›schon‹ – ›früh‹ – › schnell‹

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Abstact

There obviously are semantic/conceptual connections between temporal uses of adverbs and particles meaning ›already‹ (*schon*), ›early‹ / ›late‹ (*früh/spät*), or ›quickly‹ / ›slowly‹ (*schnell/langsam*). If something is "already" the case, it's the case "earlier" than otherwise; if something already happened, it happened more "quickly". If something is done "quickly", it will be completed "earlier" than if it were done "slowly"; and so on. In Japanese, 'quickly' and 'early' even are the same word, *hayai/hayaku* (but 'slowly' and 'late' are different words.)

A proposal is advanced according to which ›quickly‹ in all its uses can be considered a gradable adjective on degrees of speed (if the notion of speed is appropriately generalized). This distinguishes ›quickly‹ from closely related ›early‹; the latter is a gradable adjective on times. Certain uses of ›already‹ are connected to the basic meaning of ›quickly‹ by both relating to a relatively advanced development of states-of affairs. On the other hand, ›quickly‹ and ›early‹ correspond via a correlation of quick completion with early completion of events.