Synchronic Exploration in Search of Diachronic Path:
An Areal-Typological Study on the Grammaticalization of "PUT/KEEP" in Northeast, Central and South Asian Languages

Prashant Pardeshi
Kobe University

Abstract

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 about the cross-linguistic differences in the co-occurrence restrictions of a given V2 with the V1. Such co-occurrence restrictions are a barometer of the degree of semantic bleaching/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 comparative study of the vector verbs across the Northeast, Central and South Asian languages 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 this paper, I focus 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) and shed light on the similarities and differences in its co-occurrence restrictions with main verb (V1) through a questionnaire based elicitation study. I classify V1 in the following 5 groups in the order of decreasing transitivity: canonical transitive (e.g. *wash cloths*, *clean the room*, etc.), semi-transitive/ingestive (e.g. *eat food*, *drink medicine*), reflexive transitive (e.g. *take shower*, *wash one's hands*, etc.), unergative (e.g. *run*, *walk*, *sit*, etc.) and unaccusative (e.g. *die*) and check if they can co-occur with the vector PUT/KEEP in the languages under discussion.

The results of the study show that all the languages under discussion behave alike with regard to the concatenation of PUT/KEEP with canonical transitive V1. As for the combination of the same verb acting as V1 as well as V2 (KEEP+KEEP) differences are observed. Northeast and Central Asian languages allow such combinations while South Asian languages do not. With regard to ingestive verbs, very few languages barring Japanese and Korean permit concatenation with PUT/KEEP. The same trend is found for the reflexive and unergative verbs. Finally, as for unaccusative, only Japanese allow concatenation with PUT/KEEP. The vector PUT/KEEP in Japanese (*oku*), unlike its Korean counterparts, also undergoes phonetic attrition. From these facts, I conclude that on the continuum of grammaticalization of the vector PUT/KEEP Japanese occupies the higher end and South Asian languages the lower one. Korean and the Central Asian languages fall mid-way between these two poles.

Selected References

Hook, Peter. 1988. Paradigmaticization: A Case Study from South Asia. In *Proceedings of the Fourteenth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society,* pp. 293-303.
Masica, Colin. 1976. *Defining a Linguistic Area: South Asia.* Univ. of Chicago Press.