The grammatical profile of the Latvian vajadzēt vs the debitive

The two main means of expressing necessity in Latvian are provided by the debitive form and the verb vajadzēt; see Holvoet (2007) for more details. The paper looks for the difference in their grammatical profiles, that is, a relative frequency distribution of their forms in a corpus. (The definition follows Janda & Lyashevskaya (2011).)

All instances of the debitive and the verb vajadzēt have been extracted from the annotated version of the Balanced Corpus of Modern Latvian (the version known as miljons-2.0) consisting of roughly 4.5 million words. The number of the debitive forms by far exceeds the number of the uses of vajadzēt — 10,652 vs 2,733 of which only 1,240 are used with infinitives of other verbs.

The debitive is used in the positive in 95% of the forms. The negative forms of vajadzēt are more frequent, amounting to 27% vs 73% in the positive when used with infinitives. The four most common categories occurring with both the debitive and the verb vajadzēt (in combination with infinitives) are simple forms of present, past, future and subjunctive. About 3% of the vajadzēt forms and 1% of the debitive are comprised of various instances of perfect and evidential.

The most frequent use of the debitive (60% of positive and negative uses together) is represented by the present form in the positive without the auxiliary, such as jādara. The second place goes to the same form with the auxiliary, ir jādara (19%). The positive forms of subjunctive (būtu jādara), past (bija jādara) and future (būs jādara) as well as the negative form of subjunctive (nebūtu jādara) share the third position with the value of 4%–5%.

The verb vajadzēt is much more diverse, its most common form being the one of subjunctive in the positive (vajadzētu darīt) with 30% of all uses of vajadzēt in combinations with infinitives. It is followed by the positive forms of present (vajag darīt) and past (vajadzēja darīt), each having the value of 18%. The negative forms of subjunctive and present (nevajadzētu darīt and nevajag darīt) comprise 12% and 10% of all instances. It is worth noting that of 793 uses of vajadzēt without an infinitive, the present constitutes the overwhelming majority having 46% of present forms in the positive (vajag naudu) and 23% in the negative (nevajag naudu).

References