The Emergence of a Hybrid Pro-form System in the History of German

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This paper investigates the pro-form *es* in the history of German. In a construction such as *Edgar bedauert es, dass…* 'Edgar regrets it that…' the *es* functions as a pro-form, which stands in for the dependent *dass*-clause. There are two types of approaches for the analysis of pro-forms, hybrid approaches (e.g. Breindl 1989, Sudhoff 2003) and uniform approaches (e.g. Sternefeld 2015, Schwabe 2013). In contrast to uniform approaches, hybrid approaches distinguish different syntactical categories of pro-forms. Sudhoff (2003) differentiates between an anaphoric and a non-anaphoric pro-form. The crucial difference between these two categories shows up in an answer to a question, which induces an all-focus answer, like in (1):

(1)　　What's new?
　　　　a. *Edgar behauptet es, dass er den Zug verpasst hat.
　　　　　 *Edgar claims　　 it　 that　he the train missed　has.
　　　　　 *'Edgar claims it that he has missed the train.'
　　　　b. Edgar bedauert es, dass er den Zug verpasst hat.
　　　　　 Edgar regrets　　it　 that　he the train missed　has.
　　　　　 'Edgar regrets it that he has missed the train.'

According to Sudhoff (2003), *es* in (1a) is an anaphoric pro-form. It needs a referent in the previous discourse to be grammatical. The non-anaphoric pro-form in (1b) is grammatical because it can occur discourse-initial. Largely unnoticed in previous research is the diachronic point of view. If there is a hybrid pro-form system, as Sudhoff (2003) claims it, two questions arise. When did the hybrid pro-form system develop? How did it develop? An investigation from Axel-Tober (2012) states that it is neither attested in Old High German nor in Middle High German. By looking into data from Early New High German and New High German I will provide new insights into the development of pro-forms in the history of German. I will locate the development of the hybrid pro-form system in the middle of the 18th century. Up to this time all instances of *es* in the database show anaphoric reference and therefore are anaphoric pro-forms according to Sudhoff (2003). But since the 18th century, *es* is also attested without anaphoric reference, providing evidence for the non-anaphoric proform. Based on the empirical evidence, I analyze the development of the hybrid pro-form system as a grammaticalization process. During this process the *es* loses its anaphoric reference and can be used with more grammatical functions. The emergence of the hybrid pro-form system directly effects the development of complement clauses in German. According to Reis (1997), only the occurrence of a non-anaphoric pro-form is a criterion for complement status. It therefore follows that the complement status of the embedded clause is uncomplete till the middle of the 18th century when the non-anaphoric pro-form first appears.

References

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