

Appearances Are Deceiving: Polysemization and Grammaticalization of Korean and Thai Lexemes of Chinese Origin

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Abstract—From crosslinguistic and grammaticalization perspectives, uniquely valuable insights into the role of conceptual and cognitive operations in language change can be obtained when observing myriad developmental patterns of lexemes in multiple languages which originated from the same etymon in a donor language. These historical borrowings undergo diverse changes within a language, often independent of the characteristics in the donor language. While Korean and Thai are typologically distinct and genealogically unrelated, both have been extensively influenced by Chinese in historical times, albeit with little or no documentation at the time of borrowing. This paper addresses the polysemization and grammaticalization of the two lexemes *yang* in Korean and *yàaŋ* in Thai, whose etymon is the Chinese *yàng* ‘appearance, shape, etc.’ In the recipient languages, a number of lexical meanings were borrowed or innovated, with different foci in each instance. The lexemes were also grammaticalized into a prefix, preposition, conjunction, modality markers for probability and false similarity (counterfactual), and a similative denoting ‘like’. A notable aspect is that Korean *yang* and Thai *yàaŋ*, unlike their Chinese etymon *yàng*, developed into markers of false resemblance, i.e., counterfactuals. This paper shows the influence of the morphosyntactic characteristics of the recipient languages on grammaticalization processes.

Index Terms—grammaticalization, polysemization, contact-induced change, semantic map, false similarity

I. INTRODUCTION

It is an axiom that languages are in constant flux for diverse internal and external reasons, with respect to their lexicon (thus ‘emergent lexicon’, Bybee, 2007) and grammar (thus ‘emergent grammar’, Hopper, 1987). When different languages come into contact, they may undergo a range of changes in their respective lexicon and grammar; a phenomenon known as ‘contact-induced’ change (Heine & Kuteva, 2005). Heine and Kuteva (2005) extensively study diverse phenomena associated with language contact and ensuing grammatical change. Interlingual borrowability has been explored mostly from a synchronic perspective, notably in bilingualism studies (e.g., Maschler, 2000; Matras & Sakel, 2007; among others). Recently, a body of research focuses on borrowed Chinese words that developed into discourse markers in other Asian languages such as Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Thai (Rhee et al., 2021; Heine et al., 2024.).

From crosslinguistic and grammaticalization perspectives, similarities and differences of developmental patterns of lexemes that originated from the same etymon reveal uniquely valuable insights into the role of conceptual and cognitive operations in language change. These historical borrowings tend to be close to the source language in their form and meaning at the initial stage, but over time their form and meaning undergo diverse changes within the language (‘internally-motivated’ change, Heine & Kuteva, 2005). Therefore, promising topics of research on language contact and grammaticalization studies include the amount of initial borrowing from the donor language, the amount of ensuing innovation in the recipient language, and the number of commonalities and differences exhibited between the donor and recipient languages in both the lexicon and grammar.

Many Asian nations have been influenced by China for millennia, and their contact with China was primarily motivated by ‘cultural prestige or attractivity’ (Bisang, 2006, p. 89) for China’s dominant cultural-political role in the region. Although Korean and Thai are typologically distinct and genealogically unrelated languages, both have been influenced extensively by Chinese especially in historical times (albeit with little or no documentation at the time of borrowing), as evidenced by the sizable inventories of Sino-Korean and Sino-Thai terms in the respective languages. Among numerous borrowings in Korean and Thai is the Chinese etymon *yàng*, denoting ‘appearance’-related meanings such as ‘shape’,

‘pattern’, etc., which, after borrowing, has undergone diverse changes in the two languages in both lexical meanings (i.e., polysemization) and grammatical function (i.e., grammaticalization).

Given the background, the objectives of this paper are threefold: (i) to explore multitudinous meanings and functions of Korean *yang* and Thai *yàaŋ*, (ii) to contrast these meanings with those of the Chinese etymon *yàng*, and (iii) to discuss theoretically important issues from polysemization and grammaticalization perspectives. To pursue these objectives, this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents theoretical background briefly introducing contact linguistics, polysemization and grammaticalization, and a brief literature review; Section 3 describes the target languages and data collection; Section 4 provides results for Chinese, Korean, and Thai; Section 5 discusses polysemy and conceptual network, grammaticalization, and contact-induced and evolutive grammaticalization; finally, Section 6 summarizes the findings and concludes the paper with further research directions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The target forms of this paper, i.e., *yang* in Korean and *yàaŋ* in Thai, both borrowings of the Chinese etymon *yàng*, have not been discussed either singly or comparatively in existing literature. However, an increasing body of research addresses Chinese etyma in neighboring languages, focusing especially on their discourse marking functions. The first study appeared at the 2019 Japanese Cognitive Linguistics Association meeting, addressing ‘result’ and ‘of course’ in Korean and Japanese (to appear in Higashiizumi & Shibasaki, *forthc.*). It was followed by the 2023 International Pragmatics Conference, where a number of studies in the same thread of research were presented and later published in a special issue of *Russian Journal of Linguistics* (28.4). These studies address the discourse markers developed from the Chinese etyma denoting ‘fruit’, ‘truth’, ‘world’, ‘even’, ‘originally’, ‘completely’, ‘one morning’, etc. in Korean, Japanese, Thai, and Vietnamese.

All these studies, their obvious merits notwithstanding, have made considerable contributions to the scholarship of contact linguistics by focusing on discourse markers and pragmatic markers only. Given the strong presence of Chinese borrowings in Asian languages, the research scope needs to be expanded to include lexicalization (for semantic change leading to polysemy) and grammaticalization of other types of grammatical markers (e.g., connectives, conjunctions, etc.). Focusing on the development of the lexeme *yang* in Korean and *yàaŋ* in Thai, both denoting ‘appearance, shape’, in semantic change and grammaticalization, this study intends to fill the research gap and encourage future studies along the same vein.

III. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A. Contact Linguistics

In recent linguistic research traditions, the role of language contact in grammaticalization, and, more generally, language change, have attracted the attention of researchers, notably Heine and Kuteva (2005), Jones and Esch (2002), Adamou and Matras (2020), Grant (2020), Hicky (2020), among others. Important contributions of these studies include identifying the influence of the donor language (or ‘model’ language) on the recipient language (or ‘replica’ language) with respect to the borrowed lexemes’ original semantics, the language’s typological profile, and the limits of the transfer, i.e., borrowability. Furthermore, by comparing the donor and recipient language situations, a better understanding of the ‘contact-induced’ (Heine & Kuteva, 2005, i.e., language-external) and ‘evolutive’ (Paul, 1920, 1880; Andersen, 1973, i.e., language-internal) grammaticalization has become possible. Contact linguistics, by way of identifying language-external forces, facilitates the discovery of valid explanations for linguistic phenomena that are often irreconcilable otherwise.

B. Polysemization

Words encapsulate the concepts of a language community. Lexicons of individual languages exhibit a great deal of universal properties as a result of common human experience and needs (e.g., survival, perception, group bonding, communication, etc.), and cognitive operational mechanisms (e.g., metaphor, metonymy, pragmatic inference, etc.), as evidenced by several factors such as the correspondence of words in a language’s lexicon to words in another language, the high level of similarities in grammatical paradigms of individual languages, and translatability between languages with a reasonable degree of semantic equivalence. However, any degree of microscopic analysis reveals many differences as a result of diverse cultural priorities, variable types of contact with neighboring languages, ecological contexts, etc. Despite such distinctions, individual languages seem to favor particular lexicalization strategies as a result of language typology or individual idiosyncrasies, as shown by the notions of ‘polysemy’ and ‘monosemy’ strategies (Rhee & Khammee, 2024; Khammee & Rhee, 2025).

Following Sweetser’s (1990) seminal work, a body of research on polysemy and polysemization has emerged, notably Geeraerts (1993), Nerlich and Clarke (2001), Vanhove (2008), Glynn and Robinson (2014), Vicente and Falkum (2015), Carston (2021), among others. Polysemization is a result of cumulative semantic extension based on a particular aspect of existing meaning. For their relatedness between previous and innovated meanings, the meanings of a lexeme create a network, largely by way of metonymization (i.e., domain-blind, contiguity-based extension) and metaphorization (i.e., cross-domain, similarity-based analogy).

C. Grammaticalization

Grammaticalization theory is a framework with the tenet that language change reveals the conceptual and cognitive mechanisms operating in a unidirectional way (Kuryłowicz, 1975, 1965; Heine et al., 1991; Hopper & Traugott, 2003, 1993). The theory has greatly aided language scientists in understanding diverse aspects of language, especially with respect to the formative forces in grammar. Language change, from the perspective of grammaticalization, occurs so systematically that it can be explained by an orderly set of principles and mechanisms. Grammaticalization scenarios across languages, however, despite their overwhelming tendency for unidirectionality, often exhibit differences in actual progression in individual languages. Similar or different grammaticalization scenarios of an identical lexeme in multiple languages provide an ideal window through which the commonalities and differences of human cognitive operations driving language change can be investigated.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Target Languages

The two recipient languages (Korean and Thai) are geographically distant, genealogically unrelated, and typologically distinct. The donor language (Chinese), on the other hand, is geographically close to both languages, genealogically distinct from either of them, and typologically similar to Thai but very different from Korean. These features are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
GENEALOGY AND TYPOLOGY

	Korean (recipient language)	Thai (recipient language)	Chinese (donor language)
Geography	Northeast Asia	Southeast Asia	East Asia
Genealogy	Transeurasian (Altaic) Koreanic	Kra-Dai Tai	Sino-Tibetan Sinitic
Morphological cohesion	Agglutinating (stacked)	Isolating (isolated)	Isolating (isolated)
Morphological complexity	Synthetic (multiple)	Analytic (single)	Analytic (single)
Head directionality	Head-final	Head-initial	Head-final
Word order	SOV	SVO	SVO

B. Data Collection

The present research is a conceptual, descriptive analysis of linguistic data, and it involved no experimentation. The data have been collected from diverse sources, including historical and contemporary dictionaries, lexica, online resources, reference grammars, contemporary and historical corpora, and, importantly, native-speaker intuitions of the authors and consultants. The historical information on the donor language was derived from the online sources *Handian* (n.d.) and CTP (n.d.), which detail meanings from historical data sources, and were particularly useful. Similarly, the historical information on Korean lexemes is provided in a number of authoritative dictionaries including *Wulimalsaym* (by NIKL), *Koe Taysacen* (2016), *Koe Taysacen* (2010), *Hankwuke Taysacen* (2011, 2009), and *Wulimal Khunsacen* (1996, 1992). *The Royal Institute Dictionary* (n.d.) provides extensive information on contemporary Thai but no official dictionaries or lexica for historical information have been made available. Thus, historical information on the Thai language is garnered from diverse sources such as etymology dictionaries and lexica, notably the SEALANG archive (n.d.).

Since dictionaries are inherently normative and conservative, often adding new entries or sanctioning new semantic designations only after they have been sufficiently conventionalized, the information on contemporary usage garnered from dictionaries has been reviewed with reference to the information from corpus data. For this purpose, the researchers consulted the 15-million-word historical section of the Sejong Corpus (1446-1913) and the 24-million-word Drama and Movies Corpus (1992-2015) for Korean, and the 33.4-million-word Thai National Corpus, an online searchable contemporary corpus (mostly 1988-2017).

For comparing the target languages with respect to their semantic designations and grammaticalization patterns, the lexeme's functions were evaluated, and the respective conceptual motivations have been hypothetically created in the form of semantic maps (Narrog, 2010). While this method is hypothetical in nature, it is characterizable as a 'from synchrony to diachrony' approach, and has proved particularly useful in contexts where historical data are scarce (Traugott & Heine, 1991; Givón, 1971, 2015; among others). This approach principally draws on the uniformitarian principle, arguably the most fundamental precept in grammaticalization and historical linguistics generally.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the data search. Since this research focuses on the state of affairs in the recipient languages, only a brief description of the donor language is provided.

A. Chinese yàng

The lexeme *yàng* (classical 樣, simplified 样) in Chinese has an extensive history in the referenced data sources. In contemporary Chinese (Mandarin), the five semantic-functional designations, as listed in an authoritative dictionary, *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* (2016, 7th edition), are (i) ‘shape, pattern’, (ii) ‘appearance, state’, (iii) ‘sample, standard’, (iv) ‘situation’, and (v) the marker of grammatical function as a classifier (authors’ translations).¹

The word’s early history, however, is more complicated. According to *Shuowen Jiezi* (100-121 C.E.), the oldest Chinese dictionary, the word, denoted by the classical character 樣 /yàng/, means ‘appearance, shape’, composed of the semantogram ‘tree’ (木) and the phonogram /yàng/ (漾) ‘long river’, which, in turn, is composed of the semantogram ‘long’ (永) and the phonogram /yàng/ (羊) ‘sheep’. It originally meant ‘oak (tree/berry)’, as suggested by the tree-radical, but this meaning was replaced by another character 橡 /xiàng/ and the original 樣 /yàng/ came to be used for the ‘appearance’ meaning (Ha, 2021, 2014, p. 528; *Handian* n.d.; CTP n.d.). This semantic transfer from ‘oak’ to ‘appearance’ seems to have occurred very early because lexicographers only comment on the shift, and historical data (nearly) always show only the appearance-related meanings.

Historical data sources list numerous meanings related to ‘appearance’ that developed in the past two millennia. For instance, *Zhan Guo Ce*, a history book dating from the 1st c. BCE, provides an example pertaining to King Chu who climbed a platform to see the river collapse in the flood, i.e., [watch collapse *yàng*]. In this example, *yàng* means the ‘appearance’ or ‘scene’ of the river collapsing, i.e., how the river bank is washed away in a flood. In *Bai Hu Tong Lectures* (79 CE), *yàng* is used to mean ‘bearing’ as in [minister GENITIVE bearing *yàng*] meaning ‘minister’s bearings or manners’, in which *yàng* occurs with the semantically synonymous *yí* ‘bearing’, a common type of redundancy found in Chinese lexicalization. Additionally, early in history, in *Simin Yueling* of the 2nd century, a description of a festival references [steam cake *yàng*] to mean the ‘shape of a steamed cake’. In *Yiwen Leiju*, a 7th century poem, *yàng* is used to mean ‘shape’, as in [bamboo bud resemble lotus *yàng*] meaning that the unfolding bamboo crown resembles the shape of the lotus flower. This usage, involving verbs like ‘resemble’, ‘take after’, etc., seems to have provided a context for the reinterpretation of ‘shape’ to mean ‘be similar’. *Taiping Yulan*, a 10th century encyclopedia, says that appearance of double halos both on the sun and the moon are [famine GENITIVE *yàng*], an ‘omen’ of an impending famine. In *Jiyun*, a rime dictionary published in 1037, *yàng* is defined as ‘method’. *Sanguozhi Yanyi*, a 14th century historical novel, contains an example of *yàng* to mean ‘style’ or ‘pattern’ as in [palace *yàng* outfit] ‘palace-style outfit’ in the context of describing the discovery of the body of an unidentified woman in court costume. *Jin Ping Mei*, a 16th century novel, contains an expression [that *yàng* person] meaning ‘that kind of person’ in which *yàng* denotes ‘kind, type’. Thus, when *yàng* is modified by ‘one’, as in [one *yàng* old majesty] (1705, *Quan Tangshi*), the compound ‘one kind’ denotes ‘same’. Similarly, in *Rulin Waishi*, a novel published in 1750, an expression [that *yàng* good son-in-law] is used to mean ‘that kind of a fine son-in-law; such a good son-in-law’. Closely related to this usage is an instance found in *Zhuzi Yulei*, a 17th century version of a work from 1270 (thus likely to reflect both the 12th and the 17th century language uses), *yàng* is used as a marker of kind or type, which further developed into a classifier.

The cursory historical survey above shows the diverse meanings of the Chinese lexeme *yàng*, largely centering around the meaning of ‘appearance’,² which is closely related to scene (i.e., occurrence of an event) and nearly indistinguishable from the ‘similarity’ meaning. The ‘similarity’ meaning engenders ‘sample’, ‘method’, ‘style, pattern’ (note that ‘pattern’ here refers to an (artistic) decorative design, not consistent arrangement), and ‘kind, type’, which meaning further developed into the grammatical marker of classifier. It is also noteworthy that every historically attested meaning has survived in contemporary Chinese, with no notable addition in modern times, despite some shifts in their individual strengths and use frequencies.

B. Korean yang

The Chinese etymon *yang* was borrowed into Korean at a time not yet conclusively determined but well before Late Middle Korean (mid-15th century ~ 16th century). Beginning from the mid-15th century invention of the Korean *Hangeul* script, many documents were composed in mixed writing using both the Korean *Hangeul* and the Chinese *Hanja* scripts. Interestingly, *yang* had already undergone considerable nativization by this time, as evidenced by the fact that it was mostly written in *Hangeul* while most other Sino-Korean words were written in Chinese characters, a rare phenomenon indeed. However, many historical sources such as commentaries on scriptures or philosophical treatises clearly state that the Korean lexeme *yang* originated from the Chinese *yàng*. Furthermore, since Korean favors the bi-syllabic structure of Sino-Korean words, *yàng* was often used as *yangca* [*yang*-NOMINALIZER] ‘shape’ or *moyang* [mold-*yang*] ‘shape’. The earliest attestations of *yang* carry ‘appearance’-related meanings such as ‘shape’, ‘look’, ‘type’, as well as the simulative meaning ‘like’. The following is an excerpt from *Welinsekpo* (1447), the earliest *Hangeul* writing (written in mixed scripts), in which *yang* occurs as *yaNG* with the old form of *NG* for the velar nasal /ŋ/.³

- (1) a. *yang* ‘outer appearance, look’

¹ Special thanks go to Lin Zhang for her assistance with the Chinese data.

² Determining the ‘pivot notion’ (François, 2008) among multiple meanings is often not straightforward, but we follow the exposition in *Shuowen Jiezi* (100-121 C.E.), the oldest and most highly regarded Chinese dictionary. Conferring the pivot status to ‘appearance’ is also consonant with the authors’ and native speakers’ intuitions.

³ The Extended Yale Romanization System (Rhee, 1996) is used for romanization of the Korean data. Also, following convention, the Chinese characters in historical sources are rendered in their Modern Korean pronunciation, indicated in upper-case.

PWUIN-i [...] kacang piz-e tyoh-an yang ha-ko
 queen-nom very.much adorn-CONV be.good-ADN appearance make-and

‘The (first) queen made an attractive appearance by adorning herself very much and...’ (1447, *Welinsekpo* 2:5)

b. *yang* ‘appearance’

saskas ssu-ko homuy mey-ko ka-nan yang-i hankaha-oy
 reed.hat wear-and hoe carry.on.shoulder-and go-ADN appearance-NOM be.leisurely-DEC

‘The appearance/scene (of the farmer) wearing a reed-hat and carrying a hoe on the shoulder is leisurely.’
 (early 19c., *Kyolinswuci*, Myotaychen edition, 3:3a)

Excerpt (1a) is taken from a Buddhist scripture commentary, describing a power-hungry, wicked queen who was trying to win the favor of the king in order to eliminate the four sons born to other queens who might be obstacles to her own son becoming the next king. In the excerpt, *yang* is used to mean the ‘appearance’ made up by adornment. Excerpt (1b), taken from a later source, a Japanese interpreter’s training manual, describes the idyllic, simple appearance of farmers going to the field to work.

Another meaning of *yang* attested in early literature is ‘type, kind’, exemplified in the following:

(2) *yang* ‘type, kind’

cakya-s nalah-aysye kesulpc-un yang ha-nan NAN-i-ena
 own-GEN country-LOC be.rebelliant-ADN type be-ADN disturbance-be-CONN

‘[or] disturbances of the type of a rebellion in his country, or’ (1447, *Sekposangcel* 9:33a)

Excerpt (2) is taken from a Buddhist scripture commentary, where Buddha is instructing the kings how to overcome all types of difficulties, e.g., plague, foreign invasion, internal unrest, astrologically unusual phenomena, famine, etc., in which *yang* (in the form of *YANG*) denotes ‘type, kind’.

Another meaning, ‘scene’, occurs in 17th century literature, exemplified below:

(3) *yang* ‘scene’

ku api tocek-uykey cwuk-nan yang-ul po-ko
 that father robber-DAT die-ADN scene-ACC see-and

‘(He) witnessed the scene in which his father was killed by a robber and...’ (1617, *Tongkwuksinsok* Hyo 7:54b)

Excerpt (3), taken from an ethics book, describes a man who witnesses his father being killed by a robber and later avenges his father. In the example, *yang* denotes the ‘scene’ or ‘occurrence’ of an unfortunate event.

In addition to these meanings, a different meaning arose at a later time, i.e., ‘act’, as exemplified by the following example:

(4) *yang* ‘act’

ha-nan yang-ul po-li-la
 do-ADN act-ACC see-FUT-DEC

‘I will see what (he) is doing.’

(18c., *Naksyengpilyong* 1:35b)

The emergence of the ‘act’ meaning from ‘appearance’ is noteworthy because this type of semantic extension shows a shift from the macroscopic to the microscopic view of an event, or, in finer terms, viewing the details of an event whereby the agent, theme, etc., are visible, as opposed to the holistic view of an event as a broader scene. This shift towards viewing the details of the internal structure also led to the emergence of some related meanings such as ‘bearing’, ‘plan’, and ‘intention’, all of which involve an agent, either explicit or implicit, and the agent’s conation.

There also arose grammatical meanings of epistemic probability: ‘be likely’ in a periphrastic form of [ADNOMINALIZER – *yang* – COPULA], as exemplified in the following (note that *-l* is a prospective adnominalizer and *-i* is a copula ‘be’; for elaboration, see discussion section below):

(5) *yang* Epistemic probability modal (‘be likely’)

ne-y nal-ul hemulha-l.tusha-l.yang.i-lota
 you-NOM me-ACC criticize-be.likely-PROB-DEC

‘(If I insist further) it is probable that you will take offense (at me).’ (1677, *Pakthongsaenhay* 49b)

Excerpt (5) was taken from a Chinese interpreter’s training manual, and depicts a scene of two merchants at an inn. One of them wants to play chess with his fellow merchant, who does not want to. After some exchange of request and rejection, the reluctant one gives in and says that if his fellow merchant would insist further, the merchant would likely take offense from excessive rejection, and agrees to play chess with him. It is notable that the periphrastic *-l.tusha-* ‘be likely’, involving the formal noun *tus* ‘appearance’, is also used, suggesting a ‘harmonic context’ (Bybee et al., 1994, p. 215). In Modern Korean, the sentence with the meaning comparable to (5) needs only one epistemic marker, since both markers carry adequate probability meaning. Useful to note is that the development of likelihood from similarity is an instance of analogy. In other words, the similarity relationship between two objects is projected to the similarity relationship between two situations, i.e., the hypothetical situations of ‘my’ continuous rejection and ‘your’ taking offense share a kind of similarity that is reminiscent of the relationship between the English lexemes *like* (similar) and *likely* (probability).

The likelihood or probability meaning was further ‘subjectified’ (Traugott & König, 1991) and became the counterfactual ‘as if’ (from false, surface similarity), hence the time-old axiom ‘Appearances are deceiving’. The false similarity or pretense function of *yang* is exemplified in the following:

- (6) *yang* Pretense-marking conjunction ('as if', false similarity, counterfactual)

machi hakca-i-n yang-ulo malha-n-ta
like scholar-be-ADN PRET-INST say-PRES-DEC

'(He) speaks as if he were a scholar (knowledgeable person, in a pretentious way).' (Modern Korean, *Wulimal Khunsacen*)

The exposition above shows that the Chinese lexeme *yàng* has been borrowed together with its various 'appearance'-related meanings ('appearance', 'shape', 'scene', 'similarity', 'bearing', 'kind, type', 'sample', 'like', etc.) while its 'sample'-related meanings ('style, pattern', 'method', and 'sample') remain absent.⁴ Additionally, the classifier usage for quantifying objects was not adopted. Korean, on the other hand, developed other senses and functions through semantic extension based on existing meanings, specifically, 'act', 'intention', 'plan', 'probability', and 'false similarity'.

C. Thai *yàaŋ*

The Chinese etymon *yàng* was borrowed into Thai during the Middle Chinese period (4th ~ 12th centuries) (SEALANG, n.d.). Since historical documentation of Thai is sparse, the meanings of *yàaŋ* attested prior to Modern Thai cannot be effectively ordered but can only be deduced from contemporary Thai usage. Similar to the Korean *yang*, the Thai *yàaŋ* retains most 'appearance'-related meanings, as exemplified in part in the following:

- (7) *yàaŋ* 'shape, thing' (form)

khǎw rúu lǎay yàaŋ
he know various thing

'He knows many things.' (Modern Thai)

- (8) *yàaŋ* 'kind' (type)

khǎw thamŋaan lǎay yàaŋ
he work many kind

'He works many kinds (= does many kinds of work).' (Modern Thai)

The Thai *yàaŋ*, like its Chinese etymon, also serves the grammatical function of classifier. Similar to the Chinese *yàng*, which is a classifier for items of differing attributes, the Thai classifier *yàaŋ* can be used for general, ordinary objects, either tangible (e.g., tools, furniture, food, etc.) or intangible (e.g., meaning, strategy, penalty, etc.), of differing kinds, varieties, patterns, types, and sorts. It is to be noted that a numeral classifier phrase has the syntactic structure of [noun number CLASSIFIER], as exemplified in (9) below. By contrast, in (8) above, the usage of *yàaŋ* does not imply a particular noun or object (note that the verb *thamŋaan* 'work' is a compound consisting of *tham* 'make, do' and *ŋaan* 'n. work'). The subtle difference between (8) and (9) reflects a process of grammaticalization from the former to the latter.

- (9) *yàaŋ* Type classifier (for kinds)

nay caan níi mii aahǎan sii yàaŋ
in plate this have food four CLF

'There are four types of food on this plate.' (Modern Thai)

The Thai *yàaŋ* has also acquired similitive-related grammatical functions such as the preposition 'like' to denote comparability or similarity. As illustrated in the following examples, *yàaŋ* may take a noun phrase as its complement, as in (10), or, optionally, it may be compounded with the comitative preposition *kàp* 'with' and form a compound preposition to mark the standard of comparison in equative comparatives, comparing one thing against another (cf. Heine, 1997; Bisang, 1998), as in (11).

- (10) *yàaŋ(kàp)* Similitive preposition 'like' (comparability)

tham hǎy dii yàaŋ chǎn
do give good like I

'Do (it) well like me (as I do/did).' (Modern Thai)

- (11) *yàaŋ(kàp)* Similitive preposition 'like' (similarity)

phûuchaay khon níi tham thǎathaŋ yàaŋ.kàp dèk
man CLF this make gesture like child

'The man acts like a child.' (Modern Thai)

Closely related to the comparability-marking preposition is the conjunction function of marking pattern conformity. As shown below, the conjunction *yàaŋ* takes as its complement a clause headed by a complementizer.

- (12) *yàaŋ* Similitive conjunction 'as' (pattern conformity)

yàaŋ thǎi thǎə hǎn chǎn yûŋ mâak
as COMP you see I busy very

'As you see, I am very busy.' (Modern Thai)

⁴ Some of the meanings in Chinese were lexically deflected to form different words involving *yang* as *mwunyang* 'pattern', *yangsik* 'method, style', etc.

Still another grammatical function of *yàaŋ* that derived from the ‘similarity’ meaning is that of marking manner, i.e., a derivation prefix comparable to the English manner-marking suffix *-ly* (as in ‘angrily’, ‘hastily’, etc.), as exemplified below:⁵

- (13) *yàaŋ* Manner-marking Prefix
 lôn òk càak bâan yàaŋ-rîp.rêŋ
 she go.out from home MNR-rush
 ‘She left home hastily.’ (Modern Thai)

Particularly notable is the fact that the similarity-based conjunction usage has further developed into the counterfactual conjunction ‘as if’ (false similarity, pretense), as seen in the Korean excerpt (6) above. In Thai, the counterfactual conjunction function of *yàaŋ* in the compound form *yàaŋ-kàp* (with the comitative *kàp* ‘with’) ‘as if’ can be seen below:

- (14) *yàaŋ-kàp* Pretense-marking conjunction (‘as if’, false similarity, counterfactual)
 khǎw ñap yàaŋ-kàp wâa khǎw mây dâayyin àray
 he silent PRET COMP he not hear anything
 ‘He kept quiet as if he didn’t hear anything.’ (Modern Thai)

As observed in Korean, the Thai *yàaŋ* shares some uses with the Chinese etymon, although the Thai has more innovative meanings. From these descriptions provided above, we next discuss a few noteworthy topics in the following section.

The states of affairs of lexical development (polysemization) and functional extension (grammaticalization) in the recipient languages (Korean and Thai) in comparison with the donor language (Chinese) present a number of theoretically important issues. Of these, we will focus on polysemization and conceptual network, grammaticalization, and contact-induced vs. evolutive grammaticalization.

D. Polysemization and Conceptual Network

From a cognitive linguistics perspective, polysemization reflects the ‘malleability’ of meaning (Robert, 2008, p. 56), and is a result of human cognitive flexibility in the construal of events (cf. ‘schematic form’, Culioli, 1990; ‘image schema’, Langacker, 1991), differential focus on a described event (‘active zone’, Langacker, 1987), influence of context and situation (Heine, 2002), conventionalization of inferences (Hopper & Traugott, 2003, 1993), among others. Cognitive operations involved in creating multiple meanings are metaphor and metonymy, both of which exist under the broad concept of pragmatic inferences (cf. Hopper & Traugott, 2003, 1993).

A careful look at all the meanings of *yàn*, *yang*, and *yàaŋ* reveals predominantly metonymic relationships among them, i.e., they are linked by contiguity either in terms of physical properties or conceptual relatedness. Some such links are shown in simplified forms in the following list (for more comprehensive connections, see below):

- (15) a. appearance – similarity – false similarity (pretense)
 b. appearance – similarity – kind/type – classifier
 c. appearance – similarity – method
 d. appearance – scene – act – intention – plan

While semantic designations in polysemous lexemes generally tend to be predominantly metonymic, there are semantic developments that may look prima facie unmotivated from the ‘appearance’ meaning. For instance, the development of ‘false similarity’ (15a) from the primary meaning ‘appearance’ does not seem to be well-motivated. It is noteworthy, however, that the development of ‘false similarity’ from ‘appearance’ was mediated by ‘similarity’, which has two potentially opposite interpretations: ‘similar and nearly the same’ and ‘similar but not the same’; the first emphasizes shared properties and surface manifestations and the latter different properties and subsurface qualities (cf. Rhee, 2005). The false similarity or pretense meaning of *yàn*, *yang*, and *yàaŋ* is based on the latter. This clearly shows how different conceptualization foci can lead to diverse polysemous meanings and functions (Rhee, 2000, 2005). Similarly, the link between ‘appearance’ and the function of classifier (10b) also seems unclear. However, if the intervening notions ‘similarity’ and ‘kind, type’ are considered, the conceptual progression of extension becomes reasonable. When entities are placed in a category based on their similarities, the linguistic device of categorization can function as a classifier, thus the phrase *aahāan sîi yàaŋ* [food four appearance] in (9) above is reinterpreted as [food four type] and, further, as [food four CLASSIFIER] ‘four kinds of food’. Likewise, other right-most meanings in the metonymic chains in (15) above, such as ‘method’ (15c) and ‘plan’ (15d), which may appear conceptually distant from the ‘appearance’ meaning, can be easily connected to it when the intermediate meanings serve as ‘conceptual bridges’ analogous to ‘bridging contexts’ (Heine, 2002).

Two other types of change merit attention, and are discussed below:

- (16) a. appearance – similarity – probability
 b. appearance – similarity – comparability – pattern conformity

The emergence of the ‘probability’ function (16a) from ‘appearance’ was, as is the case with many instances of extension, mediated by the ‘similarity’ meaning. Our focus here is the fact that ‘appearance’ in the source meaning was primarily with reference to tangible objects like ‘shape’, ‘designed pattern’, etc. (i.e., the first-order entities) while

⁵ This state of affairs is intriguing for being reversed directionality from the common grammaticalization path [manner > similative] observed crosslinguistically (Treis, 2017; Kuteva et al., 2019). The topic warrants future research.

probability involves propositions, e.g., ‘you will take offense’ (see (5) above), ‘a war will break out’, etc. (i.e., the third-order entities). Thus, the probability of an occurrence of an event encoded by a marker of an object’s appearance is an example of metaphor by virtue of cross-domain mapping. Similarly, the ‘pattern conformity’ function involves a clausal complement, e.g., ‘as you see’ in (12). In the example “As you see, I am very busy”, the marker *yàŋ* asserts that there is a conceptual match between the ‘appearance’ in ‘your’ visual perception and the state of affairs of ‘my’ being busy.

In this regard, the persistent debate about the role of metaphor and metonymy in semantic change and grammaticalization warrants a brief discussion. In contrast to the ample attention given to metaphor in the seminal work by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metonymy had not received due attention until Hopper and Traugott (2003, 1993) and Traugott and König (1991) redefined metonymy to include cognitive and covert contexts, specifically the pragmatic contexts of conversational and conventional inference. The metonymic-metaphorical model of semantic change by Heine et al. (1991) is particularly noteworthy in that it captures the relationship between metonymy and metaphor, and reconciles the roles played by each. In other words, semantic change occurs in small steps by virtue of connectedness, i.e., metonymy, but since the small-step changes occur continuously by increment, eventually the meaning or function becomes considerably detached from the original semantics to the point that it eventually belongs to a different conceptual domain, i.e., metaphor, as in the English futurity marker *be going to* starting from the domain of physical locomotion and developing to the grammatical domain of futurity. From the perspective of Heine et al. (1991), actual extension at the micro-level is always metonymic, and the holistic process between the source and target at the macro-level ‘can’ be seen as an instance of metaphor. A similar view is found in the notion of ‘post hoc metaphor’ (Lessau, 1994, p. 672). Furthermore, attributing the operating mechanism for semantic change to metaphor is often the result of an approach that simply compares the input and output and guesses the process, which is warned against in Bybee et al. (1994). Therefore, metonymy is the actual cognitive mechanism and metaphor is an epiphenomenon.

From the above discussion, we can conclude that the meanings that evolved from ‘appearance’ are metonymically related, and metaphor is not an actual mechanism but is only a description of the end-result in view of the source. A simple version of the metonymic links of all the meanings of *yàŋ*, *yang*, and *yàŋ* in the three languages is given in Figure 1.

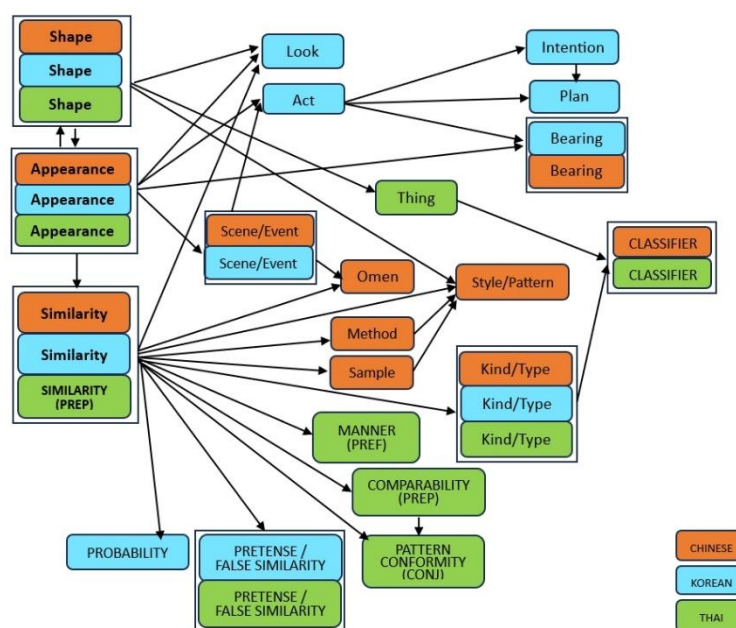


Figure 1. Conceptual Network of ‘Appearance’ in Chinese, Korean, and Thai

The conceptual network in Figure 1 is a type of semantic map. Semantic maps were originally conceived of in order to compare grammatical meanings crosslinguistically (van der Auwera & Plungian, 1998; Haspelmath, 1999, 2025; Narrog & van der Auwera, 2011), but they can be useful for lexical studies of polysemy as a way of illustrating the network of conceptual and semantic space (cf. Levinson & Mejra, 2003; Majid et al., 2007; François, 2008, p. 177).

The semantic map of ‘appearance’ shows interesting aspects. Most of all, the recipient languages only selectively borrowed the meanings of the etymon of the donor language. Thus, the meanings ‘omen’, ‘method’, ‘sample’, and ‘style, designed pattern’ have not been adopted in either language. Thai either adopted or independently developed the classifier usage mediated by the ‘kind, type’ meaning (note that the exact time of borrowing and of the grammaticalization in the two languages has not been established due to the paucity of historical data), but apart from that, secondary meanings that emerged from ‘appearance’ and ‘similarity’ in Thai rarely overlap with those in Chinese. Semantic extension in Thai leans toward the comparability concept. As for Korean, the situation is similar; the overlap is found to a very limited extent in only the ‘scene/event’, ‘bearing’, and ‘kind/type’ meanings. Semantic extension in Korean tends toward the

event and diverse aspects of an event, such as ‘act’, ‘intention’, ‘plan’, and ‘bearing’. Another notable aspect relates to the grammaticalization of certain functions with subjective meanings, such as pattern conformity, false similarity, and probability, not attested in the donor language. This point will be discussed in the following section.

E. Grammaticalization

As shown above, Chinese *yàng* can function as a classifier, evidently grammaticalized from its earlier meaning of ‘type, kind’. Historical records show the classifier function in a 17th century data source: a publication of 12th century literature. The time when the grammaticalization occurred is indeterminable since dictionary listing does not strictly follow chronological order of appearance. Besides the classifier use, no noticeable instances exist suggesting grammaticalization of *yàng* in Chinese.

Both recipient languages show grammaticalized uses of the Chinese etymon. In Thai, *yàaŋ* also functions as a classifier as well as a preposition in the form of *yàaŋ* alone or a compound form *yàaŋkàp* (see (10) and (11) above). Although Chinese and Thai share many typological characteristics, Thai is exceptionally prone to developing prepositions from nouns and verbs (cf. 181 Thai prepositions vs. 91 Chinese adpositions; Rhee, 2021). Thus, for this idiosyncratic propensity, the Thai compound [appearance N] is likely to develop into ‘like N’.

Similarly, the Thai derivational prefix use of *yàaŋ*, as in *yàaŋ-rīip.rēŋ* [appearance-rush] ‘hastily, hurriedly’ (see (13) above), is a function not attested in Chinese. In grammaticalization theory, the development of a derivational affix from a lexeme is regarded as a weak form of grammaticalization (cf. Kuryłowicz, 1975, 1965) for its low productivity, limited scope, and relative paucity of grammatical meaning as compared to inflectional affixes. While weak in grammatical strength, the development of the derivational prefix *yàaŋ* is well-motivated in view of Thai morphosyntax. As an isolating language with a high level of transcategoriality of lexemes, the structure [appearance-rush], especially when it occurs in a non-argument position such as ‘she left home [appearance-rush]’ in (13), can easily be reinterpreted adverbially as ‘in a rushing manner’, since Thai does not have a well-established, independent adverbializer.

The conjunction usage of *yàaŋ* to mark pattern conformity is closely related to the prepositional use of *yàaŋ*. The conjunction function is evidently an instance of semantic extension from similarity between objects (for prepositions) and between propositions (for conjunctions), two conceptually close grammatical categories that are usually not clearly distinguished in Thai. Even crosslinguistically, the flexibility of and grammaticalization between adpositions and conjunctions are well documented (cf. Genetti, 1991; Lehmann, 1991; Craig, 1991; Rhee & Koo, 2015).

Another interesting grammaticalization scenario is the development in Korean of the epistemic marker from the Chinese etymon. As shown in (5), *yang* forms periphrastic epistemic markers of probability, with variation of an adnominalizer which functions as a secondary tense marker, i.e., the prospective adnominal *-l* (future), the simultaneous adnominal *-nun* (present), and the anterior adnominal *-n* (past). The periphrastic epistemic markers are *P-l.yang.i-* ‘it is probable that P will happen’, *P-nun.yang.i-* ‘it is probable that P is happening’, *P-n.yang.i-* ‘it is probable that P happened’. This development is observed only in Korean, and its emergence is also attributable to the Korean idiosyncrasy called ‘mermaid constructions’ (Tsunoda, 2020; Kim, 2020), wherein a noun performs a dual function as a noun and part of a predicate. The noun in mermaid constructions tends to have a general meaning (e.g., ‘shape’, ‘situation’, etc.) and often cannot be used independently, thus it is called ‘dependent noun’, ‘formal noun’, and ‘defective noun’. The presence of a large number of these nouns, many of them monosyllabic, is among the more notable characteristics of Korean, observed as early as Ramstedt (1997, 1939). The more than seventy mermaid constructions (Kim, 2020) carry diverse subjective and modal meanings. Thus, *yang* could have been easily adopted into these mermaid constructions for their structural and semantic affinities. This, once again, emphasizes the significance of morphosyntactic idiosyncrasies of recipient languages in grammaticalization.

The grammaticalization of the modal marker of pretense or false similarity, attested in both Korean and Thai, is addressed separately in the next section.

F. Contact-Induced and Evolutive Grammaticalization

In the preceding exposition, we noted that Korean and Thai borrowed certain meanings but not others, and that the Chinese etymon functioned as a classifier, which Thai also uses, although it is not clear if Thai also borrowed the grammatical function when it began borrowing the etymon. As the borrowing occurred during the Middle Chinese period (4th ~ 12th centuries) (SEALANG, n.d.), and historical sources show the classifier function in Chinese in the 17th century publication of the 12th century source, it is not clear if the function was part of the semantic and functional package of the borrowed *yàaŋ*, but it is possible that the function developed later as part of evolutive or ‘natural’ (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988) processes, i.e., not contact-induced but internally-driven development.

A more straightforward instance of functional change is that, unlike in the donor language, recipient languages show development into grammatical markers involving propositions rather than objects, e.g., conjunctions (of pattern conformity) or modal markers (of false similarity/pretense and probability epistemic markers). Of these, the false-similarity marking function is particularly interesting since it is highly subjective (thus constituting an excellent instance of subjectification) as compared to the fundamentally objective meaning (‘shape’ and ‘appearance’) in its lexical origin, and, further, it is not attested in the donor language, but is attested in both recipient languages. The two recipient languages, having had no contact and being typologically very different from one another, developed a grammatical marker based on the false, misleading nature of appearance. The function is not only subjective but also highly semantically specific,

and this grammaticalization is unlikely to be a chance development. Incidentally, Japanese has the borrowing from the same etymon: *yoo* (よ う) in sound-based borrowing (*ondoku*), and *sama* (さ ま) in meaning-based borrowing (*kundoku*). While *sama* denotes ‘shape, appearance’, *yoo* (with a copula *-da*, as in *yoo-da*; 様だ) denotes ‘similarity’ and ‘false similarity’ (Joungmin Kim, p.c.). Since Chinese was borrowed extensively in the neighboring languages (cf. ‘Sino-Xenic’ languages, Martin, 1953; as cited in Bentley, 2001, p. 39), the extent of the grammaticalization of this false similarity in Sino-Xenic languages would constitute a productive topic of future research.

VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper addressed the polysemy patterns of the lexeme denoting ‘appearance, shape’ in Korean and Thai that originated from the Chinese lexeme with the same meaning. The linguistic situation in the recipient languages compared to that of the donor language exhibits commonalities in semantic content regarding polysemy, especially the basic meanings of ‘appearance’, ‘shape’, and ‘similarity’. There are, however, overwhelming differences in further extensions, which are likely to be the products of evolutive, rather than contact-induced, development. The meanings of all three languages addressed here form a semantic map in which meanings are connected with intuitively reasonable, metonymic links. This paper also argued that the developments in the recipient languages are likely to have been facilitated by each language’s idiosyncrasies. Among the most interesting aspects of grammaticalization in the recipient languages is the development of the highly subjective modal meaning of false similarity or pretense. Observing a similar developmental pattern of the same etymon in another Sino-Xenic language, Japanese, further research on other Sino-Xenic languages, such as Vietnamese and languages in the Hmong-Mien and Kra-Dai language families, would foster enhanced understanding of the extent of similar grammaticalization scenarios and polysemy patterns in contrast with the donor language Chinese. Attention to meaning and function is particularly relevant, considering that studies of Sino-Xenic languages have focused predominantly on sound changes, and meaning and function have not yet been given due attention.

APPENDIX. ABBREVIATIONS

ACC: accusative; ADN: adnominalizer; CLF: classifier; COMP: complementizer; CONN: connective; CONV: converb; DAT: dative; DEC: declarative; FUT: future; GEN: genitive; LOC: locative; MNR: manner; NOM: nominative; PRES: present; PRET: pretense; PROB: probability

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