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Chomskyan Revolution in Bulgarian Socio-Cultural and Linguistic Environment

The term *Chomskyan revolution* is commonly used in the USA to denote the Transformational-Generative Grammar (TGG) of the American linguist Noam Chomsky (Chomsky, 1957, 1965 and later works). As this grammar was transferred to Bulgarian linguistic theory soon after it appeared in the USA, it is essential to see if it came with its revolutionary aura or lost it on the way – an issue discussed here as a matter of cultural-linguistic difference, essential for the overseas perspective of TGG. The attitudes towards Chomskyan grammar model on Bulgarian soil are traced in focal research of Bulgarian generative grammarians and linguistic historiographers since 1970s.

1. *Chomskyan revolution* as a mythologeme

Generally, in the U. S. and other countries, the opinion that Noam Chomsky's contribution to linguistics is revolutionary, i.e. leading to an entirely new way of exploring language, became so hugely popular that *Chomskyan revolution* got established as mythologeme – a sign of a social myth whose authenticity is not even questioned, see Fig.1.

Figure 1.0 Uses of *Chomskyan revolution*[1]

Chomskyan revolution was also paraphrased as *Chomsky's Revolution* or predicatively as *Chomsky revolutionized linguistics.* The core mythologeme is complemented by designations of its main figure Noam Chomsky – *the father of modern linguistics*, taken quite seriously, and even *messiah*, used ironically by Harris (1993, p. 37). It is possible that *revolution* and *father* even appear in the same text.

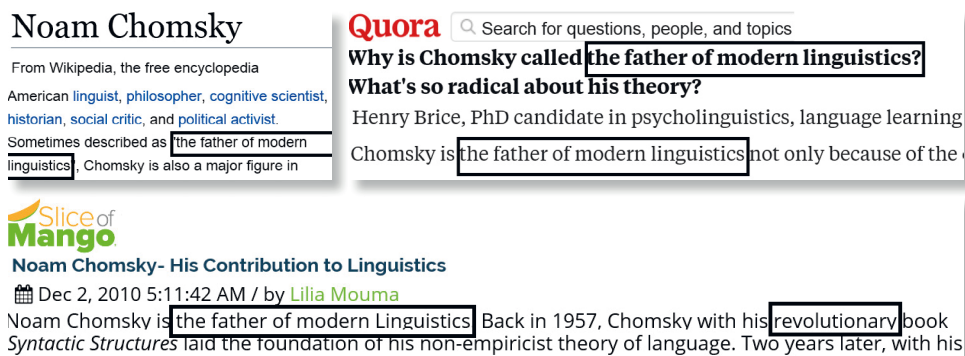Figure 2. Uses of *the father of modern linguistics*[2]

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[1] Figure 1 is based on Searle (1972), Newmeyer (1986), McGilvray (2009) and Harris (2010).
[2] Figure 2 is based on "Noam Chomsky" (2017), Harris (2010), Brice (2016) and Mouma (2010).

Revolutionary and fatherly metaphors surpassed specialized linguistic circles, where they are accompanied by some argumentation or put in quotation marks, and permeated the general cultural and social spheres. There they formed a network of unquestioned mythologemes about modern linguistics in the midst of which Chomsky's figure rose revolutionary-patriarchally.

2. Origin of the mythologeme *Chomskyan revolution*

Chomskyan revolution is closely related to *digital, scientific and cognitive revolutions* – all of them active social mythologemes, based on T. Kuhn's theory of scientific revolutions. He described them as "tradition-shattering complements to the tradition-bound activity", "major turning points in scientific development" leading to "a new set of commitments, a new basis for the practice of science" (Kuhn, 1962, p. 6)[3]. Most objectively observable is the *digital revolution* in the development and spread of digital computers. It motivated *the cognitive revolution* – the reorientation of the humanities for the needs of computer technologies and the emergence of resulting areas such as artificial intelligence, cybernetics, robotics, machine translation, computational linguistics, psycholinguistics, etc. While, however, "scientists believe in a revolution because it provides them with an origin myth which constitutes a beginning that will help in legitimizing their science" (Leahey, 1991, p. 362), linguistics does not require such a narrative. We can rather see *Chomskyan revolution* as an attempt to monopolize the inevitable computerization of linguistics and center it in the U. S. In other words, it is a kind of "Americanization" of grammar, expressed by a logic-algorithmic means of language description, whose development had started decades ago. Although Chomsky (1957, 1965) did not set the computerization of linguistics as a goal, constructing a unified logical frame for metalinguistic description is a prerequisite for computational natural language processing. On the other hand, such a frame is an ideal of grammar description and as such, it undoubtedly fired up a new passion of research in theoretical grammar in the USA and abroad.

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[3] It is interesting that the term *linguistic revolution* had been used earlier (1940) by the Bulgarian linguist Aleksander Teodorv-Balan in regard to Ferdinand de Saussure's ideas; see Vesselinov (Веселинов, 2008, pp. 348–349).

Chomsky (1957) did not claim revolutionary intentions directly; neither have they been noted in his first review by Lees (1957), defined by Pullum (2011, p. 1) as "extraordinarily laudatory". Soon they were hinted in Voegelin (1958, p. 229), who made a parallel to "a Copernican revolution". The term *Chomskyan revolution* was first used by Thorne (1965) and Sklar (1968), according to Newmeyer (1980, pp. 7, 229), and J. Lyons claimed that Chomsky "revolutionized the scientific study of language" in his monograph on him (Lyons, 1970, p. 9).

It is noteworthy that the first reviews of Chomsky appeared in prestigious linguistic magazines such as *Language* and the *International Journal of American Linguistics*, as well as in popular mass-circulation magazines such as *The New York Times, The Nation*, and *The New York Review of Books*. What is more, *Chomskyan revolution* was in the headlines, so that the average reader would not miss it. Moreover, the popularization of the concept also started in the UK.

3. Debunking the mythologeme *Chomskyan revolution*

The initial "revolutionarism" was called into question in the late 1970s when linguists started drawing links to previous syntactic knowledge. This process began either within the generative framework or in critical assessments of Chomsky's work.

 Among the generativists, Gazdar (1979a, 1979b) is one of the first to revitalize the phrase-structure rules[4] that had been "revolutionary" replaced by Chomsky's transformations. Gazdar (1983, p. 556) claimed that recent work has shown that "none of the arguments [advanced by transformational linguists in the late 1950s and early1960s that phrase-structure grammars were inadequate for natural languages] were valid"[5]. It is the leading idea in *Generalized Phrase-Structure Grammar* (Gazdar, Klein, Pullum, & Sag, 1985) – an attempt to rehabilitate phrase-structure grammars and discard transformations while still preserving some basic ideas of Chomsky. Another early non-transformational syntactical model is the *Lexical-Functional grammar* (Kaplan & Bresnan, 1982), incorporating lexical semantics and sentence parts (termed *functions* there) in the general frame. Other models, being generative while at the same time avoiding transformations, were also developed.

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[4] Also known as *(immediate) constituent analysis*.
[5] Original author's emphasis.

Despite the continuing enthusiasm, negative attitudes started to gain prominence in linguistic historiography. The connection between the "government subsidization of research" and "the likelihood of scientific revolutions for the worse" was ironized in McCawley (1976, p. 25). Murray (1980, p. 73) wrote about "the widely believed folk history of the confrontation between an established neo-Bloomfieldian generation and the revolutionary advances of transformational grammarians". Generative-Transformational grammar was defined as *post-Saussurean structuralism* in Koerner (2002, p. 163). According to him, it is rather the influence of the *zeitgeist* of a rebellious generation, fashion, funding, and ideology than *revolution* (Koerner, 1994, pp. 3, 6). For Pullum (2011, pp. 1, 4) the contributions of TGG are "greatly overstated". He provided solid argumentation that the underlying mathematics had been largely present in much earlier work, and focused on the results of the logician Emil Post (1943, 1944) related to the logic assumed by Whitehead and Russell (1913).

The objections against the revolutionary role of TGG, however, remain without a consequence for the mythologeme, since it is not susceptible to rational arguments, as it is illustrated in the figures above. The TGG of Chomsky – "the snowball which began the avalanche of the modern cognitive revolution", see Lightfoot (2002, p. v.), is still permeating the socio-cultural sphere.

4. Transfer of the mythologeme Chomskyan Revolution to Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, the term *Chomskyan Revolution* is rare and only found after 1989, see Fig. 3, although the model was accepted and followed as a methodology.

Figure 3. Use of *Chomskyan Revolution* in Bulgaria[6]

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[6] Figure 3 is based on Krapova (Кръпова, 2012).

Therefore, a clear line between the transfer of the theoretical model itself and the mythologeme of it in the reception process from American to Bulgarian linguistics must be drawn. TGG in Bulgaria is developed in close connection to the grammar tradition and the European structuralism, which has solid roots there.

4.1. *Chomskyan Revolution* and Bulgarian grammar tradition

Talking about the Bulgarian grammatical tradition, we should not forget that it is relatively young and has gone through dramatic twists. American generativism met the "tradition" of the 1960s and 1970s in Bulgaria, which was actually a result of a sharp change from the mid-1940s, when the totalitarian communist regime was established and all intellectual activities were affected by it (Кръстева, 2017, p. 196). TGG was to be incorporated in an obligatory ideological paradigm, which gave a misleading impression of establishment. In fact, TGG corresponds to various Bulgarian linguistic ideas, popularized before 1944 – proposed by S. Mladenov, A. T.-Balan and others, and I believe it is no coincidence that the first sentence in the first generative monograph on Bulgarian language "Structure of the Bulgarian Sentence" (Пенчев, 1984) is a quote by A. T.-Balan.

The pursuit of integration of the American CGG into Bulgarian syntactic tradition is characteristic of Penčev (Пенчев, 1984). He saw Chomsky as a continuation of what "grammarians have always sought" – "the rules, the laws of use of one or another sentence category" (Пенчев, 1984, p. 5). Penčev related some of Chomsky's generative postulates to those of Bulgarian linguists: he included the sentence definitions of A. T.-Balan, L. Andreyčin and K. Popov (Пенчев, 1984, pp. 7–9); pointed out the connection between the generative term "semantic role" and Balan's "case relations" (Пенчев, 1984, p. 44), as well as between Chomsky's rules generating verb forms in and L. Andreyčin's rules of forming Bulgarian non-evidential verb forms (Пенчев, 1984, p. 52); and quoted K. Ilieva and M. Lakova regarding the structure of the interrogative sentences (Пенчев, 1984, p. 61). No revolutionary aspect was concerned at all – the significance of TGG was assessed very moderately, as "fitting a more precise description of sentence structure". The positive assessment of TGG was balanced by criticism in terms of its "insufficiency to present all significant aspects of the sentence" (Пенчев, 1984, p. 5). This cautious approach reveals expectations of traditionalism and a suspicion of the American model in the receptive linguistic environment.

Penčev (Пенчев, 1993) continued the integration trend by quoting Bulgarian linguists on key issues. This time, the first paragraph of the introduction contained a quotation by L. Andreyčin on the role of syntax (Пенчев, 1993, p. 9). His statements were also included in regard to predication (Пенчев, 1993, p. 9) and verb morphophonetic rules (Пенчев 1993, p. 34). A number of A. T.-Balan's statements, corresponding to generativism, were also considered – about predication (Пенчев, 1993, p. 9), abstract case – this time in more detail (p. 72), and the predicative nature of apposition (Пенчев, 1993, p. 46). Although Chomsky's model[7] was presented in detail (Пенчев, 1993, pp. 9–26), no evaluation or attitude is expressed[8].

The view of TGG in continuity with the European grammatical tradition was also expressed by Stambolieva and Doshkov (Стамболиева & Дошков, 1991, p. 16). They emphasized that "the merits of traditional linguistics should not be underestimated" and asserted that "transformational grammar is nothing but formalized traditional grammar". They pointed out that so called "traditional linguistics" had "gathered" enormous factual material and had made very deep and true observations. However, some shortcomings were shown there, too, such as the look at the language through "Latin grammar schemes" (Стамболиева & Дошков, 1991, p. 6). An interesting aspect of their interpretation is the consistent comparison between generative terms and traditional linguistic terms and concepts (Стамболиева & Дошков, 1991, p. 6–8).

The positive stance on integration of TGG in Bulgarian grammatical tradition was also maintained by Barkalova (Бъркалова, 1997), according to which "the intersections between the old and the new theoretical paradigms should not be deleted" and balance should be kept between "the banalized old practice" and "the unrecognizable new one", despite "the state of ambivalence and discomfort" (Бъркалова, 1997, p. 157). The imagery of *new* and *change* was strongly employed in her text, but it didn't reach as far as *revolution*: "a new look at the organization of linguistic matter", "a radical change of the linguistic picture", "a new task of linguistics, a difference that overturns the instruments of the classical practice of language analysis", "the need for a new attitude", "looking into the unrecognizable new", "new times provok-

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[7] Penčev (Пенчев, 1993) followed later versions of TGG – *Theory of Government and binding* form 1981 and the following changes until 1993, including *Minimalist program*.

[8] The defense of the TGG was made earlier – Penčev (Пенчев, 1977), where he also did not talk of revolution and used *structural linguistics* and *generative grammar* instead of the term *TGG*.

ing today's linguists with <u>new</u> questions", "looking with <u>new</u> eyes at language and humans" (Бъркалова, 1997, pp. 5–6)[9]. As this book was intended to be an academic textbook, the significance of the TGG is very comprehensively explained, thus providing one of its most convincing motivations in Bulgarian linguistics. Barkalova also characterized the process of integration of TGG in our tradition: "the method of generative transformational analysis was considered as a theoretical and practical way of breaking away from tradition and then as a new returning to it" (Бъркалова, 1997, pp. 6–7).

4.2. *Chomskyan Revolution* and structuralism

In essence, Chomsky attempted to distinguish his model not only from American but also from European structuralism and post-structuralism. In contrast to his predecessor L. Bloomfield who made a detailed overview of European linguistic achievements and consistently referred to them throughout his text (Bloomfield, 1933), Chomsky only provided casual links to some authors, such A. von Humboldt, F. de Saussure and few others, apart from stating strong connection with the philosophical ideas of René Descartes. As mentioned above, this is a way to legitimize a new, American, beginning of linguistics through a revolution as a kind of the interruption of continuity. In Bulgarian linguistics of the 1960s the supporters of structuralism (first accepted timely in early 20th c. but in the 1950s criticized as "non-marxist linguistics" – see Vesselinov (Веселинов, 2008, p. 353) are also supporters of TGG as well. Moreover, structuralism had foundations in Bulgaria before 1944 that could not be forgotten so quickly.

Prior to 1989, Ž. Molhova pointed out the role of the preceding structuralist trends in American linguistics – anthropology, empiricism, behaviorism, descriptivism and their influence on N. Chomsky's views (Молхова, 1975, p. 6). She emphasized that "at the beginning of his scientific career, [Chomsky] followed the principles of the Bloomfieldian School" and saw the role of his TGG as "a huge impetus to linguistic thought" (Молхова, 1999, p. 6). Her use of *huge impetus* can be considered a euphemistic synonym of *revolution*.

A very detailed argumentation of the ontological similarities between structuralism and generativism was developed in Dančev (Данчев, 2001, pp. 28–29). He argued that generativism is one of the branches of structural-

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[9] Author's emphasis.

ism, which is "dynamic, transformational and mainly theoretical", unlike the phrase-structural branch, which is "taxonomic (static, distributive and mostly methodological)". Dančev distinguished four common traits between the two trends: "precision and correctness of analysis"; "idealization of language models"; "fundamental role of the concept of *structure*" and "uncovering of characteristics unique to the structure of each language".

The link with structuralism in terms of language competence and language universals was noted by Raynov (Райнов, 2000, pp. 115–116). Later, Raynov (Райнов, 2011, p. 4) drew an in-depth parallel between Aristotelian Syllogisms and what in modernity Chomsky calls "infinitely many combinations out of a finite number of elements". His criticism turned to bitter sarcasm when he wrote about "bumptious and arrogant American and Canadian authors, almost unexceptionally ignorant of European [linguistic] trends and of any other language but English". In the same style, he focused on them being supported by "American industry and special military projects funded by the grant system" and saw the place of the Eastern European scientists as "the poor relatives" (Райнов, 2011, p. 1).

5. Conclusions

The disregard of the mythologeme *Chomskyan revolution* on Bulgarian soil sharply contrasts with the situation in the United States, described above.

Most of all, from the very beginning, generativism in Bulgaria was seen as a continuation of structuralism and the existing linguistic tradition. It is natural, as structuralism had strong roots in Bulgaria, dating from before 1944 due to the close connection with German and French linguistics, reinforced in the 1960s.

Moreover, the disregard of the mythologeme came from the fact that *Chomskyan revolution* is an expression of "Americanization" as a new beginning in science, while the contrary trend of "Sovietization" was imposed on Bulgarian science until 1989. It turned out that the very reason why the mythologeme was promoted in the US led to its rejection in Bulgaria. There was no way that the idea of an American revolution would appeal to the then pro-Soviet linguistics, as in the light of political ideologemes it was absurd for "an imperialist bourgeois state" to carry out a revolution. The problem, however, was that

N. Chomsky had made an overtaking move, whereas the totalitarian system of linguistics had led to considerable lagging behind in the USSR and the Eastern Bloc. The situation was similar in electronics in regard to the development of computers that were expected to process language. Because of this, the works of Chomsky and his followers were translated into Russian, and their results were followed in their essence – the Soviet bloc could not help complying with them in order to stay up-to-date. As the strategic line of the USSR and Eastern Europe at that time was oriented towards their own cognitive revolution (similarly to US, financially supported by their governments), TGG was termed *structural and applied linguistics*, *mathematical linguistics*, etc. This line can be summarized as: our own structuralism and grammar algorithmization – "yes", Chomskyan revolution – "no". The development of "their own structuralism" was encouraged, but it also monitored and guided to prevent it spinning out of control. And the critical attitude towards Chomsky's grammar was very careful in order to avoid swings like those in the preceding reception of Marrism[10] in Bulgaria.

Another reason is that by 1989 – the time when non-ideological comprehensive interpretations of TGG as framework could appear due to the fall of the totalitarian regime – TGG revolutionarism was no longer in vogue even among American linguists. As can be seen, the dating of the commented works of Bulgarian generativists is mainly after that year. In the US, linguistics in the 1990s was shifting attention to the post-Chomskyan non-transformational models, as well as other paradigms. It was too late to reinforce this mythologeme.

On the other hand, a factor in favor of the TGG's reception was the well-known left-wing political orientation of N. Chomsky. Ideologically, he was close to the Marxist doctrine dominating Bulgarian linguistics at that time (cf. Андрейчин, 1986, p. 69): "In some areas of scientific-theoretical terminology [in Bulgaria], characteristic changes were made in relation to the new political situation and Marxist-Leninist theory, methodology, and ideology". This political proximity can be seen as one of the reasons for TGG's easier acceptance in Bulgarian linguistics, unlike structuralism in literary theory.

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[10] Marrism is the *Japhetic theory (New Teaching about Language)* of the Soviet linguist Nikolai J. Marr developed in the 1920s, imposed by Stalin to the Soviet and Eastern bloc linguistics, and later renounced by him in 1950. It was used by the authorities to oppress linguists for not supporting it, and after that – for having supported it.

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Rewolucja Chomsky'ego w bułgarskim środowisku społeczno-kulturowym i lingwistycznym

Termin „rewolucja Chomsky'ego", odnoszący się do całkowicie nowatorskiego nurtu współczesnego językoznawstwa amerykańskiego i Chomsky'ego jako jego wiodącej postaci, przeniknął do popularnej sfery językowej i społeczno-kulturowej w USA jako część ich metaforycznego imaginarium. Przekroczył on niejako granice wyspecjalizowanych środowisk lingwistycznych, które standardowo zapisywały go w cudzysłowie, i ostatecznie wyznaczył

model gramatyki transformacyjno-generatywnej Chomsky'ego. Chociaż „rewolucja Chomsky-'ego" stała się centralnym elementem amerykańskiej siatki niekwestionowanych mitologemów kulturowych, środowisko bułgarskie zareagowało inaczej. Ogólna opinia bułgarskich środowisk językoznawczych i społeczno-kulturowych na temat rewolucyjnego skoku była dość sceptyczna i pełna zastrzeżeń, chociaż sam model gramatyki Chomsky'ego został wprowadzony do praktyki badawczej. Przedmiotem artykułu jest właśnie ta odmienność postaw pod względem motywacji i stanowisk zajmowanych wobec statusu gramatyki transformacyjno-generatywnej w kraju źródłowym i kraju odbiorcy.

Słowa kluczowe: bułgarska składnia transformacyjno-generatywna, międzykulturowa recepcja teorii lingwistycznych Chomsky'ego, rewolucja Chomsky'ego gramatyka transformacyjno--generatywna

Chomskyan Revolution in Bulgarian Socio-Cultural and Linguistic Environment

The term *Chomskyan revolution*, referring to the innovative current in modern American linguistics and Noam Chomsky as it's leading figure, permeated the metaphorical imagery of the popular linguistic and socio-cultural spheres in the USA. This term actually surpassed specialized linguistic circles, where it designated Chomsky's transformational-generative grammar model and normally appeared in quotation marks. However, although *Chomskyan revolution* came to occupy a central position in the American network of unquestioned cultural mythologemes, its Bulgarian reception was different. The overall impression in Bulgarian linguistic and socio-cultural circles regarding the revolutionary leap has been rather skeptical and reserved, although the Chomskyan grammar model itself has been introduced into research practice. Such a difference in attitudes towards the status of transformational-generative grammar in the source and a target country is discussed here in terms of motivations and basic positions.

Keywords: Bulgarian transformational-generative syntax, cross-cultural reception of Chomskyan linguistic theories, Chomskyan revolution, trasnformational-generative grammar

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