

The PRESENTATIVE > DEMONSTRATIVE Grammaticalization Pathway in Arabic

In their recent survey of lexical sources for the grammaticalization of demonstrative forms, Heine et al. (2020) identify the development of imperative verbs of perception to demonstratives as a cross-linguistically attested pathway. As a component of that discussion, they refer to the proposed origin of the French demonstrative *ce* in an earlier presentative construction *ecce ille* ‘Behold that!’ (cf. van Gelderen 2011), noting that, “while not a verb, *ecce* has a meaning similar to that of the imperative form of a perception verb” (Heine et al. 2020: 420) and proceeding with their analysis on that basis. In this presentation, I move to expand on this latter observation by adducing additional corroborating data from varieties of Arabic, and to discern in finer detail the relation between PRESENTATIVE > DEMONSTRATIVE and PERCEPTION VERB > DEMONSTRATIVE grammaticalization pathways. In so doing, I identify conceptual characteristics of the proposed diachronic sources that are especially consonant with established precepts of synchronic demonstrative function, which speak to the broader viability of a PRESENTATIVE > DEMONSTRATIVE grammaticalization pathway beyond the specific contexts of the languages here considered.

The material for this discussion comes primarily from the review and synthesis of three Arabic demonstrative series previously proposed in to originate in presentative predications, but not till now considered under a unified, concentrated lens. These include the Classical Arabic *hāḏā* proximals (Magidow 2013), the Egyptian Arabic *dawwa* proximals/*dukha* distals (Leddy-Cecere 2021), and Libyan Arabic *āhwa* proximals (Pereira 2008). Extending beyond earlier accounts, I will show that each of the above – while distinct from the others in time, place and etymology – may be plausibly analyzed as originating in a topic-dislocated presentative structure of the type ‘Behold it, X!’/‘X, behold it!’, through processes of grammaticalization (desemanticization, extension and decategorialization – cf. Heine 2007) and rebracketing. Classical Arabic *hāḏā* and Egyptian *dawwa/dukha* represent “reinforcing” developments that incorporate and modify an inherited demonstrative element in the grammaticalizing source construction, while Libyan *āhwa* does not.

Building on the observation preliminarily voiced by Heine et al., I assert that the linkage between PRESENTATIVE > DEMONSTRATIVE developments like these and those deriving demonstratives from imperative verbs of perception consists explicitly not in the *semantic* dimension of their source meanings, but rather in the shared *pragmatic* status of those sources as directive speech acts that implore an addressee to attend to a given demonstratum. This directive nature thus contributes to the deictic component of the demonstrative function – the identification/demonstration to the addressee of an index – while the inherited pronominals involved in all examples considered here contribute toward the demonstrative function’s classificatory component – assisting the addressee’s ultimate attachment of that index to a referent (cf. Nunberg 1993).

As a direction for future research, I will briefly consider the implications of these findings for a novel interpretation of two further Arabic demonstrative series – the Classical Arabic *ḏālika* and North Fertile Crescent Arabic *hāk* distals – as grammaticalizing from dative presentative/offertive constructions (‘Here you go, X!’). While more data remains to be gathered (particularly in the Classical Arabic case, for which a rich textual record survives), the entailment of a directive to attend in a directive to take/receive supports the viability of such a pathway in light of the PRESENTATIVE > DEMONSTRATIVE cases already considered, and further work in this area may serve to illuminate aspects of the interflow between person- and distance-oriented distinctions in demonstrative development.

References

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