Etymology and Lexicalization in Cognitive Grammar

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1. Introduction

The goals and subjects of linguistics in the last century had been focused on the works that was analyzing the data based upon natural language or spoken languages and finding out the regularities of language phenomena. At the last decades of last century, along with the broad understanding of structures and functions of brain, interdisciplinary researches of human intelligence and real substance and mechanism of human communication ability were activated. Consequently it became inevitable to cooperate with other disciplines and to extend its territory. The efforts to understand the substance of human communication ability which supports intellectual competence are strongly demanded, as well as practical and traditional territories of linguistics as the humanities, such as school-grammar education, language education.

It is necessary to investigate the mechanisms of communication ability based upon intellect and cognitive competence. Furthermore it is necessary to reconsider, on the basis of actual experiences and language performances, which one is more empirical and positive approach; module-based theory that linguistic ability is composed of separated categories, and network theory working as a complex of intellectual faculties. In this paper, among some controversial issues in relation to the territory of linguistics, archetype notion of lexicalization-grammaticalization in cognitive grammar and etymological method would be discussed as examples of comparison. In fact, the notion of archetype (or prototype) has no empirical ground to be treated as basic notion at the categories of lexicon and grammar. More fundamental categories of concepts could be admitted in cognitive science, but it is inapplicable to the level of lexicon-grammar. It is more empirical to suppose that the schematization of conceptualization and the process of lexicalization-grammaticalization belong to different levels. The notion of archetype in the process of conceptualization is repeated at the level of lexicalization-grammaticalization: from source domain of a concept to target domain. It is applicable to polysemy and homonymy. The archetype (prototype) is considered to be conceptualized without teaching or acquisition. On the contrary the source domain of concept is not cognized by the language users, it is usually acquired by learning afterwards.

The reason why to compare etymological works with the archetype-notion and source concept of CG (cognitive grammar) is that they are useful for instrumental concept to understand the processes concerned. Etymological works have derived from the question of seeking the history of word changes and it also got to make up a part of basic works investigating historical changes of language. While on the other any linguist who takes analytic methods is unwilling to mention it, because the word ‘etymology (meaning from Greek: studying the true sense)’ contains a sense of value or genuineness. It is impossible to clear up the ultimate origin of a word, but also the methods of many etymologists seem lack of understandings of the mechanism of language learning.
and the process of diachronic changes. But using etymological analysis is practically an effective way to learn and enlarge vocabulary. We know that a dictionary of established reputation would not miss etymological analysis out.

2. Method of etymology

2.1. Contents of etymology are only handled as diachronic changes of lexical items. A problematic issue was concerned with the viewpoint of value and the attitude toward history of linguistic changes. Controversial points of etymology are as follows. The first, the aim or task of etymology was to track vocabulary to the ultimate origins. This attitude assumes a teleological viewpoint that language has ultimate elements and language itself has the reason for being. The second, etymology sometimes leads to irrational understanding of linguistic facts and mysticism about language. Like a taboo or an amulet, knowledge about language causes an illusion as a substitute for real world. Etymological stage itself represents a phase of diachronic changes, not unchangeable. It is difficult to admit etymology without consideration about a context of changes. Nevertheless the reason of including etymological explanations in a large-scale linguistic dictionary is due to the effectiveness for vocabulary learning. The first, it provides an analytic view for vocabulary. The second, it enriches vocabulary—a neologism, an archaism etc. The third, related word group of a language-learner can be easily made up. It is considered as even especially more effective tool when learning non-native languages. Etymological or historical approach at vocabulary acquisition could be admitted in substance although the term ‘etymology’ is being shunned.

2.2. Example: folk-etymology

A typical example of pseudo-etymology is folk-etymology. The some examples of it is as follows.

\(\) (1a) bridegroom: OE. guma(man) >> groom(<<attendant) (from obsoletism)
(1b) cockroach: Sp. cucaracha >> cock + roach (incorrect analysis from foreign language)

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(2a) ulge > ul-γe > ure >> urwe [ 을계 > 을예 > 우례 >> 우뢰(雨雷)]
(2b) chilssam >> kilssam (weaving cloth) [ 질쌈 >> 길쌈] (hyper-correction)

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(3a) akagire(あかぎれ): aka + kire [ << a(足) + kakaru(戦) ]
(3b) namida(涙)\(^1\) [ << ? na(生る) + mi(水) + deru(出) ]

\(^1\) It seems more reasonable that ’namida(< namita)’ and Thai ’náamtaa(tears)’ make cognates in a viewpoint of historical-comparative linguistic method. Thai ’náamtaa’ is compound of ’náam’(water) and ‘taa(eye)’. 

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Even though it is undoubtedly difficult and unnecessary work to verify opinions about folk-etymology itself, the operating mechanism of making up folk-etymology provides suggestive ideas. The re-constructed framework of etymology in the process of such a work is applicable to the reverse flow of deriving from prototype or source domain at the cognitive grammar. The cognitive mechanism with which language-user re-construct an etymology is similar in substance to the lexicalization in cognitive grammar about the diffusion-transition process of meaning. It is a matter of ‘time’ and ‘cognitive mechanism’. The diachronic change which language-user cannot grasp the whole process only by intuition repeats the same mechanism in the process of lexicalization in CG. Because a user’s linguistic ability in which links of cognitive relations are severed have to establish new relations (or semantic network). For example, in the case of taking ‘central park’ as an example we can assume two cases; the one whose mind ‘a park located at the center of a town’ comes into, and the other some specific park such as ‘Central Park in New York’. The meanings and concepts of each other are made up in different ways.

2.3. A semantic network of an individual is always bound to develop itself from initial stage: in a figurative sense it could be called ‘initialization’. It is similar to the phenomenon that phylogeny repeats ontogeny in biology. The accumulation of evolution of physiological brain-functions does not guarantee the development of content in the brain. Development of Intellect has not accompanied accumulation of knowledge. As applications have to be installed again at a new computer system, a semantic network or network of meanings and concepts of a specific user has to be established newly. The re-construction of etymology corresponds to such a process. Sometimes errors of analysis happen to occur: that is folk etymology. The mechanism of process is applicable to in the lexicalization in CG, too. The same cognitive mechanism is working in the processes. As etymological information is not set up in the brain of language user, information about prototype and process of lexicalization is so.

3. Lexicalization in CG and prototype

3.1. Development of cognitive science owe to neuro science and brain physiology, and cognitive grammar could make use of such results of neighboring disciplines furthermore. After the concept ‘prototype’ is shaped from the academic traditions of philosophy and psychology, it is still useful concept in the field of cognitive science. Concerning the concept ‘prototype (archetype)’ of cognitive grammar an issue could be discussed. It would be a discussion about an interpretation of mechanism of meaning change in the process of lexicalization. The first issue is that prototype has a real existence in the brain of language user, and the second is how changes originated from the source concept could spread into other users.

There is no evidence or proof of the first question. In empirical judgment language user rather re-constructs prototype by analogy for himself and re-form prototype by acquisition. A typical example is an error in an analysis (‘meta-analysis’ in old terms) at folk etymology. Even though the concept of prototype (archetype) is an available means explaining lexical-semantic network
and lexicalization as if an imaginary number is available at mathematics, there is no empirical and positive ground to believe that prototype exist really or language user cognize it a priori. Concerning lexicalization, the flow of a process between source domain (of a concept) and derived domain (of a concept) is explained as progressive direction. Practically the process of cognition is considered to show reverse direction. This is applicable to the case of prototype, too.

How are the concept of prototype and the source concept at lexicalization made up in the cognition of user? The first, it comes from the sensory experiences. In the case that a source of experience is changed, the concept of prototype itself changes, too. The prototype is not unchangeable, but variable according to environment being cognized by language user. It resembles the formation process of dialect areas. As if dialect area is divided and re-formed by language contacts, prototype concept is re-formed by influences of environments. The second is a re-construction of prototype by acquisition. It is made up or re-formed by etymological analysis as mentioned before or language learning within influences of school and mass media.

3.2. How the changes spread

With the assumption that linguistic change occurs and the result is re-formed at the level of user individual, it is evident from empirical experiences that genetic heredity or outside factor cannot intervene in the process of language acquisition and the formation of linguistic ability. New changes of a source user spread by language contacts. In contemporary times social factor of language contacts is more influential than geographical factor. In the case of young generation non-face-to-face contacts such as SNS are remarkable factors.

3.3. Structure of lexical item (lexeme)

The discussion above about prototype intends to understand lexical item and mechanism of lexicalization. A structure of lexical item could be schematized.
In the case of polysemy (and homophony), conceptual meaning01 and conceptual meaning02 are independent from each other, but polysemy does not share its grammatical and pragmatic information. It functions as a separate item. It is the practical mechanism of lexicalization that the relation of polysemy is re-constructed in the process of language acquisition of an individual. The instances at first stage of lexicalization are as below.

(4a) 바가지 [a gourd.]
(4b) 바가지를 긁다 [verb. yap. (scratch a gourd)]

(5a) しも [下, 下流]
(5b) しものせわをする

(6a) will [verb]
(6b) will [modal]

The change from (6a) to (6b) presents a process of lexicalization (exactly, grammaticalization). The process of grammaticalization is ended when (6a) become an obsolete word. Examples of (4a), (5a) is in current process of lexicalization. After the result of lexicalization, it is called as fossil remained at compounds or idioms. The relation of (a) and (b)-afterward etymological relation-is not recognized at first stage of language learning because the process of language learning starts from a clean sheet.

4. Concluding remark

A linguistic theory needs to be explanatory because it has to analyze and interpret the phenomena. The causes of linguistic changes could be explained such a way that the cognitive mechanism of language acquisition always requires initialization or reset of linguistic ability. Therefore the present aim of linguistic study needs to investigate the mechanism of language and to co-operate with other sciences. Even if linguistic ability itself is innate like intellect of human-beings, the contents are innovated and renewed all the times. The changes and diversity of languages are inevitable. Language education and language plan need to take such nature of language mechanism into consideration.

References

Abstract

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Among some controversial issues in relation to the territory of linguistics, archetype notion of lexicalization-grammaticalization in cognitive grammar and etymological method were discussed as examples of comparison. The notion of archetype (or prototype) has no empirical ground to be treated as basic notion at the categories of lexicon and grammar. It is more empirical to suppose that the schematization of conceptualization and the process of lexicalization-grammaticalization belong to different levels. The notion of archetype in the process of conceptualization is repeated at the level of lexicalization-grammaticalization: from source domain of a concept to target domain. A semantic network of an individual is always bound to develop itself from initial stage: in a figurative sense it could be called ‘initialization’.

The origin of the concept of prototype and the source concept at lexicalization are as below. The first, it comes from the sensory experiences. In the case that a source of experience is changed, the concept of prototype itself changes, too. The prototype is not unchangeable, but variable according to environment being cognized by language user. It resembles the formation process of dialect areas. As if dialect area is divided and re-formed by language contacts, prototype concept is re-formed by influences of environments. The second is a re-construction of prototype by acquisition. It is made up or re-formed by etymological analysis as mentioned before or language learning within influences of school and mass media.

The causes of linguistic changes could be explained such a way that the cognitive mechanism of language acquisition always requires initialization or reset of linguistic ability. Therefore the present aim of linguistic study needs to investigate the mechanism of language and to co-operate with other sciences.