

# **Persistent Cycles of Pragmaticalization**

Manchester Network on The Role of Pragmatics in Cyclic Language Change

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# Abstract

- In this presentation, I analyze **the cyclic evolution of different linguistic items** (e.g. discourse markers, rhetorical questions, truth markers), via the '**persistence principle**' (Bardenstein 2020) and argue that **such items cyclically pragmaticalize and become “polysemous” via a core function.**
- I show that **it is the item's initial discursively-recruited function** that motivates its cyclic linguistic change and it is that function that also persists throughout its history, in one way or another.

A single communicative **"super-motivation"** lies at the basis of different related functions which evolve over time.



# Why change?

Different linguistic items are often recruited and mobilized for different linguistic purposes. All in all, there are five main reasons for recruiting and mobilization of certain linguistic items (Bardenstein 2018, Bardenstein in press):

**A. Following social and cultural norms.** (e.g. Being polite and saving Face, Brown and Levinson 1978).

**B. Stance-expressing** (e.g. the use of rhetorical questions and exclamatives)

**C. Argumentation** (e.g. the use of ‘minimizers’ to strengthen a negative claim due to ‘sloppy/loose’ language use; rectification (‘anti-thesis’)

**D. Coherency and proper flow of the discourse:** (e.g. Drawing the addressee's attention (DMs), suspending progressivity (‘wait a minute..’)

**E. Expressing speaker's style and language versatility** (e.g. the use of allusions, irony and humor etc.)

- There might be an overlap

# The Persistence Principle

However, despite these different recruited purposes of different linguistic items, they linguistically evolve in a strikingly similar way:

The initial core discursively-recruited **function**:

- a. Motivates the change
- b. 'Takes over' the meaning of the linguistic item/construction
- c. Persists throughout its history as a 'common thread', even when grammaticalizing/Pragmaticalizing.).

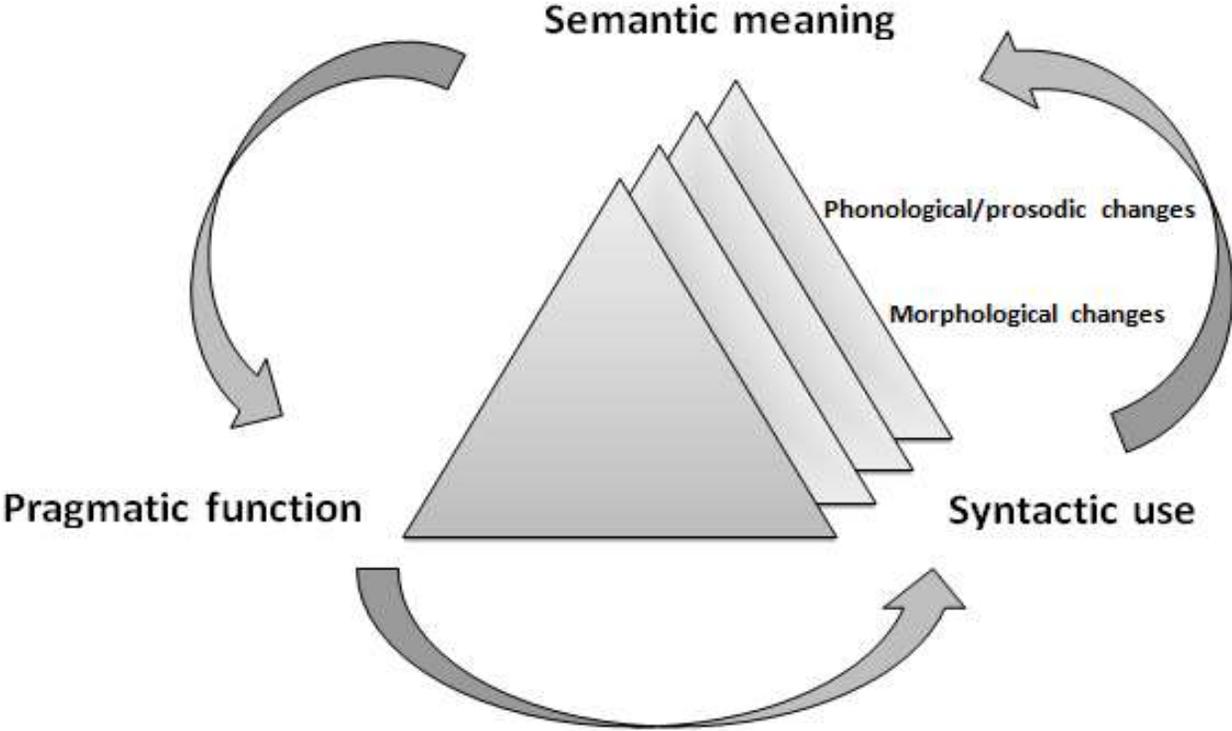
This can happen to the same item more than once : Code < inference <code (inference< code < inference..)/ Hansen (2020): Content < context < content (context< content etc..)(e.g. from a question construction to an intensifier and from an intensifier to a NPI adverbial, see Bardenstein (2022, in press). (**semasiological** cycles', Hansen 2020)

- From specific contexts to all contexts (Hansen 2020) **Via expansion of use:** metaphoric/metonymic/analogical and functional

# Form-Function Correlation

- Thus, a certain linguistic form with a certain meaning/function might add meaning(s)/function(s) and turn into a polysemy /poly-functional (e.g. French *pas*, Hebrew *be'etsem*) via a core 'super motivation' that is the functional common thread between those different meanings/functions down the path of history.
- In the case it gets to a point where it bleaches/ isn't used/ not even perceived by speakers as the original meaning anymore- in that case, the use of a 'booster' or 'revivaler' of the original meaning/function may take place (see Hansen 2020) in the following ways:
  1. **Counter-loosening:** *Literally!*, Hebrew *mamash* (Bardenstein and Ariel 2021)
  2. **Explicating Function:** Hebrew *afilu im/ele im* (Bardenstein 2019, Bardenstein and Ariel 2019)  
*Cyclicity*
  3. **Recycling** (Arabic minimizer *ishi*<negation suffix *sh*< negation suffix *sh* + minimizer *ishi*: *Ma baaref ishi*<*baarefish*<*baarefish ishi* (spiral)
  4. **Recruiting of a replacement** (Hansen 2020: "Onomasiological Cycles")

# The spiral of Pragmaticalization (Bardenstein 2018)



# The persistency of the recruited function 'The Persistency Cycle'

*Ma ze-X!* ('so X [adjective/verb/adverb/sentence]') :

- Question Construction: ***ma ze-X?*** 'What is this X'? (Bible)

1. The Rhetorical Question *ma ze X?(!)* ('what is this X?') as conveying rejection/resentment towards an accessible assumption or claim, followed by a rectifying Y to the rejected X : *ma ze X(?)*, *Y!* (Y upgrades X). (Rabbinical Hebrew)

2. Then, the shortened upgrading construction was left (via ellipsis and hybridity): *X, ma ze X!* (X denotes Y). (20<sup>th</sup> century)

3. Lastly, the construction shortened again (via ellipsis) and became ***ma-ze X!*** in which construction, X performs upgrading to itself (replaces Y). (Contemporary Hebrew)

***Ma ze X?! (=not X) → Ma ze X, Y! (upgrading) → Maze X, X! (upgrading) → Maze X (upgraded X)***

Persistence of speaker's strong stance!

A single communicative "super-motivation" lies at the basis of different functions which evolve over time.

Rectificational *be'etsem*:

1. Strengthening of a prior claim ('a **bone**' as an even-like operator)
2. Counter expectation (leaving Egypt the **midst of** the day as opposed to night time)
3. Generalization- broadening ("**essentially**": not keeping all Jewish rules and not just dog ownership)
4. Implicit rectification between two claims (**Actually**: homeowners at the time were also actually beggars)
5. **Self repair, marking rectificational common knowledge, clarification, definitions, explanations, summing up etc.)**

# Persistent Function:

A single communicative "super-motivation" lies at the basis of different functions which evolve over time.

- French *Pas*: persistence as 'a negation item': minimizer for the purpose of 'real' negation < negation
- Hebrew *PP Bixlal*: persistence of strengthening the speaker's claim: widening of a Rabbinical Rules/Category < widening the gap between two claims. (Bardenstein 2016)
- Hebrew *PP be'etsem*: persistence of argumentative rectification: rectification of a biblical rule < rectification marker (Bardenstein 2020)
- Hebrew speech act *slixa* 'sorry/'excuse me': Persistence of the 'wrong doing stance': wrong doing of the sinner < wrong doing of the addressee (Bardenstein 2021).
- Hebrew truth marker *mamsh* 'really': persistence of strengthening of the speaker's claim: counter-loosening < intensifying (Bardenstein and Ariel 2021)
- Hebrew conditional phrase *afilu-X* 'even': persistence of strengthening the speaker's claim (contrary to expectation): inclusion of minimizing/extreme state of affairs for the purpose of strengthening Rabbinical laws < Strengthening marker



**Thank You!**

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