Grammaticalization and Cognition: A look at the Periphrastic Past in Catalan

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> *Language is the formative organ of thought . . . Thought and Language are . . .*
> *one and inseparable from each other.*

> Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) as cited in "Linguistic Relativities" by
> John Leavitt, 2006.

Movement in linguistics is omnipresent. More broadly, languages can stir movement, but languages are also in motion. One of the best ways to track this movement and growth is by examining the evolution of various phenomena diachronically. By looking at how the verb *go* shifted from a motion-spatial verb to a temporal one, we can trace Catalan's movement and growth throughout the centuries.

With that being said, movement itself is also important in languages. As cognitive and cultural elements feed into the language we speak, the notion of movement can change, shift, and transform into expressing other notions, such as time. After all, a large branch in the field of linguistics explores and examines conceptual metaphors, conceptualizations of abstract ideas in something more directly accessible. Language use therefore reflects that the one aspect that has not changed a lot since time immemorial is movement.

It is widely known that in most languages of the world, the grammaticalization process is majorly polygenetic, meaning that it does not have one source as its origin but multiple.[1] Grammaticalization in Linguistics refers to the process according to which a lexical unit—a word or phrase—acquires a new, grammatical meaning.

Then, in many seemingly unconnected languages of the world, grammatical expressions are fuelled by semantic units with similar metaphoric meaning. One of the best examples to

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[1] Detges, "How Cognitive is Grammaticalization?," 1.

demonstrate this is the *go (to)*–periphrasis. This grammatical expression acts as a future marker not only in English (e.g *she is going to sing*) and the dominant Romance European languages (SP. *Ella va a cantar* and FR. *elle va chanter*) but, as Bybee et al. cite, it also occurs in languages such as Margi (Afro-Asiatic, Nigeria), Cocama (Tupi, Peru), Maung (Yiwaidjan, Australia), Atchin (Austronesian, Vanuatu) and others.[2]

The above finding is traditionally interpreted as the universal tendency to associate a grammatical function with the verb *go.* This verb is usually interpreted as movement forward, transitioning many times into a marker of the future tense. In other words, across many languages, the use of *go* in narrative contexts caused a loss of lexical meaning ('bleaching') and, in turn, a semantic shift from spatial to temporal movement.[3] It is visible, therefore, that movement in space and movement in time can also be connected cognitively, and a link between movement and linguistic change can be established. Due to being a "highly anomalous" case of grammaticalization, the Catalan feature of the periphrastic past (*passat perifràstic*) has attracted a lot of scholarly attention, seeing that in contrast to the languages mentioned earlier, Catalan's go–periphrasis is a past marker, a preterit (1).[4]

(1) Vaig   comprar   un   llibre

     GOPR.1-SG   BUYINF   a   book

     I bought a book.[5]

Apart from this peculiarity in the Catalan grammaticalization process, similar phenomena of constructions with *go* not following its 'moving forward' paradigm are attested in different languages

[2] Bybee et al., *The Evolution of Grammar,* 112.
[3] Cruschina & Kocher, "A Surprise in the Past," 162.
[4] Pérez Saldanya & Hualde, "Origin and Evolution," 49.
[5] Cruschina & Kocher, "A Surprise in the Past," 182.

globally and have been discussed by a multitude of scholars.[6] Despite the plethora of studies, there have been, to my knowledge, no efforts to connect this shift to universal notions such as cognition and its reflection on culture.

The present article aims to study the motion-verb periphrases, such as the Catalan go–past from a cognitive and cultural perspective. The purpose of this study is to highlight the cognitive and cultural processing that takes place diachronically during the different grammaticalization stages of a grammatical phenomenon. To explore that, the cultural and cognitive significance of the grammaticalization of the Catalan *passat perifràstic go + infinitive* is analyzed and the implications of applying cognitive theories, such as *Linguistic Relativity*, to studies of historical perspective are discussed. Thus, the main question asks if and to what extend this phenomenon owes its appearance to cognitive behavior and whether it reflects a degree of cultural predispositions.

This paper is organized as follows: first, I will delve deeper into the existing literature focusing on the grammaticalization of the *passat perifràstic* in Catalan as well as the general theories of language, culture, and cognition. Secondly, after analyzing the methodological aspect of this study and conducting a limited corpus research, I intend to apply my chosen theoretical framework on the results. With the final goal of exploring the grammaticalization process from a different perspective compared to the narrative, pragmatic and linguistic ones that have appeared in the academic literature already.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework
Traditionally, two major studies have been pivotal in the study of the provenance of the *passat perifràstic*. Both Pérez Saldanya & Hualde

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[6] De Vos, *Verbal Pseudo-coordination*, 3; Wiklund, *Dependent Verb Second*, 29; Joseffson, *Pseudocoordination in Swedish*, 30; Ross, *Going to Surpise*, web conference; Cruschina, *Gone Unexpectedly*, 133.
For Sicilian see: Cruschina & Kocher, "A Surprise in the Past." For English see: Carden & Pesetsky, "Double-verb Constructions." For Spanish see: Arnaiz & Camacho, "A Topic Auxiliary in Spanish." For French see: Tellier, "French Expressive Motion Verbs as Functional Heads." For Italian see: Cruschina, "Gone Unexpectedly." For Swedish see: Josefsson, "Pseudocoordination in Swedish."

and Detges, connect the origin of the formation to narrative contexts.[7] According to Pérez Saldanya & Hualde, the semantic change is linked to an inference suggesting that the action that follows 'go' has already been completed. This inference of a complete action, as time passed, became generalized through a process of conventionalization, appearing in contexts irrelevant to narratives, simultaneously shifting the semantic load of the original motion verb.[8] Therefore, during storytelling, in the example of (1) *vaig comprar,* the verb *vaig* (=go), firstly denoted that the action of the following infinitive—*comprar* (= to buy)—has already been completed. An English equivalent, for example, would be 'I went and bought'. This newly formed expression in Catalan started appearing in contexts outside of storytelling until it became prevalent everywhere.

On the other hand, Detges follows a more pragmatic approach to reach a similar conclusion.[9] He claims that when the speaker mentions that the agent is moving to some place to do an action, they also denote the intention of doing that action and hence the beginning of the action itself.[10] Movement and beginning are therefore closely related and such actions are considered more "dynamic" and "spectacular" than aspectually unspecified ones.[11] It, therefore, becomes a narrative strategy to use such constructions in order to make storytelling more appealing. In English, (2) is less "dynamic" and "spectacular" than (3):

I went to the supermarket and bought tomatoes.[12]
I bought tomatoes from the supermarket.

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[7] Pérez Saldanya & Hualde, "Origin and Evolution," 57; Detges, "How Cognitive is Grammaticalization?" 220.

[8] Bybee et al., *The Evolution of Grammar,* 112*;* Nagy, "The Pragmatics of Grammaticalization," 90.

[9] Detges, "How Cognitive is Grammaticalization?" 211.

[10] Meyer-Lübcke, *Das Katalanische,* 12; Colon, "Sobre el Perfet Perifràstic," 133.

[11] Cruschina & Kocher, "A Surprise in the Past," 163; Detges, "How Cognitive is Grammaticalization?" 214.

[12] In English we need to insert 'and,' in Catalan it is not necessary.

The second step involves the gradual conventionalization of this practice by structuring the past event in such a way that the turning point—or a noteworthy action—is foregrounded.[13] According to Detges, this phenomenon does not follow regular grammaticalization patterns but is forged under the pressure of narrative strategies and rhetorical techniques that would improve storytelling.[14]

Other views include Jacobs, who—based on previous literature—claims that go-past is an influence from Old Occitan, and Juge, who dismisses Pérez Saldanya & Hualde and Detges, felicitously saying that this is not a phenomenon of go-past but a phenomenon of went-past.[15] Conducting a corpus analysis, he suggests that the phenomenon was conjugated using past forms of the verb anar (=to go) and later transformed to its modern state, thus disconnecting itself from any previous theories of narrative present that the aforementioned authors had used.

A cognitive approach to *passat perifràstic*

Moving on to the cognitive-cultural aspect of time that falls under the scope of this paper, it appears valid to explore the go-past periphrasis and the effects it has on speakers' cognition and identity. After all, it is said that when speaking about abstract notions, speakers often make use of metaphors that come from more concrete domains.[16] Extending that thought even further, it can be argued that people prefer spatial metaphors when they talk about time. From a cognitive approach, therefore, the grammaticalization

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[13] Colon, "El Perfet Perifràstic Català," 120; Colon, "Sobre el Perfet Perifràstic," 133; Perez Saldanya, *Del Llatí al Català,* 43; Perez Saldanya & Hualde, "Origin and Evolution," 56.

[14] Detges, "How Cognitive is Grammaticalization?" 226.

[15] Jacobs, "Present and Historical Perspectives," 231; Juge, "Narrative and the Catalan Go-past,"; Perez Saldanya & Hualde, "Origin and Evolution," 56; Detges, "How Cognitive is Grammaticalization?" 226.

[16] Clark, "Space, Time, Semantics," 27; Gruber, *Studies in Lexical Relations*, 15; Jackendoff, *Semantics and Cognition*, 17; Lakoff & Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 21; Pinker, *How the Mind Works*, 23; Talmy, "Force Dynamics in Language and Cognition," 50.

process of temporal phenomena using motion—and in this case spatial—verbs, is to be expected.[17]

With that being said, the relation between space and time in languages is asymmetrical as speakers talk more about time using space than vice versa.[18] As Sweetser has discussed and this paper aims to prove, historical language change has evidenced that "spatial representations are primary, and are later co-opted for other uses such as time."[19] Interdisciplinary evidence from psycholinguistics seems to support this claim.[20]

Langacker's Cognitive Grammar theory sets the background for one aspect of today's cognitive linguistics.[21] He claims that "language is neither self-contained nor describable without essential reference to cognitive processing" and views linguistic aspects, such as syntax and lexicon, as a continuum of symbolic units that symbolize conceptual content.[22] In addition, Talmy views structural properties—such as perception, or reasoning—as factors that influence how language organizes and shapes conceptual content.[23] Therefore, the combination of Talmy's and Langacker's theories suggests that language evolves in ways that align with the shared cognitive frameworks of a speech community, denoting a sense of linguistic identity, as languages differ among ethnic groups. In more precise terms, the local community can affect the way language encapsulates and explains conceptual meanings—such as time— around it.

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[17] Alverson, *Semantics and Experience*, 45; Clark, "Space, Time, Semantics," 27; Traugott, "Spatiotemporal Relations," 370.

[18] Lakoff & Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By,* 21; Lakoff & Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 34.

[19] Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics*, 39; Cassanto & Boroditsky, "Time in the Mind," 580.

[20] Boroditsky, "Metaphoric Structuring," 20; Boroditsky, "Does Language Shape Thought?" 18; Boroditsky & Ramscar, "The Roles of Body and Mind," 187; Núñez & Sweetser, "Looking Ahead to the Past," 443; Piaget, "The Child's Conception," 45; Torralbo et al., "Conceptual Projection of Time," 751; Tversky et al., "Cross-cultural and Developmental Trends," 551.

[21] Langacker, "Cognitive Grammar," 1.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] Talmy, *Cognitive Semantics*, 45; Talmy, *Vol II*, 13; Marchetti, *A Criticism*, online webinar.

Linguistic Relativity

The term 'Linguistic Relativity' refers to the influence of the language we speak on our perception of reality and is the subject of one of the most heated debates in the field of anthropological and cognitive linguistics. Philosophers and other educated individuals such as Locke, Condillac, Diderot and Herder had formulated ideas close to our modern ones since the seventeenth and eighteenth century.[24] In the nineteenth century, Humboldt and Saussure set the ground for the next century's formulations.[25]

It was not until the middle of the 20th century when anthropological linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf emphasized the need to steer away from hierarchical—arguably, colonial ranking—of the world's languages or the obsession with considering inflectional languages as superior.[26] While it is not easy to provide one specific definition of *Linguistic Relativity*, the different proposals based on this theory share one common axis: "They all claim certain properties of a given language have consequences for patterns of thought about reality*. . .* Language embodies an interpretation of reality and language can influence thought about that reality."[27] This theory has alternatively been termed the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. Therefore, the study of the grammaticalization of the Catalan preterit periphrasis merits research from a cultural and anthropological perspective as it can lead to interesting insights on the culture and cognition of the Catalan people.

Bad Data

As this paper concerns material that falls under the scope of historical linguistics and sociolinguistics, it is deemed necessary to

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[24] Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure*, 78; Aarsleff, *On Language*, 56; Gumperz & Levinson, *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity*, 40; Friedrich, *The Language Parallax,* 76.

[25] Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure*, 92; Aarsleff, *On Language*, 41; Lucy, "Linguistic Relativity*,"* 302.

[26] Sapir, "The Grammarian," 151; Sapir, "The Status of Linguistics," 161; Sapir, "Conceptual Categories," 128; Whorf, "Habitual Thought and Behavior," 135; Whorf, "Science and Linguistics," 210.

[27] Lucy, "Linguistic Relativity," 294.

address the difficulty inherited by such an endeavor. In order to study from a holistic perspective—cognitively or linguistically—the grammaticalization process of a phenomenon like the *passat perifràstic,* much more data is needed than mere written, usually literary language. In other words, a major part of everyday communication, that is, spoken discourse, is omitted from relevant studies due to the scarcity, if not unavailability, of useful data. This is what Labov termed *bad data.* As he explains, data is "rich in so many ways and impoverished in others. Historical documents survive by chance and not by design and the selection that is available is the product of an unpredictable series of historical accidents."[28] Therefore, it should always be kept in mind that what we study is just a window that has been physically provided to us by history, and one that we owe to protect for future generations to study too. With regards to this study, inclusion of spoken discourse would provide a better overview of the speakers' linguistic habits diachronically.

Methodology

The primary methodological approach followed in this article is based on a corpus analysis. It consists essentially of a qualitative analysis of primary sources on which I aim to apply the theoretical framework of Linguistic Relativity, Cognitive Grammar and Talmy's views on conceptual contents, all of which have been established already.[29] This provides a new perspective on the study of linguistic ideologies, cognitive and cultural linguistics.[30]

On Catalan historical data

In a general sense, scholars interested in historical research of the Catalan language are in the unfortunate position of not having access to the wealth of primary data available to their colleagues in other European languages, such as English. The primary source of

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[28] Labov, "Linguistic Methodology," 100.

[29] Sapir, "The Grammarian," 151; Sapir, "The Status of Linguistics," 161; Sapir, "Conceptual Categories," 128; Whorf, "Habitual Thought and Behavior," 135; Whorf, "Science and Linguistics," 210; Langacker, "Cognitive Grammar," 1; Talmy, *Cognitive Semantics*, 45; Talmy*, Vol II*, 13.

[30] Sharifan, "Cultural Linguistics," 2.

diachronic linguistic data in Catalan is the *Corpus Informalitzat del Català Antic* (Digital Corpus of Old Catalan, henceforth CICA), created by Toruella, Pérez Saldanya and Martines.[31] This corpus contains religious, historical, literary and other documents as well as correspondence covering from the early years of the 12th century until the second half of the 18th century.

Previous scholarship, such as the previously mentioned Detges and Pérez-Saldanya & Hualdez, has meticulously mapped the grammaticalization process in diachrony using corpus data.[32] I aim to complement this data with my own research, focusing on *temporal sequencing*, that is, the order the events happen on the time continuum, and *action completion,* whether an action has been completed or not. The application of the established frameworks on my results will yield significant insight on the cognitive use behind such constructions diachronically.

To gather the necessary data, an electronic search in the environment of CICA was conducted, searching for occurrences of *va, van* or *varen*, respectively, along with an infinitive ending in *-r(e).* I focused only on the third person since prior literature suggests that the grammaticalization process is closely connected to narrative contexts in which the third person prevails.[33] Therefore, the search string I used parsed all co-occurrences of 'go' third person present singular and plural along with words that include an indefinite amount of unknown characters but end in -r or -re, which are the typical endings for Catalan infinitives. After retrieving these tokens, all non-complying ones were manually reviewed and discarded as irrelevant (e.g *va sobre* where *sobre* is an adverb). Finally, the phenomenon's co-occurrence with temporal adverbs or sequential markers was examined to study temporal framing and action completion.

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[31] Torruella y Casañas, "Los ejes Principales," 23; Masanell i Messalles, "Beneficios de los Corpus Informatizados," 151.

[32] Perez Saldanya & Hualde, "Origin and Evolution," 57-58; Detges, "How Cognitive is Grammaticalization?" 228-30.

[33] Gandarillas, "Catalan Anar," 30; Pérez Saldanya & Hualde, "Origin and Evolution," 58.

Results and Discussion

Out of 8.656.847 tokens, 504 instances related to the search query I had entered. From these, 310 appeared as characteristic cases of the go-past phenomenon, as it is described in existing scholarship provided earlier. From the results, the complete absence of the phenomenon is visible until the first half of the 13th century, when the instances started to multiply. For an analysis and exploration of these results I refer to Gandarillas, as a historical-linguistic explanation of the grammaticalization process is beyond the scope of this article.[34]

Regarding the literary genre the instances are found in, 116 out of 310 (37%) instances are found in chronicles and historiographic works while 68 (22%) come from letters and diaries. Thus, 59% of the results come from works which, probably, employ more narrative tools than other works present in the corpus (such as religious or administrative texts). Out of the 310 results 72 (24%) were in the context of a sequential marker or temporal adverb. The more characteristic examples can be found in (a), (b) and (c) where the phenomenon is bolded while the sequential marker is underlined.

a. *E <u>quant</u> los marcelesos les viuren ferir, **van metre** l' estandart de sen Victor a bayx molt vilment (and <u>when </u>the Marseillians saw them hurting, they **put down** the standard of Saint Victor very vilely) [Crònica B. Mesclot, 13th century, p. III.121 line 15]*

b. *Cor, <u>primerament</u> **va donar** preu sufficient, e puys resebé lo caval qui li era offert (Because, <u>first</u> **he gave** sufficient compensation, and then received the horse that he was offered) [Diàlegs St. Gregori, 14th century, fol. 14v lines 16-17]*

c. *[...]cridaren: - Desperta, ferres! Desperta! -, et <u>tots a colp</u> **van ferir** dels ferres de les lançes en les pedres... ([...] they shouted: - Wake up, fires! Wake up! – and <u>suddenly</u> they **were hurt** by the fires and the spears and the rocks...) [Crònica R. Muntaner, 14th century, fol. 103vb, lines 12-13].*

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[34] Gandarillas, "Catalan Anar," 30.

Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis and the *go-past* periphrasis

The results above highlight a trend for the phenomenon to be present in contexts of temporal sequencing. We see that the *go–past* periphrasis is, indeed, used in narrative contexts when one event happened immediately after another, confirming previous bibliography. Despite the existence of another grammatical phenomenon with similar semantic meaning during that period, the gradual grammaticalization of the periphrasis under study prevails and, diachronically, eradicates the simple past, which is also visible in the examples I provided (*viuren* in (1), *resebé* in (2), and in (3), *ferren)*. In Gandarillas, the gradual phasing out of that tense is more meticulously analyzed.[35]

By applying the notions of *Linguistic Relativity*, one can argue that the periphrastic past was associated with events structured in a linear, explicit manner. Since this can indicate a cognitive framing of time as a continuum, it shows that Catalans expressed events in a discrete, complete way. By emphasizing this tendency with the use of periphrastic structures, it is evident that for Catalans being explicit with time-placement on that continuum was paramount.

Also, the emergence of such a phenomenon may indicate a cognitive-cultural tendency for explicit and sequential representations of actions, seeing that the grammaticalization of this structure prevails over other past forms.

Lastly, Catalan speakers may have cognitively prioritized the go–past periphrasis due to its alignment with straightforward and analytic structures. In the context of narrative scenarios, it is possible that a preference for clarity and simplicity in temporal distinctions was preferred.

Another thought: Language as identity

Talmy's and Langacker's theories suggest that languages evolve in ways that align with the shared cognitive framework of a community and can thus become a differentiating, symbolical factor, of that community.[36] As the grammaticalization of this phenomenon is profoundly different from the processes followed in other Romance languages, it has, perhaps, led to Iconization and the assertion of

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[35] *Ibid.*

[36] Talmy, *Cognitive Semantics*, 45; Talmy, *Vol II*, 13; Langacker, "Cognitive Grammar," 32.

distinctiveness and ethnical continuity through language. Catalans needed this continuity in order to keep their language alive during times when Madrid's authority was strict.[37]

Therefore, one can claim, that ethnosyntax, meaning the study of how a community's cultural norms and worldview shape the way language is constructed and meaning is conveyed, can be a critical factor in the linguistic identity of a national language and its fight for survival among dominant languages. [38] In our case, the grammaticalization of this go-past periphrasis in a totally different way, made Catalans feel their language was different and had different features than the dominant Spanish variety.

A cognitive-cultural approach on periphrastic structures

"So what?" might be the question of this journal's readers. Why are the results found in this study important and how can they contribute to the connection between language and movement?

The answers to the research question provided herein showcase that language shift is not motivated only by purely internal linguistic actions but can also be influenced by cognitive and cultural processes. While cognition is universal, the cultural elements that govern linguistic choices can differ, enabling modifications to the existing language used and giving birth to linguistic and dialectal variation.

Taking a step back, earlier I showed that cognitive universals have made parallels between movement and time explicit. Therefore, the paradigm followed for this paper's case study can be used for other temporal constructions as well. The results of this study are not confined to the Catalan language but work as a framework of how these theories can be applied elsewhere.

Conclusion

This study aimed at highlighting the cognitive effect of the Catalan *go-past* periphrasis (*passat perifràstic*) to the speakers of the language from a historical perspective, that is during the first years of its grammaticalization. After presenting the relevant linguistic

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[37] Irvine & Gal, "Language Ideology," 51; Andronis, "Iconization, Fracral Recursivity and Erasure," 267.
[38] Wierzbicka, "Ethno-Syntax," 314; Wierzbicka, *Chapter 2*, 14.

debate on the origins of the periphrasis, this study used a small-scale corpus search to identify the role the phenomenon had inside the language. By filtering the results through the theories of *Linguistic Relativity* and the claims of Talmy and Langacker, the cognitive-cultural profile of the phenomenon was emphasized.[39] Lastly, it was argued that this could have played a role in the survival of the minority language through the centuries, based on Irvine & Gal's theory of Iconization.[40]

With this study concluding, a lot still remains to be answered. Further studies on the cognitive semantics and cultural aspects of this peculiar grammatic phenomenon with special regards to its past meaning could shed further light on the reasons behind its eventually successful grammaticalization. Furthermore, synchronic studies on the cognitive load of users of the *go–past* periphrasis during use can yield information on the cognitive effect the outcome of this grammaticalization process has on native speakers when they speak Catalan and other languages (e.g Spanish), but also during second language acquisition by non-speakers. In diachrony, the application of *Linguistic Relativity* to other historical varieties can reveal a lot about the world's languages.

Of course, lack of historical material plays a pivotal role in any historical study, especially ones that deal with minority languages and entail unavoidable limitations. The fact that we do not, to my knowledge, possess any material that could potentially verify the claims of this article makes them linger between the sphere of hypothetical theorizing and reality. What's more, the very essence of grammaticalization processes in a historical perspective can easily become a topic for academic debate, adding to the uncertainty of the nature of the phenomenon.

In any case, this study showed that, apart from linguistic, other factors such as cognition can also play a major role in the grammaticalization of various phenomena. It is added to the toolbox of every scholar wishing to purposefully study the grammaticalization process of *passat perifràstic* in Catalan as well as to anyone interested in cognitive and cultural studies.

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[39] Talmy, *Cognitive Semantics*, 45; Talmy, *Vol II*, 13.
[40] Irvine & Gal, "Language Ideology," 51

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