

## The French inchoative *se mettre à* and the grammaticalisation process

Filip Verroens (Ghent University)

In this paper, based on ongoing Phd-research, we will discuss the French inchoative construction *se mettre à* and its possible relation to the grammaticalisation process. Our analysis will be corpus-based and presented from a purely synchronic perspective.

On the syntactic level, we will examine in detail the valency frame of the construction, with particular attention to the function of the reflexive *se*. According to Ruwet (1990) the clitic *se* in *se mettre à* is a “pronom réfléchi” whereas Gross (1975) and Peeters (1993) classify it rather as a “pronom neutre”. We will take up the debate and examine to what extent an analysis in terms of reanalysis can be proposed.

On the lexico-semantic level, most Romance languages show similar inchoative constructions based on a main verb with the proper meaning of *to take* or *to grasp* (Coseriu 1976). If Schogt (1968) is to be credited, the construction in question is derived from the full lexeme *mettre* (to place something somewhere) and *se mettre à* would have gone through a progressive process of semantic bleaching. In this respect, he notices a difference in the semantics of *mettre* between examples (1) and (2).

- (1) Je me mets à travailler.  
 (2) Je me mets à réfléchir

In (1), contrary to (2), the verb would maintain some characteristics of a “motion” event. If, however, the process of semantic bleaching of the inchoative *se mettre à* is to be considered as fully completed, it should be semantically empty as an aspectual morpheme. Consequently, the construction should be used in an entirely neutral way and be compatible with all types of verbs (Schmid 1984). We will examine to what extent this is actually the case. Evidence for this paper is taken from *Frantext* (written literary corpus), *Le Soir* (written journalistic corpus) and *Corpaix* (spoken French)

### References

- Coseriu, E. 1976. *Das romanische Verbalsystem*. Tübingen: TBL Verlag Gunter Narr.  
 Gross, M. 1975. *Méthodes en syntaxe: régime des constructions complétives*. Paris: Hermann.  
 Peeters, B. 1993. *Commencer et se mettre à: une description axiologico - conceptuelle*. *Langue française* 98:24-47.  
 Ruwet, N. 1990. Des expressions météorologiques. *Le français moderne* 58:43-97.  
 Schmid, A. 1984. Ein Beitrag zur Phraseologie des Französischen: Syntaktisch-semantische Untersuchung zu *mettre* in festen Verbindungen. Innsbruck: Amoe.