1. Abstract (292 words):

Japanese ka-marked clause expanded from polar interrogatives to wh-interrogatives around the Muromachi to the Edo Period (Takamiya 2005:17; Kinuhata and Iwata 2010:11). Before and after the change, the syntactic role of the wh-feature did not change. By analyzing this change as a semantic reanalysis in the set-creation process (i.e., a single proposition became reanalyzed as a singleton set of propositions), this paper, as a case-study of diachronic formal semantics (Eckardt 2006; Deo 2015), answers the question as to how the semantic change shows similar/different properties to the typical syntactic change discussed in diachronic syntax (Lightfoot 1979, 2006; Roberts 2007).

First, this change is involved with a domino-effect frequently observed in the syntactic change. Right before the advent of the ka-marked wh-interrogative, it is reported that the ka-marked clause started being used as an embedded polar interrogative and a disjunct construction. This study proposes that these preceding changes are responsible for the reanalysis of a set-creation process, triggering a domino-effect (Lightfoot 1979; Roberts 2007).

Second, this change is not a parametric change (Roberts 2007). This is just a construction specific change; i.e., one cannot assume a particular parameter in a language as to whether that language can exploit the wh-interrogative. The change is, rather, considered to be an abduction from a proposition to a singleton set of propositions (cf. the alternative/partition semantics, Hamblin 1973; Groenendijk and Stokhof 1984), because of the strong ambiguity of polar interrogatives (Roberts 2007:133). This fits well with the recent view of Lightfoot (2016) in that a change is hypothesized to appear in a new generation when they discover/accept a pattern as long as the pattern is coherent to the language system that they have. The study suggests that the basic syntactic/semantic learning mechanism/changes are driven by similar principles.

2. Presentation summary (45 words):

This is a case-study of diachronic formal semantics (Eckardt 2006; Deo 2015). By examining a semantic change of the ka-marked clause in Japanese, this study answers the question as to how the semantic change shows similar/different properties to the typical syntactic change discussed in previous studies of diachronic syntax.

3. References


