

Gothic *usgaggan us*: a case study on preposition-copying.

This paper focuses on preposition-copying as a degrammaticalization process, with a test case from Gothic.

I shall first present the phenomenon with some examples from ancient Indo-European languages (Ancient Greek, Latin, Gothic, Old High German) and from Modern German. The feature under discussion consists of the repetition of a preposition that is prefixed to a compound verb as head of a prepositional phrase depending from it, in a syntactic structure that can be represented by the scheme [(P₁+V)+P₁+N], e.g.: gr. εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον, lat. *exire ex urbe*.

Second, I shall provide a brief overview of the studies on this phenomenon, which has been referred to by various names, such as «preverb repetition» (Dunkel 1979), «preverb-preposition pleonasm» (Olsen 1996), «preposition copying» (McIntyre 2001), «preverb-preposition redundancy» (Goetting 2007), before focusing on the studies on the phenomenon in Gothic: Goetting 2007, Bucsko 2011, Miller 2019, Tan 2024. I shall also consider studies on the functional identity of pre-/post-positions and pre-/post-verbs (Bader 1997), on preverbatation and composition of complex verbs (Kuryłowicz 1964, Miller 1993, Booij – Van Kemenade 2003) and preposition incorporation (Baker 1988).

Goetting 2007 claimed that «preverb-preposition redundancy is attributable to Greek influence, and that the semantic bleaching of the Gothic preverb plays a role in facilitating literal translations of Greek complex verbs with pleonastic prepositional phrases¹». The Gothic Bible is, by its translational nature, a partial witness, and must be remembered that the Greek *Vorlage* played an important role in determining the translator's choices, also the linguistic ones (Drinka 2011). I shall argue that the reasons of this phenomenon are to be sought in internal factors, not only in the textual influence of Greek.

I shall focus on a case-study from Gothic, namely the construction of the verb *usgaggan* (to go out) with the preposition *us* (out). I shall present the instances in which this syntactic structure appears and I shall compare it with the total occurrences of the verb *usgaggan* in the surviving corpus of the Gothic Bible, alone and in composition with different prepositions.

From the analysis of the data thus collected, I shall propose to read the phenomenon as a form of degrammaticalization. Specifically, as a consequence of the univerbation process, the P element prefixed to the verbal form is reanalyzed as a constituent of the verb (PV > V) which maintains the

¹ Goetting 2007: 319.

semantics of the compound but loses its syntactic properties, requiring the introduction of a new P as a licensing element: this could explain the relevant number of occurrences (44%) of the structure (P_xV)+P_x+N.

Lastly, partly rejecting Goetting's thesis on semantic bleaching, I shall argue that the semantic of the preverb was not opacified, as shown by the rare use of *usgaggan* with an adverb (8%), and almost all instances of this use can be explained by the textual influence of the Greek *Vorlage*.

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