

Abstract

This diploma thesis maps the diachronic tendencies in the frequency and functions of *it*-cleft sentences in two sub-registers of academic prose, humanities and natural sciences, from 1800 to 2019. Biber and Gray (2016) showed changes in grammatical complexity in academic writing, namely the shift between *phrasal* and *clausal* grammatical complexity and *explicitness*, which motivated the hypothesis of this thesis, i.e. that the frequency of *it*-clefts is expected to decrease in the course of 20th century in both sub-registers with the development being faster and more salient in natural sciences. General description presents the syntactic and semantic properties of *it*-clefts together with discussion about FSP and the distinction between *new* and *given* information, as the objective of the thesis is also to study the development of the functional types of *clefts*.

The empirical part analyses a corpus of 170 academic texts, covering the time period under study. It is divided into sections based on time periods displaying similar features concerning the frequency of *it*-clefts in natural sciences and humanities. The analysis confirms that the expected decrease in the frequency of *it*-clefts is clearly notable in the case of natural sciences, while in humanities the frequency of *it*-clefts in individual texts differs to such an extent that it is impossible to draw any conclusion, and a larger sample of humanities data would be required. The qualitative analysis shows that in 19th century “Informative-Presupposition” type of *it*-clefts prevails in both sub-registers. This prevalence of “Informative-Presupposition” *clefts* remains unchanged in the humanities, while in natural sciences *it*-clefts cease to be used completely in the course of 20th century, with two instances occurring in 21st century natural sciences data, both of “Stressed-Focus” type.

Keywords: *it*-cleft sentence, grammatical complexity, academic register, frequency change