

‘It’s good, but I’m not happy!’: Pragmaticalization of Negative Attitude from Favorable Source Lexemes

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1 Introduction*

Discourse markers (DMs) are known to develop from diverse conceptual and structural sources and perform various discourse-organizing and interpersonal functions (Koo 2018). It has also been observed in a large body of literature that DMs are typically polyfunctional (Brinton 1996, Fischer 2006). The variability of function is such that it is not unusual for a DM to perform seemingly opposite functions, e.g., agreement and emphatic negation of *kulssey* (Rhee 2015).

* I am thankful for the comments made by the JK 27 audience. This research was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2019S1A5A2A01035042), and by the research fund of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies.

This paper addresses one pair of paradigm examples of grammaticalization of opposite functions from two source lexemes of similar meanings, which presents a number of issues of theoretical import. The DMs under investigation are *twaysse* ‘(It) is OK.’ and *coha* ‘(It) is good.’ and their variants (with variable sentence-enders modulated by differential degrees of honorification and politeness), which originated from an inchoative verb *toy-* ‘become; reach a desired state’ and an adjective *coh-* ‘be good; be likable’, respectively. Morpho-syntactically, *twaysse* is a contracted form of *toy-ess-e* [become-PST-END] and *coha* is from *coh-a* [be.good-END] without change in morpho-syntactic or phonological shape.

The objectives of this paper are twofold: (i) to illustrate the usage of the DMs with negative connotation despite the favorable meanings in their lexical sources, and (ii) to discuss some select aspects that bear theoretical imports, e.g. the role of source lexemes, discursive strategies, universality of this particular DM usage, and prosody.

The data are mostly taken from a contemporary 24-million word drama and cinema corpus, a collection of 7,454 scenarios of dramas and films dating from 1992 through 2015, compiled by Min Li of Seoul National University.¹ Some examples, however, are constructed for more succinct and clearer exposition and for the interest of space.

2 DMs and the Data

2.1 DMs

The identification of a form as a DM is not always straightforward, due to diverse definitions and terminologies. In her seminal monograph, Schiffrin (1987) proposed an operational definition of DMs ‘as **sequentially dependent** elements which bracket units of talk’ (emphasis in original). In contrast to this configurational definition, Lewis (2006, 2011) proposes a more functional definition: ‘an expression that combines the semantics of discourse-relational predications with syntactic dependency on a clausal host and low informational salience’ (2011: 420). In a more concrete and analytical manner, useful as a diagnostic, Heine (2013: 1209) presents a list of defining properties of DMs as in (1):

¹ Special thanks go to Min Lee and Professor Jinho Park for kindly making this valuable resource available for research.

- (1) a. They are syntactically independent from their environment.
- b. They are typically set off prosodically from the rest of the utterance.
- c. Their meaning is non-restrictive.
- d. Their meaning is procedural rather than conceptual-propositional.
- e. They are non-compositional and as a rule short.

At the time of writing, the list of Korean DMs compiled by the author contains 177 DMs, which carry the function of ‘global’ organization in contrast with that of ‘local’ organization (Rhee 2017; cf. ‘modal elements’ for the former and ‘connectors’ for the latter, in the spirit of Vincent 2005).

2.2 The Data

The DMs under the present discussion, *twaysse* and *coha*, can signal approval or affirmation of the speaker, as shown in (2):²

- (2) Approval/Affirmation (The “Yes, it’s good” function)
 - a. (A military sergeant A asks a private B to consider him his Big-brother to forge a more intimate relationship, to which B agrees.)

A: [If you feel like treating me as your brother, just call me Big-brother.]

B: [Yes, Big-brother]

A: 됐어! 아, 기분 좋다!

twaysse! *a*, *kipwuncoh-ta*

DM INTJ feeling be.good-DEC

‘DM (Good!) Oh, it feels good.’

(1997 Drama *Kutay kuliko na*, Episode #8)
 - b. (A, in a great hurry, asks a Thai tuk-tuk-driver B to go faster.)

A: [Mr. Driver, hurry, hurry... Go faster, please.]

B: 좋아! 내가 원하던 바야.

coha ! *nay-ka wenha-te-n* *pa-y-a*.

DM I-NOM want-RETRO-ADN NOMZ-END

‘DM (Good!) That’s exactly what I’ve wanted to do.’

(2006 Drama *Kwung*, Episode #9)

² The following abbreviations are used in glossing: ADN: adnominal; BEN: benefactive; COMP: complementizer; CONC: concessive; DEC: declarative; DM: discourse marker; EMPH: emphatic; END: sentence-ender; INTJ: interjection; INTJ: interjective; NOM: nominative; NOMZ: nominalizer; PROM: promissive; PST: past; Q: question; RETRO: retrospective; and TOP: topic.

The Approval/Affirmation function exemplified above is a natural outgrowth of their lexical source meanings and thus there is nothing particularly intriguing other than the fact that they have attained the formulaic status and function as DMs. The DM *twaysse* has another function of polite refusal of an offer as in (3):

(3) Polite refusal of offer (The "That's OK" function)

A: [I can't take you to the bus terminal because of work. I'll grab a taxi for you instead.]

B: 됐어! 그냥 지하철 타고 가면 돼!

twaysse! kunyang cihachel tha-ko ka-myen tway!

DM just subway board-and go-if be.good-END

'DM (That's OK!) I can just take the subway.'

(2007 Drama *Kangnam emma ttalacapki*, Episode #15)

However, a strategic use of the two DMs in discourse pushes them to a vastly different function of marking the discontent of the speaker, which is the primary function in contemporary Korean, as in (4) and (5):

(4) Discontent (The "I don't like it" function)

a. Wife: [Shall we go to the movies together tomorrow night?]

Husband: [I'm busy tomorrow. Let's go next week.]

Wife: 됐어. 안 가도 돼.

twaysse an ka-to.toy-e.

DM not go-may-END

'DM (Never mind!). (We) don't have to go.' (Constructed)

b. (Father and daughter; father unhappy because his daughter refuses to go to a blind-date for an arranged marriage, is trying to persuade her.)

Daughter: [Didn't I tell you I'm not interested in doing such things!]

Father: [All I do is only for the good on your part.]

Daughter: 됐어 아빠가 괜한 짓 안 해도 나 잘 돼.

twaysse appa-ka kwaynhan cis an ha-yo

DM dad-NOM useless ac t not do-CONC

na caltoy-e

I do.well-END

'DM (Never mind!) Even if you don't do (such) a useless thing (for me), I do well.'

(2007 Drama *Kaywa nuktayuy sikan* Episode #5)

(5) Discontent (The “I don’t like it” function)

a. Mother: [Why are you going out to play when the SAT is just next week?]

Son: [I know, mom, but I have an appointment with my friends.]

Mother: 좋아. 네 맘대로 해.

coha ney mam-taylo ha-y.

DM your heart-according.to do-END

‘DM (Never mind!). Do as you like.’ (Constructed)

b. (A’s son runs a fever and A wants to leave early from work but A’s supervisor, B, is unwilling to let her do so and threatens A even suggesting that B quit her job.)

A: [So you are afraid of losing your job!]

B: [Hey, you! I am quitting, OK?]

A: [(speechless)]

B: [You’ve been mean and nasty these past several days, driving me crazy.. (cleans up her desk)]

니 인생에서 꺼져 달라 이거지? 좋아! 바람과 함께 꺼져줄게.

ni insaying-eyse kkecy-etala i ke-ci?

your life-from disappear-BEN this thing-END

coha palam-kwa hamkkey kkecy-ecwu-lkey

DM wind-with together disappear-BEN-PROM

‘What you mean is that you are asking me I should be out of your life, isn’t it? DM (Alright!) I will be gone with the wind.’

(2009 Drama *Kongcwuka tolawassta*, Episode #10)

Evidently, the discontent-marking function exemplified in (4) and (5) is the outcome of sarcasm or ironic usage, whereby the speaker presents a positive evaluation *prima facie* (i.e., the utterance with the literal meaning ‘It’s good’) that, in fact, contradicts her truthful negative evaluation of the state of affairs. Thus, the DMs in this function are the signals of disapproval in disguise of approval. This usage is strongly associated with the speaker’s resignation, but a functional twist is that the utterance of resignation is directed to the addressee as a means of signaling the negative stance so that the addressee can make amendment, e.g., changing the mind and accepting the proposal of going to the movies in (4a) or staying home to study in preparation for an important test in (5a). Thus, the seeming resignation is, in fact, loaded with a protest and a demand for a redressive action.³

The function of the DM *coha* is further extended to signal tentative acceptance of the state of affairs or the interlocutor’s assertion, especially in

³ The DM *twaysksetun*, a variant of *twaysse*, is one specialized in signaling the discontent and irritation in contemporary Korean.

argumentative contexts. The tentativeness associated with the DM *coha* is to such an extent that it strongly signals the speaker's unwillingness to accept the interlocutor's assertion. In this respect, 'tentative acceptance' is strategic only to earn time to refute the interlocutor's assertion and further to persuade him or her. Thus, the DM signals temporary suspension of the validity of the addressee's assertion or acceptance of the state of affairs, as illustrated by (6) and (7):

(6) Suspension (The "Wait a minute!" function)

Man: [You say we should not increase the general welfare spending. But just think of those who live in extreme poverty. Aren't they also entitled to a happy life? You're so self-centered.]

Woman: 좋아. 근데 그 돈은 어디 있냐?

coha *kuntey* *ku* *ton-un* *eti* *iss-nya*
DM but that money-TOP where exist-Q

'DM (OK). But where's the budget (for it)?' (Constructed)

(7) Suspension (The "Wait a minute!" function)

(A is the CEO of a movie production company and B is a director. Since B's reckless elopement with a girl disrupted an on-going movie filming and caused its cancelation. Upon returning, B says to A that he wants to continue his movie production, while A still holds grudge against him and remains unresponsive to his plea.)

A: [Why on earth are you telling me about what you want to do?]

B: [Because you have to help me [...] I will do all I can. If things don't work even after I tried my best, then I have to accept the reality, but I think it would be foolish to give up just because of a rumor about me.]

A: [A rumor? That's not a rumor, is it?]

B: (looking) 그래, 좋아. 근데 누가 뭐래도 일은 일이구 사적인 문제는 사적인 문제잖아.

kulay *coha* *kuntey* *nwu-ka* *mwe-lay-to*
yes DM but someone-NOM what-COMP-CONC
il-un *il-i-kwu* *saceki-n* *mwuncey-nun*
business-TOP business-be-and private-ADN problem-TOP
saceki-n *mwuncey-canh-a*
private-ADN problem-EMPH-END

'Yes, DM (OK), whatever people may say, business is business and private life is private life, isn't it?'

(2006 Drama *Nen enu pyeleyse wassni*, Episode #14)

As is obvious, the woman in (6) is not in agreement with the man's position about welfare expansion or the claim that she is egoistic, but utters the DM

coha whose literal interpretation is affirmative, “It’s good.” Its use is an instance of discursive strategy to maintain the addressee’s engagement in the interaction by making herself seem amenable, albeit momentarily, but her intention is to withhold the development of the addressee’s argument then and there so that she can fight back making reference to the non-availability of the required budget.

Similarly, in (7) the speaker B says *coha* to A even though he does not fully agree with A’s evaluation and cannot accept the challenge about his previous act. The motivation of B saying so is not to be involved in a discussion of his act but to stick to his intention of persuading A about continuation of his film directing business. The robustness of the disagreement function of the DM is such that there is no possibility for the interlocutor to interpret it as otherwise. The DMs in this function is typically followed by the adversative connective *kuntey* ‘but’ as a signal of an upcoming counter-argument.

3 Discussion

The development briefly sketched above presents a number of theoretically intriguing issues. Among them, we will discuss the role of source lexemes, discursive strategies, universality, and prosody.

3.1 Source lexemes

Semantics of the source lexeme has been thought to be the primary determinant of the DM function (Rhee 2017, 2019b). This observation has been made with respect to grammaticalization in general in Bybee et al. (1994), in the form of the Source Determination Hypothesis, which states that the developmental course and the final product of a grammaticalizing form largely depend on the source meaning of the form. Similarly, in her discussion of the hypothesized correlation between peripheral positions and the subjectivity/intersubjectivity, Traugott (2014) states that the contrast of subjectivity vs. intersubjectivity of a grammaticalized form’s function is influenced to a much greater extent by the original semantics of the form than its occurrence in the left- vs. right-peripheral positions.

In this regard, the functions displayed by the DMs under the present focus constitute peculiar cases in grammaticalization studies, since the current analysis shows that variability can be truly extensive, i.e., to the point of becoming one of antonymic function. This strongly points to the fact that grammaticalization pathways, though strongly exhibiting directionality, are never deterministic. This is in line with the point made by Hopper and Traugott (2003[1993]: 211), who state, with respect to the unidirectionality,

the developmental trait commonly recognized as the defining characteristic of grammaticalization, that the continua of grammaticalization are not exceptionless. Indeed, this state of affairs supports the claim of the powerful working of pragmatic inferences in the course of meaning negotiation in discourse, the cumulative effect of which brings forth grammaticalization (Rhee 2019a, Rhee & Koo 2019).

3.2 Discursive strategies

Another issue concerns discursive strategies that play crucial roles in grammaticalization (Koo 2007, Rhee 2016, 2018). As elaborated above, the surface representation may contradict the intention of the speaker. Such a development is the outcome of intricate interaction of rhetorical and discursive strategies, whereby pragmatically inferred meaning becomes entrenched through repetition and as a result constitutes an integral part of the functions of the form.

For instance, when the speaker's evaluation about the discourse situation, especially the content of the utterances spoken by the discourse interlocutors, is not positive, the speaker may say a linguistic form whose default meaning, i.e., one based on the literal meaning, is positive, i.e. 'It's good!' This strategic utterance, as we have seen above, is a device to sarcastically signal the speaker's discontent (and thus a demand for an redressive action) or to withhold the current speaker's utterance without explicitly signaling the negative attitude in order to secure the interlocutor's attention to the soon-to-follow counter-argument.

In sum, the DMs *twaysse* and *coha* exhibit intricate discursive mechanisms that operate in their development, including pragmatic inferences, rhetoric, and (inter)subjectification.

3.3 Universality

Still another issue concerns the (potential) universality across languages. It appears that there is a universal component with respect to this developmental pattern. There are many instances of a similar kind in terms of the source characteristics, i.e. the DMs developed from the lexemes that encode 'good' meanings, widely attested across languages. The following are some of the DMs that have been addressed in literature or from personal communication, shown in (8):

- (8) English DMs: *well, good, OK, That's OK, fine* (cf. Watts 1989, Jucker 1993, Schourup 2001, Müller 2004, Defour 2007, Cuenca 2008, Gaines 2011, Rhee 2019c)
- Japanese DM: *mō ī* (DK Kim, p.c.)
- Chinese DM: *hǎo* (JH Kim, p.c.)
- Spanish DMs: *muy bien, bueno* (cf. Blas Arroyo 2011, Cuenca & Marin 2009)
- Catalan DM: *bueno, bien* (cf. Cuenca 2008, Cuenca & Marin 2009)
- Puerto Rican Spanish DM: *bien* (cf. Cuenca 2008, Brown & Cortes-Torres 2013)
- Xhosa English DM: *well* (cf. de Klerk 2005)
- Polish interjection (DM): *no* (Kryk 1992)

It has been observed that many instances of the DMs that originated from the ‘good’ semantics are in fact used for ‘bad’ meaning. This is not entirely unexpected, considering that DMs are typically polyfunctional. In English, for instance, the DMs *well, good, OK*, and *fine*, all originating from the lexical meaning of ‘goodness’ is now functioning as markers of a range of negative attitude, i.e., *well* as a preface to dispreferred information, *good, OK* and *fine* as markers of resignation or of feigned acceptance before presenting a counter-argument (cf. further, *OK* and *It's OK* also have the acceptance and non-acceptance contrast).

Likewise, the Japanese DM *mō ī*, originating from *ī* ‘be good’, signals the speaker’s cynical, negative attitude in the form of a ‘goodness’ meaning (DK Kim, p.c.). The Chinese DM *hǎo*, originated from *hǎo* ‘good’, has the parallel usage (JH Kim, p.c.). A few other languages also seem to have this ‘bad’-meaning DM functions originating from ‘good’-form lexemes, in similar argumentative contexts. An elaboration on individual cases, however, should await more in-depth research in the future.

3.4 Prosody

Generally speaking, the signal interpretation in vis-à-vis communication strongly depends on the prosodic features of linguistic forms. It has been observed in literature that among the multiple determinants of DM functions, prosody surfaces among the most important factors (Park & Sohn 2002, Sohn & Kim 2014, Kim & Sohn 2015, Rhee 2017).

Prosodic differences are closely correlated with the functional differences of the DMs under the present investigation. Indeed, the ‘approval’ function prosody is of normal speed with normal declarative falling intonation; the ‘discontent’ function prosody is of longer duration with often elongated termination or of fluctuating LHL intonation (typical of tones of sarcasm);

and the ‘suspension’ function is usually of faster speed (thus shorter duration) with the final level-intonation suggesting the non-terminal nature of the utterance or followed by a very short pause, for the upcoming counter-argument.

4 Summary and Conclusion

In the foregoing, we have seen that the DMs *twaysse* ‘(It) is OK.’ and *coha* ‘(It) is good.’ and their variants display a wide spectrum of discourse functions. These DMs have seemingly contradictory functions of Approval/Affirmation, Polite Refusal, Discontent, and Suspension functions. The development has gone through the path that can be diagrammatically presented as in (9):

- (9) "It is good."
 > "I am good; don't bother."
 > "I am good without you; read my mind."
 > "It's good, but hold on. There's more to come."

Since the developmental pattern sketched in (9) is largely inferential, the diverse functions can be said to have emerged from the pragmatic inferences from use contexts. We also noted that the DMs have differential functions with characteristic prosody, in confirmation of previous research that prosody is one of the crucial factors in determining discourse functions of DMs.

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