Estonian võtma ‘take’ in two infinitive constructions

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High frequency verbs with the meaning of TAKE are grammaticalized to various extents in many languages of the world (e.g. Heine and Kuteva 2002, Kopecka and Narasimhan (eds) 2012), this is also true for Estonian. In the paper we examine the dynamics of the grammatical uses of the polysemous verb võtma ‘take’ in written Estonian from the 16th century to the present. The focus is on the verb võtma as a finite component in two verbal constructions with different infinitive verbs: with da-infinitive, expressing agent-related modality, mainly volition, and with ma-infinitive in a causative construction.

The aim of the study is to determine the scope of the grammatical use of the verb võtma, based on literary language texts and taking into account the argument structure and dynamics of the grammatical functions of constructions with the two infinitives. Based on literary language data we examine the grammaticalization paths of võtma while also analyzing why the meaning of future expressed by võtma has not survived in present day Estonian and why was another causative construction (võtma-construction) needed in addition to the existing constructions. We investigate whether võtma-constructions show signs of foreign influences, which are noticeable in many grammatical constructions because of the strong German influences in older literary Estonian, or whether these are vernacular constructions. We also analyze the semantic and morphosyntactic constraints on the use of võtma-constructions.

The study is based on grammaticalization theory. We describe aspects of verbalizing the event of taking on a broad functional and cognitive background. The data come from the corpora of Estonian from old literary Estonian (the Corpus of Old Literary Estonian; 16th - 19th century) to modern unedited language use (The Mixed Corpus of Estonian (new media)). võtma + da-infinitive is widely and productively used in old literary Estonian, especially during early 18th century. The construction is used for expressing future:

(1)
Kui ta löppetab poiad kandmast, siis wottab talluda seält seest neid waglad kerre seest wälja, lessed kissuwad nemmad ärra. (Thor Helle 1732, 401)
‘When it finishes bearing offspring, it will trample from in there these maggots out of the body, the widows tear them off.’

However, in modern Estonian võtma + da-infinitive constructions are relatively rare and express volitional processes with discernible inchoative meaning:

(2)
Aga natuke on põrsaskotisostmise tunne, lähemal kui helsingis pole diilerit kah kes võtaks pehmeks rääkida (new media corpus, newsgroups).
‘But feels a bit like buying a pig in a poke, closer than Helsinki there is no dealer, too, who could be talked into it.’

Such constructions are usually stylistically marked, having humorous or ironic connotation, e.g.
võttis öelda ‘said’ (lit. took to say), võtab märgata ‘notices’ lit. takes to notice, or are fossilized as idioms, e.g. kuulda võtma ‘listen to someone’s advice’ (lit. take to hear).

The second construction in our study is võtma + ma-infinitive in a causative construction which characterizes the change of activity or state of the causee. This construction is not present in old literary language. In modern Estonian võtma + ma-infinitive is productive mainly with descriptive verbs:

(3)
Tütre sünd võttis Mart Juurel jala värisema. (Kroonika 04.08.2010)
‘The birth of his daughter made Mart Juur’s leg tremble’

The results of the study could be of interest for comparing grammatical functions cross-linguistically. The results can be compared to data from other languages to find similar and different paths of development. Furthermore, the development of the grammatical use of Estonian võtma had not been systematically studied until now. We hope to show that a detailed analysis of one language can be interesting and beneficial for the comparative study of other languages as well. As a result of the study we will give an overview of the use of võtma in infinitive constructions in old literary Estonian and modern Estonian and explain how the constructions present in modern Estonian emerged and why võtma-constructions have developed in this way.

References:

Data sources:
Corpus of Old Literary Estonian http://www.murre.ut.ee/vakkur/Korpused/korpused.htm
The Mixed Corpus of Estonian (new media) http://www.cl.ut.ee/korpused/segakorpus/uusmeedia/