

A diachronic approach to extraposition

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In this paper we will, on diachronic grounds, propose a different delineation of the extraposition construction than the one assumed in the English synchronic tradition with expletive *it* and *be* in the matrix (e.g. Huddleston & Pullum 2002). We argue that the schematic extraposition template also subsumes matrices *there is* and *I have* (and related expressions), as in *It's / there's / I have no doubt she will do well at the Olympics*. Both the whole construction and the component elements constitute very similar form-function pairings, as shown particularly clearly by matrices that (came to) occur in all three variants over time. In support of our redefinition of extraposition we will present diachronic qualitative and quantitative analyses of the extraposition structures developed by *it/(there) be / (have) no/any/a wonder (that), there/(it) be/have no/any/a need to, it/there be/ have no/any/a doubt (that)*. They all have lexical and grammatical uses, with grammaticalization processes being accelerated by the presence of negative polarity items (e.g. Davidse, De Wolf & Van linden forthcoming). We hold that the predicative, existential or possessive forms of the matrix express different meanings in the lexical uses and even in the grammaticalized uses, which may involve modal, mirative or interactional meanings. Their development goes back to Middle English (*doubt*, with *tweo* as its Old English counterpart) and Old English (*need/ neodðearf/ ðearf* and *wonder*). Datasets were extracted from the York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose (YCOE), the Penn corpora of Historical English for Middle (PPCME) and Early Modern English (PPCEME), the Corpus of Late Modern English texts (CLMETEV), and the Present-day British English subcorpora of WordBanksOnline.

The earliest variants of the extraposition schema are generally assumed to have matrices without overt subject or with cataphoric *þæt* (Van linden 2012). The latter has distinct discourse-pragmatic properties as it “claims the audience’s attention and anticipates that something of high information value follows in the appositional clause” (Möhlig-Falke 2012:176). The subjectless matrix with *be* alternated with, and was replaced by either predicational *it* or existential *it/there* when the subject became syntactically obligatory. (Existential *it* occurred in older stages of English in simple existential clauses (Breivik 1983: 278, 319; López-Couso 2006:182), as well as in extraposition matrices.) The fact that predicational and existential extraposition matrices share the same origin is diachronic evidence for including the latter into extraposition constructions.

We argue in addition that the formal and semantic similarities between structures like *it/there is no wonder/need/doubt* and *I have no wonder/need/doubt* suggest inclusion of possessive matrices in the extraposition schema. They are all followed by a clausal complement spelling out what the wonder, need or doubt is about, and the grammaticalized uses express attitude attributed to the speaker either overtly (*I have*) or covertly (*it/there is*).

In reconstructing the general grammaticalization paths followed by these expressions, we will pay special attention to their thetical variants, which include the early constructions with cataphoric *that* as well as parenthetical variants of the three matrix types, which typically postdate the extraposed ones. We will reflect on the pros and cons of viewing these variants as part of Thetical Grammar, whereas core extraposition is part of Sentence Grammar (Kaltenböck et al. 2011).

References

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