DISCOURSE AND COGNITIVE RESOURCES FOR GRAMMATICALIZATION IN THAI

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In this paper, I will discuss some processes of grammaticalization found in Thai. I will do it in three steps. First, I will introduce an emerging theoretical framework for functional linguistics known as the “usage-based model of language.” This will properly situate the grammaticalization processes which I will investigate. Second, I will draw our attention to the synchronic grammatical phenomenon which I refer to as the “bi-polar distribution of a word,” whereby the same word appears at two opposite positions in a sentence. Third, I will focus on one particular Thai word, hay ‘give,’ to illustrate how grammaticalization proceeds to produce the bipolarization pattern.

1. Usage-based Model of Language

The “Usage-based Model of Language” was first proposed by Langacker in his 1987 book on Cognitive Grammar. This model of language, according to him, gives “substantial importance (...) to the actual use of the linguistic system and a speaker's knowledge of this use.” (p.494). More recently Barlow and Kemmer in their edited book published in 2000 extended the range of this model and suggest diverse areas of linguistic research which can be fruitfully examined under this model. According to them “the speaker's linguistic system is fundamentally grounded in 'usage events.'” This means, among others, that the usage events provide the foundation for forming the abstract linguistic systems (or schemas), and that the linguistic structure is highly fluid and is subject to constant restructuring.

The usage-based model of language, thus, provides an ideal theoretical framework for the study of language change and grammaticalization, since it is in the actual use of language where language change takes place. Methodologically, this model allows us to examine the synchronic data to achieve a better understanding of how grammar may change. I will investigate one interesting synchronic grammatical
phenomenon found in Thai, which I refer to as the bipolar distribution of a word, and suggest how it has developed its current pattern.

2. Bipolar distribution of a word

The bipolar distribution of a word, as I already mentioned, refers to a phenomenon whereby the same word appears at the opposite ends of a linguistic unit with different functions. In (1-a) X is a word, and it appears at the beginning of a unit as X1, and at the end of a unit as X2. As shown in (1-b), X1 and X2 may appear at the two poles of the same unit. When X1 and X2 have the identical shape (which is often the case), the different functions ascribed to them are defined exclusively by their positions.

(1-a) X1 ...........
        ...........X2

(1-b) X1 ........ X2

I will discuss four words which show the bipolar distribution. They are, háy, lééw, lɔɔy, and dáy. These words are function words of various sorts when they appear at the periphery, but they may also appear as verbs. Their meaning as verbs are: háy = give; lééw = finish, lɔɔy = pass, go beyond; and dáy. = get, obtain. What this means, in light of the general pattern of grammaticalization, is that bipolarization is a consequence of the process whereby a lexical verb changes into a function word.

Let’s look at some examples of the bipolarization pattern. Most of the examples are from a data set consisting of 38 telephone conversations provided to me by Supa Chotchoey. The telephone conversations were recorded at one household for some period of time, during which one female member of the family was expecting a baby and finally delivered a baby boy. Thus many people called in to check if she had delivered her baby yet. I have supplemented this data with earthquake conversation data which I collected in Los Angeles in 1994.
(2) 

hay “give” (TC #114:163)

hay mồ tràt hay chây máy
CAU doctor examine BEN right Q
“You had the doctor examine you, right?”

léew “finish” (TC #57:11)

léew khoán nǐi pay léew lā
CONJ evening this go ASP Q
“And, did you already go (there) tonight?”

ləəy “pass” (TC #90:45)

ləəy hay khâw tənán ləəy
CONJ give he there D.MOD
“So, I gave (mangostins) to him there.”

dây “get/obtain”
(TC #105:45)

kə-ləəy [ may dåy fàak phięi nom pay ]
so NEG AUX leave o.sister (name) go
“So I didn’t get to leave it with Sister Nom”

(TC #97:35)

[ fàak phięi nom mày dåy ] lā
leave o.sister (name) NEG POT SFP
“Can’t you leave (it) with Sister Nom?:”

As noted earlier, the words used in the above examples are not lexical verbs. In light of a general tendency of grammaticalization, we can assume that the words appearing here are later developments from full-fledged verbs. What we are encountering is, of course, a common phenomenon of what Hopper (1991) calls the “layering” of older and newer functions of words. But the functions associated with some words are extremely diverse, as we will see shortly, and thus requires us to examine in detail exactly how they have come about.

I will analyze the process of bipolarization with two notions: reanalysis and the layered structure of a language unit. Reanalysis, involved in many cases of grammaticalization in
general, especially at the beginning stage of grammaticalization, is a process which manipulates word boundaries; it may delete, add, or shift boundaries, and, as a consequence, a new word may be formed. It should be emphasized that reanalyses take place during actual usage events.¹

Our second notion, the layered structure, needs some discussion. I assume that a sentence has several internal layers, represented in (3).

(3) [ [ [ ] ] ]

The most internal layer contains the semantic core of the unit. It may take the simple form consisting of a verb and its associated arguments, or the complex form consisting, for example, of serialized core units. In the mid layer lies sentence modality and discourse salient information, represented by such words as sentence modals and left- and right-dislocated words. With these two layers a sentence expresses a discourse sensitive complete proposition, simple or complex. The most external layer contains elements outside of the proposition. In particular, it hosts discourse markers, speech act related sentence final particles, and other discourse modality expressions.

A reanalysis may take within the most internal layer, or may cross the boundaries between different layers. Sometimes a word falls out of one layer, and acquires an even more grammatical status. For example, leew moved out of the core and settled in the posterior mid layer to become the completive aspect marker, and as it moved to the most external layer it further grammaticalized as a sentence final particle. What is interesting in the case of the conjunctive leew is that it reached the sentence initial position from the sentence final position of the aspectual leew In other words, the conjunctive leew was grammaticalized in the context where two sentences are juxtaposed in discourse, and the final element of the prior sentence is reanalyzed as the initial element of the following sentence. Although leay also has the conjunctive function, it has arrived at its position from within. This is shown by the fact that leay appears after the subject and the highlighting particle ko as in “khaw ko leay ...” This contrasts with the case of leew which appears before the subject “leew khaw ko ....” As it has moved toward the extreme posterior of a