

Grammaticalization of postural verbs in Russian A further point on the cline

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Postural verbs are a rich source for progressive meaning and are likely to grammaticalize into the progressive aspect (*e.g.* Newman 2002). The grammaticalization of postural verbs tends to occur in pseudocoordinative constructions in which a postural verb is coordinated to a lexical verb, *e.g.* Norwegian *Han sitter og skriver brev* (He sit and write letters, ‘He is writing letters’). This phenomenon has been covered with regard to Germanic languages (Ebert 2000), cross-linguistically (Kuteva 2001), and in reference material on individual North Germanic languages (*e.g.* Walshe 1965, Åsit-Beret, 1986, Holmes 1994). At the same time, the development of postural verbs into progressive markers in pseudocoordinative environments has not received much detailed attention in Slavic languages.

In this paper I report on the grammaticalization of the Russian postural verbs *sidet* ‘sit’, *ležat* ‘lie’, *stojat* ‘stand’ into markers of progressivity. The data for my project were collected from two sources: (1) a questionnaire and (2) the Russian national corpus. A semantic and syntactic analysis of these data pointed to the conclusion that the postural verbs in Russian have been partially grammaticalized into progressive auxiliaries.

Semantically, Russian postural verbs appear to carry limited lexical meaning. In Russian sentences such as *I sit and read*, questionnaire respondents have consistently rated the second verb as carrying more meaning, which points to the semantic bleaching of the postural verb and the increasing lexical importance of the second verb. The Russian national corpus yielded comparable evidence of semantical bleaching, *e.g.*:

- (1) Ja 20 let tut sizhu rabotaju
 I 20 years here sit work
 ‘I have been working here for 20 years’

Syntactic evidence provides further support for the auxiliatation of postural verbs in Russian. These verbs appear to exhibit a degree of syntactic bonding higher than their counterparts in North Germanic languages: the conjunction between the postural and following verbs is often dropped, *c.f.*:

- (2) Russian *Ja sizhu chitaju*
 Norwegian **Jeg sitter Leser*
 I sit read

I argue that postural verbs in Russian behave like progressive auxiliaries, which have split off from their lexical source and gained autonomy. While these verbs are by no means fully grammaticalized, their auxiliary-like behavior in asyndetic constructions represents a distinct point on the grammaticalization cline of lexical postural verbs into grammatical markers of progressivity.

References

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