Said, the overlooked English determinant
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This presentation describes a study in progress of the said and said in examples like a true copy of (the) said document. I am investigating the hypothesis that the development of the said and said do not fit the typical descriptions of grammaticalization but are examples of contact-driven category change spread from written Latin and French > written English > spoken English. I am also investigating the idea that bare said arose independently a number of times and am considering what factors may have lead from the said to bare said.

I argue that bare said (used before a noun without the) belongs to the lexical category of determiner (Dcat) and explore a suggestion from Breban (2012) that the said is a complex Dcat. I provide a diachronic corpus analysis of their use from the earliest examples. The use of (the) said is worth examining because of the rarity with which languages add instances of Dcat and said’s various unusual properties. Almost uniquely, it can appear either together with the before a singular, countable noun (e.g., the said document) or without (e.g., said document), without any apparent change in semantics. The development of a Dcat from a past participle is also unusual.

Dictionaries almost universally list said as an adjective in cases like the said document, and the use of bare said is broadly overlooked; neither the OED nor Huddleston and Pullum (2002), for instance, make any note of it. Bare said qualifies as Dcat based on the grammaticality of NPs of the form said + sing-count-noun, which typically require some element functioning as determiner (Dfunc); members of Dcat and genitive NPs can function as Dfunc, but past participles and AdjPs can’t. I tentatively argue that the said should be seen as a complex Dcat because they are found together in more than 99.7% of Dcat + said pairings. After the, modification of said is questionable (e.g., ‘the previously said document; cf. the previously said words). Modifiers of the noun also almost never appear between the and said (e.g., ‘the first said document).

Semantically, I find that, unlike similar expressions, said is compatible only with definite NPs (e.g., a previously mentioned document vs *a said document), and bare said is sufficient to mark an NP as definite. This is the type of semantic behaviour you would expect of a Dcat.

Although a word’s lexical category can clearly change over time, and dictionaries don’t always keep up, this is a very old change, predating all English dictionaries but having largely escaped notice. Many of the properties described here are not noted in the linguistics literature or by published reference works. There has been some limited discussion of the said (e.g., Breban 2011; Breban, Davidse & Ghesquière 2011; Breban 2012; Frajzyngier 1996; Kopaczyk 2013; Mellinkoff 1963), but this has not extended to bare said.

Among the earliest uses of the said are calques of the French de dit (“of the said”) c1400 (found in the PPCME2, Kroch & Taylor 2000), and calques from Latin (prae)dictus (Garner 2009). The first example of bare said appears essentially cotemporaneously in the 1384 E40/A1779 London Indenture (Fisher, Richardson & Fisher 1984), but there are very few examples until the late 1600s, when it suddenly becomes very common, (e.g., >100 times per million words (PMW) in the 1690s in the Evans corpus (Text Creation Partnership n.d.)), while the said is exceedingly frequent from the mid 1400s until the early 20th century (e.g., >500 PMW in the PPCME2 from 1475–1500, >1000 PMW in Evans in the 1690s, >300 PMW in the 1830s in the Google Books corpus (Michel et al. 2011). Today, said and the said are deprecated by legal writing guides (Garner 2011; Mellinkoff 1963), and their use is generally on the wane (e.g., <1 PMW in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies 2008)).

I tentatively conclude that new members of the closed classes can be added directly through language contact without undergoing the traditional processes hypothesized as part of grammaticalization.
References


