On the development of ALL-pseudo-clefts in English
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In synchronic work pseudo-clefts like:
(1) What you must do is (to) apply for a leave.
have been discussed at length (e.g. Prince 1978, Higgins 1979, Delin 1990, Collins 1991, Kim 1995, Lambrechts 2001, Huddleston and Pullum 2002), especially in comparison with IT-clefts. Diagnostic characteristics include: a) split focus: two clauses, one (reduced) relative, the other copula, b) uniqueness, c) givenness: the referent of WH- is discourse-old, or triggers an inferrable poset, d) the copula is specificational, not ascriptive/predicational. Mention is sometimes made of pseudo-clefts with ALL, but the only detailed study is Bonelli (1992), which investigates the strength and type of subjective perspective conveyed in different contexts by the ALL-pseudo-cleft, cf.
(2) All you need do is apply for a leave.
While Ball (1991, 1994) details the history of IT-clefts, the development of pseudo-clefts has been ignored. I discuss the history of ALL-pseudo-clefts from the perspective of historical “micro-pragmatics” (cf. Jucker 1995). Data are drawn from a variety of electronic data bases for the history of English including ICAME and LION.
The ALL-pseudo-cleft originates in predicational and purposive constructions, where ‘all’ is the quantifier ‘everything’ and discourse-oldness is not required:
(3) All I did, was to aduance thy state. (1601)
When used in adversative (typically refutational) contexts where it is inferrable or discourse-old, ‘all’ came to be understood as convertible with ‘only’. A possible early bridging example is:
(4) [T]heir puzzling subtleties … are to be repudiated … because, all they do is to envelop the brightness of the Supper in great darkness (= the subtleties ‘are all designed to obscure the meaning of the Last Supper’, or ‘do nothing but obscure …’). (1536)
The ALL-pseudo-cleft arose in the 16thC in the context of verbs of saying and ‘do’, often modified by the modal auxiliaries ‘can’ and ‘would’. In the corpora, expansion to main verbs with modal meaning (‘desire’, ‘want’) is attested in the late 17thC, and to verbs of the senses (‘see’, ‘hear’) in the 20thC. Non-finite clauses are typically introduced by ‘to’ before the 19thC, but an early example without ‘to’ is:
(5) All I could do was stand and laugh at him. (1681)
This syntactically excludes the older purposive reading.

The development of the ALL-pseudo-clefts shows that pragmatic effects arising not only from linguistic contexts (e.g. adversative ‘but’), but also from dialogic argumentative orientation (Schwenter 2000, Verhagen 2005), may become semanticized, and attracted to constructions in which they are unambiguous, e.g. with non-finite clauses without ‘to’ as in (5), progressive as in ‘All I am saying is…’. It illustrates subjectification (Traugott 2003) because the construction is reanalyzed as having a split Topic and Focus/Comment structure, and as signaling negative evaluation of the Focus. Furthermore, it provides historical evidence for the continuum between scalar additivity and exclusivity identified by Schwenter (1999) to account for polysemies of Spanish ‘si’ ‘if’, but, because, so’, and co-occurrence of ‘si’ with “totalization possibility” as expressed by ‘incluso’ ‘even’ (historically derived from ‘(totally) included’).
REFERENCES
Bonelli, Elena Tognini. 1992. ‘All I’m saying is…’: The correlation of form and function in pseudo-cleft sentences. Literary and Linguistic Computing 7: 30-42.