On the argument fronting in Slavic languages - Constructional approach

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The present investigation focuses on the correlation between the position and the realisation of the arguments in the syntactically dependent clauses in some Slavic languages (Polish, Russian, Croatian and Bulgarian).

The fronting of the arguments of the embedded infinitives is an observed phenomenon, which has been traced back to the requirements of the information structure of the sentence. While the languages with the strict word order tend to develop the construction of the type (1-2) (known as tough-movement-construction) as a means of foregrounding an important topic (Givon 2001), the oblique form of the fronted argument in the Slavic languages (for ex. (3) and (4)) is due to their relative free word order (Comrie & Matthews 1990).

(1) Cette couleur est difficile à voir. [FR]

(2) This problem is tough to solve. [EN]

(3)   Ètu knigu (*Èta kniga)   legko (*legka)   čitat'. [RU]
       this bookACC (*NOM)   simpleNEUT (*FEM)   readINF
       'This book is simple to read.'

(4)   Tu knjigu (*Ta knjiga)   je lako (*laka)   čitati. [CR]
       this bookACC (*NOM)   is simpleNEUT (*FEM) readINF
       'This book is simple to read.'

The fronting of the infinitival arguments out of the subordinate clause occurs prevalently in the constructions with a raising or an auxiliary matrix predicate, opening only one syntactical position for the infinitive and its arguments. It can also be commonly observed in the constructions with a control matrix predicate (as in (3-4) or in (5)) with an unexpressed first argument, probably because of the tendency to put the verb into the second position, since SVO (not being obligatory) is the statistical dominant transitive order in all Slavic languages (Siewierska & Uhliřová 2010).

(5)   Ego   xoteli   pobit'   raz.... [from ruscorpora.ru]
       himACC   want3P.PL.PAST   hitINF   once
       'Once they wanted to hit him...'

The present study aims at surveying the distribution of the infinitival arguments in the complex predicate[1] constructions according to the construction type and the argument realisation (its morphological and syntactical category) in Polish, Russian and Croatian. With Construction Grammar we have a framework, where all construction types (and thus all word order types) have equal importance, since they reflect semantic, morphosyntactic (grammatical) or pragmatic information. In my contribution, I will discuss the motivations for the argument fronting within and across Slavic languages, as well as the factors blocking the fronting of arguments.

References

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[1] I use the term „complex predicate" in its very broad sense.