LOCUS IN CONTEMPORARY BULGARIAN: THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract- This paper explores phenomena in the morphology and syntax of contemporary colloquial Bulgarian from a functionalist and typological perspective and in a synchronic framework. Most European languages are regarded traditionally as predominantly dependent-marking. I explore phenomena in contemporary colloquial Bulgarian that are typical of head marking. From a diachronic point of view, these phenomena are relatively new but they show a tendency towards head marking that is consistent with other older innovations that have been widely recognized as a shift in the same direction. At the phrase level, I demonstrate that definite possessive phrases with a pronominal possessor are typically head-marking. At the clause level, I demonstrate that pronominal clitics which are attached to predicate verbs are typical head-marking devices that, together with the lack of case in nouns, parallel constructions in typical head-marking languages, geographically quite distant from Bulgarian. Constructions from the colloquial language show even stronger trends towards head-marking than the conservative written language, which proves that the tendency is strong and still in process.

Key words- linguistic typology, (marking) locus, head marking, dependent marking, pronominal clitics, clause, noun phrase

Note on transcription: Bulgarian words are written in the Romanization system currently used by the Bulgarian government. Abbreviations used in the glosses: 1 – first person; 2 – second person; 3 – third person; Acc – accusative (direct object case); Aor – aorist; Dat – dative (indirect object case); F – feminine; M – masculine; Pl – plural; Poss – possessive (marker); Sg - singular

I. INTRODUCTION

During the last three decades, especially since Nichols 1986 [1], an important distinction is often made between head-marking and dependent-marking constructions and also between predominantly head-marking languages and predominantly dependent-marking languages. In Bickel and Nichols 2007: 193 [2] the term locus is proposed "for what has been known as head/dependent marking". It is based on where the morphological marker of the syntactic relation or constituent type is placed on the head or on the dependent. "For all of these patterns it is immaterial whether a marker is an affix, a clitic, or a change in the stem" [3]. The introductory examples there are the English phrase the man's house and the Hungarian phrase
az ember ház-a
the man house-3Sg
the man's house

In the English phrase the morphological marker is on the possessor noun, i.e. on the dependent, while in the Hungarian example the marker is on the possessed noun, i.e. on the head. Such distinctions can be made on the clause level as well.

Nichols 1992 [4] classifies the types of marking into six categories:
1) dependent marking;
2) head marking;
3) double marking: when both the head and the dependent receive markers
4) no marking: when there is no explicit morphological marker; the relation could be expressed by juxtaposition;
5) split marking: when marking is different and depends on properties of the constituents, e.g. "constituents with pronoun dependents are head-marked while those with noun dependents are dependent-marked" (ibid: 53);
6) detached marking: when the marker is detached (not attached) to the dependent or the head; typically, "a detached marker is positioned relative not to a particular word but to constituent boundaries" (ibid: 55). Bulgarian's closest relative BCMS (Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian) has this type of marking with pronominal clitics (ibid).

Most European languages tend to be dependent-marking with one major exception: the indexing of the subject on the predicate verb. That is usually called agreement of the verb with the subject in person and number, and in some cases in gender. Practically all finite verb forms are subject-indexed. English is rare in having only one form, the one for third person singular present tense, explicitly marked.

Bulgarian too has the indexing of the subject on the predicate verb. However, it is also widely known that unlike all the other Slavic languages, contemporary Bulgarian has no case marking on nouns depending on the syntactic relation. Diachronically speaking, it has "lost" it. Bulgarian nouns typically have only four forms: singular, plural, and both of these with the definite article, which is a suffix. At the same time, it has pronominal clitics

attached strictly to the predicate verbs. Both these features are examples of head marking.

In this paper I will examine a number of Bulgarian constructions which seem to show a tendency of head marking.

I start from two observations which I agree with:

Morphological marking of grammatical relations may appear on either the head or the dependent member of the constituent (or on both, or on neither). Grammatical relations – and whole languages – may be classified according to their propensity for using one of these types of marking. Implicational relations among various marking patterns can be stated: languages display a tendency to use one type consistently throughout their grammar. (Nichols 1986: 56) [5]

Although the head-marking pattern is cross-linguistically favored, grammatical theory is strongly biased toward the dependent-marked patterns that happen to dominate in Indo-European. (ibid)

Regarding the main concepts used here, we consider them well-established and not frame-specific.

The analysis proposed here is built on only two concepts, both of them straight-forward and non-theoretical. One is headedness, a theory-independent notion which in fact figures as a primitive in almost all theories […] The other is the presence and location of overt morphological marking of syntactic relations – the fact that a given word bears a given affix, while another does not. (ibid)

As for the dependency relations in the most common constructions we also follow the relations specified there (in the table below).

LEVEL	HEAD	DEPENDENT
Phrase	possessed noun	possessor
	noun	modifying adjective
	adposition	object of adposition
Clause	predicate	arguments and adjuncts
	auxiliary verb	lexical (‘main’) verb
Sentence	main-clause predicate	relative or subordinate clause

We will start with a discussion of phrase-level constructions.

II. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. Noun Phrases for Possession

Some possessive noun phrases, both definite and definite, in standard written Bulgarian show a tendency towards dependent marking. When the possessor is expressed with a noun, it is accompanied by the preposition na and the thus formed PP follows the head noun:

knigata na Elena
book.the of Elena
Elena’s book

When the possessor is expressed pronominally the dependent is an adjective-like “long possessive form” that agrees with the head noun in gender and number:

neyna-ta kniga
her.F-the book
her book

edna neyna kniga
one her.F book
a book of hers

However, the definite possessive phrases with a possessor expressed pronominally have an alternative that is preferred in both colloquial and written Bulgarian. It contains the so-called “short possessive form”, a pronominal enclitic that is attached to the head noun which is normally with the definite article (which in Bulgarian is a suffix). The enclitic does not agree with the head noun. It just indexes the person and number of the possessor.

kniga-ta=i
book-the=her
her book
kniga-ta=mi
book-the=my
my book

These are typical head-marking constructions paralleling similar constructions in typical head-marking languages:

0-tha-wowapi ki Lakhota [6]
3Sg-Poss-book the
his book
mi-tha-wowapi ki
1Sg-Poss-book the
my book

(a) haz-ad Hungarian [7]
the house-2Sg
your house

Colloquial Bulgarian has also alternative double-marking constructions which are not accepted as “elegant language” in written Bulgarian but are quite common in colloquial registers, e.g.

na Elena kniga-ta=i
of Elena book-the=her
Elena’s book

In such examples we observe both head marking and dependent marking in the same phrase. Further research is needed in order to understand and explain the occurrence of such constructions adequately.

2.2. Head Marking at the Clause Level

In Bulgarian the definite direct object and the indirect object, when the nouns denoting them are not present, are indexed on the predicate verb with

pronominal clitics. The pronominal clitic attached to the host verb as proclitics by default but, since there is a restriction that they cannot be in the beginning of a sentence, they could be used as enclitics as well, retaining the ordering of the clitic complex. Sentences (1) to (6) below have two versions each. If the material in the brackets is not present, they are good examples of written Bulgarian, where the pronominal clitics are used only if the co-referring noun phrases are omitted. If the material in the brackets is present, they are examples of colloquial Bulgarian, where the pronominal clitics are almost always present regardless of the presence or absence of the noun phrases. Since a topical subject in Bulgarian can be entirely omitted, sentences with omitted subjects (2), (4) and (6) are given immediately below the respective sentences with an explicit subject (1), (3) and (4). Sentences (7) and (8), where both the direct-object noun phrase and the indirect-object noun phrase are missing, can only be grammatical if both clitics are present. Since there is a restriction on pronominal clitics starting a sentence, they move to the other side of the verb when the sentence has to start with the verb complex. This is one of the reasons they cannot be classified as suffixes. The subject indexing is not analyzed explicitly here. It is expressed in the flections of the verb form. The emphasis is on the pronominal clitics indexing direct and indirect objects.

(1)
Elena (mu=ya=)dade kniga-ta na Ivan
Elena (3SgMDat=3SgFAcc=)give.Aor.3Sg book-the to Ivan
Elena gave the book to Ivan.

(2)
Dade(=mu=ya) kniga-ta na Ivan.
give.Aor.3Sg(=3SgMDat=3SgFAcc) book-the to Ivan
[She] gave the book to Ivan.

(3)
Elena (mu=ya=)dade na Ivan.
Elena (3pSgMDat=3pSgFAcc=)give.Aor.3pSg to Ivan
Elena gave it to Ivan.

(4)
Dade(=mu=ya) na Ivan.
give.Aor.3Sg(=3SgMDat=3SgFAcc) to Ivan
[She] gave it to Ivan.

(5)
Elena (mu=ya=)dade kniga-ta.
Elena (3pSgMDat=3pSgFAcc=)give.Aor.3pSg book-the
Elena gave him the book.

(6)
Dade(=mu=ya) kniga-ta.
give.Aor.3Sg(=3SgMDat=3SgFAcc) book-the
[She] gave him the book.

(7)
Elena mu=ya=dade.
Elena 3SgMDat=3SgFAcc=give.Aor.3Sg
Elena gave it to him.

(8)
Dade=mu=ya.
give.Aor.3Sg=3SgMDat=3SgFAcc
[She] gave it to him.

It is obvious that colloquial Bulgarian has a tendency to head marking when it comes to predicate and the core arguments in the clause. This tendency is consistent with the historically certified development in Bulgarian of losing virtually all case marking on nouns. Case marking on arguments and modifiers is another typical feature of dependent-marking that Bulgarian has lost. In this regard, colloquial Bulgarian looks more like Lakhota, a typical head-marking language:

"In head-marking languages like Lakhota, verbs do not assign case to NPs; rather, they are cross-referenced by pronominal affixes on the verb. Peripheral elements are never cross-referenced and may be marked by adpositions." [8]

Here is an example from Lakhota (ibid: 24):
Matho ki hena wicha-wa-kte.
bear the those 3plOBJ-1sgSUBJ-kill
I killed those bears.

Wicha-wa-kte.
3plOBJ-1sgSUBJ-kill
I killed them.

The respective colloquial Bulgarian sentences will be very similar in syntax and glossing:
Ubih=gi mechki=te.
kill.Aor.1Sg=3PlAcc bear.pl-the
I killed the bears.

Ubih=gi.
kill.Aor.1Sg=3PlAcc
I killed them.

We have to admit that the tendency towards head marking in treating the core arguments and in abolishing cases is very well defined in Bulgarian despite the fact that a lot of attributes of dependent marking are still retained. Although this feature sets the Bulgarian language apart from all other Slavic languages, it should be noted that there are parallels with developments in Romance languages like French, Spanish, Italian. These languages have lost case historically but have a well-developed apparatus of pronominal clitics indexing direct and indirect objects.

III. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER PROSPECTS

Our observations of constructions both at the phrase level and the clause level have led us to conclude that there is a progressing shift in marking locus in Bulgarian from dependent marking towards head marking, an important and intriguing phenomenon at the interface of morphology and syntax. Certain morphemes seem to advance on the path of grammaticalization towards suffixation although this change is far from complete yet. Similar processes might be observed in other Slavic and Balkan languages and the careful study and analysis of all phenomena can reveal fascinating insights into the workings of language as a whole. The typological-functional approach combined with the methods of comparative and contrastive linguistics gives us a useful theoretical framework for further research in this field.

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