

Nominal Predicates in Tungusic languages
Diachronic analysis on nominal predicates
— focusing on -č̣a in Tungusic languages —

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Tungusic languages are one of the three groups of ‘Altaic’ languages (Turkic, Mongolic and Tungusic). Their nominal predicates are called “participles” (“*prichastie*” in Russian). On the one hand, the “participles” in Tungusic languages are like derived nouns in European languages. On the other hand they are like infinitives.

I propose the hypothetical scenario on the development of the past forms in Tungusic languages as follows:

The suffix *-č̣A in Proto-Tungusic was a kind of noun derivational suffix which form a noun as a result of the action because we can see such character of this suffix in Udihe and Nanai (genetically remote each other). On the analogy of participles which had been already established, the suffix *-č̣A began to acquire its verbal character especially in the languages of Group I (Ewen, Ewenki, Solon and Negidal).

In the languages of Group I, at that time, a past form in a predicate position was required because the change from an evidentiality-centered system to a tense-centered system had occurred. Perhaps the evidential past *-kA had been lost at that time. And the suffix *-č̣A began to expand its verbal character more. In other words a grammaticalization had occurred.

On the stage of Proto Ewenki (including Ewenki, Negidal and Solon), the suffix *-č̣A was established as the default past form in a predicate position. In the Middle-Western dialect of Ewen the same change had occurred independently (or maybe by the influence of Ewenki). On the other hand in the Eastern dialect of Ewen the nominal character of this suffix remains still now.

As seen above, on the one hand the suffix *-č̣A had grammaticalized and become inflectional element which is frequently used in some languages, and on the other hand it remained as a derivational and even less-productive element in other languages.

Reference

- Kazama, S. (2010) Tsungusu syogo no setsuji -č̣a ni tsuite. [The suffix -č̣a in Tungusic languages.] *Ajia Afurika no gengo to gengogaku* 5. [Asian and African Languages and Linguistics 5.] Tokyo University of Foreign Studies Research Institute for Languages of Asia and Africa.