

Diachronic Change in the Syntactic Status of Old Russian Participle Constructions (On the Basis of the Suzdal Chronicle)

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In Old Russian the system of participles differed both in a functional and formal sense from the present system: five types of participles were used (present and past active, present and past passive and the –I participles), participles could function as predicates, adverbs, attributes or substantives. Moreover, a special type of construction, the dative absolute was also used.

Research on Russian historical syntax employed traditional methods to describe diachronic linguistic states. These methods simply characterized the different structures applying the grammatical categories and rules of the modern language on them. Thus, they do not provide an explanation for the changes. The present study aims at revealing the underlying motivation for the functional alternations in the use of participles. In order to reach this goal two theories are used on our diachronic text: a generative method – minimalism, and a functional method – Role and Reference Grammar (RRG). These modern syntactic theories were chosen because they can cope with the problem of non-verbal predicates.

For the given analysis a 14th century Old Russian manuscript, the Suzdal Chronicle was used. The chronicle is written on a “hybrid language” in the sense that it contains Old Church Slavonic and Old Russian elements as well.

The first six chapters of the dissertation with the help of an inductive approach give an overview of the corpus, of the evolution, formal and functional characteristics of participles, of the history of diachronic syntax, types of syntactic change, and the definition of predicate and predication. Chapter 8 contains the deductive examination of the participle constructions applying minimalism and RRG.

The results of the given research show that participle constructions were affected by two types of diachronic change: analogy and reanalysis. The application of the minimalist framework revealed that the functional changes of participle constructions were probably due to a change in their functional categories – namely tense and aspect. This theory could provide an explanation for the dative case of DA subjects. With the help of RRG on the other hand, the problem of nominative subjects in participle constructions is solved.

The dissertation contains an appendix with the participle constructions of the Suzdal Chronicle which makes possible the comparison of our results with that of other studies in this field.