

## Constructionalization, grammaticalization and discourse The case of *magari*.

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Recent grammaticalization studies (Bybee et al 1994, Bisang, 1998, Traugott, 2003, Diewald, 2004) have shown that constructions are to be taken as the framework within which lexical units are assigned grammatical meaning. In these studies, *constructions* are thus considered *as the context* for grammaticalization. Less explored is the hypothesis that *constructions themselves* may be assigned grammatical meaning and “once grammatical” may be “assigned increasingly grammatical functions”.

It is clear that such a hypothesis would interestingly extend the borders of grammaticalization, especially if one takes constructions in the technical sense of Construction Grammar (Fillmore, Kay and O’Connor, 1988, Goldberg, 1995, Michaelis, 2006, Östman, 2005). In this framework, in fact, any conventionalized association of form and meaning – ranging from single words to discourse – is considered as a construction. Accepting the hypothesis that constructions may undergo grammaticalization processes would entail that grammaticalization is not necessarily limited to morphologization, but that there may be grammaticalization at any level of linguistic structure.

The literature provides some evidence that complex constructions can undergo grammaticalization processes. Squartini (1998), for example has shown that Romance verbal periphrases have grammaticalized as aspectual markers. Lombardi Vallauri (2004) has shown that the protasis of Italian hypothetical constructions, gaining autonomy from the apodosis, has turned into a free conditional that fulfils a number of pragmatic functions (offers, requests, generic questions, etc.).

The present work focuses on the grammaticalization of discourse level constructions. Building on Pietrandrea’s (2007) hypothesis that Italian epistemic adverbs are bonded within discourse level constructions that contribute to their semantic definition, the history of the epistemic adverb *magari* (roughly corresponding to “I wish”, but also to “maybe”) is studied. Data drawn from a corpus of Italian literature show that *magari* was introduced as an optative marker in the XIII century. Its occurrence in ambiguous contexts admitting both a wishing and a neutral reading for the propositional content in the scope of *magari* paved the way for a semantic bleaching of this marker. This allowed *magari* to occur in contexts where it had scope on a unit belonging to a list of alternative options occupying the same syntactic position. These contexts forced the interpretation of *magari* as a generic non factual marker indicating that the propositional content in its scope is but one of a number of possible options. As a matter of fact, the non factual *magari* is nowadays regularly bonded within discourse constructions characterized by lists of units occupying the same syntactic position, such as the list of PPs in (1) or the list of clauses in (2):

- (1) *Poteva restare magari in un ambiente, in una foresta piuttosto che in una giungla nel deserto*  
‘He could stay maybe [magari] in a scene, in a forest, or in a jungle, in the desert’
- (2) *Lo pensava e magari lo ha detto agli amici*  
‘He thought that and maybe [magari] he told his friends’

Clearly, this discourse context not only favoured the bleaching of *magari*, but it has “constructionalized” and grammaticalized, creating a grammatical constructional marker of non factuality.

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