

Abstract Frankfurt

While non-referential *it* in subject position has received much scholarly attention (*It is raining*), its use in object position (*to leg it*) has rarely been investigated. When considering examples such as *leg it*, *floor it*, *snuff it*, we are faced with the question of what motivates the occurrence of *it*.

- (1) Let vs legge it a little. (OED: Deacon, J & J. Walker. Dialog. Disc. Spirits & Divels. 1601)
- (2) "Follow me!" he yells at Felipe as he swings into his pickup and floors it, racing for the striper as it approaches the end of the route. (COHA Richerson, Carrie. By Good Intentions. 2006)
- (3) I have the pleasure to inform you that your mother-in-law snuffed it. (OED: Daily News 1896)

The paper presents a corpus-based intervareital and diachronic study of non-referential *it* with the aim of shedding new light on the role of transitivity in language change. It sets out to investigate whether the occurrence of non-referential *it* can be related to a series of (de-)transitivization processes (cf. e.g. Rohdenburg 2009, Mondorf 2010) that have recently been observed for weakly entrenched verbs or verb senses. Defining transitivity with Hopper & Thompson (1980: 251) as the effectiveness with which an action takes place, the function of *it* might be to enhance a verb's transitivity by equipping it with a pseudo-object. Such semi-transitive uses have also been observed for verbs that do not normally take direct objects, e.g. cognate objects (*to snore a good snore*), verbs occurring in *way*-constructions (*She worked her way to the top*) or with reflexives (*She worked herself to the top*) (cf. Mondorf 2011). The question arises whether the function of non-referential *it* is to modulate transitivity in accordance with the changing entrenchment of the verb with which *it* is used.

Literature

Hopper, Paul J. & Thompson, Sandra A. (1980) "Transitivity in Grammar and Discourse". *Language* 56: 251-299

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Rohdenburg, Günter (2009) "Reflexive Structures". In: Rohdenburg, Günter and Schlüter, Julia (eds.) *One Language, Two Grammars? Differences between British and American English*, 166-181. (Studies in Language). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.