Synchronic exploration in search of diachronic paths: A contrastive study of the grammaticalization of "PUT/KEEP" in Japanese and Marathi

Prashant PARDESHI

National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics, Tokyo

In his seminal work on areal linguistics Masica (1976) shows that the "explicator compound verb (ECV hereafter)" is one of the hallmarks of the languages spoken in Northeast, Central and South Asia. The ECV is sequence of two verbs: the main verb (V1, non-finite) and an explicator/vector verb (V2, finite). The vector verb is semantically bleached and "explicates" the meaning of the main verb. Masica (1976: 143) points out that the combinations of V1 and V2 are "lexically selective" in that a given V2 combines only with such V1 as are compatible with it.

Not much is known, however, about the cross-linguistic differences in the co-occurrence restrictions of a given V2 with the V1. Such co-occurrence restrictions can be considered as a barometer of the degree of semantic bleaching or grammaticalization of the V2 in question. Assuming that the direction of semantic change is the same and that the speed of the change may vary from one language to other, a cross-linguistic comparative study of the vector verbs provides us an invaluable opportunity to examine the process of grammaticalization at different points in apparent time and to follow it through successive phases (see Hook 1988). Such an exploration in "space/geography" provides a glimpse in the "time/history" of the trajectory of change.

In Pardeshi (2008) I focused on the vector verb (V2) usage of an experientially basic verb called PUT/KEEP in the languages of Northeast (Japanese, Korean, Mongolian), Central (Kazakh, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Uyghur) and South Asia (Hindi, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam) through a small-scale questionnaire based elicitation study and found that the repertoire of V1 co-occurring with the vector *oku* (KEEP/PUT) in Japanese is far wider in scope than its counterparts in the other languages under consideration. Building on this and using a different methodology, I focus in the present study on two languages, namely Japanese and Marathi. Using data from a large corpus for Japanese (BCCWJ, 100 million words) and online data from Marathi, I attempt to show qualitative as well as quantitative differences in the concatenation of "V1 + PUT/KEEP" in Japanese and Marathi, differences which can be arguably attributed to the difference in the degree of grammaticalization of the vector verb *oku* in Japanese and its counterpart *ṭhev-ṇe* in Marathi.

Selected references

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