The Development of the Continuative Aspect: A Comparative Study

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In this paper, I investigate the syntactic and semantic development of aspect markers, each of which is selected from Japanese, Korean, Newari, Pengo, and Seneca. The peculiarity of these markers is that one single marker is used for indicating both progressive and resultative (mentioned as ‘continuative’ in the paper).

The universal directionality of the development of aspect markers has been investigated in the past in various forms. For instance, Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca (1994) examine 1046 languages out of 55 language groups. They classify aspect markers into two categories, namely, 1) completive, perfect, resultative and perfective, and 2) progressive, continuative, iterative, habitual and imperfective. They claim that each group takes a distinctive path of semantic shifts, which is determined by the meanings of lexical items from which the aspect markers are derived. That is, the resultative or completive markers (i.e., group 1), which are usually derived from verbs such as ‘be’, ‘have’ ‘finish’, ‘come’, ‘be away’, changes to perfect, then eventually to perfective. On the other hand, the progressive markers (group 2), which originate from locative expressions, evolve to continuative, then to imperfective.

This approach gives us an overview of the semantic changes of aspect markers, there are two major problems. First, they do not discuss the mechanism of these semantic changes. It is necessary to discover what sort of sub-changes result in the overwhelming tendencies of the semantic change in aspect markers observed in various languages. Second, the binary classification they provide cannot account for the grammaticalization in Japanese, Korean, Newari, Pengo, and Seneca, all of which have a single marker that signifies both progressive (which is classified as group 1 by Bybee, et. al.) and resultative (which belongs to group 2).

I first propose that a progressive marker can co-occur only with [+durative] verbs where as a resultative markers can only with [+telic] verbs, assuming that these features are logical requirements for progressive and resultative meanings respectively. Every occurrence of these markers was classified according to the semantic types of co-occurring verbs. I adopted a revised version of Vendler’s categories in order to determine the semantic properties of each verb, consulting with Smith (1991, 1997) and Olsen (1997). The advantage of this systematic methodology is that it introduces the formality to a comparative work among genetically unrelated languages.

I have discovered that in all languages the original meaning of the markers (either progressive or perfect) was expanded to continuative, by the expansion of the verb types that the
marker can co-occur. In other words, the aspect markers in the early stage of their development only co-occur with very specific types of verbs, where as the markers in the later stage can be used with a variety of verbs. This result indicates the interference between syntactic and semantic changes; that is, syntactic expansion (i.e., a marker enables to co-occur with more types of verbs than its earlier stage) results in the semantic changes of the marker.

Therefore, I propose that the development of aspect markers can be systematized into a single hierarchical model, based on the degree of syntactic freedom. This model illustrates not only the directionality of diachronic development of aspect systems, but also the synchronic structures of aspectual paradigm in human language.

References


