When does an affix cease to be an affix? The lexicalization of inflected closed-class nominals in some Uralic languages

In this paper I will address the phenomena of lexicalization of certain inflected forms of closed-class nominals, mainly pro-forms and relational nouns (traditionally called postpositions and adverbs in Uralistics, cf. e.g. Grünthal 2022). The main issue is how can productive inflection and lexicalized forms of same stems with same case markers be distinguished, and the other way around, when is an inflectional element considered a part of a case paradigm and when is it regarded as a synchronically unanalyzable part of a lexical form. By lexicalization I mean a phenomenon where a combination of stem and affix acquire distinct semantics thereby separating it from the original paradigm (some researchers can consider my examples as instances of grammaticalization [cf. Lightfoot 2011: 439–447], but this distinction is not important here).

The words in question exhibit at least partially productive case inflection, usually pro-forms can be inflected in (most) of the cases of a language, whereas relational nouns mainly take spatial case inflection. For example, consider the partial paradigms in Tables 1 and 2.

meźe	*meźe-ń*	*meź-ńeń*	*meź-d'e*	**_meźe-ks_**	*meźe-se*	*meźe-ste*	*meźe-s*
'what' [what-NOM]	'of what' [what-GEN]	'for what' [what-DAT]	'what' [what-PART]	**'why' [what-TRA]**	'where' [what-INE]	'from where' [what-ELA]	'(to) where' [where-ILL]

Table 1. Part of the paradigm of Erzya interrogative *meźe-* 'what' (adapted from Цыганкин [1980: 262]).

'behind'		'after'
ber-in 'behind' [behind-INE]		*ber-in* 'after' [after-INE]
ber-iś 'from behind' [behind-ELA]		*ber-iś* 'from after' [after-ELA]
ber-e '(to) behind' [behind-ILL]		**_ber-e_ 'after' [after-ILL]**
ber-ti 'along behind' [behind-PROL]		*ber-ti* 'along after' [after-PROL]

Table 2. Part of the paradigm of Udmurt *ber-* 'behind' and *bere* 'after'.

Table 1 shows part of the paradigm of the Erzya interrogative *meźe-* 'what'. The inflection is morphologically and semantically transparent except for the form *meźeks* 'why', as the transparent combination of the stem and translative case would mean *'be as/become what'. The situation in Table 2 is a bit more complicated. The table shows a partial paradigm of Udmurt relational noun *ber-* 'behind'. As can be seen from the left-hand column of Table 2, in spatial use the relational noun can be inflected productively in most spatial cases. In addition, there is the word *bere* 'after' in Udmurt, which is clearly the illative form of *ber-*. However, with this temporal meaning other spatial cases are impossible, as can be seen in the right-hand column of Table 2.

Now, the question is at what point does an inflected form cease to be part of a paradigm and become lexicalized. It is rather clear, that *meźeks* 'why' is a lexicalized form originating from the paradigm of *meźe-* 'what', as the combination of the stem and the case yields an emergent meaning. But what

about *bere* 'after'. In Udmurt, the illative can express temporal meaning, and the word is formally illative of *ber-* 'behind'.

Based on data from some Uralic languages (mainly Finnic, Mordvin, and Permic), I suggest that the most important criteria for distinguishing inflection from lexicalized forms is the semantic transparency of the form (cf. e.g. Bauer 2001: 97–99) on syntagmatic and paradigmatic levels. That is, a case must express similar semantics in e.g., content noun and relational noun inflection, and all the case forms a closed-class nominal can take must be able to express a meaning in the same semantic domain, e.g., a temporal meaning.

References:

Bauer, Laurie 2001: *Morphological productivity*. Cambridge studies in linguistics 95. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Grünthal, Riho 2022: Adpositions and adpositional phrases. In Marianne Bakró-Nagy, Johanna Laakso & Elena Skribnik (eds.) *The Oxford guide to the Uralic languages*. 961–969. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Lightfoot, Douglas 2011: Grammaticalization and lexicalization. In Berndt Heine & Heiko Narrog (eds.) *The Oxford handbook of grammaticalization*. 438–449. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Цыганкин, Д. В. (ed.) 1980: *Грамматика мордовских языков. Фонетика, графика, орфография, морфология*. Саранск.

I intend to present the paper in person.