Vyjádřete (*svůj* nebo *Vaš*?) *názor*. Possessives as politeness markers in Bulgarian, Czech, and Russian

In the typology of possessive adnominal modifiers, all Slavic languages belong to the reflexive type, i.e. they have a special reflexive possessive item to distinguish a coreferential pronominal possessor from a non-coreferential pronominal possessor (Manzelli 1990). However, the actual use of reflexive possessives varies across Slavic languages as well as across conditions within a single Slavic language. Slovene and Russian have been reported to make the most use of the reflexive possessive, whereas Polish and Bulgarian (in long pronouns) the least (Pekelis 2021). It has also been observed that in Slovene, the reflexive possessive is less obligatory in 2nd person plural/polite contexts than in the 2nd person singular, where it often competes with the non-reflexive possessive, which is considered a politeness marker (Uhlik & Žele 2020). In this presentation, we address the question whether possessive pronouns in Bulgarian, Czech, and Russian are used to express politeness distinctions in 2nd person contexts similarly to Slovene. Specifically, we test two hypotheses: (1) the non-reflexive possessive is more frequent in 2nd person polite/plural *Vy*-contexts (e.g., ru. *Kogda Vy prišlëte mne Vašu stat'ju* 'When you.2PL send me your.NREFL article') than in the 2nd person singular (ru. *Kogda ty prišlëš mne tvojuʔ stat'ju* 'When you.2SG send me your.NREFL article'), and (2) the non-reflexive possessive is more frequent in imperatives (e.g., ru. *Prišlite mne Vašu stat'ju* 'Send me your.NREFL article') than in indicatives (e.g., ru. *Kogda Vy prišlëte mne Vašuʔ stat'ju* 'When you.2PL send me your.NREFL article'). By using comparative corpus methodology, we analyze random samples of 2nd person possessives from the sketch engine corpora of Bulgarian, Czech, and Russian (bgTenTen12 v2, csTenTen12 v9, and ruTenTen11). The results confirm the two hypotheses for Russian and for Czech showing that the reflexive is the default possessive in the 2nd person and the non-reflexive is used mostly in polite/plural imperative contexts. In Bulgarian long possessives, however, the non-reflexive is overall much more frequent than in Russian and Czech, and whereas the reflexive still dominates in the singular, reflexives and non-reflexives are equally frequent in plural/polite contexts. In Bulgarian short possessives, the picture is reversed, i.e. only the reflexive possessive occurs in all 2nd person contexts. The results will be discussed from a larger perspective by taking into account both the synchronic state and the diachronic development of possessives in Slavic languages.

References

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