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The Formation of Gerunds in the Slavic Languages as a Process of Grammaticalization

It is a common feature of practically all languages in Europe that they during the last millennium have developed verb forms generally called *gerunds* (or in a more modern generalized terminology, *converbs*). This is also the case with the Slavic languages as they generally have two nonfinite verb forms, i.e. forms of the verb paradigm whose function is to mark adverbial clause subordination where the gerund's subject is co-referential with the subject of the matrix sentence. In Slavic these forms developed from present and past active participles in appositive position originally showing agreement in case, number and gender with the subject of the matrix sentence. As long as this agreement was upheld, the participles remained participles and maintained their morphological and syntactic properties. The development towards gerunds sets in when the participle in appositive position starts to lose the agreement with the subject in the matrix sentence. The loss of agreement involves all three categories relevant for the participle, case, number and gender. As case is rendered irrelevant since the participle typically refers to a subject in the nominative case, the agreement categories to be lost are consequently number and gender. Then, as soon as the loss of agreement in either number or gender starts, the process towards the formation of a new verb category of gerunds can be observed. The loss of agreement categories has, however, occurred differently in the various Slavic languages, resulting in different morphological make-ups of, for instance, the present gerund, cf. Russian *govorja* versus Polish *mówia^ć*. In the present paper the development in Russian will be explored by investigating texts from the period when the loss of agreement occurred, i.e. the 16th/17th. The result of the investigation of three texts will be presented. As the loss of agreement with the matrix subject in number and gender is crucial, texts have been chosen where the main character of the story is either male, or where the main characters are male and female or where the main character is a single female. A comparison of the data from these texts then makes it possible to gain insight into how the formation of the gerunds took place as a process of grammaticalization in

terms of decategorialization in which the participles gradually are losing their morphological categories of number and gender. The process of gradual loss of agreement is completed when these forms are no longer members of the participial paradigms. As there is no possibility for the gerundial forms to “reenter” these paradigms, the formation of the gerunds in Slavic can be considered a substantial argument in favor of the hypothesis of unidirectionality in processes of grammaticalization.