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New markers of negation in Slavonic languages

This paper concerns the development of minimizers as new markers of negation in Slavonic languages, with special focus on Russian and Bulgarian. Minimizers, elements that denote the smallest possible quantity or extent of something, seem to be found in all languages to reinforce negation. Examples from Slavonic include Bulgarian *pet pari* ‘five coins’ and *puknat groš* ‘a cracked groat’ (e.g. *V džoba njamam puknat groš* ‘I haven’t got a penny (a cracked groat) in my pocket.’) or Russian *ni bel’mesa* ‘not (understand) a word’ (< Tatar *bilməs* ‘I don’t know’) or *ni (lomannogo) groša* ‘not a broken groat’. Minimizers seem to be universally strong negative polarity items because the pragmatic environment in which they must occur is one of emphatic focus (Krifka 1995, Eckardt 2006). In Slavonic, this is demonstrated by the frequent (often compulsory) accompanying use of emphatic markers, such as Russian *ni* or Bulgarian *nito* ‘even’.

While minimizers are often initially restricted to contexts linked etymologically to their source, some extend their use, either losing their association with a particular verb type or moving from nominal to adverbial status. In Slavonic languages, nominal minimizers readily develop into negative adverbs (‘not at all’) and negative quantifiers (‘not any, no’). For instance, Bulgarian *xič* (< Turkish *hiç* ‘anything’) functions both as a nominal argument and as an adverbial. Bulgarian *gram* ‘gram’ now shows all three functions: a nominal argument, a negative quantifier (*Ne viždam gram svetlina* ‘I can’t see any light.’) and a negative adverb (*Ne sážaljavam gram* ‘I don’t sympathize at all.’). Various items in Russian have developed a similar distribution (for instance *ni kapel’ki* ‘not a drop’ and various colloquial or vulgar items such as *ni čerta* ‘no devil’ and *nixrena* ‘no horseradish’). The first goal of this paper is to set out the paths of development attested in the grammaticalization of these items and the reanalyses necessary to account for them. A further more speculative question is why Slavonic languages are so ready to innovate new negative adverbs and quantifiers while they fail to go further and develop these items into markers of pure sentential negation as many western European languages have done,

notably French *pas* < minimizer *pas* 'a step'. Various hypotheses are considered including the failure of Slavonic languages (in the main) to innovate indefinite articles, the robustness (outside of Bulgarian and Macedonian) of the inherited case systems, the use of overt emphatic markers and the impact of language contact.

Eckardt, Regine. 2006. *Meaning change in grammaticalization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Krifka, Manfred. 1995. The semantics and pragmatics of polarity items. *Linguistic Analysis* 25: 209–257.