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THE ROLE OF UNCONSCIOUS ASSUMPTIONS: A CONCRETE CASE

1. The existence of a formally expressed definite article is one of the most characteristic features of modern Bulgarian grammar. This is remarkable, since, among other features, the Slavonic languages are generally characterized by a lack of formally expressed articles. As a matter of fact, within the Slavonic group only Bulgarian and the very closely related Macedonian have a definite article,[1] which clearly distinguishes these two from the languages to which they are genetically most closely related.[2]

2. Despite the fact that the use and function of the definite article (hereafter referred to as DA) in modern Bulgarian are fully developed, it was not until the middle of this century that the DA was subjected to more detailed studies from a synchronic point of view. This lack of serious studies was explicitly acknowledged and deplored in a paper by Andrejčin in 1958. He said (p. 3):

"Трябва да се признае, че въпросите около членуването на имената са били до сега едни от най-слабо проучените въпроси из граматиката на нашия език. Десетилетия наред у нас нямаше по-сериозни проучвания нито върху основните граматически проблеми на членуването, нито върху различните конкретни случаи на неговата правоговорна и стилистическа страна."

Since the early 1950's, this situation has to a certain extent been remedied, particularly through works by Stojan Stojanov and Svetomir Ivančev. The latter published his first paper on the DA in 1955, treating some cases with and without the article in the vocative. In a thought-provoking paper two years later, Ivančev attacked the problem of the usage of the DA in Bulgarian, applying functional sentence analysis. In 1958 he returned to the same subject on a somewhat broader basis, using the same method also on other

kinds of sentences. However, the most voluminous work on
the subject so far is Stojanov´s study published in two
parts in 1959 and 1963. In this work, which is both descriptive and - to an unfortunate extent - normative, Stojanov treated both phonetical-morphological, syntactic, and
semantic aspects. Despite several weaknesses (one being the
subject of the present study), this must be considered the
standard work on the Bulgarian DA because of the rich material collected there. A more popular and condensed version
intended for the general public appeared a few years later
(Stojanov 1965). The impact of Stojanov´s two-part monograph has also been considerable because he included several
sections of it in his university grammar published in 1964,
which is still (1978) the one in use. Stojanov (1968a) has
also made an interesting comparative analysis of the grammatical category of 'definiteness' in Bulgarian and other
Slavonic languages. In the 1970's, Stojanov and Ivančev
again returned to the subject of the DA in Bulgarian (e.g.
Stojanov 1972, 1973, Ivančev 1974), but Stojanov´s studies
are mainly repetitive.

3. Stojanov and Ivančev approach the problem of how the
usage of the DA in Bulgarian should best be understood and
described in very different ways. Stojanov´s analysis in
his two-part monograph (1959, 1963) is based largely on
traditional syntactic criteria, i.e. he analysed every
sentence as a separate entity without taking account of a
wider context, and his notion of semantics was rather restricted. This means that Stojanov classified his material
in the following way: Does the subject, the direct object,
the indirect object, the temporal adverbial etc. take or
not take the DA? Ivančev, on the other hand, meant that the
usage of the DA could not be studied satisfactorily outside
a wide linguistic and factual context. Therefore, he used
functional sentence analysis, taking the communicative load
of the different parts of the sentences as the main criterium for his classification and analysis (e.g. Ivančev
1957). Naturally, their different conceptions of how the
problem should best be handled led to widely different results and in due time also to a heated argument between

them (Ivančev 1967, Stojanov 1968b). In the present study, Stojanov's point of departure in his large and influential monograph will be critically examined from a methodological point of view.

According to Stojanov himself, his two-part monograph is the result of a study in which he used the inductive method. The classifications are presented as though they are the only possible ones and the natural consequence of the inductive method Stojanov claims to have used. Thus, in his introduction to the second part of this large work he says:

"Методът на изследване и в тази част е такъв, какъвто е в първата част - и н д у к т и в е н. Излиза се винаги от фактите на говоримия и писмения книжовен език. След описването, класификацията и анализа на достатъчен брой примери се правят обобщения и се дават формулировки на установените закономерности при употребата на членувани и нечленувани форми" (Stojanov 1963, p. 627).

This point of view was again repeated by Stojanov in his argument with Ivančev. There he refused to accept that one could work according to a particular hypothesis or theory, as Ivančev explicitly stated that he had done, and declared:

"Единствено правилният метод, чрез който може и трябва да се изследва проблемата за закономерностите при употребата на определителния член в българския език, а и във всеки друг език, е и н д у к т и в-н и я т м е т о д. Грижливото събиране на фактите от езиковата практика, описването на тези факти и тяхната класификация ще ни даде възможност да установим закономерностите, по които се ръководи употребата на определителния член в нашия език" (Stojanov 1968b, p. 61).

But then one has to ask: Is there, or can there be, a pure inductive method, and did Stojanov in fact use such a method?

Is it not so that the very way in which one gathers, classi-
fies, and analyses one's material to a certain, often consi-
derable extent is dependent on the views - conscious and/or
unconscious - which one held in advance and which might
easily hinder one from seeing things from a new angle and
from making a more satisfactory analysis? Might not Stoja-
nov's study of 1959 and 1963 be characterized by preconceived
notions which influenced his classification and analysis,
even though these notions are not openly declared due to the
fact that the author was not aware of them? Stojanov's
classification was presented above. Let us quote some passages
from the first part of his monograph (1959) in order to see
what results his method, claimed to be inductive, yielded.

On p. 45, where he treats nouns functioning as the subject
in sentences with transitive verbs, Stojanov says:

"... съществителните-подлози като названия на глаголното
лице при преходни глаголи могат да бъдат ч л е н у в а-
н и и л и н е ч л е н у в а н и в зависимост от общото
положение: дали означават определени, или неопределени
обекти."

On p. 46, where he treats nouns functioning as the subject
in sentences with intransitive verbs, Stojanov says:

"Съществителните-подлози като названия на глаголното
лице при непреходни глаголи могат да бъдат ч л е н у-
в а н и и л и н е ч л е н у в а н и в зависимост от
общото положение: дали означават определени или неопре-
делени обекти."

On p. 53, where he treats nouns functioning as the direct
object in the sentence, Stojanov says:

"... употребата на ч л е н у в а н а и л и н е ч л е-
н у в а н а форма на съществителното като пряко допъл-
нение е обусловена от ситуацията и е подчинена на общата
закономерност за членуване на имената в съвременния
български език. Съществителното име в служба на пряко
допълнение с е ч л е н у в а и л и н е в зависимост

от това, дали обектът на глаголното действие се явява като определен или като неопределен за говорещия и за възприемащия в момента на изказването на дадено изречение."

On p. 58, where he treats nouns functioning as indirect objects at intransitive verbs, Stojanov says:

"Съществителните имена като непреки допълнения при непреходни глаголи могат да бъдат ч л е н у в а н и или н е ч л е н у в а н и."

On p. 59, where he treats nouns functioning as indirect objects at transitive verbs, Stojanov says:

"Съществителните като непреки допълнения на преходни глаголи могат да бъдат ч л е н у в а н и или н е - ч л е н у в а н и в зависимост от общото положение - дали означават определено лице или предмет или не."

On p. 61, where he treats nouns functioning as part of prepositional attributes in general, Stojanov says:

"Опредедениятa, изразени със съчетание от предлог + съществително име, могат да бъдат ч л е н у в а н и или н е ч л е н у в а н и."

On p. 83, where he treats nouns functioning as place adverbials together with the preposition в, Stojanov says:

"Съществителните в съчетание с предлог в като обстоятелствени пояснения за място на глаголи с п р я к о з н а ч е н и е могат да бъдат ч л е н у в а н и или н е ч л е н у в а н и в зависимост от общото положение - дали означават определен или неопределен обект."

Thus, Stojanov says the same thing about 1) the subject in sentences with transitive verbs, 2) the subject in sentences with intransitive verbs, 3) the indirect object in sentences with intransitive verbs, 4) the indirect object in sentences with transitive verbs, 5) the direct object, 6) prepositional

attributes in general, and 7) the place adverbial when con-
structed with в + a noun. As a matter of fact, he has to
repeat the very same statement over and over again through-
out the entire work. There can only be one conclusion. If
in every main syntactic position the noun may or may not
take the DA, and this depends on *non*-syntactic criteria,
then the *syntactic* fun_{...}tion of the element to which the DA
is added is obviously not a reasonable basis for classifica-
tion in a work which aims at giving a satisfactory treatment
of the usage of the DA.

Why, then, did Stojanov use the kind of classification he
actually did? The answer may be found in a statement in the
same paper in which he categorically stated that the only
possible and admissible method in this kind of study of any
language is the inductive one (Stojanov 1968b). In this paper
he also declared:

"Особено внимание обърнах на синтактичното гледище,
т.е. помъчих се да установя общите и частните законо-
мерности при употребата на членувани и нечленувани
форми на имената в зависимост от синтактичната им
служба в изречението" (p. 57).

From this statement it is clear that from the beginning of
his study Stojanov was inclined towards a classification
based on syntactic criteria, that from the very outset he
collected and classified his material according to this
preconceived notion of the best way of doing it. He never
changed his classificational criteria later in spite of the
fact that they proved to be not very satisfactory. Thus,
contrary to what he claimed, Stojanov's method was not in-
ductive. But as he was not aware of this, he could not exer-
cise caution or examine and discuss his expectations and
preconceived assumptions. The result of this lack of methodo-
logical awareness was rather devastating and Stojanov's
work therefore became highly repetitive and unnecessarily
lengthy.[3]

4. The problem of preconceived notions and their role in

scientific research is naturally not a new one and the aware-
ness of its importance in linguistics and other fields has
increased in recent years. For instance, Lyons (1970, p. 8)
has remarked that

> "... one may argue that certain theoretical assumptions,
> however inchoate and inexplicit, must of necessity accom-
> pany the selection and description of the events held
> under observation; and that there is no reason why these
> assumptions and expectations should not be given full
> theoretical recognition from the outset ...".

Linell (1974, p. 156) expresses basically the same idea,
although he formulates it differently:

> "It should be obvious that all scientific theories are
> necessarily based on some metaphysical presuppositions,
> and that metaphysics plays an important role in deter-
> mining the ways of scientific thinking ... Scientists
> should not leave their metaphysics unconscious and un-
> clear, for if they do, their 'empirical' theories and
> results will rest on unclear assumptions."

It seems clear to me, however, that the role unconscious
assumptions and expectations play in scientific research
has not been sufficiently observed, at least not among sla-
vists. In the present paper, my intention has been to point
out one concrete and illuminating case of this. In summary,
Stojanov in his two-part monograph may be said to represent
a typical example of a researcher who has classified a vast
body of materials according to a preconceived notion without
noticing either that he had it or that it was not very
suitable for classifying and analysing the kind of material
he was gathering.[4] The value of Stojanov's long study would
undoubtedly have been much enhanced if the author, instead
of maintaining that presuppositions on the part of the
researcher are inadmissible and fervently denying that he
himself held any, had openly declared and discussed his ex-
pectations.

NOTES

1. For political and emotional reasons, Macedonian is not even now, more than three decades after it was formed as a literary language, accepted as such by many Bulgarian linguists. This is why even in such a recent paper as Ivanova´s (1974, p. 91) one can read that "Bulgarian is the only Slavonic language which has a definite article".

2. The existence of a definite article, or something strongly reminiscent of a definite article, is also attested in seventeenth-century vernacular Russian, mainly through the writings of Avvakum (see e.g. Voge 1958).

3. Stojanov also used another classificational criterium, still more fundamental than the syntactic one. Thus, without ever motivating it, he divided his entire work into two parts depending on whether the DA within the nominal phrase was added, on the one hand, to a noun or, on the other, to an adjective, a numeral, a pronoun, or a participle. The reasonableness of this division will be brought up in another context (Gyllin in prep.).

4. In fact, Stojanov had an additional preconceived notion of considerable importance, namely that it is both possible and reasonable to treat 'definiteness' in language without taking any account of the other means of expressing this feature, apart from the DA, and the relationship between these different means. This point was never discussed by Stojanov, although it can in no way be taken for granted.

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