

Animacy Distinction in Slavic Possessive Relative Pronouns

The subject of this abstract is the distribution of etymologically animate relative pronouns in Slavic languages.

Many Slavic languages have a special pronoun used to relativize on possessors. These relative pronouns start with *č* (or *c*). Hereafter they are referred to as *č*-pronouns.

The relative *č*-pronouns are derived from interrogative pronouns. These interrogative pronouns almost invariably refer to animates (Beličova 1988). However, at least in some Slavic languages, the relative *č*-pronouns can be used with an inanimate antecedent. This phenomenon is illustrated by Russian examples (1)–(2).

- (1) <...> *dal'se pošel tekst, č'e avtorstvo prinadležalo Šeremetu*
 further went text whose authorship belonged to Sheremet
 'There followed a text whose author was Sheremet'. (RNC)
- (2) a. *??Čej avtor Šeremet?*
 whose author Sheremet
 lit. 'Whose author is Sheremet?'

The stem of *č*-pronouns is common Slavic (Vasmer 1986: 323–324). However, their usage in relative clauses is comparatively late. For instance, in Russian, they were not used in this function as late as the 17th century (Issatschenko 1983: 514). Therefore, the similarities in the use of *č*-pronouns cannot be explained exclusively by common origin.

A corpus-based study was conducted on different Slavic languages in order to check whether the relative *č*-pronouns are 1) frequent in headed relative clauses and 2) attested with inanimate antecedents. The corpora used for this study are InterCorp, ParaSol, The Oslo Corpus of Bosnian Texts, Corpus Albaruthenicum, HOTKO and Montekorpus. The following results were achieved.

In **West Slavic** languages (at least Czech, Polish, Slovak, and Upper Sorbian), the relative *č*-pronouns are extremely rare in headed relative clauses. The corpus data are partly confirmed and complemented by the existing descriptions, see (Beličova 1988; Bartels, Spiess 2012: 226).

In **South Slavic** languages (Bulgarian, Macedonian, Slovene, Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian and Montenegrin) and **East Slavic** languages (Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian), the *č*-pronouns are relatively frequent and attested in both animate and inanimate contexts. This fact is well-known for Croatian, Serbian and Bulgarian, see among others (Beličova 1988; Kordić 1995: 128–140).

The fact that *č*-pronouns in East Slavic languages and Slovene are compatible with inanimate antecedents contradicts many of the existing descriptions (Beličova 1988; Švedova 1980; Gołąb, Friedman 1972: 41). A diachronical study of Russian (RNC) and Slovene (Nova Besesda) showed, inter alia, that the relevant examples were quite frequent by the time these descriptions were written. This suggests that this material is problematic for grammaticality judgment, and thus corpus-based methodology is required.

A set of more detailed information, shown in Table 1, confirms some of the claims made above and demonstrates that modern Slovene patterns in this respect with East Slavic languages.

Table 1. The frequency of *č*-pronouns as compared to other means of internal possessor relativisation (Yandex)

	East Slavic				South Slavic		
	Russian	Ukrainian	Belarusian	Slovene	Croatian	Bulgarian	Macedonian
'man' ('human')	0,59	0,83	0,49	0,49	0,99	(1)	(1)
'man' ('male')	0,43	0,45	0,6	0,48	1	(1)	(1)
'institute'	0,09	0,08	0,11	0,00	0,98	(1)	(1)
'film'	0,03	0,03	0,00	0,05	0,99	(1)	(1)

The data presented in this abstract suggest that the animate-inanimate shift in relative possessive pronouns is very frequent. Some data for further discussion are provided by non-Slavic languages which demonstrate a similar kind of shift. These include, at least, English (*whose*), Dutch (*wier*, *wiens*) and Ingrian Finnish (*kene-n* who-GEN). A comparison of possessor relativisation strategies in these languages allows to determine which properties may (not) be the triggers of the animacy shift.

References

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- The Oslo Corpus of Bosnian Texts (tekstlab.uio.no/Bosnian/Corpus.html)
- Corpus Albaruthenicum (grid.bntu.by/corpus)
- HOTKO – Hornolužický textový korpus (korpus.cz/corpora/run.cgi/first_form);
- InterCorp (www.korpus.cz)
- Montekorpus (eiprevod.gov.me/korpus)
- Nova beseda (bos.zrc-sazu.si/s_beseda.html)
- ParaSol – A Parallel Corpus of Slavic and other languages (parasol.unibe.ch)
- RNC – Russian National Corpus (ruscorpora.ru)
- Yandex – the Yandex search engine (yandex.ru)