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Peculiarities of the Development of the Modal System in German

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the development of the modal system in German. The comparative analysis of the changes in the semantics of the moods and of the preterite-present verbs expressing modality is based on Gothic, Old and Middle High German texts. On the basis of this analysis was shown as in the process of decategorization – transition of the functions of expression of the internal modality from moods to the being in process of formation modal verbs – the meanings expressed in morphological category on the grammatical level pass to lexical-grammatical means, that allow to express the internal modality more differentially.

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1. Introduction

Modern German language has a branched modal system; elements of this system express different types of modality: internal, objective external and subjective external modalities. The internal modality is the attitude of a subject (less frequently of an object) to an action they take (for an object it is the attitude to the action it undergoes). The main means of expressing the internal modality in modern Germanic languages are modal verbs. The external modality of a sentence is the attitude of its content to reality in terms of reality/ irreality (the objective external modality) and the degree of firmness of a speaker to the facts he or she conveys (the subjective external modality). The main means of expressing the subjective external modality in modern Germanic languages are modal words, the main means of expressing the objective external modality are moods (Ermolaeva, 1987, p. 68-69).

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There is no agreement in Russian and international German studies about the structure of the category of the mood and its division in modern German (for more detail refer to Zhukova, Babakina, 2012). Traditionally it is viewed as three-member opposition: the indicative/ the conjunctive/ the imperative. However, within the scope of this concept of moods the status of the imperative and of the indirect speech conjunctive are unsettled. The view of the relations between the present and the preterite forms of the direct speech conjunctive also seems contradictory.

The analysis of the process of development of the modal system in German gives the opportunity to show the peculiarities of this process, which in their turn allow to explain the specifics of the modal system of modern German and to suggest the decision to the disputable questions of the traditional theory of the moods.

2. Methodology

To understand the process of establishing the modal system in German *comparison and collation* of the modal systems of Gothic, Old and Middle High German were conducted, which allowed determining the peculiarities of the development of the modal system of German.

To that effect the original Gothic, Old and Middle High German texts were studied. In total, 8 sources were analyzed with *the method of continuous sampling*. The studied block of Gothic Bible (*Die gotische Bibel*, 1908) consists of 80 000 lexical units. The studied selection of texts of Old High German period consists of 46 000 lexical units from a gospel harmony translated by Tatian (1966), 60 000 lexical units of Notker's translation (*Notker der Deutsche*, 1933) and 33 000 lexical units of Otfrid's translation of Gospel (*Otfrids Evangelienbuch*, 1973). To analyze the modal system of Middle High German period the fragments of the following literary works were researched: "Poor Heinrich" written by Hartmann von Aue (1981) – 20 000 lexical units, "Parzival" by Wolfram von Eschenbach (1933) – 20 000 lexical units, lyric poetry by Walther von der Vogelweide (1972) – 20 000 lexical units, "The Song of the Nibelungs" (*Nibelungenlied*, 1992) – 20 000 lexical units.

In the selected examples from the given texts by means of the method of semantic interpretation and using *the method of contextual analysis* both the meanings of separate moods and the meanings of preterite-present verbs functioning as modal verbs in Gothic language and in the correspondent periods of the development of German language were determined.

Due to the consistent usage of *the method of comparison and collation* in the process of analysis of the specified units their similarities and differences in Gothic, Old and Middle High German languages were determined, which in its turn made it possible to show the transformation in the semantics of the moods under analysis as well as the preterite-present verbs in the process of restructuring of modal system. To follow the general tendency of its development in more detail while analyzing the transformation in the semantics of preterite-present verbs appeared in modal function, *the methods of mathematical statistics* were also used. Therefore, while determining the dominant meaning of the preterite-present verbs in modal function the percentage ratio of the meanings expressed by such verbs was calculated. In order to do so, sample survey was used, whereby not the whole sampled population (not the entire amount of the texts of analyzed periods), but some specific amount, which is called sample, is used, since "sample survey allows to draw the conclusion regarding the whole sampled population" (Nosenko, 1981, p. 12, 23). Calculating the percentage ratios of various meanings peculiar to preterite-present verbs in modal function in Gothic, Old and Middle High German languages was conducted on the average samples with the amount of the text's frequency of 100 of every verb. The samples were articulated with *the method of continuous sampling*. Lesser amount of the samples for certain verbs is determined by the absence of such verbs in the texts of ancient periods.

During the comparative analysis of semantics of preterite-present verbs in modal function their frequency was taken under consideration, on the grounds that, according to J. Bybee (2003), it is the increase of frequency which contributes in appearance of new meanings. Thereby she distinguishes the frequency of two types – frequency of occurrence of lexical unit in a text (token frequency) and the amount of lexical units, with which correlates a typical grammatical model (type frequency) (Bybee, 2003, pp. 604-605).

To determine the changes of the text's frequency the absolute and the relative frequency were calculated for every verb. "The absolute frequency represents the amount of implementation of a verb in the analyzed text; the relative frequency is the ratio of the absolute frequency to the amount of units in a studied selection" (Nosenko, 1981, p. 10). For the sake of convenience in conducting the comparative analysis of the text's frequency, the relative frequency in this research was calculated to the amount of 1000 lexical units. Given that the studied selection for

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