The Comment Clause in English: Syntactic Origins and Pragmatic Development. **Laurel J. Brinton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, xvii + 280 pp.**

Reviewed by Nancy Hedberg*

This book is about the historical development in English of comment clauses. The author defines comment clauses as pragmatic markers that are parenthetical and that comment on the clause to which they are attached in the sense of expressing speaker attitude or stance. A pragmatic marker is "a phonologically short item that is not semantically connected to the rest of the clause but serves pragmatic or procedural purposes" (p. 1). Many pragmatic markers are single words, like *well*, *okay*, and *now*, and are often called discourse markers (e.g. Schiffrin 1987) or discourse particles. Comment clauses are clausal in nature, and have been much less studied. Chapter 1 situates comment clauses within the larger categories of sentence adverbial, disjunct and parenthetical, and argues that comment clauses should be understood as pragmatic markers.

Chapter 2 gives an overview of the syntactic and semantic development of comment clauses and other pragmatic markers historically, focusing especially on controversial aspects of the former. Brinton argues that comment clauses, like pragmatic markers in general, follow the clines of Traugott and Dasher (2002):

Truth conditional > non-truth conditional
Content > content/procedural > procedural meaning
Non-subjective > subjective > intersubjective
Scope within proposition > scope over proposition > scope over discourse

The syntactic development of pragmatic markers has been less well studied, especially comment clauses. One salient hypothesis, which Brinton ends up largely arguing against throughout the book, is the 'matrix clauses hypothesis' of Thompson and Mulac 1991, according to which comment clauses develop according to the following cline:

Matrix clause > parenthetical disjunct > pragmatic marker.

There are various syntactic sources of comment clauses, including first, second, and third person declaratives ((*I) say*, *I mean, (you) see, I gather, I find*), matrix imperatives (*look, see*), adverbial/relative clauses (*if you will*, *as it were*), and nominal relative clauses (*what is more*, *what else*). The development of each of these is discussed in detail as a case study in the seven chapters (Ch. 4-10) that make up the main body of the book. Each chapter contains a wealth of details and examples of the use of each form and its variants from each historical period.

Before proceeding with the case studies, Chapter 3 discusses the historical development of comment clauses in relation to grammaticalization theory. The definition of Hopper and Traugott 2003 states that grammaticalization is "the change whereby lexical items and constructions come to serve grammatical functions." Brinton explores whether comment clauses should instead or additionally be understood as undergoing alternative processes, such as 'pragmaticalization' 'lexicalization' or 'idiomatization', and argues that comment clauses do undergo grammaticalization because their development exemplifies features such as decategorialization (in this case, often correlated with the loss of *that*, whereby they become frozen clauses that can appear in a variety of syntactic positions); semantic bleaching (loss of

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referential meaning); acquisition of discourse, pragmatic and politeness features; increased subjectivity; and sometimes phonological attrition.

As mentioned, the body of the book is taken up with case studies of the development of some interesting comment clauses, which have been little studied for the most part. The data is taken from a variety of corpora, including the *Oxford English Dictionary* quotation bank for all periods, and additional written corpora from five periods: Old English, Middle English, Early Modern English, Late Modern English, and Present Day English. For Present Day English, Brinton examined corpora of British, American, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand English and offers some comparisons between the different varieties. She doesn't include much comparison between synchronic varieties, but I believe the volume will still be of interest to researchers in World Englishes because it demonstrates clearly how comment clauses can arise in the development of a variety.

The first case study is discussed in Chapter 4, which examines comment clauses with *say*. *Say* with alternatives *let's say* and *I say* represents the comment clause with the widest variety of distinguishable meanings and syntactic categories. Brinton identifies eight meanings and sub-meanings here, including *say*^{1} meaning 'suppose, assume', and *say*^{4} meaning 'tell me/us', both of which can be analyzed as imperative verbs; *say*^{2} meaning 'about, approximately' and *say*^{3} meaning 'for example, suppose, let's imagine' (both of which can usually be replaced by 'like' in youthful contemporary spoken English) and which can be analyzed as adverbs; *say*^{5a}, used to express a mild emotional response, *say*^{5b}, used to call or evoke the hearer's attention, and *I say*^{6b} used to express emphasis that the speaker has chosen certain words, all of which can perhaps be analyzed as interjections; and finally *I say*^{6a} involves a subject plus a main verb and is used again to clarify or explain the use of words. These different senses arose at different times in English, with at least *say*^{4} and *say*^{6} dating back to the Middle English period. Brinton concludes that *say*$^{1-4}$ originate as second-person imperative verbs with clausal complements, with 'let's say' developing later from some of these forms; and that *say*$^{5-6}$ originate from matrix 'I say' with clausal or nominal complements—although the matrix clause hypothesis is still problematic here because only 18% of the 180 Middle English examples of *I say* occurred with a complement clause.

Chapter 5 examines the very frequent *I mean*. Schiffrin (1987) distinguishes two full meanings of 'I mean', which Brinton identifies as 'to intend [to do something]' (which is rare in Present Day English), and 'to signify, to intend to convey a certain sense.' She also recognizes four extended meanings: appositional uses of exemplification or repair (recent), or a reformulation or a greater degree of explicitness (older); causal meanings—'I'm saying this because…' (recent); expressions of speaker attitude (older); and interpersonal meaning (older). Brinton argues that parenthetical uses of *I mean* arise neither from a full matrix clause construction (*I mean (that)* S), usage of which has always been rare, nor from an adverbial/relative structure (*{as/to/which} I mean*), but rather from *I mean* + phrasal category (NP, VP, AP, PP, AdvP).

Chapter 6 looks at *see*. *You see* has been found to be more frequent in British than in American English, and Brinton's corpus findings support this. It is used to claim addressee attention and to mark transitions between arguments. Parenthetical *as you see* (dating from 1300 in the OED), *so you see* (dating from 1626), and *see* (dating from 1952) are less frequent. Brinton identifies the origins of *see* in parenthetical imperative forms *see here* and *see now*, which date from the 16th century, and identifies the origin of *you see* in *as you see*.

Chapter 7 focuses on *if you will* and *as it were*. These have much the same metalinguistic meaning. This sense of *as it were* dates back to Middle English and was possibly influenced by the Latin *quasi*, while this sense of *if you will* is much more recent. *If you will* appears to be more grammaticalized in Canadian English than in British English, since it is used parenthetically proportionately more frequently in the Canadian corpus.

Chapter 8 discusses *look*, which has imperative origins and occurs in several variants, including *look here* and *lookit*. *Look* and its variants as parentheticals primarily have an attention getting function rather than a concrete perceptual meaning. Non-concrete usage of *look* alone extends only back to the Early Modern English period.

Chapter 9 looks at *what's more* and *what else*. The former dates back only to the end of the 16th century, and along with *which is more* has its origins as a relative clause modifying a clausal element. *What else* originates as an elliptical interrogative construction, and dates only to Early Modern English as a comment clause.

Chapter 10 compares *I gather* and *I find*, and situates them in the class of epistemic parentheticals, such as *I think* and *I guess*. Brinton reports that *I gather that* is more frequent than *I gather Ø* in Canadian English; while the opposite is true in British English. *I find* in general is much more frequent than *I gather*, but parenthetical uses are less frequent. Brinton argues that *I find* originates in the parenthetical *as I find*, which dates from Middle English, rather than from a matrix clause. The parenthetical *I gather*, however, likely originates from a matrix clause. *I find* has conveyed a non-concrete meaning when functioning as comment clauses since Middle English, but *I gather* as a comment clause only dates to the late 19th century.

The concluding chapter of the book summarizes the findings, especially regarding conclusions about the dating and syntactic sources of the different comment clauses discussed, and how their development exhibits features of grammaticalization. The author concludes that Construction Grammar (e.g. Kay 1997) should be a good syntactic framework for the further study of comment clauses, since such clauses appear to be constructions *par excellence*—that is, conventionalized chunks of language with identifiable syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features, that have autonomy and can fruitfully be studied as a package.

This book fills a gap in the study of pragmatic markers, and is thorough and detailed in its coverage. I highly recommend it.

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