

From clause to adverb: On the history of *maybe* and related forms

MARÍA JOSÉ LÓPEZ-COUSO & BELÉN MÉNDEZ-NAYA

University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain

Complementation structures in which an originally complement-taking-predicate clause is downgraded to a parenthetical provide one of the most common developmental paths for pragmatic markers. This is, for example, the origin that has been posited for widely studied first person epistemic parentheticals like *I think*, *I guess*, and *I gather* (cf., e.g., Thompson & Mulac 1991; Boye & Harder 2007; Kearns 2007; but cf. Brinton 2008: chapter 10). On the other hand, impersonal parenthetical clauses with a third person singular subject (e.g. *it seems*) have not attracted so much scholarly attention. These are precisely the focus of our ongoing research project (cf. López-Couso & Méndez-Naya 2014a; 2014b; forthcoming). Interestingly, some of these third person parentheticals have lost their clausal features, thus coming close to adverbs. Examples of this process of adverbialization are Middle and Early Modern English *methinks* (cf. López-Couso 1996; see also Palander-Collin 1996; Wischer 2000), as in (1), and Contemporary American English *looks like*-parentheticals (cf. López-Couso & Méndez-Naya 2014b), as in (2).

- (1) Respect to all kind of Superiours is founded **methinks** upon Instinct. (1711 R. Steele *Spectator* No. 6. 5; OED s.v. *methinks* v.a)
- (2) He didn't like it, **looks like**, just shouted. (COCA 1990 CNN_King)

According to the OED (s.vv.), epistemic adverbs such as *maybe* and *mayhapp(en)* (cf. (3a-b)) also originate in the reanalysis of a clause featuring the modal *may* followed by the verb *be* or a verb meaning 'happen'.

- (3) a. This, **may be**, was the reason some imagin'd Hell there. (1661 J. Glanvill *Vanity of Dogmatizing* 175; OED s.v. *maybe* adv., n. and adj. A.1.a)
- b. Or hast thou **mayhap** wandered wide? (1870 W. Morris *Earthly Paradise* II. iii. 37; OED s.v. *mayhap* adv.)

In this paper we examine the development of *maybe*, *mayhapp(en)*, and related forms (cf. OED s.v. *may* v¹, Phrases 2) from clauses to adverbs. Data are drawn from the standard historical dictionaries and various historical English corpora (*Helsinki Corpus*, *ARCHER*, *Corpus of Early English Correspondence*, *Corpus of English Dialogues*, and *Old Bailey Corpus*), with special emphasis on texts showing a high degree of speechlikeness. The development of these epistemic adverbs is considered here as an instance of grammaticalization, featuring decategorialization, fusion, semantic bleaching, and pragmatic strengthening.

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