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EMOTIONS IN GRAMMAR:  
FEAR IN THE BALKAN LANGUAGES

INTRODUCTION

In psychology, fear is considered one of the basic and universal emotions, and some psychologists see it as an innate. For example, Paul Ekman identifies six basic emotions — fear, anger, joy, sadness, surprise, and disgust, which are inherent and have a universal facial expression (Ekman 1972). In natural languages, fear is lexicalised in various content word classes, among which verbs seem to best express the emotional experience of fear, while nouns name the emotion, and adjectives and adverbs as denoting properties are not directly related to the feeling as a process (fearful does not necessarily mean, that someone is afraid). Verbal lexemes can express a different intensity of the emotion — from worry to horror, but usually in languages there are one or more lexemes that convey the sense of fear in a “pure” way, without additional weakening or intensifying nuances. Besides the lexical level, the emotional state can be encoded in the grammar.

FEAR AS INNER EXPERIENCE: VERB DIATHESIS

In Indo-European (IE) languages, verbs denoting fear have different forms of expression, active or inactive, and further represent different diatheses. In many IE languages, for example, the main verbs of fear are active and transitive: Eng. *fear*, Germ. *fürchten*, Fr. *craindre*. In the Balkan languages, verbs of fear are predominantly middle. In fact, middle, understood as an inactive diathesis with experiencer in subject position, in which the subject is the place where the process develops, both the center and the actor of the process (Benveniste 1966: 172), has a deep connection to the semantics of fear as an emotion experienced within human beings.

The main verbs for fear can be grouped into several models that exhibit the common processes to express fear in the Balkan languages. The grouping takes into account several criteria:

- i. morphological marking: active is morphologically unmarked, inactive is marked by pronominal particles in Bulgarian and Romanian and an inflectional suffix in Greek and Albanian;
- ii. verbal diathesis: a scheme of correspondences between items of semantic and syntactic level (Холодович 1970: 16); we consider only diatheses related to the verbs of fear;
- iii. accusativity: the property of a verb to take a direct object marked by accusative case;
- iv. causativity: for verbs of fear, a construction that indicates that the subject causes a change of state of the object.

**Active causative and inactive non-causative (middle).** The decausative formation of the verbs for fear involving inactive marking is regular in all Balkan languages. The semantic transition from causing fear to feeling fear is carried out through the transformation of an active causative verb into inactive non-causative (middle).

‘scare’ > ‘fear’

бълг. *плаша* > *плаша се*;

алб. *frikësoj* > *frikësohem* / *frik* > *frikem*, *tremb* > *trembem*, *tut* > *tutem*;

рум. *a înfricoșa* > *a se înfricoșa*, *a speria* > *a se speria*, *a înspăimânta* >

*a se înspăimânta*, *a înflora* > *a se înflora*;

гр. *σκιάζω* > *σκιάζομαι*

Most of the verbs in this group are denominal or deadjectival and the active causatives are the initial derivatives, while the inactive non-causatives are secondary formations. The effect of the formal transformation active > inactive is the loss of semantic connection of the non-active verbs with their active counterparts (Генчева, Асенова 2006: 450), and in Bulgarian the middle verbs are considered different lexemes with respect to the initial active verbs (Ницолова 2008: 235). Active verbs require a direct object, inactive verbs are unaccusative and may have both an anticausative and a mediopassive use: *плаша се много* ‘I fear a lot’ / *плаша се от кучета* ‘I fear dogs’.

**Constant inactives (media tantum).** The media tantum verbs have a constantly inactive form and do not have active counterparts, i.e. they are not formed through active > inactive transformation. That group includes two verbs in Bulgarian:

*страхувам се* — denominal middle verb derived from the noun *страх* ‘fear’ by means of standard verbal suffixation; in Old Church Slavonic (OCS), the verbs *страшити* and *страшити се* (continued in the rarely occurring today *страша* and *страша се*) formed a causative/non-causative pair;

*боя се* (Old Church Slavonic *боѣти се* < Proto-Slavic *\*bojati se*) is a common Slavic word (ЭССЯ II: 163–4), derived from IE *\*b<sup>h</sup>eyh<sub>2</sub>-/\*b<sup>h</sup>oyh<sub>2</sub>-* (LIV: 72–3). An interesting fact is that the Indo-Iranian cognates Skt. *bháyate* ‘he fears’, Av. *bayante* ‘they fear’ are also middle verbs. Its primary lexicalisation as a verb and its middle diathesis emphasizes its ability to conceptualize fear as an inner emotion in a very “Balkan” way.

Similarly to the previous group, the two media tantum verbs may have both anticausative and mediopassive use.

**Constantly inactive accusative: Gr. *φοβοῦμαι/φοβάμαι*.** The medio-passive verb *φέβομαι* ‘flee in panic’, attested only in Homer and his imitators, the intransitive middle iterative *φοβέομαι* ‘to be put to flight (Hom), terrify, alarm (Hom+)’ and the transitive active causative *φοβέω* ‘put to flight (Hom), to be seized with fear, be affrighted (Hom+)’, which is a back-formation from *φοβέομαι* according to Jasanoff (2003: 134), are cognates with PSI. *\*b<sup>h</sup>egati* < IE *\*b<sup>h</sup>eg<sup>w</sup>-* ‘run, flee’. The inactive verbs *φέβομαι* and *φοβέομαι* can be used with the preposition *ὑπό* plus dative/genitive, on the one hand, or as transitive with accusative, on the other.

Modern Greek *φοβοῦμαι/φοβάμαι*<sup>1</sup>, descending from *φοβέομαι*, is the basic verb denoting fear and is part of the group of verbs that are both inactive and accusative (Асенова, Генчева 2006: 451). The active causative *φοβέω* was replaced by the Modern Greek *φοβίζω* ‘frighten, scare’ which lacks an inactive counterpart (*\*φοβίζομαι*). Thus, *φοβίζω* (active, causative) and *φοβάμαι* (inactive, non-causative) are etymologically related, but do not form a regular pair. This fact points out that the inactive verb has been detached and evolved independently from the active, getting closer to the category of media tantum.

**Active causative and non-causative.** This model is represented by one verb in Greek — *τρομάζω*. When accusative, the verb is causative (the subject causes fear to the object), and when unaccusative, it is non-causative and indicates that the subject feels fear. The unaccusative verb can be used

<sup>1</sup> On the psych verbs expressing state or change of state depending on their aspect, see Вунчев 2007: 101.

as anticausative (without indicating cause) or with a preposition that introduces the cause:

*Μα... τι τον τρομάξε;* ‘But... what scared him?’

*Γιατί τρομάξες τότε; Τι είδες;* ‘Why did you get scared? What did you see?’

*Τρομάζω από θόρυβους.* ‘I’m afraid of noises.’

The verb does not form inactive. The causative alternation is more frequent in Greek than in the other Balkan languages (Асенова 2015: 109), cf. Gr. *ανοίγω την πόρτα / η πόρτα ανοίγει*, on the one hand, and Bulg. *отварям вратата / вратата се отваря*, Alb. *hap derën / dera hapet* и Rom. *deschid ușa / ușa se deschide*, ‘I open the door / the door opens’, on the other (in the latter the non-causative meaning is expressed by regular inactive transformation). Another factor to support the alternation is the origin of the verb: it is derived from the Ancient Greek iterative formation *τρομέω* ‘tremble with fear’, i.e. the primary meaning is the non-causative one.

**Active and inactive non-causative.** One verb pair in Albanian (probably with Proto-Albanian origin) follows that model: *druaj* > *druhem*. Both active and inactive verbs have non-causative meaning (feeling fear). The active verb takes a direct object marked with accusative and denoting the cause of fear, the inactive verb is used with dative or with a preposition.

In Romanian, the active non-causative and accusative *a teme* ‘fear’ derives from Lat. *timere* ‘fear’, which is active, non-causative and accusative, too. Subsequently, the inactive *a se teme* ‘fear’ is formed through regular derivation, keeping the non-causative meaning. The active verb developed a secondary meaning ‘suspect’. The active *a teme* ‘fear’ (with its primary meaning) occurs in old texts, it is also found in Eminescu’s poetry whose language is archaic, but it is rare in today’s language.

*Eu încă tem pre Domnedzeu...* ‘I still fear God.’

*Tu, ce nu temi furtuna și durerea...* (Mihai Eminescu)

‘You, who don’t fear storm and suffering...’

In Modern Romanian *a se teme* is the main lexeme to denote fear. Pușcariu attributes the prevailing of the inactive verb in Romanian to the influence of the Slavic verb *bojati se* (Pușcariu 1940: 277). It is a probable hypothesis, taking into account the fact that Christian literature in Romanian is translated mostly from Old Bulgarian. On the other hand, a similar development, both semantic and formal, is attested in the cognates in Spanish (*temer*

‘fear; suspect’ / *temerse* ‘fear; suspect’ and Italian (*temere* ‘fear; suspect’ / *temersi* ‘fear’), but the active verbs are frequently used and the only change in inactive formations is the intensification of the emotion. We can conclude that the common Romance trends are enhanced in Romanian by the contact with Slavic and the overall Balkan disposition to express fear and other emotions through middle diathesis.

The analysis of the verb patterns in the Balkan languages proves the salient connection between the emotion of fear and the middle diathesis. The “central” verbs denoting fear (the most frequent and with pure semantics) tend to be middle: Bulg. *боя се, страхувам се* appeared originally as middle and do not have active counterparts, and Gr. *φοβᾶμαι*, also originally middle, lost its active counterpart. In Romanian, the active non-causative *a teme* is about to disappear and to be fully replaced by the inactive *a se teme*. Only in Albanian and Greek the active non-causatives *druaj* and *τρομάζω* are stable in terms of usage. The peripheral verbs are regularly formed through active > inactive transformation and decausativation.

The mediopassive use of the inactive verbs is semantically and structurally close to the passive diathesis: the source of fear is always explicit and the semantic role of experiencer in subject position gets confused with patient.

### **The viewpoint of the experiencer: change of syntactic position**

In the argument structure of sentences with predicates for fear, as well as for other physical and mental states, the experiencer is usually in subject position. In Bulgarian and Romanian, there are impersonal constructions in which the experiencer is demoted to object position and is expressed by a weak form of the personal pronoun, accusative in Bulgarian, dative in Romanian: Bulg. *страх ме е*, Rom. *mi-e frică, mi-e teamă*. The emotion is presented by a nominal predicate. As the experiencer is an obligatory participant in the situation described by the predicate, the pronominal clitics cannot be removed. They can be doubled and in such case the doubling element is the strong pronoun or the noun phrase that specifies who the experiencer is: *мен ме е страх* ‘I am afraid’, *Иван го е страх* ‘Ivan is afraid’, but not \**мен е страх*, \**Иван е страх*.

The inconformity in the case form of the pronouns in the two languages is an interesting fact. In the Romanian construction with dative pronoun, the situation can be described as if fear is introduced from outside to inside, the source giving and the experiencer receiving the emotion. The fusion of

dative and genitive in the Balkan languages allows for another interpretation: fear becomes a possession of the experiencer, and hereof the Rom. *mi-e frică, mi-e teamă* is close to the Alb. *kam frikë* ‘(lit.) have fear’ (cf. with Fr. *avoir peur*), a construction that is somehow trivial.

In Bulgarian, impersonal constructions with a nominal predicative may contain an accusative (*страх ме е, срам ме е*) or a dative pronoun (*жал ми е, мъка ми е*). As the accusative case marks the direct object, it presents the experiencer as affected by the emotion. The emotion, again, penetrates from the outside to the inside, but the experiencer is a passive participant in the situation.

In the impersonal constructions the semantic role of experiencer is contiguous with patient, formally because of the oblique marking that subsequently results in semantic passivity.

### Conclusion

In the Balkan languages, two formats are predominantly used to express the experiencing of fear: inactive verb related to the middle diathesis in all four languages and impersonal accusativum/dativum tantum construction with a nominal predicative in Bulgarian and Romanian.

The middle diathesis is a common inclination of the Balkan languages to express fear, as well as other emotions. It seems that the Balkan model of the world comprises the middle as a way to express the internalization of some human states and in this respect emotions are viewed as deep inner processes that take place in the experiencer himself. It is formally expressed by the inactive verb form and many of the verbs for fear are formed through inactive transformation of an active causative verb. The tendency to express fear by middle culminates in the media tantum verbs, which do not have active counterparts.

In mediopassive and especially in impersonal constructions, the experiencer is viewed as a recipient (possessor) or as affected by the emotion and moves closer to the semantic role of patient. Based on grammatical expression, can we argue that the Balkan way to undergo emotions is to endure them, and that *Homo Balkanicus* goes through emotions by suffering?

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