



Контекстная субъектификация значения глагола «may/mighte» в аспекте его грамматикализации как маркера разрешения и утверждения (на материале «Кентерберийских рассказов» Дж.Чосера)

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Contextual subjectification of the meaning of the verb «may/mighte» in the aspect of its grammaticalization as a marker of permission and assertion (based on «The Canterbury Tales» by G.Chaucer)

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Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются случаи контекстной субъектификации значения среднеанглийского глагола «may/mighte» в «Кентерберийских рассказах» Дж.Чосера с целью выявления прагматических факторов его грамматикализации как маркера речевых актов разрешения и утверждения.

Abstract

The article deals with the cases of contextual subjectification of the meaning of the Middle English verb «may/mighte» in «The Canterbury Tales» by G.Chaucer.». The purpose of the research is to define the pragmatic factors of its grammaticalization as a marker of the speech acts of permission and assertion.

Ключевые слова: контекст, прагматика, субъектификация, грамматикализация, маркер.



Keywords: context, pragmatics, subjectification, grammaticalization, marker.

(1) The subjectification of the meanings of language units arising in speech implicatures as new senses, those of modal verbs in particular, is recognized as one of the major factors of their further grammaticalization. Meanings based in the external situation tend to become dependent on the internal (evaluative, perceptual, cognitive) or metalinguistic situation, i.e. they tend to become increasingly based in the speaker's subjective belief state/attitude toward the situation. The unidirectional development of modalities «dynamic > deontic > epistemic» implies the appearance of stronger subjective senses from earlier weak ones [Traugott, 1990, pp. 499-501]. Thus one and the same modal verb can express more or less subjective shades of its meaning(s) at every stage of its historical development.

(2) Context-induced reinterpretation is the ground for the rising of new meanings from earlier peripheral senses. It involves the following stages: 1) the use of a language item in «bridging contexts», which have both common and different features with the known contexts; 3) the appearance of «switching contexts» with a new meaning; 4) the conventionalization of the new meaning regardless the context [Heine, 2002, pp. 84-5]. The study of the contextual subjectification of modal meanings can help to reveal the dynamics of semantic and pragmatic shifts taking place during a certain period.

(3) In Middle English «may/mighte» generally continued to express its original meanings of ability and possibility. The sense of objectivity could become stronger when it rendered «eventuality», «contingency» or «admissibility of supposition», or it could weaken in the

expressions of uncertainty about an event in the sense of «perhaps + infinitive». However, these shades of meaning did not have a formal expression [Visser, 1973, pp. 1756-62]. Thus the cases of the subjectification of the meanings rendered by «may/mighte» require a careful context-discourse analysis.

(4) «The Canterbury Tales» by G. Chaucer (further CT) present «the lively human intertext... coloured by each speaker's personality...» [CT, 1994, p. 3]. The contextual uses of «may/mighte» in «The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale» (further WBP and WBT) provide a most favourable ground for the search of subjective senses as the Wife of Bath's (further WB) speech is abundant in the expressions of her personal attitudes to religious and social norms, women's position in society, family matters, etc.

(5) The subjectivity of the deontic sense of «may/mighte» is weak in «bridging contexts» having much in common with typical contexts for ability or objective possibility. For instance, concerned with the legality of her five marriages WB challenges the medieval canon law, which permitted a woman to marry only once, referring to a biblical story:

(1) WBP 21-23: *But that I axe, why that fifthe man / was noon husbonde to the Samaritan? / How many myghte she have in mariage?* — 'But what I ask is why that fifth man was not a husband to the Samaritan woman? How many might she have in marriage?' (Here and further translated by M. Tsvinaria).

Similar examples of permissions rooted in the external factors (laws, customs, etc.) but coloured with WB's subjective attitude to them are WBP 517-20; WBT 878-81; WBT 914.

(6) Dialogues can provide «switching contexts» for asking a subjective permission:



(2) WBT 1096-97: *'What is my guilt? For Goddes love, tell me it, / And it shal been amended, if I may.'* — *'Amended?' quod this knight, 'allas, nay, nay!'* — *'What is my guilt? For God's love, tell me, and it shall be amended, if I may. — Amended?—said the knight, — allas, no, no!'*

The verb of obligation «shal» marks the knight's wife promise to please him, but considering her obedience to him in the context of their relations its realization depends on his consent, so «may» is sooner the marker of a humble request than of a statement of ability. A similar example is WBT 1236-38.

(7) The subjectification of «may» is highest in the conventional expression of a wish, where it is used instead of the principal verb of permission «moote» as a marker of the optative:

(3) WBT 1174-75: *Yet may the hye God, and so hope I / Grante me grace to lyvenvertuously.* — *'Yet may the high God, and I hope so, grant me the grace to live virtuously'.*

(8) The assertions of epistemic possibility as an eventual or highly admissible situation can be found in «bridging contexts». For instance, WB's personal inference about the ways for husbands to get their wives' love sounds like people's wisdom:

(4) WBP 415: *With empty hand men may none haukes lure.* — *'Men cannot lure hawkswith an empty hand.'*

(9) The subjective sense of «may/mighte» is more evident in personal assertions with such explicit markers of opinion as «thauseist» — *'you say'* (WBP 265-66), «as thinketh me» — *'as it seems to me'* (WBT 1204), «paraventure» — *'perhaps'* (WBT 1003) and the metacommunicative markers of attracting attention «Heere» — *'Hear'* (WBT 1146), «Lo, heere» — *'What about'* (WBT 719-20).

(10) The expressions of certainty like «may ye se wel» — *'you see well'* (WBT 1146), «men may weloften fynde» — *'people often find'* (WBT 1150) are proper «switching contexts» for the use of «maywel» as a marker of a confident assertion:

(5) WBP 283: *Wel may that be a proverbe of a shrewe!* — *'Most certainly this is a saying of a scoundrel!'*

(11) The use of the past form «mighte» with the loss of its temporal meaning in complex sentences with a conditional (WBP 6-7) or a comparative clause (WBT 1142-44) is a sign of its grammaticalization as marker of a subjective supposition:

(6) WBT 1133-38: *If gentilnesse were planted naturelle... / They mighte do no vileynie or vice.* — *'If gentleness were inborn..., they would be incapable of villainous or vicious deeds.'*

(12) The degree of the subjectification of the deontic and epistemic meanings of «may/mighte» in CT varies from weak in «bridging contexts», where it needs cognitive and communicative grounding, towards a much stronger one in «switching contexts». The uses of «may/mighte» for the expression of requests, wishes, statements of certainty and subjective suppositions can be regarded as the sufficient evidence of its gradual grammaticalization as a marker of permission and assertion in Middle English.

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