Grammaticalization paths of the Thai verb day3:

A corpus-based study

Kiyoko Takahashi
Kanda University of International Studies

Previous studies on the polysemous meanings of the verb day3 in Thai and Lao (e.g. Sindhvananda 1970, Matisoff 1991, Bisang 1996, Meesat 1997, Diller 2001, Enfield 2003, inter alia) assume that the original, core meaning of day3 is ‘to be able’ or ‘to get (gain, obtain, acquire, attain) something’ or ‘to come to have (possess) something as a result of some prior event’. However, few, if any, studies have seriously tried to provide historical evidence for this assumption.

Based on examination of diachronic corpus data of expressions including day3 that are gathered from Thai inscriptions in the 13th century through the present time (Takahashi 2005), I hypothesize that originally day3 was a non-volitional ‘emergence’ verb (whose basic syntactic pattern is [day3 quantity-NP] which means ‘some quantity emerges’), from which different functional meanings have derived under different syntactic and semantic-pragmatic conditions. Specifically, my investigation of the data shows that it is likely that the meaning of day3 has undergone changes along the following paths.

Path 1:  [day3 quantity-NP] (Verb of ‘emergence’)
> [day3 NP DATIVE human-NP]
> topic-NP [OPTATIVE CAUSATIVE day3 DATIVE human-NP]
> preceding discourse [OPTATIVE day3 (as I wish)]
> [OPTATIVE day3 VP]
> [day3 VP] (Auxiliary for participant-external actuality or ‘realization’)
e.g. day3 pay1 ‘I did go.’

Path 2:  [day3 quantity-NP] (Verb of ‘emergence’)
> [seeking-VP NP] [NEGATIVE day3 quantity-NP]
> [seeking-VP NP] [NEGATIVE day3]
> [VP NEGATIVE day3]
> [VP day3] (Auxiliary for participant-external possibility or ‘circumstance possibility’)
e.g. pay1 day3 ‘It is possible to go.’

Path 3:  [day3 quantity-NP] (Verb of ‘emergence’)
> [VP] [day3 quantity-NP]
> [VP] [day3 NP]
> [VP] [day3 NP] -conclusion (Modal copula for ‘conclusion’)
e.g. nap4 duay3 dUan1 day3 saam5 sip2 dUan1 ‘If I count the period by month and then I should conclude that it amounts to thirty months.’

* day3 in present-day Thai is no longer used as a modal copula.

These grammaticalization paths all involve the two major processes of semantic change: (a) ‘abstraction’ or ‘generalization’ (Bybee&Pagliuca 1985) (cf. ‘semantic bleaching’ (Sweetser 1988), ‘schematization’ (Langacker 1991), ‘attenuation’ (Langacker 1999)); (b) ‘specification’ (Traugott&König 1991, Kuteva 1999) (cf. ‘pragmatic strengthening’ (Traugott 1988), ‘subjectification’ (Traugott 1989, 1995)). Particularly, they involve (a) abstraction of the referential, content meaning of day3 and its nominal argument (i.e. the described emergence event with an emerging entity) and (b) specification of the constructional, “frame”-like meaning of the day3 expression in question and a certain modal meaning associated (i.e. the speaker’s subjective construal).
References