

From verb of visual perception to interactional discourse markers: the case of *šāf* ‘to see’ in contemporary Moroccan Arabic

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The aim of this research is to investigate the characteristics and occurrences of interactional discourse markers originated from the verb of visual perception *šāf* ‘to see’ in Moroccan Arabic, an exclusively spoken variety of Arabic, within the framework of pragmaticalization¹.

Discourse Markers (DMs) are linguistic units which develop discourse-pragmatic properties by drawing from a heterogeneous set of sources categories, including verbs. Research on the development of deverbal forms has highlighted that cross-linguistically it is common for them to evolve from verbs of cognition and perception. Also, it is a recurrent tendency that verbs of perception eligible for DM status acquire interactional functions. A number of studies², moreover, demonstrate that some interactional DMs are attested in a wide-range of (un)related languages, such as those derived from verbs expressing visual perception.

In Moroccan Arabic, the most widespread verbs of visual perception, **ra* and *šāf*, are undergoing a grammaticalization/pragmaticalization process. As Taine-Cheikh states in one of her recent works (Taine-Cheikh 2013), the first of them, crystallized into the fixed particle *ṛā-* (< second person singular imperative of Classical Arabic *raʔā* ‘to see’), may serve a “presentative” or “actualizing” function depending on the context³, while no verb-based DMs derived from *šāf* seems to have been attested.

However, on the basis of recent analysis of Moroccan Arabic data, collected systematically in the last years, I noticed an interactional use of two forms arisen from *šāf* ‘to see’: the imperative *šū(u) ~ šūf* ‘look!’, and a conjugated form of the perfective verb (*ši ~ šti ~ šafti* ‘you saw’).

By comparing features of their different contexts of use, the study provides a synchronic description of the frequency and functions of each form, and it tries to prove that they act as interactional DMs as a result of pragmaticalization.

¹ I refer to pragmaticalization as a “grammaticalization of discourse functions” (cf. Diewald, 2011: 365).

² We can mention some works on Italian (Manili 1983, 1986; Mara 1986; Waltereit 2002; Bazzanella 1990, 1995, 2001, 2006, 2010; Kleinknecht 2007; Ghezzi 2012; Ghezzi and Molinelli 2014); on Spanish (Romero Trillo 1997; Pons Borderia 1998); Marín Jordà and Cuenca (2000), Marín Jordà (2005) on Catalan; Brinton (1996, 2001, 2009) on English; Rossari (2006) and Bolly (2010, 2012) on French; Dostie (1998, 2004) on Quebec French, in addition to studies devoted to cross-linguistic comparison (such as Rhee 2001; Fagard 2010; Van Olmen 2010, 2012).

³ See also Caubet (1992).