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Interpreting scarce data – Synchronic and diachronic variation and the replacement of the genitive and dative with the preposition *na* in Balkan Slavic

Modern Bulgarian and Macedonian (Balkan Slavic, BS) display remarkable grammatical restructuring in comparison to the other Slavic languages. In this paper, I will address a question related to the loss of case inflection: the replacement of the genitive and dative with the preposition *na* ‘on’, used with an uninflected noun. Examples (1) and (2) illustrate this morphosyntactic change:

(1) Old Church Slavonic (OCS). Codex Marianus, 11th Century (Luke 1:77).

dati razumъ spasenij-a ľud-emъ jeho
to-give sense.ACC.SG salvation-GEN.SG people.DAT.PL his
‘to give his people the knowledge of salvation’

(2) Modern Macedonian

mu ja dadov kniga=ta na brat=í na Marija
he.DAT.CL it.ACC.CL I-gave book=DEF PREP brother=she.DAT.CL PREP Marija
‘I gave the book to Maria’s brother’

The study of the diachrony of this phenomenon is, nevertheless, hampered by the archaizing character of the written, mainly Church Slavonic evidence: The loss of case inflection in BS took place approximately between 12th–16th centuries (Wahlström 2015, 81–84), but the manuscripts produced during this period do not give direct evidence about the ongoing changes in the spoken varieties.

Here, I will present examples from the Church Slavonic corpus that have been deemed by earlier research as indicative of the emerging of the analytic *na*-construction, replacing the genitive and dative (see, e.g., Duridanov 1956; Mirčev 1957; Steinke 1968). I argue that the suspected *na*-constructions do not, however, involve the marking of the core functions of the genitive and dative, that is, the marking of adnominal possession and recipient, respectively. Yet there is some evidence suggesting that there may have been another grammaticalization path for the adnominal *na*-constructions in addition to the most widely presumed series of development. Also, based on both textual and dialectal evidence, the loss of case inflection – and, thus, the emergence of the *na*-construction – seems to have affected certain classes of nouns sooner than others.

The early loss of inflection in certain classes and the retention of inflection in others can be analyzed in terms of referential hierarchies. Modern dialectal variation suggests that nouns denoting humans, especially men, retained their inflection longer, and were, therefore, the last to appear in constructions with the preposition *na*. An interesting counterexample, showing the simultaneous use of case marking and the preposition, will be discussed. I argue that these constructions are helpful in understanding the diffusion of the *na*-constructions within the BS dialectal continuum.

References

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