Determination in possessive, demonstrative and possessive-demonstrative constructions in the Balkan languages

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0. Introduction

The (postponed) definite article is one of the primary common features in the nominal systems of the Balkan *Sprachbund*. The fact that Balkan Slavic has developed a definite article and Balkan Romance a postponed one has been underlined since the early phase of the Balkan linguistics (cf. Sandfeld 1930). A Balkan invariant of the use of the definite article has been proposed by Revzin (Ревзин 1977) and further enlarged by Asenova (Асенова 2002: 130–140). The double determination — the use of two or more markers of definiteness within a nominal phrase, is another phenomenon that occurs in the Balkan languages described by Asenova (2002: 129–130), Rudin (2018), Joseph (2019), Friedman (2019), Friedman and Rudin (2021). Our study focuses on the possessive, demonstrative and possessive-demonstrative constructions in Greek, Romanian, Albanian, and Bulgarian and the role of the article within them.

1. Possessive constructions

In many languages possessive constructions, referring to noun phrases (NP) that involve a possessive determiner, imply definiteness. To form an indefinite possessive construction, a periphrastic way is used. Since possessives include definiteness in their meaning, they cannot co-occur with other determiners, such as demonstratives and articles.

Eng.   *This is my friend. / This is a friend of mine. / *this my friend / *the my friend / *a my friend*

Fr.   *C'est mon ami. / C'est un ami à moi. / *ce mon ami / *le mon ami / *un mon ami.*

In the Balkan languages definite and indefinite constructions are formed with the same possessives but with different articles to mark definiteness and indefiniteness. In Greek, Romanian and Bulgarian three markers are possible: Definite article, indefinite article and zero article. In Greek the so-called full form of the possessives, which in fact functions as a regular adjective, covers the same three types, but additionally, a pattern with double determination in possible to express emphasis. In Bulgarian, on the other hand, the possessive clitics can be used only with a definite NP (except for some names of relatives which are not a topic of the study, cf. Асенова 2002: 136).

Gr.   *Αυτός είναι ο φίλος μου. / Αυτός είναι ένας φίλος μου. / Αυτός είναι φίλος μου.*

Gr.   *Αυτός είναι ο δικός μου φίλος. / Αυτός είναι ο δικός μου ο φίλος. / Αυτός είναι ένας δικός μου φίλος. / Αυτός είναι δικός μου φίλος.*

Rom.   *Acest este prietenul meu. / Acest este un prieten al meu. / Acest este prieten al meu.*

Bulg.   *Това е моят приятел. / Това е един мой приятел. / Това е мой приятел.*

       *Това е приятелят ми. / *приятел ми / *един приятел ми*

       'This is my friend. / This is a friend of mine.'

In Albanian, there are much more patterns expressing either definiteness or indefiniteness. To express definiteness, the regular pattern with a definite noun is used, and additionally, an emphatic pattern with double determination, i.e., both the noun and the possessive add a definite article. To denote indefiniteness, besides the usual options with indefinite or zero article, two other patterns are found: in the first one the indefinite article co-occurs with the definite one and in the second one it is added to a possessive construction with double determination.

Alb.   *Ky është miku im. / Ky është miku imi.*

       'This is my friend.'

       Ky është një mik im. / Ky është mik im. / Ky është një miku im. / Ky është një miku imi.

       'This is a friend of mine.'

The sentences below illustrate the context of some of the more unusual patterns in Albanian:

Jo shumë moti një mik imi u paraqit në skenë i freskët nga divorci. (ceeol. com) 'Not a long time ago, a friend of mine showed up freshly divorced.'

Mbrëmë, në Itali, korri një fitore të shkëlqyer një mik i madh i Shqipërisë, i Partisë Demokratike, miku imi, Silvio Berluskoni. (arkiva.km.gov.alb) 'Last night, in Italy, a big friend of Albania and of the Democratic Party achieved a brilliant victory, my friend Silvio Berlusconi.'

…një ditë në 2019-ën një miku imi më ftoi në një koferencë online per bizneset online. (panoramaonline.com) '…one day in 2019, a friend of mine invited me to an online conference about the online business.'

2. Demonstrative constructions

Demonstrative constructions are NPs in which the noun is modified by a demonstrative determiner. They always imply definiteness. In many languages, again, demonstratives cannot co-occur with articles or other determiners.

Eng.   *This woman is clever.* / *this the woman* / *this a woman*

Fr.   *Cette femme est intelligente.* / *cette la femme* / *cette une femme*

The demonstrative constructions vary across the Balkan languages, each of them having peculiarities. In Greek and Romanian, this type of construction has fixed patterns. In Greek it always includes the definite article, whereas in Romanian there are two patterns according to the word order: If the demonstrative precedes the noun, there is no article in the construction, and if the demonstrative is in postposition, both the demonstrative and the noun are marked for definiteness.

Gr.   *αυτός ο φίλος* / **αυτός φίλος*

Rom.   *acest prieten* / *prietenul acesta*
       'this friend'

In Bulgarian and Albanian the regular pattern is the one without definite article.

Bulg.   *този приятел*

Alb.   *ky mik*
       'this friend'

However, the use of the definite article is possible especially if the noun has another modifier — an adjective, an adverb, a PP, or an embedded clause. In Albanian the pattern with definite article is emphatic as compared with the neutral one, but not necessarily expressive. It can also occur without any modifier. In Bulgarian, it is very rare, always expressive and/or affective, usually with negative connotation. It arose most probably as an apposition, which can still be seen in sentences where the noun has no modifier or is modified by a PP, whereas the co-occurrence of the demonstrative with a substantivized adjective sounds the most natural. Similar examples in Macedonian can be found in (Friedman and Rudin 2021). It seems that Macedonian slightly differs from Bulgarian in terms of frequency, but not in terms of usage.

Alb.   *Këndon edhe me sy ky njeriu.* (Instragram) 'He sings with eyes too, this man.'

Ky njeriu që bëre, duket i vërtetë. (Odhise Grillo, *Valbona blen ylberin*) 'This man that you made looks like real.'

Ky njeriu këtu (drejton gishtin tregues në drejtim të portretit të kryeministrit Edi Rama) në mënyrë absolute e ka lënë Shqipërinë pa institucione. (sot.com.al) 'This man here (he points with the index finger to the portrait of the prime minister Edi Rama) absolutely left Albania without institutions.'

Ah, ky njeriu i shkretë! (Twitter) 'Oh, this poor man!'

Bulg. *Ония идиотите ги прескачай. Да вървят на майната си.* (bg-mamma.com) 'Don't pay attention to those idiots. They can go to hell.'

В онази къщата на гробището, където бяха Даръл и Бет, нали дойде едно куче да проси храна. (bg-mamma.com) 'In that house at the cemetery, where Darrel and Beth lived, a dog came to beg for food, remember?'

То кой работи тези дни, освен нас и онези горките женици по супермаркетите. (homes.gruh.org) 'Who else works at all these days but us and those poor women in the supermarkets.'

Тая лудата се беше скрила за известно време. (vremeto.dir.bg) 'This crazy [woman] disappeared for a while.'

– А тази малката пък коя е? — извика той и се наведе да види близначката, която се беше скрила зад учителката. (Камен Калчев, "При извора на живота") 'And who is this little one? — he shouted and bent down to see the twin who had hidden behind the teacher.'

The indefinite article is incompatible with the demonstrative constructions in all Balkan languages.

3. Possessive-demonstrative constructions

Possessive-demonstrative constructions are NPs that include both possessives and demonstratives. We already noticed that they cannot co-occur in languages where they function as determiners. In the Balkan languages they occur with two functions: The first one is stylistically neutral, it consists in attaching a demonstrative to a possessive construction thus adding an extra-discourse (deictic) or intra-discourse (anaphoric or cataphoric) reference, whereas the second one is expressive being the result of the expressive potential of the demonstratives but also of the co-occurrence of the demonstratives and the possessives (Търпоманова 2020: 189–192).

In Greek and Romanian, the possessive-demonstrative constructions are built following the respective patterns of the demonstrative ones: With the obligatory definite article in Greek and depending on the word order in Romanian.

Gr.   *αυτός ο φίλος μου*

Rom.   *acest prieten al meu / prietenul acesta al meu*
      'this friend of mine'

In Albanian, as the possessive has the function of a noun modifier, the pattern with definite article is preferred in possessive-demonstrative constructions. The other patterns — without article, with article added to the possessive and with double article, are possible, but rare, the last two being rather emphatic.

Alb.   *ky miku im* / (very rare) *ky mik im* / (rare) *ky mik imi* / (rare) *ky miku imi*
      'this friend of mine'

In Bulgarian, for the same reason, patterns without and with definite article occur, the former being the regular, more frequent, with either neutral or expressive function, whereas the latter can be only expressive. The pattern with possessive clitics, in which they take the second position in the word order thus modifying the demonstrative, is less frequent and mostly neutral. In this pattern the noun has no article, because the clitic modifies the demonstrative which implies definiteness. Another pattern with possessive clitics is possible, in which the clitic modifies the noun that has a definite article. It is rare and, in our view, rather an apposition.

Bulg.   *този мой приятел / този моят приятел / този ми приятел / този приятелят ми*

'this friend of mine'

The following sentence illustrates the use of the possessive clitic as a modifier of a definite noun:

Bulg.   *А че историкът ме прецака, тоя приятеля ми, не гаджето ми, приятеля ми имам предвид, определяйки сума, която щяла да ми стигне…* (puls.bg) 'And that the historian screwed me, this friend of mine, not my boyfriend, I mean my friend, determining an amount that would have been enough for me…'

4. Conclusions

Unlike many other languages, the possessives in the Balkan languages do not imply definiteness and subsequently can co-occur with indefinite article and zero article to express indefiniteness. That is to say that they do not function as determiners but rather as modifiers. This also applies for the Greek possessive clitics but not to the Bulgarian ones which are the only exception of the common Balkan model as they require a definite NP. Another peculiarity of the Balkan possessives is the possibility to co-occur with demonstratives thus forming possessive-demonstratives constructions.

The demonstrative and the possessive-demonstrative constructions in Greek and Romanian are grammaticalized, i.e., the presence or the lack of the definite article is not motivated by any semantic or pragmatic reasons. In Albanian, a desemanticization of the definite article is in process allowing for the co-occurrence of the definite and indefinite article in constructions with indefinite value. In Bulgarian, the definite article in demonstrative and possessive-demonstrative constructions is a pragmatic means mostly used with expressive value.

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