

From Tense to Mood? Grammaticalization and the Slavic Conditional

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Old Church Slavonic (OCS), the first Slavic literary language, exhibits two sets of auxiliaries used in the conditional periphrasis, both being inflected forms of *byti* ‘be’: (i) *bimǎ*, *bi*, etc. which are usually characterized as the only synthetic conditional forms in OCS, and (ii) *bychŭ*, *by*, etc., which are homonymous with the aorist (completed past tense) forms of *byti*. As the former forms ceased to be used at an early stage, the latter ones replaced them, with continuations in most modern Slavic languages. The presence of aorist auxiliaries in the conditional periphrasis raises the question of how and why they (and no other forms) came to be used. Two theoretical possibilities and their implications will be discussed: (a) The use of the aorist forms is due to a transfer from the domain of Tense to the domain of Mood; (b) the use of the aorist forms results from an early division of the original paradigm into two distinct new paradigms, one of which came to be used in the conditional. While option (a) involves a shift from one grammatical into another grammatical category and might thus be considered a ‘regrammaticalization’, option (b) is more akin to a conventional grammaticalization from a (desemanticized) lexical into a grammatical category. The discussion includes semantic, morphological, syntactic, and grammaticalization theoretical considerations.