Nor Jnl Ling 29.2, 173–200 © 2006 Cambridge University Press doi:10.1017/S0332586506001570
Printed in the United Kingdom

Keevallik, Leelo. 2006. From discourse pattern to epistemic marker: Estonian (*ei*) *tea* 'don't know'. *Nordic Journal of Linguistics* **29.2**, 173–200.

From discourse pattern to epistemic marker: Estonian (*ei*) *tea* 'don't know'

Leelo Keevallik

In contemporary informal Estonian, the negative verb form *ei tea* 'don't know' has become a routinized part of generic questions, in which the agent is left unexpressed. This pattern is in accordance with the general impersonal and reference-avoiding style of conversing in Estonia. The study outlines a continuum of synchronic usages from the original expressions *sa ei tea* 'you don't know' and *ma ei tea* 'I don't know' to the epistemic usages of (*ei*) *tea*, which are specifically tied to the speech act of questioning. The data is interactional and the analysis relies on the interpretation of (*ei*) *tea*-questions by the participants themselves, following the methodology of conversation analysis. It is demonstrated that the development of (*ei*) *tea* displays phonological and semantic erosion, pragmatic strengthening, subjectification, and decategorialization. Thus, grammaticalization theory is here combined with interactional linguistics in order to display the emergence of a grammatical structure from a discourse pattern.

Keywords discourse patterns, emergent grammar, epistemic modality, epistemic phrase, Estonian, generic reference, grammaticalization, interactional linguistics, parentheticals, questions

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Grammar comes into being in everyday language use. This paper shows that the negative form of the verb 'know' emerges as an epistemic marker, (*ei*) *tea* '(don't) know', in contemporary spoken Estonian. The marker (*ei*) *tea* is currently a part of Estonian interrogative grammar, and it regularly marks speaker stance in questions. It has become phonologically assimilated, morphosyntactically drained and semantically bleached, thus displaying classic features of the grammaticalization process. The original verb form and sentence predicate has come to be used as a question-mitigating device that predominantly occurs in turn- and utterance-initial positions. The sources of this development can be found in the synchronic discourse patterns which will be demonstrated below.

The analysis is grounded in the belief that grammar is constantly 'done' in our everyday interaction: it is preserved, negotiated, and changed in encounters between speakers of the language. In other words, it emerges in human interaction. Some parts of grammar are more stable, others more fluid, and the linguistic structure is

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0332586506001570 Published online by Cambridge University Press

constantly created and recreated via usage. Interaction is the locus of grammar and its emergence, and grammatical patterns arise from discourse patterns.

Consequently, this study will first be contextualized within the research tradition of the grammaticalization of discourse patterns. Then the data and the pattern itself will be presented. The major part of the study concerns the two origins of (*ei*) *tea* as an epistemic device, the expressions *sa ei tea* 'you don't know' for information questions and *ma ei tea* 'I don't know' for rhetorical questions. After this, the interactional functions of the emerging (*ei*) *tea*-questions are discussed, showing the particular social advantages of this generic format.

1. ROUTINIZATION OF DISCOURSE PATTERNS AS GRAMMAR

The suggestion to use the term EMERGENT GRAMMAR was first made by Paul Hopper who proposed that grammar be seen as a real-time social phenomenon, the structure of which is always provisional, always negotiable, and in fact epiphenomenal; that is as much an effect as a cause (Hopper 1987:142). Hopper sees grammar as similar to any cultural pattern. Nobody doubts that culture is temporal, emergent, always disputed, and forever changing, and this is the way we should also think about grammar. Structure (grammar, meaning) is thus understood to be much less rigid than we used to think, and to involve fuzzy categories as well as variation. Grammar is more a result of spreading of systematicity via repetition than an overarching set of abstract rules (Hopper 1987:143f.). Structure is a product of, rather than a prerequisite for, communication or, in other words, an adaptive response to recurrent habits in the way people talk to each other. Naturally, socio-cultural linguistic practices are passed down to us from within the speech community, while linguistic structures are 'already there' when we, as actors, 'enter the continuity of practice' (Linell 1998:125). Nevertheless, they are interactionally generated, renegotiated and redefined (ibid.). It is this generation and renegotiation that is tackled within the concept of emergent grammar.

One major outcome of this kind of understanding of language structure and its emergence is that diachrony and synchrony fade into each other – synchrony is at the same time diachrony, as synchronic structure also crucially depends on repetition and the experience of individual speakers. Repetition may lead to formal reduction, but it may also drain meaning away, which is one of the things that the theory of grammaticalization attempts to capture. Grammaticalization can easily illustrate the idea of emergence, in which a form, a combination, or a group of forms is singled out from what was once a more extensive paradigm – it fixes, or routinizes, a meaning or discourse function. Grammaticalization and, more generally, routinization processes seem to account largely for how language evolves and emerges.

Grammaticalization studies prototypically belong to the field of historical linguistics and deal with the diachronic development of grammatical categories in

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a language. A classical definition of the process of grammaticalization says that it is an 'evolution whereby linguistic units lose in semantic complexity, pragmatic significance, syntactic freedom, and phonetic substance respectively' (Heine & Reh 1984:15). According to this, grammaticalization is seen as a complex of related or parallel processes, describable as continua of usage patterns where there is a more lexical item at one end and a more grammatical item at the other. The example of the grammaticalization process most often cited is probably the development of *be going to* into *gonna* as a marker of prospective temporality in English. Originally the progressive form of the main verb *go* plus a subordinator introducing a purposive clause, in certain contexts *be going to* came to function as an auxiliary marking future tense (Traugott 1994:1481), going through an assimilation process on its way. Similarly, the Estonian expression *sa/ma ei tea* 'you/I don't know' has shortened into *ei tea*, *t'ea* with a palatalized *t* or even *tea*, which at present functions as an epistemic device used with questions. In both cases, original verb forms have lost much of their lexical content and internal grammatical structure. They have undergone paradigmatic change.

There has been some controversy as to how and to what extent the development of pragmatic markers, including epistemic and speech-act markers, can be considered instances of grammaticalization, as they do not belong to the core grammatical categories of a language. Formally and semantically, however, the development of many pragmatic markers is consonant with the notion of grammaticalization, and some studies (most notably Brinton 1996:272; 2001) argue that it is plausible to account even for pragmatic categories within a theory of grammaticalization. Brinton outlines two problems in this regard: since in general pragmatic markers remain free forms, phonological attrition and morphological bonding rarely occur (something also true in the case of function words). Besides, phonological attrition clearly does occur in the case of (*ei*) *tea*. Second, pragmatic markers may also develop from larger phrases or entire syntactic constructions, but this has already been incorporated into the theory of grammaticalization (Brinton 1996:273). Third, pragmatic markers do not tend to expand rather than shrink their syntactic scope – they come to relate to the entire speech event (Brinton 2001:194). In contrast, in a grammaticalization process items are generally thought to lose syntactic scope. Some additional issues concern coalescence and fixed utterance positions (Waltereit 2002:1005). Specifically, it has been claimed that discourse markers in general do not undergo coalescence but remain free morphemes with respect to their adjacent elements (ibid.). However, (*ei*) *tea* tends to form a single phonological word with the following question word. Additionally, the utterance positions of (*ei*) *tea* are restricted, possibly due to its specific epistemic meaning.[1] The case of (*ei*) *tea* should thus qualify as an instance of grammaticalization.

Grammaticalization theory explicitly deals with the relationship between more and less fixed in language. It demonstrates how grammatical forms arise. Through

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examination of either diachronic or synchronic data, it studies the minute semantic changes in local contexts that are part of the development of a more fixed content (or lexical) item into a more fixed function (or grammatical) item, and from grammatical to more grammatical forms. Grammaticalization need not always be studied from a diachronic 'source and pathway' perspective. As a syntactic, discourse-pragmatic phenomenon, it can also be studied from the point of view of fluid patterns of language use at a synchronically segmented moment in time (Lehmann 1985; Traugott & Heine 1991:1). The developmental paths are then put forward as potential continua from the more lexical or 'literal' usage to the more specifically grammatical patterns via gradual semantic–pragmatic change. Otherwise there would be no practical way of studying the emergence of many informal patterns that are only used in everyday face-to-face settings, as the relevant type of data is not accessible in the traditional written sources.[2] In this kind of research, a very general kind of unidirectionality is usually assumed, viz. that development takes place from more to less categorial items, from less to more bonded forms, and from more lexical to more grammatical forms. This assumption is based on solid historical findings about actual developments, including the emergence of pragmatic markers (e.g. Brinton 1996, 2001; Traugott & Dasher 2002:81–89, 152–189).

Synchronically, a grammaticalization cline can be thought of as a continuum: an arrangement of forms along an imaginary line at one end of which is a fuller form of some kind, perhaps 'lexical', and at the opposite end a compacted and reduced form, perhaps 'grammatical' (Hopper & Traugott 1993:7). Alterations of the semantic range of an item are thus dependent on what happens in interaction as the crucial locus for renegotiating meaning. This is what is suggested by Traugott (1982:267) when she defines an area of future study in grammaticalization: the question of the extent to which the process of grammaticalization is determined not only by the lexical sets from which grammatical terms are derived, but also by general discourse strategies involved in creating a universe of discourse. Therefore, and because of the interactional nature of the (*ei*) *tea*-question, conversational sequences will be our main focus of interest below.

The specific perspective of discourse gradually becoming morphosyntax in grammaticalization theory focuses on the so-called packaging of discourse and the evolution of syntactic and morphological structure through the fixing of discourse strategies (e.g. Hopper 1987). At the same time, it is still not common in the field to pay much attention to factors outside the immediate linguistic or the more content-based discourse context such as, for example, narrative structure, episode boundaries, foregrounding and backgrounding. A comprehensive inventory of factors that includes a number of interactional matters is presented by Brinton (1996:36–38), although her written historical data certainly limits the extent of possible interactional analysis. At the same time, there is no doubt that the sequencing of

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actions by the interactants on a turn-by-turn basis is crucial in the use of many pragmatic markers. For instance, whether a turn is disagreeing or agreeing cannot necessarily be figured out on the basis of the utterance produced. However, the turn-format (with or without pauses or hesitations), specific pragmatic markers, and the subsequent reaction by the interlocutor gives us a clue. The meaning of pragmatic markers can in these cases only be discovered in action sequences produced by participants.

If we want to account for these more interactional facets of grammar and its emergence, the conversation analysis method and especially its next-turn proof procedure are of great help. One of the basic principles of CA methodology is its focus on participant orientation and the validation of the researcher's analysis via the observable behaviour of the interactants in subsequent turns. As it is, some analysis, understanding or appreciation of the prior turn will be displayed in the recipient's next or ongoing turn. The interpretations embedded in these treatments of the prior turn are publicly available as the means by which previous speakers can determine how they were understood (Heritage 1984:255f.). By looking closely at what interpretations are displayed in the subsequent turns by participants, even the researcher has empirical access to what the participants orient to. In order to understand the function of the (*ei*) *tea*-question, the analysis in this study relies to a great extent on the participants' responses to these questions.

2. THE DATA

The data used in the current study is contemporary, which means that we can outline the possible stages of (*ei*) *tea*-question development as they reveal themselves synchronically in the current usage. The majority of the data comes from the internet (henceforth NET), which is nowadays the largest collection of informal Estonian. Besides, in contrast with bigger languages, the risk of finding examples produced by non-native speakers is minuscule. Internet examples have been found with different kinds of advanced searches on Google and their orthography has not been changed.

In addition, two spoken-language corpora have been used. The first one was collected and transcribed by myself in 1997 and 1998, and consists of naturally occurring telemarketing calls as well as everyday calls between family members, relatives, friends, and colleagues (henceforth the LK corpus). There are about 103,000 words in the corpus. The other corpus is publicly available and constantly growing, consisting of about 700,000 words at the moment. The data comes from a variety of settings, including face-to-face conversations (henceforth the Tartu corpus or TC). Each example is provided with a code revealing its origin (LK, TC, NET, respectively). In these sources, more than a hundred cases have been analysed for

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the current study, 38 of which come from the corpora. Transcription and glossing conventions can be found at the end of the article.

3. (*EI*) *TEA* IN QUESTIONS

Questions in Estonian may be implemented with the item (*ei*) *tea* 'don't know', which has become a routine part of a certain question format. Consider the following examples from conversation as well as the internet. All these utterances, although formally statements, are interpreted as questions in Estonian. In English, the semantic–pragmatically closest item to (*ei*) *tea* is probably *I wonder*,[3] but since this does not cover the exact nuances of (*ei*) *tea*, the marker will be left untranslated in idiomatic English. Note that negative forms are not inflected with person endings in Estonian, nor is the negation word. Thus, the word combination *ei tea* is used in all person and number categories, which is impossible to preserve in the translation.

(1) a. **Ei tea** Kas see on mõne saadiku idee ka või?[4]
NEG know QUES this is some:GEN ambassador:GEN idea too or
'EI TEA is this an idea of an ambassador?' (NET)

b. **Ei tea** mis maitsega need ka veel on?
NEG know what taste:COM these too PART are
'EI TEA what do these ones taste like?' (NET)

c. **Ei tea** kes need lobod (.) muretses.
NEG know who these name:PL brought:3SG
'EI TEA who brought these "lobos"?' (LK)

d. **Ei tea** kesse eestis essa oli?
NEG know who Estonia:INS first was
'EI TEA who was number one in Estonia?' (NET)

The pattern is thus questions initiated by *ei tea* 'don't know' + question word, where the latter may be either the question particle *kas* or a *wh*-question word, such as *mis* 'what', *kesse* informal 'who', *miks* 'why', *millal* 'when', etc.

Importantly, in spoken data, *ei tea* is never produced with a separate intonation contour. It is latched to the following question word and they have one prominent syllable in all, often the syllable *tea*. *Ei* may be cliticized, resulting in something like *eitea* or *itea* or even *t'ea* with a palatalized initial *t*. The more frequently a complex item like this occurs in a specific context, the more it may start functioning as a constituent, and the more it can lose its phonological content (cf. *I dunno* in English, as described in Bybee & Scheibman 1999). Note that the transcriptions below do not reflect these small phonetic details, though.

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In addition, the pure stem *tea* without the negation word *ei* may initiate questions. On the internet, these sentences are often marked with a question mark, thus demonstrating clearly that the writers intend the sentences which follow to function as questions. In spoken usage, *tea* and the following question word would be produced together as one phonological word with the word stress on *tea*. The latching makes it similar to a clitic, while on the other hand it has preserved the stress pattern from the 'main clause'.

(2) a. **Tea**, kas suudab viljalao rottidest puhta hoida?
know QUES can:3SG corn supply rat:PL:ELT clean keep:INF
'TEA can it keep the corn supplies free from rats?' (NET)

b. **Tea**, kes meie vana kommunisti kokk on?
know who our old:GEN communist:GEN chef is
'TEA who is our old communist's chef?' (NET)

c. **Tea** mis on peeglikatetes olevate tulekeste mõte?
know what is mirror cover:PL:INS be:GER:PL light:PL:GEN reason
'TEA what is the reason for lights in the mirror covers?' (NET)

d. **Tea** kuhu see torm siis jääb???
know where:ILL this storm then stay:3SG
'TEA why the storm is delayed???' (NET)

The format can be applied for soliciting information or for rhetorical effect, but not in order to request action or solicit confirmation or intensification, which can all be functions of interrogative structures in a language (Payne 1997:298f.). In other words, it can function as a request for information or a rhetorical question that does not require an answer. In contrast, it cannot be used in requests, such as *Will you close the window?*, confirmation questions, such as *You're going, aren't you?*, or for intensification, such as *Did he ever yell!*. This functional limitation is a consequence of the particular origin of the question type and the specific epistemic nature of the marker. In the following, the way that this questioning pattern has become routinized in conversational usage will be examined.

4. THE ORIGIN OF INFORMATION QUESTIONS: SECOND PERSON SINGULAR

In this section, we will look at cases in which the second person pronoun is used together with *ei tea* and its interactional disposition to become a separate format for information questions. Traditionally, the clause following *sa ei tea* 'you don't know', has been considered a complement clause, as in *You don't know, what I want*. However, it has recently been argued that in interaction it is more reasonable to analyse object complements as main clauses, while the 'main clauses' rather function

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as epistemic or modal phrases subsidiary to the complement clause (Thompson 2002). The emergence of (*ei*) *tea*-questions supports this line of reasoning, as it is the 'main clause' that loses its internal structure and becomes minimized, while the complement clause carries the main communicative load.

This is structurally facilitated by the fact that in Estonian the word order is exactly the same in interrogatives and in complement clauses initiated by interrogative pronouns. For example, all the above interrogative clauses presented in (1)–(2) could occur as direct interrogatives (main clauses) without the (*ei*) *tea*. They could equally well occur as indirect interrogatives (subordinate clauses) following a main clause. Estonian is a free word order language and the word order in interrogative main clauses as well as interrogative complement clauses depends on the pragmatic focus. The only difference is that inversion may be used in interrogative main clauses, and this will be particularly focused on in section 6 below. However, there is no information in the structure of the interrogative clauses in this study that could reveal their subordination.

The word combination *sa ei tea* occurs in the data, albeit much less frequently than the grammaticalized (*ei*) *tea*-question pattern itself.[5] There are two cases of *sa ei tea* in the LK corpus as compared to eight cases of (*ei*) *tea*-questions, and three and thirty cases in the Tartu corpus, respectively. As Estonian is a pro-drop language, personal pronouns are often dropped. This, however, seldom happens in the negative, in which person endings are no longer marked on the verb. Personal pronouns in the negative may only be dropped in cases where the referent is very clear from the context, such as in responsive turns. Sequences such as *Kas Pille tuleb homme? – Ei tea.* 'Will Pille come tomorrow? – (I) don't know' do occur. In contrast, the (*ei*) *tea*-question is an initiating move in conversation. Furthermore, subjectless responses are rarely, if ever, continued by a 'complement clause', which would be a prerequisite for the developmental starting point of (*ei*) *tea*-question format. Subjectless responses are minimal.

Consequently, example (3), involving *sa ei tea* and an interrogative complement clause is a much more likely starting point for the emergence of the (*ei*) *tea*-question than the responses. Here, the speaker L is asking about her grade in the exam and *sa ei tea* is used before the clause that in traditional grammars would be seen as a complement clause. In accordance with the analysis suggested by Thompson (2002), *sa ei tea* could instead be seen as an epistemic phrase combined with an interrogative clause which provides the main content of the question.

(3) 1 L: ahaa, **sa** **ei** **tea**, mis ma sain.
okay you:2SG NEG know what I got:1SG
'Okay, you don't know what I got.'
2 M: ma ei tea jah, tal ei old seal nimodi - /- - -/
I NEG know yeah s/he:ADS NEG have:PPT there:ADS so
'Right, I don't know, s/he didn't have it like that-.' (LK)

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Note that the utterance in line 1 is grammatically a declarative statement about what the interlocutor does not know.[6] Naturally, various kinds of statements can function as questions for various reasons. Statements about something that is in the first instance known to the other interlocutor and not the speaker always make relevant a confirmation or non-confirmation by the interlocutor. This regularity was first described by Labov & Fanshel (1977:100) who call this type of utterances A's statements about B-events, where A is the speaker and B her interlocutor. As it is only speaker M in this example who can judge her own knowledge, the statement of a B-event in line 1 functions as a question. Here, the question is explicitly about the interlocutor's knowledge. The expression *sa ei tea* functions as an insinuation that the interlocutor does not have the knowledge to answer the question, and thus it has a clear epistemic value. In addition, in this particular sequential position, the speaker has a good reason to believe that M does not know her grade as she has told a long story about the exam already and the grade would most probably have had a high priority. Furthermore, the negative stance in the question presupposes a negative response from the interlocutor. The response in line 2 demonstrates that L's assumption was correct.

The connotation of the interlocutor potentially not knowing the answer, as illustrated in the above example, has been preserved in the (*ei*) *tea*-questions. *Ei*(*ei*) *tea*-questions cannot be asked about matters that the interlocutor would normally know, such as one's age, origin or wants. Rather, they are used when there is a real possibility that the information is not available for the receiver, or for face-saving reasons. *Sa ei tea* helps the speaker to be pessimistic about whether the receiver possesses the necessary knowledge, and thus be polite, as in example (4).

(4) 1 V: see nõude koha pealt (.) **sa ei tea**, kust saab n(h)õusid.
this dishes about you:2SG NEG know where:ELT get:3SG dishes:PL:PRT
'About the dishes (.) you don't know where to find the dishes?' (TC)

As *sa ei tea* implies the interlocutor's lack of knowledge, (*ei*) *tea*-questions are frequently used when information about third persons is solicited, as in examples (5)–(7). It is important to notice that while the above turns that involved *sa ei tea* could be responded to as if they were questions of knowledge access (as *ma ei tea* 'I don't know' in line 2 of example (3)), the following questions do not get responses that relate to knowledge, that is the (*ei*) *tea* part of the question. This is a strong argument for not considering *ei tea* the main clause here. As Thompson (2002:131–134) argues very convincingly, claims on which clause is 'profiled' in a grammatical structure need to refer to the course of actions that the participants are engaged in. In other words, we have to observe what the speakers do when they talk to each other. Thompson demonstrates that in real interactional data the profiles of this

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type of complement clause regularly override those of the 'main clauses', because the recipients of these turns typically orient to the 'complement clause' rather than the 'main clause'. Accordingly, when the Estonian speakers regularly orient to the interrogative clause, (*ei*) *tea* should be analysed as an epistemic expressing the speaker's stance instead of as a main clause.

In example (5), the question concerns a person who is not present in the current encounter and thus the correct answer may not be available to anybody. This is reflected in the *ei tea*-question format and confirmed by the epistemically marked response.

(5) 1 J: tal on kohus täna ju.
he:ADS be:3SG court today PART
'S/he has (to go to) court today doesn't s/he?'
2 R: jõuab ta jah sinna täis peaga - (0.5)
get:3SG s/he yeah there:ILL drunk
'Sure, s/he (will) get there, drunk (as s/he is).'
3 H: **ei tea** kas ta esmaspääval [jõudis] vä. (0.8)
NEG know QUES s/he Monday:ADS got:3SG or
'EI TEA whether s/he got there on Monday?'
4 J: [ikka vast.]
PART maybe
'I hope so.' (TC)

In multi-party talk, such as in the above example, the interactional advantage of dropping the pronoun is that the question can be addressed to everybody at the same time. Importantly, the plural pronoun *te* is never used in this kind of question in the form of a statement. Again, this is characteristic of grammaticalization, where only one possible form typically undergoes the process.

In example (6), the question also concerns information about the actions of a non-present person. However, here the recipient is able to discard the presupposition of the whole question.

(6) 1 K: **ei tea** kas emme mõne pildi ka tegi või. (.)
NEG know QUES mummy some:GEN picture:GEN too took:3SG or
'EI TEA whether mummy took any pictures?'
2 tal oli [fotoaparaat kaasas.]
she:ADS be:IMF:3SG camera with:INS
'She had the camera.'
3 E: [emmel es ole üldse] aparaati kaasas.
mummy:ADS NEG be at all camera with:INS
'Mummy didn't have the camera.' (TC)

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In example (7), two sisters discuss whether a third sister would like to join them at their father's birthday. Again, the possibility of the recipient's lack of knowledge is reflected in the question format and confirmed in the epistemically marked response.

(7) 1 E: jah, **ei** **tea** kas Viiu **t**ahab ka tulla ve.
yeah NEG know QUES NAME want:3SG too come:INF PART
'Yeah, EI TEA whether Viiu wants to come too?'
2 M: no, v:ist ikka tahab.
PART probably PART want:3*SG*
'She probably does.' (LK)

In contrast, example (8) is a case where *ei tea* is clearly implemented for politeness purposes, as H has called an information desk at a hospital whose job it is to provide information about exactly the type of matters H is asking about. The unproblematic nature of the question is also reflected in the straightforward and rapidly produced answer.

(8) 1 V: registratuur tere
registration hi
2 H: tere. (.) **ei** **tea** mis kellast doktor Laane vastu võtab.
hi NEG know what time:ELT doctor NAME receive:3SG
'Hi, EI TEA when Doctor Laane will be seeing patients?'
3 V: e kella neljateistkümnest seitsmeteistkümneni.
clock:GEN fourteen:ELT seventeen:TER
'From two to five p.m.' (TC)

The developmental path suggested for (*ei*) *tea*-questions so far involves the syntactic and phonological reduction of the target item in the specific interactional function of asking a question. It could be summarized as follows:

sa ei tea 'you:SG don't know' → *ei tea* → *itea* → *t'ea* → *tea*
'interlocutor's possible lack of knowledge, politeness'

Semantically, the statement about an interlocutor's lack of knowledge *sa ei tea* has developed into an epistemic marker indicating the possibility of a lack of knowledge and occasionally expressing simply politeness. In terms of syntagmatic position, we have only seen cases where the marker occurs turn-initially and this is also its most frequent position. However, it can also occur turn-finally and we will now look at this parallel path of emergence.

In addition to *sa ei tea* preceding the actual question, a question format may also be achieved with a turn-final *sa ei tea*, as in example (9). This retroactively adds epistemic modality to the question, suggesting that the interlocutor may not know the answer. The turn-final position is the last possible locus for the speaker to provide

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modal information, and this option is regularly used for adding epistemic markers in different languages (Karlsson 2003; Keevallik 2003:74–78). In this example, the caller is talking to her father, while it was actually the mother who was the one who had to buy the tickets for her. After asking the question, the speaker adds *sa ei tea* at the end of her turn.

(9) 1 H: [noh, ku]le, kas ema sai d mulle piletid. **sa ei tea**.
PART hear:IMP:2SG QUES mother got: 3SG I:ALL tickets you:SG NEG know
'Did mother get me the tickets, you don't know?'
2 U: ääämv, vist ei saand. aga ma kutsun ta.
probably NEG get:PPT but I call:1SG her
'(I) don't think so but I('ll) get her.' (LK)

Correspondingly, *ei tea* may occur turn-finally, albeit much less frequently than it occurs in the turn- or utterance-initial position.

(10) 1 M: a millal ta tuleb **ei tea**.
but when she come:3SG NEG know
'But when (will) she come back EI TEA?'
2 P: .h vot mai tea. /- - -/
PART I:NEG know
'I really don't know.' (LK)

Similarly to turn-beginnings, in turn-final positions *ei tea* may be implemented for politeness reasons. In example (11), the speaker T is responsible for the keys to the apartment block and thus S can assume that he is likely to be the person who has the answer to her question. Thus, *ei tea*, in her turn, is used for face-saving. In both turn-final cases (examples 10, 11), including the *ei tea* that is prosodically incorporated into the same intonation unit, the pitch simply drops further. As it also has very little syntactic structure, there is no reason to consider *ei tea* as an utterance or syntactic unit on its own.

(11) 1 S: mhmh, .hhh aga millal selle võtme Rumba käest
uhuh but when this:GEN key:GEN NAME:GEN from
'Uhuh but when could we get the key'
2 saaks kätte **ei tea**.
get:COND hand:ILL NEG know
'from Rumba EI TEA?'
3 T: ta juba lubas ta ära tuua
s/he already promised:3SG it:GEN bring:INF
'S/he has already promised to bring it.' (LK)

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There are thus two alternative patterns of emergence of the epistemic question marker (*ei*) *tea*, which result in its two possible turn positions in the current usage. The only difference in terms of position is that the shortest form *tea* does not occur in turn-final position in the data. This confirms the predominant turn-initial locus of emergence of the epistemic marker, which was already suggested on the basis of frequency.

A number of studies have demonstrated how combinations of subject and verb have developed into parentheticals, turn-initial or turn-final pragmatic markers or adverbs in various languages, such as *I think* (e.g. Kärkkäinen 1998), *you think* and *I guess* (e.g. Thompson & Mulac 1991), *I mean* (Fox Tree & Schrock 2002), *I don't know* (Tsui 1991; Bybee & Scheibman 1999; Scheibman 2000) in contemporary English, and numerous first person parentheticals in the history of English (Brinton 1996:212–241), *jag tycker*/*tycker jag* 'I think' (Karlsson 2003) and *jag tror*/*tror jag* 'I believe' (Lindström & Karlsson 2005) in Swedish, and *ma arvan* 'I think' and *ma usun* 'I believe' in Estonian (Keevallik 2003:74–78). All of these express the speaker's stance toward what she is saying.

In contrast, the (*ei*) *tea*-question expresses expectations about the interlocutor's state of knowledge. It is thus overtly interpersonal and interactional, similarly to *you know* in English (Schourup 1985; Jucker & Smith 1998; Fox Tree & Schrock 2002; Macaulay 2002), but the negative form does not seem to have developed in an analogous way in English. In addition, in none of the above original subject + verb cases has the subject disappeared, as it has done in the case of Estonian (*ei*) *tea*. However, the subject may well have lost its referential properties and become the starting point of a perspective (Traugott 1995b:39). There are, of course, means of soliciting alignment from the interlocutor that are highly interactional in every language. Among them, English tag-questions may be in the negative form. (*Ei*) *tea* differs from these agreement-soliciting means in that it expresses an assumption about the interlocutor. Furthermore, instead of assuming common knowledge, the phrase assumes a common LACK of knowledge.

The above (*ei*) *tea*-questions are all information questions, and clearly interpreted as such by the recipients in the examples. These questions are posed to persons who potentially lack the answer, or merely for politeness purposes. The original direct statement about the recipient's lack of knowledge has gradually emerged as a pessimistic question format that leaves open the possibility that the recipient may not have the necessary information. As there are clear parallels to the (*ei*) *tea*-questions that involve the pronoun *sa*, it can be concluded that the pronoun has been dropped, similarly to other contexts in which the subject is clear from the context. First, no other personal pronouns besides *sa* are used in similar ways in this type of turns. Second, the emergence of the (*ei*) *tea*-question could only happen as a result of the inherent potential of second person statements, or B-events, that require a response from the interlocutor. The responsive pro-drop formats display no such potential to

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develop into questions. The grammaticalized pronounless format has now become much more frequent than the original *sa ei tea* (thirty three and five cases respectively in the spoken corpora).

However, (*ei*) *tea*-questions are even asked rhetorically, something which cannot quite be explained with the original *sa ei tea*-pattern in statements about interlocutor knowledge. In the next section, the alternative source of rhetorical questions will be discussed.

5. THE ORIGIN OF RHETORICAL QUESTIONS: FIRST PERSON PLURAL

It is possible that the information questions with (*ei*) *tea* have simply spread to the domain of rhetorical questions. Many other types of questions are used in this way and the epistemic marking is not a hinder for rhetorical usage. However, in case of rhetorical (*ei*) *tea*-questions, the borderline between statements and questions is blurred. This suggests an alternative emergence pattern.

Another source for rhetorical (*ei*) *tea*-questions is the word combination *ma ei tea* 'I don't know'. *Ma ei tea* is extremely frequent in spoken interaction, amounting to 352 cases in the LK corpus in its different phonological and functional variants. Speakers may literally claim lack of knowledge with this format and it can happen that the information they lack is produced by their interlocutors in the following turn. However, the turns involving *ma ei tea* or the shortened form *mai tea* are generally not interpreted as questions by the interlocutors. It is therefore also unlikely that the development of (*ei*) *tea*-questions has started from here. Turns involving the literal expression *ma ei tea* are interpreted as simple informative statements, as the recipient in lines 3 and 5 in example (12) does. Even the turn in line 4, which includes an interrogative pronoun at the beginning of the 'complement clause', is interpreted

(12) 1 V: mai tea, ma pole ni ammu üheski poes käind, **mai tea**
I:NEG know I be:NEG so long ago single:GEN shop:INS go:PPT I:NEG know
'I dunno, I haven't been to any shops for such a long time, I have absolutely'
2 ültse mida poodides müiakse. (1.0)
at all what:PRT shops:INS sell:IMS
'no idea what is sold at the shops.'
3 H: jah (0.5)
yeah
4 V: **mai tea** kas on midagi ilusat ja head.
I:NEG know QUES be:3SG something:PRT nice:PRT and good:PRT
'I don't know whether there is anything nice and good.'
Alternatively: 'I don't know, is there anything nice and good.'
5 H: mhmh
uhuh (TC)

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as an informing turn rather than as a question. This contrasts sharply with how the turns including *sa ei tea* were interpreted by the interlocutors in examples (3) and (4). Furthermore, in case of *ma ei tea*, the interlocutor may attend to the information about a lack of knowledge, offering an alternative source, as in example (13). This can be compared to the above cases (5)–(9), where in the case of (*ei*) *tea*-questions the 'complement' part of the turn was attended to instead.

(13) 1 H: /- - -/ aga **mai tea** mis se vibraatoriga see maksta võib.
but I:NEG know what this vibrator:COM this cost:INF may:3SG
'But I don't know what the one with the vibrator could cost.'
2 V: vast issi teab. (.) peab talle: rääkima /- - -/
PART daddy know:3SG must:3SG him tell:INF
'Daddy should know that, we should talk to him.' (TC)

The first person plural pronoun *me* also occurs with *ei tea* in similar sequences, when the speaker expresses herself in the name of a group. The utterance *Me ei tea ju kus te elate* 'We don't know where you live' receives the address as a response. However, *me ei tea* is much less frequent than *ma ei tea*, occurring only twice in the spoken-language corpora.

A further difference between this pattern and *sa ei tea* is that *ma ei tea* occurs predominantly in responsive turns and not initiative ones, such as asking questions. Consequently, *ma ei tea* has developed into a different kind of interactional device, implementing dispreferred response structure and textual disjunction, and a different kind of hedge, expressing a speaker's epistemic stance towards the content produced or mitigating face-threats. It is often produced as *mai tea* or *maitea* (for a detailed analysis of these developments, see Keevallik 2003:78–100). Nevertheless, statements like the ones in example (13) may occasionally be responded to. The next speaker may volunteer the information that the speaker claims to lack.

When the pronoun is dropped in this position, the resulting syntactic structure is identical with the (*ei*) *tea*-questions for information described in section 4 above. The difference is that this (*ei*) *tea* does not necessarily occur turn-initially or turn-finally, but only utterance-initially. It typically constitutes a continuation of some prior argument. In example (13), the *ei tea*-utterance is a continuation of talk about a polishing machine. In examples (14)–(15), the *ei tea*-utterances are also used as continuations on the same topic. Furthermore, examples (14)–(18) are instances in which (*ei*) *tea* is ambiguous about whether it expresses a statement about the speaker's lack of knowledge or marks speaker uncertainty at the beginning of a question. This ambiguity is reflected in the writers' use of punctuation, which can categorize it either as a statement (14)–(15) or a question (17)–(18). If considered to be questions, they would be rhetorical ones, as they do not necessarily solicit a response. In (15), the *ei tea*-initiated clause is even a part of a longer complex sentence.

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Example (14) is a comment on a picture of an overloaded caravan.

(14) Tuus pilt, ei tea mis tunne oleks seal pakkide otsas
great picture NEG know what feeling be:COND there luggage:GEN on top
'Great picture, EI TEA what it feels like to sit there on top of the'
istuda, **ei tea** mis siis juhtuks kui Eestis niimoodi
sit:INF NEG know what then happen:COND if Estonia:INS like that
'luggage, EI TEA what would happen if people started moving around'
kolima hakataks.
move:INF start:IMS:COND
'like that in Estonia.' (NET)

Example (15) is from a travelogue.

(15) Üks mure reisi eel oli kindlasti kuritegevus maanteedel.
one worry journey:GEN before was certainly crime roads:ADS
'Before the journey, one of our worries concerned crime on the roads.'
Ei tea kas meil vedas või ongi olukord selline,
NEG know QUES we:ADS had luck or is:CL situation like that
'EI TEA were we lucky or if the situation really is like that,'
kuid põhilised kogemused sel teemal /- - -/
but main:PL experience:PL this:ADS topic:ADS
'but our main experiences in this regard. . . ' (NET)

In example (16) the speaker is reacting to somebody's story about his first experiences of a water slide. This utterance actually receives a response.

(16) **Ei** *tea* kudas se kas selili või kõhuli või kudas
NEG know how this QUES on the back or on the stomach or how
'EI TEA is it better on the back or on the stomach'
se parem on.
it better is
'or which way is best?' (TC)

Example (17) is an online comment on a newspaper article. It does not trigger any responses. Example (18) is a reaction to a comment that the army wants to take over New Orleans. The text continues immediately after the *ei tea*-sentence.

(17) **Tea**, milleks selline artikkel nüüd hea peaks olema?
know what:TRA this article PART good must:COND be:INF
'TEA what this kind of article is good for?' (NET)

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(18) **Ei tea** milleks peaks sõjaväel seda linna vaja olema?
NEG know for what would army:ADS this:PRT city:PRT necessary be:INF
'EI TEA why should the army need this city?'
Tsunami põhjustas palju suuremaid purustusi: /- - -/
Tsunami caused much bigger:PL:PRT damage:PL:PRT
'The tsunami caused much more damage:' (NET)

In these examples, (*ei*) *tea* can function as an epistemic marker of speaker uncertainty, scepticism, or even challenging of something that has been claimed previously. The latter is especially clear in the confrontational examples (17) and (18), in which the author challenges a previous writer. In contrast with information questions, here the epistemicity concerns the speaker and not the recipient. Therefore, responding is optional, as in rhetorical questions. The expressions *ma ei tea* 'I don't know' and peripherally also *me ei tea* 'we don't know' are the most likely sources of this development.

ma (me) ei tea 'I (we) don't know' → *ei tea* → *itea* → *t'ea* → *tea*
'speaker uncertainty, scepticism'

Semantically, the claim of not knowing has developed into an epistemic marker of uncertainty and scepticism. Syntagmatically, the rhetorical (*ei*) *tea* occurs utterance-initially. In other words, the two parallel processes of question pattern emergence from *sa ei tea* and *ma ei tea* are not entirely independent of each other. Their coalescence will be discussed in the following section.

6. SYNOPSIS: THE RISE OF A GENERIC QUESTION

The origin of *ei tea*-questions is the expression pronoun + *ei tea*. First and second person pronouns have been considered above. Third person pronouns do not occur in the relevant actions and sequential positions that would enable the emergence of questions. Furthermore, all the other grammatical persons are much less frequent than *sa ei tea* and *ma ei tea*. This is not surprising, as first and second person singular are the immediate participants in interactional events. However, once the question pattern without a pronoun has emerged, this allows the speakers to be unclear about who the knowledge-lacking subject is. This behavioural pattern is a part of a larger system of avoiding personal reference in the Estonian language community. In many situations, impersonal and generic grammatical forms are preferred. The phenomenon has been widely described for Finnish (Hakulinen 1987; Seppänen 1989:200–213; Yli-Vakkuri 1989:58–60, 2005) but it certainly also

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applies in the closely related Estonian language. Some Estonian evasive address patterns have been described briefly (Erelt 1990; Keevallik 1999:130f.). Among other things, there are a number of ways of avoiding the reference to a specific agent or patient, and strategies for avoiding the socially obligatory choice between the informal second person singular and the formal second person plural address. (*Ei*) *tea* effectively avoids this choice: see especially examples (8) and (10) from institutional settings.

The usage of (*ei*) *tea* enables the speaker to express herself in a generic impersonal manner, putting forward an inquiry without even choosing between a rhetorical question (or statement) and an information question, and not obliging anybody to answer. The following examples (19a, b) come from the internet, from contexts in which the writer is not sure whether anybody knows or is willing to write down the answer. The personless forms addresse nobody and anyone at the same time.

(19) igavesti tore lelu ju... **tea** mis selline maksab...
very fun toy PART know what this kind cost:3SG
'A great toy, isn't it. . . TEA what does it cost. . . ' (NET)
retsept ütleb, et 300 F – **tea** mis see Celsiuses võiks olla?
recipe say:3SG that 300°F know what it Celsius:INS can:COND be:INF
'The recipe says 300° Farenheit – TEA what could it be in Celsius?' (NET)

In example (20), *ei tea* is applied in the case of plural reference,[7] which further supports the argument that (*ei*) *tea* may blur the subject and thereby impersonalize the utterance.

(20) "**Ei tea** on seal mees- või naislaulja?" murdsid neiud pead.
NEG know is there:ADS male or female singer pondered:3SG girls
"'EI TEA is this a male or a female singer there?" pondered the girls.' (NET)

Similarly, sceptical or challenging questions about prior talk may be put forward with the (*ei*) *tea*-question, without committing oneself to who exactly the non-knowing subject is. As challenges are inherently face-threatening, this is a useful mitigating strategy. We can see the blurring of the agent in example (21), where the telemarketer puts forward a subscription offer and the potential client questions its reality. In a way, line 5 is a case of a responsive turn and a sequential position in which the pronoun may be dropped, as it is very clear from the context that the non-knowing agent is the potential client. It is also clear from the institutional roles of the speakers here that M would have to know the answer. Cases like this could therefore have contributed to the loss of the pronoun *ma* 'I'. At the same time, *ei tea* insinuates that the interlocutor does not have the answer either, and therefore functions as a challenge. The turn is

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ambiguous as to person: it is generic.

(21) 1 M: ahhaa .h aga kas oleksite präegu huvitatud lehe
okay but QUES be:COND:2PL now interested paper:GEN
'Okay, but would you be interested in subscribing'
2 tellimisest kui saaksite tellida telefoni teel präegu
subscribing:PRT if get:COND:2PL subscribe:INF phone:GEN on now
'to the paper if you could subscribe (to it) right now on the phone'
3 ja .h ää k- ühe kuu hinna eest kaks kuud kuuskend
and one:GEN month:GEN price:GEN for two month:PRT sixty
'and (you would get) two months for the price of one? Sixty'
4 viis krooni (1.2)
five kroons:PRT
'five kroons.'
5 K: @ o@oi, <@ **ei tea** mismoodi. @>
oh NEG know how
'Oh, EI TEA how (would that be possible)?' (LK)

This brings us to a crucial feature of (*ei*) *tea*-questions. To a certain extent, the interlocutor may choose whether she wants to treat the (*ei*) *tea*-turn as an information question or a rhetorical one, or even a statement, which makes this a very useful interactional strategy. By using an (*ei*) *tea*-question, the speaker does not impose an obligation to give an informative answer. In the following example (22), speaker A chooses to treat the *ei tea*-initiated utterance as a statement and agrees with its proposition, while a response to the question would also have been perfectly acceptable. Speaker E is telling a story about female students at thelibrary.

(22) 1 E: alati kihistavad ästi valjusti=ja (0.4)
always giggle:3PL really loud and
'They always giggle really loud'
2 A: mhmh
uhuh
3 E: **ei tea** mis nad seal üldse tegemas käivad.
NEG know what they there:ADS in general do:INF:INS go:3PL
'EI TEA what they are doing there.'
4 A: * ei tea.*
NEG know
'No idea./I don't have a clue either.' (TC)

As shown in this example, the *ei tea*-utterance can be responded to with a mere denial of knowledge without the speaker sounding uncooperative. Rather, he aligns with what he chooses to treat as a statement in line 3. It would also have been perfectly

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possible to treat this as a question. In fact, the stress at the end of the utterance supports the interpretation of the utterance as a question. In a statement, the main stress would probably have been on *tea*. The epistemic question-designing (*ei*) *tea* does generally not carry the main stress of the utterance, as can be seen in the transcripts in all the relevant examples (5)–(8), (10)–(11), (16), (21)–(22).

However, Estonian intonational cues do not help us to categorically distinguish between questions and statements. Both are terminally falling contours. The main difference revealed by laboratory experiments, based on a maximum of two words, has been that questions have a higher pitch peak than statements and a generally somewhat higher pitch (Vende 1973). It is unclear how this relates to real-life settings and whole turns. Measurements of utterances in a reading passage demonstrated that Estonian speakers may use a pitch upstep in a question but need not do so (Asu & Nolan 2001). Generally, intonation in Estonian is not nearly as important in distinguishing between sentence types as it is in some other languages. Questions are instead marked morphosyntactically (Wiik 1991:106) and they may be intonationally identical with statements.

Last but not least, the epistemic marker (*ei*) *tea* has become independently tied to the speech act of questioning, and not merely to question words, which was common in the examples above. This is evidenced by the fact that even inversion questions may be asked with the initial (*ei*) *tea*, and in these cases there is obviously no initial question word used after (*ei*) *tea* (example (23a, b)). Inversion is furthermore impossible in complement clauses, so in these cases (*ei*) *tea* has distanced most from its original function and syntactic position as a main clause.

(23) **Ei tea** on see suure harjutamise vili või hoopis sisemise
NEG know is it big:GEN practice:GEN result or rather inner:GEN
'EI TEA is this a result of a lot of practice or the result of'
motiveerituse tulemus.
motivation:GEN result
'an inner motivation?' (NET)
Ei tea on mul õigus või mitte
NEG know is I:ADS right or not
'EI TEA am I right or not?' (NET)

At this point, it is clear that (*ei*) *tea* has been reanalysed as a question-initial marker, an epistemic item that initiates an interactionally distinct generic question. It has a relatively fixed utterance-initial position, and the only other option, for the variant *ei tea*, is turn-final. The distinction between the 'main clause' and the 'complement clause' has vanished; the syntactic context has become generalized at least to inversion questions. In this process, the expressions *sa ei tea* and *ma ei tea* have lost some of their

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phonology and become decategorialized (Hopper & Traugott 1993:103–113), thus displaying the most salient feature of the grammaticalization of pragmatic markers.

> The most salient process undergone by forms becoming pragmatic markers is 'decategorialization', or loss of the morphological and syntactic characteristics of their original word word class and movement down the scale from more major to more minor word class membership. (Brinton 1996:273)

(*Ei*) *tea*-question is much more frequent than the discourse pattern *sa ei tea* + question, while *ma ei tea* has developed in many different directions and cannot therefore be used for frequency comparison here. Characteristically, too, decategorialization has lead to 'increased bonding locally within the grammaticalizing construction, and at the same time increased pragmatic force and semantic abstraction' (Traugott 1995a:16), as is characteristic of the development of pragmatic markers. (*Ei*) *tea* has started to fulfill a discourse function of initiating generic (rhetorical) questions rather than expressing the propositional meaning of somebody lacking knowledge. Thus, (*ei*) *tea* is semantically more abstract in the question-initial usage and it explicitly codes relevance that 'earlier was only covertly implied' (Traugott 1988:413; Traugott & Dasher 2002:34–40). That the speaker does not have the knowledge she is asking for implies speaker uncertainty, and the statement that the interlocutor does not have the knowledge implies uncertainty on the interlocutor's part. This epistemic modality gradually becomes coded in the (*ei*) *tea* used in questions. This development, which characteristically occurs in the early stages of grammaticalization, is known as *pragmatic strengthening*. In this process, the original invited inferences and conversational implicatures are strengthened (Traugott 1988, 1995b; Traugott & König 1991).

(*Ei*) *tea* has furthermore shifted from the more objective content meaning to the more subjective epistemic domain, indexing now the stance towards participants. This conforms with the semantic–pragmatic tendencies outlined already by Traugott (1988:409), who claims that in a semantic change 'meanings situated in the external described situation' tend to turn into 'meanings situated in the internal (evaluative/perceptual/cognitive) situation'; and 'meanings tend to become increasingly situated in the speaker's subjective belief-state/attitude toward the situation' (Traugott 1988:410; still maintained in Traugott & Dasher 2002:94f.). This process has come to be called SUBJECTIFICATION (Traugott 1980:47, 1989:540, 1995b, 1996; Traugott & Dasher 2002:19–24). However, it is difficult to make the emergence pattern studied in this article conform with the idea that intersubjectification would be a further developmental step following subjectification (Traugott 2003) or that subjectivity is a prerequisite to intersubjectivity (Traugott & Dasher 2002:22). Items such as *sa ei tea* 'you don't know' seem to be intrinsically intersubjective from the start, as they in essence make statements about the interlocutor's state of

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knowledge. This item explicitly pays attention to the role of the addressee/recipient as an interlocutor in the speech event, as it triggers a response (cf. the discussion in Traugott & Dasher 2002:22). Details like this can only be discovered in conversational sequences by looking at how the speakers treat each others' turns.

7. CONCLUSION

In contemporary informal Estonian, the original negative verb form *ei tea* has become a routinized part of generic questions which leave the subject unexpressed. Occasionally, these are used for politeness purposes, or in order to avoid the socially compulsory choice between second person singular and plural address. Such structural features, plus the negative stance of the (*ei*) *tea*-question, enable it to be used as a means of mitigation for face-saving reasons. Another interactionally crucial feature of these questions is that they may leave their question-status open, thereby letting the interlocutor have a choice of responses. She may treat the (*ei*) *tea*-utterance as an information question, a rhetorical one, or even as a statement, the latter making not answer but rather an alignment into the relevant response. Partly, however, the intonation on *tea* or somewhere else in the utterance may define it as a statement or a question, respectively. This ambiguous pattern accords nicely with the generally impersonal and reference-avoiding style of conversation normal in Estonia as well as Finland. The (*ei*) *tea*-question allows the speaker to impersonalize her contribution.

The general path of development of the marker (*ei*) *tea* involves the disappearance of the pronoun and eventually also the negation word, assimilation and shortening. The expressions *ma ei tea* and *sa ei tea* occur together with interrogative clauses, and in this particular function they have started to extensively drop pronouns. Their subsidiary nature in relation to the interrogative clause thereby becomes obvious. Parallel to their phonological and morphosyntactical draining they also lose their referentiality, becoming inter-subjective epistemic means. A discourse pattern that attracted an interlocutor's response has become grammaticalized into a specific question format. Schematically, this can be shown as follows:

STRUCTURE	FUNCTION
sa/ma ei tea 'you/I don't know' + interrogative clause	subject + verb; statement attracting interlocutor response
→ *ei tea* → *itea* → *t'ea* → *tea* initial in the interrogative clause[8]	→ epistemic marker; used for generic questions

Cross-linguistically, the concept of 'not knowing' has not been documented as a common source for the grammaticalization of question items, although structures involving negation, such as *A-not-A* and *or not* may become grammatical means of asking yes/no questions (Heine & Kuteva 2002:216f.). As can be seen above, (*ei*) *tea* may be used with yes/no questions as well as wh-questions, and even though it

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only appears together with questions, it has not become a question particle on its own. Instead, it is an epistemic marker that latches to the following or, less often, preceding question.

The (*ei*) *tea*-question is predominantly an informal pattern, but it does occur in dialogues in fiction. Nevertheless, it has not been described in any grammar. The interactive data was thus necessary, on the one hand, simply to observe the pattern, but on the other hand, it enables what these questions/statements accomplish in interaction and how they are interpreted by the fellow conversationalists to be seen. This empirically proves what their function is, as understood by members of the language community. In the case of (*ei*) *tea*-questions we discovered that they were doing interactionally intricate work of face-saving, reference-avoiding, and offering the interlocutor a choice between answering or not. Such factors are easily accounted for within interactional linguistics that relies on the originally sociological conversation analytic method.

However, grammaticalization theory and interactional linguistics have not yet been combined in many studies (examples include Hakulinen & Seppänen 1992; Waltereit 2002; Keevallik 2003). Part of the reason may be that the core of grammaticalization studies has been diachronic, while interactional linguistic studies tend to be synchronic and deal with stretches of interaction in the here and now. At the same time, there is much interest in the appearance of similar phenomena in both traditions (examples include pragmatic markers, floating categories, and usage patterns of single items in specific contexts), and it is hard to see how a minute semantic and functional change could happen outside the social practice of language use in (spoken) interaction.

A more serious reason preventing the two traditions from enriching one another is that they seem to subscribe to a somewhat different understanding of what grammar is. The understanding of grammar as emergent in interaction and subject to sequential contingencies and reflecting turn-taking practices is not immediately compatible with the understanding of grammar as only represented in the core grammatical categories, such as case, and tense/aspect. Among other things, whether all kinds of pragmatic markers, response particles or hesitations should be treated as part of grammar depends on what we mean by the term GRAMMAR.

The above study illustrates that in order to understand why grammatical patterns look the way they do, we sometimes have to study language as it is used by ordinary users in everyday interaction. Grammaticalization paths may start within specific implementations of social actions, such as statements about an interlocutor's lack of knowledge. Without looking at the subsequent activities of the recipient of such a turn, we would not notice that it regularly attracts her response. Furthermore, to fully understand the current functions of the (*ei*) *tea*-question, it was necessary to study subsequent turns in order to discover that (*ei*) *tea*-questions could be ambiguous as to statement/question value. Sometimes they received answers but sometimes they were simply aligned with, a direct and crucial result of their developmental logic.

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Grammaticalization theory can thus profit from incorporating the paths of change that originate in a specific implementation of social action, rather than merely in a linguistic or textual context. Both the source and the result of grammaticalization can pertain to specific sequential contexts of action.

Transcription conventions

underlining	emphasis
ja-	truncation
[ ]	overlaps
(0.5)	pause length in milliseconds
(.)	micropause
:	lengthening
<@ jah @>	laughing voice
@	laughter syllable
.h, .hh	breathing in
h, hh	breathing out
.	pitch fall at the end of the intonation unit
,	level pitch at the end of the intonation unit
-	truncated intonation unit
/---/	a part of the turn has been left out of the example
PART	untranslatable particle
t'ea	palatalization of *t*
*	low voice

Less frequently used grammatical codes

ADS	adessive
ALL	allative
COND	conditional
COM	comitative
CL	clitic
ELT	elative
GER	gerund
ILL	illative
IMP	imperative
IMS	impersonal
INF	infinitive
INS	inessive
PPT	past participle
PRT	partitive
TER	terminative
TRA	translative

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0332586506001570 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research has been funded by grant No 6510 from Estonian Science Foundation.

NOTES

1. In fact, very many pragmatic and discourse markers display clear restrictions as to their turn positions as well as utterance positions (Hakulinen & Seppänen 1992; Keevallik 2003; Lindström & Wide 2005, among many others).
2. The type of face-to-face data available in historical written sources, such as court transcripts or simulated dialogues in fiction and drama, lack hesitations, restarts, overlapped talk, self-repairs, etc. that are often crucial for the usage of pragmatic markers. These details, recoverable only from recordings, have been considered crucial within interactional linguistics and conversation analysis. In terms of discourse marker usage, literary dialogue has been shown to be markedly unlike modern face-to-face conversation (Biber & Finegan 1992:669f.). Differences in present-day drama and conversational usage of discourse particles have also been pointed out by Lindström & Wide (2005:230). However, meaningful historical work can of course be carried out on some types of pragmatic markers, as is proved by Brinton (1996), Traugott & Dasher (2002:152–189), Lindström & Wide (2005), among others. A nice discussion of the methodology can be found in Mosegaard & Rossari (2005).
3. *I wonder* in English is similarly used as an epistemic/evidential/evaluative phrase rather than the 'main clause' + question (Thompson 2002).
4. Note that the writer has used a capital letter after *ei tea*, which probably reflects the understanding that *ei tea* does not belong to the question in the written convention. The same understanding is reflected by the use of commas in example (2).
5. The plural variant *te ei tea* 'you:PL not know', which is also plausible, does not occur in the spoken-language corpora. The downright suggestion that the interlocutor does not know something does not match with the politeness level required when communicating with people who are addressed with the distancing *te*.
6. Negative interrogatives would be formulated with the utterance-initial negative particle *ega*, as in *Ega sa ei tea, mis ma sain* 'You don't know what I got?' or the general question particle *kas*: *Kas sa ei tea, mis ma sain* (identical translation).
7. The reference is implied to be plural because the matrix clause is in plural. Compare: ∗*The girls said* '*I'll go to school*'. and *The girls said:* '*We'll go to school*'.
8. It should be borne in mind that a certain ambiguity as to the statement/question status always remains.

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