



Information

Discussion

Different functions, different histories. Modal particles and discourse markers from a diachronic point of view

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Abstract: One of the main concerns of recent research in discourse markers, modal particles and related elements has been the problem of a neat categorical delimitation between the major classes involved. Comparing the Spanish discourse particle *bien* and its French cognate modal particle *bien*, we show that the functional difference between discourse markers and modal particles can be accounted for in diachronic terms. In other words, discourse markers and modal particles arise in different diachronic pathways, and ultimately from different pragmatic strategies. Strategies which eventually yield discourse markers are related to the joint coordination of human interaction. In contrast, strategies which give rise to modal particles make reference to the status of a given proposition for the ensuing discourse. Our results suggest that there are levels of generalization on semantic change below the overarching tendencies of subjectification (Traugott and Dasher 2002). More importantly, we provide specific motivations for these levels of generalization, and ultimately for subjectification itself.

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