Grammaticalisation meets Construction Grammar: Syntactic reanalysis and actualization

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• Today's topic (new research topic)
  – starts very locally (my children's variety of Belgian Dutch)
  – moves to a much larger, possibly recurrent pattern of language change concerning evaluative adjectives
Belgium

home (Flanders, Belgium)

Dutch-speaking ("Flemish")

work (Lille, France)

French-speaking

German-speaking
The çà va phenomenon

(Lemmens 2012; 2013)

• Belgian Dutch (="Flemish") : informal conversations often use French phrase çà va ('it goes') in answer to the question "How are things/How are you?"

• Example (pers. att.):

  A: Hoe gaat het ? How goes it ?
  B: çà va, en met u ? çava, and with you?
• This **conversational use** of *ça va* is a perfect calque of the French use:
  – *Comment ça va ?* | How it goes?
  – *ça va Ø / bien / mal.* | It goes Ø / well / badly

*cf. English: How’s it going? It’s going (fine).*
• In Belgian Dutch ("Flemish"), the phrase is fully lexicalised loanword, as a monomorphemic invariable unit
• commonly used as answer to question
  How are you? How is it? (= conversational use)
• new use as ADJECTIVE (first predicative, then attributive)
ça va as predicative adjective

• X is ça va ; I find X ça va
  – Die pokémon is nog wel ça va (www)
    that pokémon is still ça va (itgoes)
  – ik vind het toch ça va nog zo (www)
    I find it nevertheless ça va still like that
ça va as predicative adjective

With intensifiers:

– de kotbazen zijn **heel erg ça va** (www)
  the landlords are **very much ça va**

– **voor de rest is die echt ça va !** (www)
  for the rest this one is **really ça va**

– **dik çavatjes zou ik zo zeggen** (www)
  **fat çava.** DIM.PL I would say
ça va as attributive ADJ

• DET ça va NOUN:
  – Maar toch een ça va plaat om …
    but still a çava (music) record to …
  – Ziet er nog een ça va cd’ke uit
    looks like a çava CD.DIM
  – zij speelden een ca va match
    they played a çava game
  – a çava degree, a çava blogger, etc.
• Once adjectival use is possible, adverbial use becomes possible as well (no formal difference in Dutch between ADJ & ADV):

– [je kan] toch çα va meedraaien. (www)
  you can nevertheless play along çava

– Dit is çα va gedaan (TV Eén, 22/02/2012)
  this is çava done (=well done)

– Ik slaap çava nog wel (pers. att. 20-11-2011, Simon Lemmens)
  I sleep çava despite all
• Adverbial pre-adjectival modifier:
  – ik vind alle nieuwe BMW’s strontlelijk, de Z8 is mooi, oude M3 ook, en de M6 is nog wel sava mooi, X5 is degoutant, X3 nog ranziger (www)
  I find all new BMW shit-ugly, the Z8 is pretty, old M3 too, and the M6 is still çava pretty, X5 is disgusting, X3 even more revolting

  – Da’s toch ça va logisch (pers. att, JW Lemmens, 20-11-2012)

This is PRT çava logical
Analysis in terms of reinterpretation & actualisation
• Not really grammaticalisation, but *syntactic reinterpretation* and subsequent *actualisation* (triggered & driven by analogy; cf. De Smet 2012; Denison 2001), yet may be road into grammaticalisation (cf. below)

• Different steps *need* not be strictly linear (↔ grammaticalisation); rather *similarity* network (within and beyond)
Hoe is het? ça va.

Hoe gaat het? ça va.
Empirical support

• difficulty of finding sufficiently reliable corpus evidence:
  – highly informal register (adolescents)
  – WebCorp/Twitter: impossible to filter out noise
    • ça va extremely common on French Belgian sites
    • spelling often cava and cv: overlaps with common words (sparkling wine, curriculum vitae)
Informal acceptability inquiry

- 35 KU students (Flemish; 19-21 yrs);
- 2 moments (nov. 2011, nov. 2012); $N_1=18$, $N_2=17$);
- sentences projected on PPT (one after the other), individual written answers "yes"/"no" regarding acceptability in informal Flemish

- $N_1$: 2 sentences (pred. & attr. use), $N_2$: 4 sentences (2 adverbial uses, V & ADJ)
Results

• predicative use: 91% (32 on 35)
  the new Coldplay CD is still çava

• attributive use: 80% (28 on 35)
  this is a çava song

• adverbial use (VP): 17.6% (3 on 17)
  play along çava

• adverbial use (AdjP): 17.6% (3 on 17)
  this BMW is çava pretty
Interim conclusion

- Change from conversational particle to adjective; analogy-driven reinterpretation and actualisation = rise of new constructional possibilities because of reinterpretation
- Starting from predicative use (locus of analogy), expanding to (1) attributive use and (2) adverbial uses
- Not grammaticalisation (yet)
Outline

1. Use of the French loan ça va ('it goes') in Belgian Dutch

2. Analysis in terms of actualisation & reinterpretation;

3. Parallels with OK
English O.K. (OK, okay)

- Evolution of çava similar to that of OK
  INT > Pred. ADJ > Attr. ADJ

1. Interjection / Q-tag
   A: OK, let’s go. / Let's go, ok?
   B: OK.

2. Predicative ADJ / ADV
   It is OK; he seems ok; it works ok

3. Attributive ADJ
   an OK N
OK in English

- Empirical support (English):
  1. O.E.D.
  2. Corpus data:
     - Corpus of Contemporary Am. English
     - Corpus of Historical Am. English
     - Google books
O.E.D.

• O.K.: "chiefly in predicative use or as int."

• predicative use:
  – 1839 The house was O.K. at the last concert
  – 1839 It’s O.K. (all correct) in this quarter
  – 1840 He pronounced all O.K.

• attributive use:
  – 1869 The O.K. thing to do
  – 1874 We had an O.K. time till we went to bed
be OK

an OK thing

an OK person

an OK job

Google books
N-grams Google books:

an OK/okay N

![Graph showing the frequency of phrases containing "an OK/okay" over time]
Typical patterns & collocates

• Predicative use of English *ok*:
  – *it’s ok to* [V]
  – *that’s ok.* (anaphorical backreference)
  – *X looks/seems/sounds ok*
  – *X works ok* (adverbial)
- Collocates attr. use (COCA): ART

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English OK: summing up

• Similar evolution to Dutch ça va:
  – starts out as interjection
  – reinterpreted as (predicative) adjective, because of constructional analogy
    • *Shall we go? OK* (int.) / *(That’s) OK* (adj.)
  – actualisation: extension to attributive use (*an OK N*) and adverbial uses (*it works ok*)

fairly robust collocational patterns: people or creative work (book, film; often context of evaluation)
OK (oké) in Dutch

• Three usage patterns:
  1. stand-alone conversational use (cf. English):
     • "yes / I agree"
  2. predicative evaluative adjective (cf. English):
     • "X is ok"
  3. attributive evaluative adjective (cf. English)
     • "a (very) OK N"
• Hypothesis: similar path of change:
  1. conversational/pragmatic
     > 2. Pred. ADJ.
     > 3. ATTR. ADJ

• Empirical support (contemporary Dutch only):
  – *Corpus Gesproken Nederlands* (Corpus Spoken Dutch; Neth. D & Belgian D.)
  – about 5,900 sentences with *oké*
## oké in Dutch

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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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okeetjes  OK.DIM.PL

• Also diminuative use possible:
  – *Alles okeetjes :) k werk nu freelance …*
    all ok.DIM.PL :) I work freelance now
  – *[deze zaal] is wel ok hoor, ik had daar een verloving, was wel okeetjes.*
    this (ball)room is fairly ok, you know, I had an engagement (party) there, was ok.DIM.PL
OK (okej) in Swedish

• widespread as interjection (cf. En. & Du):
  A: Ska vi gå? B: okej
  A: Shall we go? B: ok

• widespread as pred. adjective (cf. En. & Du):
  det är (helt) okej
  that is (totally) ok
OK in Swedish

- **Empirical evidence:** Språkbanken – Bloggmix (2012)
  - [http://spraakbanken.gu.se/korp/](http://spraakbanken.gu.se/korp/)
  - 31,152 hits for *okej*

- **Restrictive search on [ART] okej [N]:**
  - 276 occurrences; 164 types
  - much more varied set of nouns (cf. next slide)
  - much more positive
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Similar patterns in other languages

• Estonian *okei*
  \[\text{INT} > \text{PRED. ADJ} > (\text{ATTR. ADJ})\]

• Spanish *mas o menos* ('more or less')
  \[\text{ADV} > \text{PRED. ADJ} > (\text{ATTR. ADJ})\]
Outline

1. Use of the French loan ça va ('it goes') in Belgian Dutch
2. Analysis in terms of actualisation & reinterpretation
3. Parallels with OK (okay, ok)
4. Further grammaticalisation?
5. Conclusions
ça va vs. oké in Dutch

• parallel uses & evolutions:
  – discourse particle (INT)
  – adjectival uses (PRED. ADJ > ATTR. ADJ.)
  – diminuative (only INT & PRED. ADJ)

• differences:
  – çava: use as pre-adjectival modifier (adverbial use); not for oké (*oké fijn 'ok nice')
ça va vs. oké in Dutch

• Pragmatic/contextual factor: ça va typically used against background of negative expectation, e.g.,
  
  as far as Xs go, this X is still ça va
  
  despite X, it was still ça va
  
  not the best X ever but still ça va

  often used with stance/attitudinal particles toch, nog, wel, etc. ('nevertheless', 'still', 'despite X')
Meliorisation

• negative expectation => mediocre becomes good => meliorisation, e.g.
  – cocktails worde gemaakt door 2 pro’s, die kunne da blijkbaar wel çava goe
  cocktails are made by 2 pros, these seem to be çava good
  – Hoe komt da het ni zo goe was dees jaar?
    ’Vroeger’ waarde gij toch çava goe?
    how come that it wasn't as good this year?
    ’Vroeger’ were you still çava good?
• ambiguous contexts: çava = "mediocre" or "very" (intensifier)
=> beginning grammaticalisation?
  cmp. goed fout 'good wrong' = very wrong

• importantly: only in adjectival and adverbial use

• so far: only with positive adjectives
  – çava good / pretty
  – goed leuk / cool
Conclusions

• Evidence for on-going change for çà va and ok;

• Triggered by analogy (reanalysis and actualisation)

• çava: meliorisation esp. in attributive use and adjectival modifier (subjectification?)
  – beginning of (further) grammaticalisation?
• Some desemanticisation (widening of usage) but strictly speaking, these evolutions are not instances of grammaticalisation
  – no phonetic reduction
  – no increase of dependency
  – no evolution from lexical to grammatical

• However: CxG: everything is a construction, so what then is grammaticalisation?
• NOT grammaticalisation, but reanalysis (cf. Himmelman 2004:39) yet actualisation that follows opens the road to *new constructions*

  – Bybee (2003:145) defines grammaticalisation as "the creation of new constructions"

  – Traugott (1988:410): in grammaticalization “meanings tend to become increasingly situated in the speaker’s subjective belief / attitude toward the situation”
Conclusions

• Further research necessary:
  – further analysis of corpus data (esp. pragmatic uses)
  – collocations & Cx patterns
  – parallels with other evaluative adjectives, also in other languages

• In short:
  – Still quite a bit of work to do, but the first results are quite positive: ça va / okay
References


http://www.internationaleneerlandistiek.nl/vol51/nr01/a01

Thank you!

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