(DET) fact is (that) construction in English and Dutch: A Functional Discourse Grammar account

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This paper will deal with a frequently used construction in English and Dutch which can be broadly described as the *(DET) (adj) fact is (that)* construction; some examples can be found in (1) and (2):

(1) a. *The fact is,* there's been a complete lack of consultation. (BNC, S_meeting)

  b. And *the plain fact is that* Hector isn't. (BNC, W_fict_prose)

(2) a. *Vaststaand feit is* dat Kolonel Weber daar was (S, CGN)
        definite   fact is that Colonel Weber there was

  b. *Feit is dat* verbeteringen tijd   kosten. (W, 38M)
        fact is that improvements time   take

Entirely different accounts have been given of these constructions in English and Dutch: for English, Aijmer (2007) argues that, similar to the *thing is* construction, *the fact is that* is becoming grammaticalized, gradually changing from a matrix clause into a pragmatic marker; Hoeksema (2000), focusing on Dutch constructions with bare nouns (*feit is dat*) only, analyses these constructions as topicalized predicative (copular) constructions.

The present paper has two major aims. Using authentic data, the paper will begin by providing a detailed discussion of the differences and similarities between the English and the Dutch constructions in both form and function. The formal aspects to be considered will include (i) the presence and form of the determiner; (ii) the presence and type of any modifier (in terms of scope and function), (iii) the form of the complement clause (e.g. subclause vs. main clause word order in Dutch); and (iv) the use of punctuation, stress and intonation. As for their specific pragmatic and discourse functions, a detailed analysis will be provided showing subtle but systematic differences between the two languages.

The second aim of this paper is to propose a Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG) analysis of constructions of this type reflecting their specific formal and functional properties. It will be argued that the sequence *(DET) fact is (that)* functions as a semi-fixed pragmatic and/or discourse-rhetorical marker in a presentative (non-specificational) construction; as such, it is not regarded as a matrix clause, but as an extra-clausal constituent. It will be shown that by exploiting the distinctive characteristics of FDG, an accurate and insightful account can be provided of (i) the nature of both the (different degrees of) variability exhibited by these constructions as well as constraints on this variability, and (ii) the interaction between the pragmatic, semantic, syntactic and phonological features of these constructions, demonstrating the non-arbitrary relationship between their function and their form.

References

Aijmer, Karin. 2007. The interface between discourse and grammar: The fact is that. In *Connectives as discourse landmarks*, Agnes Celle & Ruth Huart (eds), 31-46. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Hoeksema, J. (2000). Verplichte topicalisatie van kale enkelvouden: *de feit is dat*-constructie. *TABU* 30: 113-142.