

Why do we have to say certain things? On the obligatorification of dependents

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A common feature of the grammaticalization of function words is that they develop the requirement for obligatory dependents. For instance, English /the /does not occur except when followed by a nominal construction. This talk offers an account of the historical development of obligatorification - how dependents develop from optional extras to required accompaniments. I will show how the process leading to obligatorification is driven by universal communicative requirements. In this sense, the development in question sets in before grammaticalization “proper”, rather than being a result of grammaticalization as has been widely (if only implicitly) assumed. In fact, specific semantic structures create the need for overt hosts at every synchronic stage of every language. Only rarely does this requirement for an overt dependent develop into a syntactic requirement as a result of grammaticalization. I illustrate this with both diachronic and synchronic examples from diverse parts of speech that stem from several languages.