Title: Grammaticalization of Korean mwusun ‘what kind of’

This presentation will offer a synchronic and diachronic analysis of mwusun from a grammaticalization perspective to show the evolution of mwusun as a discourse marker. Grammaticalization is a process of semantic shift and grammatical restructuring, and, sometimes, phonological change. These three kinds of changes correlate and evolve gradually along a path that follows the same direction across languages. Research has documented that Korean interrogatives such as mwe ‘what’, way ‘why’, and eti ‘where’ have undergone processes of grammaticalization to become discourse markers in Modern Korean (Kim 1995; Lee 1997, 1999; Ku 1999, 2000; Kim 2000; Lee 2002; Kim 2005) whereas mwusun has been neglected in most research. In order to fill the gap, I will show how mwusun, which is derived from the Middle Korean musu, can also be considered a discourse marker as it has undergone the required processes for grammaticalization: (1) reanalysis of its grammatical category, (2) expansion of its semantic and pragmatic functions, and, (3) phonological changes.

First, mwusun has gone through a dynamic syntactic recategorization. According to Jang’s (2017) analysis, Middle Korean musu expanded its syntactic functions from determiner to adverb. However, the Standard Korean Language Dictionary published by the National Institute of the Korean Language (2008) classifies contemporary mwusun as a prenou. And most grammar books introduce mwusun as a demonstrative prenou, along with i ‘this’, celen ‘such’, and enu ‘which’, or as an interrogative. However, Lee (2015) argues that some ‘demonstrative pronouns’ such as enu ‘which’, mwen ‘what’, weyn ‘certain’, eccen ‘what’, and mwusun ‘what kind of’ form a new category, ‘interrogative-indefinite-prenouns’, because their meaning has expanded beyond the interrogation function. The apparent inconsistency in its analysis emerges because, as mwusun has gone through syntactic changes, it retains some of its older categorical properties to coexist with the new ones.

Second, the meanings of mwusun, according to the Standard Korean Language Dictionary (National Institute of the Korean Language, 2008) definition, are as follows: (1) a word used to ask about unknown matters, objects, things, etc.; (2) a word used to refer to an unspecified object; (3) a word used to emphasize something unexpected and unsatisfactory; (4) a word that emphasizes adversative meaning. Although it defines mwusun only as a prenou when it is located before a noun, (3) and (4) seem to reflect the functions of a discourse marker, showing more subjective meanings and expanded pragmatic functions. Kim (2006) analyzed the discourse functions of mwusun into two categories, ‘approximation’ and ‘underestimation’. Based on that analysis, Kim (2016) proposed more detailed sub-categories. Their analyses were mostly limited to mwusun’s functions when it occurs before a noun. However, my discourse data from TV dramas reveals more pragmatic functions, where mwusun can occur in the sentence-final position and can stand alone. For example, the combination of topic particle un/nun and mwusun at the end of a sentence is often used to negate a prior statement for various reasons, such as to be humble, as seen in the example (1). Negating mwusun can also stand alone in dialogues to underestimate or express humility. In this case, the politeness marker -yo can be attached to mwusun as in the example (2).

Lastly, mwusun also has undergone phonological changes that are optional in the grammaticalization process. The three forms of Middle Korean musu (musu, musus, and musum) consolidated into musum. This form changed to musus in the 17th–18th centuries, and then changed again to mwusun in Contemporary Korean (Lee, 2009).
Example 1

No pang sil: Kosayng manh-usy-ess-eyo.
hard.work be.much-PST-POL
‘You did hard work.’

Wang hoycang: Kosayng-un mwusun.
hard.work-TC mwusun
‘It was not hard work.’

Example 2

A: Ne Hwangsinhyey talm-ass-ta.
you Hwang Shin Hye resemble-PST-PLN
‘You look like Hwang Shin Hye (famous actress).’

B: Mwusun-yo...
mwusun-POL
‘No way…’

List of Abbreviations

PLN Plain speech level suffix
POL Polite speech level suffix or particle
PST Past tense suffix
TC Topic particle

References


