semantic evolution, contextual influence, and reanalysis. They emphasize that studying function words and syntactic structures requires tracing their historical origins and evolutionary processes, noting the results of diachronic changes are reflected in synchronic grammatical phenomena. Their work reveal specific triggers and mechanisms of grammaticalization in Chinese, and is regarded as the milestone in the study of grammaticalization, marking the transition of grammaticalization studies in Chinese linguistics from introduction and adaptation to independent innovation and

theoretical construction.

Wu (2004) introduces the latest Western grammaticalization theories to the Chinese academic community, providing a systematic overview of contemporary research developments. The work systematically discusses the key concepts of grammaticalization, including unidirectionality, degrees and clines of grammaticalization, and intersubjectification, and integrates them with relevant studies of Chinese language.

Meanwhile, a growing body of literature is emerging, discussing the integration of grammaticalization theories into the second language instruction. Guan (2008) utilizes the Chinese Character “所” (suǒ) as an example to investigate the application of the grammaticalization theories in foreign language teaching. The study points out that the process of grammaticalization and the sequence of language acquisition are closely related to human cognition, concluding that the research achievements in grammaticalization are conducive to the instruction of grammatical items in a more reasonable sequence, and thereby improve teaching efficiency.

Sun (2011) supports this trend, and viewing it as evidence of growing theoretical awareness among researchers and language teachers, which infuses novel elements into language teaching, especially Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL). Sun therefore considers the inquiry a worthwhile pursuit. Nevertheless, he also notes that due to differences in the understanding of the nature of TCFL, the divergent interpretations and the significance of theories in teaching practice must be considered reasonably. This is especially important for some primary aspects within grammaticalization. Amidst these achievements and caveats, language teachers continue to vigorously engage with this scholarship, applying their understandings of theories and findings in teaching practice, concerning the relationship of Chinese grammaticalization order and acquisition order of resultative complements (Luo 2019), grammaticalization of adverbs (Ling 2022), teaching

strategies of certain Chinese verbs (Zang 2023).

Grammaticalization, as one of the key linguistic concepts, provides insights for language teachers to explain Chinese grammar in TCSL. However, there has been little research on the practical application of the grammaticalization theory in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). This gap motivates the present study, aiming at facilitating the understanding and mastery of abstract grammatical items by providing teachers with concrete historical “narratives” to share with their students.

III. APPLICATION OF GRAMMATICALIZATION IN THE INSTRUCTION OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR

Grammaticalization, as a key theory in linguistics, provides valuable insights for both linguistic research and language pedagogy. One of its central values lies in its practical applications for instruction. It offers specific application strategies relevant to lexicon, syntax and pragmatics, providing evidence for predication of learning difficulties, course design, and error correction. The following section elaborates on the theory’s practical utilization with examples from English language teaching.

3.1 Application in vocabulary teaching

The primary value of grammaticalization lies in its explanatory ability to expound the evolution of function words and word-formation elements, which is directly applicable to the instruction of prepositions, auxiliary and modal verbs as well as affixes. Such research provides a macro theoretical framework and explanatory tools for the instructors, aiding them to grasp the systematic nature of grammar.

3.1.1 Teaching prepositions

English prepositions are largely a highly grammaticalized word class. For example, when explaining the phrase “in front of”, it should be highlighted that its three components originally all indicate space. “in” means “inside”; “front” indicates “forepart”; and “of” is a possessive marker.

Later, the construction extends metaphorically from spatial meanings (e.g., in front of the building) to temporal ones (e.g., in front of the meeting), and even to more abstract fields, such as case markers. This historical perspective can aid the students who suffer from the negative transfer of our mother language—Chinese, to avoid the simplistic equivalences between English prepositions and specific Chinese characters, reducing their confusion in mastering the usages of some prepositions.

3.1.2 Teaching auxiliary and modal verbs

In English, auxiliary verbs, such as “can”, “may”, and “must”, originate from content words indicating “ability”, “possibility” and “necessity”. Their polysemy is just the results of semantic evolution during the process of grammaticalization, which involves persistence and extension of meaning. For example, “can” can indicate ability (e.g., She can sing) or permission (e.g., You can go now). Similarly, “must” has evolved from expressing strong necessity or obligation (e.g., You must announce the notice as I told you), to indicate a logical deduction or high probability (e.g., He must be moving something in the next room since I can hear the noises). This developmental path from deontic to epistemic modality, is the typical outcome of grammaticalization. Thus, students can grasp their core and peripheral meanings more systematically aided by the semantic charts indicating evolution.

3.1.3 Teaching affixes

In English, affixes play a significant role in word-formation. A better understanding of affixes can boost the comprehension and application of derivatives. The English suffix “-ly” derives from the Old English noun “lic”, which means “body”, or “form”. Therefore, adjectives formed by adding the suffix “-ly” (e.g., “manly” from “man,” “friendly” from “friend”) maintain the original sense of “having the form/quality of”. Thus, by adding the suffix “-ly” to nouns, students can create new adjectives and grasp the meanings of such kind of new words in reading materials. Furthermore,

adverbs derived by adding “-ly” to adjectives (e.g., “carefully” from “careful”), express the “manner” of the action described by the adjectives. Having a knowledge of this historical and functional distinction, enables students to go beyond the surface of word formation of the abstract affixes, such as “-ly”, and thereby achieve a more concrete grasp of its dual role in expressing “characteristic” (for adjectives) or “manner” (for adverbs). This insight renders the learning process of word formation more vivid and accessible.

3.2 Application in explaining the set constructions

Chinese is an isolating language. Unlike inflected languages, it does not depend on inflectional affixes to express grammatical meanings. Instead, it relies on word order, function words, and context to convey relationships such as tense, aspect, and voice. This characteristic poses a significant challenge to students’ comprehension and mastery of the English tense system. In teaching English to Chinese students, set constructions present another difficulty. The grammaticalization theories are conducive to the illustration of the origins of these structures, particularly in understanding the English tense system and the changes produced by different tenses.

3.2.1 Perfect Aspect “have + V-ed”

English tense, a key component of English sentences, is such kind of system, which poses a significant challenge for Chinese students in mastering the correct use of different tenses indicating time. In English grammar, there are typically 16 basic tenses formed through the combination of “time” (present, past, future, future-in-past) and “aspect” (simple, continuous/progressive, perfect, perfect continuous). Even in simplified classroom teaching systems, at least 12 tenses are considered essential. The remaining four are often omitted due to their association with the “future-in-the-past,” as they are less frequently used or are sometimes categorized under mood. This relatively complex grammatical system, along with the inflectional changes involved, constitutes a major difficulty for Chinese students.

In teaching the English Perfect Aspect “have +

V-en”, teachers can explain to the students that this structure originates from the possessive verb “have”, combined with the past participle of a verb to express a completed meaning. For example, the expression “he has finished the task” was originally equal to something like “he has the task in a finished state”. Over time, “finished” was less analyzable, and eventually reanalyzed together with “have” as a single grammatical unit. This kind of analysis helps students understand the essential relationship between the “perfect” aspect and the present—namely, that the state resulting from the action is currently “possessed.”

3.2.2 Future tense

In teaching the structure of future tense, teachers can explain to the students that the tense marker “will” evolves from the verb meaning “volition”, “be going to” derives from the motion verb “go”, and “be about to” originates from the notion of “immediacy”. This trend is not random, but is supported by evidence in many unrelated languages. Through comparison, students may recognize that this change forms a future-tense continuum ranging from “subjective intention” to a “settled” plan, and finally to “imminent occurrence”. Such an approach more effectively aids the students’ grasp of the subtle distinctions compared with the rote memorization of each structure in isolation.

The emergence of grammaticalization theories offers insights into the nature and history of English tense, clarifying the confusion of categorization and mastery of the related grammatical items, and thereby facilitating the learning process. Students can be informed that most aspects and tenses evolve from action verbs, forming a cline from action to aspect and tense, which is a universally acknowledged phenomenon across languages.

3.3 Application in pragmatics and discourse

Grammaticalization theory here can elucidate the development of understanding discourse markers, mood and modality, thereby helping the students to better understand the subjectivity of the utterances and the intentions of the speakers.

3.3.1 Teaching discourse markers

In English discourse, markers play an important part in connecting the different sections or paragraphs to form a coherent discourse. Take “well” as an example. Its original meaning is “good”, and has later been highly grammaticalized into a common discourse marker with little conceptual meaning, employed to organize discourse, introduce topics, indicate hesitation, facilitate turn-taking, or soften the tone, reflecting strong subjectivity. In the sentence “Well, I did not mean that, “well” does not convey its literal meaning “good”. Instead, it shows that the speaker is organizing his language to express his idea more appropriately, or expressing a kind of reservation. Another case in point is “I mean”. Its literal meaning is “I intend to say”, but now has evolved to be a discourse marker introducing self-correction or clarification. Informing students that all these result from a high degree of grammaticalization, can help them move beyond literal interpretation, enable them to identify their functions in communication, especially in listening, and use them more naturally and idiomatically, to enhance the fluency of communication.

3.3.2 Teaching mood and modality

A case in point in English is the modal verb “will”. Its process of grammaticalization is full of subjectification. As mentioned above, it evolves from a main verb indicating “to desire, or want”, into a core modal auxiliary, mainly marking the future tense. In modern English, it is primarily employed to express subjective judgement concerning the intention, likelihood or inevitability of a future event. From the perspective of grammaticalization, students might gain a fundamental understanding of its pragmatic function to convey the speaker’s view, commitment, or prediction about future events, thus, rendering the teaching and learning of “will” more meaningful and moving quite beyond the mechanical memorizing of rules, and treating it merely as a future tense marker. Such an approach also helps students to distinguish it from other

future markers, such as “be going to”, which may vary in terms of evidence or intention.

3.3.3 Teaching cultural background and pragmatic transfer

Language is the carrier of its culture. Many discourse patterns and subjective markers are deeply rooted in the communicative styles of its culture. Gaining knowledge of grammaticalization can lubricate the communication process. The process of grammaticalization may reflect evolution and changes of society and culture. For instance, the English modal verb “must”, evolves from the Old English root *mōtan* (“to be allowed”). Currently, it indicates “necessity” or “logical deduction”, reflecting the changes in people’s attitudes within a cultural background, in relation to obligation and reasoning. Furthermore, in the pragmatic field, grammaticalization exposes how linguistic forms evolve from concrete lexical items into functional ones, and even abstract pragmatic markers. Here, we also use “well” as an example to illustrate the point. It is used as a discourse marker, or a communicative strategy, to preface responses, manage turns, and even indicate hesitation. Through the explanation of related evolutions, teachers can instruct students to explore the cultural logic underlying language, avoid the negative transfer of language habits from Chinese, and thereby foster and enhance their cross-cultural awareness and communicative competence.

3.4 Activity design

From the perspective of the role of grammaticalization in English learning, a variety of classroom activities could be organized to facilitate the learning process, and to produce more authentic learning outcomes.

3.4.1 Grammatical story time

This activity aims at transforming the abstract and dull presentation of linguistic change into a vivid narrative. The teacher can narrate the story of a grammatical item, such as “The travel diary of ‘be going to’”. A construction can be personified to present its journey from its literal meaning of motion, for example, “I am going to school.” Later,

the construction evolves into a marker of future tense, as in “It is going to snow”. By doing so, the concept and its usage become more memorable, supported by the imagined pictures in students’ minds. This approach improves cognitive retention by visualizing the language in a dynamic and evolving scenario, rather than as static and abstract rules. It can also be accompanied by activities like timelines or illustrations tracing the “history” of the construction through centuries, in order to engage the students’ attention and imagination.

3.4.2 Diachronic example sequencing

Students are given a set of example sentences that illustrate the usage of a certain word in different historical stages. For instance, they are presented with the shuffled sentences indicating the evolution of “since” from a temporal marker (e.g., since last month), to a causal conjunction (e.g., since you decide). Students are required to rearrange the sentences in chronological order. By doing so, they actively participate in the process of the word’s grammaticalization by “following” the path of its evolution. Discussions based on this sequencing task can spark their interest in exploring the mechanisms underlying the changes, such as semantic bleaching (loss of original meaning) and pragmatic strengthening (gain of a new functional meaning). This approach promotes students’ analytical thinking, fosters a deeper understanding of the usage of abstract constructions, and makes them direct “observers” of the language history, thereby eliminating the boredom induced by passive lectures.

3.4.3 Diachronic explanation of errors

The phrasal construction “cannot help” is a typical example employed by teachers to illustrate why it is usually followed by a gerund (the -ing form). The verb “help” in the structure no longer means “assist”, but instead, evolves from an old sense of “avoid”, which develops an extended meaning, “to aid oneself against something” in the later phase of Old English. After its climax in Middle English period, the only surviving remnant of this archaic sense of “help” as “avoid”, is merely retained in

some fixed historical structures such as “cannot help + V-ing”, or its negative variant “cannot help but + base form of verb”. Its evolving path is like this: to help (somebody in a positive way)→to help (somebody avoid or escape something not good)→to cause (a bad thing) to be avoided→to avoid (a bad thing). Such an evolution represents an important stage in its semantic development, although its original independent meaning has entirely vanished in modern grammar. Teachers can explain that both the base verb form and the -ing form in these constructions, are directly derived from its older usage due to semantic change in language use. By showing how fossilized or grammaticalized structures govern modern usage, rote memorization of rules can be transformed into a logical and historical insight, and mistake analysis can become a form of meaning-based learning.

3.4.4 English-Chinese language contrastive analysis

This kind of comparative exercises aims to provide students with a glimpse of language development, and to highlight the unique evolutionary trajectories of linguistic items. Students are guided to make comparison and contrast between different paths of grammaticalization of words or phrases such as “since” in English (which evolves from temporal to causal meaning), and “自从” (zìcóng) in Chinese (which has remained exclusively temporal). This comparison helps to clarify the confusions of the usages of “since”, deepens their understanding, prevents negative transfer and explains why sometimes direct translation fails to convey the meaning of the source language. In this activity, parallel dialogues are provided to the students, prompting them to deduce the narrower usages of “自从” in contrast to the comparatively broader usages of “since”. Training students’ meta-linguistic awareness is crucial. It moves their understanding of translation beyond surface-level correspondence to conceptual boundaries, laying a solid foundation for advanced English learning.

IV. CONCLUSION

Grammaticalization theories offer us a gateway to

understanding the cognitive and functional motivations underlying language evolution. Introducing these theories into language teaching, especially English grammar teaching, is by no means, an attempt to replace synchronic rules with diachronic knowledge, but rather to treat them as powerful explanatory tools to facilitate the teaching of English grammar. In language learning, they can provide a diachronic rationale to resolve some exceptions and irregular phenomena, which are often products of language evolution at different stages. Informing students of the origins and evolutionary paths can transform the dull memorization of rules into meaningful engagement. Grammaticalization theories reveal the intrinsic connections between different grammatical items, which is conducive to the construction of a grammar network that promotes the students’ systematic acquisition of English grammar. Students can come to realize that the grammaticalization process in many languages exhibits universal pathways, while also possessing unique cultural or linguistic features. Comparing and contrasting English with our mother language can leverage positive transfer while explaining negative transfer in language learning, thereby lightening the study load and fostering students’ cross-cultural awareness.

To conclude, by means of such approaches, static, abstract and isolated grammatical items become dynamic, concrete and interrelated cognitive schemas, thereby making grammar learning a process full of rationality and engagement. Students are no longer passive recipients of rules, but active constructors of knowledge network, which facilitates their comprehension of related knowledge and cultivates their cross-cultural communicative competence. Of course, teachers should also conduct the application cautiously. Students’ linguistic and cognitive abilities should always be the core concern when related grammatical items are presented in light of theories of grammaticalization. The core and most relevant insights should be extracted and presented in an

appropriate and accessible measure, to avoid imposing unnecessary workload on students. Future research should focus on evidence-based teaching experiments, to examine the actual learning effects of grammaticalization-informed teaching approaches on learners at various proficiency levels, with the aim of optimizing teaching strategies and guiding foreign language teaching in a more scientific and efficient direction.

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