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From a noun to a discourse marker: The case of *seysang* ‘world’ in Korean

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Abstract

This study delves into the semantic evolution of the Korean lexeme *seysang*. Despite its rich functional development, *seysang* has received limited attention in grammaticalization research. This study addresses this gap by exploring its extended meanings and functional shifts in Korean. It aims to trace the transformation of *seysang* from a historical noun to its role as a contemporary discourse marker (DM) which conveys a range of pragmatic meanings, marking the speaker’s emotions and stances. Using historical and contemporary corpora, including data spanning from the 15th century to modern media, this paper qualitatively analyzes the grammaticalization process of *seysang* while quantitatively examining the discourse functions of *seysangey*. The analysis particularly focuses on *seysangey*’s positional flexibility within Left Periphery (LP), Right Periphery (RP), and stand-alone positions, and its preference in positive, negative, and neutral contexts. This study further investigates whether *seysangey*’s LP and RP functions align with previous research, which associates LP with subjectification and RP with intersubjectification. The analyses indicate that *seysangey* exhibits both subjectification and intersubjectification across LP, RP, and stand-alone positions. Findings reveal that *seysang* has expanded to signify broader social spaces, from birth-to-death spans and societal environments beyond enclosed communities to symbolic meanings of people’s hearts and the earthly realm. It also functions adverbially as ‘very’ (degree modifier) and ‘at all’ (negative polarity item). In Contemporary Korean, *seysangey* operates as a flexible DM marking subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and speaker stance, providing insight into the complexities of language evolution and external influences shaping the Korean lexicon and grammar.

Keywords: *grammaticalization, subjectification, intersubjectification, stance marking, seysang, seysangey*

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От существительного к дискурсивному маркеру: *seysang* ‘мир’ в корейском языке

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Аннотация

Данная работа посвящена исследованию семантической эволюции корейской лексемы *seysang*, которая, несмотря на развитие новых функций, получила ограниченное внимание в исследованиях по грамматикализации. Настоящее исследование устраняет этот пробел и изучает расширенные значения существительного *seysang* и функциональные сдвиги в корейском языке. Оно прослеживает трансформацию *seysang* от существительного в дискурсивный маркер (ДМ), который передает ряд прагматических значений, указывающих на эмоции и позицию говорящего. Используя исторические и современные корпуса, включающие данные с 15 века до наших дней, эта статья качественно анализирует процесс грамматикализации *seysang* и одновременно количественно исследует дискурсивные функции *seysangeu*. Особое внимание уделяется позиционной гибкости лексемы *seysangeu* в пределах левой периферии (ЛП), правой периферии (ПП) и отдельных позиций, а также ее предпочтению в положительных, отрицательных и нейтральных контекстах. В исследовании также ставится вопрос о том, совпадают ли выявленные функции ЛП и ПП с результатами предыдущих исследований, которые связывают ЛП с субъективацией, а ПП с интерсубъективацией. Анализ свидетельствует о том, что *seysangeu* демонстрирует как субъективацию, так и интерсубъективацию в ЛП, ПП и отдельных позициях. Результаты показывают, что лексема *seysangeu* расширила свое значение и обозначает более широкое социальное пространство, включая и эмоциональное. Она также функционирует в качестве наречий «очень» (модификатор степени) и «совсем» (отрицательная полярность). В современном корейском языке *seysangeu* употребляется как гибкий ДМ, указывающий на субъективность, интерсубъективность и позицию говорящего и демонстрирующий сложность эволюции языка и влияние внешних факторов на корейский лексикон и грамматику.

Ключевые слова: грамматикализация, субъективация, интерсубъективация, маркировка позиции, *seysang*, *seysangeu*

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1. Introduction

Korea has historically engaged in extensive interactions with China due to geopolitical and cultural dynamics. This enduring relationship is evident in the significant proportion of Korean vocabulary that originates from Chinese (Narrog & Rhee 2013, Rhee 2020, 2021). Norman (1988) provides a comprehensive overview of the Chinese language, including its history, structure, and dialects, highlighting the role of written texts in the spread of Chinese vocabulary to neighboring languages such as Korean. According to Rhee (2021), based on

findings by Sohn (1999: 87) and Kim (2002), approximately 60% of Korean vocabulary is of Chinese origin (Sohn 1999: 87), and in the authoritative dictionary *Phyocwun Kwuke Taysacen* (1992) by the National Institute of the Korean Language, 57.3% of its headwords are of Chinese origin (W.Y Lee 2002). Rhee (2021) further states that quantitative studies reveal a much lower percentage of Sino-Korean words used in daily life. For instance, Kim (2005) shows that only 19% of the top 100 high-frequency words are Sino-Korean. Similarly, the proportion of discourse markers derived from Sino-Korean words is very low, at 14.4% (27 out of about 188), though the exact number of discourse markers is not definitive. It is well recognized that some Chinese-origin words serve as discourse markers in various Asian languages (e.g., Rhee et al. 2021).

Sohn (1999) delves into the influence of Chinese on Korean, particularly through the borrowing of Chinese vocabulary in written form and addresses the differences between Sino-Korean vocabulary and native Korean words, highlighting how these influences have shaped modern Korean. The extensive borrowing of Chinese vocabulary into Korean primarily occurred through written texts, which differs from typical cases of lexical borrowing through colloquial registers (Norman 1988, Sohn 1999, Narrog et al. 2018, Irwin & Zisk 2019). Narrog et al. (2018) discuss the process of grammaticalization in various Asian languages, including Korean, and highlight instances where written Chinese influenced the grammatical structures of Korean, leading to the development of new grammatical elements. They emphasize how written Chinese texts facilitated the grammaticalization process, resulting in the adoption of new adverbials, numeral classifiers, and deverbal postpositions in Korean (Narrog et al. 2018). According to Rhee (2020) and Eom & Rhee (2021), the development of a discourse marker (DM) from a Sino-Korean phrasal expression is unique (see Shibasaki (2021), and Higashiizumi & Takahashi (2021) for similar cases in Japanese). Irwin and Zisk (2019) explore the borrowing of Chinese vocabulary into Korean and Japanese, focusing on how written Chinese texts served as a primary medium for these borrowings and examining the subsequent grammaticalization of some of these borrowed terms.

Recent studies (Rhee et al. 2021, Higashiizumi & Shibasaki in preparation), and this special issue volume focus on Chinese-origin words used in Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai and Chinese, exploring theoretically significant issues related to language contact. One notable example is the Korean lexeme *seysang* (世上) meaning ‘the world,’ which is of Chinese origin. A historical survey shows that the first appearance of *seysang* is attested in the 15th century, meaning ‘the world people live in.’ While *seysang* primarily translates to ‘the world,’ its semantic journey through the centuries has seen it adopt various meanings and functions, including its use as a discourse marker (DM) in the formation *seysangey* (‘in the world’), which combines *seysang* with the locative particle *-ey*, in contemporary Korean. Despite these intriguing transformations, including shifts from concrete to

abstract meanings and grammatical functions, the development of *seysang* has not received sufficient scholarly attention.

This study addresses this research gap by examining the grammaticalization process of *seysang*, from a noun meaning ‘the world’ to the discourse marker *seysangey*. Using historical and contemporary corpora, this study explores how *seysang* has expanded to convey a range of pragmatic meanings, marking speaker emotions and stances. The goal is to trace these transformations and understand their implications within the broader framework of Korean language evolution. It aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How has *seysang* evolved from a concrete noun to a discourse marker in contemporary Korean?
2. What are the specific pragmatic meanings and speaker stances conveyed by *seysangey* in discourse?
3. How does the grammaticalization of *seysang* reflect broader patterns in Korean language change?

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical framework, Section 3 describes the data and methods, Section 4 provides data analysis and answers to the research questions, Section 5 discusses the findings, and Section 6 concludes the study.

2. Theoretical framework

Grammaticalization refers to “a process that transforms lexemes into grammatical elements and further increases the grammatical nature of these elements” (Kuryłowicz 1965, Lehmann 2015[1995]). This process typically involves a transition from concrete to abstract meanings and from independent lexical items to dependent grammatical elements. For instance, a noun or verb may evolve into a preposition, conjunction, or auxiliary verb over time. Heine and Kuteva (2002) describe grammaticalization as a unidirectional process in which content words (like nouns and verbs) gradually become function words (like prepositions and conjunctions), often resulting in the reduction of phonetic substance and an increase in frequency of use. The evolution of *seysang* serves as a clear example of this linguistic phenomenon, illustrating how a term denoting ‘the world’ has transitioned into various grammatical forms.

Previous studies have examined the asymmetry in the peripheral functions of linguistic forms, suggesting that left-periphery (LP) functions are generally linked to subjective roles, while right-periphery (RP) functions are associated with intersubjective roles (Adamson 2000, Onodera 2007, Degand 2014, Traugott 2014, Beeching & Detges 2014, Onodera & Traugott 2016). This study applies these hypotheses to analyze *seysangey* in Present-Day Korean.

3. Data and methods

The research combines a historical review of linguistic data from classical and Modern Korean texts with an analysis of contemporary usage in media and

literature. Two corpora are utilized as data sources. Historical data comes from a 15-million-word historical corpus, part of the larger 21st Century Sejong Corpus developed by the Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism, spanning from the 15th century to the early 20th century. Contemporary Korean data is drawn from a 24-million-word Drama & Movies Corpus, developed by Min Li of Tsinghua University, comprising 7,454 scripts from films, TV dramas, and sitcoms created between 1992 and 2015. The search engine UNICONC, used to analyze both corpora, was created by Jinho Park of Seoul National University¹.

The methodology involves several key steps:

- Data collection: Gathering relevant texts from the historical and contemporary corpora to track the usage of *seysang* and its grammatical forms.
- Data analysis: Using qualitative methods to examine the contexts and semantic shifts of *seysang* in historical texts, and quantitative methods to analyze frequency and distribution in contemporary usage.
- Comparative analysis: Comparing the findings from historical and contemporary data to identify patterns of grammaticalization and the factors influencing these changes.
- Theoretical integration: Integrating the results with existing theories of grammaticalization to draw broader conclusions about the linguistic processes involved.

This study follows the periodization proposed by K. M Lee (2006[1961]) in *Kwukesakaysel* (An Outline of the History of the Korean):

- Old Korean (OK; before 918):
Use of early Chinese character borrowing systems in inscriptions and texts from the Three Kingdoms and Unified Silla periods².
- Early Middle Korean (EMK; 918~1445):
Linguistic features observed in documents and records from the Goryeo Dynasty, including the development of Chinese character borrowing systems.
- Late Middle Korean (LMK; 1446~1600):

¹ I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the developers of the corpora and the search program for their generosity in allowing their use for academic research.

² Korea's major historical periods are as follows:

- Gojoseon: circa 2333 BCE–108 BCE
- Three Kingdoms Period:
 - Goguryeo: 37 BCE–668 CE
 - Baekje: 18 BCE–660 CE
 - Silla: 57 BCE–935 CE (Unified Silla from 668 CE)
- Unified Silla: 668 CE–935 CE
- Goryeo Dynasty: 918 CE–1392 CE, and
- Joseon Dynasty: 1392 CE–1897 CE

Written and grammatical systems found in texts after the creation (1443) and promulgation (1446) of Hangul, the Korean writing system.

- Early Modern Korean (EMoK; 1601~1893):
Standardized Korean language usage and foreign word incorporation evident in late Joseon Dynasty literature
- Modern Korean (MoK; 1894~present):
Changes in vocabulary and grammar observed in documents from the post-Enlightenment period to present-day newspapers and magazines.
- Present-Day Korean (PDK; 2000~present; PDK is a component of MoK):
Emergence of new vocabulary and expressions in the internet and digital media since the early 21st century.

Romanization adheres to the Extended Yale System (Rhee 1996). Consistent with Korean historical linguistics conventions, Chinese characters in historical data are represented in capital letters using Modern Korean pronunciation. For simplicity in typography, old Korean characters are shown in a simplified form.

The study's methodology is both qualitative and quantitative. This study also examines the discourse marker *seysangey* in Present-Day Korean, focusing on its use in left-periphery (LP), right-periphery (RP), and stand-alone positions. Drawing from the Min Li Drama & Movies Corpus, we analyze contexts (positive, negative, and neutral) in which *seysangey* is used, exploring its pragmatic functions and distribution across different sentence positions. The qualitative descriptive approach is rooted in the theory of grammaticalization, which elucidates how lexical items transform into grammatical elements, providing a framework for understanding the historical development of grammatical structures. The quantitative aspect involves the analysis of frequency and usage patterns.

4. Analysis and results

As mentioned in Section 1, the noun *seysang* (世上) is composed of two Chinese lexemes. *Sey* (世) means 'human being,' and *sang* (上) means 'top.' The primary meaning of *seysang* is 'the world or the society people live in.' Initially used to denote 'the physical world,' *seysang* appeared in various philosophical and historical texts where it connoted a sense of space and existence. Over the centuries, its usage expanded to incorporate more abstract notions, reflecting changes in society and philosophy. In the following subsections, the examples are excerpted from the Sejong Historical Corpus and contemporary corpus, Min Li's Drama & Movies Corpus to illustrate the evolution of *seysang* from a noun to a discourse marker.

4.1. *Seysang* in Late Middle Korean

When *seysang* appeared in Korean in the 15th century, it was used as a full-fledged noun, with examples marked by possessive, locative, and topic

markers. In the 16th century, examples with accusative markers were also found. *Twusienhay* is a book that translates the works of Du Fu (杜甫), a poet from the Tang Dynasty in China (618~907). This translation was commissioned by royal decree during the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1897). The first edition was published as a printed book during the reign of King Seongjong (1481), and the reprinted edition was published during the reign of King Injo (1632). Examples (1) & (2) are taken from this book. *Seysang*'s semantic function was predominantly to denote 'the world people live in,' as shown in (1):

- (1) **世上**엿 길히 비록 해 어즈러우나
SEYSANG-ays kil-hi pilok hay eculewu-na
 the world-GEN path-NOM nevertheless very chaotic-CONN
 내의 사람도 또한 가지 잇나나라
 nay-uy salom-to stohAn kAzi isnAnila
 I-Gen living-also also end-NOM exit-DEC
 'Although the way of the world is very chaotic, my life also has an end.'
 (1481 *Twusienhay* 10:3b)

In example (1), the word *seysang* as a noun is employed with a genitive marker and modifies the noun *kil* 'way.' It denotes 'the world we live in,' which is the primary meaning of *seysang*.

- (2) **世上**애 그딴가티 가난하니 잇디 아니하니라
SEYSANG-ay kutuy-kAthi kananhAn-i is-ti ani.hA-nila
 the.world-LOC you-like poor.person exist-COMP not.do.-DEC
 'In the world, there is no poor person like you.'
 (1481 *Twusienhay* 16:27b)

In example (2), *seysang* was used with a locative *ay* (-ey in Modern Korean), indicating 'in the world we live in' as well.

4.2 *Seysang* in Early Modern Korean to Modern Korean

The transition from Early Modern Korean to Modern Korean marked significant changes in the usage of *seysang*. It began to appear as *seysangey*, a discourse marker used for emphasis and emotional expression in everyday conversation. This transformation is indicative of the lexeme's grammaticalization process.

4.2.1. Nominal form with nominal function

In Early Modern Korean, *seysang* primarily functioned as a noun, denoting the world or society people live in. Over time, its usage expanded to encompass various abstract and metaphorical meanings, reflecting broader societal and philosophical changes.

- (3) 어진 덕을 닦가 한가한 대 나아갓다가
 ecin tel-ul taska hAnkahAn tAi naakas-taka
 righteous virtue-ACC cultivate leisurely time move.forward-CONN
 일천 해만의 세상을 바라 가 신선의
 ilchyen hayman-uy **syeyasyang**-ul pAli-e ka sinsyen-uy
 one.thousand year.just-GEN the world-ACC abandon-CONN go immortal-LOC
 올라 더 흰구름을 타 하늘의 나라면
 olla tye huykwulom-ul tha hanAl-uy nil-Amyem
 ascend that white.cloud-ACC ride sky-LOC reach-COND
 ‘[...] then, having cultivated virtuous deeds and during a tranquil time, if one wishes to abandon the world of a thousand years and become an immortal riding on white clouds, [...]’

(1832 *Sipkwusalyakenhay*: text 26)

The sentence in example (3) is an excerpted example from *Sipkwusalyakenhay*. This book provides Korean annotations and commentary on the first volume of *Sipkwusalyakthongko* compiled by the scholar Yeojin from the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). The book includes translated text for each chapter, but there is no preface or colophon, so the translator is unknown. Several versions of the book are available, but the edition published in 1832 by the Gyeongsang Provincial Office (Daegu) is noteworthy for its relevance to dialectology according to *Dialectology Dictionary* (2003). Here in (3), *seysang* is used to denote the span of a person’s life, specifically referencing the total duration of their earthly existence, which is contrasted with the pursuit of immortality. This shows *seysang* as referring to the entire human life cycle.

Next, the example (4) is taken from *Cywunyenchemlyeykwangik*, which is a spiritual and moral cultivation book published in 1865 by Berneux, the fourth Apostolic Vicar of the Joseon Diocese. It was created to aid Korean Catholic believers in their spiritual and moral development.

- (4) 나 보시고 명하샤 주교와 교종끼
 na po-isi-ko myeonghA-si-ya cywukyo-wa kyocong-kkuy
 I see-HON-CONN command-HON-CONN bishop-and monks-together
 품하야 온 세상 사람을 위하야 이 첨례와
 phwumhA-ya on **syeyasyang** salAm-ul wihAya i chyemlyey-wa
 hold-CONN whole the.world people-ACC for.the.sake.of this feast-and
 ‘Seeing me and commanding, the bishop and the monks joined together to hold this ceremony for all the people in the world.’

(1865 *Cywunyenchemlyeykwangik*: text 74)

In example (4), *syeyasyang* “세상” is an orthographic variant of *seysang* “세상.” In this context, *seysang* refers to the general secular society, as perceived from the perspective of the religious community, rather than the entire world where all

people live. Therefore, *seysang* in this sentence corresponds to the outside society. This usage shows how *seysang* can denote a broader societal context.

Examples (5) through (8) are taken from *Sinhakwelpo*, which is a theological magazine first published in December 1900 by missionary G. H. Jones, while stationed in Jemulpo. The magazine was published until 1904, then temporarily ceased before resuming publication in 1907, continuing until the fall of 1909.

- (5) 거룩하신 턴당보좌를 떠나사 더러운 세상에
kelukhA-si-n thyentangpocwa-ul stena-sa teleo-n **seysang-ey**
holy-HON-ADN heaven.throne-ACC leave-HON unclean-ADN the.world-LOC
오서서
o.se-se
come.HON-CONN
‘[Jesus] left the holy heaven throne, came to the unclean earthly world, and’
(1902 *Sinhakwelpo* 2:573)

In example (5), the word *seysang* refers to ‘the earthly world’ in contrast to ‘the heavenly world.’ Here, *seysang* is used to describe the “unclean earthly world” as opposed to the “holy heaven throne” that Jesus left. This usage highlights the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, emphasizing the contrast between the heavenly and earthly realms.

- (6) 복음을 전파하였스면 이거시 참 우리의 깃분
pokum-ul cenphaha-yessu-myen ikes-i cham wuli-uy kispwu-n
gospel-ACC evangelize-PST-if it-NOM really we-GEN happy-ADN
세상이 될지라
seysang-i toy-l-cila
the.world-NOM become-FUT-DEC
‘If the gospel is evangelized, it will be really the happy world.’
(1903 *Sinhakwelpo* 3:476)

Seysang in example (6) is part of the phrase “깃분 세상,” which literally translates to “happy world.” In this context, *seysang* is not merely referring to the physical world but is associated with the emotional or mental state of the people. The phrase emphasizes the inner joy or happiness brought by the gospel. Thus, *seysang* here reflects the emotional transformation of the people’s hearts and minds, marking a shift from a reference to the physical world to symbolizing an emotional state. When used in this sense, *seysang* is often paired with adjectives that describe human emotions, such as “야박한” (cold-hearted) or “따뜻한” (warm-hearted), further highlighting its role in conveying emotional and mental states.

- (7) 가령 우리 교회로 말하야도 그리스도교 세상에
kalyeng wuli kyohoy-lo malha-yado kulisutokyo **seysang-ey**
for.example we church-INST say-CONN Christianity the.world-LOC

행한지 일천오백년에 만일 덕국의 마틴루터가
 hayngha-n-ci ilchenopayk.nyen-ey manil tekkwuk-uy mathuynlwuthe-ka
 do-ADN- NOMZ 1500.years-at if German-GEN Martin Luther-NOM
 안났더면
 an.nas.temyen
 not.come-COND

‘For example, even when we talk about our church, in the 1,500 years of the Christian world, if Martin Luther from Germany hadn’t appeared ...’

(1903 *Sinhakwelpo* 3:399)

Seysang in example (7) refers to the Christian world, illustrating the context or environment where individuals or groups can be active. This usage shows how *seysang* can denote the societal or cultural sphere in which significant events or movements occur.

(8) 상고에 하나님끼서 세상을 지으시고
 sangko-ey hana-nim-skuyse **seysang**-ul ci-usi-ko
 ancient.epoch-at the.God-HON-NOM the.world-ACC create-HON-CONN
 ‘At a very ancient epoch, the God created the earth and ...’

(1903 *Sinhakwelpo* 3:483)

In example (8), *seysang* indicates the earth inhabited by life. This demonstrates that *seysang*, while primarily meaning ‘the world inhabited by people,’ can also extend to mean the physical land or the earth.

4.2.2. Nominal form with adverbial function

In transitioning from Early Modern Korean to Modern Korean, *seysang* underwent significant changes not only in meaning but also in grammatical function. While examples (3) to (8) illustrate *seysang* functioning as a noun, its role evolved further.

The next example is excerpted from *Kwenikcwungsilki*, published in 1926. It explores the distinction between the two types of individuals, depicting stories that illustrate what constitutes loyalty versus betrayal. The below example (9) is an intriguing instance where *seysang* demonstrates two different grammatical functions within a single sentence.

(9) 세상 몫슬 귀신들은 부귀영화로 사는 사람
Seysang mopsul kwisin-tul-un pwukwiyenghwa-lo sa-nun salam
 the.world wicked ghost-PL-TOP wealth.and.prosperity-INST live-AND person
 세상에 만컨마는 불상한 유리객을 이지경 속이나냐?
 seysang-ey man-khenmanum pwulsangha-n yulikayk-ul i-cikyeng soki-nanya
 the.world-LOC many-although poor-ADN drifter-ACC this-NOMZ trick-Q
 ‘How do the very wicked ghosts trick a poor drifter this much although there are many people in the world who are in wealth and prosperity?’

(1926 *Kwenikcwungsilki* 1)

Degree modifiers are expressions used in grammar to intensify or compare the degree or intensity of adjectives or adverbs. They highlight the strength or extremity of a quality or action, often through comparison or emphasizing words like *very*, *extremely*, or *beyond compare*. In example (9), *seysang* in the first line acts as an adverbial degree modifier before the adjective *몹쓸* ‘wicked’, emphasizing the degree of wickedness by comparing it to the extremes of the world. On the other hand, the second occurrence of *seysang* underlined is used with the locative particle *-ey*, meaning ‘the world where people live,’ functioning as a noun.

The next example demonstrates another adverbial use of *seysang*:

- (10) 사은품에 따라 백화점 매출이 왔다갔다하니
 saunphwum-ey ttala paykhwacem maychwul-i wasstakasstaha-ni
 freebie-to according department store sales- NOM came.and.went-CONN
 세상 이거 되겠어?
seysang ike toy-keyss-e
 the.world it[NOM] become-FUT-Q
 ‘Department store sales go up and down depending on the freebies. Is this going to work at all?’

(2007. Drama. *Que sera sera*)

In example (10), *seysang* in a noun form functions as an adverb and reinforces the negative meaning of ‘at all,’ modifying the sentence, *Is this going to work?*. *Seysang* in this usage tends to become a negative polarity item. This evolution of *seysang* from a noun to an adverb illustrates its dynamic nature in the Korean language.

4.2.3. *Seysangey* as a discourse marker

Examples (9) and (10) showcase *seysang* in its nominal form but functioning adverbially, marking an important shift in its usage. Moreover, from example (11) onwards, we observe *seysangey*, a compound of *seysang* and the locative particle *-ey* (literally meaning ‘in the world’), developing into a discourse marker (DM) with varied functions. This progression highlights the dynamic nature of *seysang* as it transitioned from a noun to a DM in Modern Korean, ultimately becoming a versatile component of Present-Day Korean.

Heine (2002) argues that there are four stages to how a linguistic expression acquires a new grammatical meaning. In the bridging context stage, there is a specific context giving rise to an inference in favor of a new meaning. The example in (11) shows a bridging stage.

- (11) 내 보니 **世上**에 덕 媒人 되엿난 이
 na-i poni **SEYSANG-ey** tye MAYIN toyyes-nAn i
 I-NOM see-CONN the.world-LOC that matchmaker become-ADN person

男家에 가 곳 소겨 나라도
 NAMKA-ey ka kos soki-e nilAtoy
 man.house-LOC go soon cheat-CONN say-CONN
 ‘I see that in the world the one who became a matchmaker went to the man’s house
 and soon cheatingly lied...’

(1721 *Olywuncenpi*: 156)

The example in (11) is sourced from *Olywuncenpi*, published in 1721 during the Joseon Dynasty. This work translates Gu Jun (丘濬)’s *Olywuncenpiki* (五輦全備記), a comprehensive guide covering various aspects of governance, military strategy, and social organization. Gu Jun was a prominent scholar and official during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Intriguingly, *seysangey* in (11) can be syntactically interpreted in two different ways. In one interpretation, *seysangey* can be understood as ‘I know there exists a certain type of person in the world,’ functioning as an adverbial phrase. Alternatively, it can carry a negative connotation, meaning ‘on earth,’ which reflects the speaker’s viewpoint on the event. This dual interpretation in example (11) aligns with the concept of a ‘bridging context’ as described by Heine (2002), where a lexical item with dual interpretations can develop into a discourse marker, as observed in examples (12) and (13).

Examples (12) and (13) are excerpted from *Kwiuyseng*, which is a representative work of new fiction genre “sinsosel” by Injik Lee in 1908. It exposes the helplessness of the declining noble class, while simultaneously depicting the oppressed class resisting the exploitation and extortion by the ruling class. The term “sinsosel” literally means ‘new novel,’ which is a type of literary fiction that flourished in Korea from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. It marks the transition from classical novels to modern novels. It is also sometimes referred to as “Enlightenment Period fiction.” The word *seysang* with a locative marker *-ey* in the formation of *seysangey* ‘in the world’ can be found in the historical corpus as in (12) and (13), with a comma.

(12) 세상에, 그런 흉악한 년이 잇슬 줄 누가 아라
seysangey kulen hyungakha-n nyen-i iss-ul cyul nwukA al-a
 DM such brutal-ADN bitch-NOM exit-ADN NOMZ who know-Q
 ‘Oh my gosh, who knows that there exists such a brutal bitch?’

(1906 *Kwiuyseng*)

Seysangey in (12) means ‘on earth’ in a rhetorical interrogative from a negative viewpoint. This usage reflects the speaker’s disbelief and disdain.

(13) A: He dared to have taken our money.

B: 응, 세상에, 참 우순 놈, 다 보겠구
 ung, **syseysangey** cham wutyu-n nom ta po.kAis-kwu
 yes, DM truly ridiculous-ADN jerk all see-INTJ
 ‘Right, oh my gosh, how ridiculous jerk!’

(1906 *Kwiuyseng*)

In (13), *syeyssangey* “세상에” is an orthographic variant of *seysangey* “세상에.” *Syeyssangey*, meaning ‘on earth’ carries speaker B’s negative underestimation of the guy they talk about. This usage emphasizes the speaker’s negative judgment and emotional reaction. Even, stand-alone *seysangey* as a discourse marker can be found. The following example demonstrates this usage:

- (14) A: (in a calm voice) ... I was fired!
 B: what?!
 A: I said I got fired. The manager said to me that I’d better work as a sale representative or canvasser than an office worker. The ones that are needed to run around outside a lot...
 B: 세상에...
Seysangey
 DM
 ‘Oh my gosh...’

(2000. Movie *Phullantasuy kay*)

In example (14), speaker A tells B that A was fired, which is surprising news to B. The use of *seysangey* by speaker B signals the speaker’s stance, primarily conveying a feeling of unexpectedness. *Seysangey* in (14) functions as a DM and stands alone. As a DM, *seysangey* is independent of the sentence where it occurs. The prominent feature of discourse markers is their positional flexibility, among other characteristics. The function of *seysangey* here is to convey an emotional reaction, highlighting the speaker’s surprise and engaging the listener in the conversational exchange. This example illustrates how *seysangey* operates as a DM in spoken Korean, particularly in informal settings, to convey complex emotional responses succinctly.

4.3. *Seysangey as a discourse marker in Present-Day Korean*

In Present-Day Korean (PDK), *seysangey* functions as a discourse marker (DM) with notable flexibility in sentence structure, appearing in left-periphery (LP), right-periphery (RP), and stand-alone positions. This analysis investigates whether *seysangey*’s usage aligns with previous hypotheses, which LP is associated with subjectivity and RP with intersubjectivity. We explore the usage patterns and contextual variations of *seysangey* across these positions, examining how it expresses subjective and intersubjective functions through various emotional stances. In the following subsections, examples are presented to illustrate *seysangey*’s pragmatic roles and the contexts in which it is preferred.

4.3.1. *Left-periphery analysis*

Among the tokens of *seysangey* in LP as in [*seysangey*, STATEMENT], 289 were used for analysis.

(15)

Context	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total
Tokens	34 (11.8%)	205 (70.9%)	50 (17.3%)	289 (100%)

As indicated in (15), *seysangey* is the most frequently used in negative contexts, accounting for 70.9% of the cases. This high percentage suggests that speakers often employ *seysangey* to convey surprise or disbelief in response to negative information.

The next example illustrates a neutral context where *seysangey* is used. In this situation, Jongnam, a foster daughter, has been praising her mother and is now asking Jaeman how long he has known her mother:

(16) [*Seysangey* in LP in the neutral context]

Jongnam: By the way, since when did you know my mom?

Jaeman: ...well... I think it's been for about 40 years.

Jongnam: 세상에, 그럼 한 동네 친구셨어요?

seysangey, kulem han tongney chinkwu-si-ess-eyo?

DM so same neighborhood friend-HON-PST-END.Q

'Oh my gosh, so you were a neighborhood friend?'

(2005. Drama *Pyelnan yeca pyelnan namca* Ep. 30)

In (16), *seysangey* is used by Jongnam to express surprise upon learning that Jaeman has known Jongnam's mother for about 40 years and was a neighborhood friend. This example demonstrates the use of *seysangey* in a neutral context, where the primary function is to react to unexpected information without attaching a positive or negative sentiment. It highlights the speaker's astonishment and curiosity, adding an element of engagement to the conversation.

The next example is from a situation where Hyera and Taejin are having dinner at a restaurant when Taejin handed a shopping bag to Hyera:

(17) [*Seysangey* in LP in the positive context]

Hyera: [...] then, I will take it happily. Can I open it?

Taejin: Sure.

Hyera: (She opens it, and it's a sky blue scarf.)

세상에, 너무 예뻐요. 저 하늘색 좋아하는데!

seysangey, nemwu yeyp-eyo. ce hanulsay cohaha-nuntey!

DM, so beautiful-DEC. I sky.blue like-END.INTJ

'Oh my gosh, it's so beautiful. I like the sky blue color!'

Taejin: Is it? (smiling) That's a relief.

(2006. Drama *Nay Insaynguy supheysyel* Ep.7)

Example (17) reveals that *seysangey* carries speaker Hyera's positive attitude towards the unexpected gift. Upon receiving and opening a gift, Hyera's reaction includes both her delight and astonishment at the beauty of the scarf. This shows how *seysangey* can be used to convey positive emotions and enhance the expressive quality of speech, emphasizing the speaker's emotional response.

suggesting that *seysangey* consistently functions to express negative sentiments or critical judgments regardless of its position within the sentence.

The given situation in (20) is that two speakers happen to meet each other by chance in a pharmacy:

- (20) [*Seysangey* in RP in the neutral context]
Junghwan: (entering) Excuse me, do you have any other ointment? This one isn't working at all.
—Manager Kang, who was drinking a tonic nearby, stares at Junghwan—
Kang: Excuse me, but are you...?
Junghwan: (turning around) Oh, Manager Kang!
Kang: (simultaneously) Oh, Assistant Han! Wow, it's been a long time. (shakes hands warmly)
Junghwan: How long has it been? I think the last time we met was at my wedding.
Kang: When did you come back from New York?
Junghwan: It's been a while. (giving Kang a business card) My office is nearby.
Kang: Is it? **세상에...** (also giving a business card to Junghwan)...

Seysangey

DM

'Oh my gosh'

(2002. Drama *Kechimepsnun salang* Ep.3)

Kang's reaction with *seysangey* expresses that the information on Junghwan's office location is new to him. Here in (20), *seysangey* is used to convey surprise in a neutral context, without any strong positive or negative connotations; the DM here highlights the newness of the information to the speaker. This example demonstrates the marker's flexibility in expressing astonishment in various contexts.

The following example is excerpted from a scene after Byeonghee mentioned that she received a proposal from Dr. Bae, who is considered the top eligible bachelor:

- (21) [*Seysangey* in RP in the positive context]
(After Byeonghee, a daughter, mentioned she was proposed to.)
Swunam: [...] My heart is pounding.
Junhee: (laughs) Mom, why is your heart pounding?
Swunam: Exactly, how ridiculous.
Byeonghee: Mom hasn't experienced that because she got married in an arranged marriage.
Swunam: (even clapping hands) Oh, right, yeah. I'm jealous, Byunghhee.

How wonderful must that be **세상에**.

seysangey

DM

'Oh my gosh'

(2006. *Yewuya mwehani* Ep.10)

Stand-alone *seysangey* in (23) is also most frequently used in negative contexts by 67% with 85 cases among 127 cases. This distribution underscores that *seysangey* as a stand-alone DM is also predominantly employed to express negative emotions or reactions.

The following dialogue is quoted from the moment when Taeyeong and Miryeong are showing gifts to their grandmother:

- (24) [*Seysangey* in stand-alone position in the neutral context]
 (Taeyang and Miryeong are explaining to their grandmother what they brought as gifts for a newborn baby.)
 Miryeong: Grandma, look at this hat, a hat...
 Grandmother: You bought a good one. It will be useful when coming up to Seoul...
 Miryeong: And this is an album...
 Grandmother: You bought an album for the baby?
 Taeyeong: (smiling) Nowadays people make albums from the first day the baby is born...
 Gramma: 세상에...
 seysangey
 DM
 ‘oh my gosh’

(2003. Drama *Nolansonswuken* Ep. 97)

In (24), DM *seysangey* used in a stand-alone position during a speaker’s turn reflects Grandmother’s surprise at the completely new information given.

The scene in example (25) is set in a hospital, where Mr. Kyung awakens from a coma:

- (25) [*Seysangey* in stand-alone position in the positive context]
 Mr. Kyung’s wife: Honey? Do you know who I am?
 Mr. Kyung: (slowly looking around, blinking his eyes)
 Mr. Kyung’s wife: (holding hands and going close to the face) Honey? Can you see me? Do you know who I am?
 Mr. Kyung: (nodding still)
 Mr. Kyung’s wife: 아우, 세상에.
 Awu, **seysangey**
 INTJ, DM
 ‘Oh! my gosh’

(2005. Drama *Pwuhwal* Ep.18)

In (25), Mr. Kyung’s wife’s use of *seysangey* reflects her surprise and relief when Mr. Kyung regains consciousness. This stand-alone use highlights *seysangey*’s ability to convey a mix of emotions, enhancing the depth of the speaker’s immediate reaction. Although “awu” is an interjection expressing an initial reaction of surprise, the phrase “awu, *seysangey*” is considered standalone because “awu” serves merely as an interjection and does not affect the discourse marker function of *seysangey*.

The following example is excerpted from a conversation between Eunha, who is about to undergo surgery, and her acquaintance Seoyoung in the hospital room, where Eunha inquires about the well-being of their mutual acquaintances:

- (26) [*Seysangey* in stand-alone position in the negative context]
 Eunha: [...] Except for Woojin... Is everyone... okay? How about Dr. Jeong?
 Seoyoung: (expression changes)
 Eunha: (looking worriedly at Seoyoung) What's wrong?
 Seoyoung: ... Dr. Jeong passed away. ...it was suicide...
 Eunha: 세상에.
 seysangey
 DM
 ‘Oh my gosh’

(2003. Drama *Lepuleythe* Ep.11–16)

In (26), Eunha's utterance of *seysangey* conveys her shock and sadness upon hearing about Dr. Jeong's suicide. This example underscores the marker's role in expressing strong negative emotions, serving as an immediate and powerful reaction to distressing news.

The stand-alone analysis further confirms that *seysangey* carries both subjective and intersubjective functions regardless of its syntactic position. When used alone, *seysangey* often expresses the speaker's immediate emotional reaction while also drawing the listener into this emotional state. This observation reinforces the idea that *seysangey*'s discourse functions are not confined to a single category (subjective or intersubjective) nor strictly tied to its position within a sentence but rather operate flexibly across different contexts.

In sum, a distributional analysis of *seysangey* shows that it is preferred in negative contexts. However, contrary to the theoretical expectations that LP and RP are distinctly associated with subjective and intersubjective functions respectively, our findings suggest that *seysangey* consistently exhibits both subjective and intersubjective characteristics across different positions, including LP, RP, and stand-alone usage. The data suggests a more complex interaction between context and peripheral functions, emphasizing that *seysangey*'s discourse roles are adaptable and not rigidly determined by its sentence position.

4.4. Answers to the research questions

The study addresses the evolution of *seysang* from a concrete noun meaning ‘the world’ into a versatile discourse marker, *seysangey*, in contemporary Korean. This transformation illustrates the grammaticalization process whereby *seysang* shifted from a noun describing a physical realm to a discourse marker that expresses various speaker stances, including surprise, admiration, and disapproval.

To answer the first research question, *seysang*'s journey from a noun to a discourse marker involved shifts from describing the external world to marking subjective reactions, aligning with general grammaticalization patterns.

In response to the second question, *seysangey* serves multiple pragmatic functions and conveys stances reflecting emotional and evaluative responses, depending on context. The marker's flexibility—appearing at the left periphery (LP), right periphery (RP), or as a stand-alone utterance—enhances its expressive function and often invites listener engagement.

Lastly, regarding the third question, the grammaticalization of *seysang* reflects broader patterns of language change in Korean. This process, involving subjectification and intersubjectification, aligns with observed trends in other East Asian languages where nouns and concrete expressions evolve into pragmatic markers that convey speaker attitudes and interactional stances.

5. Discussion

The developmental course of *seysang* and its derivative *seysangey* as a DM in Korean reveals theoretically notable aspects: decategorialization, subjectification, intersubjectification, stance-marking, and metaphoric transfer.

5.1. Decategorialization

Examples (9) and (10) illustrate that *seysang* has experienced significant semantic and functional changes over time, transitioning from a primarily nominal role to include adverbial functions as well. The transition of *seysang* from a nominal word to a degree modifier as an adverb in (9) and to an NPI in (10) suggests a reduction in the nominal properties characteristic of *seysang* over time, a process known as decategorialization (cf. Hopper 1991). Historically, *seysang* was nominally oriented, frequently accompanied by case-marking particles such as *-i*, *-ey*, and *-ul*, as well as the topic marker *-un*, all of which are typically attached to nominal expressions. Over the centuries, these nominal properties have gradually diminished in specific contexts. While *seysang* still retains its nominal form and meaning in many uses, in examples (9) and (10) it has undergone decategorialization and functions as an adverb.

As evidence of decategorialization, *seysang* in its noun form is no longer able to be modified by adjectives, as is typical for nouns. Consequently, *seysang* in its adverbial role does not allow the modification of adjectives, as seen in the hypothetical construction 나쁜* 세상 모습 (bad* seysang wicked). Similarly, as an NPI, *seysang* functions as an adverb and cannot be modified by adjectives, resulting in ungrammatical constructions like 아름다운* 세상 이게 되겠어? (beautiful* seysang is this going to work?).

5.2. Subjectification, intersubjectification and stance marking

The transformation of *seysang* into DM *seysangey* illustrates its grammaticalization from a noun through an adverb to a discourse marker. This process involved both subjectification, where the lexeme acquired more subjective meanings, and intersubjectification, where it began to play a role in managing interpersonal relations.

Subjectification refers to the process by which linguistic expressions become increasingly based on the speaker's internal perspective, attitudes, or beliefs (Traugott 1982, 1995, Traugott & König 1991). *Seysang*, a society people live in, is a physical domain for a speaker to live and experience things, so it naturally becomes the epistemic domain for a speaker to judge an event. *Seysang* in (6) means that the people will feel happiness in their hearts. This indicates a shift from a physical world to an emotional state. In addition, *seysang* is employed to reflect the speaker's subjective stance toward the intensity or degree of a property. It has the interpretive meanings of 'very' in modifying adjectives as in (9) and 'at all' as in (10) where an anticipated event does not happen in a way a speaker wants. Through the subjective evaluation of an event or state of affairs, this transfer is made from the physical entity to the abstract entity or subject evaluation.

Intersubjectification, as explained by Traugott (2008), involves the speaker's awareness of the addressee's attitudes and beliefs. This concept emphasizes the interactive nature of communication and the shared understanding that arises from it. Du Bois's (2007) stance triangle further elucidates how speakers use language to position themselves, align with or against others, and evaluate objects of discourse. The stance triangle consists of three components: stance-taking, alignment, and evaluation. When the speaker uses *seysangey*, the speaker is simultaneously evaluating the event, positioning themselves about the event, and aligning with or against the interlocutor's statement. This multifaceted process is exemplified in the usage of *seysangey* to convey not only surprise but also an implicit judgment or reaction to the state of events, as seen in 4.3.

Stance marking is evident in the degree modifier function of *seysang*, as the speaker uses *seysang* to emphasize the degree or intensity of quality, reflecting the awareness of the addressee's attitudes and beliefs. As shown in 4.3, *seysangey* as a DM serves to highlight the notable and surprising value of the information given, meaning something like 'I can't believe it happens in the world'. When the speaker uses *seysangey*, the speaker is showing his/her interpretive judgment on the given statement by an interlocutor or state of events the speaker faces, exemplified in 4.3.

According to Rhee (2011: 405), stance markers can be categorized into attitudinal, epistemic, emotional, and evidential types. The use of *seysangey* in section 4.3 aligns with the emotional stance category, where the marker reflects the speaker's positive, negative, or neutral emotions toward a proposition or event. For example, in negative contexts, *seysangey* often conveys shock or disapproval, reflecting a negative emotional stance. In positive contexts, it may express delight or amazement, aligning with a positive emotional stance. In neutral contexts,

over time, its meaning extended to multiple abstracted meanings, including intensifiers such as ‘very’ and ‘at all.’

In the course of semantic change, *seysang* and its derivative *seysangey* exhibit subjectification, shifting from a ‘physical’ to an ‘abstract’ meaning. These terms mark the speaker’s stance, encompassing both positive and negative judgments, and express a wide range of emotions such as joy, sadness, anxiety, and disappointment. *Seysangey* also exhibits intersubjectification, indicating that the speaker signals the addressee to share their evaluation of the situation. *Seysangey* (literally meaning ‘in the world’) as a DM tends to appear freely in left-periphery (LP), right-periphery (RP), and even in stand-alone positions, often signaling counter-expectation or surprise. The survey reveals that it carries subjective and intersubjective meanings and is frequently used in contexts of both negative and positive emotional responses.

Future research will explore related expressions such as *seysangepsi* (세상없이) ‘without the world,’ *seysangeupseto* (세상없어도) ‘even without the world,’ and *seysangmoluta* (세상모르다) ‘not know the world,’ all of which are related to *seysang* ‘the world.’

The study offers insights into the dynamics of language change influenced by past contact with a dominant language like Chinese. Such investigations can enhance our appreciation of the complexities involved in language evolution and the role of external influences in shaping the lexicon and grammar of a language.

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Abbreviations

ACC = accusative; ADN = adnominal; COND = conditional; CONN = connective; DEC = declarative; DM = discourse marker; END = sentence-ender; FUT = future; GEN = genitive; HON = honorific; INTJ = interjection; INST = instrument; LOC = locative; NOM = nominative; PL = plural; PST = past; Q = question; TOP = topic

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