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THE GRAMMATICALIZATION CHANNELS OF EVIDENTIALS AND MODAL PARTICLES IN GERMAN: INTEGRATION IN TEXTUAL STRUCTURES AS A COMMON FEATURE

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with German evidentials and German modal particles (henceforth: MPs). Both serve as linguistic means for expressing different grammatical contents in present-day German (henceforth: PDG), and both have developed via the process of grammaticalization. Sentences (1)–(4) illustrate the PDG usage of the infinitive constructions with werden ‘become’, scheinen ‘seem’, drohen ‘threaten’ and versprechen ‘promise’ as grammatical markers of evidentiality; sentences (5)–(8) illustrate the prototypical PDG usage of the MPs aber, ja, eben, denn, serving here as examples for the class of MPs as a whole.

Evidential constructions:

(1) Peter wird jetzt im Büro sein.
   ‘Peter will be in the office right now.’

(2) Sie scheint ihren Schirm im Büro gelassen zu haben.
   ‘She seems to have left her umbrella in the office.’

(3) In Ungarn drohen die Dämme zu brechen.
   ‘In Hungary the dams threaten to break.’

(4) Der Abend verspricht ein Erfolg zu werden.
   ‘The evening promises to be a success.’
Constructions with MPs:

(5)  
Das ist aber keine gute Idee.  
‘That is aber not a good idea.’

(6)  
Es soll ja auch schwimmen.  
‘It is ja meant to float.’

(7)  
Deutsch ist eben schwer.  
‘German is eben difficult.’

(8)  
Warum fahren Sie denn so schnell?  
‘Why are you denn driving that fast?’

The two categories in question differ to a great extent in their function as well as in their formal realization. Evidentiality is concerned with indicating the information source the speaker is relying on to make a claim. This places this category next to epistemic modality without, however, merging them into one.\(^1\) Evidential distinctions are realized in German by periphrastic verbal constructions, i.e. what we witness is the grammaticalization of auxiliaries and verbal periphrastic forms which is a well-known general tendency in the German language (cf. Section 2.1). As to the class of MPs, their function is a discourse grammatical one: an MP marks the utterance containing it as a non-initial turn. This is achieved by relating the proposition to a pragmatically presupposed unit, i.e. to the discourse context, to the hearer’s/the speaker’s shared knowledge and assumed thoughts.\(^2\) MPs constitute a formal word class of their own, with peculiar clustering characteristics, the development of which is no less than the rise of a new, previously unknown grammatical category in German (cf. Section 2.2).

Thus, the two categories at first sight do not seem to have more in common than being categories that have not received much attention by linguists as far as the German language is concerned.

In this paper, we will show that common developmental tendencies may be postulated in the grammaticalization of even such functionally different linguistic elements as evidential markers and discourse grammatical devices like MPs. The intention behind this approach is to propose that these common features are potentially powerful indicators of grammaticalization channels in general.

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\(^1\) Evidentiality has been often subsumed under the area of epistemic modality (e.g. Palmer, 1986; Ifantidou, 2001). In our view, however, evidentiality – as a semantic domain as well as a grammatical category – has to be kept notionally distinct from other categories, in particular from modality and the grammatical category of mood (cf. Anderson, 1986; de Haan, 1999, 2001b; Aikhenvald, 2003, 2004).

\(^2\) It should be noted that the speaker by using a modal particle – and contrary to a particle-less but otherwise identical utterance – claims the existence of such a context. This claim may or may not be in line with the actual situation.