Grammaticalized GIVE in Slavic between drift and contact: causative, modal, imperative and mood
Ruprecht von Waldenfels,
University of Bern

The present talk presents a survey of the grammaticalized meanings of the descendants of protoslovak *dati ‘give’ in the Slavic languages.

• Probably the earliest traceable grammatical meaning is permissive causation (‘let’), as shown already in the earliest Slavic documents (Waldenfels 2012). This is a very frequent extension of GIVE (see, e.g., Newman 1996) and the basic argument structure of GIVE in Slavic is to a large part retained.

• In the West and South West Slavic languages, we see evidence of a factitive curative marker (‘having causation’) at an early stage. A development of give to ‘let’ and then to ‘have/make’ is a cross-linguistically rather common development (see e.g. Lord et al. 2002). Waldenfels (2012) traces these developments in the history of Czech and Polish and finds evidence of a specific grammaticalization path, i.e., the generalization of causee-less phrases in the development of ‘having’ causation.

• In the same languages, we also find a specific passive-like reflexive permissive meaning (‘to give/let oneself be cheated’) that dominates in the causative domain. With this meaning and with the factitive meaning, we see profound changes in the argument structure: the inherited dative causee argument is now expressed as a passive-like agent in some languages.

• In the West- and South West Slavic languages, a derived modal construction (‘something gives/lets itself be done’ in the sense of ‘something can be done’) has developed that becomes the most frequent use of GIVE.

• In the Western-most languages, i.e., Upper and Lower Sorbian spoken in Germany today, we find an imperative-hortative construction (‘give/let us go’ - ‘let’s go’) as well as a change in the marking of the erstwhile benefactive/causee/agentive argument from dative to accusative. In Lower Sorbian, we also find a grammaticalized optative marker derived from the infinitive of GIVE.

• In the Eastern Slavic languages, the imperfective imperative of GIVE has grammaticalized as a hortative marker in both dedicated constructions and as a free pragmatic particle. A similar, but evidently unrelated and much more restricted development is notable in Western South Slavic.

Most of these meanings reflect networks of constructions that retain only indirect links to the original semantics of GIVE. At the same time, the morphology of GIVE is mostly fully retained. In a variety of constructions, especially in the West, language contact has been an important factor in shaping structures that are largely analogous to German lassen ‘let’, but also show important differences.

References