

Re: Noun and Pronoun flexion in contemporary English

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Joachim Pense wrote:

Am 15 Jul 2006 10:15:40 -0700 schrieb Gorol:

Joachim Pense wrote:

We know English has only a handfull of verbal flexion forms. But in modern English the tenses etc. lead to a conjugation (or declination?) of the subject, as in

he'll go
Peter's going
we've done it

and so on.

Is there a name for this kind of flexion? Would it make sense to call "he'll" a case of "he"?

Does something like that occur in many languages?

Joachim

This is no declension. Imagine the German sentence "wie geht's". Is that a conjugation of the verb? Absolutely not.

Absolutely. Look at a similar case: the second person "du gehst". The "t" originally was a postponed 2nd person singular pronoun ("du")

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that was incorporated into the word (more than 1000 years ago).
(Compare other IE languages like Latin, that only have the "s" ending
in the 2nd person).

Today, "es" is being incorporated yielding the new form "geht's".

Word incorporation a standard way flexion comes into being, and that's
what's happening to the English nouns and pronouns here.

The interesting part for me is that in my English examples ("I'll go")
tense/aspect marking now is done on the subject (with no or only
defective tense/aspect marking on the verb (go/going)).

Your German example is interesting as well – the form "geht's" ("wie
geht's?" "so geht's!") is a new 3rd person form that has an implicit
subject and does not accept an explicit one.

Joachim

Wrong. "geht's" are in fact two words "geht es". "I'll" are two words
as well – "I will". There is only another (short) form which is
enclitic. It is the same as in Slavonic where pronouns have two forms –
a long one (accented) and a short one (enclitic). With a preposition,
they can form virtually one form, e.g. pon (for him) etc. In your
example, you will get "will you ..." in case of inversion, so it's no
inflection at all. What could be considered sort of inflection are
Polish verbal suffixes (mowil – he spoke, mowileM – I spoke) but even
here one has to be careful since one can say "jam mowil". In other
words, the suffixes can be attached at more words, either the subject
or the verb. When it gets stabilized (grammaticalized) you can call it
"conjugation". The same is happening in my native language with
personal pronouns which are getting sort of tense markers at enclitic
position (similarly to Russian but there the pronouns are accented).

Turkish has already gone through that development.

Personal pronouns after the verb forms have turned into suffixes.

bilir-im < bilir men (know I)

bilir-sin < bilir sen (know you)

bilir-. < bilir ol (know she/he/it)

bilir-iz < bilir miz (know we)

bilir-siniz < bilir siz (know you)

bilir-ler < bilir ollar (know they)

If you speak Austrian think about the example "Kimmtà scho wennst
wärtst". Would you say the schwa which is attached at the first verb
is a verbal suffix? And what about –st at the conjunction "wenn".

