Brinton, L. J. (2008). *The Comment Clause in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. xvii+298 pp. (ISBN-13: 9780521886734)

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Considerable attention has been devoted to a class of single lexical items known as pragmatic markers or discourse particles (e.g., *well, like, oh, um*). These are extra-syntactic entities, or outside the standard syntactic structure of an utterance, and their various pragmatic and discourse management functions are fairly well understood. Brinton's newest volume draws attention to a related class of items known as comment clauses (*I think, I find…*), which are assumed to be pragmatic or discourse markers, similar in origin and function to their monolexemic pragmatic marker counterparts. Brinton shows that matters are not so simple, as their origin and linguistic features differ from monolexical markers, e.g., comment clauses have an internal syntactic structure, unlike the monolexemes. Yet others (e.g., Schiffrin, 1987) have assumed that *you know* and *I mean* can be analyzed like the monolemexes. Brinton examines evidence from historical sources to show that the use and development of such phrases is more complex than one would assume.

Brinton reviews various classifications of comment clauses in the literature in the first chapter, noting that many are first-person expressions (*I reckon, I hope, I admit, I see, I understand*) and fewer in the second person (*you know, you see*) or third person *(so it seems, they say*). They seem similar functionally and prosodically to sentential adverbs (*frankly, thankfully*) and other adverbials, and they are parenthetical — not integrated into the syntactic structure, but juxtaposed with or inserted into the utterance structure, constituting a separate tone group. Comment clauses are typically viewed as matrix clauses that became grammaticalized, e.g., *I think (that)* reducing to *I think* and taking on pragmatic functions. But Brinton notes that some markers (*say, look, as you see, as it were, if you will*) are not explained so easily as derivatives from matrix clauses.

Brinton (1996) and others have shown how monolexical markers derived from other lexical classes, a process known as grammaticalization. This involves decategorialization (moving from a major to a minor word class), semantic generalization (emptying or bleaching of their original referential, propositional, or representational meaning), restriction to pragmatic functions related to speaker and hearer perspective (interpersonal meaning) or processing (procedural meaning, such as managing discourse production or interaction), and even phonological

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reduction. The grammaticalization process is discussed in the second chapter, in regard to lexical markers and then for comment clauses. While grammaticalization of matrix clause expressions like *I think* seems like the intuitive approach, this is not so simple, due to the internal syntactic structure of comment clauses. Thus, how does an entire phrase grammaticalize and move, and how could phrases like *I think* can be inserted at different points in a sentence? Monolexical markers like *well, oh,* and others do not enjoy such freedoms. The proposed explanations for a former matrix phrase detaching and freely appearing at different locations have often been transformational approaches; for example, it is claimed that *I think that* first loses the complementizer *that*, then detaches and moves to other positions (citing, e.g., Thompson and Mulac, 1991). Others, as Brinton notes, object to this approach because of the semantic non-equivalence of such parentheticals; the meaning and function of *I think* as a comment clause differs markedly from its matrix clause meaning and function. Citing Jackendoff (1972), Brinton notes that this approach fails to explain the ungrammaticality of negative comments (*John is, *I don't think, a fink*).

This matrix clause hypothesis, which regards *that*-deletion as a stage in the progression toward comment clauses, cannot entirely explain the historical data for the more common first-person phrases, e.g., *I pray, I think, I'm sorry, I'm afraid*. In fact, *that*-complements with such phrases in earlier stages of English were not so common, or were followed by other complements like *wh*-phrases. This hypothesis encounters problems with phrases of second and third person origin (*mind you, let alone*), nominal-relative clauses (*what's more surprising*) and phrases like *I expect* that were originally more common with dependent infinitive phrases than *that*-complements. Thus, the historical evidence does not support the standard hypothesis. However, the grammaticalization framework also encounters difficulty in explaining the structural and functional changes involved.

The different conceptualizations of grammaticalization and related concepts are then surveyed — lexicalization, decategorialization, pragmatic bleaching, pragmatic strengthening, subjectification, idiomatization, pragmaticalization, semantic changes, changes in grammatical scope of markers, and others (Chapter 3). With phrases like *I think* and *I guess,* other studies cited show how these have developed epistemic and politeness functions such as hedging, expressing agreement, and seeking confirmation. Further evidence for some form of grammaticalization or another analogous process comes from *you know*, which among younger speakers has a more subjective usage (e.g., hedging, expressing disagreement) and greater use as a discourse cohesive device than among older speakers. The various frameworks for diachronic change discussed loosely capture the basic changes leading to comment clauses, such as loss of referential meaning, decategorialization, and acquisition of pragmatic functions.

Yet Brinton notes that these frameworks cannot fully account for all the pragmatic and syntactic changes involved. Brinton also invokes decategorialization (change to a more minor category) to describe aspects of their change, but loss of syntactic category status seems qualitatively different than processes of lexical change and demotion of lexical status in grammaticalization. A change from a matrix clause to a parenthetical clause, still with its own internal syntactic structure, differs from grammaticalization of a content word to a function word. Brinton does note that lexicalization seems more problematic, as these phrases do not entirely lexicalize, i.e., they don't become unanalyzable, single lexical items, and lexicalization is more associated with pragmatic strengthening than bleaching (the latter being more typical of grammaticalization).

Chapter 4 discusses *say* and its various pragmatic functions, and discusses other variants (*I say, I daresay, as you say, that is to say, let's say,* in Chapter 4). Its has its origin as a matrix verb primarily in two forms: as a second-person imperative taking complement clauses, and a form derived from *I say*, reduced to *say*, with nominal or clause complements, a conjunction-like *say*. These two matrix forms would seem to explain some of its pragmatic functions classified earlier in the chapter. But as Brinton notes, the historical data do not offer conclusive evidence for this, as only 18% of such sentences in the OED for Middle English occur with complement clauses, mostly *that*-clauses. Nonetheless, a number of grammaticalization processes, e.g., decategorializatiaon, desemanticization (loss of original content word meaning), subjectification and intersubjectification of the speaker's perspective or orientation toward the listener, are documented from historical data. These processes can also account for the evolution of *(I) dare say, as you say, as they say, that is to say*, and related phrases into the modern comment clauses. This is well documented with historical and contemporary English data, and helpful descriptions of their pragmatic uses are provided.

Another chapter is devoted to *I mean*, which has become rather common in contemporary English. Various pragmatic studies cited indicate that is serves to modify or comment on a speaker's intentions, including conversational repair, as well as to indicate clarification, reformulation, hedging expressions for protecting the speaker's face, and to indicate the speaker's orientation toward the speaker. Its various functions in contemporary usage are well illustrated in the chapter. Its parenthetical usage, namely, as a repair marker, is first attested in the 17th century, while its use as a reformulation marker and other uses can be traced back to Middle English. Possible origins of the parenthetical *I mean* are suggested — as a matrix clause phrase (*I mean that*), or from an adverbial / relative structure (*as I mean, which I mean*), though the data for its exact syntactic origins are not so clear.

Chapter 6 treats the *see* phrases (*I see, you see, as you see, so you see*). Various studies discuss their contemporary frequency, and their use for explanation, exemplification, agreement, and confirmation, and the more figurative and resultative meaning for *so you see* (e.g., implying result, conclusion, or inference). These expressions date back to Early English, often with a more literal meaning, and only sometimes with complement clauses. Historically, *you see, I see,* and *see* had separate, independent origins, albeit somewhat concurrently. Brinton notes that *you see* derives not from a matrix clause plus complement clause, but from *as you see* with loss of a complementizer, and *see* (e.g., as an attention-getter) derives directly from an imperative.

Chapter 7 examines *if you will* and *as it were*. Since Early English, *if you will* (i.e., 'if you are willing to do so' = 'if you will allow me to say so') has served as an implied directive. *As it were* derives from an archaic expression ('s if it were + NP) for hypothetical comparisons, and a possible Latin influence from *quasi* on its use (but not its origin) is discussed. Chapter 8 addresses *look* expressions, which take many forms, with metaphorical meanings deriving from the perception verb (attention-getting, emphasis). Dialect forms preserve archaic functions, such as *lookee* (from *look ye*), *lookyhere,* and *lookit* (Brinton suggests this developed independently and separately from the other *look*-expressions, deriving from *look to it*); these older forms, particularly *lookit*, can convey extra senses of negative emotion, such as frustration or aggression. As with *see*, the *look* expressions derive primarily from imperatives in matrix clauses. Chapter 9 examines *what's more* and *what else.* Originally an initial relative clause, *what's more* serves now as a sentence-initial comment clause for commenting on or elaboration of preceding content. Brinton proposes that *what else* developed from a reduced interrogative phrase, and now serves for seeking confirmation.

The next chapter examines *I find* and *I gather*, commonly treated as subjective evidential or epistemic expressions as well as pragmatic markers. Thus, as subjective markers, they focus more on the speaker's subjective perspective or evaluation of discourse content. The phrase *I gather* also extends to hearsay knowledge, or knowledge inferred or deduced by the speaker, and hence, a different evidential nuance than *I find*. The final section of this and the preceding chapters describe how the evolution of these parenthetical clauses can be explained within the framework of grammicalization, based on the historical data and observable changes in meaning and function.

The final chapter revisits some of the theoretical issues laid out in the early chapters. These mainly include (1) explanations for the historical changes from matrix clause elements (or other kinds of structures) to comment clauses that would also account for the structural and functional change, and (2) the type of grammaticalization framework that would explain their functional, semantic,

and pragmatic evolution. While grammaticalization theory cannot explain the structural changes involved, conversely, the pragmatic and semantic differences between the matrix clause and comment clause forms, as noted, pose a significant difficulty for transformational explanations.

The matrix clause extraction hypothesis assumes a progression from a full matrix clause, deletion of the complementizer, and then decoupling the matrix clause. Brinton's study finds that this hypothesis, however, is not always supported by the historical data, and has particular difficulty explaining second-person and third-person parenthetical clauses (e.g., *mind you, you see, as it were*). For those clauses where the hypothesis seems more intuitive, especially first-person expressions (*I say, I find, I gather*), Brinton finds that the historical data also are not so convincing, given the paucity of such forms with *that*-clauses in earlier stages of English, and a lack of evidence for the kind of progression assumed by the extraction hypothesis. While a clear alternative structural account is presently lacking, Brinton suggests that a few clauses such as *see* might derive from a tag question or a simple interrogative (*do you see?*, p. 253), but such a process would not be productive enough to account for comment clauses.

Among the various related frameworks and approaches to explain the pragmatic and semantic development of comment clauses, Brinton adopts the main grammaticalization framework, along with pragmaticalization (emphasizing, e.g., adoption of or change in pragmatic functions), which is compatible with the larger grammaticalization framework. Lexicalization is not seen as viable here, as it emphasizes pragmatic bleaching and strengthening, and becoming a fixed lexical form. However, comment clauses mainly undergo bleaching or lessening of the original semantic content, and still exist as distinct analyzable lexical units (as in *I see*, where each word, though semantically reduced, still contributes to the overall phrase meaning). Grammaticalization captures many aspects of the development of comment clauses, such as reduced semantic content, some degree of phonological reduction (at least their more rapid pronunciation, often with reduced intonation), adoption of specialized pragmatic functions, and more subjective or intersubjective functions.

Subjectification and intersubjectification are discussed briefly in the opening chapters, and in discussion of the pathway of grammaticalization for various comment clauses discussed throughout the book. These terms refer to the speaker's personal perspective toward the content of the discourse and the listeners, and these would seem to describe some of the socio-pragmatic functions of many comment clauses. Subjectivity would describe the speaker's own attitudes or orientation, including using markers for planning and processing utterances and expressing affective states and attitudinal nuances, while intersubjectivity would correlate to politeness functions and other listener-oriented aspects of discourse. However,

Brinton rightfully and appropriately keeps these discussions short, though this would seem like a promising avenue of research. However, these constructs are poorly understood, and a well defined theory of subjectivity and intersubjectivity is woefully lacking in linguistics; the terms are used somewhat loosely to cover various pragmatic aspects of discourse, often without much semantic or psycholinguistic precision. This is understandable, as these terms are difficult to define, because these ultimately involve a poorly understood nexus of socio-cognitive, psycholinguistic, and epistemic domains.

Brinton's discussion assumes that these forms have little semantic or referential content, much like how previous studies of pragmatic markers assume that such words have become semantically "emptied" in the process of moving to minor lexical categories. However, for comment clauses in particular, this assumption is slightly problematic. The constituent lexemes (such as "I" and "find" in *I find*) would still be understood by English speakers as meaningful and not interchangeable with items (e.g., *I discover*, *you find* or *they see* as comment clauses would be judged as infelicitous). In fact, the pragmatic and grammaticalization accounts may underestimate the semantic contribution provided by a lexical item that has been reanalyzed to a minor category (e.g., the discourse marker *like* is not entirely empty, if speakers can associate it with the older content word forms, or if the discourse marker is connected with the content word forms in the mental lexicon of the speaker). Thus, components of an expression such as *I think* contribute subjectivity (particularly the pronoun), information on the speaker's perspective, epistemic information, and other pragmatic information. A further level of meaning in comment clauses may from the constructional meaning, as in the Construction Grammar approach (Goldberg, 1995). This seems worth exploring, given that these phrases may still possess an argument structure. Thus, e.g., *I think* could have an Experiencer subject, which contributes meaning (e.g., the subject and the experience of a cognitive perception). In fact, being grammaticalized, the semantic content of such phrases is reduced, but the argument structure can still contribute semantic content to the phrase. In fact, its meaning may depend largely on pragmatic / socio-pragmatic meaning and constructional meaning. This then shows a limitation of grammaticalization theory, as currently formulated, in accounting for comment clauses, as the standard grammaticalization framework does not account well for constructional meaning that is still present. This also relates to the issue of idioms with fixed and sometimes unusual lexical and argument structure (Jackendoff, 1997), and raises the question of whether comment clauses are similar to idioms in that sense. This then seems to be the primary limitation of grammaticalization theory regarding comment clauses — explaining how they could be similar to, and differ from, monolexical pragmatic markers, and how

their process of grammaticalization could be analogous but different from monolexical items due to their inherent syntactic structure.

At the end of the last chapter, Brinton starts to sketch out a possible Construction Grammar approach, in terms of schema based changes in semantic content and function, but not the structural issues. Construction Grammar seems compatible in many ways with grammaticalization, and with a combination of these approaches, it might be possible to articulate a theoretical framework that would account for the syntactic structure of comment clauses, and their pragmatic and structural changes. This would allow for a theoretical alternative to the matrix clause hypothesis, and could better explain their structural properties as well.

Overall, this volume will serve as a well researched companion to Brinton's 1996 volume on the development of pragmatic markers. Like the 1996 work, this book contains a good amount of historical data, as well as corpus based information on the historical and contemporary usage of comment clauses. The only area not covered in this book would be phonetic and phonological aspects of comment clauses — brief discussion of their prosodic properties (their likely faster and sometimes reduced pronunciation, and lower intonation) might be desirable. Both volumes are must-haves for historical linguists, pragmatics researchers, and applied linguists. This new work in particular would also be a helpful reference for linguists and those in the language teaching profession interested in teaching pragmatics, especially parentheticals, as comprehensive linguistic works on this topic have been lacking. The many references to corpus based, historical, and pragmatic studies of comment clauses and comment clauses, and the many historical and contemporary examples, make this book a worthwhile reference. Thus, this book fills an important gap in the linguistics literature, in terms of a comprehensive treatment of parentheticals that covers diachronic, synchronic, pragmatic, and theoretical aspects of these phrases.

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