

Referential Types of Bare Nouns and Anti-grammaticalization of Prefixes: A case study of 𠵹 a^{33} in Chaoshan Southern Min dialect

Ruiling Huang and Yimin Sheng
Shaanxi Normal University; Fudan University

Abstract: 𠵹 a is a commonly used prefix in the Sino-Tibetan languages. Dong (2021) summarized the previous discussions and believed that the word formation prefix 𠵹 a is an evaluative form of intimacy. In Dong’s summary (2021), 𠵹 a is only used as a prefix and has no other functions. However, it is common in the Chaoshan region(e.g. Jieyang, Shantou, Chaozhou, Chaoyang, Chenghai, etc.) of Guangdong Province to utilize 𠵹 a as not only a prefix but also as a referential marker. For example:

- (1) a. a^{33} be^{35} b. a^{33} tse^{42}
 Prefix father Prefix sister
 father
- (2) $buŋ^{42-24}$ tsu^{33} khe^{2-3} o^{33}/a^{33} Lim^{55-22} $lausu^{35-21}$ 33
 CLAS book give REF-Marker surname teacher
 This/That book is for teacher Lim.

In (1a-b), 𠵹 a^{33} is a prefix, which when attached to be^{35} and tse^{42} , forms the words $a^{33} be^{35}$ and $a^{33} tse^{42}$. In (2), 𠵹 is attached to $Lim^{55-22} lausu^{35-21}$ and can be pronounced as o^{33} or a^{33} .

In terms of semantic function, the 𠵹 o^{33}/a^{33} is attached to the individual meaning of the referential nouns, which is composed of kinship, proper nouns, occupations and social titles. When the referential nouns refer to both individuals and kinds, 𠵹 o^{33}/a^{33} makes it explicit that it is referring to individuals. The individual referential marker 𠵹 o^{33}/a^{33} evolved from the anti-grammaticalization¹ of the prefix 𠵹 a^{33} , is neither found in Fujian Southern Min dialect and Taiwanese Southern Min dialect, nor in Ming and Qing dynasty Southern Min texts, and its origin should be linked to the weak nouns referential type evolved from a general referential type. In modern Chaoshan Southern Min, the referential marker $tsia^{42}$ or hia^{42} is commonly employed to represent the kind-reference when the bare nouns are present without any restricted components, and there is a distinction in the degree of life when expressing the individual-reference: the nouns refers to people with 𠵹 o^{33}/a^{33} when expressing a person, and it refers to non-human with restricted modifiers such as classifiers or demonstrators.

Semantics		individual-reference	kind-reference
bare nouns	human[+]	o^{33}/a^{33}	$tsia^{42}/hia^{42}$
	human[-]	restricted modifiers	

¹ Hopper and Traugott (1993/2005:7) pointed out that grammaticalization has a cline which has only one direction: content item > grammatical word > clitic > inflectional affix. Haspelmath (2004:27-28) used the term “anti-grammaticalization” which refers to such an evolution: a possible grammaticalization end point can be developed to a possible grammaticalization starting point or a middle point. Considering that 𠵹 a originated as a prefix in Sino-Tibetan languages, and then developed into a referential marker in Chaoshan dialect, it can be defined as anti-grammaticalization.

The weak referential nature of Chaoshan Min's bare nouns makes it strongly tokenized. As a result, the prefix a^{33} in front of the personal nouns has gradually evolved into a marker² to mark individual-reference, and together with the kind-reference marker, it forms a distinctive regional expression of the bare noun referential system, which is different from other Southern min dialects or even other Chinese dialects. This case serves as a valuable reference for linguistic typology. It shows a new path of anti-grammaticalization that has never been mentioned in previous research about Chinese dialects.

Key words: bare nouns; Southern Min; anti-grammaticalization; prefix; 𑍑 o^{33} / a^{33}

References

- Dong, Xiufang 2021 Evaluative morphology in Sino-Tibetan Languages. *Minority Languages of China*. (2): 3-14.
- Haspelmath, Martin 2004 On directionality in language change with particular reference to grammaticalization. In Fischer, Olga, Muriel Norde and Harry Perridon (eds) , *Up and down the Cline: The Nature of Grammaticalization*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. Pp, 17–44.
- Hopper Paul and Traugott, Elizabeth C. 2003 Grammaticalization second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

² After becoming a referential marker, in order to distinguish it from the prefix 𑍑 a^{33} , the referential marker 𑍑 is read as o^{33} in most cases, although it can also be read as a^{33} .