

On the development of the function and form of the original periphrastic perfect in 14th-century Old Czech

The original Slavic periphrastic present perfect consists of an I-participle and an auxiliary verb with the meaning 'to be' in the form of the present tense. This periphrastic present perfect grammaticalizes as a past tense, and its functional spread into the semantic domain of the past is accompanied by reduction or loss of the auxiliary. In Old Czech, the deletion of the auxiliary of the 3rd person is attested. The paper focuses on functional and formal aspects of the grammaticalization process of the periphrastic perfect in 14th-century Old Czech.

The material base is formed by our own excerpts from Old Czech texts dating back to the 14th century. Attestations were extracted manually and saved in electronic databases (in total, about 3.500 verb forms from 16 texts).

An analysis of the examples excerpted provided especially the following refinement of the previous knowledge about the development of the original periphrastic perfect in 14th-century Old Czech: (1) The spread of the original periphrastic perfect into the semantic domain of the past tense began already before 1300, i.e. before the origin of the oldest preserved continuous texts (cf. Gebauer, 1958, p. 65). Nevertheless, in most of the excerpted texts, the functional distinction between simple past tenses (narrative) and the original periphrastic perfect (contexts with relevance to the moment of speech) persists to some extent.

(2) The deletion of the 3rd person auxiliary occurs in all the excerpted texts. Dickey's (2013, p. 77) claim about the functional distinction between forms with and without the auxiliary was verified. According to Dickey, forms with the auxiliary express current relevance/emphasis, whereas forms without the auxiliary function as a neutral past tense. Our analysis suggests that this functional difference was perhaps manifested to some extent in texts dating back to the former half of the 14th century. On the contrary, in some texts from the latter half of the 14th century a high frequency of auxiliary use in narratives as well as in contexts of current relevance may be observed, which can be interpreted as a sign of a high (especially biblical) style. Given the possibility of stylistic use, we consider it very probable that there was no functional difference between forms with and without the auxiliary in the second half of the 14th century.

References

DICKEY, Stephen, 2013. See, now they vanish: Third-person perfect auxiliaries in Old and Middle Czech. *Journal of Slavic linguistics*. 21, 77–121.

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