Nominalization and Grammatical Complexity in Tibeto-Burman and Beyond

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Abstract

In this talk I will discuss some grammaticalization chains that begin with the emergence of nominalizing morphemes from the heads of verb-noun compounds. Once such nominals have grammaticalized as functional morphemes, they are observed to participate in a diverse range of derivational and syntactic uses in Tibeto-Burman languages, including nominal derivation, relativization, genitivization, tense/mood marking, clause chaining, subordination and coordination. Cross-linguistic correlations with other languages of Eurasia and South America suggest that there is a cognitive basis for the grammaticalization of syntactic complexity via nominalizing structures. These diachronic developments will be demonstrated with representative data from Tibeto-Burman languages, supplemented by parallel examples from other languages of Eurasia and South America.