

Tendencies of the evolution of a definite article in the Sorbian languages

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1. Introduction: Some examples

- 1 Na, něk je mi wona pokazawa *tón puć won*, hale blows přede wsu.
Na, now she showed me *the way out*, but only out of the village.
(Upper Sorbian dialect text from Radibor, Michalk/Protze 1966, 141)
- 2 A nježelju zas reju (...) *Te źuwca* šykne burske obljacone...
And on Sunday dancing again (...) *The girls* are all clothed in peasant fashion...
(Lower Sorbian dialect text from Turnow, Faßke/Jentsch 1972, 14)
- 3 Mó smó zade jeno Lkweja jěli. *Tón kur* bě šreklich.
We were going behind a truck. *The smoke* was horrible.
(Upper Sorbian Colloquial Language, Breu 2004, 20)
- 4 Wone by *temu cźwojekej* ljpe bywe, fo by βo won nenarodźiw...
It would be better for man (lit. *the man*) not to be born...
(Upper Sorbian letter from 1782, Schuster/Šewc, 1967, 280)
- 5 Žurna běšo małemu Šwjeli *ta přědna droga* z Lutola až do Noweje Cale...
For little Šwjela *the first journey* from Lutol to Nowa Cala was not easy...
(autobiography of Kito Šwjela, published 1922)

2. Why are these examples interesting?

use of the demonstrative pronoun in a position where

we would expect a definite article in languages like English or German

we would not expect a demonstrative pronoun in languages like Russian

this could be steps on the way to the grammaticalization of a definite article

(there are similar phenomena in other West Slavic languages which cannot be treated in detail here)

3. Possible ways of investigating this phenomenon

diachronic: is this phenomenon typical of Sorbian as a whole? how did it emerge? is there a difference between the written language and the dialects? etc.

synchronic: is this really a definite article? how should we define the notion of “definite” article? which types of definiteness can be expressed by *ten/tón*? etc.

“contact linguistically”: which way did the German influence take?

4. A diachronic overview on the use of “definite articles” in Sorbian

I Written language

- λ massive use of demonstrative pronouns occurs in written Sorbian texts from the beginning (16th century)
- λ the existence of a definite article is mentioned in some of the first grammars of Upper Sorbian (e.g. Matthaei 1721, Zejler 1830) and Lower Sorbian (Hauptmann 1761), Jordan (1841) explicitly denies it;
- λ the use of demonstrative pronouns as articles disappears from written texts during the period of National Rebirth, in Upper Sorbian in the second half of the 19th century, in Lower Sorbian in the beginning of the 20th century
- λ grammars of the 20th century allow the use of *tón/ten* only in some special cases, but they sometimes mention its “exaggerated” use in the spoken language.

I Spoken language

- λ the demonstrative pronoun is used frequently in Upper and Lower Sorbian dialects, but there has been only little research on this issue;
- λ Michalk/Protze (1967, 38; 1974, 83) claim that younger dialect speakers use the “definite article” less than older speakers and explain this by the influence of education in Sorbian;
- λ Breu (2004) describes the “definite article” in Upper Sorbian colloquial language and claims that it is used much more frequently than in older dialect texts.

5. Is this really a “definite article”?

Lötzsch (1968, 26), Jentsch (1980, 160) and others state that in contrast to German the Sorbian “definite article” is “not obligatory” and that it is not used in some of the positions where one would expect a definite article in German;
if we define the definite article as a grammaticalized expression of the category of definiteness we will expect that the article is somehow “obligatory”, on the other hand it is not adequate to describe the use of *tón/ten* only in contrast to German;
functions of the definite article which occur in article languages
anaphorical use
expression of pragmatic and semantic definiteness (Breu on the basis of Löbner 1985)

pragmatic definiteness
deictic use
(anaphoric use)
indirect anaphora
cataphoric use
nominalization of adjectives

semantic definiteness
reference to classes (including generic noun phrases)
proper names
unique referents (absolute and relative)

different views on the question from where on we can speak of a grammaticalized definite article

anaphoric use: attested in all varieties of Sorbian except the modern written language

- 6 Pschi tym měšće pak, hdžež wón kschižowany bu, bėsche sahroda a w sahrodže *nowy row*, w kotrymž hishcže nchtó nebě ležał. Tam položischtaj wonaj Jesuša teho dnja židowskeho pschihotowanja dla, dokelž *tón row* blisko bėsche. Tych šabatow přeni džeň, njedželu, pak pschińdže Maria Madlena rano, jako hishcže cźma bėsche, *k temu*

rowu a widži, so tón kamjeń *wot rowa* běsche precž wsaty. (John 19:41-20:1)
 Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden *a new sepulchre*, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for *the sepulchre* was nigh at hand. The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, *unto the sepulchre*, and seeth the stone taken away *from the sepulchre*. (King James Bible, *ibid.*)

- 7 Wón sej šitko na *jenu cedlku* napisa. Ha potom wón *tón cedlku* tóm pólicajej před nosom dźerži.
 He writes everything on *a paper*. And then he holds *the paper* before the policeman's nose. (Breu 2004, 19)
- 8 Čora bě mama popołdnju *zes kolesom* pola nas. (Breu 2004, 27)
 Yesterday noon, mum visited us on *the bicycle*.

pragmatic definiteness, attested in all varieties of Sorbian

- 9 Mó smó zade jeno Lkweja jěli. *Tón kur* bě šreklich. (indirect anaphora)
- 10 A nježelju zas reju (...) *Te žuwca* šykne burske obljacone...
- 11 Rycže *tych bjesbóžnych* načinja krej pschelecze; ale rt *tych fromnych* jich wumože. (Pr 12:6)
 The words of *the wicked* are to lie in wait for blood: but the mouth of *the upright* shall deliver them. (King James Bible, *ibid.*)
- 12 *to* přědku stojece *wulicenje* (Kito Šwjela)
the story mentioned (lit. standing) above

semantic definiteness not attested in spoken language, but to some extent in older texts

- 9 *Cźlowjek* Bebi derje we wutrobje něscho prjódk wosmj; ale wot Knjesa pschińdže, schož jasyk rycžecz dyrbi. (Bible) [??? translation from King James Bible, <http://www.bibleserver.com/>]
- 10 *Serb* nebži. (Breu 2004, 26)
A Sorb does not lie.
- 11 A ja widžich, so wone tón schesty sygl wotewri; a hlaj, sta ƚo wulke semjerženje, a *ƚónzo* scžini ƚo čorne jako włoƚowy měch, a *měƚaz* bu jako krej. (Re 6:12)
 I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. *The sun* turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, *the whole moon* turned blood red. (King James Bible, *ibid.*)
- 12 Wone by *temu cźwojekej* ljpe bywe, ƚo by ƚo won nenarodźiw...
- 13 Dyž *ten džeń* zasej był jo a *to slujńčko* zasej jaro rjanje swěćilo, da jo mója mać zasej šla... (Nepila, beginning of 19th century)
 When it was day (lit. *the day*) again and *the sun* was shining again, my mother went again...

	anaphoric use	pragmatic definiteness	semantic definiteness
older written language	+	+	(+)
modern written language	–	(+)	–
traditional dialects	(+)	+	–
contemporary coll. lang.	+	+	–

6. Which way did the German influence take?

it is rather evident that there is no continuity between the older written language and contemporary colloquial language;

but German influence is also needed to explain the definite article in the local dialects;

the system of the older written language can probably be accounted for by the important role of translations, the system of the local dialects is either a reduction of this system, or the dialects borrowed only the most salient features of the German system;

the system of contemporary colloquial speech can be explained by the much stronger language contact after 1945.

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