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FORM, ITS MEANING, AND DICTIONARY ENTRIES

Abstract. As we know, a language form is a unit which plays a specific form in the language, e.g. a semantic or syntactical one. We establish the function of a form based on its use (occurrence), i.e. its relation with the meanings of other forms in speech or in a text. The meaning of a form is the value of its function. In the traditional grammar, form is opposed to its meaning. However, various grammar schools have big problems with distinguishing between a form and its function. For example, the present tense form has a number of basic temporal meanings in Bulgarian as well as in Polish and Russian, and in none of those languages this is only the present time, (see past, future and habituality expressed using the present tense form). It is a big mistake not to distinguish between the meanings of article in article languages. For example, in Bulgarian the same form of article can express both uniqueness and universality (or, respectively: definiteness and indefiniteness). In the quoted book (Koseska-Toszeva 1982), I put forward a hypothesis on the development of the meaning of Bulgarian article. In my opinion, initially the article expressed uniqueness of an element (object), and then started to express also uniqueness of a set, which later, due to equalling two completely different semantically-logical structures, i.e. structures with universal and unique quantification, lead to a homonymy and to the article expressing also universality, i.e. indefiniteness. Similarly in English, French, Rumanian or Albanian, where the same form of article can express either uniqueness or universality This proves that the above homonymy is of a general rather than typological (e.g. Balkan) character. Naturally, in the above languages the definite article form can also express uniqueness of an object or a set, so it also expresses definiteness. Ambiguity of the definite article form is a phenomenon exceeding the area of Balkan languages, and the only Balkanism is the position of the article — speaking more precisely, its postpositiveness (postpositive position). However, that position gives us no right to treat it differently than the English or French article. In Bulgarian, Rumanian and Albanian the postpositive article is written together with the name its concerns, but it is neither a unit belonging to the root of the word nor the ending of the word.

The above observations, based first of all on the semantically-logical aspects of the definiteness category, have been confirmed by the language material from the Suprasl Code, where Bulgarian article does not occur in universally

quantified nominal structures, but in uniquely quantified nominal expressions, denoting satisfaction of the predicate either by one element of the sentence or by the whole set treated as the only one.

It is worth stressing that distinguishing between the form and its meaning in comparing the material 6 languages belonging to three different groups of Slavic languages (as is the case in the MONDILEX Project) will allow us to avoid numerous substantive mistakes and erroneous conclusions. Hence dictionary entries should be verified and made uniform in that respect before they are “digitalized”... Distinction between the form and its meaning in a dictionary entry is fully possible, as shown by works of Z. Saloni (2002) and A. Przepiórkowski (2008).

Keywords: Language form, meaning of a form aspect and tense, semantic category of definiteness/indefiniteness, contrastive studies, semantic interlanguage, terminological dictionary, contrastive description leading from meaning to form.

1 Introduction

Linguistics is a broad and already well-developed theoretically knowledge area. To elaborate the system of some language according to the contemporary linguistic knowledge, it is not enough to know that language. Hence in what follows I will deal with examples which show the pitfalls leading to errors in descriptions of language structures — in order to help avoid them.

2 Language form. Function. Value of a function. Meaning of a form

As we know, language form is a language unit which plays a specific form in the language, e.g. a semantic or syntactical one. We establish the function of a form based on its use (occurrence), i.e. its relations with meanings of other forms in speech or in a text. The meaning of a form is the value of its function. In the traditional grammar, form is opposed to its meaning. However, various grammar schools have big problems with distinguishing between a form and its function.

According to my experience, it is the grammar schools in southern Slavic countries, and — more broadly — grammar schools in the Balkans that have the most troubles with distinguishing between a language form and its meaning. The grammars which have found themselves under the influence of structuralism in language studies fare much better. Without coming into much detail, let me quote here works by J. Baudoine de Courtenay, known already in the 19th century, those by J. Kuryłowicz, dating from early 20th century, works of the famous Prague school of structuralism, R. Jakobson’s works from the 1960s, and many others.

3 Aspect, tense vs. definiteness/indefiniteness category

Let me begin with examples from the traditional academic grammar of Bulgarian concerning aspect, tense and the definiteness/indefiniteness category.

3.1 Aspect of a verb

I will consider aspect and the problem of its classification as a specific language category in connection with analysis of temporal issues in Bulgarian. The following deliberations are of a fragmentary character. In the literature on that subject discussing the issue of aspect of Slavic verbs, there is no unique answer to the question: What is the aspect? In his fundamental work on aspect in Bulgarian, Maslov makes the reservation that he is not considering aspect as a “lexically-grammatical or word formation category, but as a solely grammatical category” (Маслов 1963). The notion of a “grammatical category” itself is adopted in different ways in linguistics, so there is no unequivocal answer either to the question whether aspect is a grammatical category or not (Piernikarski 1989, p. 10). Some Czech and Slovak linguists treat aspect as a “grammatical category” as well (Pokdauf 1964). A similar approach is adopted by W. Śmiech, according to whom aspect is a grammatical category which consists in the fact that each verb is either perfective or imperfective in all its mode and tense variants (Śmiech 1971, p. 5, 6.) In turn, A. Isachenko assumes that aspect is a lower morphological category (Исаченко 1966, p. 26). Further, a Polish scientist Z. Stieber is of the opinion that the aspect category can hardly be considered as an inflected category (Stieber 1973, p. 9). The opposition between perfective and imperfective verbs is, according to him, expressed both in the pre-Slavic language and in present-day Slavic languages with word formation means rather than inflected means. A. Heinz, Z. Gołąb and K. Polański define aspect as a morphologically-inflected category of a verb which expresses the semantic opposition between perfectiveness and imperfectiveness (Heinz, Gołąb, Polański 1968). J. Kuryłowicz states the semantic character of the aspect category, which in his opinion has been built on the previousness category (Kuryłowicz 1972, p. 93–98). It is the semantic category of previousness which is the feature of all languages, while verbal aspect is only known to some of them. We know that it is a property of Slavic languages, which is opposed to other Indo-European languages, e.g. Latin and Greek, where perfectiveness and imperfectiveness are expressed as an opposition based on inflection (Safarewicz 1947, p. 198). In a work of exceptional importance for aspect-related issues in Bulgarian, S. Ivanchev brings up all problems concerning aspect in literary Bulgarian against the background of other Slavic languages, arguing that aspect of a Bulgarian verb is a live category (Иванчев 1971, p. 3–246). In the author’s opinion, aspect exhibits complicated morpho-semantic relationships in the contemporary literary language. In the context of those problems, Ivanchev develops a proposal for a new temporal model for the system of Bulgarian, rejecting the theory of absolute and non-absolute (relative) tenses adopted in the literature on temporal meanings of the verb. Up to that time, this was the way tenses were treated in the academic grammar of Bulgarian, see (Пенчев 1967, p. 134), (Koseska-Toszewa 2007, p. 233–245).

3.2 Absolute and non-absolute tenses

The classification of tenses into absolute and non-absolute (relative) was most probably tailored to languages which possess the previousness category but do not

possess a formalized aspect category, see e.g. French *imparfait* = present dans le passé (СТАНКОВ 1969). Such a classification is underlain by the semantic category of previousness. However, in Slavic languages, where the aspect category is a grammatically developed one, classification of tenses into absolute and relative ones fails to explain temporal relations in a satisfactory way, and in fact makes them more complicated. This is also the case with the theory of action types (*Aktionsart*) taken from German, where, in opposition to Slavic languages, there is no aspect category, so its transfer to any Slavic language is unjustified. In *Aktionsart*, the division of verbs into action types is not disjoint, and the individual verb types often overlap. Since from the semantic viewpoint aspect is also a type of action, then what is the difference between aspect and other kinds of action types? While in German, and maybe in Germanic languages, this kind of theory has some application in classification of verb meanings, in Slavic languages, where aspect is a live, developing category, the above theory has no proper application. In the *Contrastive Bulgarian-Polish Grammar*, aspect is treated as a semantic category, and in order not to confuse the form of aspect with its contents, we write there about the “semantic category of aspect”, see (Karolak 2008).

3.3 Aspect and tense

Regardless of whether aspect is a grammatical, morphological or semantic category, it cannot be disregarded during the analysis of temporal relations, especially in Bulgarian. This fact is an argument in the discussion between Bulgarian linguists representing the so-called temporal school with representatives of the so-called aspect school. The temporal school is exemplified by works of L. Andrejchin, V. Stankov, M. Dejanov, and the aspect school — by those of J. Maslov, E. Demina, S. Ivanchev. Since we know that in the languages with aspect there are few tenses, like in north-Slavic languages, while languages devoid of aspect have a higher number of them (like Latin or French), we could expect that in southern Slavic languages there are two tendencies: one going towards reducing the number of tenses (as in Serbian and Croatian), and a second one, connected with gradual disappearance (or underdevelopment) of aspect, and maintaining a large number of tenses. This tendency has been searched for e.g. in Bulgarian. However, the aspect category still exists in the eastern group of southern Slavic languages, and yet the number of tenses in those languages does not decrease. Southern Slavic languages, and especially their eastern group, from the typological viewpoint represent the transitional stage between Greek and Latin on the one hand (large number of tenses, absence of the aspect category) and northern Slavic languages (aspect category, small number of tenses) on the other hand. This is why the problems of temporal relations in southern Slavic lands are especially important both for explaining the Slavic aspect category and for the semantics of tenses in Slavic languages.

Consequently, we should recall the thesis of S. Ivanchev (ИВАНЧЕВ 1971, p. 129), who claims that there is a genetic connection between imperfectiveness and imperfectum. He considers the aorist : imperfectum relation not as a temporal or aspectual one, but as a joint temporally-aspectual relation.

In Serbian, the imperfectum form could only be built for imperfective verbs and had a clearly aspectual character, in opposition to the Serbian aorist form, which could be not only perfective, but also imperfective (though very rarely) (Vuković 1967, p. 276–313).

The language facts from old Bulgarian sources confirm that the ratio of imperfectum forms of perfective verbs to imperfectum forms of imperfective verbs was (Dostál 1954, p. 99). Based on this, some scholars consider the bi-aspectual character of the aorist and imperfectum forms as an archaic state of things (Koschemieder 1967, p. 19). However, in southern Slavic languages, and especially in the Bulgarian-Macedonian area, this state is a live one, and it is not transient at the given stage of language development.

4 Semantic category of time

The connections between aspect and temporality in southern Slavic languages (except for Slovenian) confirm Kuryłowicz's thesis about the semantic character of aspect (Feleszko, Koseska-Toszewa, Sawicka 1974, p. 183–187). In turn, Gołąb, Heinz and Polański when considering the notions of aspect and its strict connection with the category of time propose a diagram which fully explains the differences in meaning between both categories. This reduces to the fact that exponents of time position a given action with respect to the speech state (the so-called moment of speaking), while a exponent of aspect position the same action with respect to the point which represents the moment of ending the action, regardless of the speech state, see (Heinz, Gołąb, Polański 1968; Koseska-Toszewa 1982).

By the semantic category of time I mean a category that orders states and events with respect to the speech state by using the previousness-successiveness relation (Koseska-Toszewa 2007). For the basic notions of time — states and events as elements of temporality, see A. Mazurkiewicz in this volume). For example, the praesens form (present tense form) has a number of basic temporal meanings in Bulgarian as well as in Polish and Russian, and in none of those languages this is only the present time, see (Grochowski 1972; Koseska 1977). In those languages, the present tense form denotes:

1. present time:

- BG Анета спи в моята стая.
- PL Aneta śpi w moim pokoju.
- RU Анета спит в моей комнате.

2. future time:

- BG Утре идвам в два, а не в три часа.
- PL Jutro przychodzę o drugiej, nie o trzeciej.
- RU Я завтра прихожу в два, а не в три часа.

3. past time:

- BG И чак тогава той разбира своите грешки.
- PL I dopiero wtedy on rozumie swoje błędy.
- RU И едва тогда он понимает свои ошибки.

4. habituality:

BG Той всеки ден са разхожда поне един час.

PL On codziennie spaceruje przynajmniej jedną godzinę.

RU Каждый день он гуляет хотя один час.

Sentences (1) are expressed in the present tense; they are indicative, and hence they have either true or false value. In this respect, sentences (1) differ from e.g. sentences (2) in the future tense, which do not have either true or false value, and hence are not indicative. Instead, they have a third value — possibility, which is a modal value. Do the sentences: *Jan ponoć teraz jest na spacerze. Ян бил сега на разходка. / Ян уж е сега на разходка.* refer to the present time, or are they just sentences with the present tense form? Certainly, they do not have either true or false value, and hence they cannot be sentences expressing the present time. This is evidenced by e.g. Bulgarian, where the *бил* form signals the imperceptive modality rather than the present time, see z *Той сега е на разходка.*, where present tense occurs. Sentences with various types of the possibility modality, not only the imperceptive one like above, often occur with the praesens form, but can also have a third value — possibility, so during the speech state we do not know whether the described state or combination of state and events exist or not. In such a case, we cannot speak of the present time, but only of a present tense form, see e.g.:

PL On jakoby jest złodziejem.

BG Той май е крадец. / Той бил крадец.

The interpretation of the above sentences as ones with the present time is a good example of a failure to distinguish between a verbal form and its temporal function. Defining the present time more precisely, it is worth stressing that the present, i.e. what is happening now according to the bearer of the speech state, should be understood as a state coexistent concurrent with the speech state. Very roughly, it can also be understood solely as a state coexistent with the speech state.

However, Bulgarian grammars commonly use statements of the type: “this is a metaphorical meaning of the present time”, though the present time is the meaning of a present tense form (Станков 1969). Such statements often lead to speaking of another meaning of some meaning, i.e. to a tautology. Similarly, Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian grammars still distinguish between the so-called absolute and relative tenses, and do not always distinguish between a form and its meaning, see (Silić, Pranjković 2005; Toporishich 1976).

5 Semantic category of definiteness/indefiniteness

Research on the definiteness/indefiniteness category has usually reduced to describing its morphological exponents first of all in the so-called article languages. The researchers have also searched for lexical analogues corresponding to the contents of article in article-free languages. In consequence, the definiteness/indefiniteness category has been treated solely as a nominal phrase category. For many years, this

fact influenced the descriptions of the category we are interested in, which in article-free languages were often reduced solely to analysis of the meanings of pronouns. Studies have shown that the definiteness/indefiniteness category as a semantic category is expressed with various language means: lexical and morphological ones, also at the level of the verbal phrase rather than only the nominal phrase, as used to be the prevailing belief in the literature on that subject, and that this is a category of the sentence rather than of the nominal phrase (Koseska-Toszewa 1982).

The use of the term “definiteness” in the cases when the so-called “definite article” expressed indefiniteness, i.e. universality, was an obvious mistake, and followed just from not distinguishing between the form and its meaning. In our works, the definiteness/indefiniteness category was defined as a category with the semantic opposition: uniqueness: non-uniqueness, whereby by definiteness we mean only uniqueness of an element of a set (satisfying the predicate), and by indefiniteness — non-uniqueness (both in the sense of existentiality and of universality, (Koseska-Toszewa 1982)).

In Bulgarian, the most typical morphological means for expressing uniqueness and universality in the nomen group is deemed to be the article. Its absence, i.e. morphological 0, is meaningful — it is an exponent of either existentiality or pure predication. The ambiguity of Bulgarian article is a good illustration of the difficulties encountered by a scholar studying that category during classification, here quantificational classification of natural language expressions. As I have already mentioned, in Bulgarian the same form of article can express both uniqueness and universality (or, respectively: definiteness and indefiniteness). In the already quoted book (Koseska-Toszewa 1982), I put forward a hypothesis on the development of the meaning of Bulgarian article. In my opinion, initially the article expressed uniqueness of an element (object), and then started to express also uniqueness of a set, which later, due to equalling two completely different semantically-logical structures, i.e. structures with universal and unique quantification, lead to a homonymy and to the article expressing also universality. See:

1. *Човек-ът е от нашето село. / Ten człowiek jest z naszej wsi*, where the article *-ът* expresses uniqueness of an element of a set of people.
2. *Човек-ът е мислещо и разумно същество. / Każdy człowiek i tylko on jest istotą myślącą i rozsądną*, where the article *-ът* expresses uniqueness of a set. (Only the set of people satisfies the predicate: *x is a thinking and rational being*).
3. *Човек-ът е смъртен. Człowiek jest śmiertelny*, where the article *-ът* expresses universality.

Not only this form of Bulgarian article, but also its other forms can express both uniqueness and universality, i.e. definiteness and indefiniteness. Similarly in English, French, Rumanian or Albanian, where the same form of article can express either uniqueness or universality. This proves that the above homonymy is of a general rather than typological (e.g. Balkan) character. For details on that subject, see (Koseska-Toszewa 1982). Examples in which the English definite article expresses indefiniteness are discussed by Reichenbach (1944, p. 101), who writes about the fact that the English “the” can express “universality” rather than definiteness! Examples:

- EN The lion is a ferocious animal. ‘The lion is a dangerous, wild animal.’
 F Le lion est un animal feroce. (French) ‘The lion is a dangerous, wild animal.’
 RO Omul este muntor. (Romanian) ‘Each man is mortal.’
 AL Qeni është mik i njeriu. (Albanian) ‘The dog is a friend of the man.’
 BG Човек-ът е смъртен. (Bulgarian) ‘Each man is mortal.’

Naturally, in the above languages the definite article form can also express uniqueness of an object or a set, so it can also express definiteness. Examples:

- EN The man closed the door.
 F L’homme a ferme la porte.
 RO Omul a intrat in camera.
 AL Libri është mbi tryeze ‘(The) book is on the table.’
 BG Човекът затвори вратата. / Книгата лежи на масата.

From the above examples it is evident that ambiguity of the definite article form is a phenomenon exceeding the area of Balkan languages, and the only Balkanism there is the position of the article — speaking more precisely, its postpositiveness (postpositive position). However, that position gives us no right to treat it differently than the English or French article. In Bulgarian, Rumanian and Albanian the postpositive article is written together with the name its concerns, but it is neither a unit belonging to the root of the word nor the ending of the word.

The above observations, based first of all on the semantically-logical aspects of the definiteness category, have been confirmed by the language material from the Suprasl Code, where Bulgarian article does not occur in universally quantified nominal structures, but in uniquely quantified nominal expressions, denoting satisfaction of the predicate either by one element of the sentence or by the whole set treated as the only one (Koseska-Toszewa 2007).

It is worth stressing that without distinguishing between the form and its meaning, a comparison of material taken from 6 languages belonging to three different groups of Slavic languages may involve numerous substantive errors, and lead to erroneous conclusions. Hence dictionary entries should be verified and made uniform in that respect before they are “digitalized”... Distinguishing between the form and its meaning in a dictionary entry is fully possible, as shown by works of Z. Saloni (2002) and A. Przepiórkowski (2008).

A dictionary entry should obligatorily distinguish between a language form and its meaning. A further stage is to determine what we understand by the meaning of a given language form.

6 Instead of a summary

The distinction between a form and its meaning concerns those theoretical confrontative studies in which the description of the language material goes from the meaning to the form. Contrastive (confrontative) linguistics is known to be a field

of synchronous linguistics with both theoretical and practical applications. If contrastive studies deal with analysis of differences and similarities for practical (didactic or translation-oriented purposes), we refer to them as a field of **applied** linguistics, connected first of all with foreign language teaching. We can also single out there the stream of research on machine translation theory.

In turn, we speak of **theoretical** contrastive studies in the case when such studies concern universal linguistic issues, and when they employ language examination methods aimed at distinguishing within the studied languages, treated equally, all elements which are either common or different for them. With respect to the research methods employed, as well as the use of **synchronous approach**, theoretical contrastive studies are close to **typological** studies, but differ from the latter in the aim of description: typological studies lead to classification of languages, while contrastive studies — to systemic analysis of the languages under comparison.

7 Interlanguage and terminological dictionaries

The distinction between theoretical and applied contrastive studies is connected with the notion of an interlanguage, which is a key problem for theoretical contrastive studies. We remember the strong entrance of the generative-transformational grammar theory following Chomsky in the 1970s, and the criticism which the proponents of that grammar heaped on contrastive studies, charging them first of all with *lack of criteria for foundations of contrastive analysis, i.e. lack of an interlanguage (tertium comparationis)*. This criticism had a positive influence on the development of theoretical contrastive studies. In Selinker's opinion, the interlanguage is „the type of competences in the target language which is the product of the competence in the home language and the target language system” (Selinker 1972). However, this definition fails to tell us what type of competences in the target language is referred to. We also have a problem of another nature here, but that problem will be discussed later. As we can see, both the term and the notion of an interlanguage are relatively new. We can expect that along with development of the contrastive grammar theory they might be used in a way which will not necessarily be compliant with the intention of the author of that term. Without doubt, also in this case a good methodological solution would be an interlanguage, allowing for an objective comparison of the meanings and forms of the studied languages based on their equal treatment. However, development of such a *tertium comparationis* is not an easy task (Koseska-Toszewa, Korytkowska, Roszko 2009).

The process of developing a semantic interlanguage can be divided into the following stages:

1. Selection of a universal semantic language category — e.g. definiteness/indefiniteness, time, communicant, semantic case, e.g.
2. Selection of a logically-semantic theory to be used for developing the concept system of the interlanguage, e.g. logical quantification, network-based description of time in a natural language, theory of logical predicate-argument structures, etc.
3. Definitions of notions according to the selected theory, see below.

4. Development of a terminological dictionary starting from the semantic interlanguage.

The selection of semantic language categories must take into consideration the specifics of Slavic languages. For example, Reichenbach's logically-semantic theory of time in a natural language, well-known and popular in linguistics, does not distinguish between the meanings of time and aspect, and without such a distinction the description of meanings in any Slavic language is both incomplete and false.

In our opinion, a very important requirement is that the interlanguage be built **based on theories which do not lead to a contradiction**. For example, when building the basic semantic units used to describe the linguistic category of definiteness/indefiniteness in the interlanguage, we can use either the reference theory or the definite description and quantification theory. However, a simultaneous use of both the theories is not recommended, since it leads to internal inconsistencies in the concept system of the interlanguage. This can be seen in the works which do not distinguish between the notions chosen here as an example, such as reference and definite description. Already based on Volume 2 of the Bulgarian-Polish Contrastive Grammar (Koseska-Tošewa, Ğaprow 1990) we can see that **a description which takes as a starting point the Bulgarian formal linguistic means is quite different from a description originating from the Polish formal linguistic means**. One of the reasons for this is the more expanded morphological plane of the means for expressing the notions of definiteness and indefiniteness in Bulgarian compared to Polish, see also (Koseska-Toszewa, Mazurkiewicz 1988). This is, among others, why replacing the interlanguage by one of the contrasted languages together with its metalanguage would be a major methodological error — and this is exactly the approach employed in most of the works known to us, in which the description of the language goes from the form to the contents.

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