

When crudity steps into grammar: The case of Korean auxiliary verbs

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Korean has a large inventory of auxiliary verbs that developed from various lexical sources through verb serialization. Auxiliary verbs typically mark grammatical aspect such as Completive, Perfective, Progressive, Ingressive, Iterative, etc. By virtue of their periphrastic nature they have not advanced much along the cline of morphosyntactic reduction, and the participating verbs in the construction tend to retain semantic residue (Rhee 2003). This residual meaning serves as the basis of further development of (inter)subjective meanings.

One of the diverse sources of Korean auxiliary verbs is the semantic class of crudity or lack of sophistication, e.g., *tay-* 'touch', *ssah-* 'pile up', *ceykki-* 'push aside', and *chiwu-* 'put away'. The auxiliary verbs involving them developed to mark, in addition to aspects, the speaker's attitude toward an event, e.g. Excessivity, Recklessness, Irritability, Pejoration, Frivolousness, etc., as illustrated by the following examples of *ssah-* 'pile up':

- (1) *ku-nun pyektol-ul ssah-ass-ta.*
he-TOP brick-ACC pile.up-PST-DEC
'He stacked bricks (e.g. to build a wall).'
(2) *ayki-ka wul-e.sсах-nun-ta*
baby-NOM cry-ITER-PRES-DEC
'The baby keeps on crying (e.g. which gets on my nerves).'

Unlike in (1), in which the lexical verb *ssah-* encodes 'pile up', the heterosemous auxiliary verb *-e ssah-* in (2) carries the aspectual meaning of Iterative and, in addition, the subjective meaning of Excessivity and intersubjective meaning of Irritability.

This developmental path, largely applicable to all the aforementioned verbs, exhibits diverse aspects characteristic of grammaticalization, e.g., decategorialization, desemanticization, erosion and extension (Heine and Kuteva 2002), subjectification and intersubjectification (Traugott and König 1991), among others.

However, more intriguing and crucial in the development is the role of culture, in which the events involving the acts denoted by the source verbs are negatively construed. For instance, material piling up (*ssah-* 'pile up') is typically associated with accumulation of objects, which was typically viewed negatively often leading to excessiveness and even moral corruption; physical touching (*tay-* 'touch') was traditionally shunned and regarded as reckless or even incriminating; putting away, especially when encoded by the verb *chiwu-* 'displace' instead of other displacement verbs, was historically associated with the removal of human waste or manure, which involved acts lacking sophistication or refinement. These semantic vestiges of the source lexemes are contributing factors to the development of negative viewpoints.

Recent literature on the role of culture in linguistic structure (Enfield 2002) lends insights to the puzzles that cannot be easily explained otherwise. Drawing upon historical corpus data and making reference to cultural associations, this paper addresses the role of culture in grammaticalization.

References

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