

Possible forms of cyclic change in language contact: With examples of copula-adjective polysemy in Chinese and related languages (dialects)

Old Chinese *shì* was polysemy because it underwent poly-grammaticalization. It followed a hypothetical pronominal demonstrative > manner demonstrative > manner demonstrative verb > affirmative adjective pathway to have developed into an affirmative adjective; see (1).

(1) Affirmative adjective *shì*

Gōng jiàn qí qī yuē: “Cǐ zǐ zhī nèizǐ yē?”
 Lord see his wife say DEM you POSS wife Q

Yànzi duì yuē: “Rán, shì yě.”

Yanzi answer say yes (that’s).true SFP

‘The Lord saw his wife and said, “Is this your wife?” Yanzi said, “Yes. **(That’s) true.**” (*Yànzi Chūnqiū*, Di 24 [Yanzi’s Spring and Autumn Annals, Chapter 24]; the late 5th century BCE to the early 4th century BCE)

It also followed a hypothetical pronominal demonstrative > copula pathway to have developed into a copula; see (2).

(2) Copula *shì*

Xiāngzǐ yuē: “Cǐ bì shì Yùràng yě.”

Xiangzi say this surely COP Yurang SFP

‘Xiangzi said, “This surely **is** Yurang.”’ (*Shǐjì, Cìkè Lièzhuàn* [Shih Chi, Collected Biographies of Assassins]; ca. the first century BCE)

From Chinese of approximately the first century CE, only the affirmative adjective and the copular usages of *shì* retained, and the other usages almost all disappeared.

As a form of cyclic change, speakers of languages (dialects) in contact with Chinese adopted one of the three strategies to introduce the polysemy into their languages (dialects): (i) to use the loanwords of Chinese *shì* to function as copulas and affirmative adjectives (see (3a) and (3b)), (ii) to use their own copulas to function as affirmative adjectives (see (4a) and (4b)), (iii) to use their own adjectives meaning ‘true, correct’ to function as copulas (see (5a), (5b), and (5c)).

(3) Wuhan variety of Southwest Mandarin

a *Tsʰ35 sɿ35 ɲo42 ti0 nau42tʰou213.*
 DEM COP I POSS dad

‘This **is** my dad.’

b A: *Ni42 ɛi42xuan0 tʰa55 pə0?* B: *Sɿ35 a0.*
 you like he Q (that’s).true SFP
 ‘Do you like him?’ ‘**(That’s) true.**’

(4) Guangzhou variety of Cantonese

a *Gó dī yàhn haih ngóh ge pàhngyáuh.*
that CLF people are I POSS friend
'Those people **are** my friends.'

b A: *Léih móuh saai chín àh?* B: *Haih a.*
you not.have all money SFP (that's).true SFP
'You don't have any money?' '(That's) true.'

(5) Lianshui variety of Jianghuai Mandarin

a *pɛ²³⁴ təu⁵⁵ tɛ²³⁴⁻⁰ tʰi³⁵*
NEG correct NOMZ problem
'The (math) questions that are not **correct**'

b A: *TʰA³¹ kʰɔ²¹³⁻²¹ saŋ⁵⁵ tA⁵⁵⁻³¹ ɕia²³⁴ l⁰ pA⁰?* B: *Təu⁵⁵ A⁰.*
he take.exam up college PFV Q (that's).true SFP
'Has he passed the college entrance examination?' '(That's) true.'

c *ɿ²¹³⁻²¹ təu⁵⁵ Li³⁵ suəi²¹³⁻²¹ Tsoŋ³¹ ɕia²³⁴ ɕia²³⁴⁻⁵ sən³¹.*
I COP Lianshui Middle.school student
'I **am** a student of Lianshui Middle School.'

These strategies explain the formation of copula-adjective polysemy in these languages (dialects), and also provide insights to the possible forms that a construction may take when replaced by another synonymous construction in the background of language contact.

Keywords: *shì*; copula-adjective polysemy; cyclic change; language contact