

Definite articles in Old Church Slavonic revisited

Modern Bulgarian has a mature, full-blown system of definite articles, which are second-position clitics in the noun phrase.

- (1) *kniga=ta* ‘the book’
- (2) *interesna=ta kniga* ‘the interesting book’

It is clear that the article descends from the demonstrative *tb* ‘that’ in Old Church Slavonic (OCS), which can reasonably be thought of as the direct ancestor of Bulgarian. The mainstream consensus in the literature is that OCS, nonetheless, does not show signs of having developed this demonstrative into a definite article yet – “L'article vieux-slave n'est pas *tŭ* postposé, qui conserve en vieux slave sa valeur pleine de démonstratif” (Vaillant 1942). Such claims are based on the observation that the demonstratives *tb* (distal) and *sb* (proximal) are very rarely used unless there is a demonstrative in the Greek source text (and the overwhelming bulk of canonical OCS texts are translations from Greek), which was convincingly shown quantitatively by Kurz (1963). Dimitrova-Vulchanova & Vulchanov 2010 nonetheless argue that these demonstratives in their clitic postnominal use (*dbnb=tb* ‘day that’, *člověkb=sb* ‘man this’) are already incipient articles, arguing that in this position they have scope over the entire phrase, and no deictic meaning, even when they correspond to a Greek demonstrative. They do not, however, base this claim on a corpus with principled information-status annotation, and some of their data is post-canonical.

In this paper I use parallel Greek and OCS data with information-status annotation (Haug, Eckhoff & Welo 2014) from the PROIEL parallel treebank to assess the status of *tb* and *sb* in the Codex Marianus gospel manuscript. I follow Lyons 1999 in assuming that demonstratives and definite articles share an anaphoric function (they can indicate previously mentioned referents), but that definite articles will not have a deictic function (*I bought the book* and *I bought this book* are not synonymous), while demonstratives will not be used to signal inferred reference (*I got into the car and turned on the engine* / **I got into the car and turned on this engine*). I test the following three hypotheses: 1) Demonstratives are not used unless Greek has a demonstrative. 2) Demonstratives are not used with nouns whose reference has to be inferred. 3) Postposed demonstratives are used with the same distribution of reference types as preposed demonstratives, including the deictic type

1) There are 20 examples of *sb/tb* without a corresponding Greek demonstrative (out of a total of 324) in the Codex Marianus. However, only one of them seems to be a reasonably convincing possible example of *sb* rendering the Greek definite article, Mk. 8.2 *milb mi estb narodo=sb* ‘the/this crowd is dear to me’ rendering *splagkhizomai epi ton okhlon* ‘I have compassion for the crowd’. The remaining examples are either obviously deictic or correspond to passages where multiple Greek manuscript variants do have demonstratives. 2) There are 19 examples of *sb/tb* where the Greek head referent has been tagged as known from inference. However, in all examples a deictic or anaphoric interpretation is also possible, and the examples are not limited to postnominal position. 3) The distribution of reference types is largely similar for pre- and postnominal *sb/tb*, as both are predominantly used in anaphoric (prenominal: 64, postnominal: 103) and deictic (prenominal: 21, postnominal: 81) function. There is no sign that deixis is reserved for prenominal *sb/tb* – in fact we see significantly more of it in postnominal position.

There is thus no compelling reason to abandon the traditional position on the basis of the Codex Marianus data: *sb/tb* appear to be demonstratives in all positions, and are not identified with Greek articles by the translators. It is, however, clear that the stage is set for the grammaticalisation of the postnominal type, with plenty of bridging contexts.

References

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