

Grammar as a Mirror of Culture: A Case of Grammaticalization of Undesirability-Markers in Korean*

1. Introduction

- Currently, there is an ongoing discussion on linguistic typology list-serve mailing (Lingtyp) posted by David Beck (“Americanist contributions to typology”, July 2, 2016) with insightful comments on the influence of native American languages on linguistics (esp. linguistic typology), many of which relate to culture.
- Since language and culture are intertwined and interactive often to the point of inseparability, how cultural aspects affect language and linguistic change should be an object of serious research for linguists. (Sapir 1931, 1949[1912], Whorf 1956, Pawley 1987, Perkins 1992, Heine 1997, Wierzbicka 1979 “ethnosyntax”, Enfield 2002, Koo 2004, Everett 2005, Gladkova 2015, Koo & Rhee 2016)
- Korean has a large number of auxiliary verbs (from verb serialization) that signal grammatical aspect, modality, and the speaker’s diverse stances (Koo & Rhee, forthcoming).
- This paper investigates seven auxiliary verbs that mark the speaker’s negative evaluation (undesirability) of the propositional content or the sentential subject.

(1)	<i>mek-</i> ‘eat’	<i>tay-</i> ‘touch’
	<i>pe-</i> ‘throw away’	<i>chiwu-</i> ‘throw away, remove’
	<i>ppaci-</i> ‘fall (into)’	<i>cappaci-</i> ‘fall back’
	<i>anc-</i> ‘sit’	

- These verbs have gained, and are gradually gaining, the auxiliary verb status, losing the original semantic content and gaining the function of marking the speaker's viewpoint, and constitute excellent exemplars of “subjectification” in language. (Traugott 1982, Traugott & König 1991, Traugott & Dasher 2002)
- More importantly, the developments are largely due to the unique Korean culture, albeit some having cross-cultural validity, with respect to the meanings denoted by the verbs involved.

2. Objectives

- To illustrate the ‘grammaticalized’ functions of the seven lexical verbs (‘grammaticalization’: Heine et al. 1991, Hopper & Traugott 2003[1993])
- To show how culture is mirrored in language, and how grammatical forms are derived from culture (Heine 1997, Chaput 1997, Sinha & López 2000, Witherspoon 1980, Rhee 2003, inter alia)

3. Data

3.1 Verb of Eating (cf. Rhee 2003, Bae 2000, Song 2009, for Korean; Yamaguchi 2009 for Japanese, Næss 2001, Newman 2009 across languages)¹⁾

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1) The list of languages (other than Korean) in which these verbs or similar verbs are grammaticalized is mostly taken from two lexicons: Heine et al. 1993 and Heine & Kuteva 2002.

- *mek-*: ‘eat’ as a lexical verb

(2) *na-nun cemsim-ul mek-ess-ta*
 I-TOP lunch-ACC eat-PST-DEC
 ‘I ate lunch.’

- *-e.mek-*: Contemptibility marker as a grammaticalized auxiliary verb (& Excessivity & Completive)

(3) a. *i kulssi-un mos ilk-e.mek-keyss-ta*
 this writing-TOP not read-AUX-FUT-DEC
 ‘(I) cannot read this writing. (What terrible handwriting...!)’
 (Lit.: ‘I cannot read and eat this writing.’)

b. *ku-nun os-ul ccic-e.mek-ess-ta*
 he-TOP clothes-ACC tear-AUX-PST-DEC
 ‘He had his clothes torn. (How careless he is!)’ (Lit.: ‘He tore and ate his clothes.’)

3.2 Verb of Physical Contact (cf. Rhee 1996, Lee 1992, Kim 1992, Sohn 1996, Park 2004)

- *tay-*: ‘touch’ as a lexical verb

(4) *i kikyey-ey son tay-cima-si-o*
 this machine-at hand touch-PROH-IMP
 ‘Do not touch this thing.’

- *e.tay-*: Recklessness marker as a grammaticalized auxiliary verb (& Continuative, Iterative)

(5) a. *ton-ul emcheng ssu-e.tay-n-ta*
 money-ACC much use-AUX-PRES-DEC
 ‘(He) keeps spending lots of money recklessly. (He must be insane...)’
 (Lit.: ‘(He) spends and touches money very much.’)

b. *ay-ka congil wul-e.tay-n-ta*
 child-NOM all.day cry-AUX-PRES-DEC
 ‘The child keeps on crying all day long. (It’s getting on my nerves...)’
 (Lit.: ‘The child cries and touches all day long.’)

3.3 Verbs of Displacement (cf. Lee 1976, Rhee 1996, Cho 2013, for Korean; Austin 1981 for Diyari, Bybee & Dahl 1989, Bybee et al. 1994, for Palaung and Fore; Ono 1992, Ono & Suzuki 1992, Watanabe 2000, for Japanese)

- *pele-*: ‘throw away’ as a lexical verb

(6) *na-nun ssuleyki-lul pele-ess-ta*
 I-TOP trash-ACC throw.away-PST-DEC
 ‘I threw away trash.’

- *e.peli-*: Undesirability marker as a grammaticalized auxiliary verb (& Irrevocable)

(7) a. *ku-ka nay pap-ul mek-e.peli-ess-ta*
 he-NOM my food-ACC eat-AUX-PST-DEC
 ‘He ate my food. (Now I’m helpless and must go hungry...)’ (Lit.: ‘He ate and threw away my food.’)

b. *ku cungin-i cwuk-e.peli-ess-ta*
 the witness-NOM die-AUX-PST-DEC
 ‘The witness died. (Now we are in trouble...)’ (Literally: ‘The witness died and threw away.’)

- *chiwu-*: ‘remove’ as a lexical verb

(8) *i komwul com chiwu-ela*
 this junk please remove-IMP
 ‘Remove this junk, please.’

- *e.chiwu-*: Undesirability marker as a grammaticalized auxiliary verb (& Fast and easy)

(9) a. *ku-nun pwulkoki 5inpwun-ul mek-e.chiwu-ess-ta*
 he-TOP roasted.meat 5.serving-ACC eat-AUX-PST-DEC
 ‘He devoured 5 servings of roasted meat. (He is a monster...!)’
 (Lit.: ‘He ate and removed 5 servings...’)

b. *ku-nun taytaylo sal-te-n cip-ul phal-a.chiwu-ess-ta*²⁾
 he-TOP for.generations live-RETRO-ADN house-ACC sell-AUX-PST-DEC
 ‘He sold the house which was the home of (his family for) many generations. (He lost reason...!)’
 (Lit.: ‘He sold and removed the house...’)

3.4 Verb of Withdrawal (cf. Rhee 1996, 2003, Koo & Rhee 2016, for Korean; Subbarao 1979, Arun 1992 for Telugu; Goddard 1985, Austin 1998, for Yankunyjtajara; Stolz 1992 for Dutch; Kuteva 1999 for Bulgarian; Newman & Schuh 1974 for Kanakuru; Hannan 1987 for Shona, Boretzky 1988 for Sudan Arabic)

- *anc-*: ‘sit’ as a lexical verb

(10) *yeki anc-ala*
 here sit-IMP
 ‘Sit here.’

- *ko.anc-*: Contemptible Habitual marker as a grammaticalized auxiliary verb (& Continuative) (N.B. Past tense in form but present continuative in meaning)

(11) a. *ku-nun cam-man ca-ko.anc-ass-ta*
 he-TOP sleep-only sleep-AUX-PST-DEC
 ‘He is only sleeping. (He’s not doing anything else!)’ (Lit.: ‘He only slept and sat down.’)

b. *kyay-nun congil chwukkwu-man ha-ko.anc-ass-ta*
 that.guy-TOP all.day soccer-only do-AUX-PST-DEC
 ‘That guy plays soccer all day long. (He’s not doing anything else!)’
 (Lit.: ‘That guy played soccer and sat down all day.’)

3.5 Verbs of Falling (Rhee 1996, Koo 2002, Ahn 2005, Bak 2007, for Korean; Svorou 1994 for Ijo; Hagen 1914 for Bulu; Haspelmath 1990 for Tamil and Tonga)

- *ppaci-*: ‘fall into’ as a lexical verb

(12) *silswu-lo mwulwungtengi-ey ppaci-ess-ta*
 mistake-with water.puddle-at fall.into-PST-DEC
 ‘(I) fell into a water puddle by mistake.’

- *e.ppaci-*: Pejoration marker as a grammaticalized auxiliary verb (N.B. Past tense in form but normally adjective in present tense in meaning)

(13) a. *kulen pyenmyeng-un hunha-e.ppaci-ess-ta*
 such excuse-TOP be.common-AUX-PST-DEC
 ‘Such an excuse is trite. (That old excuse won’t work!)’
 (Lit.: Such an excuse was common and fell (into something).)

2) The AUX *-a chiwu-* is a variant form of *-e chiwu-*. The same applies to other AUXs of *-e* forms.

- b. *ku salam-un cengmal yak-a.ppac-ess-ta*
 that person-TOP really be.tactful-AUX-PST-DEC
 ‘That guy is truly cunning and tactful. (You’d better be duly cautious!)’
 (Lit.: That guy was very tactful and fell (into something).)

• *cappaci-*: ‘fall back’ as a lexical verb

- (14) *elumphan-eyse cappaci-ess-ta*
 icy.spot-at fall.back-PST-DEC
 ‘(I) fell back on ice.’

• *ko.cappaci-*: Contemptibility marker as a grammaticalized verb (& Continuative) (N.B. Past tense in form but present continuative in meaning)

- (15) a. *kkapwul-ko.cappaci-ess-ney*
 be.playful-AUX-PST-EXCL
 ‘(You) are just too playful! (Stop being ridiculous!)’ (Lit.: ‘He was playful and fell back.’)

- b. *ku-nun nolki-man ha-ko.cappaci-ess-ta*
 he-TOP playing-only do-AUX-PST-DEC
 ‘He is doing nothing but playing. (It's deplorable...)’ (Lit.: ‘He played and fell back.’)

4. Cultural Analysis

4.1 Why is ‘eating’ contemptible?

• Cultural aspects with respect to eating:

- (16) a. As a long tradition, Koreans have been using spoons and chopsticks in eating.
 b. Touching food with bare hands (unless in cooking) has been strongly avoided. Finger-licking is extremely offensive to the viewers.
 c. The noble class in old Korea avoided being seen eating, and outdoor cafés were practically non-existent until recently.
 d. Officers in the military are still instructed not to frivolously join their men in eating, and their dining halls are separated from those for their men (likely to be in other cultures, too).
 e. Pastors are trained to exercise extreme caution with their appearance when eating with their members of the congregation.
 f. Until recently, i.e. until around the 1980s, restaurants and coffee shops had non-transparent walls to help their clients avoid being seen eating/drinking from outside.
 g. Even in modern days, most high-class restaurants have rooms or partitions for their clients for the sake of their privacy.
 h. People have developed a large inventory of euphemistic substitutes for the ingestion verb, such as ‘lift’, ‘do’, ‘sit’, ‘perform’, ‘equip’, etc. (cf. Thai ingestion verbs by class distinction.)
 i. Eating has been associated with the lack of sophistication, and regarded as the sign of greed for satisfying animalistic instinct, and thus something to be avoided to be seen (probably universal, though at varying degrees, Rhee 2003, Koo & Rhee 2016. cf. table manners; cf. Okabayasi 2002 for Japanese).

4.2 Why is ‘touching’ reckless?

• Cultural aspects with respect to touching a person:

- (17) a. Touching others has been generally avoided, and touching as a display of affection in romantic relationships is also deemed unacceptable, and was taboo in public until the mid-20th century.
- b. Koreans did not shake hands (now a common practice due to Western influence).
- c. Even pointing a person (esp. a superior) has been avoided.
- d. Furthermore, hand gestures that have the iconic value of touching a person, such as those for requesting to come close or to go away, have been avoided.
- e. Cross-sexual physical touch was a taboo. Boys and girls of 7 years of age or older were traditionally not allowed to sit together (*namnyechilsey pwutongsek* ‘male-female 7 years no shared sitting’) (Early Christian churches had separate seating by gender for congregation; Even spouses sat separately.).
- f. Royal doctors were not allowed to touch female court members even when examining the pulse (they stood away with a partition in-between and felt the pulse through a tightly drawn string).
- g. Husbands and wives (esp. noble class) used to use different living quarters, and even when they traveled together, they usually walked with a distance between them.
- h. Consequently, *tay-* ‘touch’ is strongly associated with the lack of decorum, violation of manners, and consequently with recklessness.

4.3 Why is ‘throwing away’ undesirable?

- Cultural aspects with respect to throwing away objects:
- (18) a. Koreans were generally regarded as thrifty people.
- b. Throwing away things was generally viewed as undesirable, even though the act of throwing away *per se* is neutral, and can be even beneficial in a context of eliminating undesirable objects. (cf. ‘subjectification’, Traugott 1982, 2003, 2010, Traugott & König 1991, Traugott & Dasher 2002)
- c. All extended meanings of *pel-* ‘throw away’ have negative connotations, such as ‘waste’, ‘spoil’, ‘betray’, ‘ruin’, ‘forsake’, ‘desist’, etc., all signifying deviance from desirable states.
- d. Consequently, *pel-* ‘throw away’ is strongly associated with undesirability. (potentially universal (?))

4.4 Why is ‘sitting’ contemptible?

- Cultural aspects with respect to sitting:
- (19) a. Koreans were generally regarded as among the most diligent peoples.
- b. Working hard for success has been a time-old obsession for Korean people.
- c. There has been no proper emphasis on the importance on play, rest, recreation, and enjoyment.
- d. Most (nearly all) protagonist-antagonist pairs in folk tales are good-natured hard workers and ill-natured idle persons.
- e. ‘Resting’ is a synonym for ‘stopping’, ‘discontinuity’, or ‘inactivity’.
- f. ‘Sitting’ is an antonym of work/action/production.
- g. Consequently, *anc-* ‘sit’ is strongly associated with undesirable inaction. (Also observed in other languages, see 3.4 above.)

4.5 Why is ‘falling back’ contemptible?

- Cultural aspects with respect to falling back:
- (20) a. Koreans were particular about their postures.
- b. Proper postures in motion (esp. noblemen) involve head-up, chin-down, chest-out, slow movement occupying a large operational space.

- c. Falling into something (esp. puddles, bogs, etc.) is embarrassing experience for losing decorum.
- d. Falling down, esp. falling back, in which the experiencer has fewer options for self-protection than in falling forward, has been regarded as an extreme embarrassment.
- e. Even for a descriptive term, ‘falling back’ is rarely used with respect to superiors, or in decent contexts in general (only occasionally used for describing self’s own experience in a self-deprecating manner).
- f. Lying down is sometimes referred to as ‘falling back’ in order to show contempt, i.e., pejorative substitute.
- g. Consequently, *ppaci-* ‘fall into’ and *cappaci-* ‘fall back’ are ridden with embarrassment, disgrace and, thus, contempt.

4.6 Remaining Issues: Other Cases

- (21)
- a. *ssah-* ‘pile up, heap, stack, accumulate’: potentially positive, but why developed into a marker of undesirability?
 - b. *mal-* ‘stop’: similar to *anc-* ‘sit’ for inactivity/unproductivity?
 - c. *pachi-* ‘give upward, devote’: possibly from pejorative stance toward someone displaying subservient attitude?
 - d. *ssa-* ‘be cheap’: likely to have originated from pejorative attitude toward something of lower quality (if so, not culture-specific)?
 - e. *casi-* ‘eat honorably’: likely to have originated from sarcasm?
 - f. *theci-* ‘burst, break, crack open’: probably from uncontrollability of an event?
 - g. *ceykki-* ‘push aside’: probably from disparaging attitude (if so, not culture-specific)?

[Challenging questions]

- What is the extent of the influence of culture on language?
- How can we draw a boundary between culture-specificity and culture-universality?
- When the culture changes, how would the culturally-effected grams react to the change?

5. Summary & Conclusion

- Grammar is based on human cognition, which is shaped by human experience.
- Common aspects of human experience in a language community may affect, and be reflected in, the language.
- Certain grammatical forms that mark the speaker’s attitude toward the proposition/sentential subject in Korean were developed from lexical verbs denoting ‘eating’, ‘touching’, ‘throwing away’, ‘sitting’ and ‘falling (into/back/down)’.
- The negative attitude of the speaker as marked by these markers emerged from the unique Korean cultural viewpoint toward the events denoted by the lexical verbs. E.g., in Korean culture, eating and touching are best avoided in public; sitting or withdrawal from an activity is easily condemned for the consequent lack of productivity; throwing away is regarded as an act causing irretrievability; and falling back is the ultimate disgrace where gentle demeanor is highly prized.
- Culture shapes language not only at the level of lexicon but also at the level of grammar.
- This paper shows how certain parts of culture are mirrored in language, and how certain parts of grammar are derived from culture.

Abbreviations

ACC: accusative; ADN: adnominal; AUX: auxiliary; DEC: declarative; EXCL: exclamative; FUT: future; IMP: imperative; PROH: prohibitive; PST: past; RETRO: retrospective; TOP: topic

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