



# From choice to counter-expectation: Semantic–pragmatic connections of the Korean disjunctive, concessive, and scalar focus Particle *-na*<sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

This study proposes semantic–pragmatic connections from Choice (disjunctive “or”; *two given choices*) to Free-choice (“regardless”, “whatever”; *regardless of choices*), and then to Counter-expectation (scalar focus particle “even” and concessive “even though”; *beyond expectation*), drawing on the case of Korean *-na*, on additional evidence from Hausa and Korean, and on König’s studies on the emergence of concessive markers (1985, 1986, 1988, 1991a).

Starting with 5th century pre-alphabet texts, the study uses diachronic corpus data to investigate the history of Korean *-na*. The versatile *-na* expresses nine functions (mostly markers of choice, free-choice, and counter-expectation) including two opposite scalar focus particles, additive “as many as” and restrictive “just”. The study proposes that after starting out as a disjunctive with NPs in the 8th century, *-na* subsequently became disjunctive with VPs and then engendered “even” in the nominal and “even though” in the verbal domain through the mediation of “free-choice”.

The study presents an integrated analysis of the historical development of these seemingly remote nine functions of *-na*, and on that basis, demonstrates the importance of pragmatic inference and local context in the emergence of new polysemies.

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## 1. Introduction

Semantic change has traditionally been considered arbitrary and random, with unpredictable directionality. In recent years, however, a group of functional linguists, especially those in the field of grammaticalization, have suggested regularities in semantic change (Traugott, 1982, 1989, 1995; Brinton, 1988; Sweetser, 1990; Heine et al., 1991; Bybee et al., 1994; Traugott and Dasher, 2002; Hopper and Traugott, 2003). Traugott (1985) states that unlike the semantic changes of nouns, which have served as the main data for studies of semantic change, but are vulnerable to unpredictable socio-cultural

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factors (e.g., amelioration vs. pejoration), the semantic changes of grammatical markers tend to be more systematic and regular.

These functional theorists have proposed robust tendencies in the semantic changes of grammatical markers such as extensions from concrete to more abstract meanings (Heine et al., 1991; Hopper and Traugott, 2003), from deontic to epistemic modals (e.g., Traugott, 1989; Sweetser, 1990), from demonstratives to definite articles (Greenberg, 1985), and from causative to passive constructions (Haspelmath, 1990).

This study will propose another plausible route of semantic–pragmatic connections from choice to free-choice, and then to counter-expectation, drawing on the case of Korean *-na*, on additional evidence from Hausa and Korean, and on König's studies on the emergence of concessive markers (1985, 1986, 1988, 1991a).

The study will investigate the developmental paths of Korean *-na* using diachronic corpus data that goes back to Korean pre-alphabet texts. Examination of data has shown that *-na* started out around the 8th century as a disjunctive postposition “or” (e.g., NP-*na* NP “NP-or NP”) and over time, gave birth to eight grammatical markers including two opposite scalar focus particles, additive “as many as” and restrictive “just”; see examples (1) through (9). Except for (3), which is from a 15th century text with a now obsolete usage, the rest are Present Day Korean examples. Please note that *-ina* is an allomorph of *-na* used when suffixed to a noun that ends with a consonant, and that *-kena* is a disjunctive used with VPs.

- (1) (Disjunctive postposition [with NP])

mina-na mini-ka ka-lke-ta  
Mina-na Mini-NOM go-FUT-DC<sup>1</sup>  
 “Mina or Mini will go.”

- (2) (Free-choice quantifier [with NP])

Etten umsik-ina cal mek-nun-ta  
What food-na well eat-IN-DC  
 “Whatever the food, I eat well.”

- (3) (Additive focus particle “even” [With NP]) (now obsolete)

hAn CWUNGSAYNG-ina pwuthye tAoy-ti mot hA-myen  
 one person-na Buddha become-COMP NEG do-COND  
 “If even one person cannot become Buddha...”

(Nungemkyeng 1461, 3:112b)<sup>2</sup>

- (4) (Additive focus particle “as many as” [with NP])

Haymbeke-lul sey-kay-na mek-ess-ta  
 Hamburger-ACC three-item-na eat-PAST-DC  
 “I ate as many as three hamburgers.”

- (5) (Restrictive focus particle “just” [with NP])

cenyek-ey haympeke-na mek-ca  
 dinner-LOC hamburger-na eat-SUG  
 “Let's eat just hamburger for dinner.”

- (6) (Approximate particle “about” [with NP])

i swuep-un myech myeng-ina tut-ko.iss-eyo  
 this class-TOP how.many person-na listen-PROG-POL  
 “As for this class, approximately how many people are taking it?”

<sup>1</sup> The transliteration system adopted in this study is an extended Yale system developed by Seongha Rhee (1996) for the transliteration of Middle Korean (e.g., z for △). Also, following Samuel Martin's (1992) system, capital letters are used to transliterate Chinese characters in original texts. The abbreviations used in this article are ACC (Accusative), ADVZ (Adverbializer), CONC (Concessive), CONN (Connective), COP (Copular), DC (Declarative), DESID (Desiderative), DN (Dependent Noun), EMP (Emphatic), FUT (Future), GEN (Genitive), HON (Honorific), IE (Intimate Ender), IMP (Imperative), IN (Indicative), INT (Intentional), LOC (Locative), NOM (Nominative), NOMZ (Nominalizer), PAST (Past, Old anterior), PL (Plural), POL (Polite Ender), PROG (Progressive), Q (Question), RETRO (Retrospective), REL (Relativizer), SUG (Suggestive), and TOP (Topic).

<sup>2</sup> In citing sources of examples, I follow the conventions used in Korean studies. Each example from historical documents is followed by a mark (Nungemkyeng 1461, 3:112b) as in (3). Here, *Nungemkyeng* is the title of the cited text; the number 1461 represents the year of publication; 3 represents the volume number; and 112b indicates the page number.

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