

On the Grammaticalized Aspectual–Modal–Evidential Nominal Predicates

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September 15, 2023

1 Synopsis

Main article: Taguchi (2022) “Mermaid Constructions in Lexical Functional Grammar”

<https://ojs.ub.uni-konstanz.de/lfg/index.php/main/article/view/19>

- Topic: Nouns that behave like aspectual–modal–evidential (AME) predicates (AME nouns henceforth)
- Characteristics:
 - **Semantics:** AME nouns have lost their original meaning as content words, and instead have acquired a more abstract, grammatical meaning (aspect, modality, evidentiality)
 - **Syntax:** AME nouns typically cannot be modified by adjectives.
 - **Morphology:** AME nouns can be used in restricted morphological forms, typically in the default form.
 - **Lexicon:** AME nouns cannot be substituted with their synonyms.
 - **Typology:** AME nouns are found across languages, though not so common (Japanese, Korean, Amdo-Tibetan, Tagalog, Tatar, Welsh, etc.)
- Similar phenomena: English *Chances/Odds are* constructions
- Hot take: Parts-of-speech (syntactic categories; nouns, verbs, ...) are not universal

2 Keywords

- **Grammaticalization:** A process of language change where a content word turns into a function word, typically undergoing semantic change and phonetic reduction (shorter pronunciation).
 - Old English *willan* (to want) → Modern English *will* (future marker) → *'ll* (future clitic)
 - English *to be going to* → *be going to* (prospective aspect) → *gonna*
 - Mandarin Chinese 把 *bǎ* (to hold) → *bǎ* (object marker)
 - Mandarin Chinese 不用 *bú yòng* (do not use) → *bú yòng* (no need to) → *béng*
 - Latin *facere* (to do) + *habeō* (I have) → Late Latin *facere habeō* (I will do; future) → French *ferai* (I will do), Spanish *haré*, Italian *farò*
 - German *werden* (to become) → *werden* (passive marker)

- Japanese *de=wa nai* (it is not that...) → *ja nai* → *jan* (tag question marker, emphatic)
- (Grammatical) **Aspect**: A grammatical feature that expresses how the action (verb) is executed over time (not to be confused with tense). For example, in *John will have gone (by that time)*, the tense is future, and the aspect is perfective. Other aspects include habitual, progressive, prospective, imperfective, and so on.
- **Modality**: A grammatical feature that expresses the relationship between a proposition and the world. For example, *John must go* expresses that, for the statement to be true, there is necessity that the proposition (*John goes*) happens (deontic modality).
- **Evidentiality**: A grammatical feature that expresses the source of information uttered by the speaker. For example, *John seems to be sleeping* expresses that the proposition (*John is sleeping*) is inferred by the speaker from the context.
- **Clitic**: A morpheme that is attached to its host, forming a phonological unity but maintaining its morphosyntactic independence (i.e., not affix). The English possessive 's as in *Trader Joe's* is a clitic, because (1) it is attached to its host, and (2) the possessive 's can float like [*the Queen of England*]'s crown. A clitic boundary is shown with =.
- **Affix** (prefix, suffix): A morpheme that is attached to its host with stronger phonological and morphosyntactic unity. English adverbializer *-ly* is a suffix (not a clitic), because *morphologically and phonologically* but not **[morphological and phonological]ly*. An affixal boundary is shown with a hyphen -.
- **Raising** constructions: Raising is a syntactic construction where the subject of the embedded clause is “raised” to the main clause. For example, *Tom* in *Tom seems to catch Jerry* is not the semantic subject of *seem* (**seemer*) but of *catch*.
- **Control** constructions: Control is a syntactic construction where the subject of the main clause is the same as the unpronounced subject of the embedded clause. For example, *Tom* in *Tom tries to catch Jerry* is not only the semantic subject of *try* but also of *catch*.
 - Raising and control look similar, but their internal structures are strikingly different.

3 Data

Most of the data shown in this section are from Tsunoda (2020). It reports that Japanese is the language with the highest number of MA nominal predicate types, amounting to 121 nouns.

3.1 Japanese

yotei (予定) is a noun meaning “a plan”, but it means **prospective aspect** when used as an AME predicate.

△ Japanese is an SOV language.

- (1) (a) Non-AME
kore=ga Hanako=no yotei=da.
 this=NOM Hanako=GEN plan=COP
 ‘This is Hanako’s plan.’

- (b) AME (prospective aspect)

Hanako=ga Amerika=ni ik-u yotei=da.

Hanako=NOM US=DAT go-NPST plan=COP

‘Hanako is going to go to the US. (*lit.* Plan is, Hanako goes to the US.)’

The AME noun *yotei* does not allow adjectival modification.

- (2) (a) Non-AME

kore=ga Hanako=no yoi yotei=da.

this=NOM Hanako=GEN good plan=COP

‘This is Hanako’s good plan.’

- (b) AME (prospective aspect)

**Hanako=ga Amerika=ni ik-u yoi yotei=da.*

Hanako=NOM US=DAT go-NPST good plan=COP

The AME noun *yotei* cannot be substituted with its synonyms.

- (3) **Hanako=ga Amerika=ni ik-u sukejuuru=da.*

Hanako=NOM US=DAT go-NPST schedule=COP.NPST

- The AME noun *yotei* “plan”) turns out to have a **raising** construction.
- i.e., The subject is in fact “raised” from the embedded predicate.
- Passivization test

- (4) (a) Tom seems to catch Jerry.

(b) Jerry seems to be caught by Tom.

- (5) (a) *Tom=ga Jerry=wo tukamaer-u yotei=da.*

Tom=NOM Jerry=ACC catch-NPST plan=COP

‘Tom is going to catch Jerry.’

- (b) *Jerry=ga Tom=ni tukamaer-are-ru yotei=da.*

Jerry=NOM Tom=by catch-PASS-NPST plan=COP

‘Jerry is going to be caught by Tom.’

- There are also AME nouns with a **control** construction: *ki* 気 “spirit, feeling”

- (6) (a) Tom tries to catch Jerry. (Tryer = Tom)

(b) Jerry tries to be caught by Tom. (Tryer = Jerry)

- (7) (a) *Tom=ga Jerry=wo tukamaer-u ki=da.*

Tom=NOM Jerry=ACC catch-NPST spirit=COP

‘Tom intends to catch Jerry. (*lit.* Spirit is, Tom catches Jerry.)’ (Intender = Tom)

- (b) *Jerry=ga Tom=ni tukamaer-are-ru ki=da.*

Jerry=NOM Tom=by catch-PASS-NPST spirit=COP

‘Jerry intends to be caught by Tom.’ (Intender = Jerry)

3.2 Tatar

Tatar (< Kipchak Turkic < Turkic) is spoken in Tatarstan, Russia.

- In (8), the subject is marked in genitive (and in the possessive suffix on the AME noun).
- In (9), the subject is marked in dative.
- My presentation on this in August at the International Conference on Turkish Linguistics: https://ctaguchi.github.io/assets/pdf/ICTL_Tatar_modal_nominal_predicate.pdf

(8) *isäp*: “idea, thought” (non-AME), “plan to” (AME)

Marat-niñ kit-ärgä isäb-e.

Marat-GEN leave-INF idea-POSS.3

‘Marat plans to leave. (*lit.* Marat’s leaving idea.)’

(9) *röxsät*: “permission” (non-AME), epistemic modal “be allowed to” (AME)

Marat-qa kit-ärgä röxsät.

Marat-DAT leave-INF permission

‘Marat is allowed to leave. (*lit.* To Marat, leaving permission.)’

3.3 Latin (!)

Special thanks to Stephen!! The Latin noun *opus* “work” seems to be one of the AME nouns, functioning as a deontic modal marker “need to”. In this construction, *opus* must be used in the default form (nominative/accusative singular) and not in its inflected forms (morphological restriction), according to Wiktionary; e.g., **opera sunt*.

(10) *nunc opus est tē anim-ō val-ēre.*

now work is you.ACC soul-ABL be.strong-INF

‘Now you need to be strong. (*lit.* Now it is work for you to be strong.)’

3.4 English?

Though structurally not so similar, English *Chances/Odds are* construction has a lot in common with the AME constructions.

- Semantic change: epistemic modality (“probably”)
- Syntactic restriction: unmodifiable by adjectives
- Morphological restriction: always used in plural (without the definite article, for some speakers)
- Lexical restriction: Unsubstitutable with their synonyms (**Probabilities are, *Coincidences are, *Accidents are*)

4 Unsolved discussions: What on earth are they?

As for their origins, they seem to have undergone **grammaticalization** from the usage as canonical nouns. However, we are not certain yet about their syntactic category.

AME nouns seem to be nouns:

- Phonologically identical to canonical nouns (*yotei* and *ki* in Japanese, or *opus* in Latin)
- It requires a copula (while verbs do not)

However, they do lack some crucial features of nouns:

- Aspectual–Modal–Evidential functions (usually nouns don't play a role in them)
- Not modifiable with adjectives (nouns should be able to be modified adjectivally)
- Morphologically defective (limited or no inflectional change)

See Table 1 for a summary.

This observation gives rise to some interesting suggestions:

- Parts-of-speech (syntactic categories) are probably not universal, and probably should not be a fundamental assumption in linguistics.
→ Consistent with the fact that some languages lack basic POS, e.g., Amharic lacks adjectives.
- **Proposal:** Instead, syntactic categories can be treated as bundles of different features.
- (Existential crisis: what would happen to all the work done with the assumption that basic parts-of-speech like nouns, adjectives, and verbs exist universally?)

Glossing Abbreviations

ACC: accusative; COP: copula; DAT: dative; GEN: genitive; INF: infinitive; NOM: nominative; NPST: non-past; PASS: passive; PL: plural; POSS: possessive; PST: past; SG: singular.

References

Tsunoda, Tasaku. 2020. Mermaid Construction: A Compound-Predicate Construction With Biclausal Appearance. *Comparative Handbooks of Linguistics*, Mouton de Gruyter.

	Noun	AME	Aux	Adj-noun	English Adj	Japanese Adj	Verb	Control Verb	Raising Verb
	<i>neko</i>	<i>yotei</i>	—	<i>kirei(=na)</i>	—	<i>nagai</i>	<i>iku</i>	—	—
	<i>cat</i>	(<i>chances</i>)	<i>must</i>	—	<i>long</i>	—	<i>go</i>	<i>try</i>	<i>seem</i>
Function	$\lambda x.P(x)$	$\lambda Q\lambda e.P(e, Q)$	$\lambda Q.P(Q)$	$\lambda x\lambda e.P(e, x)$	$\lambda x\lambda e.P(e, x)$	$\lambda x\lambda e.P(e, x)$	$\lambda x\lambda e.P(e, x)$	$\lambda Q\lambda x\lambda e.P(e, x, Q(x))$	$\lambda Q\lambda e.P(e, Q)$
Type	<i>et</i>	<i>tvt</i>	<i>tt</i>	<i>evt</i>	<i>evt</i>	<i>evt</i>	<i>evt</i>	$\langle\langle et \rangle, evt \rangle$	<i>tvt</i>
Semantics	[+entity]	[+AME]	[+AME]	[+state]	[+state]	[+state]	[+action]	[+action/attitude]	[+AME]
Copula?	[+COP]	[+COP]	[-COP]	[+COP]	[+COP]	[-COP]	[-COP]	[-COP]	[-COP]
Modified?	[+mod]	[-mod]	[-mod]	[+mod]	[+mod]	[+mod]	[+mod]	[+mod]	[+mod]
Inflection?	[+infl]	[-infl]	[-infl]	[-infl]	[-infl]	[+infl]	[+infl]	[+infl]	[+infl]

Table 1: A summary of the features, comparing AME nouns and other parts-of-speech. “Adj-noun” stands for adjectival nouns (also called *na*-adjectives), which are semantically adjectives but require a copula. “Function” shows the semantic representation of the predicate; e.g., $\lambda x.P(x)$ means that the predicate is a function P that takes one argument ($\lambda x : P(x)$). “Type” is the semantic type of the predicate, where type e is *entity*, type t *truth value*, and type v *event*; e.g., a function of type et takes an argument of type e and returns a truth value t .