

Contact-Induced Grammaticalization in Slavic: Evidence from “Low-Contact” Languages

Wiemer and Hansen (2012) have recently assessed the range of contact-induced grammaticalization (CIG) in Slavic. They discerned “more or less clear cases” of CIG to be encountered for different grammatical domains in Slavic under the influence of German, Italian, non-Slavic Balkan languages, Latin, and Finno-Ugric languages in the European part of Russia, arguably also Scandinavian. The authors identified, in total, fourteen cases of CIG in such grammatical domains as verbal complex, noun phrase, pronominal elements, clause level relations, and complex clause level. Wiemer and Hansen made use of Heine and Kuteva’s (2005) model of contact-induced grammaticalization according to which the grammaticalization path is more or less predictable and unidirectional.

In my paper, I intend to show quite the opposite. Even if contact-induced grammatical change is essentially subject to the same principles of grammaticalization as grammatical change not induced by contact, the “more or less clear cases” of CIG are not the immediate corollary to the influence of the aforementioned model languages. In fact, grammatical changes can occur in large populations down to the level of individual speakers whose communication is determined by the amount of adult language contact, type of social stability, size of a speech community, type of social ties, and amounts of communally shared information (Trudgill 2011). Whence, in the case of geographically close language systems (dialects), a grammatical innovation, following a cross-linguistically identifiable grammaticalization pathway, can hardly be triggered by language contact only. A grammatical change can be linked to language contact indirectly via respective changes in the “internal determinant” (developmental tendency) of the language system due to changes in the “external determinant” defined by a constellation of societal factors and their variables (Trudgill 2011: 146–148, 185).

Premised on the postulates of the sociolinguistic typology (Trudgill 2011; Mel’nikov 2003), one can predict, for instance, the grammaticalization of the comitative instrumentals as well as the reverse grammaticalization path, as evidenced in Southwest Ukrainian and other low-contact languages (dialects) (Danylenko 2015). In view of the changing societal variables and respective internal determinant(s), it becomes possible to explain the grammaticalization of articles, ‘man’-construction, possessive resultative, accusative with infinitive construction, and some other cases of CIG in Ukrainian dialects and some other languages (dialects) which have not been in contact with the aforementioned model languages.

Selected Bibliography

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