Grammaticalization of nominalizer constructions in Tibeto-Burman languages

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One of the characteristic features among Tibeto-Burman languages is the extensive use of nominalization constructions. The major functions of nominalization in Tibeto-Burman languages are 1) lexicalization (nominal, adjectival, intransitivization), 2) modification of noun, 3) clausal nominalization as noun, 4) non-embedded nominalization as finite clause, 5) adverbial clause formation (Noonan 1997; DeLancey 2009; Genetti 2011).

In this chapter, I will discuss grammaticalization and syntactic reanalysis of nominalizers in some Tibeto-Burman languages. Genetti (2011) identifies three types of grammaticalization and syntactic reanalysis: 1) deriving lexical adjectives, 2) developing true converbial clauses, and 3) tense-aspect marking. I will discuss more cases of these, taking up other languages that are not discussed in Genetti (2011), and also add non-embedded nominalization as a fourth type to this kind of grammaticalization in Tibeto-Burman languages. The languages to be discussed are Kathmandu Newar, Meche (aka. Bodo), Amdo Tibetan, Kaike, Burmese, and Athpare.

More detailed analysis will be provided for tense-aspect marking and non-embedded nominalization. Grammaticalization of nominalizers into tense-aspect markers involves change in verbal paradigm. Compared to the cases in Japanese, where nominalized form of verb reanalyzed as a finite form and stepped into the verbal paradigm of Japanese, Kathmandu Newar will be examined with respect to the grammaticalization of nominal forms turned into finite forms. Furthermore, not only TAM marking, it will be shown that nominalizer is involved with negation in Athpare. Meche, spoken in Nepal, is also taken up as another instance of grammaticalization of the nominalizer into a tense marker, in comparison to Boro, a sister language spoken in Assam, India.

Secondly, non-embedded nominalization of a clause will be discussed with special reference to Kathmandu Newar, Amdo Tibetan, Burmese and Athpare. This structure is first noted in Lahu by Matisoff (1972). In this construction, the nominalized clause is reanalyzed as an independent clause. The non-embedded nominalized clause is semantically different from the non-nominalized clause in terms of modality and discourse function. I will provide a detailed analysis of the non-embedded nominalized clauses in Kathmandu Newar.