

## Global and local grammaticalization The emergence of the nominative object construction

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The origin of the nominative object construction, which occur most often with independent infinitives, in North Russian dialects has been intensively investigated, often related with neighboring Baltic and Finnic languages (cf. Filin 1969, Kiparsky 1969, Timberlake 1974, Ambrazas 2001). There are three crucial questions to be addressed; (a) the apparent form-function mismatch, i.e., the nominative case for an object, (b) word order, i.e., a noun followed by an infinitive in neutral order, and (c) modal meaning, i.e., deontic semantics in the apparent absence of modal verbs.

It is proposed here that the nominative object construction started out as an existential construction, whose skeletal structure would be BE – Noun<sub>nom</sub> – Noun<sub>dat</sub> (2-I). This assumption obviates the need to devise ad-hoc hypotheses to account for the problems (a) and (b). Crucial to the first stage is that *paxatei* (which would become an infinitive in a later development) is not a verbal, but a nominal category. The existential verb *esti* and the purposive dative *paxatei* combined produce the modal (deontic) semantics, ‘there is a piece of land to plow’ > ‘It is necessary to plow the land’, and this development (existence/possession > deontic) is cross-linguistically very common (‘global grammaticalization’, cf. van der Auwera et al 2007; Bhatt 1998).

The second stage (2-II) is characterized by the category change of *paxatei*. The dative noun became a verbal category, i.e., infinitive (‘local grammaticalization’, cf. Haspelmath 1989). And this change is accompanied by the dependency change (that is, the emergence of argument structure), by which *zemlja* became dependent on the verb *paxati*, i.e., an object-verb relation. By this change, (i) the case assignment became “quirky”, because nominative case is used for an object function, and (ii) the locus of modal semantics was transposed onto the existential verb *est’*, since the new combination, an infinitive plus its object, was not apt for carrying the meaning.

*Est’*, though saturated with the deontic meaning, is syntactically not supported. That is, *zemlja* is no longer the asserted entity of existence, but an object of the following verb. Therefore *est’* dropped out, giving today’s structure, *zemlja paxat’* (2-III). This change causes the whole sentence to take over the modal semantics (‘global grammaticalization’). There are two possible ways of explaining this semantic transposition. First, the place where *est’* used to occupy, now a zero, might be seen as grammaticalized to assume the modal function (cf. Bybee 1994). Alternatively (and more plausibly), the disappearing existential verb with the deontic meaning, *est’* might be seen as having left an invisible trace (but noticeable given the word order and semantics) (cf. ‘Cheshirization’, Matisoff 1991)

Aside from elucidating the origin of the nominative object construction with the idiosyncratic problems (a-c) solved, the current proposal has theoretical and empirical consequences as well. By providing an example of clause-level, or above-the-phrase level, grammaticalization and showing how global and local grammaticalization might interact with each other, this paper aims to contribute to the work of the sentence-level grammaticalization, e.g., its typology, motivation, etc.

- (1) Zemlja paxat’ ‘It is necessary to plow the land/one has to plow the land’  
NSg Infinitive
- (2) Developmental stages of the nominative object construction
  - I. Esti zemlja paxatei ‘There is a piece of land to plow’  
3Sg-BE NSg DSg

- II. Esti zemlja paxatī  
 3Sg-BE NSg Infinitive
- III. Ø zemlja paxat' (=1)  
 NSg Infinitive

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