

On the Development of Evidential Contrasts in the Greater Himalayan Region

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Abstract : Evidentials indicate how the speaker obtained the information conveyed in a statement. Detailed diachronic-functional accounts of evidential contrasts found in the Greater Himalayan Region (GHR) reveal that contrasting evidentials are not only defined against each other but also that most of them once had different aspecto-temporal (TA) values which must have aligned when their contrast was conventionalized. Based on these accounts, the present paper sheds light on hitherto unidentified mechanisms of grammatical change. The main insights of the present study were facilitated by 'functional reconstruction', which (i) revolves around morphemes which appear to be used in divergent ways within a language and/or across different related languages, (ii) persistently devises hypotheses as to how these functional divergences may have developed, and (iii) retains those hypotheses which most plausibly and economically account for the data. Based on the dense and detailed grammatical literature on the Tibetic language family, the author of this study is able to reconstruct the initial steps by which its evidentiality systems developed: By the time Proto-Tibetan started to be spread across much of Central Asia in the 7th century CE, verbal concatenations with and without a connective -s had become common. As typical for resultative constructions around the globe, Proto-Tibetan *V-s-'dug 'was there, having undergone V' (employing the simple past of 'dug 'stay, be there') allowed both for a perfect reading ('the state resulting from V holds at the moment of speech') and an inferential reading ('(I infer from its result that) V has taken place'). In Western Tibetic, *V-s-'dug grammaticalized in its perfect meaning as it became contrasted with perfect *V-s-yod 'is there, having undergone V' (employing the existential copula yod); that is, *V-s-'dug came to mean that the speaker directly witnessed the profiled result of V, whereas *V-s-yod came to mean that the speaker does not depend on direct evidence of the result, as s/he simply knows that it holds. In Eastern Tibetic, on the other hand, V-s-'dug grammaticalized in its inferential past meaning as it became contrasted with past *V-thal 'went past V-ing' (employing the simple past of thal 'go past'); that is, *V-s-'dug came to mean that the profiled past event was inferred from its result, while *V-thal came to mean that it was directly witnessed. Hence, depending on whether it became contrasted with a perfect or a past construction, resultative V-s-'dug grammaticalized either its direct evidential perfect or its inferential past function. This means that in both cases, evidential readings of constructions with distinct but overlapping TA-values became contrasted, and in order for their contrasting meanings to grammaticalize, the constructions had to agree on their tertium comparationis, which was their shared TA-value. By showing that other types of evidential contrasts in the GHR are also TA-aligned, while no single markers (or privative contrasts) are found to have grammaticalized evidential functions, the present study suggests that, at least in this region of the world, evidential meanings grammaticalize only in equipollent contrasts, which always end up TA-aligned.

Keywords : evidential contrasts, functional-diachronic accounts, grammatical change, himalayan languages, tense/aspect-alignment

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