

Intersubjectivity, Pragmaticalization and the development of grammaticalized constructions

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Abstract

This study examines the *it ... that* construction which has developed specialized pragmatic/discourse functions associated with detachment and objectivity in the expression of stance in formal (written) English. This structure performs two discourse/pragmatic functions: implicitness through suppression of self-reference and expression of speaker/writer stance (Berman et al, 2002; Berman, 2005; Biber & Finegan, 1989; Hyland, 2005). It is observable that in formal, interpersonal spoken English, in contrast, this construction is often blended with discourse markers and hedging devices that employ self-mention, e.g. *I mean, I think* as in *I think it is necessary that*. Remarkably, hedges such as *I think* are themselves expressions of speaker stance (Narrog, 2017), which might make these expressions redundant since they compounded with a construction whose main function is to express stance. They, however, also play a central intersubjectivity role in discourse by indicating the speaker/writer's attention to the interlocutor/reader (Traugott, 2003) or what Narrog (2017) calls hearer orientation. It follows that even though structurally discourse markers and hedging devices are speaker-oriented, pragmatically they are addressee/reader oriented. In formal spoken English, the demands of intersubjectivity appear to have further pragmaticalized the construction so that it has come to be associated with stance only, thereby losing the implicitness feature as a consequence of blending with personal expressions. Another observable consequence of intersubjectivity relates to how the construction has acquired new functions not found in the written register, e.g. eliciting stance, e.g. *is it your conclusion that*. Based on this, it will be argued along similar lines of Diewald (2011) that pragmaticalization, which involves speaker/writer attitude towards the hearer/addressee has to be an aspect of grammaticalization since, as the target construction demonstrates, it influences the grammatical construction itself.

References

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