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The Russian Zero Construction

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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.

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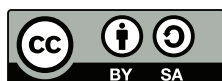
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