

## **Grammaticalization and the IT-cleft construction**

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In this paper, I reexamine the development of the IT-cleft construction from the perspective of grammaticalization. In a previous study, Ball (1991) finds that the IT-cleft was initially restricted to NP foci, with the relative clause expressing presupposed information that is already known to the hearer/reader. However, it is well-known that the modern day IT-cleft also permits a range of non-NP foci and that the relative clause is no longer restricted to presenting information that is necessarily known to the intended audience. In contrast to Ball's analysis of these developments, I argue that they provide evidence of the grammaticalization of a construction, with meaning gradually becoming constructional rather than strictly compositional. Ball (1991) suggests that the appearance of IT-clefts with AdvP/PP foci was the result of a syntactic merger with impersonals, which she argues to be "functionally similar" to the IT-cleft. In a follow-up paper, Ball (1994) argues that the 'informative presupposition' (IP) IT-cleft did not develop as an extension of the IT-cleft, but has a complicated origin, influenced by multiple constructions, including the IT-cleft, cleft-like impersonals, the new AdvP/PP IT-cleft as well as inverted pseudo-clefts.

Although Ball's (1991, 1994) focus is exclusively diachronic, her analyses are heavily influenced by her understanding of the modern day construction. She argues that the NP-focus IT-cleft has a different structure to the non-NP-focus IT-cleft and is strongly led by Prince's (1978) suggestion that IP IT-clefts are functionally distinct from IT-clefts with a presupposed relative clause. In a largely qualitative study, Ball uses diachronic evidence to support these synchronic analyses, by showing that these different aspects of the modern day IT-cleft have separate origins.

Using data from the English Parsed Corpora series, and a more sophisticated search engine that enables quantitative research, I examine the extent to which the historical development of the IT-cleft can be shown to be a case of gradual constructional emergence. I suggest that by allowing a wider range of focal elements, the IT-cleft construction shows increasing schematicity, relating to the concepts of mismatch and type-shifting (Michaelis, 2003). This analysis is supported by the synchronic accounts of Davidse (2000) and Kiss (1998) who argue that non-NP items take on referential characteristics in order to fill a strictly nominal position in the construction.

Contra Ball (1994), I suggest that the 'informative presupposition' (IP) IT-cleft did not arise as a separate construction to the IT-cleft. I argue that new information in the relative clause is accommodated into the existing IT-cleft construction via coercion. This appears to be the only satisfactory way of explaining Prince's (1978) comment that the IP IT-cleft stylistically marks a new piece of information as known or unasserted. In accordance with Lambrecht (1994) and Lehmann (2007), I suggest that this development involves grammaticalization, whereby the information structure becomes associated with the construction as a whole and is no longer predictable from the meaning of its parts. The hypothesis that constructions grammaticalize in this way is consistent with Traugott's (Forthc) work on WH- and ALL-clefts. Although this line of argumentation is explicitly rejected by Ball (1994), she does not provide an alternative causal theory as to why (NP-focus) IP IT-clefts should appear.