

Possessive suffixes as definite determiners in Indonesian languages: A possible grammaticalization pathway

Languages with definite articles can be found in different languages families. Most of these definite articles evolved out of demonstratives but some of them have other sources (Himmelman 2001), as for example possession marker. Indonesian languages like Colloquial Jakartan Indonesian and Cirebon Javanese, among others, frequently use their third person singular possessive suffixes to indicate the unambiguous reference of a noun, just like definite articles (Ewing 1995, Sneddon 1996, Rubin 2010); this is illustrated in (1) and (2). Their function is not overall identical with that of the definite article for example in English, though. The main difference is that the possessive suffixes are optional as definite determiners; they can be omitted or replaced by a demonstrative (Rubin 2010).

The goal of this talk is twofold: (i) to present a possible grammaticalization pathway of the Indonesian third person possessive suffix towards a definite determiner and (ii) to explain against this background the occurrence and distribution of the possessive suffix in definiteness marking function. For this purpose, I take Fraurud's (2001) analysis of Turkic and Uralic languages as starting point. Fraurud assumes that the grammaticalization of possessive suffixes starts within associative anaphors because they offer both a possessive and a definite interpretation (like *I bought a car. The/Its steering wheel is made of aluminium.*). Associative anaphors can be seen as the most natural context for possessive suffixes since a noun with a possessive suffix needs an anchor to which the suffix refers to (or, in different terms: agrees with), the possessor. In my talk, I would like to amend Fraurud's assumption and suggest that the grammaticalization of the suffix started indeed in the context of associative anaphors but with non-relational head nouns, that is, with nouns that do not require a possessor argument for reference (like *chair, cat, tree*).

Associative anaphors can be seen at the intersection of semantic and pragmatic uniqueness in the sense of Löbner (1985). Semantic uniqueness means that the unambiguous reference of a noun comes from its semantics, either because the noun itself denotes a unique reference (for example *sun* or *pope*) or via a unique relation to a possessor (for example *Peter's father* or *my head*). Pragmatic uniqueness, on the other hand, means that the non-ambiguity of the referent has to come from the context (like with anaphors: *I bought a car. The car is red.*). With inherently relational nouns, the reference of a suffix-marked noun in associative anaphoric use comes from the relation (which is determined by the semantics of the noun) to the anchor, that is, the possessor; accordingly we can speak of semantic uniqueness. With non-relational nouns, however, the reference has to come from the context and the established relation between possessor and possessum; this is an instance of pragmatic uniqueness. Crucially, I assume that a possessive suffix always indicates the unique reference of both the possessor and its host noun.

The context of pragmatic uniqueness serves as starting point for the grammaticalization since with non-relational nouns the suffix can represent any possessive relation. In a next step, the function of the suffix to agree with a third person possessor is bleached. Instead, the function of establishing a relation of any kind is extended. The suffix serves as a linker but not to a possessive anchor but to more abstract anchors like for example the world knowledge (see also Ewing 1995), the discourse, or in a next bleaching step as anaphoric linker to the co-referent anchor (that is, in anaphoric contexts). Finally, only the indication of uniqueness remains and the possessive suffix becomes a definite determiner.

In this way, the use of the suffix as definite determiner spread in both pragmatic and semantically unique contexts, but to different degrees in different Indonesian languages. Moreover, the suffix is not fully grammaticalized in some contexts; this explains why its occurrence is optional and sometimes restricted by other factors which have nothing to do with the unique reference of the noun.

Examples:

(1) Colloquial Jakartan Indonesian (Sneddon 2006:37, cited in Rubin 2010:107)

Hawa-nya panas sekali sore ini.
Weather-3SG hot very evening this
'The weather is very hot this evening.'

(2) Cirebon Javanese (Ewing 1995:79)

Poto semono jelasé, bisa, ... endhas-é buntung kabéh Ér.
Photo that.much clear can [end up with] head-3SG cut.off all Er.
'Pictures that are that easy [to take], can [end up with] the heads all cut off Er.'

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