The grammaticalization of Russian taxonomic nouns

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The grammaticalization of taxonomic nouns (nouns designating ‘a class of people or objects with particular features in common’, henceforth TNs) has recently become a topical issue in crosslinguistic research. Besides their primary classificatory meaning, TNs have been argued to have developed a whole range of new grammaticalized uses crosslinguistically, e.g. quotative, discourse marker, hedge, approximator, semi-suffix, quantifier, nominal qualifier, attributive modifier, complex determiner, etc. (cf. Denison 2011, Brems & Davidse 2010, Davidse et al. 2013, Mihasch 2016, Rosier 2002, Voghera 2013, et al.).

Russian TNs (тип, вид, род, сорт, etc.) have been under-researched in this regard, though a number of parallels can be drawn with the trajectories of change observed in other languages. Furthermore, the inflectional character of the Russian language allows to add new perspectives to current crosslinguistic debates. Based on systematic analysis of contexts from the Russian National Corpus (RNC), I will discuss in detail constructions with TNS (or those with lexemes deriving from TNS) in various functional domains:

- the nominal qualifier or attributive modifier (одного из крупнейших у нас учёных / one of our largest scientists of a cabinet sort)
- quantifier (массового производства / mass production of sweets and all sorts of pickles...; и всякого рода подковерные интриги / and all kinds of undercover intrigues)
- exemplification (Нашу компанию знают в основном по ярким работам, типа Curara или Body. / Our company is known mostly for its bright works, such as Curara or Body)
- comparison (как Солнца нашего станет по размерам примерно с Землю) /... A star like our Sun will be about the size of Earth)
- hedge (Максим Галкина она пригрела э... типа усыновила / She took kindly to Maxim Galkin er... kinda adopted; Фестиваль этот был вроде турнира... / This festival was a sort of a tournament...)
- quotative marker (Нет такого открытого письма / That / Сергей Шнуров / shut up and don’t sing any more.)
- filler (Мы... вот пошли в... на английский... Ну типа вот / We... went to... to English... And well, like [tipa] yeah.)

The results of the study corroborate the following model of the grammaticalization of Russian TNs: TNs with full lexical weight → nominal modifier/qualifier/quantifier with partially bleached meaning and fixed grammatical form → prepositional use expressing the relation of comparison, exemplification and bridging contexts with emerging hedge use → particle use (hedge, quotative and related uses, and filler). The analysis of corresponding constructions in the RNC reveals that some Russian TNS demonstrate more advanced grammaticalization than others, some have ‘frozen’ at a certain stage, and some are still evolving.

References:


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