Constructions out of Constructions:
A Case Study of choe3-chit8-e7 and chit8-e7-ku2 Constructions in Taiwanese Southern Min
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This paper explores two intriguing types of constructions which ‘grow out of’ existing constructions as realized in choe3-chit8-e7 and chit8-e7-ku2 in Taiwanese Southern Min (TSM). As Lien (2007) and Li and Wang (2003) so insightfully observed, in addition to the typical semantic and grammatical properties of the combination of a numeral plus a verbal classifier, chit8-e7 ‘(lit.) one-time’ has formed a frozen expression with new semantic and pragmatic functions. However, a close survey of chit8-e7 in the database of Modern TSM1 reveals that there are in fact new frozen expressions extended from, or ‘grew out of’ the construction chit8-e7. One of the new expressions is choe3-chit8-e7 ‘(lit.) do-one-time’. Instead of the compositional meaning of ‘do (something) for one time’, choe3-chit8-e7 depicts an event being performed by a group, roughly translated as ‘all together’. Thus the syntactic subject is restricted to plural, which is not a constraint of chit8-e7. Moreover, distinct from chit8-e7 modifying the verb phrase, choe3-chit8-e7 is like a sentential adverb, as (1) illustrates.

(1) chiong3 huat4-kuann1 choe3-chit8-e7 kin2-tiunn7 khi-lai
all judge all-together nervous up
‘The judges got nervous all together.’

Another construction is chit8-e7-ku2 ‘(lit.) one-time-long time’. When chit8-e7 combines with the adjective ku2 ‘a long time’, the extended expression means ‘after a long time.’ In addition to the new semantic property, pragmatically, it functions as a discourse marker, introducing a subsequent event, as illustrated in (2):

(2) a chit4-e5 hoonn2-ki5 e lang5 chit8-chhu3 kue3 chit8-chhu3 a sit4-bong7 ji5 kui1 a
chit-8-e7-ku2 le	to7 lai5 hong3-khi3 a lai5 pang3-be7-ki7 a
PART this curious DE person once pass once PART disappont and return PART
for-a-long-time PART and come give-up PART come forget-it PART
‘This curious person went by again and again, but returned home, disappointed.
After a long time, (he) forgot all about it.’

To sum up, choe3-chit8-e7 and chit8-e7-ku2 are two instances of form and meaning pairings which are extended from an existing frozen expression. That is, a construction may take in additional elements, and forms a new construction, in which non-compositional semantic content and/or new pragmatic significance further evolve. This paper adopts the view of Construction Grammar and explores the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic properties and constraints of such constructions by the case study of choe3-chit8-e7 and chit8-e7-ku2 in Taiwanese Southern Min.

References:

1 The database is Minnan yu zilioku (Taiwan Southern Min Database), built by the Graduate Institute of Linguistics, National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan.