On the *Promise* Cycle in the History of German

Introduction: In present-day German, *versprechen* and *verheißen* (both: 'promise') can be employed either as predicates describing a speech act of promising (cf. 1a and 2a; henceforth: *v*1s) or as epistemic predicates expressing an evaluation on the part of the speaker of the proposition's validity (cf. 1b and 2b; henceforth: *v*2s). In this talk, I will examine the origin of *v*2s and show, contrary to the claims made in the functional literature, that gradual changes can be explained within the generative theory too.

Puzzle I: Traugott (1997) who mainly elaborates on English *promise* and *threaten* claims that their epistemic development cannot be accounted for by using generative techniques. Since *promise* and *threaten* in their epistemic usage should be treated neither as lexical predicates nor as fully grammaticalized auxiliary verbs, but rather as an in-between class, there are supposed to be inconsistencies between the grammaticalization theory on the one hand and the generative paradigm on the other. Based on that, it has been argued that the gradience of word-class membership is not compatible with and applicable to generative accounts (Traugott & Trousdale 2010).

Puzzle II: Another problem, that immediately relates to German and that has not been picked up in the literature so far, pertains to the redundant availability of *verheißen*. Here, one may wonder why German, unlike many other European languages, possesses two similar predicates expressing a commitment to and an epistemic attitude towards what is embedded.

Analysis: In what follows, I assume the formal approach to grammaticalization advocated by Roberts & Roussou (1999, 2005) and provide an analysis showing that (i) *v*2s are to be re-analyzed as an upward and leftward movement in the syntactic structure, (ii) in present-day German *v*2s externally merge in *v*, (iii) Feature Economy is a motivating grammaticalization force of *v*2s (van Gelderen 2004, 2008). Similar to Lubańska (2010), I consider *v*1s as lexical verbs being base-generated in V and moving to *v*. This head-to-head movement gets lost as soon as *v*2s come into play. According to the Feature Economy Principle, they do not move to, but merge directly in *v*. The suppression of the movement begins in ENHG (1350-1700) and is due to the subject's formal features [-human] and [-animate]. As exemplified in (3), *versprechen* embeds the NP *Sicherheit* ('safety'), develops via a metaphorical extension a *v*2s-meaning and in the early 19th century its non-illocutionary use spreads to infinitival complements as well (cf. 1b). As in most other subject-to-subject raising structures, *v*2s extend their usage to the raised subject being equipped with the features [+human] and [+animate] yielding ambiguous interpretations: *Er verspricht ein guter Arzt zu werden* ('He promises to become a good doctor.').

As to Puzzle II, I adopt the approach to linguistic cycles in van Gelderen (2009: 2, 2011), according to which "a phrase or word gradually disappears and is replaced by a new linguistic item." In this connection, I will provide data indicating that (i) both predicates are subject to such a cycle, (ii) *verheißen* is older than *versprechen*, (iii) *versprechen* acquires the complement type order of *verheißen* (first DPs, then infinitival complements), (iv) at the beginning of New High German (1700-1900), *verheißen* takes a backseat and is about to be superseded by *versprechen* in either uses.

Implications: Consequently, two main questions remain to be asked. First, how are we to account for the raising status of (1b) and (2b)? This problem disappears if one looks at the structure of unaccusatives and the notion of covert A-movement. What subject-to-subject raising predicates and unaccusatives have in common is that they take one internal clausal

argument, that moves overtly to the subject position. In other words: they do not assign an external θ-role to the subject position. (1b) and (2b) seem to behave in exactly the same way. Second, if *v*2s merge in *v*, i.e. so low in the structure on the one hand and epistemic modality is rooted almost at the top of the TP domain on the other (Cinque 2001, Hacquard 2010), the question arises how the epistemic flavor of *v*2s comes about. Lubańska (2010) treats English *promise* as an inherent epistemic modal verb. In my opinion, however, this view cannot be maintained: since the *v* head is also associated with voice structures as well as with ergative and anticausative predicates, that in turn do not express any kind of epistemicity (Kratzer 1996, Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou 2004, Aldrige 2004), there must be another device triggering the modality. Correspondingly, I assume a covert EPIS(temic) possibility operator taking the scope over the whole *p* (Condoravdi 1989, Kissine 2008 and Krifka et al. 1995). I shall demonstrate that *v*2s cannot be evaluated against an epistemic modal base and so they differ from pure epistemic quantifiers in several respects.

Conclusion: The picture outlined above does not force us to assume, as Wurmbrand (2001) does, that *v*2s merge in AuxP, i.e., in the highest functional head of the modal domain. Since AuxP presupposes the [+finite] feature on the verb and as observed by Reis (2007), *v*2s can also be [-finite], there is no structural need having *v*2s merge as high as epistemic modal verbs do. Finally, the problem of the class membership appears to be solved too: whereas *v*2s, as lexical verbs, are generated in V and then move to *v*, *v*2s, as functional verbs, appear base-generated in *v*.

Data:

(1a) *Er **verspricht**, den bewährten Vorstand zu motivieren*
       he promises   the established board to motivate.INF
       'He promises to motivate the established board.'
       (COSMAS II, *St. Galler Tagblatt*, 18/2/2012)

(1b) *Der Urlaub **verspricht** schön zu werden*
       the holiday promises   nice to become.INF
       'The holiday promises to become pleasurable.'
       (COSMAS II, *St. Galler Tagblatt*, 15/2/2012)

(2a) *Der Bewerber **verheißt**, das Unternehmen mit Visionen zu bereichern*
       the applicant promises the company   with visions to enhance.INF
       'The applicant promises to enhance the company with (some new) visions.'
       (COSMAS II, *St. Galler Tagblatt* 22/5/1999)

(2b) *Die neue Regionalliga-Saison **verheißt** eine gute zu werden*
       the new regional.league-campaign promises a good to become.INF
       'The new regional league campaign promises to become a good one.'
       (COSMAS II, *Rhein-Zeitung,* 1/8/1998)

(3)   *Das Schaff*
       war von den Wellen dergestalt bezwungen/ daß wir
       keine andere Hoffnung hatten/ als etliche Stein--Klippen/
       welche im Meere [NP ***einige Sicherheit***] *wider*
       *das Wasser/ nicht aber wider den Hunger **versprachen**.*
       (BonF, Christian Weise (1684): *Jugendlust*, p. 112: 25-27, Upper Saxon)
       '(…); some stone cliffs promised a safety against the water, but not against the starvation.'

Selected references: M. Kissine (2008): Why *will* is not a modal, in: *Natural Language Semantics* 16: 129-155. M. Lubańska (2010): Grammaticalization and generative theory: the case of epistemic 'promise', in: *Belgrade English Language & Literature Studies* 2: 93-106. M. Reis (2007): Modals, so-called semi modals, and grammaticalization in German, in: *Interdisciplinary Journal for Germanic Linguistics and Semiotic Analysis* 12: 1-57. I. Roberts & A. Roussou (2005): *Syntactic change. A minimalist approach to grammaticalisation.* Cambridge: CUP. S. Wurmbrand (2001): *Infinitives. Restructuring and clause structure.* Berlin: de Gruyter.