

# A case of degrammaticalization in northern Swedish

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In the northern dialects of Sweden there are two verbs that are etymologically related to the Swedish verb *behöva* ('need'), see (1.). In the Piteå-dialect,<sup>2</sup> it is e.g. possible to use all of the varieties below (2 a-c; Brännström 1933:122 presents similar examples from Nederluleå):

(1) *Det **behöver** han inte göra.* Swedish  
it need he not do  
'he doesn't need to do that'

(2) a. *Hä **böhöv'n** it djära.* Piteå  
it need.heCL not do  
'he doesn't need to do that'

b. *Hä **bö'n** it **höv** djära.* Piteå  
it bö.heCL not höv do  
'he doesn't need to do that'

c. *Hä **bö'n** it djära.* Piteå  
it bö.heCL not do  
'he doesn't need to do that'

In northern Swedish, the Swedish infinitive ending *-a* is in general lost after bisyllabic or "heavy" stems (cf. Brännström 1993:34ff), and the present tense suffix *-(e)r* is absent in most northern Swedish dialects. The bare verb form *böhöv*, without suffixes, is thus not

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<sup>1</sup> Two anonymous reviewers have commented on an earlier version of this paper, for which I thank them. I also wish to express my gratitude to Ulf Teleman, who has suggested several improvements of the same earlier version. None but myself is responsible for remaining faults.

<sup>2</sup> I will mostly use data from Piteå throughout this paper; I thank Mattias Johansson and his family for providing data, as well as a number of informants from other areas in northern Sweden.

unexpected, and it may function as an infinitival verb as well as a verb in the present tense. As can be seen, the Swedish *behöva* is in the Piteå-dialect matched by *böhöv*, *bö höv* or just by *bö*. Below, I will use the term *bö X höv*-word order for those cases where items separate *bö* and *höv* (as in 2 b.).

This variation was mentioned by Noreen (1906:7f), but it was first discussed by Brännström (1933), who states that this phenomenon is present in all areas north of Ångermanland, with the exception for the northernmost districts (Kalix and Övertorneå). Due to the general decline of genuine dialects<sup>3</sup> in Sweden in recent times (Pettersson 2005: 201ff, Hallberg 2005:1691ff), there is at present a marked difference between generations (younger speakers do not use *höv* at all; see further below), but the speakers that do use the *bö X höv*-word order are still to be found in the same area as when Brännström performed his study. The approximate distribution of the *bö X höv*-word order (the northern and southern boundaries are better established than the inland spread) is depicted in figure 1.

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<sup>3</sup> A genuine dialect is used in a more restricted area than a regional dialect, and deviates more from the standard language (in this case, Swedish) (Pettersson 2005:202). Hallberg (2005:1692) uses the term *rural local dialect*.



Figure 1. *The approximate distribution of the bö X höv-word order.*

The modal verb *bö* is, I argue, derived from *böhöv*, with *bö X höv* as an intermediate stage, as suggested by Brännström (1933). This language change thus appears to be a clear case of degrammaticalization, i.e. prefix > auxiliary.

In the present paper, I will first briefly introduce the notions of grammaticalization and degrammaticalization (section 2). Then I discuss the origin and the detailed development of the dialectal varieties (in section 3), describing the phonetic, semantic and syntactic aspects of the proposed change. It is concluded that *bö* is derived from *böhöv*, and that the change *böhöv*

> *bö* indeed is an undisputable case of degrammaticalization.<sup>4</sup> Section 4 sums up the discussion, and in section 5 I make some final comments.

## 2. Grammaticalization and degrammaticalization – a brief overview

### 2.1. Two different notions of grammaticalization

Due to a number of foundational works in the 1980s (e.g. Traugott 1980, Heine & Reh 1984, Lehmann 1985), the process of language change that gives rise to different kinds of grammatical markers was given a prominent position on the linguistic agenda.<sup>5</sup> Following Meillet (1912), this type of language change has been named grammaticalization.

Since the 1980s, grammaticalization has been a hot topic within the field of historical linguistics: "During the past two decades, the revived interest in grammaticalization phenomena has firmly established itself as one of the most flourishing branches of historical linguistics." (Fischer & Rosenbach 2000:1). Several definitions of the notion have been proposed (Campbell & Janda 2001 present a compilation of various definitions). There are however two main approaches: the functional, which may be represented by e.g. Bybee et al (1994) and Heine & Kuteva (2002), and the formal, represented by e.g. Roberts & Roussou (2003) as well as van Gelderen (2004). Indeed, in his book about formal and functional perspectives in linguistics, Newmeyer (1998) spends an entire chapter discussing grammaticalization.<sup>6</sup>

The main differences between the functional and the formal camps with respect to the study of grammaticalization may be summarized as follows. First, the functionalists concentrate on the semantic and pragmatics aspects of grammaticalization, whereas the formalists' focus is syntactic change. Second, functionalists do not assume that there are clear cut borders between grammatical categories, whereas formalists do, and finally, a majority of the functionalists claim that grammaticalization is a distinct process of language change that is unidirectional, gradual and partly determined by the source construction, and thus allows

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<sup>4</sup> From a standard Swedish perspective, the *bö X höv*-construction actually appears so exotic, that when Westroth and Holm compiled Swedish dialectal data as a preparation for the Swedish Academy Grammar (Teleman et al 1999), they chose not to include it in their work (Westroth & Holm 1987) (Lisa Christensen (née Holm), pc).

<sup>5</sup> A thorough introduction to the history of grammaticalization is provided by Hopper & Traugott (2003:chapter 2).

<sup>6</sup> It is reprinted in *Language Sciences* 23, 2–3 (2001), an issue of the journal containing only articles criticizing grammaticalization theory.

for reconstruction of earlier stages of language based on just synchronic data – i.e, they are proponents of grammaticalization theory. The notion of grammaticalization theory and its applications is firmly rejected by linguists with a formal inclination – cf. e.g. Campbell (2001).

However, in spite of these differences, some researchers, e.g. van Kemenade (1999), point out that the two approaches ”complement rather than contradict each other in important ways” (van Kemenade 1999:998; cf. also Rosenkvist 2005), and in this paper no possible explanations will be excluded on merely theoretical grounds.

## 2.2. *Two similar notions of degrammaticalization*

One often discussed point of grammaticalization theory is the assumed unidirectionality; why do there seem to be a number of language changes that proceed in the opposite direction and which hence seem to refute unidirectionality? A great number of such changes, i.e. degrammaticalizations, are presented by e.g. Campbell (2001:127f, 132).<sup>7</sup> In a reply to this question, Haspelmath (2004) sets out to ”examine a substantial number of alleged exceptions to unidirectionality and show that only a very few of them can be accepted as real exceptions.” (2004:17). In the end, Haspelmath recognizes eight cases of genuine degrammaticalizations (2004:29; I return to these cases in section 4), claiming that all other cases that have been proposed to constitute examples of degrammaticalization actually are not.<sup>8,9</sup>

A genuine case of degrammaticalization is, according to Haspelmath, ”a change that leads from the endpoint to the starting point of a potential grammaticalization and also shows the same intermediate stages” (2004:27f). Obviously, Haspelmath’s definition depends on which notion of grammaticalization one is committed to; Haspelmath seems to take a more or less standard functionalist view on grammaticalization, as defined by e.g. Heine & Reh (1984:15):

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<sup>7</sup> As for the development of the Swedish modal verb *må* (‘may’), one of the most cited examples of purported degrammaticalizations (cf. van der Auwera & Plungian 1998:105, Lehmann 2004:177), it has recently been demonstrated that this verb actually did not change from grammatical to lexical meaning in the history of Swedish (Andersson 2007:chapter 4). *Må* appears with lexical meaning already in the earliest texts.

<sup>8</sup> Heine (2003), on the other hand, deconstructs the notion of degrammaticalization and concludes that ”none of the processes underlying degrammaticalization [...] clearly exhibits any directionality” (2003:175) and that neither do these processes share any common denominator. Hence, Heine suggests, degrammaticalization has no explanatory or descriptive value. Cf. also Lehmann (2004:170ff).

<sup>9</sup> Haspelmath (2004:27) introduces the term *antigrammaticalization* for such changes that are true opposites of grammaticalization.

”With the term *grammaticalization* we refer essentially to an evolution whereby linguistic units lose in semantic complexity, pragmatic significance, syntactic freedom, and phonetic substance.” From a morphosyntactic perspective, which is particularly relevant when it concerns the emergence of *bö*, Haspelmath also appears to encompass the view on grammaticalization as encoded in the cline of grammaticality (Hopper & Traugott 2003:7):<sup>10</sup>

(3) content item > grammatical word > clitic > affix

Also Norde (2006) starts out from this cline, in a recent contribution to the discussion of degrammaticalization. She assumes a more stringent position when defining degrammaticalization, however, suggesting that degrammaticalization involves "a SINGLE SHIFT to the left on the cline of grammaticality" (Norde 2006:202ff), and that it also must include more than one type of change – i.e, a morphosyntactic change must coincide with a semantic change, e.g.

Both Haspelmath (2004) and Norde (2006) stress that the identity of a construction must be preserved in a grammaticalization (and, accordingly, also in a degrammaticalization): “[...] grammaticalization changes modify the constructions they affect but preserve their identity” (Haspelmath (2004:28). I.e, grammaticalization never results in new constructions – this is however a quite vague concept, and Haspelmath clarifies his definition by stating that ”a change [...] is said to preserve its identity because it consists of numerous imperceptible changes with no radical break at any point.” (2004:28).

So, although there are some minor differences between the definitions of degrammaticalization suggested by Haspelmath (2004) and Norde (2006), they agree on most points. Degrammaticalization is a construction-preserving change which operates at more than one domain of language, the direction of which is opposite to that of grammaticalization.

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<sup>10</sup> The cline itself encompasses different types of change, and its descriptive and explanatory values can be questioned. Nevertheless, Haspelmath (2004) and Norde (2006) use the cline as a point of origin in their discussions.

### 3. The emergence of the verb *bö*

#### 3.1. The verb *böhöv*

According to Brännström (1933), *bö* is derived from *böhöv*, which in turn is related to the Swedish verb *behöva* ('need'). This verb was borrowed from Low German (*behoven*) in the Middle Ages, and the prefix appears to have had the same phonetic form in Swedish since then (Hellquist 1980:61).

In the northern Swedish dialects, the verb *böhöv* is unique in three respects. First, it is the only verb where the prefix *be-* has changed into *bö-*. The cause for the change *be-* > *bö-* is probably the vowel [ø:] in the root. Lindgren (1890-1918:69) proposes that "Be-höva has probably become *bö-* through assimilation of *e* with the following *ö*, hence a kind of *ö-Umlaut*, so to speak" (my translation). Apart from *böhöv*, there are also a few other instances of unstressed [e] before [ø:] which have changed into [ø] in the northern Swedish dialects,<sup>11</sup> but, crucially, no other verbs with the *be-* prefix have changed in a similar way, as was stated above.

The distribution of this sound change coincides with the distribution of the *bö X höv*-word order; north of the area where *böhöv* is found (in Kalix and Överkalix), *be-* has changed into *bi-* (Rutberg 1924-1931, Pihl 1948:26, 66) and south of this area, in Ångermanland, *be-* is preserved. This is an indication that the two linguistic changes are related to each other.

Second, *böhöv* is also the only one of the verbs with this prefix (*be-/bö-*) that may express a modal meaning. It may e.g. have the meanings 'must' or 'ought to' (Lidström et al 1991:26).

(4) *I böhöv djär'e.*

Piteå

*I böhöv do.itCL*

'I need/must/ought to do it'

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<sup>11</sup> The matter may be more complex; Lindgren (1890-1918) makes a point out of the fact that *be-* in the noun *behov* ('need') has not changed into *bö-*, which seems to support his Umlaut-hypothesis. However, in Old Swedish the same word actually appears as *böhoff* in at least one manuscript (Söderwall 1884-1973 I:10). The crucial point for the present discussion is however that no other verb than *böhöv* had a *bö-* prefix in 19th-century northern Swedish.

interpretation 1: 'I need to do it.'

interpretation 2: 'I must do it.'

interpretation 3: 'I ought to do it.'

The meanings of *böhöv* are discussed further in section 3.3.

The third factor is that the root *-höv* is a meaningless morpheme (a so called cranberry morpheme) – it is not related to any other item in the language – whereas most other roots in the group of *be*-verbs have clear lexical meanings.<sup>12</sup> One example is the verb *be-söka* ('visit'; the meaning of *söka* is 'search').

In the remainder of this section, I will first discuss and criticize Brännström's (1933) hypothesis concerning the origin of the *bö*, and then I will present the relevant semantic and syntactic circumstances in greater detail.

### 3.2. Brännström's (1933) hypothesis

The first explanation of the emergence of the verb *bö* (as in 2. c), was issued by Brännström (1933:121f).<sup>13</sup> He proposes that *bö* has originated from the verb *böhöv*. When *böhöv* was used as a modal verb it was always unstressed, he claims, and, through sound change, a weak form (*bö*) eventually emerged, in the following pattern:<sup>14</sup>

(5) *böhöv* > *böhö* > *böö* > *bö*

Accordingly, we would expect a meaning difference that separates *böhöv* from *bö*, and Lidström et al (1991:26) actually states that the verb *böhöv* only has a root meaning ('need'),

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<sup>12</sup> I thank the CCG-audience for pointing this out.

<sup>13</sup> The *bö X höv*-word order is also mentioned by Noreen (1906:8f), who suggests that the element intervening between *bö* and *höv* may be an infix. This hypothesis is clearly untenable.

<sup>14</sup> An anonymous reviewer claims that the Swedish verb *behöva* is regularly contracted into [bø:] in colloquial speech, and that this contraction is involved in the *bö X höv*-construction. However, there are two pieces of evidence that indicate that this is on the wrong track: first, it cannot explain the presence of *höv* in northern Swedish, and, second, it seems to be empirically incorrect. During the period 2005-2008, Swedish dialect recordings from all over Sweden were transcribed in the project Swedish Dialect Syntax (under my supervision). The transcriptions now constitute a corpus with 222 informants and approximately 500 000 words. The transcriptions are linked to the recordings, and a random sample of the verb *behöver* (85 tokens from all over Sweden) seems to confirm that it is only in the northern Swedish region that *behöver* may be pronounced as [bø:] by some informants. A preliminary version of the corpus can be found via the ScanDiaSyn webpage: <http://uit.no/scandiasyn/3517/>.

while *bö* has modal meanings ('must', 'ought to'). Clearly, the short form seems to function solely as a modal verb in the Piteå-dialect at present.

However, in the Nederluleå-dialect, spoken in an area adjacent to Piteå, Brännström (1933:115) noted that *bö* and the longer form *böhöv* both appear to be used as modal verbs:

- (6) a. *No **böhö** jö gå häim.* Nederluleå (Brännström 1933:115)  
 now *böhö* I go home  
 'now I need to/must go home'
- b. *No **böhövd'n** fa smisk.* Nederluleå (Brännström 1933:115)  
 surely *böhöv*-PAST.heCL get smack  
 'surely he ought to be smacked'

At the time of Brännström's investigations, both *böhöv* and *bö* were accordingly used as modal verbs in Nederluleå, and there was no functional division of the type suggested by Brännström. This is an argument against Brännström's hypothesis (but not a very strong one, admittedly).

Another argument against Brännström's hypothesis is the fact that *bö* and *höv* may appear in separate positions in the clause, with one or more elements between them. *Bö* and *höv* may e.g. be separated by one or more adverbials (7. a) or the subject and an adverbial (7. b) – the word order actually indicates that *bö* is a finite verb, situated in the V2-position, while *höv* in these samples seems to appear in the slot for infinitival main verbs (Teleman et al 1999:4:14ff).

- (7) a. *Han **bö** so jäddransh väl **höv** e* Norsjö (Brännström 1933:120)  
 he *bö* so darned well *höv* it  
 'he really needs it'
- b. ***Bö** dö it **höv**'e?* Piteå  
*bö* you-SG not *höv*.itCL  
 'don't you need it?'

Brännström did of course observe this word order pattern, and explains it as a contamination between the two forms of the verb (*böhöv* and *bö*):

[...] the clause with separable compounding [i.e. *bö X höv*] may have emerged from the other thus, that you, when you in the pronunciation had arrived to *bö*, associated and identified this with the prefix in the more complete form *böhöv* and then filled it up with a *höv*, inserted after the negation. (Brännström 1933:122; my translation)

There are a number of problems with Brännström’s explanation for the emergence of the *bö X höv*-word order, however. E.g, it is supposed that a speaker first selects *bö*, and then regrets this choice and inserts a semantically and syntactically undefined *höv*. This element is furthermore inserted further down in the clause and not adjacent to *bö*, which had been natural if *höv* had been interpreted as a missing verb root. Also, other verbs beginning with *bö*- (such as e.g. *böre* ‘begin’) have never been subject to *höv*-insertion, which perhaps would have been expected given Brännström’s explanation.

To conclude, Brännström’s explanation for the emergence of the verb *bö* is based on a Neogrammarian approach to language change. Since there appears to be more involved than mere sound change in this particular case, his explanation is however unsatisfactory in several respects; data contradict it, and he has to postulate *höv*-insertion, an otherwise completely unheard of mechanism, in order to explain the *bö X höv*-word order.

Below, I therefore present a more coherent hypothesis concerning the emergence of *bö*, utilizing current theories on semantic and morphosyntactic change.<sup>15</sup>

### 3.3. The semantic aspects of *böhöv*, *bö X höv* and *bö*

As discussed above, the source for *bö* is the verb *böhöv*. *Böhöv* may express a lexical meaning (8 a.) as well as modal meanings (following the definition of modality suggested by van der Auwera & Plungian 1998:80):

- (8) a. *I böhövd it öksa.* ‘need’  
 I need-PAST not axe  
 ‘I didn’t need the axe.’

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<sup>15</sup> An anonymous reviewer suggests that the Swedish verb *bör* (‘should’) may have been involved in the emergence of *bö*. However, Brännström (1933:123) explicitly rejects this hypothesis, showing that in the genuine northern Swedish dialect, Swedish *bör* corresponds to the verb *borda* or *bola*, and that possible occurrences of *bör* are late loans from standard Swedish. Furthermore, also this hypothesis fails to explain the *bö X höv*-construction.

- b. *Kleda böhöv no twettes väsamma.* 'need', root modal  
 clothes-DEF need probably wash-PASS immediately  
 'The clothes must probably be washed immediately.'
- c. *No böhövd'n fa smisk.* 'ought to', root modal.  
 surely böhöv-PAST.heCL get smack subject autonomous  
 'surely he ought to be smacked'
- d. *Nöckeln böhöv it ha köme bort.* 'needn't', epistemic  
 key-DEF need not have come away modal  
 'The key needn't have been lost.'

In (8 b.), *böhöv* is used as a modal auxiliary, expressing a possible obligation relating to the subject – this is hence a root modal meaning. Also *böhöv* in (8 c.) is a root modal auxiliary, although in this case it is subject autonomous (cf. Abraham 2002:36ff); the subject may have another opinion than the speaker (and in this particular case, this is highly probable).

Interestingly, *behöva* also may be used as an epistemic modal auxiliary (8 d.), although only in negative contexts – epistemic *böhöv* is hence a negative polarity item, just as Swedish *behöva* (Teleman et al 1999:4:290ff; cf. also van der Auwera 2001, who discusses Danish *behøve*, Dutch *hoeven* and German *brauchen*). In example (8 d.), *böhöv* is used to express the speaker's belief that it is not probable that the key has been lost, and it is hence epistemic: "Epistemic expressions qualify the truth of the proposition" (Traugott & Dasher 2002:16).

So, *böhöv* had a number of meanings, and it was used as both a main verb (with lexical meaning) and as a modal verb. These functions and meanings are also available for the *bö X höv*-variant, but, crucially, the verb *bö* can only be used as a modal verb with root meaning; see table 1.

Table 1. *Meanings of böhöv, bö X höv and bö.*

	main verb (lexical)	modal (root)	modal (epistemic)
<i>böhöv</i>	+	+	+
<i>bö X höv</i>	+	+	+
<i>bö</i>	-	+	-

Hence, a sentence such as (9 a: cf. 8 a.), in which *bö* is used as a lexical verb is judged to be ungrammatical by speakers of northern Swedish, and also epistemic interpretations of *bö* are ungrammatical (9 b: cf. 8 d.):

- (9) a. \**I bö it öksa.*  
*I bö not axe*  
'I don't need the axe.'
- b. \**Nöckeln bö it ha köme bort.*  
key-DEF need not have come away  
'The key needn't have been lost.'

To conclude, the meaning of *bö* indicates that this verb has lost the possibility to express lexical as well as epistemic meaning – it is clearly not more grammatical than the source construction *böhöv* or *bö X höv*. Rather, it has been semantically degrammaticalized.

### 3.4. The syntactic reanalyses of *böhöv*, *bö X höv* and *bö*

Reanalysis is a well known mechanism of language change (cf. Langacker 1977, Harris & Campbell 1995:chapter 4 etc) and it is plausible, I think, to assume that *bö* is the result of a segmental reanalysis (Rosenkvist 2004:35f). If so, the starting point must have been subject-initial clauses without clause adverbials. In such clauses, there is no material that indicates whether *böhöv* is a simple word or two separate words, and hence these clauses are syntactically ambiguous: *böhöv* can be analysed as a verb, or as an auxiliary *bö* plus the main verb *höv* (the analytical options are discussed further below). Furthermore, in some cases at least three semantic interpretations of *böhöv* are possible in northern Swedish (as shown above).

Thus, the sound change *be-* > *bö-* separated the verb *böhöv* from other verbs with the *be-* prefix, making it possible to dissociate *bö-* from the *be-* prefixes. *Böhöv* also developed a modal meaning (which in general is a feature of auxiliaries)<sup>16</sup> and it is probable that *böhöv* appeared quite frequently in ambiguous clauses. Given these phonetic, semantic and syntactic

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<sup>16</sup> Eide (2002:chapter 5) discusses modal verbs in the Scandinavian languages, and their interaction with other categories.

prerequisites, I propose that clauses such as *I böhöv'e* ('I need it') were reanalysed. The suggested reanalysis is illustrated in figure 2.

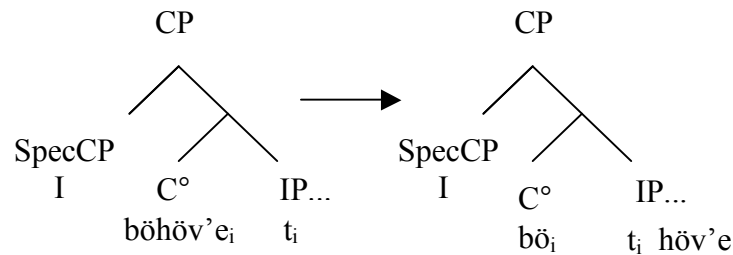


Figure 2. Reanalysis from verb to free bö and remnant höv.

A reanalysis such as the one in figure 2 would yield a new syntactic option for the language user: *bö* is analysed as an auxiliary verb (the form of which fits well among auxiliaries such as *ha* 'have', *få* 'get', *må* 'may' and *ska* 'shall') and *höv* as a quite meaningless main verb which, considering that *bö* expresses the salient semantic features (cf. 2. c), either must be assigned some other function or replaced with another main verb such as e.g. *djära* ('to do'). Overt elements in positions between C° and *höv*, such as the subject in SpecIP or clause adverbials, will indicate that *bö* and *höv* are separate items – the *bö X höv*-word order is thus a result as well as an indicator of the reanalysis.

The exact meaning of *höv* is actually hard to grip. Brännström (1933:123) notes that *höv* in clause final position may give a clause "a strong emphatic, rebuffering quality" (my translation), but he does not mention what *höv* could have meant in other positions. Interestingly, it seems that older contemporary speakers are quite uncertain regarding the meaning of *höv* – some say that it has no meaning at all, and some that it "intensifies" the clause" (as in 10. b). However, all speakers agree that *höv* cannot appear with any other verb than *bö* (11 a–b):

- (10) a. *I bö it fåra no.* Piteå  
*I bö not leave now*  
 'I don't need to leave now'
- b. *I bö it höv fåra no.* Piteå (some older speakers)  
*I bö not höv leave now*  
 'I REALLY don't need to leave now'

- (11) a. *I nöges it fåra no.* Piteå  
 I must not go now  
 'I don't have to leave now'
- b. *\*I nöges it höv fåra no.*

So, we find some confusion regarding the exact meaning of *höv*, and the contrast in (11.) indicates that *höv* is neither an independent verb, nor an independent adverbial. Furthermore, younger speakers of northern Swedish<sup>17</sup> are not even aware of the existence of *höv* – an indication that *höv* is disappearing from the northern Swedish dialects rather rapidly. It is also notable that *höv* is not included in Lidström et al (1991), which is an attempt to document the dialect of Piteå. This is, I claim, what we would expect if *bö* emerged through a reanalysis, stranding *höv*, while there is no reason why speakers should have stopped inserting *höv* due to contamination with *böhöv* (Brännström's hypothesis), given that *bö* and *böhöv* still both are in use. This is another reason why it is difficult to maintain Brännström's explanation for the *bö X höv*-word order, I think.

Hence, I find that it is reasonable to assume that *bö* actually emerged through reanalysis as illustrated in fig. 2, and that *höv*, once a verb root, accordingly became superfluous and eventually dropped out of use. Had *höv* regularly occurred in certain specific pragmatic contexts, it is plausible that speakers by pragmatic inferencing (Hopper & Traugott 2003:7ff) had assigned some specific meaning to *höv*, but this was apparently not the case. The former prefix *bö* has on the other hand taken over some of the meanings of *böhöv* and developed into a regular verb; it is as such inflected for tense in the same pattern as e.g. the verbs *ro* ('row') and *bo* ('live in').<sup>18</sup>

- (12) *I bödd it fåra åt stan.* Piteå  
 I bö-PAST not go to city-DEF  
 'I didn't need/have to go to the city'

By abandoning Brännström's explanation – as I have shown, there are several arguments against it – it becomes necessary to assume that the prefix *bö-* has developed into a verb,

<sup>17</sup> I have interviewed four younger speakers (aged 22-26) from Skellefteå.

<sup>18</sup> Swedish modal auxiliaries have preterite forms, unlike English auxiliaries.

leaving *höv* behind. In the following section, I argue that this change constitutes an instance of degrammaticalization.

#### 4. Is the emergence of *bö* a true case of degrammaticalization?

In this section the changes of *bö* and *höv* will be discussed further, and I aim to show that the emergence of the verb *bö* is a genuine case of degrammaticalization, given the definitions quoted in section 2.2.

Schematically, the change from *böhöv* to *bö* and *höv* may be illustrated as below:



Figure 3. *The split of böhöv.*

A prefix (*bö-*) has changed into a regular free verb (*bö*), while *höv* has an unclear status, at first, and at a later stage becomes obsolete. Given Haspelmath's definition (cf. section 2.2), the rise of *bö* was construction-preserving – the semantic changes occurred before the reanalysis, and the reanalysis itself occurred in syntactic contexts which were structurally ambiguous. Hence the reanalysis was imperceptible until it was revealed by the *bö X höv*-word order. This is of course a regular feature of reanalyses; as noted by Harris & Campbell (1995:61), a syntactic reanalysis "does not involve any immediate or intrinsic modification of its surface manifestation".

In his list of eight undisputed attested degrammaticalizations, Haspelmath (2004:29) includes no less than three changes of the type affix > independent word. In Irish, the suffix *muid* has change into a personal pronoun (Doyle 2002), in Saame the reconstructed suffix *ptaken* has become a postposition (Nevis 1986) and in Modern Greek the prefix *ksana* has turned into an adverb (Méndez Dozuna 1997). *Bö-* fits nicely in this group, being the fourth example of this kind of change. An important difference is however that *bö-* was a unique prefix, only occurring in one single verb, and thus the change did not affect an entire paradigm of prefixes (unless, of course, one claims that *bö-* constituted a paradigm in itself, albeit a very small one).

Also *höv* emerged through this change, but it is not clear whether the emergence of *höv* is a case of degrammaticalization too. Consider the changes of the linguistic properties of *bö* and *höv*, respectively, with Heine & Rehs' definition of grammaticalization (1984:5; it is quoted

above) and Hopper & Traugotts' (2003:7) cline of grammaticality as theoretical backgrounds (cf. table 2).

Table 2. *Bö and höv – degrammaticalization scores.*

	<b>semantic complexity</b>	<b>pragmatic significance</b>	<b>syntactic freedom</b>	<b>leftwards on cline</b>
<i>bö</i>	+	+	+	+
<i>höv</i>	- (?)	- (?)	+ (?)	?

The former prefix *bö-* has subsumed some of the meanings of the verb *böhöv*, and has thus clearly gained in semantic complexity. It is also more significant from a pragmatic perspective (it can now be stressed, e.g.), and it has furthermore become an independent word and is thus liberated from its former host, the verb root. Naturally, this implies that it also has moved leftwards on the cline of grammaticality – even more than one step (cf. Norde's 2006 view on degrammaticalization).

The change of *höv* is on the other hand considerably harder to grasp – it seems at present to have been deserted by the community of speakers, abandoned without proper meaning or function. Nothing of this kind happened in the similar degrammaticalizations mentioned by Haspelmath (2004:29) – the reason is of course that *böhöv* had a unique prefix, and the split of *bö* and *höv* thus was a unique change, only affecting a single item in the language. For some older speakers, *höv* now appears to function as an intensifying adverb, while others just reject it and find it meaningless. One may claim that it has gained in syntactic freedom, since the root has become a free word, but as has been shown above (11.), *höv* is bound to *bö* and is not accepted in any other context. Since *höv* seems to be quite impossible to define syntactically and semantically, it follows that the change that gave rise to *höv* cannot be properly analysed in terms of grammaticalization or degrammaticalization. Interestingly, this change is merely the flip side of the change that brought about the new verb *bö*. If the explanation for the change of *bö* that has been presented here is accepted, it cannot really be disputed, I think, that the emergence of the verb *bö* is a true instance of degrammaticalization. But this change also resulted in a languishing *höv*, and from the perspective of *höv* it is not at all clear what kind of change we are dealing with. It can be concluded that this particular change assumes different guises depending on the stance chosen by the analyst.

## 5. Final comments

In northern Swedish dialects, the former prefix *bö-* has developed into a regular verb, which is inflected for tense just as other verbs. The starting point for the process of change was the verb *böhöv*, and I have argued that there were four essential prerequisites that facilitated the change. First, the sound change that changed *behöv* into *böhöv*, thereby separating *bö-* from the group of common *be-*prefixes. This dissociation can be considered to be a case of what one could call de-analogy – in an analogous change an item is included in a new category/paradigm due to salient similarities with the elements that are understood as prototypical members of this category/paradigm, whereas, in this case, *bö-* was recategorized since it did not share phonetic properties with any class of prefixes in the language. The second prerequisite was the change of meaning, whereby *böhöv* 'need' developed the modal meanings 'ought to' and 'must'. A consequence of this change was that speakers could analyse *bö* as an auxiliary, and the former verb root *höv* as a main verb (or, possibly, as an adverbial). The third factor is that the root *höv* was a meaningless morpheme, unlike most other roots occurring in verbs with the prefix *be-*. The final circumstance is that *böhöv* probably appeared in structurally ambiguous contexts quite frequently, meaning that there were numerous opportunities for the language users to perform the structural reanalysis described in section 3.4. These phonetic, phonotactic, semantic and syntactic prerequisites thus formed a linguistic conspiracy which eventually led to the degrammaticalization of *bö*. Actually, such conspiracies seem to partake in degrammaticalizations quite often (cf. the cases discussed by Haspelmath 2004), and one possible solution to the problem that degrammaticalizations are so infrequent may be that degrammaticalizations require not only one but several triggers for change, which all point in the same direction.

The changes that led to the emergence of *bö* highlight the fact that language change may proceed in idiosyncratic and unpredictable patterns, and although a majority of grammatical language changes follow certain principles, it is never possible to state which grams have developed in a regular fashion and which have not, taking only synchronic facts about a certain language into account. E.g. in Rosenkvist (2004), the development of five Swedish conditional subordinators is studied in great detail, and it is shown that the changes of at least two (*om* and *ifall*) contradict the predictions of grammaticalization theory (Heine & Kuteva 2002). Hence, it appears that reconstruction along the lines of basic grammaticalization theory *may* yield a true picture of the diachronic facts, but it is not necessarily so. There is thus no

other way to determine factual paths of change in language history than detailed diachronic studies (cf. Hopper & Traugott 2003:138f).

Accordingly, it must be pointed out that any discussion about the relation between *böhöv* and *bö* will be dependent on reconstruction, since there is no historical dialectal material in which the proposed change can be studied in detail, to the best of my knowledge. All caveats inherent in reconstruction as a method for historical linguistics must thus be considered (cf. Newmeyer 1998:279ff). The validity of this specific reconstruction thus rests on factors such as general analytical coherence and plausibility in conjunction with detailed empirical data concerning the current and early 20th century usage of *böhöv*, *bö X höv* and *bö*. In comparison with e.g. the results presented by Heine & Kuteva (2002:6), whose work mainly rests upon information from grammar books, and who point out that "Most of the over 400 grammaticalization paths discussed in this book are based on fairly reliable [sic!] reconstruction work", the reconstruction of the emergence of the verb *bö* must be considered to be quite credible.

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