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On Degrammaticalization Process in Gothic: Tendency of its Development and Occurrence Mechanism

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Abstract

This article describes the starting process of transferring the functions of expressing the internal modality from the category of mood (from the forms of the optative and the imperative) to the units of the lexical level – the preterite-present verbs, which were transforming into modal verbs in the Gothic language. To explain this degrammaticalization process the conditions and the peculiarities of the transformations in the semantics of the preterite-present verbs were analyzed, which allowed to determine the prospects in the development of the category of modality in German.

*Keywords: C*ategory of mood; modal function; preterite-present verbs; semantics changes; decategorization.

1. Introduction

There are different means of expressing different types of modality in the modal system of the modern German language, namely: the internal, the objective external and the subjective external. The authors of this article and L.S. Ermolaeva refer to the following terms:

- the internal modality – the attitude of the subject (rarely the object) of the action towards the action they perform (for the object – the attitude towards the action they are affected by)

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- the external modality of the sentence – the relation of its contents to the reality in terms of reality / irreality (the objective external modality) and the speaker's degree of assurance in the facts they convey (the subjective external modality) (Ermolaeva, 1987, pp. 68-69).

Such interpretation of these types of the modal semantics, where the differentiation takes place within one category of modality, is based on the narrow view of modality. According to this view the purpose of the utterance, affirmation / negation, direction / indirection of the statement (direct / indirect speech) are not the modal meanings. To find justification of this point of view we can refer to the works of Trunova (1991) and Zhukova (2004).

The main means of expressing *the internal modality* in the modern Germanic languages and German in particular are *the modal verbs*; the main means of expressing *the objective external modality* are *the moods* and *the subjective external modality – the modal words*.

This differentiation of the types of modality and the strict fixation of each type to their means of expression was not always peculiar to German; it was formed in the course of its historical development. The tendency of appearance of the new means of expressing the modal semantics and the fixation of the functions of the internal modality to them began in Gothic. It is possible to trace the mechanism of the semantics changes of the preterite-present verbs using the examples from the Gothic language.

2. Research Design

2.1. Means of expressing modality in Gothic

The means of expressing modality in the Gothic language had no differentiation between internal and external (subjective and objective). The system of Gothic had no modal words and no modal verbs, the only means of expressing modality were grammatical moods. The category of mood was presented by three moods: the indicative, the optative and the imperative (Gukhman, 1998). The imperative expressed commands, orders, requests; the optative was used to express possibility, necessity, i.e. the forms of these moods were mostly used to express the internal modality. However, in Gothic the preterite-present verbs could be used in the modal function.

There are 14 preterite-present verbs singled out in German studies (Birkmann, 1987, p. 91), the analysis of the Gothic Bible texts showed that six of them could express the internal modality: **magan, lais, *binauhan, gadaursan, *skulan, *þaurban* as well as the irregular verb *wiljan*.

2.2. Preterite-present verbs in modal function

One of the most frequent preterite-present verbs used in Gothic in modal function was the verb ****magan***. It expressed different shades of possibility and was mostly used to denote possibility determined by physical (…*graban **ni mag**, bidjan skama mik.* (Luk. XVI, p. 3) *'... I **cannot** dig; to beg I am ashamed.'*) or mental (…*ni mahtedun gafahan is waurde…* (Luk. XX, p. 26) *'...they **could** not take hold of his words…'*) abilities of the subject.

Much less frequently the verb **magan* was used to denote possibility, resulted from the external circumstances. Cf.: *qen liugaida jah duþe **ni mag** qiman.* (Luk. XIV, p. 20) *'I have married a wife, and therefore I **cannot** come.'* In single cases this verb could denote permission or prohibition from the third person: *jah qaþ: duþe qaþ izwis þatei ni ainshun **mag** qiman at mis, nibai ist atgiban imam fram attin meinamma.* (Jhn. VI, p. 65) *'And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man **can** come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.'*

It is worth mentioning that in practically every case in the Gothic Bible texts, where the verb **magan* is used in the modal function, this verb is used together with the infinitive of a notional verb. In rare cases this verb is used without the infinitive: *jah qaþ siponjam þeinaim ei usdreibeina ina, jah ni **mahtedun.*** (Mrk. 9, p. 18) *'and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they **could** not (cast out).'* However, in these examples the infinitive of a notional verb could be added.

In the modal function of expressing possibility the verb **magan* duplicates the functions peculiar to the present forms of the optative. The optative in Gothic was also used to denote possibility, e.g.: *hvaiwa **sijai** (the present optative) þata, þandei aban ni kann?* (Luk. I, p. 34) *'How **shall** this **be**, seeing I know not a man?'* The potential optative had its own special field of usage. Nevertheless, the analyzed material showed that the tendency to

narrowing this field of usage of the optative began to take shape in Gothic, due to the fact that the verb **magan* began to take the function of expressing the potential semantics. The usage of the lexical-grammatical means of expressing possibility – the preterite-present verbs – allowed to express different shades of potential semantics (see the examples above), which were not observed in the cases when the meaning of possibility was expressed by the forms of the optative – the grammatical means. It explains the rare usage of the optative in this function in Gothic in comparison with the verb **magan.*

There are few examples in the texts of the Gothic Bible, where the meaning of possibility could be expressed by the other preterite-present verbs:

- possibility conditioned by the ability of the subject, acquired as a result of learning or gained experience, – the verb **lais.** Cf.: **lais** *jah haunjan mik,* **lais** *jah ufarassu haban; in allamma jah in allaim usþroþiþs im, jah sads wairþan jah gredags, jah ufarassau haban jah þarbos þulan.* (Php. IV, p. 12*) 'I **know (can)** both how to be abased, and I **know (can)** how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.'*
- possibility, appeared as allowance of the third person, – the verb **binauhan.* Cf.: **hvopan binah,** *akei ni batizo ist, ...* (II. Kor. XII, p. 1) *'It is not expedient (It is not* **possible**)*for me doubtless to glory, ...'*

In the Gothic Bible in the function of a modal verb meaning «dare», «can» the verb **gadaursan** was used: *unte ni* **gadaursum** *domjan unsis silbans aiþþau gadomjan uns du þaim sik silbans anafilhandam.* (II. Kor. X, p. 12) *'For we **dare** not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves'*; **gadars** *hvas izwara, wiþra anþarana staua habands stojan fram inwindaim jah ni fram?* (I. Kor. VI, p. 1) *'Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?'*

One of the most frequent verbs used to express different modal shades was the verb **wiljan.** The analysis of its meanings showed that in all the examples it denoted wish: *jah stands atwopida þans twalif jah qaþ du im: jabai hvas* **wili** *frumists wisan, sijai allaize aftumists jah allaim andbahts.* (Mrk. IX, p. 35) *'And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man **desire** to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.'* The peculiarity about the verb *wiljan* is that it could be also used in the imperative: … **wiljau,** *wairþ (the imperative) hrains.* (Mrk. I, p. 41) *'... I **will**, be thou clean.'* and with the infinitive construction: *hva* **wileits** *taujan mik iggis (the infinitive construction)?* (Mrk. X, p. 36) *'What **would** ye that I should do for you?'* In the given examples the verb *wiljan* not only expresses wish, but also the shade of command. Cf. with the next example, where the command is expressed by the form of the imperative: **gag** *þwahan in swumsl Siloamis.* (Jhn. IX, p. 7) *'**Go**, wash in the pool of Siloam.'*

The verb **skulan,* one of the preterite-present verbs, was also used in Gothic to express modal meanings. As a notional verb it is found in the Bible in very rare cases and has the meaning «to owe (something) »: *... hvan filu* **skalt** *fraujin meinamma?* (Luk. XVI, p. 5) *'...How much **owest** thou unto my lord?'*; *þaþroh þan du anþaramma gaþ: aþþan þu hvan filu* **skalt***?* (Luk. XVI, p. 7) *'Then said he to another, And how much **owest** thou?'*

The verb **skulan* is mostly used in the function of a modal verb, generally in combination with the infinitive of a notional verb and expresses the following shades of necessity (ought):

- Necessity to act according to obligation, rule, law (instruction). E.g.: …*ni auk* **skulun** *barna fadreinam huzdjan…* (II. Kor. XII, p. 14) *'for the children **ought** not to lay up for the parents …'.*In negative sentences the meaning of ought turns into forbiddance: *iþ skalks fraujins* **ni skal** *sakan…* (II. Tim. II, p. 24) *'And the servant of the Lord* **must not** *strive …'.* Cf. the forms of the optative especially frequently express forbiddance in the negative sentences: … **ni maurþrjais***…* (Mat. V, p. 21)*'... Thou* **shalt not kill***…'*
- Necessity as a result of someone else's will (in many cases it is God's will, which is determined by the character of the analyzed text). Cf.:*'ik* **skal** *waurkjan waurstwa þis sandjandins mik.* (Jhn. IX, p. 4) *'I **must** work the works of him that sent me.'*
- Unconditioned necessity, i.e. the internal necessity of the subject. Cf.: *nauh ganoh* **skal** *qiþan izwis, akei ni maguþ frabairan nu.* (Jhn. XVI, p. 12)*'I **have** yet many things **to** say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.'*
- Necessity conditioned by the external circumstances. Cf.: *þanzei* **skal** *gasakan, þaiei gardins allans uswaltjand laisjandans þatei nis kuld ist, in faihugairneins.* (Tit. I, p. 11) *'Whose mouths **must** be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.'*

It should be noted that the verb **skulan* in Gothic could express the meanings that are peculiar to both the imperative and the optative:

- necessity as a result of someone else's will (**skulan* gained the shade of a command). Cf.: …*jabai nu <ik> usþwoh izwis fotuns, frauja jah laisareis, jah jus **skuluþ** izwis misso þwahan fotuns.* (Jhn. XIII, p. 14) *'If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also **ought to** wash one another's feet.'*
- instruction (the function of the optative). Cf.: *Qaþuþ-þan jah gajukon im du þammei sinteino **skulun** bidjan jah ni wairþan usgrudjans.* (Luk. XVIII, p. 1) *'And he spoke a parable unto them to this end, that men **ought** always to pray, and not to faint.'*

The verb **skulan* could also refer to the future with the shade of ought, inevitability. Cf.:…*jah þuhta im ei suns **skulda** wesi þiudangardi gudis gaswikunþjan.* (Luk. XIX, p. 11) *'...and because they thought that the kingdom of God **should** immediately appear.'*

The optative in Gothic has the same function. Cf.: *jabai hvis broþar gadauþnai aigands qen, jah sa unbarnahs gadauþnai, ei **nimai** broþar is þo qen.* (Luk. XX, p. 28) *'If any man's brother die, having a wife, and he die without children, that his brother **should** take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.'*

2.3. Context-induced reinterpretation as mechanism of semantics transformation of preterite-present verbs

The examples given in 1.2 show the discernible trend in Gothic to narrowing the fields of usage of the optative, since the preterite-present began to take both the function of expressing potential semantics (see the examples with the verb **magan* given above) and the function of expressing ought (necessity). The preterite-present verb **skulan* in modal function duplicates (as well as the verb **magan*) the function of the existing grammatical means in Gothic – the function of expressing internal modality. Being a lexical-grammatical mean of denoting the modal semantics of ought (necessity) it could express more of its shades as compared to the morphological forms of the grammatical moods.

The verb **skulan* is used mostly in the meaning of necessity, ought and it represents a new stage in the development of this lexeme's semantics. Semantic shift from the meaning «to owe» to the meaning of ought, necessity was conditioned by the usage of the verb in the specific fitting context. By context the authors of the article mean sufficient fragment of a text that includes a unit selected for the analysis that is necessary to determine the meaning of this unit and that does not contradict the general meaning of the text (Torsueva, 1998, p. 238).

Context plays the leading role in the development of the new meanings of lexical units. According to B. Heine the specific context is a factor that leads to the appearance of new meanings of lexical units. Context-induced reinterpretation is the process when the secondary meaning of a lexical unit steps forward in a certain context and develops into a new nuclear meaning (Heine, Clandi, & Hünnemeyer, 1991, p. 65). From B. Heine's point of view, the context-induced reinterpretation is one of the mechanisms of the grammaticalization. However, the lexical material shows that the context-induced reinterpretation does not only take place in the process of grammaticalization of the lexical units, but represents a mechanism common to different semantic changes, including grammaticalization. In that regard cf. the idea that there are no special mechanisms of semantic changes peculiar only to the process of grammaticalization (Sweetser, 1988, pp. 400-401; Hopper, 1991, p. 19). Then it appears logical to use B. Heine's theory of the context-induced reinterpretation to explain the changes in the semantics of the preterite-present verbs, which began to take the modal function in Gothic by expressing the internal modality.

According to the B. Heine's theory, the context-induced reinterpretation appears in stages. At the first stage, a lexeme is used in its primary, source meaning in a wide range of contexts. According to B. Heine's terminology, at the second stage it is used in a specific «bridging context». In the «bridging context» the meaning of the lexical unit may be considered as both source and as its new, target meaning. At the third stage, in the «switch context», the lexeme is only used in its new, target meaning, which is acquired as a result of the context-induced reinterpretation and gets the status of the independent meaning (Heine, 2002, pp. 94-95).

The examples given above where the verb **skulan* denotes modal semantics of necessity (ought) are used in the switch context, because in the given examples the meaning of the verb could not be interpreted as «to owe», i.e. the source meaning of the preterite-present verb. The examples of the bridging context, where the meaning of this verb might be interpreted both as the source one – «to owe» and as the new, modal one – «ought» were not found in the

Gothic Bible. However, it is possible to provide the examples of the bridging context to illustrate the shift in the semantics of another preterite-present verb used in the modal function and also meaning necessity. This is the verb **þaurban.*

The verb **þaurban* is found in the Gothic Bible primarily as a notional, independent verb and it is used in its source meaning «to need», «to suffer from deprivation»: *waituh þan atta izwar sa ufar himinam þatei* **þaurbuþ.** (Mat. VI, 32) *'...for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye* **have need** *of all these things.'*; *…iþ Iesus gahausjands qaþ du im: ni* **þaurbun** *hailai lekeis ak þai unhaili habandans.* (Mat. IX, 12) *'But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole* **need** *not a physician, but they that are sick.'*

In rare cases (only in two examples) the given verb performs the function of a modal verb with the infinitive of a notional verb and expresses:

- necessity, conditioned by the internal need of the subject: *…land bauhta jah* **þarf** *galeiþan jah saihwan þata.* (Luk. XIV, 18) *'I have bought a piece of ground, and I* **must** *needs go and see it.'*
- necessity, conditioned by the skill of the subject: *bi broþrulubon ni* **þaurbum** *meljan izwis, unte silbans jus at guda uslaisidai sijuþ du frijon izwis misso.* (1. Thess. IV, 9) *'But as touching brotherly love ye* **need** *not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.'*

The given examples are cited in the bridging context, because the meaning of the verb **þaurban* might be interpreted both as its source meaning «to need» and as the modal meaning of necessity. The bridging context contributes to the development of the new meaning of necessity to the verb **þaurban* and shows the emerging shift in its semantics from meaning «to need» to the meaning of necessity.

Despite the usage of the verb **þaurban* in the bridging context (which represents the second stage of the context-induced reinterpretation according to B. Heine's theory) the final shift in its semantics from the meaning «to need» to the meaning of necessity did not occur and it did not acquire the status of a modal verb. On the one hand, it is confirmed by the lack of the examples of this verb in the switch context in Gothic and on the other hand it is confirmed by the modal verbs development process in the Germanic languages. In that regard refer to (Zhukova & Babakina, 2012).

Out of two preterite-present verbs (**skulan, *þaurban*), which could perform the modal function in Gothic – they could express the semantics of ought (necessity), the status of a modal verb acquired only the verb **skulan,* as the result of the modal system development in German. Even in the system of the Gothic language this verb with its ability to express more shades of necessity (see the examples given above) differed from the verb **þaurban* that performed the same modal function and was more frequently used.

Out of four preterite-present verbs (**magan, lais, *binauhan, gadaursan*) used in Gothic to express the potential semantics only the verb **magan* developed into a full modal verb in the course of historical changes in the German language. Like the verb **skulan* it differed from its «competitors» both in the number of the shades of possibility it could express and in its usage frequency in the modal function.

Thus, in the system of Gothic neither **magan* and **skulan,* nor other preterite-present verbs analyzed above had the status of the modal verbs with the semantic, morphological and syntactic features characteristic to this kind of verbs (to find about the criteria of defining the modal verbs refer to (Öhlschläger, 1989)), though they could perform the function of expressing the internal modality.

3. Conclusion

The Gothic preterite-present verbs turning into the modal ones process was in its early stages, which is confirmed by the lack of regularity in the usage of these verbs in modal function and the possibility to express one and the same modal meaning with different lexemes. This variability reflected all the changes in the preterite-present verbs class occurred over the course of time in Gothic. Cf. K.S. Gorbachevich's theory that variability occurs in the transitional phases, in the weak elements of the reforming system of a language (Gorbachevich, 2009). This weak element of the reforming system of the Gothic language along with the preterite-present verbs class was the category of mood, parts of this category – the imperative and the optative also expressed meanings of the internal modality.

Variability of the grammatical forms of the moods and the preterite-present verbs when they express the internal modality indicate that the process of transferring the functions of this type of modality from the optative to the preterite-present verbs in Gothic began. This process represents degrammaticalization or decategorization since the meanings of the internal modality change from the forms of the morphological category of the mood (grammatical level) to the lexical-grammatical means – the modal verbs. This degrammaticalization that started in Gothic later lead to the rebuilding of the modal system in German and to the occurrence of the new means of expressing different types of modality in this system. The new means of expressing the internal modality became the preterite-present verbs. The mechanism of their semantic change emerged earlier in Gothic.

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