AREAL GRAMMATICALIZATION OF POSTVERBAL ‘ACQUIRE’ IN MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA

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This paper addresses an intriguing problem in the synchrony and diachrony of mainland Southeast Asian languages, namely the widespread use of a verb meaning ‘acquire’ (‘come to have’) as a postverbal resultative and/or modal of ‘potential’ or ‘achievement’. Some examples are Khmer baan, Thai dâaj, Vietnamese được, Hmong tau, among many others (see Matisoff 1991:418-427, Enfield 2001a, 2002). I have examined in detail the polyfunctionality of the Lao verb dâj ‘acquire, come to have’, and have established five distinct main meanings, summarized as follows (see Enfield 2002: Chapter 3 for details):

Figure 1. Five meanings of the Lao polyfunctional item dâj.

This paper focusses on the three meanings which can appear in postverbal (or V2) position, and investigates the relationship between these, both in synchrony and diachrony:

Figure 2. Three postverbal meanings of Lao dâj.

My account for the Lao data follows a logic which, I argue, is valid for the many languages of mainland Southeast
Asia which also display this ‘acquire’/‘can’ pattern. Behind this arguably consistent grammatical polyfunctionality is a complex process of semantic change. And a proper account must adopt as the basic unit of analysis not a metaphorical ‘entity’ called ‘the language’, but real utterances in real time, real usage events (Croft 2000, Iwasaki 2000). A genuine explanation of change requires a plausible and non-metaphorical view of the process, one which recognizes that living, breathing individuals participate directly in effecting the relevant changes, at ‘ground level’.

To describe and account for the development of postverbal functions of the Lao verb dâj I follow a ‘semantic-pragmatic’ model of meaning change which puts Gricean inference at the heart of the process (Evans and Wilkins 2000, Enfield 2002; cf. Sweetser 1990, Wilkins 1996). First, it is necessary to assume a clear distinction between semantics (‘encoded’, ‘non-defeasible’) and pragmatics (‘inferred’, ‘defeasible’). Fixed meanings of linguistic signs are enriched by pragmatic interpretation, involving inferences based on contextual and background information (Grice 1975, Levinson 2000). Semantic change begins when speakers’ use of a word $x$ (meaning ‘$x$’) starts to give rise regularly to a pragmatically enriched interpretation ‘$y$’. Then ‘bridging contexts’ emerge—these are contexts in which an interpretation of $x$ as merely implicating ‘$y$’ (on the basis of ‘$x$’) or as actually meaning ‘$y$’ (as distinct from ‘$x$’) become functionally equivalent, neutralizing any communicative consequences of two speakers’ differing in their interpretation of the respective contribution of encoded semantic content and contingent pragmatic enrichment (Evans and Wilkins 2000:550). Eventually, speakers regard the erstwhile enriched interpretation as a fixed and context-independent meaning, with the result that $x$ becomes polysemous, and people use it with distinct meanings ‘$x$’ and ‘$y$’. Then the earlier meaning ‘$x$’ is free, over time, to fade away or to persist in its own right.

I assume that the original ‘source’ meaning of the range of modern meanings of Lao dâj (and the corresponding element in other languages investigated) is ‘come to have’ (otherwise glossed as ‘acquire’, ‘obtain’, ‘get’). The basic argu-
ment is that speakers’ use of a verb dâj ‘come to have’ in V2 resultative position has provided the context for an implicature ‘succeed’, which eventually no longer requires contextual support and becomes a distinct meaning for dâj; next, speakers’ use of dâj ‘succeed’ in V2 position gives rise in certain contexts to an implicature ‘can’, which eventually no longer requires contextual support, leading to ‘can’ as a distinct meaning for postverbal dâj. To date, neither the ‘come to have’ nor the ‘succeed’ meanings for dâj have disappeared from the language, which means that three distinct meanings for V2 dâj now co-exist (with the ‘come to have’ and ‘succeed’ meanings also available as main verbs):

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 3. From V2 ‘come to have’ to ‘succeed’ to ‘can’*

A key role in this chain of events is played by a feature of resultative constructions in the languages of mainland Southeast Asia, namely an ambiguity between ‘realis’ and ‘potential’ readings of V1-V2 resultative expressions. I argue that the languages of mainland Southeast Asia have been collectively ‘poised’, in terms of their typological structure, to realize the same process of semantic and grammatical change.

This paper is structured as follows. In section 1, I concentrate on Lao dâj, establishing the distinct meanings it has in postverbal position and then providing arguments for how the proposed developments could have occurred. In section 2, I provide data from four other languages of mainland Southeast Asia, related to Lao not genetically but areally—Khmer, Kmhmu Cwang, Hmong, and Vietnamese—and show that the same arguments can be used with respect to those languages also. I then provide supporting evidence of a different kind with data from Pacoh, a Mon-Khmer language of Laos and Vietnam which has not developed a ‘can’ meaning for the ‘ac-
quire’ word. The paper concludes with some remarks on the nature of language change and its appropriate mode of description, as well as the role of a language’s ‘typological poise’ in facilitating certain changes.

1. Case study: Postverbal functions of Lao dâj

1.1 In synchrony: three meanings of postverbal dâj

Postverbal dâj can have three distinct meanings, the first two of which are not inherently postverbal, but are main verbs appearing in V2 slot of a V1-V2 resultative construction.

First, dâj may mean ‘come to have (something)’ (or more precisely, if ‘x dâj y’, then ‘something happens, and because of this x has y’):³

(1) tēe bo dâj ngón
Lao but neg come.to.have money
‘But (we) didn’t get any money (for the work).’ (268.11)

The second relevant main verb meaning of dâj is ‘succeed’ (or more precisely, if ‘x dâj’, then ‘p happens, because x did something wanting p to happen’). This ‘succeed, prevail’ meaning for intransitive dâj is interpreted as ‘win’ in sporting contexts. In the following example, the speaker is discussing a Lao word phēe, which means ‘defeat, be victorious’, but which in neighbouring Thai, and increasingly in young people’s Lao, means ‘lose, be defeated’, leading to a confusion often remarked upon by Lao speakers. In clarifying the meaning of phēe intended in the context (i.e. ‘win’, ‘be victorious’), the speaker uses intransitive dâj as a gloss:

(2) khān phēe han sīa — sanā’ cang
Lao if “phēe” tpc.pcl be.lost “sanā” thus
mēen dâj
be succeed
‘(In Thai) if (you say) “phēe”, that’s ‘to lose’—“sanā” is ‘to win’.’ (84.1)
The next example, an observed exchange between a bicycle-owner A and a mechanic B (who had been fixing A’s bicycle), shows that dâj can have the meaning ‘succeed’ with no ‘win’ reading available in the context:

(3) A: dâj  lêew  b抽查
Lao succeed  pfv  q
‘Is it fixed?’ (i.e. ‘Have (you) succeeded yet?’)

B: dâj  lêew
succeed  pfv
‘Yes, it’s fixed.’ (i.e. ‘Yes, (I’ve) succeeded.’)

The third relevant meaning of postverbal dâj—‘can’—is inherently subordinate to a main verb (and has the same vagueness regarding ‘ability’ or ‘permission’ interpretations as English can and its equivalent in other languages). Here are two examples:

(4) khɔɔŋ nák  me- tanggal  bèek  bɔ dâj
Lao things heavy  f.prfx-woman carry.on.back neg can
‘Heavy things, women can’t carry.’ (579.14)

(5) bɔ  lûk  ka  bɔ dâj
Lao neg arise  foc.pcl neg can
‘We couldn’t get up.’ (701.9) (‘We had to get up.’)

1.2 Synchronic distinction between V2 dâj as modal ‘can’ and as resultative verb ‘succeed’

When dâj as a main verb ‘come to have’ or ‘succeed’ appears as V2 in a resultative construction, the resulting structure is superficially identical to the VP-dâj ‘can VP’ construction. There are, however, covert distinctions, both grammatical and semantic, between strings of the form ‘VP-dâj’.

With the available readings of postverbal dâj as either ‘can’ or ‘succeed’, the following resultative constructions, involving V1 ‘projected accomplishment’ verbs (i.e. verbs such as ‘seek’ which do not entail a specific outcome, but rather the intention to produce one) remain ambiguous. The (i) readings
of the following examples assume \textit{dâj} as postverbal modal ‘can’; the (ii) readings assume \textit{dâj} as resultative V2 ‘succeed’:

(6) \textit{khòcj făng \ 'ăn-nîi dâj}  
Lao l listen thing-this can/succeed  
i. ‘(I) can listen to this.’  
ii. ‘I (can) understand this (from hearing it).’

(7) \textit{sěng \ bô dâj}  
Lao sit.exam neg can/succeed  
i. ‘I was unable to sit the exam.’  
ii. ‘I failed the exam.’

The (i) meanings of (6-7) have the following entailment:

(8) \textit{[V bô dâj] ‘cannot \ V’ entails [bô V] ‘not \ V’}.

Thus, for the (i) meanings of (6-7), ‘cannot listen’ entails ‘not listen’ and ‘cannot sit the exam’ entails ‘not sit the exam’. This entailment does not hold for the (ii) meanings—i.e., ‘not understand’ (‘not listen-and-succeed’) does not entail ‘not listen’ and ‘not pass the exam’ (‘not sit-the-exam-and-succeed’) does not entail ‘not sit the exam’.

The ambiguity of examples like (6-7) is conclusively demonstrated by explicit assertion of one sense, and negation of the other sense of the [V \textit{dâj}] string in a single sentence (with both logical orders as possible interpretations):

(9) \textit{făng dâj tēe făng bô dâj}  
Lao listen succeed/can but listen neg succeed/can  
i. ‘(I) can understand (it), but (I) can’t listen to (it).’ (e.g. tape deck is broken.)  
ii. ‘(I) can listen to (it), but (I) can’t understand (it).’ (e.g. I don’t speak the language.)

(10) \textit{sěng dâj tēe sěng bô dâj}  
Lao sit.exam succeed/can but sit.exam neg succeed/can  
i. ‘I can pass the exam, but I can’t sit it.’  
ii. ‘I can sit the exam but I can’t pass it.’
1.2.1 Two pragmatic inferences

The two functions of postverbal dâj—as a modal ‘can’, and as a resultative V2 ‘succeed’—can give rise to distinct (and almost exactly opposite) pragmatic inferences. The result is a pattern of four common readings of a V dâj expression.\(^4\)

\[ (11) \]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
V \text{ dâj} \\
\text{‘can V’} \\
\text{‘V-and-succeed’} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{‘can V’} \\
\text{‘V-and-succeed’} \\
\text{‘manage to V’} \\
\text{‘can V-and-succeed’} \\
\end{array}
\]

1.2.1.1 From ‘can’ to ‘achieved’

Predication of ‘possibility’ may receive an ‘achievement’ interpretation when the expression as a whole is given a ‘reals’ or ‘finite’ reading—i.e. in which the expression of ‘possibility’ is understood as bounded and real. If something is said to be possible on a given occasion, this may be interpreted as referring to a real event in which that ability has actually been demonstrated. For example, John was able to save two boxes from the fire implies—but does not entail—that he did save two boxes. The implicature is defeasible, as demonstrated by the acceptability of John was able to save two boxes from the fire, but for some reason he just left them there to burn.

Here is a text example:

\[ (12) \]

khăw ūng paj jūap kăn dâj

Lao 3 still dir.pcl(go) step.on rcp can

‘They still managed to run over each other.’ (10.13)

(Possible interpretation: ‘They still were able to run over each other.’ ‘They could still run over each other.’)

The inference arises out of a shift from non-specificity of the V1 event (for the ‘can’ reading) to a reading in which a specific event is predicated.
1.2.1.2 From ‘succeed’ to ‘possible’

Dâj ‘succeed’ as a resultative V2 shows grammatical properties common to regular resultative expressions. One such property is an ambiguity between ‘realis’ and ‘potential’ readings. V1-V2 resultative constructions may receive a ‘potential’ reading if the whole expression is taken in the context to be ‘irrealis’ or ‘non-finite’ (i.e. to not refer to a specific real event). Consider alternative readings of the following examples ((13) and (14) are same-subject, and different-subject resultatives, respectively; (14) is a reiterative resultative).\(^5\)

(13) tök tèek
Lao fall break
  i. ‘(It has) fallen (and) broken.’
  ii. ‘(It) can fall (and) break.’ (‘(It) would break if it fell.’)

(14) khàa tǎaj
Lao kill die
  i. ‘(S/he’s) killed (it) dead.’
  ii. ‘(S/he) can kill (it) dead.’ (‘It would die if killed.’)

Accordingly, V2 dâj as ‘succeed’ in a resultative construction may be given either a ‘realis’ (15i) or ‘potential’ (15ii) interpretation:

(15) láaw sùu mán dâj
Lao 3 fight 3 succeed
  i. ‘He has defeated him.’ (i.e. ‘...did fight-and-succeed’.)
  ii. ‘He can defeat him.’ (i.e. ‘...can fight-and-succeed’.)

Note that a third meaning ‘He can fight him’ is possible for (15) with dâj meaning ‘can’ (and with no implication of his likely success).

Thus, there are distinct semantic meanings of dâj in V2 position (as main verb or modal) with yet further distinctions arising from pragmatic enrichment, as illustrated in (11), above. Depending on the semantic structure of V1, the four readings illustrated in (11) may or may not contrast (see (20-21), below, for further clarification of this point). The distinction of all four readings emerges clearly where V1 is a pro-
jected accomplishment verb such as *hāa* ‘seek’ in the following example:

(16) khọcj ka hāa ngón dâj  
Lao 1 foc.pcl seek money can/succeed  
   i. ‘I can look for money.’  
   ii. ➞ ‘I managed to look for money.’ (i.e. ‘I was able to look for money.’)  
   iii. ‘I found money.’  
   iv. ➞ ‘I am/was able to find money.’ (635.1)

However, in cases where V1 is a verb which entails its own success (such as *khàa* ‘kill’), then two bridging contexts arise, causing distinct analyses to be functionally equivalent:

(17) khọcj ka khàa mán dâj  
Lao 1 foc.pcl kill 3 can/succeed  
   i. ‘I can kill him.’  
   ii. ➞ ‘I managed to kill him.’ (i.e. ‘...was able to...’)  
   iii. ‘I killed him with success.’ (= ii)  
   iv. ➞ ‘I am able to kill him with success.’ (= i)

First, there is equivalence between the ‘potential’ implicature of the V2 ‘success’ meaning (17i) and the semantics of the V2 ‘can’ meaning (17iv); second, there is equivalence between the ‘actual’ implicature of the V2 meaning ‘can’ (17ii) and the semantics of the V2 ‘success’ meaning (17iii).

We now turn to the role of these synchronic relationships between semantic and pragmatic interpretations in a diachronic account of the emergence of ‘can’ as a distinct meaning of *dâj*.

1.3 In diachrony: A pragmatic-semantic account for the emergence of ‘come to have’/‘succeed’/‘can’ polysemy

How did the three meanings ‘come to have’, ‘succeed’, and ‘can’ arise from a single verb *dâj*? I argue that V1-V2 resultative constructions play a crucial role. The proposed path of pragmatic-semantic development is as follows. First, as ‘come to have’, *dâj* would serve as a resultative V2 wherever V1 were
a verb which results, or is intended to result, in possession (such as ‘seek’, ‘catch’, ‘dig’, ‘pick’, ‘scoop’, ‘take’, etc.):

(18) Construction:  
[VERB which may result in possession]_{V1}+[dâj]_{V2-result}  
Meaning:  
‘V1 and come to have V2’ (+>‘V1 and succeed’)

In this resultative function, dâj basically describes the successful acquisition of something (by whatever means specified in V1). Events of ‘getting things’ are common and conceptually basic, and it is not difficult to imagine that dâj in this postverbal position became so frequent that the ‘success’ it pragmatically implicates became unhinged from its less general meaning ‘come to have’, with the result that the new construction became less restrictive of the semantics of V1:

(19) Construction: [VERB]_{V1}+[dâj]_{V2-result}  
Meaning: ‘V1 and succeed’ (‘Succeed-in-V-ing’)

Thus, resultative constructions provide a bridging context from ‘come to have’ to ‘succeed’. ‘Coming to have’ something, if it results from some acquisition-directed activity, is definitive of ‘success’, and thus, in such contexts, construals of dâj as meaning either ‘come to have’ or ‘succeed’ are functionally equivalent.

Given an established ‘succeed’ meaning for postverbal dâj, a ‘can’ meaning may now emerge. The bridging context for pragmatic extension of ‘succeed’ to ‘can’ is again provided by the resultative construction, specifically, by its openness to a ‘potential result’ reading. The ‘potential result’ reading of V2 resultative ‘succeed’ in combination with a certain type of verb in V1 position (namely, one with a ‘built-in’ result) is what allows a pragmatic inference to ‘can’. For example, if dâj has the meaning ‘succeed’ in V2 resultative position, then an expression ‘kill’+‘succeed’ with a finite interpretation would mean ‘kill-and-succeed’, or ‘succeed-in-killing’. Note that the result defining the success of killing—namely, the death of the patient—is entailed (or at least strongly implied) by the inter-
nal semantics of ‘kill’ itself. Now, less finitely—i.e. with a regular ‘potential result’ interpretation which all V1-V2 resultative constructions are open to in the language—the expression ‘kill’+‘succeed’ may also have the reading ‘can/would succeed-in-killing’. Since ‘kill’ includes its own internal semantic reference to what defines it as ‘successful’ (i.e. the patient’s death), then ‘can succeed-in-killing’ is contextually synonymous with ‘can kill’. The relevant bridging contexts (shown as dotted lines linked by ‘=’) are illustrated as follows (cf. (11), (17), above):

(20)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{‘can kill’} \\
\text{\textit{kill dâj}} \\
\text{‘kill and succeed’}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{\textit{manageto kill}} \\
\text{\textit{kill-and-succeed}} \\
\text{\textit{can kill-and-succeed}}
\end{array}
\]

The relevant bridging contexts do not arise when V1 is not an inherently resultative verb. Consider the same semantic and pragmatic relationships where V1 is a projected accomplishment verb ‘seek’:

(21)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{‘can seek’} \\
\text{\textit{seek dâj}} \\
\text{‘seek and succeed’}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{\textit{manageto seek}} \\
\text{\textit{seek and succeed}} \\
\text{\textit{can seek and succeed}}
\end{array}
\]

Thus, the bridging contexts for a pragmatic interpretation ‘can’ from ‘succeed’ are restricted to resultative constructions in which V1 is already an inherently resultative verb. At present, ‘can’ has become a distinct meaning which may occur with any verb.
The following figure summarises the proposed semantic-pragmatic relationships between senses of postverbal *dâj* illustrated in Figure 2, above:

As a V2 resultative, 'success' may take a 'potential' interpretation; where V1 is a resultative verb whose internal semantics already entail a particular result, then additional expression of a result of 'success' adds no extra sub-event; 'actual result of success' and 'potential result of success' readings of the V1-V2 string are synonymous with success and potential readings of the resultative V1 verb alone. In such a context, V2 'succeed' with a potential reading is synonymous with 'can'; it then becomes applicable with this meaning to verbs other than inherently resultative verbs.

Figure 4. 'Extensions' between three postverbal meanings of Lao *dâj*.

Section 1.2, above, provides synchronic facts which support the hypothesis put forward here about meaning change in Lao. In particular, there are bridging contexts in which the role of postverbal *dâj* in V1-V2 expressions may receive different semantic and structural analyses, which are nevertheless 'functionally equivalent, even if the relative contributions of lexical content and pragmatic enrichment differ' for interlocutors in the same speech setting (Evans and Wilkins 2000:550). The proposed path of development can also be suggested for other Mainland Southeast Asian languages, to which we now turn.

2. **Areal pattern of semantic change**

Claims have traditionally been made in literature on grammatical change that structural diffusion among neighbouring languages is more likely to occur where the languages are already structurally similar (cf. discussion and references in
Harris and Campbell 1995:123), or at least that syntactic borrowings should ‘fit with innovation possibilities of the borrowing language’ (Harris and Campbell 1995:125). The result is a self-perpetuating process which gives rise to linguistic areas. Structural borrowing or copying naturally increases the structural compatibility of the languages, thereby increasing the likelihood of further common structural borrowing or development, and so on. The ‘poise’ of a grammar determines the readiness or susceptibility of speakers to make certain pragmatic/semantic extensions. In at least this sense, speakers ‘make do with what’s historically presented to them’ (Lass 1997:xviii). I argue that the systematic ‘potential’/‘actual’ ambiguity of unmarked V1-V2 resultative constructions found across these languages is what has seen them ‘poised’ to develop a postverbal modal ‘can’ from a verb meaning ‘come to have’. We consider evidence from four mainland Southeast Asian languages—Khmer (Eastern Mon-Khmer), Kmhmu Cwang (Northern Mon-Khmer), Hmong (Hmong-Mien), and Vietnamese (Eastern Mon-Khmer).

The following examples show, firstly, that the ‘acquire’ verb has a basic main verb meaning ‘come to have’ in each language:

(22) *tantj nih qöt baan baaj sôh
Kh day this neg come.to.have rice at.all
‘Today (he) didn’t get any rice at all.’ (H3)

(23) Ō’ bwan k dön.
Km 1 come.to.have jar
‘I got a jar.’

(24) *Kuv tau peb tug t ses.
Hm 1 come.to.have three clf fish
‘I got three fish (e.g. while fishing).’

(25) Sau khi duóc sâc rôî nô ngôî dôc
Vn after time come.to.have book pfv 3 sit read
cho tôî nghei.
give 1 listen
‘After (he) had got the book, he came and read to me.’
The next examples show that the same word as a main verb may also mean ‘win, succeed’ in the four languages:

(26) njèq tiuŋ vaj-baal, khaang naa baan
Kh 2 go hit-ball side which succeed
‘You went and played volleyball, who won?’

(27) A: Ta’ Plav Ta’ Ňi n̄uut yo’.
Km title.m P. title.m Ň. push rcp
‘Plav and Ňi played a game of pushing each other.’
B: Me’ bwan?
who succeed
‘Who won?’

(28) Lao thiab Vietnam ncaws pob.roj.hmab,
Hm L. and V.N. kick ball
leej.twg tau?
who succeed
‘Laos and Vietnam played soccer, who won?’

(29) Lào và Việt Nam dà bông, ai dựoc?
Vn L. and V.N. kick ball who succeed
‘Laos and Vietnam played soccer, who won?’

Finally, each language shows a meaning ‘can’ for the same word in postverbal position:

(30) rwep còmmuen krwep baaj baan
Kh count amount grain rice can
‘(You) could count the amount of rice grains (there was so little rice in each serve).’ (A47)

(31) Kuv mus tsis tau, kuv muaj hauj.lwm nyob
Hm I go neg can I have work be.at
ntawm no.
loc here
‘I can’t go, I have work here.’

(32) Ŷ’ ’mook hrlo’ kmhmu an ba dé’
Km I tell language K. give 2sg.f dtv
bwan.
can
‘I can teach you Kmhmhu.’
(33) Tói nói tiếng Việt (không) được.
Vn 1 speak language Vietnamese (neg) can
'I can (not) speak Vietnamese.'

The extension from a resultative V2 'succeed' to 'can' is
licensed in each of the languages, along the lines described for
Lao in §1, above, by a combination of two common typologi-
cal features: (a) resultative constructions of the form V1-V2,
and (b) context-dependence in assignment of aspectual status
to predicates, and associated openness in interpretation of the
aspectual/modal relations between V1 and V2 in complex ex-
pressions.

V1-V2 resultative constructions in many mainland
Southeast Asian languages may be interpreted as either 'real-
ised' or as 'habitual'/‘potential’:

(34)

\[ V1_{cause/condition}V2_{result} \]
\[ \quad \begin{array}{ll}
\text{i. realis, on a given occasion} & \text{‘V1 and as a result V2’} \\
\text{ii. irrealis, whenever} & \text{‘can/would V1 with the} \\
& \text{result that V2’} \\
\end{array} \]

The next set of examples shows the 'actual'/‘potential’
ambiguity of unmarked resultative constructions:

(35) ròuk mùn kheeñ
Kh seek neg see
i. '(It) wasn’t found.'
ii. '(It) can’t be found.' (H133)

(36) Ô' sook kacèè am guuñ.
Km 1 seek key neg see
i. 'I didn’t find the key.'
ii. 'I can’t/wouldn’t be able to find the key.'

(37) Kuv tua noog tuag.
Hm 1 shoot bird die
i. 'I shot the bird dead.' (on a given occasion)
ii. 'I can shoot the bird dead.'
(38) Tôi thi đỗ.
Vn 1 sit.exam pass
   i. ‘I passed the exam.’
   ii. ‘I can pass the exam.’

When ‘succeed’ appears in resultative V2 position, it may be interpreted as irrealis/potential (34ii), just as in any resultative construction. The next set of examples shows the ambiguity of the word in postverbal position when V1 is a ‘projected accomplishment’—it may mean simply ‘can’ (in the (i) translations), or may mean ‘succeed’ (in the (ii) translations):

(39) ròuk mìn baaŋ
Kh seek neg can/succeed
   i. ‘(I) can’t look for (it).’
   ii. ‘I haven’t found (/didn’t find) it.’

(40) Ô’ sook bwan.
Km 1 seek can/succeed
   i. ‘I can look for it.’
   ii. ‘I have found it.’

(41) Kuv nrhiav yamsiŋ tau.
Hm 1 seek key can/succeed
   i. ‘I can look for the key.’
   ii. ‘I have found the key.’

(42) Tôi bảo về tiến sĩ được.
Vn 1 defend PhD can/succeed
   i. ‘I can do my PhD defence.’ (does not entail ‘I will pass my PhD defence’.)
   ii. ‘I passed (will/can pass) my PhD defence.’

Thus, V1-‘succeed’ may mean ‘V1-and-succeed’, or ‘can/would V1-and-succeed’. Being the most semantically general expression of result, V2 ‘succeed’ in this function occurs with the widest range of V1 verbs. With this widest distribution, under an irrealis/potential interpretation, postverbal resultative ‘succeed’ comes to have the simple meaning ‘can’, the most general expression of ‘potential’. As described for Lao in §1.3, above, this process begins in cases where V1 is a
resultative verb which inherently entails its own 'success' event, and thus where 'success' as a V2 merely reiterates this result. Under a 'potential result' reading the whole construction means simply 'V1 can happen'.

2.1 An exception to the pattern: Pacoh

The only mainland Southeast Asian language I have found to lack the 'can' reading for postverbal 'acquire' is Pacoh (Katuic, Eastern Mon-Khmer, Laos/Vietnam), and this language also lacks a 'succeed' meaning for a verb otherwise meaning 'come to have'. In Pacoh, boon means 'come to have', and while it may appear with that meaning as a resultative V2 in the construction illustrated in (18), above, it does not have a more generalised meaning 'succeed' (illustrated in (19), above), nor may it appear in V2 position meaning 'can'. This makes Pacoh unusual in the mainland Southeast Asia area, but the facts nonetheless agree with my account for the development of a postverbal 'can' meaning in Lao and other languages.

Recall the stages of pragmatic/semantic development from 'acquire' to 'can' proposed for Lao and other languages:

(43) Stages of process from 'come to have' to 'can':

i. 'come to have' \(\rightarrow\) 'succeed'
   context: as resultative V2, with acquisition verb in V1 position, 'V1 and come to have' is synonymous with 'V1 with success'.

ii. 'succeed'
   status: distinct meaning, applicable as V2 'succeed' where no 'coming to have' is entailed by V1.

iii. 'succeed' \(\rightarrow\) 'can'
   context: with resultative verb (i.e. verb which entails its own 'success') in V1 position, 'potential result' interpretation of 'V1-and-succeed' is synonymous with 'can V1'.

iv. 'can'
   status: distinct meaning, combinable as V2 'can' with full range of verbs in V1 position; may contrast with 'succeed' in these combinations.
Pacoh allows the inference in (43i), but has not made step (43ii), so it cannot move on to the further meaning change (43iv). Pacoh is one language among those I have examined for which the pragmatics-fed process described in (43) has not zoomed all the way along. The hypothesised path shown in (43) suggests that if a word meaning ‘come to have’ in a language did not have a meaning ‘succeed’, it would also not have a meaning ‘can’. Data from Pacoh, the only language in the area which lacks a ‘can’ meaning for the basic ‘come to have’ verb, supports this contention.

It is established that Pacoh boon performs most of the main functions that the ‘acquire’ verb performs in other mainland Southeast Asian languages such as Lao, including main verb ‘come to have’, postverbal adverbial complementizer, and preverbal aspect-modality marker (Enfield 2002:243-6). What is of special interest here is that boon ‘acquire’ cannot express the simple modal meaning ‘can’ in Pacoh, for which two other verbs keet ‘be able’ (also ‘be born’) and hooj ‘can’, are used in a familiar postverbal pattern:

(44) (a)  
\text{poop semuej (lêjq) keet} \\
Pa \text{go S. (neg) able} \\
‘(You) are (not) able to go to Samoy.’

(b)  
\text{poop semuej (lêjq) hooj} \\
Pa \text{go S. (neg) can} \\
‘(You) can (not) go to Samoy.’

(c)  
\text{*poop semuej (lêjq) boon} \\
Pa \text{go S. (neg) come.to.have} \\
‘(You) can (not) go to Samoy.’

However, boon ‘come to have’ may appear as a resultative V2, and in that position may indeed take a ‘potential result’ reading:

(45)  
\text{kiùù kòòp kuusèn boon} \\
Pa 1 \text{catch snake come.to.have} \\
i. ‘I caught a snake/snakes.’ 
ii. \text{+> ‘I can catch snakes.’} (potential reading in irrealis/non-finite context)
The (45ii) reading, expressing ‘possibility’, emerges from a ‘potential’ reading of the resultative construction as a whole. But in Pacoh, the ‘extension’ remains a pragmatic implicature only, and boon may only have this ‘success’ interpretation when it is a V2 resultative and when V1 contains reference to ‘acquisition’ (either projected by a verb such as ‘seek’ or entailed by a verb such as ‘catch’).

To summarise, in support of the hypothesis in (43), the Pacoh data show that while certain active pragmatic inferences do take place (e.g. ‘come to have’+›‘succeed’+›‘can’), these have not split into distinct and contrastive meanings. In Pacoh, boon ‘come to have’ has not acquired the semantic meaning ‘succeed’, and so, as the hypothesis in (43) would predict, it has not been able to acquire the semantic meaning ‘can’ either.

3. Closing remarks

Description of semantic change requires description of both stable semantic meanings and context-dependent pragmatic implicatures. To account for changes in linguistic meaning and structure, one must demonstrate the bridging contexts in which defeasible pragmatic inferences may be functionally equivalent to encoded semantics, allowing speakers to maintain different analyses of certain utterances without compromising communicative function, thus enabling the speaker population to gradually shift towards an analysis of a given pragmatic interpretation as a distinct encoded meaning. This allows a non-metaphorical account of linguistic change, which can be situated in real speech events, involving real individuals, in real time, not putative processes taking place in a hypostatised entity ‘the language’ (Keller 1994:159 and passim, Croft 2000:2-4 and passim, Iwaseki 2000).

The mechanisms I have suggested for development of postverbal ‘success’ and ‘can’ meanings from a word meaning ‘come to have’ in mainland Southeast Asian languages have given support to the notion that the ‘typological poise’ of a language can help to determine a path of semantic/grammatical development. Some linguistic developments which emerge within a system may be licensed and/or encouraged by the ex-
isting structure of that system (Matisoff 1991:444). Typologi-
cal poise makes borrowing of grammatical innovation from
similar languages easier, and makes authorship of particular
innovations by individual speakers more likely to happen inde-
pendently, perhaps to the extent that many individuals in a
given community may independently follow the same creative
path on many different occasions. Thus, certain patterns of
semantic and grammatical development may be closely parallel
across entire linguistic areas.

Notes

1. This paper is based on findings reported in Enfield
(2002). Some sections are repeated and/or revised from there,
as well as from Enfield (2001a). I would like to thank members
of the audience at a presentation of this work at the 11th
SEALS meeting in Bangkok, May 2000, for helpful input. I
also thank Nick Evans for his contribution to the development
of ideas in this paper. Support from the University of
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2. Limitations of space prevent discussion of the gram-
maticalised usage of \textit{dåj} in pre-verbal position. While some
authors suggest that preverbal functions of the ‘acquire’ word
in Southeast Asian languages are part of a single chain of
grammaticalisation which includes postverbal functions (e.g.
Haiman 1999 on Khmer), there are no convincing arguments
for this position (cf. Enfield 2001b).

3. Lao data are from spontaneous spoken texts, recorded
in Vientiane, 1996-1997. Khmer data are from spontaneous
spoken texts recorded in Phnom Penh in 1999. Numerals after
Lao and Khmer examples refer to text location; unmarked ex-
amples are elicited/constructed and checked with native speak-
ers. Kmhmu, Hmong, Pacoh and Vietnamese data are elicited
(fieldwork conducted in Vientiane (Laos), Salavan (Laos) and
for comments on transcriptions. Examples are marked Lao
(Lao), Kh (Khmer), Km (Kmhmu), Hm (Hmong), Vn
(Vietnamese), Pa (Pacoh). Abbreviations in interlinear glosses
are as follows: 1 = 1st person; 2 = 2nd person; 3 = 3rd person; clf = classifier; dir = directional; dtv = dative; f = feminine; foc = focus; hon = honorific; loc = locative; m = masculine; neg = negation; pcl = particle; pfv = perfective; pref = prefix; q = question; rcp = reciprocal; sg = singular; tpc = topic.

4. The symbol ‘+>’ means ‘conversationally implicates’ (Levinson 2000:16). In other words, ‘p +> q’ means that the utterance of ‘p’ can give rise in some context to the implicature ‘q’, but ‘q’ is not entailed by ‘p’.

5. By ‘reiterative resultative’, I mean a V1-V2 construction in which the resultative V2 explicitly predicates a caused event which is already specified as a caused event in the internal semantics of V1. In example (14), V1 specifies ‘die’ as a caused event, and this is explicitly reiterated in V2. See Enfield (2002:100) for further discussion.

6. This would be falsified if a language were found in the area which had a polysemous item meaning ‘come to have’ and ‘can’, but with no attested ‘success’ meaning. I have not found such a language. Note that I am referring specifically to languages of mainland Southeast Asia, with the relevant typological profile (i.e. in which V1-V2 resultatives have a regular ‘potential result’ reading). An extension from ‘come to have’ to ‘can’ is perhaps conceivable by some other path, in another typological context.

References


