

**ON THE BOUNDARIES OF GRAMMAR:
LINKING WORDS AND
GRAMMATICALIZATION THEORY***

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Abstract: This paper deals on three Catalan perception verbs –namely, *veure* ('to see'), *mirar* ('to look') and *escoltar* ('to listen')– grammaticalized as linking words. Our analysis, based on an oral corpus of political debate, highlights the general points in grammaticalization: (i) conventionalization of a discourse strategy, which entails changes in pragmatic use, meaning and syntactic function; (ii) categorial shift; (iii) morphological fixation and (iv) phonetic weakening. We claim that these characteristics are directly interrelated and that the overall process clearly illustrates the subjectification theory and the emergent grammar hypothesis.

Keywords: grammaticalization, subjectification, linking words, reanalysis, iconicity.

1. INTRODUCTION

The general label of *linking words*, which roughly corresponds to Schifffrin's discourse markers, refers to a function –"bracketing units of talk" in the words of Schifffrin (1987: 31)– implemented by a variety of elements belonging to different categories, as stated by Evans (1992: 227):

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...'discourse markers' are defined by function, not by form [...] and can have a range of formal possibilities which include interjections (e.g. 'oh') but also conjunctions ('and', 'but', 'because') and phrases ('I mean', 'y'know').

In this paper, we will present the preliminary results of an analysis of linking words in an oral corpus of political debate in Catalan,¹ which has been carried out within the general framework of grammaticalization theory. Grammaticalization is a classic field of interest in linguistic analysis which has been updated by Cognitive and Functional linguists in recent years (see Heine, *et al.*, 1991; Hopper and Traugott, 1993). From this innovative point of view, grammaticalization theory can be seen as the overlapping of at least diachronic syntax, synchronic syntax, pragmatics and text linguistics. Such a linguistic outlook clearly takes us to the boundaries of grammar.

We will focus on the grammaticalization of three perception verbs (*veure* 'to see', *mirar* 'to look' and *escoltar* 'to listen') as linking words. The change in function and category (from sentence constituent –predicate– to linking word) can be accounted for by means of a grammaticalization process leading to reanalysis. From this perspective, there is evidence that linking words, although traditionally identified with various categories, exhibit a quite homogeneous syntactic behavior similar to that of conjunctions and interjections. This process of linguistic change is consistent with the emergent grammar hypothesis developed by Hopper (1987), whose main claim is that grammar tends to fix structurally what originally could be understood as a communicative strategy.

Linking words, on the other hand, illustrate various stages of grammatical fixation (cf. Bybee, 1993; Hopper, 1991), and allow us to understand how the grammaticalization process takes place. The perception verbs considered here instantiate subjectification theory, which has been largely developed by Traugott (1989, 1990, 1995; Traugott and König, 1991). According to this theory, one of the essential pathways for linguistic change goes from propositional meanings to textual or even expressive ones. In other words, there is a tendency to change "from meanings grounded in more or less objectively identifiable extralinguistic situations to meanings grounded in text making (...) to meanings grounded in the speaker's attitude to or belief about what is said (...)" (Traugott and König, 1991: 198).

¹ Our corpus consists of two television debates broadcasted in November, 1995 and in February 1996, respectively. The participants are politicians of the main parties, which are identified in the examples by their name initial, and the conductor, identified as *Md*.

2. FROM PERCEPTION TO DISCOURSE ORGANIZATION

Perception is the bridge between reality and human knowledge. It is not surprising thus that language highlights the importance of perception in cognition and communication by using perception verbs in a variety of constructions, and especially those verbs related to the main senses, i.e., those of vision and hearing. Our corpus includes linking words corresponding to three perception verbs: on the one hand, *veure* ('to see'), indicating passive perception, and on the other hand, *mirar* ('to look') and *escoltar* ('to listen'), indicating active perception.² The forms are:

- (1) *veure* ('to see'): *a veure*, *aviam* (and their reduced forms *avere*, *viam*)
- mirar* ('to look'): *miri* (and its morphological variants)
- escoltar* ('to listen'): *escolti* ('m) (and its morphological variants)

The forms found in our corpus, and other forms and variants common in ordinary conversation, are associated with the imperative.³ The forms *miri/mira*, *escolti/escolta* are inflected for the 3rd person and the 2nd person singular respectively; they are essentially equivalent in that they are both used to address to the hearer. It is important to note, however, that the former is used for distal treatment, whereas the latter is generally used in familiar contexts. As a consequence, although they are morphologically different, they can be considered two alternative ways to designate a second person. *A veure* is formed by the preposition *a* ('to') plus the infinitive ('see'), and seems to be the shortened structure for *anem a veure* (lit. 'we go to see', *let's see*). The elliptic verb *anem* is a first person plural imperative (addressed thus to the speaker or to both the speaker and the hearer). Finally, *aviam* is formally parallel to *a veure* but the infinitive has been substituted by *viam*, the reduced form of the first person plural imperative, *vejам/veiam*.

The crucial point is that the morphology, the interpretation and the reanalysis of these verbal forms into linking words are closely related. It is the conative and phatic value inherent to the imperative what triggers the semantic change (from objectivity to subjectivity, according to Traugott's subjectification hypothesis), and consequently all other transformations leading to reanalysis from verbs into linking words.

² As far as we know, there are no other works on this subject in Catalan. Nevertheless, some of these elements have been described in different papers about discourse markers in other Romance languages, like French (Chaurand, 1987; Vincent, 1989; Lamiroy and Swiggers, 1992; Dostie, 1997), Italian (Manili, 1986; Mara, 1986; Bazzanella, 1990) and Spanish (Vigara Tauste, 1980, 1991; Fuentes Rodríguez, 1990; Pons, 1995). We also present a contrastive analysis of these items in Spanish and Catalan in Cuenca and Marín (to appear).

³ See Lamiroy and Swiggers (1992) for a similar analysis of imperatives grammaticalized as linking words.

3. SEMANTIC CHANGE

The semantic change just mentioned goes from physical perception to discourse organization. Specifically, the basic meaning of visual perception defining *veure* (2) co-occurs with metaphoric ones, like intellectual vision ('seeing is understanding') (3a) or even evaluation ('understanding is evaluating') (3b).

(2) Joan veia la brutícia

John saw the dirt

(3) a. Joan no veia què volies dir

John did not see what you meant (= understand)

b. Joan veu bé que hi vagi

John sees well that I go (= considers it is all right)...

A further step in the subjectification process is the weakening of the meaning of vision and even of perception in favor of a subjective meaning related to discourse organization, namely turn taking, topic distribution, changes in discourse directions and in the speaker attitudes about the overall development of the exchange.

(4) M: Bé, nosaltres, vostè ho deia, no? que ara explicarem això del 'café para todos'. **Viam**, quan es fa la Constitució es parla de nacionalitats i regions (...).

*Well, we –you were saying that, right?– we're going to explain "café para todos" [literally, 'coffee for everyone', in Spanish]. **Viam** ('let's see'), when the Constitution was written, there was some talk about nationalities and regions (...).*

The same process can be observed with *mirar*, although the active meaning of this verb seems to exclude the intellectual perception sense.

(5)R: Sí. Vostè mateixa en la pregunta ha demostrat que en economia pot haver moltes interpretacions. **Miri**, per nosaltres les prioritats són: ocupació, medi ambient, igualtat en la dona i polítiques per les persones.

*Yes. In that question you yourself showed that, in economics, there might be many interpretations. **Miri** ('look'), for us the priorities are: employment, environment, equal rights for women and policies for people.*

Likewise, *escoltar* ('to listen') undergoes a pragmaticization of its meaning, but the semantic change is weaker than with *mirar*.

(6) T: (...) Però nosaltres en aquest moment sumem més que no pas restem, molt més que no pas restem. Atur: no sóc jo que els ho dic. Però, **escolti**, realment nosaltres en aquest moment tenim un atur de l'11'11%.

*(...) But at this moment we add rather than subtract. Unemployment: it is not me the one to tell you about that. But, **escolti** ('listen'), at this moment unemployment is really up to an 11.11%.*

Whenever we talk to someone, he or she is supposed to be listening, so that the sense of physical (auditory) perception is never lost, and can still remain prominent.

The differences in meaning and meaning change we are reporting on help to explain why visual verbs (and especially the passive one *veure*) go through deeper changes in all levels than auditory ones (*escoltar* and also its passive counterpart, *sentir* 'hear', not found in our corpus but usual in conversation with some subjective values, too).⁴ The forms from *veure* (*a veure*, *aviam*) are the most grammaticalized items: being a passive perception verb, people are generally supposed to experience this sense whenever they speak or hear, and as a consequence it would not be relevant the speaker asking the hearer to see. For this use to be discursively relevant, a different meaning must emerge, a meaning that will finally have a weak relation with perception. The pragmatic inference resulting from this process of semantic weakening and subjectification becomes conventional and the semantic change occurs.

Similarly, most uses of *miri* do not imply visual perception, although the basic sense persists as a background meaning. When you are asked to 'look at an idea', you are really asked to 'hear it', to 'pay attention to it', in order to 'understand it'. At this point, *mirar* and *escoltar* become lexically equivalent, although their pragmatic components remain slightly different.

(7)S: I també vull acabar dient-li, com, eeh, se li ha dit <en> aquí. **Miri**, sense comptar amb el Partit Nacionalista Basc no acabarem [mai amb el problema del terrorisme basc].

And I would also like to end by telling you, as, uhh, you have been told here. Miri ('look'), without the Basc Nationalist Party we will never get rid of the problem of Basc terrorism.

4. DISTRIBUTIONAL CHANGES

Semantic change maps onto the distribution, function and form of these perception verbs. As for their distribution, they tend to be sentence initial, and they also become parenthetical: they are preceded and followed by a pause (typically, "full stop - X - comma" when written).

(8)Md: Sisplau, senyora Ra_ Rahola. Senyor Molins.

Please, Mrs. Ra_ Rahola. Mr. Molins.

M: **Viam**, jo crec quee, ja està clar quee a partir del 4 de març nosaltres a Madrid haurem de plantar cara.

Viam ('let's see'), I believe that..., it is clear that from the 4th of March on we will have to face up to the situation in Madrid.

⁴ It is mainly used as a command reinforcer, with a clear conative value:

(i) M'has d'ajudar, sents?

You have to help me, hear-2nd ps sg?

In this use, the verb is always in final position and constitutes an interrogation.

They also tend to combine with another linking word, sometimes as the first element but sometimes also as the second one, and then they obviously lose their absolute initial position. They can combine with another perception verb (9), a conjunction (10), and other connectives (11).

(9) a. Md: No pateixin pel temps (...) de debò. [Senyor Vidal-Quadras].

Don't worry about the time (...) really. [Mr. Vidal-Quadras].

VQ: [Fantàstic, fantàstic!]. A **veure**, **miri**, eeehm, el senyor Pujol, quan diu que som la quarta comunitat en deute, s'oblida d'un petit detall. Primer detall: som la comunitat més endeutada en termes absoluts.

[Great, great!]. A veure ('let's see'), miri ('look'), uhh, Mr. Pujol, when he says that we are the fourth region in terms of debt, he is forgetting a small detail. First: we are the region with the largest debt in absolute terms.

b. R: (...) per exemple, pel que fa al model d'Espanya. **Miri**, **escolti'm**, no ens vinguin ara amb fer actes de fe de catalanitat.

(...) for instance, as far as the model of Spain is concerned. Miri ('look'), escolti'm ('listen to me'), don't you come now and do an act of faith of Catalanhood.

(10) VQ: I aquest és el problema. I vostè ha de comprendre, i si no ho compren és igual. Perquè **miri**, el primer de novembre potser ho arreglarem altres, però vostè hauria de fer l'esforç.

And this is the problem. And you must understand, and if you don't understand, I don't care. Because miri ('look'), the first of November, perhaps others of us will fix it, but you should make an effort.

(11) R: És que des de l'esquerra certament, avui el que pugui dir el Partit Popular ja ens ho sabem. Al capdavant, **miri**, el problema no està tant en que el senyor Boyer allò, planxi ara, dissenyi les camises del Partit Popular sinó que prèviament, senyor Serra, dissenyava i planxava les seves.

Certainly, for those of us on the left, we already know by heart what the Popular Party has to say today. After all, miri ('look'), the problem is not so much that Mr. Boyer irons and designs the Popular Party's shirts now, but that previously, Mr. Serra, he did design and iron your own.

It is worth noticing that the combination of two perception words, as in (9), is not strange at all. This is a clear evidence of the weakening in the basic meaning and the increased pragmatic one: a weak lexical meaning makes it possible to combine with another element in order to specify or reinforce the discursive meaning, and it also increases context-boundness.

When combined, especially if the previous word is a conjunctive element, the pause between the two linking words tends to reduce or even disappear. This clearly shows an integration of the two connectives into a complex unit.

(12)R: (...) Però **escolti'm**, vostès governant han estat un desastre.

(...) But escolti'm ('listen to me'), in governing you've been a disaster.

These items can also become non-initial when preceded by a false start, as in (13). In this case, as well as when it is the second item of a combination, they function as if they were sentence initial:

second position is the result of adding another sentence initial element, not a prototypical position for perception linking words.

- (13) T: (...) Rebaixarem els impostos, senyor Se_ senyor Serra, acompanyadament amb el dèficit, per tothom, no només per als rics, per tothom. Es tracta_ **miri**, es tracta de que pagui tothom, de que pagui tothom, de veritat, i que ningú faci frau, d'això es tracta.
 (...) *We will reduce taxes, Mr. Se_ Mr. Serra, according to the deficit, for everyone, not only for the rich, for everyone. The point is_ miri ('look'), the point is that everyone pays, that everyone really pays, and no one evades taxes, that's the point.*

5. SYNTACTIC BEHAVIOR

Parenthetical behavior and fixation as sentence initial elements differentiate these uses of perception verbs from their prototypical use as full-fledged verbs. "Verbality" can be considered in two levels: syntactically (verbs are main predicates, that is, elements which license a subject and optionally one or several objects), and morphologically (verbs are characterized by conjugation, which is very rich in languages like Catalan). The difference between the linking and the predicative use can be made clearer by comparing examples such as (14) and (15):

- (14) a. Joan ha mirat la revista.

John has looked at the magazine.

- b. Joan escoltava les notícies.

John was listening to the news.

- c. Joan ha vist el teu missatge.

John has seen your message.

- (15) a. T: (...) [**Miri** vostè, el Partit Popular]=

(...) [Miri vostè ('look you'), the Popular Party]=

S: [Ja entenc que vostès no ho entengueren les ???; no, que jo ho entenc].

[Now I see that you didn't understand the ???; no, I do understand it].

(T:) =si guanya el senyor Aznar promourà un pacte autonòmic.

=if Mr. Aznar wins, he will promote a regional pact.

- b. R: (...) Miri, **escolti'm**, senyor Serra, vostès tenen un frau absolutament descontrolat, primer punt.

(...) Miri ('look'), escolti'm ('listen to me'), Mr. Serra, you have absolutely uncontrolled fraudulence, first.

- c. T: (...) em deixa acabar, senyora Rahola? Solidària amb la resta d'Espanya, i vostès, i vostès] [estan fent demagògia. I, senyor Serra]=

(...) would you let me finish, Mrs. Rahola? Solidary with the rest of Spain, and you, and you] [are practicing demagogy. And, Mr. Serra]=

Md: [**Avere**, sisplau deixin acabar, que ja ha d'acabar].

[Avere ('let's see'), please, let him finish, he has to finish now].

In (14) the verb has a subject and an object and is morphologically variable. In (15), however, the preverbal subject is not possible anymore. The subject can occasionally become postverbal (15a),⁵ and can often be expressed by means of a vocative (15b), semantically identifiable with the subject but syntactically detached from the predicative structure, strictly speaking. However, the most frequent structure has no explicit subject (15c), especially when the verb is strongly grammaticalized as a linking word.

On the other hand, the object disappears completely with *a veure/aviam* and *miri*. As for the third perception verb, the bare form *escolti* alternates with *escolti'm* which incorporates a pronominal object (the accusative 'm 'to me'). In fact, this second possibility is more frequent in our corpus than the first one, which suggests a lesser degree of grammaticalization of *escolti*.

(16) a. Md: ...hi ha altres paraules demanades, mm, però jo l'hi dono per al·lusions un altre torn.
[Breu, sisplau], senyor Pujol.

...some others have asked to talk, uhm, but the floor is yours as you've been alluded to. [Be brief, please], Mr. Pujol.

P: [Escolti], si l'acord <en> el qual hem arribat, i que estem aplicant i que està signat i que està publicat, realment anés contra la llei...

[Escolti ('listen'), if the agreement we have reached, which we are applying and is signed and published, was really against the law...

b. R: (...) Per què no tenim l'administració necessària a Catalunya? Tercer, **escolti'm**, xarxa de corrupció generalitzada. La de diner públic que se n'ha anat per aquí ha estat terrible.

(...) Why don't we have the necessary administration in Catalonia? Third, **escolti'm** ('listen to me'), the generalized network of corruption. The amount of public money which has gone through here, has been terrible.

The facts illustrated show a progressive loss of the predicative structure, which starts with the obligatory pronominalization and then the omission of the object (also possible in the verbal use) and ends with the detachment and the final loss of the subject (preverbal subject > postverbal subject > vocative > Ø).

6. MORPHOLOGICAL FIXATION AND PHONETIC REDUCTION

Syntactic reduction is parallel to morphological fixation, on the one hand, and to phonetic reduction, on the other hand. *A veure* hosts no inflection morpheme, as the inflected form in the original construction, *anem*, is lost. *Aviam* still keeps the first person plural morpheme (-m), but this is such a grammaticalized form that the speaker has lost almost completely the idea of inflection and even of verbality: *aviam* has been totally reanalyzed as a linking word. *Miri* and *escolti*, and their variants, correspond to a second person (morphologically third for distal

⁵ Note, however, that the postverbal subject is only possible with *mirar* and provided it is a pronoun. Even under those conditions, it is quite unusual in Catalan and, as Solà (p.c.) has pointed out, it seems to be not a genuine construction but the result of an interference from Spanish.

treatment), since they are always addressed to the hearer. Yet, no other persons, mood or tenses of these forms can be found when used as linking words, that is, morphological variability is limited. Plural morphemes are also possible (17), but they are not often found (in fact, we have few examples in our corpus), which gives evidence of a process of morphological fossilization.

(17) Se: Jo demano-

I am asking-

Md: Sí.

Yes.

Se: **Mirin**, quan es fan rebaixes d'impostos que com a màxim poden afectar a 100.000 contribuents d'aquest país, nosaltres diem que preservar l'estat del benestar és fer el que nosaltres volem fer, i si som 39 milions, legislar i governar pels 39 milions, però sobretot pels 38 milions nou cents mil que guanyen menys de 10 milions de pessetes.

Mirin ('look'-2nd ps pl), when tax discounts are given that can affect 100,000 taxpayers of this country at most, we say that...

Finally, reduction also affects the phonetic form of these linking words in a predictable way: the more they are grammaticalized the more their forms tend to reduce. *Aviam*, which is itself a reduced form from *a veiam/vejam*, loses its first vowel becoming *viam*. A *veure* monophthongates in *avere*.⁶

In the use we are describing *mira* shows no reduction. But in some interjective uses, very close to the ones we are commenting on, *mira* undergoes different types of reduction in different Catalan dialects (namely, *mi* and *ma*).⁷ *Escolti* has no corresponding reduced form in Catalan, which is consistent with the less grammaticalized character of this form as compared with the other ones.

7. DISCURSIVE FUNCTION

After observing the distributional and formal changes which go with the semantic modification, we will focus on the discursive function that perception verbs fulfil as linking words. First of all, as we have just claimed, they do not function as predicates but as connectives. They link turns of talk or speech acts (within a turn). At this point, there are some important differences among these verbs, which once again seem to correlate with the degree of grammaticalization: *aviam* and *a veure* almost always link turns of talk (18), while *miri* and *escolti* usually link speech acts (19) and scarcely turns.

(18) R: [Però si ja tenim govern de dretes, senyor Serra]; si el seu ja era un govern de dretes???

⁶ There are other dialectal reduced variants like *mem* or *vam* in the Balearic Islands, Majorca and Menorca, respectively.

⁷ It reduces to *ma* in some exclamative contexts (*ma que és simpàtic*, 'look that he is nice' = 'he is really nice'), and to *mi* combined with some pronouns or adverbs –*miquí* (= *mira aquí*, 'look here'), *mil'quí* (= *mira'l aquí*, 'look at him here'), *mit-te'l* (= *mira-te'l aquí*, 'look at him', etc.–). Cf. Alcover and Moll (1926-1968); Coromines (1980-1991).

[*But we already have a right-wing government, Mr. Serra*]; *YOURS* was a right-wing government???

Md: [**Avere**, sisplau] Estem ??? el temps del del nostre primer bloc, sisplau...

[*Avere ('let's see'), please*]. *We are ??? time for our first part, please...*

- (19) a. S: (...) ara tindríem un pressupost que ens ajudaria a crear llocs de treball i a controlar el dèficit. **Miri**, senyor Trias, l'únic que s'ha de fer si es vol controlar el dèficit és seguir la política que ha fet el govern socialista aquests, aquests darrers anys.
 (...) *we would now have a budget, which would help us to create employment and to control the deficit. Miri ('look'), Mr. Trias, the only thing that has to be done if the deficit is to be controlled is to follow the policy that the socialist government has carried out over these, these past few years.*
- b. T: Com vol que no ens deixi absolutament tremolosos de cames la possibilitat de que vostès puguin manar sense_ sense condicionaments de ningú? **Escolti'm** ('listen to me'), quin és el fet diferencial: els mil anys d'història, ho són o no ho són?
How do you pretend that the possibility that you could govern without_ without limits doesn't make our knees knock? Escolti'm ('listen to me'), what is the distinctive factor: one thousand years of history, is it or not?

Therefore, we can conclude that *a veure* can be considered more external, and thus are more grammaticalized, than *mira* and *escolta*.

As for their function in discourse, all these verbs indicate a reorientation of discourse progression in two levels: turn taking and topic development. Their constant conative value, which is associated with their original imperative form, accounts for the fact that these forms always ask for the hearer's attention. By using them, the speaker manifests a break in the actual exchange and a turn of talk and/or topic reorientation, often for argumentative purposes.

Among the many values in which this main function can be specified, we will illustrate the following:

- a. Turn distribution, and especially self-selection in turn-taking, sometimes interrupting another speaker or recovering a lost turn:

- (20) a. T: (...) jo l'he escoltat. Molt bé. **Avere**, un moment. **Miri**, l'ocult, eeh, és lo que vostès s'emporten a Suïssa, això sí que és ocult.
 (...) *I have listened to you. All right. Avere ('let's see'), just a moment. Miri ('look'), what's hidden, uhh, is what you take to Switzerland, that is really hidden.*
- b. Md: [Senyor Serra, ja està]. Senyor Molins.
 [Mr. Serra, that's all]. Mr. Molins.
 M: **Viam**, eeh, eeh, si ho he dit, senyor Serra; nosaltres, a partir del dia 4 de març haurem de plantar cara.
Viam ('let's see'), uhh, uhh, I have already said it, Mr. Serra; from the 4th of March WE will have to face up to the situation.

- b. Opposition to an argument that another speaker is defending:

- (21) T: No faci demagògia

Do'nt you practice demagogy?

R: §**Miri**, **escolti'm**, de demagògia la_ vostès quan no parlen de què volen fer amb la llengua a Catalunya.

§**Miri** ('look'), **escolti** ('listen'), *demagogy, the one..., you do when you don't talk about what you want to do with the language in Catalonia.*

c. Change in the speaker's point or reasoning direction:

- (22) R: Per la poma de Lleida ha anat bé, per exemple? I per l'ametlla, per exemple, de les Illes Balears? Perquè jo vull_ **escolti'm**, això se sent i es veu a la gran nació catalana, Illes i País Valencià.

It has been good for the apples from Lleida, for instance? And what about almonds, from the Balearic Islands, for example? Because I want_ escolti'm ('listen to me'), you can feel and see that in the huge Catalan country, the Balearic Islands and the Valencian country.

d. introduction of a new topic or subtopic, or development of the current subject matter:

- (23) Md: Dos minuts és el tope que vostès saben que hem pactat. Si és menys, si és menys, no passa res.

Two minutes is the limit that you know we have agreed upon. If it is less, if it's less, no problem.

- P: No_ no, no_ era... exacte. **Miri**, el primer punt, i em complau d'afegir-me en això. Obviament, òbviament i afortunadament, eeeh, aquest país és un país que el tirem endavant entre tots.

No_ no, no_ it's... O.K. Miri ('look'), the first point, and I am pleased to be able to include myself in this, obviously, obviously and fortunately, uhh, this country is a country that we all make go forward.

Additionally, it is worth noticing that these uses of *mira* and *escolta* are mainly oriented to the hearer, but *a veure/aviam* is also often oriented to the speaker (as we could predict considering the different morphological form, second person singular vs. first person plural).

In conclusion, by using those linking words, the speaker slows down and even stops the conversation flow and tries to bring about a change, either of speaker, orientation or subject.

8. CONCLUSION

Summing up, the forms which have been analyzed have undergone a grammaticalization process related to subjectification. They exhibit modifications affecting different levels of analysis:

(i) The pragmatic use of these items is modified, and hence their meaning, which goes from objectivity (physical perception) to subjectivity (discourse organization). Correspondingly, their syntactic function change too, as a result of the conventionalization of a discourse strategy.

(ii) There is a categorial shift (reanalysis), so that elements that previously belonged to the grammatical category verb turn into linking words. Specifically, their behavior is identifiable with

secondary interjections –which are also grammaticalized elements (cf. Cuenca, 1997)– functioning as discourse markers.

(iii) Reanalysis implies changes in the distribution of these elements, and also in their intonation contour and combination with other linking words.

(iv) The forms tend to become morphologically invariable (morphological fixation).

(v) The forms tend to reduce phonetically (phonetic weakening).

The relationship among these characteristics can be traced back to iconicity. The iconicity among form, discourse function and meaning of perception verbs used as linking words illustrates what Hopper and Thompson (1984) claimed about noun and verb categoriality:

...the less a linguistic element is required by the discourse either to report an event [verb function] or introduce an entity for potential discourse manipulation [noun function], the less saliently it will be marked as a member of the category which languages universally designate to carry this function. (1984: 747)

In other words, if some forms of the verbs 'see', 'look' and 'listen' are not used to report an event anymore –that is, they are not used discursively as verbs–, they are likely to lose progressively the features typically related to that category in the language considered. Our analysis reveals that it is possible to uncover a clear interdependence among the form, the function and the meaning of these linking words at some moment of their diachronic evolution, even though from a synchronic point of view these aspects could be understood as being arbitrarily related.

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