The rise and development of parenthetical *needless to say*

An assumed evidential strategy

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The article traces the diachronic development of the assumed evidential *needless to say*. This parenthetical expression allows the speaker to make certain assertions regarding the obviousness of what s/he is about to say, thus serving as an evidential strategy that marks the information conveyed as being based on inference and/or assumed or general knowledge. Parenthetical *needless to say* has its roots in the Early Modern English *needless to*-INF construction (meaning 'it is unnecessary to do something'), which originally licensed a wide range of infinitives. Over the course of time, however, it became restricted to uses with utterance verbs, eventually giving rise to the grammaticalized evidential expression *needless to say*. In fact, it is only in Late Modern English that the evidential pragmatic inferences become conventionalized and that the first parenthetical uses of the construction are attested. In Present-day English, parenthetical *needless to say* occurs primarily at the left periphery with forward scope.

Keywords: *needless to say*, parenthetical, assumed evidentiality, (inter)subjectification, grammaticalization

1. Introduction

The present article deals with an indirect assumed evidential expression, the English parenthetical *needless to say* illustrated in (1). Particularly, we set out to trace the diachronic development of this evidential strategy which, to the best of our knowledge, has not yet been studied.

(1)   We had a very bad trip, **needless to say**, and we saw very little of Sam until he emerged from his cabin at Oban looking very much the worse for wear. (BYU-BNC, 1989)

Regardless of its position within the utterance, *needless to say* in Present-day English can be considered a parenthetical expression, i.e., a construction that is structurally independent from the utterance in which it is linearly integrated, interrupting the prosodic flow of that utterance (Dehé & Kavalova 2007: 1). Thus, *needless to say* functions in a similar way to expectation adverbs such as *of course* (see Simon Vandenbergen & Aijmer 2007: 172) or commitment markers such as Latin *sine dubio*

'without doubt' (see Schrickx 2014: 285-286), conveying speaker attitude and/or degree of endorsement of the proposition.

Parenthetical *needless to say* has its roots in the Early Modern English < *needless* + extraposed *to*-INF SBJ >[1] construction (meaning 'it is unnecessary to do something'), which originally licensed a wide range of infinitives. In Present-day English parenthetical *needless to say* occurs predominantly at the left periphery with forward scope. Conversely, < *needless* + extraposed *to*-INF SBJ > constructions are marginal in the language.

This article is organized as follows. Section 2 is intended as a brief introduction to the concept of assumed evidentiality. Section 3 describes the data sources used in the present study. Section 4 presents the quantitative analysis of the data, putting forward an account of the rise and development of parenthetical *needless to say* based on evidence from the different sources consulted. Section 5 explores the mechanisms and processes of change involved in the rise of *needless to say* as a parenthetical, focusing in particular on the (inter)subjectification and grammaticalization of the construction, and finally Section 6 provides some concluding remarks and suggestions for future research.

2. Assumed evidentiality

Evidentiality can be broadly defined as a linguistic category whereby speakers indicate the source of information they are providing (Aikhenvald 2004: 3). This can be expressed in many ways. Some languages have grammaticalized evidential markers. This is the case, for instance, with Cuzco Quechua, which uses enclitics to mark direct evidence (*-mi*), hearsay (*-si*), and inferential evidence (*-chá*). The use of these evidential markers in Quechua, however, is not obligatory, and their absence in fact implies that the speaker has the most direct kind of information for the event or phenomenon being described (Faller 2002: 24). The Arawak language Tariana, in turn, uses the morpheme *-ka* to mark both visual evidence and recent past tense. Unlike Cuzco Quechua evidentials, the omission of the evidential marker *-ka* in Tariana would result in a highly unnatural and ungrammatical sentence (Aikhenvald 2004: 2).

By contrast, other languages do not have morphological encoding of evidentiality, resorting instead to what Aikhenvald (2004: Ch. 4) has termed "evidentiality strategies", which include, among others, lexical and discourse means to indicate source of information. For this reason, the neutral hypernym "evidential expression" is commonly used to designate those linguistic constructions which, in a given context, convey evidential meaning, irrespective of their linguistic structure and/or degree of grammaticalization (Diewald & Smirnova 2010: 41). In the present article, therefore, we refer to *needless to say* as an evidential expression, an evidential strategy, or an evidential construction interchangeably. Other examples of evidential strategies in

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[1] Throughout this article, we use the following abbreviations for grammatical terms: ADJ = adjective, ADV = adverb, COP = copula, INF = infinitive, P = parenthetical, SBJ = subject, V = verb.

European languages include the reportative use of the modal verb *sollen* in German (Aikhenvald 2004: 150, Schenner 2010) and the Romance conditional (Squartini 2001).

Several typologies of evidentiality have been proposed over the years, many of them going back to Willet (1988). In his classification, he distinguishes direct evidence (i.e. visual, auditory or other sensory) and indirect evidence. The latter may be reported (i.e. from hearsay, folklore) or inferred. Although many languages of the world have complex grammaticalized evidential systems, European languages usually exhibit expressions of indirect evidentiality, while direct evidentiality is left formally unmarked (Diewald & Smirnova 2010: 59). Within the subtype of indirect evidentials, the inference may be perceptually grounded, as in constructions with the German infinitive *drohen* (see Diewald & Smirnova 2010: 63), or, conversely, it may have a conceptual basis, involving logical reasoning or simply general knowledge. In Aikhenvald's terminology (2004: 63), the former is known as inference, while the latter is referred to as assumption. By way of illustration, consider the French expression *cela va sans dire* or the Galician adverb *obviamente* in (2) and (3):

(2) Je   reconnais   immédiatement la   voix,   **cela   va**
    I   recognize   immediately   the voice   that   goes
    sans   dire.
    without say
    'I immediately recognized the voice, **that goes without saying**.'
    (FRANTEXT, 2009)

(3) **Obviamente**,   non é   esta   unha   cuestión   estrictamente [sic]
    obviously   not is this   a   matter   strictly
    galega,   senón   xeneralizada.
    Galician   but   generalized
    '**Obviously**, this is not a strictly Galician matter, but a general one.' (TILG, 2004)

These forms are indirect assumed evidential strategies, that is, they are used to express assumption, logical reasoning or general knowledge (Aikhenvald 2004: 63). By using the expressions in bold, the speakers are not only providing evidence for what they are saying; they are also emphasizing shared worldviews or experiences and drawing attention to aspects of general knowledge. Given that the information provided is obvious, expected or self-evident, the receiver should have no problems understanding it. On this account, expressions such as these are often used as hedging devices to shade categorical assertions and for face-saving purposes. Moreover, they have an interactional and intersubjective function (see Traugott 2003, 2010, 2012, López-Couso 2010), one aimed at seeking agreement with the interlocutor.

Just like *cela va sans dire* 'that goes without saying' and *obviamente* 'obviously' in (2) and (3) above, parenthetical *needless to say* allows us to make certain assertions regarding the obviousness of what the speaker is communicating. It is therefore used as an evidential strategy to signal evidence based on inference and/or assumed or general knowledge. It can also be used as a hedging device to shade categorical assertions

(Adolphs 2007: 257) or as a face-saving strategy (see Degand 2014). Moreover, it plays an interactional and intersubjective function. Consider the following example from the *Daily Telegraph*:

(4) The ultimate fate of the Mohawks is even sadder. While those in Canada are pushed around, those on the other side of the border have been given permission by Washington to run bingo halls, the only legitimate gambling in the area. **Needless to say**, this has led to gang warfare and all the other horrors that might be expected. (BYU-BNC, 1992)

In the case of the United States, it is a well-known fact that gambling has become a leading industry and a major source of revenue for many Native Americans (see, among others, Light & Rand 2005). Since reservations have tribal sovereignty, states have limited ability to control gambling in these areas. Although gaming constitutes a means of generating income for the otherwise depressed tribal economies, there is a downside to running casinos and bingo halls, as it is generally acknowledged that these may also lead to criminal activities, money laundering and violence. By means of using the parenthetical expression, the speaker is emphasizing that s/he shares a common ground with the interlocutor. In fear of stating the obvious, the speaker is saving face: s/he does not want to make a self-evident claim (i.e., that gaming can entail illegal activities and violence), so s/he lets the readership know that s/he is aware that this is a generally acknowledged fact and, moreover, makes the reader a direct participant in the event, hence the evidential and intersubjective function of *needless to say*.

3.   Data sources

Our analyses are based on data drawn from a number of corpora: EEBOCorp for Early Modern English, CLMET for Late Modern English and, finally, the *Hansard Corpus* and the BYU-BNC for Present-day English. Table 1 below offers a brief description of these corpora and the total number of *needless to*-INF occurrences in each:

Table 1. Corpora used and absolute frequencies for the *needless to*-INF string

Corpus	Abbreviated title	Period	Size	Instances
Early English Books Online Corpus 1.0	EEBOCorp	1473–1700	525 mil	1,221
Corpus of Late Modern English Texts, version 3.0	CLMET	1710–1920	34 mil	187
The Hansard Corpus	*Hansard*	1803–2005	1.6 bn	1,772
Brigham Young University-British National Corpus	BYU-BNC	1980–1993	100 mil	410

Based on the *Early English Books Online* database, EEBOCorp features a wide variety of genres, including philosophical, religious, literary, and historical texts, among others.

CLMET includes five broad genres: narrative fiction, narrative non-fiction, drama, letters and treatises.

Data retrieval for the PDE period turned out to be somewhat complex. On the one hand, while the data for earlier periods were unavoidably drawn from the written record, our PDE data include both oral and written material. On the other hand, there is a dearth of diachronic corpora for twentieth-century British English. Thus, we turned to the *Hansard Corpus*. Although it represents a very specific genre—political speeches—its use is motivated by several factors. This corpus contains speeches given in the British Parliament, that is, texts which were conceived to be delivered in public. The fact that written and spoken language differ substantially is well-attested in the literature (Biber 1988, 1995). Despite their spoken nature, such texts tend to represent a rather formal register, and hence their distance from the written text types reflected in the other corpora should not be considered an insurmountable obstacle. After all, for the purpose of the present article we are interested in describing the development of the parenthetical expression as a whole, rather than any inexorable textual differences that may arise.

Given the textual diversity of the corpora consulted for previous stages of English, a corpus containing a variety of genres would have been preferable to the *Hansard Corpus*. However, other well-balanced existing diachronic corpora returned only a few hits for the *needless to*-INF string (e.g. while the *Hansard* yielded 1,772 hits, ARCHER yielded only 11). Thus, the *Hansard Corpus* was selected in order to have enough data to analyze the construction.

Since we focus exclusively on British English, we decided not to use other corpora, such as the *Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA), which would have provided ample evidence from a wide array of textual genres for the twentieth century. Instead, our data for this period are supplemented with evidence from BYU-BNC, which includes a variety of texts ranging from business meetings, radio shows and conversations to newspapers, books and academic journals.

The data drawn from these corpora should help to provide a complete picture of the diachronic evolution of the < *needless* + extraposed *to*-INF SBJ > construction from its onset to its eventual rise as parenthetical *needless to say* in the nineteenth century.

4. The rise and development of *needless to say*

In this section we examine the evolution of the < *needless* + extraposed *to*-INF SBJ > construction, illustrated in (5), originally meaning 'it is unnecessary to do something', which specialized in utterance verbs and came to be grammaticalized as an assumed evidential parenthetical over time, as will be argued in Section 5.

(5) It is **nedelesse to speake** of the price. (OED, 1530)

For the periods under consideration, we follow the traditionally recognized periodization in the history of English, namely, Early Modern English (EModE, 1500-

1700), Late Modern English (LModE, 1700-1900) and Present Day English (PDE, 1900-).

4.1 The early history of *needless*

According to the OED, *needless* is formed by derivation from the noun *need* + suffix -*less*. It is first attested in the early thirteenth century as an adverb with the meaning 'without any compulsion or necessity; needlessly' (s.v. *needless*, adv., OED) or 'voluntarily' (s.v. *nedeles*, adv., MED):

(6) þet is,   i   soð god monnes unmihte þet he   **neodeles**   nom   upon
     that is   in   true god man's   unmight that he needlessly   took   upon
     him seoluen for to [L. voluntarius] saluin   &   maken us   stronge
     him self   for to [L. voluntarius] save   and make us   strong
     'That is, the weakness of man in the true God, which he voluntarily took upon himself, to save us and make us firm' (MED, c1225)

As an adjective meaning 'not needed or wanted, unnecessary, uncalled for; useless, avoidable' (s.v. *needless*, adj., 1, OED), it is first recorded in the fourteenth century:

(7) Seint   thomas […]confortede   is   men   a-non; 'beth   stille,'   he
     Saint   Thomas […]exhorted   his   men   at once be   silent   he
     seid   'ӡe makiez deol   **neodeles**   nouþe   ech-on.'
     said   ye make   lament needless   now   each one
     'Saint Thomas […] exhorted his men at once: "be silent" he said, "you utter needless lamentations now, each one"'[2] (MED, c1300)

The first instances of *needless* in combination with a *to*-infinitive date back to the beginning of the EModE period (cf. example 5).

4.2 Early Modern English

EEBOCorp yielded a total of 1,807 occurrences for the search string *needless to*. We disregarded all instances in which *needless to* was not followed by an infinitive and cases of complex-transitive constructions with an extraposed object, such as (8):

(8) Plato became riche by his second voiage into Sicilia, Aristoteles longe tyme liued pore, and almost an old man was enriched by Alexander. **I thincke it Needelesse to tell** others as Homerus and Virgilius the Lanternes of Poetrye, the one a begger, the other a poore mã. (EEBOCorp, 1573)

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[2] The ME expression *deol maken* can be translated as 'to lament', 'to mourn' or 'to grieve'. However, in order to preserve the adjectival use of *neodeles*, we have opted for the less idiomatic translation 'to utter lamentations'.

Complex-transitive constructions were not taken into consideration because they are not directly linked to the emergence of parenthetical *needless to say*. Although these constructions were reasonably frequent in EModE, their frequency decreased over time, and indeed there are no examples recorded in COHA or the BNC.

In total, we retrieved 1,221 relevant examples, from which we extracted a random 400 token sample. The earliest attestations of the < *needless* + extraposed *to*-INF SBJ > construction in the corpus can be traced back to the mid-sixteenth century. Originally, a wide range of infinitives were licensed in this construction. However, over the course of time the construction specialized in utterance verbs. Examples (9-10) illustrate the < *needless* + extraposed *to*-INF SBJ > construction proper. Note the parallelism between the two infinitival subject clauses in (9). While the first *to*-INF subject clause is extraposed, the second one occupies the initial subject slot. The example in (9) could thus be paraphrased as *to pray for such holy Martyrs is needless*, *to pray unto them is most profitable*:

(9)   And for such holy Martyrs **it is needlesse to pray**, as to pray vnto them is most profitable. (EEBOCorp, 1577)

(10)   Although **it may seeme needlesse to make** any mention of Sweuelãd, because it is as it were situated in another world […] it may well deserue a place amongst other kingdomes spoken of in these relations. (EEBOCorp, 1601)

The *needless* construction can be thus represented:

(11) it_i V$_{COP}$ *needless* $_{SBJ}$[*to*-V$_{INF}$ COMPLEMENT]$_i$

In this construction, which accounts for 90% of the occurrences in the corpus, the pronoun *it* functions as an anticipatory subject, which is coreferential with the extraposed *to*-INF subject clause. The preferred copula is *be* in the overwhelming majority of cases (98%), although *seem*, illustrated in (10), and *become* also appear from time to time. As regards the *to*-INF clause, the data set includes 129 different infinitives which may take a complement, in most cases an NP (68%), but also PPs (17%), interrogative content clauses, and fused relatives (6%) or *that*-clauses (2%), among others. A second construction, related to (11), is represented in (12):

(12) SBJ V$_{COP}$ *needless* [*to*-V$_{INF}$ __]

This construction, known as the *easy-to-please* construction or *tough* movement, consists of a subject followed by a predicate formed by the adjective *needless* plus a *to*-INF clause with a non-subject gap, the interpretation of which is provided by the subject (Fischer *et al*. 2001: 256-257). In other words, it is an instance of object-to-subject raising, since the object of the embedded infinitival clause is raised to the subject position of the main verb. In (13), the raised constituent *Other matters of snowe*, which functions as the syntactic subject of the copula, holds a thematic relationship with the

passive infinitive *to be spoken of*. Such constructions amount to 10% of the occurrences in the data sample.

(13) **Other matters of snowe** because they ar cõmen with raine, **are nedeles to be spoken of**. (EEBOCorp 1563)

Table 2 shows absolute, relative and normalized (per 100 million words) frequencies for the eight most common infinitives in the data sample (more than ten tokens).

Table 2. Most common infinitives (>10 tokens) for *needless to*-INF in EEBOCorp

to-infinitive	1560-1629			1630-1700		
	N	*%*	*NF*	*N*	*%*	*NF*
give	-	-	-	16	17.00	10.20
insist	1	4.00	0.64	15	16.00	9.56
make	7	28.00	4.46	14	15.00	8.92
mention	-	-	-	12	13.00	7.65
repeat	6	24.00	3.82	13	14.00	8.28
say	4	16.00	2.55	7	7.00	4.46
speak	7	28.00	4.46	7	7.00	4.46
tell	-	-	-	12	13.00	7.65

A large number of utterance verbs (e.g. *tell*, *speak*, *say*, *mention*) appear in the construction from its onset. According to Noonan (2007: 131), utterance verbs are used in sentences that describe simple information transfers instigated by agentive subjects. All in all, 63% of the instances correspond to utterance verbs. In fact, the most frequent infinitives attested in our data count as utterance verbs, even some verbs, such as *give* (used in formulas like *give instance*, *give an account*, *give further demonstration* and *give a relation*) and *make* (used in expressions such as *make any mention* (10), *make protestations*, *make any further question* and *make any observations*), which seemingly are not utterance verbs. Although *say* is among the most frequent in the data, it is not until the LModE period that this infinitive undergoes a rise in frequency and becomes entrenched as a parenthetical construction.

EModE instances of the source construction in (11) do not *per se* encode assumed evidential nuances. Their meaning, rather, is somewhat literal. Notwithstanding, they may appear in contexts prone to evidential readings. Consider, for instance, the following examples:

(14) Concerning the filthie liues of the Popish Cleargie, **it is needlesse to speake**, being so well knowne in the world, & yet it is not their wicked life that separateth vs from their Synagogue, but their hereticall doctrine. (EEBOCorp, 1580)

(15) Calvin thinketh, that Daniel was in his chamber at this time, and in his spirit onely by the riuer, and so falling into a traunce, the rest were stricken with a

terrour: But if Daniel in spirit only had seene this vision absent, **it were needelesse to say**, that the rest saw it not: <u>for how could they see a thing absent</u>. (EEBOCorp, 1610)

In (14) above, the writer states that it is not necessary to speak about *the filthie liues of the Popish Cleargie* because it is a well-known fact. In (15), the obviousness of the information deemed not necessary to mention (the fact that only Daniel saw the vision) is reinforced by stating the fact that makes it obvious (*how could they see a thing absent*). In both examples the reason for explaining why it is unnecessary to do something is specified (underlined in 14-15), hence providing the source of evidence. However, the meaning of the *needless* construction in (14-15) can be recovered from the construction's component parts and does not on its own convey evidentiality.

4.3 Late Modern English

CLMET records 187 instances of the *needless to*-INF string with a total of 75 different infinitives. Interestingly, all those infinitives with at least four occurrences in the corpus are utterance verbs: *say* (43 tokens), *tell* (eight), *observe*[3] (six), *mention* (five), *add* (four), *inform* (four), *inquire* (four) and *repeat* (four), as exemplified in (16) and (17) below. It should be noted, however, that CLMET includes texts belonging to the first two decades of the 20th century. Therefore, some of the instances analyzed in this section could be considered PDE, according to the periodization provided in the beginning of Section 4. In particular, nine out of 187 instances are twentieth century examples, including four parentheticals.

(16) It is **needless to observe** that the generality of visiters do retire upon this hint; […] (CLMET, 1848)

(17) it is **needless to add** that they were the most talkative part of the assembly; […] (CLMET, 1834)

Concerning the verb *say*, the data for the LModE period show an increase in the frequency of this infinitive in the construction with respect to EModE. Thus, while *say* accounted for 2.8% of the cases in EEBOCorp, in CLMET it amounts to 34.2% of the total number of occurrences. Figure 1 shows the normalized frequencies per 10 million words for the total number of *say* tokens compared to the other infinitives licensed in the construction in CLMET. As illustrated in this figure, the frequency of *say* has increased exponentially from the first to the last subperiod in the corpus, and this increase over time is statistically significant at $p < 0.00001$.

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[3] In the CLMET data *observe* is used as a reporting verb ('to make a remark or verbal observation, to comment *on* or *upon. Obs.*', s.v. *observe*, 10.b., OED) rather than as a perception verb.
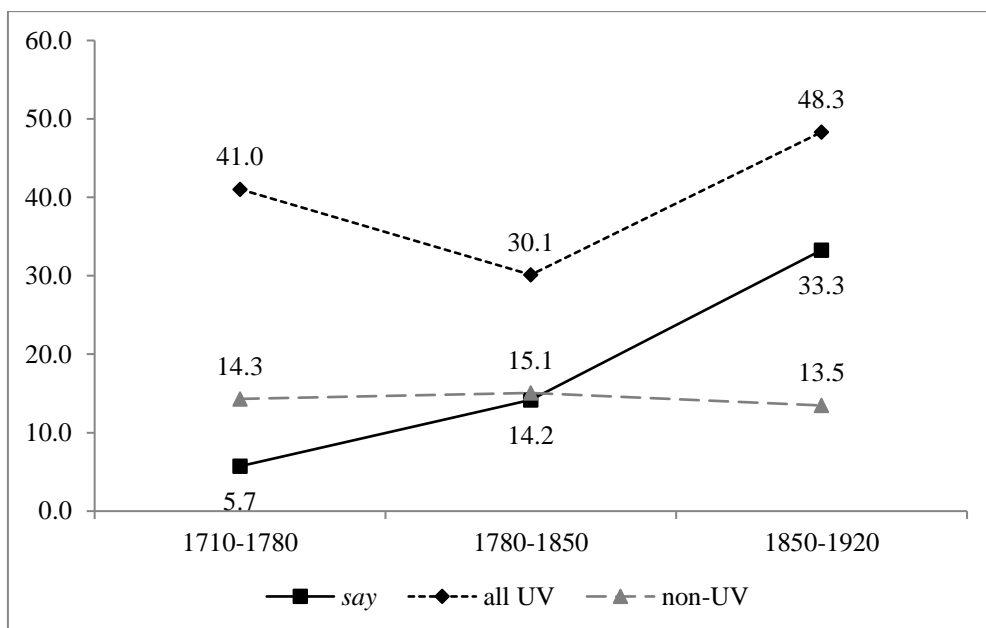
Figure 1. Utterance verbs (UV) and non-UV in LModE *needless to*-INF (per 10 mil. words)

Concerning the copulas involved in the extraposed subject construction, the picture is very similar to the data from the EModE period, since in this case *be* is also the preferred verb in the overwhelming majority of cases (96%), followed by *seem* (1%) and *become* (1%). The remaining 2% involve anticipatory *it* and copula omission, as illustrated in (24).

> (18) It seems quite **needless to multiply** comments on these results. (CLMET, 1889)

> (19) As it is now needless to forbid man-eating and Fetishism, so will it ultimately become **needless to forbid** murder, theft, and the minor offences of our criminal code. (CLMET, 1861)

As many as 87% of the instances analyzed in CLMET (162 tokens) correspond to the initial construction, featuring anticipatory *it*, as in (16-19) above, while 2% (four tokens) correspond to the *easy-to-please* construction (20-21):

> (20) 'Tis no Complement to Mr. Garrick, to say, HE IS BOTH; consequently Encomiums are **needless to prove**, what the nicest Judges have, for some few Years past, been so pleasingly convinced of. (CLMET, 1755)

> (21) If once he offer at the least familiarity--but this is **needless to say** to you. (CLMET, 1748)

In addition to the *to*-INF extraposed subject and the object-to-subject raising constructions, the LModE period provides the first instances of parenthetical *needless to*

say, accounting for 9% of the total (17 occurrences). It is only in the second half of the nineteenth century that we witness the first examples of the parenthetical construction, as in (22):

(22) Sir Richard fled from the sound of my prosy voice, and, **needless to say**, Derrick followed him. (CLMET, 1899)

The evidential and intersubjective nature of this example is straightforward, since the narrative voice remarks that the result—namely that Derrick followed Sir Richard—is evident and hopes that the reader agrees that this outcome was the expected one, marking it as something obvious.

CLMET also yields a number of ambiguous instances, which are crucial in our understanding of the eventual development of the parenthetical construction. Instances of the type < *needless to say* + subordinate clause > are especially prone to ambiguous interpretation, and amount to 31% of the data. Consider (23) below:

(23) It is **needless to say** that Theodore was of the party, and would be impossible to describe his joy. (CLMET, 1796)

The ambiguity in (23) resides in the fact that either the to-INF clause or the *that*-clause may be considered the extraposed subject. Thus, the *that*-clause may function as either the direct object of *say* or the extraposed subject of the matrix clause. This ambiguity is central for the reanalysis of the construction and its eventual development as a parenthetical.

The presence of hybrid constructions such as (24) provides further evidence for the reanalysis hypothesis. Only 2% of the LModE data (four tokens) reflect a hybrid structure, showing features of both its old and new analyses (see De Smet 2012, 2014).

(24) **Needless to say** how astonished they were, when they heard that Mr. Franklin Blake had arrived, and had gone off again on horseback. (CLMET, 1868)

In (24) *needless to say* does not have anticipatory *it* or copula (new analysis). However, the content clause *how astonished they were when they heard that Mr. Franklin Blake had arrived* seems to function as either the direct object of the infinitive (*to say*), or as the extraposed subject of the omitted matrix clause (old analysis). As De Smet (2014: 31) argues, hybrids exhibit conflicting features, since their surface structures can instantiate different underlying forms.

The reanalysis of the complement clause as an extraposed subject, however, is not the only mechanism at play in the emergence of the parenthetical construction. Thus, its inception can also be explained through cooptation, that is, as the result of a process whereby a sentence element is taken from sentence grammar and is re-defined for use as a parenthetical, in what the proponents of this operation have called thetical grammar, i.e., the grammar of parentheticals, or theticals, in their own terminology (Kaltenböck *et al*. 2011, Heine 2013, Kaltenböck & Heine 2014). Consider in this regard examples (25-26):

(25) The sale of the book, **it is needless to say**, has been phenomenal. (CLMET, 1840)

(26) **Needless to say**, he leaves it to your decision. (CLMET, 1870)

In (25) the coopted element *it is needless to say* is freed from the syntactic constraints of sentence grammar, thus appearing as an elliptic segment that has secondary status and can be moved around in the sentence. As posited in Kaltenböck *et al*. (2011: 879), the frequent repetition of cooptation may lead to grammatical change, which seems to have been the case in the emergence of *needless to say*. At the beginning, the coopted unit arises as the result of a spontaneous process. However, over time repetition results in entrenchment, and the coopted element becomes grammaticalized (see Section 5). It is over the course of the grammaticalization process that the unit loses most of its lexical meaning in favor of discourse functions, turning into a fixed formulaic unit, one which, moreover, has become eroded, losing part of its morphological and phonetic substance, as in (26):
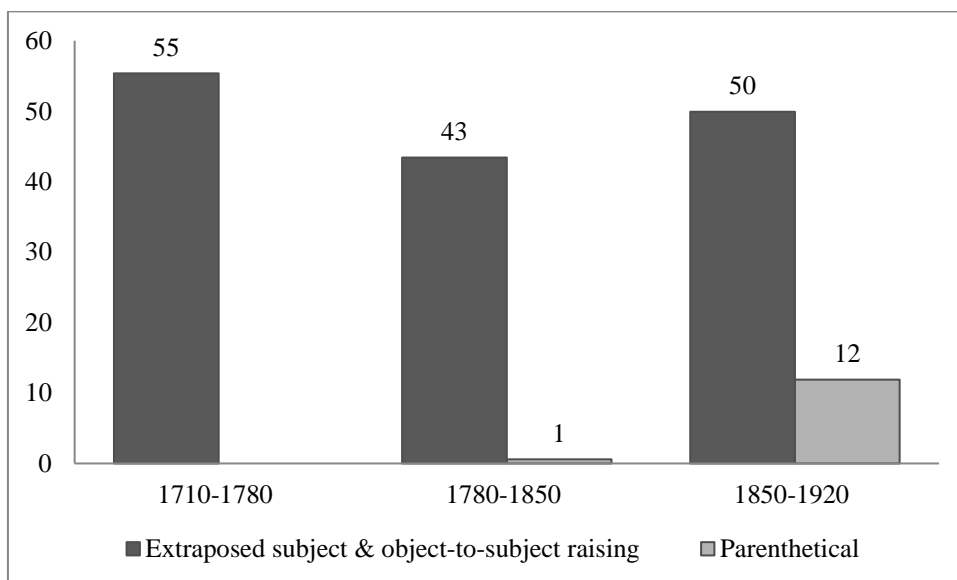

Figure 2. Frequencies (per 10 mil. words) for the *needless to*-INF string in CLMET

Figure 2 illustrates the normalized frequencies for the *needless to*-INF string in CLMET. Although extraposed *to*-INF clauses and object-to-subject raising constructions have remained relatively stable in the three periods recorded, we can also see that parentheticals, which are first registered in the second subperiod of the corpus, are on the rise. In regard to parenthetical uses of *needless to say*, 41.2% of these occur in medial position (seven tokens), as in (25), while 58.8% are attested in initial position (ten), as in (26). Nevertheless, given the impossibility of relying on prosody when examining historical texts, we have used syntactic criteria for our classification of

parenthetical uses. Initial parentheticals are those which occupy the pre-subject and pre-verbal position. They do not necessarily appear in initial position, and can also occur after a preposed adjunct or adverbial or after a conjunction between two coordinated clauses. Medial parentheticals occur in post-subject but pre-verbal position or after the finite verb. Final parentheticals appear in the sentence-final slot. During LModE, parentheticals may in fact retain the subject pronoun and the copula (25), which is the case in six out of the seven parentheticals found in medial position in the corpus.

4.4 Present Day English

The *Hansard Corpus* yielded 1,772 instances of *needless to*-INF for the period 1900-2005. A randomized 400 token sample was analyzed in order to trace the development of the construction in PDE. Parenthetical instances of *needless to say* amount to 96% of the total tokens, out of which sentence-initial parentheticals represent 83%, medial parentheticals 12%, and final parentheticals 1%. The examples in (27) illustrate the different parenthetical positions in the corpus:

(27)　　a.　**Needless to say** at this hour of the evening it is impossible for me to treat this subject adequately. (*Hansard*, 1901)

　　　　b.　Lady Cathcart's agents again urged prompt action, with, **needless to say**, the same result. (*Hansard*, 1908)

　　　　c.　Then follows the telephone number— a Lockerbie number, **needless to say**: The advertisement continues. (*Hansard*, 1965)

Figure 3 shows the distribution of the three parenthetical positions over the course of the period. Only two from a total of 48 instances of medial parentheticals occurring in the earliest decades of the twentieth century have the form *it is needless to say* (28). Such medial position parentheticals, with subject and verb retention, were also attested in the LModE data:

(28) These recommendations, **it is needless to say**, are at present receiving my earnest consideration and attention. (*Hansard*, 1930)
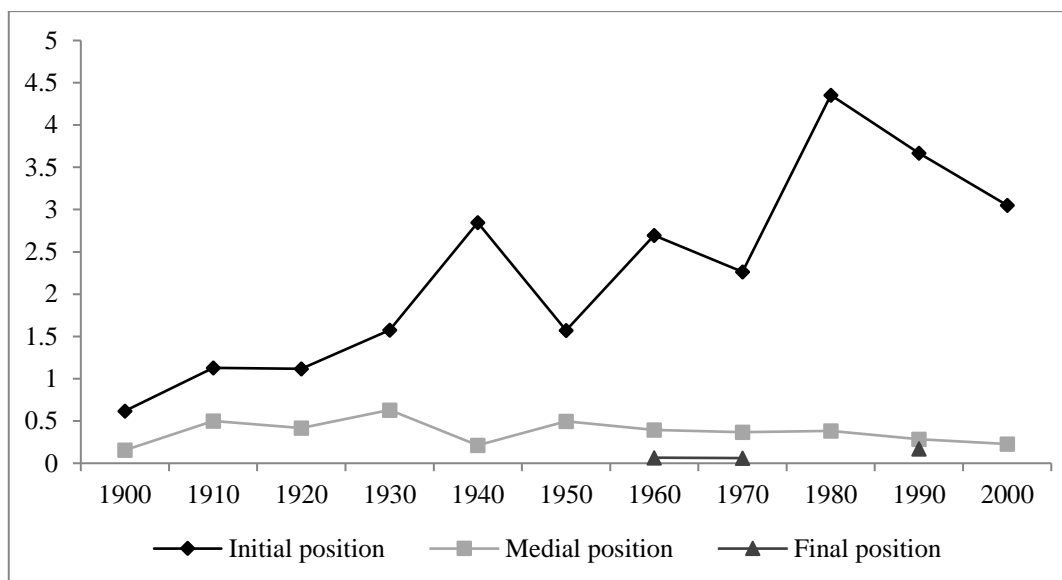
Figure 3. Distribution of parenthetical *needless to say* in the *Hansard Corpus* (per 10 mil. words)

The remaining 4% of the examples correspond to the extraposed construction. Thirteen different infinitives, including *refer* (29a) and *explain* (29b), occur in the randomized sample:

(29)   a.   **It is needless to refer** to the vast developments which have taken place in America and Canada, […] (*Hansard*, 1900)

          b.   **It will be needless to explain** the causes of these several delays: […] (*Hansard*, 1907)

Results from this corpus confirm the increasing obsolescence of the extraposed construction revealed in the late LModE period. As Figure 4 shows, while the extraposed and the parenthetical constructions were equally frequent in the 1900s, by the 1950s extraposed *to*-INF constructions had almost disappeared.

The last instance of the extraposed construction in the corpus is given in (30) below. As we saw in the ambiguous contexts adduced for the LModE period (examples 23-24), this instance shows elision of both subject (*it*) and copula (*is*), which may also point to the demise of the *to*-INF extraposed subject construction:

(30) I make no comment on the following observation, except that it seems a little inconsequential: **Needless to tell** you that my husband, myself, and seven sons, and one daughter voted for you. (*Hansard*, 1951)
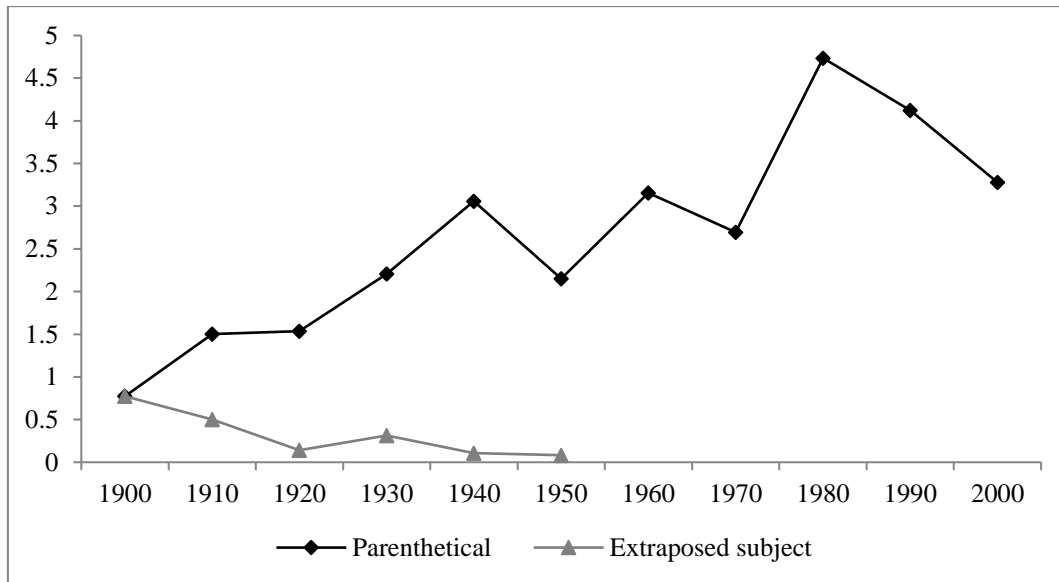
Figure 4. Parenthetical and extraposed *needless to*-INF in the *Hansard Corpus* (per 10 mil. words)

The overall results from the *Hansard Corpus* reveal a striking difference in the behavior of the *needless to*-INF constructions in relation to the previous stages of the language. By the second half of the twentieth century, the extraposed subject construction is obsolete, surviving only in the grammaticalized assumed evidential parenthetical *needless to say*. In fact very few infinitives other than *say* are attested in this corpus, while the data for EModE and LModE still allow a certain degree of variation in the use of infinitives within this construction.

Data from the BYU-BNC are consistent with the *Hansard* data. The corpus yielded a total of 410 instances of the *needless to*-INF string, 390 of which correspond to the written component and 20 to the spoken component. All examples are parentheticals, except two instances in the written component which are extraposed subject constructions. Thus, there are 21 parentheticals in the spoken component against 45 in the written component (per 10 million words). In the BYU-BNC data, parenthetical *needless to say* occurs both in written and oral texts, that is, formal and informal communication, although it has a stronger presence in the written language. Figure 5 accounts for the parentheticals found in the different registers included in the BYU-BNC. Initial parentheticals are the most frequent (34 tokens per 10 million words), followed by medial parentheticals (seven tokens) and final parentheticals (two). Interestingly, final parentheticals are more frequent in less formal registers (as evidenced by their presence in the *Spoken* and in *Magazine* components).
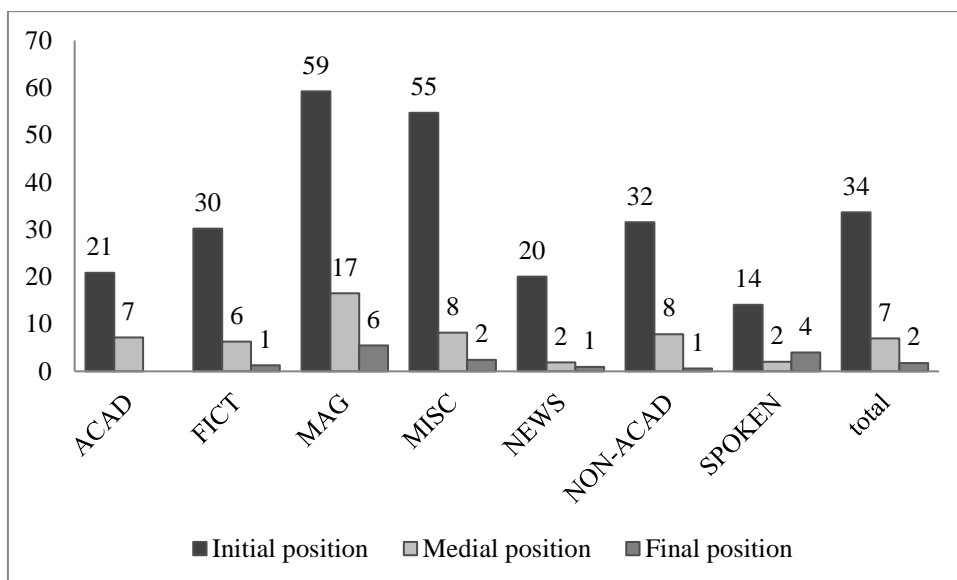
Figure 5. Distribution of parenthetical *needless to say* by register in BYU-BNC (per 10 mil. words)

All in all, parenthetical *needless to say* represents 99% of all parenthetical constructions. Other infinitives licensed in the parenthetical include *add* (four tokens, 1%), illustrated in (31), and *remark* (one), both of which can be counted as utterance verbs:

(31) This was, **needless to add**, easier said than done. (BYU-BNC, 1992)

Hence, contemporary language use seems to allow for other infinitives in the parenthetical construction, although these are rare.

Regarding *needless to say*—which accounts for the vast majority of occurrences of the *needless* constructions in this corpus—99.5% of the occurrences of the item correspond to the parenthetical function, while the extraposed subject construction appears in only 0.5% of occurrences. In (32-33) below, *to say* functions as the extraposed subject of the copulative verbs *be* and *seem*, respectively. Conversely, the examples in (34) illustrate the uses of parenthetical *needless to say* in initial (34a), medial (34b) and final position (34c):

(32)   After this demonstration it is **needless to say** which train got away first, but, of course, there was an outcry because the Mail ran late! (BYU-BNC, 1988)

(33)   It seems almost **needless to say** nowadays that exposition repeats are faithfully observed. (BYU-BNC, 1992)

(34)   a.   **Needless to say**, this immediately provoked a scandal. (BYU-BNC, 1992)

b.   it was a speech very much from the heart, and the thoughts expressed – mocked by the tabloids, **needless to say**, as philosophical ramblings – are still very relevant today. (BYU-BNC, 1991)

c.   These things were done without the knowledge of parents, **needless to say**. (BYU-BNC, 1988)

Furthermore, as shown in Figure 5, parenthetical *needless to say* seems to have specialized at the left periphery, given that utterance-initial position is the prevalent one in the corpus, accounting for 79.4% of cases, followed by medial position (16.4%) and, to a lesser extent, final position (4.2%).

5.   The grammaticalization of *needless to say*

In this section, we explore the development of *needless to say* as a parenthetical expression of assumed evidentiality (cf. Figure 6), which, as will be argued, is the result of a process of grammaticalization.
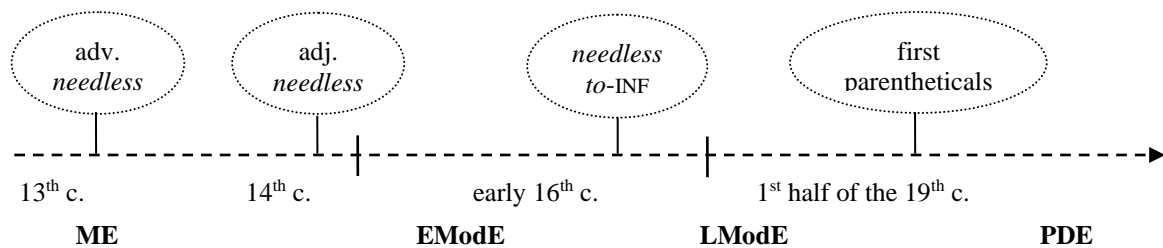

Figure 6. First attestations of *needless*, *needless to*-INF, and parenthetical *needless to say*

Along the lines of other evidential adverbials such as Sicilian *penzica* ('probably', Cruschina 2015) or Afrikaans *glo* ('allegedly', 'presumably', 'seemingly', Boye & Harder 2009: 19), which developed from attitude verbs (*pinzari* and *glo*, 'believe' and 'think', respectively), the emergence of parenthetical *needless to say* also involved the conventionalization of a new meaning, namely 'it is obvious/evident that'. This development could be argued to be either a case of grammaticalization or lexicalization, since both processes involve content reduction and the rise of a new conventional meaning. However, it is best understood as the former, since grammaticalization entails the emergence of an expression that is, by convention, discursively secondary (Boye & Harder 2012: 35). This is exactly the case with *needless to say*. As an evidential strategy of assumption, the expression has developed a secondary, more grammatical and abstract function: from the literal meaning of the EModE *needless to*-INF source constructions, the emergent construction has come to acquire a more general meaning with conventionalized pragmatic overtones, hence becoming a quasi-synonym for the adverbial *obviously*.

While other grammaticalized parentheticals are derived from verbs of saying or epistemic verbs and a complementizer (see Cruschina & Remberger 2008, Cruschina

2015 and López-Couso & Méndez-Naya 2015 for examples from Romance languages), parenthetical *needless to say* involves the grammaticalization of a more complex, multiword structure comprising an extraposed *to*-INF clause and a subject predicative (*needless*). This parenthetical, however, has not retained a fused complementizer (cf. Galician *seica* or Italian *penzica* in the studies mentioned above). In fact, it should be recalled that *that* was not the only attested complementizer in the data, as other complementizers such as *how* could also occur. However, once the expression becomes fixed with the utterance verb *say*, *that* becomes the unrivalled complementizer. Ocurrences of the *needless to say*-construction with omission of *that* are also sporadically attested (four tokens) in the corpus data. In the light of this evidence, therefore, the role of complementizer omission cannot be effectively measured.

Example (35) below summarizes the evolution of the *needless to*-INF construction:

(35) Development of the *needless to*-INF construction:

$$\text{STAGE 1:} \begin{cases} \text{(a)} & it_i \ \text{V}_{\text{COP}} \ needless \ _{\text{SBJ}}[\text{to-V}_{\text{INF}} \ \text{COMPLEMENT}]_i \\ \\ \text{(b)} & \text{SBJ V}_{\text{COP}} \ needless \ [to\text{-V}_{\text{INF}} \underline{\quad}] \end{cases}$$

STAGE 2: it_i V$_{\text{COP}}$ *needless* $_{\text{SBJ}}[to\ say$ COMPLEMENT$]_i$

STAGE 3: it_i V$_{\text{COP}}$ *needless to say* $_{\text{SBJ}}[$COMPLEMENT$]_i$

STAGE 4:   *needless to say*$_\text{P}$

During its earliest stage, the construction, meaning 'it is unnecessary to do something', licensed a wide range of infinitives. At this stage, corresponding to its earliest attestations with utterance verbs such as *tell*, *speak* or *say* (36), the *needless to*-INF string always appears with a copula and either anticipatory *it* (Stage 1a) or a raised object functioning as subject (Stage 1b), and the meaning of *needless* is literal.

(36) For the election of the Clergie and people mentioned in these two bookes of Eusebius […] Whiche M. W hym selfe hath founde out, […] it shalbe **needles to saye** any more of it. (EEBO, 1575)

In (36), for instance, the author claims that it is unnecessary to mention anything about the election of the clergy, since there are already two books which refer to the issue. During the second stage, infinitival *to say* becomes entrenched through frequency (see Figure 1). Other infinitives, however, can still fill the infinitival slot in the construction.

The third stage reflects the ambiguity adduced for examples (23-24) above. Consider the following hybrid example:

(37) **Needless to say** that Prince Tooth-powder—I beg pardon—and Anna listen while Fedor Ivanovitch again confesses his crime, this time to the daughter of

the drosky-driver, for whom he has a sincere regard, and I may add, affection. (CLMET, 1890)

In (37), taken from the humor magazine *Punch*, *or the London Sarivari*, the writer is alluding to a number of clichés about Russia and the Russians that everybody takes for granted, as they are considered to be common knowledge. The *needless to*-INF in (37), therefore, conveys an unequivocally evidential meaning. In this particular instance, the *needless* construction admits two possible analyses. The older interpretation holds the [*to*-V_{INF} COMPLEMENT] as the extraposed subject of the construction. A different analysis, however, may consider the *needless to say* string as a subject predicative and the *that*-clause as the extraposed subject of the matrix clause (Stage 3). Crucially, this ambiguity occurs in the strings with the verb *to say*, most likely owing to its semantic vagueness. It should be recalled here that combinations of *needless* with the verb *to say* increased exponentially from the EModE period onwards, and this increase in token frequency may well have favored the evidential reading of the construction. This reanalysis of the erstwhile complement clause, which is now reinterpreted as the extraposed subject of a matrix clause, is pivotal in the emergence of parenthetical *needless to say*. It thus paves the way for the new extraposed subject clause to be construed as the main clause carrying the propositional meaning, and for the former main clause to be understood as a comment expressing secondary information. This reinterpretation seems to have been reinforced by a process of cooptation, which would have allowed the recruitment of the former main clause, (*it is*) *needless to say*, as a parenthetical. The final step in this development is the loss of anticipatory *it* and the copula, which eventually led to the emergence of a new construction, that is, the grammaticalized parenthetical *needless to say*.

   All in all, it can be argued that parenthetical *needless to say* illustrates a number of features typical of grammaticalization. Its new function as an assumed evidential parenthetical indicates semantic generalization, given that it has lost the original literal meaning and acquired a more general or abstract meaning. Semantic generalization is accompanied by phonological erosion, provided in this case by the dropping of three crucial elements, namely the anticipatory subject, the copula, and the complementizer. Moreover, the reinterpretation of the former complement clause as the (discursively) primary proposition was crucial in prompting the use of *needless to say* as a parenthetical, since at this stage it is no longer feasible to hold that *to say* and its object function as an extraposed subject. As such, *say* in this new function no longer takes complements or adjuncts (e.g., **needless to say it aloud*), since the expression has become fixed in PDE. This illustrates yet another feature of grammaticalization, to wit decategorialization. Once the expression becomes fixed, it no longer allows further modification or complementation, assuming instead features of a new function, similar to adverbials such as *no doubt* and *surely* (see Traugott 2012). As a parenthetical, it is also endowed with further mobility in the sentence, and can hence occur in different positions, although as suggested in our data, in PDE it is attested predominantly in initial position (see Figure 5).

   As argued in 4.3 above, the emergence of this new parenthetical function can be considered a product of cooptation (cf. Heine 2013, Kaltenböck & Heine 2014), since

the new construction appears to operate within the domain of thetical grammar, that is, the grammar of parentheticals. Although cooptation and grammaticalization are clearly different mechanisms, Heine (2013) argues that the former seems to be a requirement for the emergence of (grammaticalized) parenthetical elements. Thus, once an element has been coopted as a thetical, it may then evolve from a spontaneous to a formulaic parenthetical, a process which seems to be congruent with an analysis in terms of grammaticalization (Heine 2013: 1223). The grammaticalized coopted parenthetical is syntactically, prosodically, and semantically independent from the utterance in which it is linearly integrated. This analysis would thus fit the present case.

Moreover, the conventionalization of an assumed evidential reading for the expression *needless to say* was enabled through the conventionalization of pragmatic implicatures and inferences. Thus, in the first attestations of the construction with the verb *say*, dating from EModE, an evidential reading was already possible. These early instances typically specified the reasons why the fact explained was obvious. In this regard, consider example (38):

(38)   But her Majesty's Character is so well known to the World already, that I shall not attempt it here. To tell of her most exemplary Piety, wou'd be no News in any part of Europe, much less in England; and it is **needless to say**, that it is now the most distinguishing part of her Character: […] (EEBO, 1700)

This example, taken from John Colbatch's *Account of the court of Portugal*, describes Maria Sophia Elisabeth of Neuburg, Queen of Portugal from 1687 to 1699. Colbatch characterizes Sophia as a pious lady, an attribute which appears to be well known not only in Portugal, but elsewhere in Europe. It being widely known implied that it was something obvious and hence not necessary to mention. Over time, such implicatures of obviousness led to the subsequent conventionalization of an evidential reading, since it was no longer necessary to provide further clarification as to why it was unnecessary to say something. The evidential reading, then, came to be conventionally associated with the expression. The conventionalization of the evidential meaning of the construction was also motivated by the rise in the token frequency (Bybee 2003, 2007) of the *needless to say* string, which allowed for the growing entrenchment of this prefab (Bybee & Torres-Cacoullos 2009) as a parenthetical.

Although *needless to say* functions predominantly as a parenthetical in PDE, it can still occur as an extraposed *to*-INF clause with a literal reading of the construction. This shows another feature of grammaticalized elements, namely layering and persistence, whereby new layers might coexist and interact with old layers (see Hopper 1991, Hopper & Traugott 2003). Finally, parenthetical *needless to say* has also increased in subjectivity over time, a feature which has traditionally been associated with grammaticalization (see, among many others, Davidse, Vandelanotte & Cuyckens 2010, López-Couso 2010, Traugott 2010). The expression thus seems to fit in the subjectification cline non-/less subjective > subjective > intersubjective, commonly associated with grammaticalization: from its original literal meaning ('something is unnecessary to be mentioned'), *needless to say* has increasingly come to be based on the

speaker's subjective belief state or attitude towards the proposition (Traugott 1989: 35). In other words, the meaning has changed from 'it is unnecessary to say that' to 'I personally think it unnecessary to say that'. In addition to an increase in subjectivity, *needless to say* has also developed an intersubjective function over time. By using this expression, the speaker is seeking the interlocutor's agreement, the form thus functioning as a face-saving strategy to mitigate categorical assertions. The interlocutor is then directly involved in the communicative exchange, so that in this new function *needless to say* could be paraphrased as 'everybody knows it, and I hope/want you to agree/understand' (Traugott 2012: 21).

6.   Concluding remarks

This study has traced the history of the expression *needless to say* from its earliest occurrences as the *needless* to-INF construction, in which *needless* had a literal meaning, to its rise as an assumed evidential parenthetical. In light of the present data, this expression came to be increasingly used with utterance verbs over the EModE period, so that by LModE the tendency to co-occur with verbs of this type was conspicuous. It is also during this period that the first parenthetical instances of the construction are documented. Our PDE data bears out the predisposition of the construction for utterance verbs, since it is in this last period that the verb *say* becomes entrenched in the construction and that parenthetical uses increase exponentially.

    In contrast to previous research on evidential parentheticals, which has examined the development of such expressions derived from verbs through a process of grammaticalization, our study is concerned with a different type of phenomenon. What is at issue here is the emergence of a formulaic parenthetical construction, with rather complex constructional origins, ultimately going back to an extraposed *to*-INF construction. To conclude, despite the limitations of the historical sources and corpora consulted for the present paper, the goal has been to offer a comprehensive picture of the historical development of this parenthetical which, clearly, can be best accounted for as a case of grammaticalization. Further research to contrast the data for British English with other varieties of the language would be of interest, as well as a broadening of the scope of analysis to encompass similar assumed evidential expressions in other languages, such as French *cela va sans dire* 'that goes without saying' or Spanish *ni que decir tiene* 'needless to say'. This, of course, remains the subject of future discussion.

Acknowledgments

Sources

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EEBOCorp   *Early English Books Online Corpus* 1.0, compiled by Peter Petré. 2013. Available at: https://lirias.kuleuven.be/handle/123456789/416330/.

HANSARD   The *Hansard Corpus 1803–2005*, compiled by Marc Alexander & Mark Davies. 2015–. Available at: http://www.hansard-corpus.org/.

FRANTEXT *Base textuelle FRANTEXT*, ATILF - CNRS & Université de Lorraine. Available at: http://www.frantext.fr/.

MED   *Middle English Dictionary*. Kurath, Hans, Sherman M. Kuhn *et al*., eds. 1952–2001. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Available at: http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/.

OED   *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford University Press. Available at: http://www.oed.com/.

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