

Grammaticalization and Semantic Change of Personal Pronouns in a ‘Pronoun-less’ Language

Osamu Ishiyama (Ball State University and University at Buffalo – SUNY)

Japanese is claimed by some (e.g. Kanaya 2002) to lack personal pronouns because their morphological and syntactic behavior is identical to that of nouns: e.g. they can freely take adjectival (*yasashii anata* ‘kind **you**’), demonstrative (*kono watashi* ‘this **I**’), and clausal modification (*nihongo ga dekiru kare* ‘**he** who can speak Japanese). By examining historical texts, this study shows how studies of grammaticalization (Lehmann 1995) and semantic change (Traugott & Dasher 2005) can shed light on structural as well as semantic-pragmatic changes of pronouns, thus nouns and pronouns are still to be distinguished in Japanese.

Textual evidence suggests that the development of pronouns from lexical nouns such as *watakushi* ‘I, (lit.) private’ is essentially the same process as the development of addressee honorifics from referent honorifics described by Traugott & Dasher: i.e. change from elements of the described event to those of the speech event via pragmatic inference when there is a partial overlap between them.

- (1) a. Toshigoro, ohyake **watakushi** oom-itoma naku te, ...
 several.years public watakushi HP-free.time not.exist CONN
 having been taken up by his own affairs (watakushi) or those of the court,
 (Genji Monogatari, 1002)
- b. Iro koso sonjite-soorae domoimada **watakushi** ni sooroo.
 color EMPH damage-HUMBLbut still watashi LOC exist
 ‘Although the color is damaged, it is still in my (watakushi) possession.’
 (Taiheiki, 14C)
- c. **Omae** mo **watakushi** mo, nekki no jikoku.
 you also watashi also fever GEN time
 ‘It’s that time of the day when both you and I (watakushi) suffer from fever.’
 (Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan, 1825)

(1a) shows the noun use of *watakushi* ‘private’, being clearly contrasted and juxtaposed with *ohyake* ‘public’. This type of contrast leads to the pragmatic interpretation of ‘private’ as ‘personal’ or ‘individual’ as shown in (1b) where there is a partial overlap between the described event and the speech event: *watakushi* is interpretable as ‘personal/individual property/house’, but it is clear from the context of the utterance that *watakushi* relates to the speaker. Eventually, it can be interpreted only as the speaker, as the pragmatic interpretation stabilizes (1c) (semanticization of *watakushi* as a first person pronoun).

Its semanticization as a pronoun has structural consequences. In (1c), *watakushi* is contrasted with a second person pronoun *omae*. This type of example suggests that they belong to the same paradigm, as paradigm mates can be defined by opposition/complementarity, a high paradigmaticity to use Lehmann’s term. Semanticized pronouns typically conform to his other paradigmatic parameters as interpreted in a pronoun-specific way: loss of semantic integrity which results in referential dependency on the context (e.g. *you and you* for different referents) and low paradigmatic variability which indicates strong interpretational restrictions (i.e. nouns can be used for any person category given the right context, while pronouns are reserved for a specific person category).

While nouns and pronouns are synchronically alike in their ability to take modifiers, examinations of historical texts offer no support for treating them alike because changes

involved in the development of Japanese pronouns are consistent with those proposed in studies of grammaticalization and semantic change.

References

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- Lehmann, Christian. 1995. *Thoughts on grammaticalization*. München: LINCOM Europa.
- Traugott, Elizabeth Closs, and Dasher, Richard B. 2005. *Regularity in semantic change*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.