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FROM GIVING TO EXISTENCE: ON ONE REMARKABLE GRAMMATICALIZATION PATHWAY

1 *German*

As is well-known, in German there is a remarkable construction serving as a predicative expression of existence, namely the construction *es gibt*:

es	gibt	X
it-Nom/Acc	give-3Pers.Pres	the entity which exists-Acc
‘there is X’		

It is without a doubt interesting that Heine and Kuteva in their *World Lexicon of Grammaticalization* do not document the grammaticalization pathway ‘give’ > ‘exist’; according to their lexicon give can grammaticalize to benefactive, causative, concern (case), dative, and purpose (conjunction) and exist can develop from comitative, locative copula, live, locative, h-possessive (cf. Heine–Kuteva 2002:149–55, 331). From a purely theoretical point of view, one can construct a combination of grammaticalization pathways which are documented by Heine and Kuteva (cf. Heine–Kuteva 2002:54, 105–6, 149–51, 153–4, 241–2): give > benefactive, give > dative, benefactive > dative, dative > h-possessive (predicative possession) and h-possessive > exist can be combined into give > (benefactive >) dative > h-possessive > exist. Leaving aside the fact that this pathway admittedly is itself somewhat wild, the main problem naturally is that it is not directly documented in general, and above all that it is excluded in the case of German *es gibt* where we are dealing with a simple shift in semantics of the verb *geben* ‘give’ in a specific syntactic construction.

The construction *es gibt* + accusative spread approximately in the 16th century. The connecting semantic component between ‘give’ and ‘exist’ is the factitive meaning ‘give rise’;¹ in a construction in which *gibt* has this meaning, the subject *es* can have an anaphoric function referring to an event mentioned before. Ebert (1993:347) quotes the following example:

wann man Pulver auf die Pfanne schüttet, und die Lunte aufsetzt, so gibt es einen grossen Knall, und speyet Feuer und Flamme von sich (1657)

Here, *es* expresses what gave rise to the entity in the object position; it expresses a “concrete actor”. In a more grammaticalized construction, *es* becomes

a “general actor” if the entity in the object position is still viewed from the point of view of its origin. In the end, *es* becomes semantically empty and the sentence is semantically interpreted from the point of view of the entity in the object position, that is, from the point of view of the existence of this entity. This process is also accompanied with blocking of the position of the indirect object (dative).

Schematically: *es gibt etwas* ‘it gives something’ > *es gibt etwas* ‘it gives rise to something’ > *es gibt etwas* ‘something exists’.

Thus, though the history of German *es gibt* would surely deserve a more detailed study, it is perhaps possible to posit another grammaticalization pathway for ‘exist’, that is, give > exist, which apparently is typologically strongly marked.

In addition to this construction, there is another German construction meaning ‘exist’, which is also not listed by Heine and Kuteva, namely *es setzt*:

<i>es</i>	<i>setzt</i>	X
it-Nom/Acc	set-3Pers.Pres	the entity which exists-Acc
‘there is X’		

This construction, recorded since the 17th century (cf. Ebert 1993:347), is now dialectal. Heine and Kuteva list only grammaticalization pathways leading from a source meaning ‘to sit, to stay’ (cf. Heine–Kuteva 2002:276–9), while the German verb in question has the ingressive meaning ‘to sit down’ or the causative meaning ‘to set’. Explanation of the rise of the meaning ‘to exist’ in the construction *es setzt* is similar to that in the construction *es gibt*: we must presuppose a causative-factitive semantic connecting component (cf. Heyne 1905:686).

Finally, German also has a third type of verb existence-construction, namely *es hat*:

<i>es</i>	<i>hat</i>	X
it-Nom/Acc	have-3Pers.Pres	the entity which exists-Acc
‘there is X’		

This construction is listed by Heine and Kuteva as one of the examples of the grammaticalization pathway h-possessive (predicative possession) > exist (cf. Heine–Kuteva 2002:241–2). However, it is not that interesting for us, since it occurs in German dialects which have no contact with Slavonic languages.

2 Sorbian

In Sorbian dialects and in colloquial Sorbian, there are three verb constructions for expressing existence: with verbs meaning ‘to be’ (Upper Sorbian *być*, Lower Sorbian *byś*), ‘to give’ (Upper Sorbian *dawać*, Lower Sorbian *daś*), and ‘to sit down, to set’ (Upper Sorbian *sydać*, Lower Sorbian *sajźiś*) respectively (see Faßke 1996:34–9 for a detailed description; cf. also Scholze 2008:320–1). As was stated (§ 1), German constructions with ‘to give’ and ‘to set’ apparently are typologically strongly marked, which is – in addition to the fact that other West Slavonic languages do not have these constructions – a clear indi-

cator of the fact that the corresponding Sorbian constructions were borrowed from German.

Nevertheless, one can observe a certain assimilation of the German construction in Sorbian. First, the entity which exists is, in Upper Sorbian dialects, mostly not in the accusative form (the object position) like in German, but in the nominative form (the subject position). This may be explained by the structural conditions of Sorbian: on the one hand, since the subject need not be obligatorily expressed by a word in Sorbian in contrast with German, the subject position was not blocked by an empty pronoun corresponding to German *es*, and, on the other hand, there was already a native Sorbian model construction with *być* ‘to be’ in which the entity which exists was in the nominative form of the subject position. In addition, verb forms that were recruited for calquing the German constructions were imperfective in Upper Sorbian (*dawać* and *sydać*), so that the aspect system of Sorbian was respected in this case.

This second fact becomes apparent when we compare it with the situation in Lower Sorbian: Lower Sorbian chose the perfective form *daś* for calquing the *es gibt*-construction, and the perfective form *sajžiś* for calquing the *es setzt*-construction. Correspondingly, in Lower Sorbian, the accusative form (the object position) of the entity which exists is more frequent than the nominative form (the subject position). Both facts seem to show a more intensive influence of German on Lower Sorbian in this case, which is in line with other studies comparing German influence on Upper and Lower Sorbian (cf. e. g. Bayer 2006:293).

However, a more prosaic explanation can also be offered with regard to the nominative in the Upper Sorbian *dawać*-construction: according to Grimms’ Dictionary, in some regions of Germany, the construction *es gibt* + nominative occurs; among these regions, Thüringen and Osterland are mentioned, that is, regions almost bordering Lusatia (cf. Grimm et al. 1878:1704).²

3 Danish

When we said above that the German *es gibt*-construction was rare or typologically marked, we did not mention that there is a corresponding construction in Danish, namely *det giver*:

<i>det</i>	<i>giver</i>	X
it-Nom/Acc	give-Pres.Act	the entity which exists
‘there is X’		

However, this construction occurs in older Modern Danish (approximately from the 16th to the 19th centuries) and in Danish dialects of Jutland (cf. ODS 1924:987); therefore, it appears probable that it originated under the influence of German. More interesting is another Danish construction meaning ‘there is’, namely *der gives*:

<i>der</i>	<i>gives</i>	X
there	give-Pres.Pass	the entity which exists
‘there is X’		

This construction has been used since the 16th century with some evidence of it that is even older (cf. ODS 1924:988) and it is also current nowadays. As can be seen, it is only partly comparable with the German *es gibt*-construction: in the position of the empty subject there is *der* ‘there’, not *det* ‘it’, and the verb has the passive form, not the active one. More detailed investigation of this construction must without a doubt be left to specialists in Danish; nevertheless, we can perhaps formulate at least a preliminary hypothesis about its origin. We are likely dealing in this case with a combination of the internal development of a certain syntactic construction along two grammaticalization pathways with an external influence on the “lexical filling” of the verb position in this construction. First, the fact that the abstract construction pattern ‘there + verb in the passive form developed from the reflexive’ acquired the meaning ‘to exist’ corresponds well with two grammaticalization pathways recorded by Heine and Kuteva, namely locative > exist and reflexive > passive > impersonal passive (cf. Heine–Kuteva 2002:203–4, 253). Second, one can imagine that alongside the passive constructions with *der* and verbs that have more concrete meaning such as *der lukkes kl. 24* ‘one closes at 12 p. m.’, a more general impersonal passive construction with the verb meaning ‘to give’ was formed or reinforced under the influence of the German *es gibt*-construction.

Notes

- 1 See also Heine–Kuteva (2002:152) on the potential of ‘give’ to acquire factitive meanings.
- 2 Upper Sorbian as well as several other West and South-West Slavonic languages show another syntactic construction with *da(va)ti*, namely *da(va)ti* + infinitive with causative-factitive meaning, influenced by German (cf. Waldenfels 2008:273). However, in this case, the model verb is not *geben*, but rather *lassen*. Interestingly, Upper Sorbian is said to follow the pattern of *lassen* more closely than other Slavonic languages (Waldenfels 2008:273, fn. 78), which shows once more the strong impact of German on Sorbian.

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OD DÁVÁNÍ K EXISTENCI: O JEDNÉ POZORUHODNÉ GRAMATIKALIZAČNÍ CESTĚ

V textu se pojednává o gramatikalizaci slovesa s významem ‘dá(va)t’ v sponu vyjadřující existenci. Tuto gramatikalizační cestu nacházíme v německé konstrukci *es gibt* + akuzativ a spojovacím sémantickým komponentem mezi ‘být’ a ‘existovat’ byl zřejmě faktitivní význam daného slovesa. Jazykovým kontaktem se tato německá konstrukce rozšířila i do lužické srbštiny a dánštiny, přičemž však byla v obou jazycích různě modifikována.

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