On the grammaticalization of nominalization marker $=ay$ in Kavalan and Amis: a contrastive study

Recently there is a growing interest in nominalization and grammaticalization (Malchukov 2006; López-Couso & Seoane 2008; Yap et al. forthcoming). In light of a functional view on nominalization (Shibatani 2009), the present study investigates the multiple functions of the nominalization marker $=ay$ in two Formosan languages Kavalan and Amis. It is shown that like underived nouns, which are capable of making references, a predicate cliticized by $=ay$ either refers to an entity through its denotations (termed “referring context”) or restricts the denotations of a juxtaposed head noun to a subset (termed “restricting context”).

In addition to denoting persons/things, the marker $=ay$ also denotes events in both languages. Moreover, the very same marker even indicates perfectivity in non-attributive verbs or emphasis in attributive verbs. In terms of Lyons’ (1977) hierarchy of ontological entities, it is argued that the marker $=ay$ has undergone grammaticalization whereby it evolved to nominalize higher order entities over time. The non-referring functions of $=ay$ is then argued to derive from its grammatical status as an epistemic modality marker that conveys a speaker’s strong commitment to a proposition. The perfective reading is thus arrived at through pragmatic inference based on the presupposition associated with nominalization (see Kaufmann forthcoming) while the emphatic reading is a natural result of higher degree of speaker’s commitment.

While there are no documented texts available showing the historical development of the marker $=ay$ from an Actor/subject nominalizer to an event nominalizer and ultimately an epistemic marker, there are two types of evidence supporting the hypothesized patterns of these developments. There exist several pieces of evidence for the homogeny between a referring nominalization marker and a non-referring epistemic marker, including (i) the existence of ambiguous “bridging contexts”; (ii) the robust crosslinguistic development in (South-)East Asian languages where nominalizers typically originate as referential nominals and over time grammaticalize into some pragmatic/stance markers (Yap & Matthews 2008); (iii) the reconstruction of $=ay$ as the fusion of the attributive ligature $=*a$ to a following demonstrative $*ya$ ‘that’, a process also attested in many non-Formosan Austronesian languages (Reid forthcoming).

Beside these, the present study offers contrastive evidence from Kavalan and Amis. First, $=ay$ in Kavalan may co-occur with another nominalization marker $-an$ in the restricting context but not in the referring context, whereas $=ay$ and $-an$ in Amis are in complementary distribution, with the former referring to Actor and the latter to Patient. This suggests that $=ay$ in Kavalan has acquired a ligature-like status, a further grammaticalized function not found in Amis, where the complementary distribution challenges the analysis of $=ay$ as a “factual mood” marker (see Wu 2006). Second, the non-referring functions of $=ay$ are much more restricted in Kavalan than in Amis, which indicates a higher degree of grammaticalization of the epistemic $=ay$ in the latter than in the former. Taken as a whole, these two differences imply that while undergoing the same grammaticalization process (from referring to non-referring) two languages may display different degrees of grammaticalization, providing evidence for the grammaticalization paths they follow.

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References