On the Emergence of the Speaker's Tepidity Stance and Discourse Politeness

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Korean has an impressive inventory of postpositional particles and clausal connectives with diverse functions. One peculiar form is *-na*, which marks the speaker's stance of 'Tepidity' as shown in (1):

(1) a.   *yenghwa-lul*   *po-ca*
        movie-Accusative   see-Hortative
        'Let's watch a movie (rather than a concert)'

   b.   *yenghwa-na*   *po-ca*
        movie-Tepidity   see-Hortative
        'Let's watch a movie (but I am not excited about watching it).'

In contrast with (1a) with an accusative-marked theme, where the speaker is specifying the theme object, (1b) with the Tepidity marker shows the speaker's tepid attitude about the proposal he or she is making. The lack of speaker's assertiveness enabled the Tepidity marker to develop into a marker of politeness, especially in hortative or imperative sentences, since attenuation is a common strategy for politeness marking (Rhee 2011).

A historical survey shows that in Middle Korean *-na* was used in the form of *-i-na*, i.e. preceded by the copula *i-,* thus suggesting that *-na* was not a postpositional particle but a clausal connective. The function of connective *-na* was largely to enumerate options, exemplars, etc. Therefore, it was most commonly used in the reduplicative form of *-na... -na... -na*, largely denoting 'A, or B, or C, ...'.

When the repetitive pattern gradually declined through history and thus a sentence came to contain only a single *-na*-marked constituent, the meaning of *-na* changed into a marker of non-specificity by implying that there are other options unmentioned, largely denoting 'A, among others'. This notion of non-specificity was further subjectified into 'forced choice' and 'tepidity', thus on the part of the speaker *-na*-marked proposition carries the meaning: 'I am not excited about this, but if I am obliged to make a choice, how about A?' and on the part of the addressee an operative analogy is: 'if A has other alternatives, there is no compelling reason to choose A'. The lack of compulsion associated with the form leads to its association with politeness strategies, thus the speaker, in saying (1b), effectively says 'How about watching a movie, but I am open to other options that you might suggest?'

Another significant divergence of this connective is its development into a sentence-final particle to mark the speaker's self-addressed question through a process of main-clause ellipsis. This monologic interrogative marker as a verbal morphology is used to show that the speaker is (still) exploratory about a state of affairs, and thus to mark the speaker's cognitive non-definiteness and indecision. This, in turn, triggers the functional spread of the form into politeness marking.

Drawing upon historical data, this paper investigates the development of *-na* from the function of marking enumeration to the affective stance marker of tepidity and its divergences into other related functions. In particular, it focuses on how subjectification, intersubjectification (Traugott and Dasher 2002) and context-induced reinterpretation (Heine et al. 1991) contribute to the grammaticalization processes, and how a form cuts across functional domains and grammatical categories synchronically as a cumulative effect of diachronic changes.

References

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