

From inference to hearsay: the development of the French parentheticals *à ce qu'il paraît, comme il paraît, il paraît, paraît-il*

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The construction *il paraît que* appeared around 1650 with a meaning 'it is obvious that'. It expressed an inference based either on visual perception or on reasoning. We will call it *il paraît que1*. In this first stage of the evolution, *il paraît que1* made an intersubjective reading possible. It concerned knowledge in general; it is an inference that anybody could have established. In Classical French and until the 20th century, *il paraît que* evolved towards greater subjectivity. It was speaker-oriented, which means it was more related to the knowledge of the speaker in particular. We will refer to this use as *il paraît que2*. It expresses inference by reasoning, based on the speaker's knowledge or on clues that are not always easily specified. In this respect, *il paraît que2* is semantically very close to Modern French *il semble que* 'it seems that' 'it would appear that'. *il paraît que2* functioned as a downtoner: it often conveyed doubt or uncertainty. In the course of the 19th century *il paraît que2*, which conveyed inference from reasoning, evolved towards *il paraît que3*, used as a hearsay evidential marker. This is the modern use, which has coexisted with the previous inferential use throughout the 19th century, up until the beginning of the 20th century. From 1925 on, *il paraît que* has only been used as a reportive evidential.

The structure *il paraît que p* has had, since the 18th century, several parenthetical variants, which can occur in initial or final position. The oldest, *à ce qu'il paraît*, is first attested in Frantext in 1755. The parenthetical can be translated in Modern French as *semble-t-il*, 'seemingly', 'it seems'. It is equivalent to *il paraît que2*, which was in use at that time. The assertion *p*, which is in the scope of *à ce qu'il paraît*, conveys the speaker's personal opinion. It expresses an analysis based on reasoning, although the speaker does not completely adhere to his own conclusion.

The remaining parenthetical variants date from the 19th century. According to Frantext, *il paraît* appeared in 1840, and *comme il paraît* appeared in 1854. In the beginning, they both had the meaning of 'so it seems' and were equivalent to *il paraît que2*. Finally, *paraît-il* is attested from 1859 and is used as a hearsay evidential. It is equivalent to *il paraît que3*, which was already in use at that time.

In Contemporary French, *il paraît que p* has two parenthetical variants: *il paraît, paraît-il*. Both are mostly reportive evidentials with a meaning 'apparently' 'from what I hear'. Besides, *il paraît* has an inferential use as a syntactically independent answer that is very frequent, with a meaning 'so it seems'. By analogy, in Contemporary French, the parentheticals *paraît, il paraît* have recently developed an inferential use in final position, with a meaning similar to French *on dirait* (*so it seems, it would seem so*).

From this overview, we see that, historically, the parenthetical variants are very close to *il paraît que*. The parentheticals *à ce qu'il paraît, il paraît, comme il paraît, paraît-il* follow the semantic evolution of the construction with a *que*-clause in parallel. They have evolved from an inferential to a reportive use. The only exception would be the recent inferential use of the parentheticals *il paraît, paraît* in final position.

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