

# Analogy-driven inter-categorial grammaticalization and (inter)subjectification of *-na* in Korean



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Received 3 May 2015; received in revised form 18 August 2015; accepted 19 August 2015

Available online 19 September 2015

## Abstract

Korean has a large number of polyfunctional particles and connectives. One peculiar form is *-na*, whose function, among others, is to mark the speaker's tepid attitude about the proposal or statement he or she is making. A historical survey suggests that the primary function of *-na* was largely to enumerate options, exemplars, etc. As the repetitive pattern gradually declined over time and thus a sentence pattern containing only a single *-na*-marked constituent evolved, the meaning of *-na* changed into a marker of non-specificity by implying that there are other options unmentioned. This notion of non-specificity was further subjectified into 'tepidity'. The lack of compulsion associated with the form *-na* leads to its association with politeness strategies. Another significant functional divergence is its development into a sentence-final particle to mark the speaker's self-addressed question through a process of main-clause ellipsis. This monologal interrogative marker *-na* as a verbal morpheme 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 extension to politeness marking. An analysis of the historical data reveals that the functional spread involved analogical reasoning based on structural and functional similarity.

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**Keywords:** Grammaticalization; Tepidity; Stance; Politeness; (Inter)subjectification; Inter-categorial Analogy

## 1. Introduction

Korean is a language of SOV word order and agglutinative morphology. It has an impressive inventory of postpositions, connectives, sentence-enders, and particles, with diverse functions.<sup>2</sup> In this language it is not uncommon for a form to be in 'heterosemous' relation (Persson, 1986), i.e., a form has multiple meanings or functions that are historically related but belong in different morphosyntactic categories (Lichtenberk, 1991:476). Among such heterosemies stands out one form, *-na*, a multi-functional form across categories such as a postposition, connective,

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, Lee and Lee (2010) list 2056 postpositional particles, connectives and sentence-final particles. Even though many of them are allomorphs, morphosyntactic variants, and polymorphemic combinations, the sheer number reveals the extraordinarily high level of diversity and richness of the grams and the consequence of multiplication of grammatical forms through agglutination.

sentence-ender and particle.<sup>3</sup> Recently, it has come to be used to mark, among others, the speaker's stance of 'tepidity,' i.e., a signal that the speaker is not enthusiastic about his or her choice. This is illustrated in the following putative examples in contrast<sup>4</sup>:

- (1) a. *yenghwa-lul po-ca*  
 movie-ACC see-HORT  
 'Let's watch a movie (rather than a concert)'
- b. *yenghwa-na po-ca*  
 movie-PRT see-HORT  
 'Let's watch a movie (but I am not excited about watching it).'

Example (1a) above, in which the theme argument is marked with the accusative marker *-lul*, is neutral with respect to the speaker's stance.<sup>5</sup> The speaker is simply suggesting that they watch a movie. On the other hand, (1b), marked with the postpositional particle *-na* instead of *-lul*, signals that the speaker is suggesting that they go to the movies but that the suggestion is only tentative and thus open to modification or even rejection. The apparent lack of assertiveness by the speaker enabled the tepidity marker to develop into a marker of politeness, especially in hortative or imperative sentences, since attenuation ('mitigation' Caffi, 1999, 2007; 'downgrading' Smith and Jucker, 2000; 'downtoning' Quirk et al., 1985; Nevalainen and Rissanen, 2002) is a common strategy for politeness marking (Rhee, 2011). The original function of the marker *-na* is that of a disjunctive or adversative connective largely equivalent to the English 'or' or 'but' but it acquired the additional function of a pragmatic particle signaling tepidity.<sup>6</sup> These tepidity-related functions are now widely attested across other grammatical domains in contemporary Korean.

Diverse meanings and functions of this form *-na* have drawn the attention from theoretical linguists as well as from descriptive grammarians (Choe, 1961; Huh, 1972, 1989; Lee, 1990; Kim, 1992; Choi, 1999; Hong, 2002; Mok, 2003; Lee, 2003; Ryu, 2013; Kim, 2015, inter alia). Most of these studies focused their attention on identifying the core meanings of the form (Choe, 1961; Yang, 1973; Chae, 1977; Huh, 1983; Lee, 1993), or exploring whether the origin of apparently variegated functions is indeed a single form from which other, currently available, functions are derived (Choe, 1961; Kim, 1979; Nam and Ko, 1985; Chae, 1993; Choi, 1999; Park, 2015; Lim, 2015). Some of them, notably Lee (1990), traced historical paths of development of the connective *-na* from the 15th through the 19th century, focusing on its core 'selective' and 'concessive' functions.

From the perspective of the present research, i.e., grammaticalization viewpoint, Lee (2003) and Kim (2015) are particularly noteworthy. Largely focusing on the contemporary uses of *-na* in different syntactic environments, Lee (2003) hypothesizes that the function of marking 'low expectation' is the source meaning of *-na*, from which 'indeterminacy,' 'disjunctive,' 'free-choice,' 'adversative,' 'polite suggestion,' and 'uncertainty modal' develop, i.e., from nominal to verbal and to modal functions. Kim (2015) rejects Lee's (2003) account which regards the sentence-final *-na* as having been derived from the connective or postpositional particle *-na*. Based on cross-linguistic reasoning patterns, most notably from König (1985, 1988), her study proposes semantic-pragmatic connections from choice "or" to free-choice "regardless", and then to counter-expectation "even (though)." Using a diachronic corpus from the 5th century onward, she argues that the Korean

<sup>3</sup> *-Na* has a number of variants (see below), but unless the distinction is necessary for clarity, *-na* is used as the representative form. The grammatical labels for *-na* as used here are as follows: a connective if it is a verbal morphology (in the form of *-na*, *-una*, *-kena*); a postposition if it is a nominal morphology (in the form of *-na* or *-ina*); as a sentence-ender (in the form of *-na*) if it occurs sentence-finally and occupies the position of a sentence-type marker; and as a particle (in the form of *-na* or *-ena*) if it simply adds semantic-pragmatic meanings regardless of the syntactic position it occupies.

<sup>4</sup> Abbreviations: ABS: audience-blind style; ACC: accusative; ADN: adnominal; ADV: adverbializer; BEN: benefactive; COMP: complementizer; CONN: connective; DEC: declarative; DESID: desiderative; EMPH: emphatic; END: sentence-ender; EVID: evidential; EXCLM: exclamative; FRM: formal; FUT: future; GEN: genitive; HON: honorific; HORT: hortative; IMP: imperative; INST: instrumental; NEG: negative; NF: non-finite; NOM: nominative; NOMZ: nominalizer; PDK: present-day Korean; POL: polite; PRES: present; PRT: particle; PST: past; PURP: purposive; Q: interrogative; REG: regret; RETRO: retrospective; SEL: selective; TAM: tense-aspect-modality; TOP: topic; TRANS: transference; TRI: trial.

<sup>5</sup> Since stance permeates language use and stance-marking is a matter of degree rather than of presence/absence dichotomy, it may be impossible to claim that any utterance is stance-neutral. As an anonymous reviewer noted, the object marker (*-lul* in (1a)) often functions as a focus marker, thus the sentence may be interpreted as having an emphatic attitude rather than being stance-neutral. In this paper, however, we use the term 'stance' in a more restrictive way, i.e., only when a form 'relatively strongly' signals the speaker's attitudinal, emotional, epistemic and evidential viewpoint it is called a stance marker.

<sup>6</sup> As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, 'disjunctive' and 'adversative' are generally considered distinct categories. But due to Korean structural idiosyncrasy the distinction between them is often fuzzy, and thus the term 'disjunctive' (and 'disjunct' and 'disjunction') may be used in this paper to describe the function that may better suit 'adversative' with reference to the verbal/clausal connection function of *-na*.

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