

Possession as a source of grammaticalisation in Semitic

By looking at data from Arabic and Modern South Arabian languages that have not yet made it to the wider platform of typological considerations, I hypothesise that a number of constructions expressing values that pertain to ASPECT and MODALITY are grammaticalisations out of possessive structures, as is the genesis of such categories, alongside with TENSE, crosslinguistically (e.g. Heine and Reh (1984); Dahl (1996); Heine (1997); Van der Auwera and Plungian (1998); Hopper and Traugott (2003)).

Conceptually, I will build on XXXX, who brings to the fore the existence of a grammaticalisation of a possessive perfect construction solely expressing the Universal perfect reading across the vast majority of the Arabic varieties; a unique grammaticalisation, crosslinguistically. Here I aim to advance further the hypothesis that the possessive construction has been the source of other grammatical values and constructions, and that this is not only true of Arabic, but of South Arabian languages, too.

Primarily I will consider Existential perfect constructions derived out of possessive structures. I claim that such constructions exist in Anatolian dialects such as Mardīn (Jastrow, 2008) (1), and Ṣanʿānī (Yemeni) (Watson, 1993), as well as in Modern South Arabian languages such as Jibbāli and Soqoṭri (Simeone-Senelle, 1997), based primarily out of what can be made of, from the translations provided (as glossing is very often lacking!), coupled with a number of reconstructions that can be hypothesised in order to infer the process of (diachronic) change, and connections with other snippets of data that may be available in a given description.

- (1) abū-hu kān kəl māt
father.SGM-3SGM.GEN be.PFV.3SGM PERF die.PFV.3SGM

His father had died.

Mardīn: (Jastrow, 2008, p. 226)

It will be argued that the grammaticalisation of the Existential perfect construction such as the above parallels that of constructions which one finds in Coptic (Reintges and Liptäk, 2006), in particular, within the broader Afroasiatic family. The Coptic data differs in that the prepositional possessive predicate involved is ‘with’. The Arabic varieties make use of the possessive predicate *la/lə* lit. ‘to; for’. The South Arabian languages, on the other hand, make use of the *d-* ‘of; for’ marker (and its phonological variants), used specifically in attributive (NP-internal) possessive structures (apart from having other functions).

More widespread than the grammaticalisation of the Existential perfect is the realization of modal values, as well as other broader IRREALIS structures, via a diachronic process which involved possessive constructions as a source. This seems to me true of the facts in Arabic, where it is the predicates *ʕala* lit. ‘on’ (2) and *la/lə* lit. ‘to; for’ that are involved.

- (2) ʕala l-muʔmin-īn ḥijab
on DEF-believer-PL veil

Lit: upon the believers a hijab

Synchronic modal reading in Ṣanʿānī: Believers must have a veil. (Watson, 1993, p. 120)

Classical Arabic possessive reading: Believers have a veil (on them) (Shboul, 1983)

In the case of Modern South Arabian I argue that from the preliminary observations being made here at the onset of this larger investigation, while a number of IRREALIS

structures are marked through the use of *lə* (and other morphophonological allomorphs), which is a (prepositional) possessive predicate in some of these languages, it seems more likely that what is involved is the grammaticalisation of the prepositional form itself, rather than the grammaticalisation of this prepositional form's function as a possessive predicate within a possessive structure.

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