

Iliev, Ivan G.

The Russian zero construction

Opera Slavica. 2023, vol. 33, iss. 2, pp. 71-76

ISSN 1211-7676 (print); ISSN 2336-4459 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/OS2023-2-5>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.78288>

License: [CC BY-SA 4.0 International](#)

Access Date: 16. 02. 2024

Version: 20230705

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

The Russian Zero Construction

Ivan G. Iliev

(Plovdiv, Bulgaria)

Introduction

In this article, I will demonstrate some uses in contemporary Russian language that are similar to the South Slavonic *da*-constructions and the Czech *at'*-constructions. What is characteristic for the three types of sentences is that they compete with similar syntactical structures where the infinitive or the subjunctive is used.¹ This phenomenon seems to appear regularly in Russian and maybe in other East Slavic languages. The material used is taken from original Russian films and films translated into Russian.

The *Da*-Construction In South Slavic

Here are several examples from Serbian, with Bulgarian equivalents, of the mentioned *da*-sentences:²

С. Хоћеш ли да пробаиш ракију?—Bg. Искати ли да опитаиш ракијата?—Would you like to try the brandy?;

- 1 See ILIEV, I. G.: Bolgarskij kon"junktiv v sinhronnom i diachronnom aspektach. *Linguistique balkanique / Balkansko ezikoznanie*, 2013, č. 1, s. 41–54, ILIEV, I. G.: Za konkurencijata meždu konjunktiva, infinitiva i *da*-konstrukcijata. In: GEORGIEVA, T. (ed.): *Izvestija na NC „Sv. Dazij Dorostolski“*. Ruse: Universitetski izdatelski centăr, 2013, s. 83–98, ILIEV, I. G.: Stereotipăt na mislene i alternativite na konjunktiva. In: BUROV, S. (ed.): *Jubilejna meždunarodna naučna konferencija „50 godini Velikotărnovski universitet „Sv. sv. Kiril i Metodij“*. Sekcija „Filologičeski fakultet“ Veliko Tărnovo: UI „Sv. sv. Kiril i Metodij“, 2014, s. 44–51, ILIEV, I. G.: Konjunktivnite upotrebi v srednobălgarskite tekstove i proizvedenija ot 14–15 vek. In: *Tărnovska knižovna škola*. Veliko Tărnovo: UI „Sv. sv. Kiril i Metodij“, 2015, č. 10, s. 544–560, ILIEV, I. G.: Za presečnite točki na starobălgarskija konjunktiv i novobălgarskite preizkazni formi. *Dzjalo*, 2017, č. 9, s. 1–26, ILIEV, I. G.: Alternativite na konjunktiva v Ochridskija apostol. In: COMATI, S., HENZELMANN, M., KRAUß, R., SCHALLER, H. (eds): *Bulgarica. Č. 4*, 2021, s. 157–166, ILIEV, I. G., KOROLOFF, L.: On a Parallel in the Use of Subjunctive Conjunctions in Russian and Bulgarian. *International Journal of Russian Studies*, 2021, č. 2, s. 1–3.
- 2 *Slavjanski ezici. Gramatični očerci*. Sofija: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1994, pp. 117–118.

S. *Мораш да доћеш ујутро*—Bg. *Трябва да дойдеш сутринта*—*You have to come tomorrow morning*;

S. *Ту треба да се нађе човек* (with an infinitive: S. *Ту треба наћи човека*)—Bg. *Тук трябва да се намери човек*—*Here you have to find a person*.

Or from Slovenian, again with Bulgarian equivalents:³

Sl. *Človek živi zato, da išče resnice*—Bg. *Човек живее за това—да търси истината*—*A person lives in order to seek the truth*;

Sl. *Ali kaj ste šli da vidite?*—Bg. *А какво ходихте да видите?*—*And what did you go to see?*, etc.

The A^t-Construction in Czech

Here are some examples of this too:⁴

Cz. *Dohlédni na to, ať vstanou, umyjí se a oblečou*—*Make sure they get up, wash and dress!*—Bg. *Гледай да станат, да се умият и да се облекат* (subjunctive: Cz. *Dohlédni na to, aby vstali včas do školy!*—*Make sure they are up in time for school!*—Bg. *Гледай да станат навреме за училище*;

Cz. *Dohlédni na to, ať si děti čistí zuby alespoň dvakrát denně*—*Make sure the children brush their teeth at least twice a day*—Bg. *Гледай децата да си мият зъбите поне два пъти на ден*.

The Ø-Construction in Russian

I am now going to get down to the essence of the matter and give the Russian examples I have found. In those examples the present form replacing the infinitive is used with a zero conjunction, which I replace here with the sign Ø (instead of the Czech *ať*, or the Bulgarian *да*). The verbs in the context mentioned are used predominantly after *хотеть, мочь, дать*. The specific ones I have found are *бросить, показать, войти, помочь, застегнуться, сказать, рассказать, рассмотреть, посмотреть, поговорить, знать*, etc.

In the film *American Sniper* (2014), directed by Clint Eastwood, Russian title *Снайпер*, at 2.01.56 sec., there is the sentence *Можно Ø скажу кое-что?* Bg. *Може ли да кажа нещо?* (*Can I say something?*) instead of *Можно мне сказать кое-что?* (with an infinitive construction). The situation here is the same as if instead of the zero conjunction, according to the Bulgarian model, there would be **Можно да скажу кое-что?* Or, according to the Czech model, there would be **Можно аť скажу кое-что?*

3 *Slavjanski ezici. Gramatični očerci*. Sofija: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1994, p. 164.

4 ŘEŘIČHA, V.: *Angličtina pro au pair*. Olomouc: Nakladatelství Olomouc, 2004, pp. 35, 38.

In the film *The Debt* (2010), director John Madden, with Russian title *Расплата*, at 6.44 sec., there is the following dialogue:

— Ну и когда же ты бросишь?—Bg. И кога ще го откажеш? (*And when are you going to give it up?*).

— Что Ø брошу? (instead of *Что мне бросить?*)—Bg. Какво да откажа? (*Give up what?*).

— Курить—Bg. Пушенето. (*Smoking.*).

In *Escobar: Paradise Lost* (2014), directed by Andrea Di Stefano, Russian title *Потерянный рай*, at 1.11.28 sec., we see the following sentence:

Хочешь я Ø поведу (*машину*)?—instead of *Хочешь, чтобы я повел?* (with subjunctive)—Bg. Искаш ли аз да карам? (*Do you want me to drive?*).

In the French production *Jeanne d'Arc* (1999)—director *Luc Besson*, Russian title *Жанна Д'Арк*, at 56.59 sec., we find the following example:

Идите Ø покажу кое-что—Bg. Елате да ви покажа нещо (*Come to show you something*).

We see the same in *Parker* (2013) too, directed by Taylor Hackford—Russian title *Паркер*, where, at 1.23.00 sec., the Russian translation is *Можно я Ø войду?*—Bg. Може ли да вляза? (*May I come in?*), and, at 1.41.36 sec., there is *Дай я тебе Ø помогу*—Bg. Дай да ти помогна (*Let me help you*).

In the film *RoboCop* (1987) of Paul Verhoeven, in Russian *РобоКоп*, at 18.46 sec., one of the characters says:

Можно я Ø застегнусь?—Bg. Може ли да се закопчае? (*Can I buckle up?*).

And, at 1.10.40 sec., there is the phrase:

— Что с вами, офицер?—Bg. Какво ви става, господин офицер? (*What's up with you, officer?*).

— Хотите Ø расскажу?—Bg. Искате ли да ви разкажа? (*Do you want me to tell you?*).

In *Robin Hood* (2010) of Ridley Scott, Russian title *Робин Гуд*, at 58.15 sec., there is again a similar sentence:

Дайте я вас Ø рассмотрю—Bg. Дайте да ви разгледам (*Let me have a look at you*).

In the film *Cry Macho* (2021)—in Russian *Мужские слезы*, again directed by Clint Eastwood, at 44.28 sec., the lead character says:

Там какая-то лавка, я схожу Ø посмотрю—Bg. Там има някакво магазинче, ще ида да погледна (*There is some kiosk over there—I'll go and have a look*).

In *Wrath of Man* (2021), of Guy Ritchie, in Russian *Гнев человеческий*, at 1.00.21 sec., the Russian translation is *Можно честно Ø скажу?*—Bg. Може ли да кажа честно? (*Can I say honestly?*), and in the same film, at 1.15.36 sec., we find a similar phrase: *Честно Ø скажу, не ожидал...*—Bg. Честно да си кажа, не очаквах... (*Honestly speaking, I did not expect...*).

And more—in *Mafia Inc.* (2019) of Daniel Grou—in Russian *Мафия Инкорпорейтед*, at 1.25.00 sec., there is the following dialogue:

- *Нам нужно поговорить!*—Bg. Трябва да поговорим (*We have to talk*).
- *Хочешь Ø поговоришь?*—Bg. Искаш да поговориш? (*You want to talk?*).

The significance of this example is that here there is a verb in the second-person singular, and not in the first-person singular, like in the other examples.

Or—*Java Heat* (2012) of Conor Allyn, Russian title *Пылающий остров*. At 1.06.23 sec., we hear:

- *За Вами следили?*—Bg. Проследиха ли ви? (*Did they follow you?*).
- *Я откуда Ø знаю?*—Bg. Откъде да знам? (*How am I to know?*).

Also, in *Un uomo in ginocchio* (Damiano Damiani)—Russian title *Человек на коленях*, first, at 1.10.10 sec., there is:

- *Ну что? Я пойду?*—Bg. А сега какво? Аз да вървя ли? (*Now what? Should I go?*).
- *Да, иди.*—Bg. Да, върви (*Yes, go*).

Also, at 1.10.47 sec.: *Если не помешаю, я лучше здесь его подожду*—Bg. Ако няма да преча, по-добре да го почакам тук (*If I am not in the way, I'd better wait for him here*).

And, at 1.38.45:

- *Вот, возьми сколько надо и уезжай как можно скорее.*

Слышишь?—Bg. Ето, вземи колкото трябва и заминавай възможно найбързо. Чуваш ли? (*There, take as much as needed and leave as soon as possible. Do you hear me?*).

- *Куда я поеду?*—Bg. Къде да отида? (*Where should I go?*).

The last three examples are from original Russian films. I will start with *Мертвое поле* (*Dead Field*) (Episode 1) (2006)—of Alexander Aravin. Here, at 27.01 sec., we hear:

— *Хороший ножик, дай Ø посмотрю*—Bg. Хубаво ножче, дай да го погледна (*Nice pen knife—let me have a look at it?*).

In the film of Sergey Bodrov *Сестры* (*Sisters*) (2001), at 24.16 sec., we see a similar sentence yet again:

— *Можно мы у вас один день Ø побудем?*—Bg. Може ли да останем у вас един ден? (*Can we stay with you for a day?*).

And finally, in the war film *T-34* (2018), director Alexey Sidorov, at 1.43.42 sec., there is:

- *Можно Ø скажу?*—Bg. Може ли да кажа? (*Can I say?*).

This hardly exhausts the cases in question, but I will stop here.

Conclusions

Although other interpretation is possible of some of the Russian examples (*Хороший ножик, дай Ø посмотрю*—Bg. Хубаво ножче, дай да (го) погледна—as well as ...нека да (го) погледна—*Nice pen knife—let me have a look (at it)* alongside with ...*can I have a look (at it)?*), or: *Честно Ø скажу, не ожидал*—Bg. Честно да си кажа, не очаквах..., as well as *честно ще си кажа, не очаквах...*—*Honestly speaking I did not expect...*—as well as *To be honest I did not expect...*, this does not change the fact that the process of creating a Ø-construction, used with other present forms in Russian, has obviously already started.

Bibliography:

- ILIEV, I. G., KOROLOFF, L.: On a Parallel in the Use of Subjunctive Conjunctions in Russian and Bulgarian. *International Journal of Russian Studies*, 2021, č. 2, s. 1–3. ISSN 2158-7051.
- ILIEV, I. G.: Alternativite na konjunktiva v Ochridskija apostol. In: COMATI, S., HENZELMANN, M., KRAUß, R., SCHALLER, H. (eds): *Bulgarica*. Č. 4, 2021, s. 157–166. ISBN 978-3-95477-137-0.
- ILIEV, I. G.: Bolgarskij kon”junktiv v sinchronnom i diachronnom aspektach. *Linguistique balkanique / Balkansko ezikoznanie*, 2013, č. 1, s. 41–54. ISSN 0324-16-53.
- ILIEV, I. G.: Konjunktivnite upotrebi v srednobalgarskite tekstove i proizvedenija ot 14–15 vek. In: *Tärnovska knižovna škola*. Veliko Tärново: UI „Sv. sv. Kiril i Metodij”, 2015, č. 10, s. 544–560. ISBN 954-542-339-2.
- ILIEV, I. G.: Stereotipät na mislene i alternativite na konjunktiva. In: BUROV, S. (ed.): *Jubilejna meždunarodna naučna konferencija „50 godini Velikotärnovski universitet „Sv. sv. Kiril i Metodij”*. Sekcija „Filologičeski fakultet”. Veliko Tärново: UI „Sv. sv. Kiril i Metodij”, 2014, s. 44–51. ISBN 978-954-524-975-4.
- ILIEV, I. G.: Za konkurencijata meždju konjunktiva, infinitiva i *da*-konstrukcijata. In: GEORGIEVA, T. (ed.): *Izvestija na NC „Sv. Dazij Dorostolski”*. Ruse: Universitetski izdatelski centär, 2013, s. 83–98. ISSN 1313-7395.
- ILIEV, I. G.: Za presečnite točki na starobalgarskija konjunktiv i novobalgarskite preizkazni formi. *Dzjalo*, 2017, č. 9, s. 1–26. ISSN 1314-9067.
- ŘEŘIČHA, V.: *Angličtina pro au pair*. Olomouc: Nakladatelství Olomouc, 2004, 213 s. ISBN 8071821802.
- Slavjanski ezici. Gramatični očerci*. Sofija: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1994, 590 s. ISBN 9544302263.

About the author

Ivan G. Iliev

University of Plovdiv, Kardzhali Branch, Plovdiv, Bulgaria

ivan_iliev20002000@yahoo.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2627-972X>



This work can be used in accordance with the Creative Commons BY-SA 4.0 International license terms and conditions (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>). This does not apply to works or elements (such as images or photographs) that are used in the work under a contractual license or exception or limitation to relevant rights.