

## From ‘see’ verbs to copulas: a little-known grammaticalization path

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The grammaticalization path SEE (imperative) > OSTENSIVE PREDICATOR<sup>1</sup> > COPULA (> TAM MARKER) is not mentioned in the inventory of grammaticalization processes provided by Heine & Kuteva (2002), and ‘see’ verbs are not mentioned as a possible source of copulas in general accounts of non-verbal predication such as Hengeveld (1992) or Pustet (2003) either. However, French **voici** / **voilà** constitute a well-known example of the grammaticalization of the imperative of a verb ‘see’ as an ostensive predicator, and additional examples can be found for example among Chadic languages (see Heelwig 2011: 380-382) on Goemai, Jaggar (2001: 468-469) and Newman 2001: 181-182 on Hausa). Moreover, the possibility that such ostensive predicators grammaticalize further as copulas has been recognized in at least two language families:

- (a) As discussed by Taine-Cheikh (2013), the grammaticalization of the cognates of the Classical Arabic verb **raʔā** ‘see’ as ostensive predicators is a common phenomena across Arabic varieties, and in some Arabic varieties, the ostensive predicators resulting from this grammaticalization process have grammaticalized further as copulas.
- (b) As observed by Creissels (1981 & 2015) and Tröbs (2003), Mande languages provide ample evidence that copulas may result from the evolution of ostensive predicators whose origin is the imperative of a verb ‘see’.

For example, among Manding varieties,<sup>2</sup> Sédhiou Mandinka has no grammaticalized use of **jé** ‘see’, whereas in other varieties the cognates of this verb have a greater or lesser range of grammaticalized uses that developed along the grammaticalization path discussed in this paper:

	Sédhiou Mandinka	Bamako Bambara	Kita Maninka
‘see’	<b>jé</b>	<b>yé</b>	<b>yé</b>
ostensive predicator	<b>félé</b>	<b>flé</b> / <b>yé</b>	<b>yé</b>
equative copula	<b>mú</b>	<b>dòn</b> / <b>yé</b>	<b>yé</b>
locational copula	<b>bé</b>	<b>bé</b>	<b>yé</b>

<sup>1</sup> Ostensive predicators are grammatical words or expressions combining with noun phrases to give sentences aiming to draw the attention of the addressee to the presence of some entity in the situation within which the speaker-addressee interaction takes place (speech situation), such as French **voici**, English **here is**, Italian **ecco**, Russian **voť**, etc. Ostensive predicators are more commonly called ‘presentative particles’, but this term is ambiguous in two respects: on the one hand, ‘presentative’ is sometimes used as an equivalent of ‘existential’, and on the other hand, the label ‘presentative particle’ is sometime used for words that have a different distribution (in particular, for interjections).

<sup>2</sup> Manding is a dialect cluster included in the Central sub-branch of the Western branch of the Mande family.

incompletive auxiliary **bé**

**bé**

**yé**

In this paper, after presenting the Arabic and Mande data, we analyze the successive stages of this grammaticalization path

The routinization of an ostensive use of the imperative of ‘see’ verbs constitutes the first step of the grammaticalization path. In its ostensive use, **See X!** is not to be interpreted in its literal meaning of an incitement to see the referent of X, but as expressing awareness of the presence of the referent of X in the speech situation. Since asserting **See X!** in its literal meaning entails the presence of the referent of X, the routinization of the imperative of a ‘see’ verb can be viewed as the semanticization of a pragmatic entailment.

Ostensive predicators entail meanings typically expressed by copulas: identification of a referent, and presence of a referent at some place. They differ from copulas in two crucial respects: the argument of an ostensive predicator must be located in the speech situation, and ostensive clauses cannot be questioned, since their function is to draw the addressee’s attention to an obvious fact. Consequently, as illustrated by our data, the relaxation of these constraints is crucial in the evolution from the status of ostensive predicator to that of copula.

Finally, as illustrated by the situation of several Arabic varieties, copulas originating from the grammaticalization of ostensive predicators may retain shades of meaning reminiscent of their origin (for example, insistence on the attribution of a characteristic), and the loss of such shades of meaning constitutes the last step in the conversion of former ostensive predicators into plain copulas.

Copulas resulting from the evolution of ostensive predicators may grammaticalize further as TAM markers, or take over the TAM marking functions formerly fulfilled by other copulas they have substituted for. However, the Arabic data suggest that TAM markers may also originate directly from the combination of ostensive predicators with verbal clauses

## References

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