The Empty Root in Cebuano and Kavalan:

A Counterexample to Grammaticalization

Fuhui Hsieh and Michael Tanangkingsing

National Taiwan University

In his study of the synchronic role of morphology in Ilocano discourse, Rubino (1996) reports a rather interesting linguistic phenomenon, i.e., the many uses of the versatile empty root *kua*. This particular linguistic form is in itself semantically empty outside of the discourse context; yet in the context, it can be fitted into any syntactic slot and inflected or derived with appropriate morphological affixations accordingly. In other words, attached with affixation, it can be used as a verb, noun, adjective, or adverb. Rubino interprets such an empty root with appropriate morphological frame as a means for word searching and thus for facilitating interactions.

The use of such an empty root is not unique in Ilocano; it is found in other Philippine languages, such as Bikol and Hiligaynon, as well as in Kavalan, a Formosan language. By investigating narrative and conversation data in both Cebuano and Kavalan, we also found that the distributions and functions of this empty root are far more complicated than what has been reported in Rubino (1996). It is not only used as a searching strategy, as shown in (1) for word searching and the second *ku'an* in (2) for sentential structure searching, but also as a discourse marker, as shown in the first *ku'an* in (2) and in (3); moreover, it is used anaphorically (or as a pseudo-deixis), to refer to some shared knowledge between the speaker and the hearer, which could be some entity (as in 4a), some activity (4b), or some abstract state known to both Speaker/Hearer. It may also be a way to avoid a direct mention of sensitive terms, as in (5). Although this empty root lacks semantic consistency (that's why Rubino acknowledges that it is not yet lexicalized), it is without question that when it is used anaphorically,[1] some negotiated meaning emerges from the discourse context (cf. Huang 1998) and thus it does acquire some semantic content in some uses.

In addition to giving a detailed description of the distribution and function of the empty root in Cebuano and Kavalan, our main concern in this paper is to

---

[1] Deixis also lacks semantic consistency, since the semantics of a referent differs in different arenas of language use; however, we do not acknowledge deixis as semantically empty (cf. Fillmore 1997; Jackendoff 1983: Chapter 9; Consten 2003; Hansenforf 2003).

offer a cognitive account of such a linguistic phenomenon, i.e., from being used with semantic void to being used with seemingly infinite uses. Our tentative explanation is based on the mechanism of underspecification (Barner and Bale 2002; Halle and Marantz 1993, 1994; Marantz 1997; Harley and Noyer 1999). According to this approach, lexical roots are category-neutral; "when placed in a nominal environment the result is a 'nominalization'; when the roots are placed in a verbal environment they become verbs" (Marantz 1997, cited in Barner and Bale 2002:772).

Also, in this paper we will demonstrate that this intriguing cross-linguistic phenomenon constitutes a counterexample to the uni-directionality principle in the grammaticalization theory (Traugott 1989, 1995, 2001, 2004; Traugott and Heine 1991; Traugott and König 1991; Hopper and Traugott 1993; Sweetser 1988). As proposed in the theory of grammaticalization, there are clines wherein lexical items go through a grammaticalization process to become grammatical items;[2] the central tenet is the unidirectionality principle, in so far as it predicts that grammatical material will not become lexical (Traugott 1995:1). However, our data show that a particular linguistic form can evolve in a totally opposite direction. It starts from a semantically empty root with purely discoursal function: word searching (a filler indeed), to discourse marker, and then to a pseudo-deictic term, which acquires some semantic content and refers to some shared knowledge (entity, or activity).

---

[2] For instance, nominal clines (nominal adposition > case) and verbal clines (main verb > tense, aspect, mood marker) are staples of grammaticalization theory.

DATA

(1)(a) Kavalan (Frog-imui)

→ 154. tangi   m-zaqis   qaniau   **ta==-iza-an** u
        now   AF-climb.up   3PL.NOM   LOC-IZA-LOC or

        ta   babaw   na   paRin, /
        LOC above   GEN tree

        'They climbed up to IZA (somewhere), or the top of a tree.'

(1)(b) Kavalan (Frog-imui)

→ 13 (0.9) *ngil=ti*   **qa==-iza,** \
            AF.want=PFV   QA-IZA

→ 14   **qa-zukat**   pasazi   ta-peRasku-an. \
           QA-go.out   toward.here   LOC-bottle-LOC

          'It was about to IZA, to come out of the…the bottle.'

(1)(c) Kavalan (Frog-buya)

64.…(0.9) t<em>eqez   nani._
            <AF>stop   DM

65. …me-zukat nani.\
     AF-go.out DM

66. quRu-na   **na   iza   na==… siRemuq**. \
     head-3SG.GEN   GEN IZA   GEN   deer

     'The head of the deer comes out.'

(2) Cebuano (used to change sentence structure)

→ **ku'an** =man =to =siya- tung nang-adto mi-g   san carlos-
    kuan   PAR   that 3SG.NOM when AF-go   1EPL.NOM-LK PN

→ kanang=   nagka- **ku'an-** nay   cancer gani
   FIL   AF (FS) KUAN   exist cancer PAR

   'ku'an, when we went to San Carlos, *em*= (he) *em*=, there was cancer
   (he had cancer).'

   (Change of structure from AF-V S to existential clause)

(3)(a) Kavalan (Frog-buya)

80. *zaqis-an-na*   *sa==*(1.0)--, /
     climb.up-LF/PF-3SG.GEN FS

81. (0.9) azu=ti   syurin 'nay zin-ta   na,_

      seem=PFV buoy   that say-1IPL.GEN DM

82. *nani.* \

    DM

    'There is a tree (trunk) over there; the child thinks the trunk
    is like a life buoy.'

→ 83. (1.2) ***iza,*** _

    IZA

84. me-lazyu   tu== nengi=ti me-lazyu=ti ta-qazqaz-an

    AF-pass   DM   good=PFV AF-pass=PFV LOC-shore-LOC

    nani zin-na.\

    DM   say-3SG.GEN

    'He thinks IZA (this way) is easy (easier) to go to the shore.'

(3)(b) Cebuano

    SM na ron sa cotabato wala gyud

    PN PFV now LOC PN   NEG   EMPH

→   pero kung **ku'an** ha

    but if   KUAN   PAR

    tung una   cotabato ang una-ng naging city kaysa sa

    that at.first PN   ANG first-LK become city than   LOC

    davao ug sa general santos m= pero dahil   daghan-g muslim

    PN   and LOC PN   FIL but because many-LK PN

    'There's really no SM store in Cotabato, but *ku'an* you know, it
    was Cotabato that became a city earlier than Davao and General
    Santos, but because there are many Muslim people there…'

(4)(a) Kavalan (Frog-imui2)

→ 24. (1.5) yau=ti   pasazi   **ta==- … iza-an**

      EXIST=PFV toward.here LOC- IZA -LOC

      situqaw   tu paRin 'nay==,_

      AF.look.up OBL tree that

25. 'nay wasu a   yau t<em>ayta tu,\

    that dog LNK   that <AF>see   OBL

26. *Rubu-na   na==,* \

    hive-3SG.GEN GEN

27. turiq a   yau, /

    wasp   LNK that

    'That dog came over IZA (here), looked up at a tree and saw a hive of wasps there.'

(4)(b) Kavalan (Pear-buya)

39 (0.8) pangmu-an-na=ti

      help-LF/PF-3SG.GEN=PFV

→ 40 **m-iza** tu== sinsuli-na

      AF-IZA OBL   plum-3SG.GEN

      'helped him IZA (pick) the plums

41 (0.8) m-isis   timaizipana atu== eh m   tu,\

      AF-support 3SG.ACC   and FIL FIL FIL

42.   zitinsya-na nani

      bicycle-3SG.GEN   DM

(5) Cebuano

=avoidance of mention of a sensitive matter (e.g., salary, confidential matters, behavior)

→ L pila   man sad imoha-ng **ku'an**- …s=sweldo

    how.much PAR also 2SG.POSS-LK KUAN salary

→ **ku'an** ra   dili

    KUAN   only NEG

→ J a   wala- dili **ku'an** confidential

    PAR   NEG   NEG   KUAN   confidential

    L: 'How much is your er… salary? Only er… er no.'

    J: 'mm… no, it's not… it's confidential.'

REFERENCES

Consten, Manfred. 2003. Towards a unified model of domain-bound reference. *Deictic conceptualisation of space, time and person*, ed. by Friedrich Lenz, 223-248. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Fillmore, Charles J. 1997. *Lectures on deixis*. Stanford, CA: CSLI (Center for the Study of Language and Information) Publications.

Hausendorf, Heiko. 2003. Deixis and speech situation revisited: The mechanism of perceived perception. *Deictic conceptualisation of space, time and*

person, ed. by Friedrich Lenz, 249-269. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Hopper, Paul J., and Elizabeth Closs Traugott. 1993. *Grammaticalization*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Huang, Shuanfan. 1998. Emergent lexical semantics. *Selected Papers from ISOLIT-II*, ed. by Shuanfan Huang, 129-150. Taipei: The Crane Publishing Co.

Jackendoff, Ray. 1983. Semantics and cognition. Chapter 9 of *Semantics of spatial expressions*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Rubino, Carl. 1996. Morphological integrity in Ilocano: A corpus-based study of the production of polymorphemic words in a polysynthetic language. *Studies in Language* 20(3): 633-666.

Sweetser, Eve E. 1988. Grammaticalization and semantic bleaching. *Proceedings of the Fourteenth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, ed. by Shelley Axmaker, Annie Jaisser, and Helen Singmaster, 389-405. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Linguistics Society.

Traugott, Elizabeth Closs, and Bernd Heine, eds. 1991. *Approaches to grammaticalization* (2 Vols). Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Traugott, Elizabeth Closs, and Ekkehard König. 1991. The semantics-pragmatics of grammaticalization revisited. *Approaches to grammaticalization* 1, ed. by Traugott and Heine, 189-218. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Traugott, Elizabeth Closs. 1995. The role of the development of discourse markers in a theory of grammaticalization. Paper presented at ICHL XII, Manchester 1995.

Traugott, Elizabeth Closs. 2001. Legitimate counterexamples to unidirectionality. Paper presented at Freiburg University, October 17. 2001.

Traugott, Elizabeth Closs. 2004. Exaptation and grammaticalization. *Linguistic studies based on corpora*, ed. by Minoji Akimoto, 133-156. Tokyo: Hituzi Syobo Publishing Co.