From -jan to sik: how valence orientation changes

The talk centers on two seemingly independent processes, namely, the development of causative -jan verbs and the emergence of reflexives in Germanic languages.

Proto-Germanic inherited the Indo-European valence-increasing suffix *-eye-/*-oye- and made it a part of its productive arsenal forming a large group of denominal and deverbative causatives like Goth. *fulljan* "to fill" < *fulls* "full" and (*ga*)*lagjan* "to lay" < *ligan* "to lie". However, eventually Germanic languages came to prefer the anticausative derivation over the causative one. This may be part of a wider areal phenomenon (Haspelmath 1993:101-103).

Another apparently areal phenomenon is the reflexive anticausatives found in Romance, Baltic, Slavic and Germanic languages (with the notable exception of English and, perhaps, Dutch where the reflexive morpheme *zich* is borrowed from German). In Proto-Indo-European, the use of reflexive constructions was apparently limited to situations like *He kills himself* (Kemmer 1993:52), but in the Northwestern IE languages its functions are close to those of the middle voice.

In this respect, it is interesting that Gothic -*jan* verbs make for 2/3 of all reflexive '*sik*' usages, and almost half of all attested mediopassive forms. This can partly be explained by their frequency. But that frequency and recent productivity (García García 2005:45) made them participate in all kinds of parallel formations, such as doublets with reflexive counterparts of the type *gawandjan – gawandjan sik*, both meaning "to turn" (intransitive).

I show that the switch from causative to reflexive anticausative derivation was already under way in Gothic. Despite Ottoson's claim (2013:348) that the 'anticausative meaning is sporadic at best' in Gothic reflexives, on closer examination the verbs *usskarjan* "tear from", *galaisjan* "teach", *gawandjan "turn"*, *skaftjan* "make ready", etc. + a reflexive pronoun are, in fact, anticausatives. From there, the reflexive form spread as a consistent valence-decreasing instrument in most Germanic languages, arguably prompting (and co-existing with) the trend towards the increase of lability and expansion of labile verbs.

(314 words)

References

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