Degrammaticalization of Pronominal Clitics in Slavic

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This talk investigates a diachronic switch of pronominal clitics into weak pronouns in Slavic, analyzing the process as a case of degrammaticalization, a reversal of grammaticalization. In a generative perspective, grammaticalization is captured as a reanalysis of an XP-element as a head (X′), coupled with its phonological and semantic weakening. Van Gelderen (2004) proposes that the process occurs for economy reasons, due to the “Head preference principle,” which favors merge as an X′ rather than XP, as well as “Late Merge,” which prefers a syntactic item to merge externally rather than internally and as late/high in the structure as possible. This process tends to be directional and cyclic (e.g. word>clitic>affix>0, Hopper & Traugott 1993).

This talk argues that the change of verb-adjacent clitics to either second position (2P) clitics or weak pronouns in Slavic instantiates degrammaticalization as an X′-to-XP shift. Verb-adjacent clitics are assumed to have mixed XP/X′ properties (Chomsky 1995: 249), as they raise from argument XP-positions in VP and adjoin to T as heads. They are exemplified by Bulgarian (Bg)/Macedonian (Mc) data in (1). By contrast, 2P clitics, which occur after the clause-initial syntactic element (see (2) for Serbo-Croatian), are arguably XP-elements located in specifiers of functional heads above VP (Stiepanović 1998, Bošković 2001). In comparison to verb-adjacent and 2P clitics, weak pronouns, exemplified by Polish, display characteristics more typical of XP-nominals, such as the availability of both Dat-Acc and Acc-Dat orders (3), no requirement of adjacency to an element of a specific category or other clitics (4), more robust scrambling possibilities, and the lack of the Person Case Constraint (see Cetnarowska 2003, Franks & King 2000). In terms of prosody, while both verb-adjacent and 2P clitics are prosodically dependent, requiring hosts, weak pronouns can be independent (cf. Cardinaletti & Starke 1999, Toivonen 2003). We propose that these three instances of morphologically reduced forms constitute a cline of degrammaticalization: verb-adjacent (X′) > 2P (XP) > weak pronoun (XP).

According to the oldest Slavic texts in Old Church Slavonic, verb-adjacent cliticization patterns were predominant across early Slavic (Radanović-Kocić 1988, Pancheva 2005). The shift from verb-adjacent to 2P clitics and then to weak pronouns is observed in Old Russian: in the earliest Old Russian texts (11th-12th ce.), pronominal clitics tend to be in 2P, but distributions as weak pronouns become frequent in later texts. For instance, an Acc clitic can occur in a PP as the object of a preposition (6) and pronominal clitics appear in non-2P (7). The process is also attested in Old Polish: the oldest Polish manuscript Holy Cross Sermons (late 13th c.) features verb-adjacent and 2P clitics (8), but later texts show a growing ratio of weak pronouns. The shift from 2P clitics to weak pronouns is also witnessed synchronically in passive participle structures in Mac, in which some speakers allow pronouns to be scrambled in non-verb-adjacent positions across the clause (9), contrasted with the Bg data with verb-adjacent clitics in (10). Finally, the shift of verb-adjacent to 2P clitics is observed in the history of Serbian, finalizing in the 19th c. (Radanović-Kocić 1988).

A crucial requirement of (verb-adjacent) clitics is that they should be licensed by adjoining to T (see e.g. Kayne 1991, Belletti 1999). This talk demonstrates that when T becomes unavailable as the adjunction site, clitics can be degrammaticalized into weak pronouns. We propose that this happens when tense morphology on the verb is lost. Diachronic data from Old Russian, Old Polish, and some synchronic contexts in Mac shows that the degrammaticalization of clitics into weak pronouns was slightly preceded by or concurrent with the loss of T in these languages, which supports our claim that the latter triggers the former. For instance, Holy Cross Sermons, the only Polish relic that contains many aorist and imperfect forms of verbs, features verb-adjacent clitics, but later texts without these tenses show prevalence of 2P patterns and weak pronouns. In this regard, we partly follow Migdalski (2013), who observes that diachronically the switch from verb-adjacent to 2P clitics in SC coincides with the loss of the aorist and imperfect tenses.

Thus, we show that degrammaticalization occurs when the X′ triggering head-adjunction is lost. In the case of Slavic, the process is instantiated by the loss of T′ and results in degrammaticalization of pronominal clitics. Though the phenomenon is statistically less common than grammaticalization (XP =>X′), the Slavic data provide empirical evidence against the idea of the irreversibility of grammaticalization (Haspelmath 1999) and the historical directionality of pronoun weakening cycle (pronoun>clitic>verbal clitic, cf. Zwicky 1977).
(1) a. Vera mi go dziev včera.
   Vera mēDAT itCL.ACC giveAO,3SG yesterday
   “Vera gave it to me yesterday.”

b. *Vera mi go včera dade.
   (Bg/Mac, Franks and King 2000: 63)

(2) Veoma (si mi) lepu (si mi) haljine (si mi) kupio
   very areAUX mēDAT beautiful areAUX mēDAT dress areAUX mēDAT buyPART,MSG
   “You bought me a very beautiful dress.”

(3) Tomek w końcu go jej jįj go/ pożyczył.
   Tomek in end itACC herDAT herDAT itACC lendPART,MSG
   “Tomek eventually lent it to her.”

(4) Jan mu wczoraj chciał go wypożyczyć a nie sprzedać.
   Jan himDAT yesterday wanted itACC lendINF and not sellINF
   “Jan wanted to lend it to him rather than sell it yesterday.”

(5) Często (go) spotykam (go) na ulicy
   often himACC meetRES,1SG himACC on street
   “I often meet him in the street.”

(6) za tę golowy swój sūkładywacmī
   for youCL.ACC headACC,PL ownACC,PL lay downPL
   “We bow down to you.”

(7) a się ego zaprīt
   and selfACC himACC shutMSG
   “And … locks himself up.”

(8) a. a togodla jį we złe chustki ognaręła
   and therefore himACC wrapPART,MSG
   “He was told to be punctual more than once.”

b. iż czego jim dojść, nie pamiętają,
   that whatGEN themDAT obtainINF, NEG rememberREL,PL
   “that they don’t remember what they should obtain.”

(9) a. %Mu e rečeno da bide točen poveče pati
   HimDAT is tellPASS to bSUBJ,3SG punctual more times
   “Peter was more than once told by the commission to be punctual.”

b. Na Petreta (mu e) od strana na komisijata (mu e)
   to Peter himDAT is from side of commission-the him
   more times himDAT is tellPASS to bSUBJ,3SG punctual
   “Peter was more than once told by the commission to be punctual.”

(10) Na Petrū mu e kazvano mnogo pūti ot strana na komisijata
    to Peter himDAT is tellPASS many times from side of commission-the
    da bide točen
to bSUBJ,3SG punctual
    “Peter was more than once told by the commission to be punctual.”