

Jasmin Hodžić,

Faculty of Humanities, „Džemal Bijedić“ University of Mostar,

jasmin.hodzic@unmo.ba

Bosnian Catenative Verbs in Syntactic Ambiguity

Abstract: This paper deals with phenomenon of syntactic ambiguity in structure with catenative verbs in Bosnian language. The aim is to show certain characteristics in correlation between meaning and grammar, by applying syntactic-semantic analysis to selected examples of usage Bosnian catenative verbs, where we can examine the relationship between subject and/or object of main and embedded clause (ie. subject/object of catenative verb and it's complement). Different possibilities in analysis of grammar leads us to the different (semantic) interpretations, what by definition we call syntactic ambiguity.

What is Syntactic Ambiguity?

The term „ambiguity“ means „double meaning“, or „double sence“. A sentence is structurally ambiguous if it can be represented by more than one syntactic structure. That is why this ambiguity we call *syntactic ambiguity*.

So, there are two types of ambiguity in linguistics, namely:

- *Syntactic (grammatical) ambiguity*, and
- *Semantic ambiguity*.

Also, someone can talk about *lexical ambiguity*, as a third type of ambiguity, which is actually so close to the semantic ambiguity, because we say that a semantic ambiguity is present when the sentence contains words or phrases which have more than one meaning, while lexical ambiguity mainly related to traditional concept of ambiguity of words, which we call the polysemy.¹

What is significantly for syntactic ambiguity is that it is not based on the ambiguity of a single word, because this type of ambiguity arising from the relationship between words and parts of the sentence. Unlike semantic ambiguity, in which syntactic structure in each of the possible interpretations remains the same, but single words are interpreted differently, in

¹ Više o teoriji ambigviteta u filozofiji i lingvistici može se naći u B.S. Gillon (1990).

syntactic ambiguity, as we already said, a sentence can be represented by more than one syntactic structure, and thus the whole statement gets a new meaning, or a different possibilities in analysis of grammar leads us to the different (semantic) interpretations, what by definition we call syntactic ambiguity.

Syntactic ambiguity in Bosnian language most commonly occurs in the headlines, then in the law (administrative) discourse, in jokes, in colloquial language, etc. Some examples of syntactic ambiguity can be seen in the following sentences:

(1) *Pozdrav tebi i tvojim prijateljima iz Crne Gore*

Greetengs to you and your friends from Montenegro

Greetengs from Montenegro to you and your friends

(2) *Dočekali smo čovjeka sa smiješkom*

We have welcomed a man with a smile

That man we have welcomed with a smile

(3) *Najviše volim svježe meso i jaja*

I prefer fresh meat and eggs

I prefer fresh meat and fresh eggs

(4) *Djeca se vode za ruke prelaze ulicu*

The children holding hands while they crossing the street

We should hold the hands of our children while they crossing the street

(5) *Veležu je nemoguće uzeti naslov šampiona*

To Velež, It is impossible to take the champions title

It is impossible to take the champions title from Velež

(6) *Hoće da konja sahrani s tatom*

He wants the horse to be burried with his dad

He wants his dad to help him burried the their horse

(7) *Otac mu je rušio kapitalizam, pa ga on sad mora braniti*

His father was toppled capitalism, so he has to defend it (capitalism) now

His father was toppled capitalism, so he has to defend he (father) now

(8) *Više voli majku od oca*

He loves his mother more than (he loves) his father

He loves his mother more than his father doo

(9) *Rodica mi je došla kući*

My cousin came home

My cousin came to my home

(10) *Prijavljeni su za odlazak u pljačku, etc.*

They have applied to attend robbery

Someone reported them that they go into robbery

For a different interpretation and possible dilemma, we might ask our self: Are there friends from Montenegro, or greetings from Montenegro in (1), did that man came with a smile, or he was greeted with a smile (2), is there a fresh meat, and fresh eggs, or just a fresh meat (3), should we hold the hands of our children, or they should do it by each other (4), whether Velež has or can have a champions title (5); whether dad (and son) buried the horse, or dad gets buried too (6), which/whom he must defend, father or capitalism (7), do He loves his mother more than he loves his father, or more than his father do (8), did my cousin came to her or to my home(9), are they applied or reported for robbery(10), etc.

Bosnian Catenative Verbs in Syntactic Ambiguity

This ambiguity is part of a broader structural ambiguous relationship, the so-called "control ambiguity". The control verb is in relation with subject or object clause, depending on interpretation or on the syntactic and semantic analysis of the sentence. So, this is what we call "the control switch", and it certainly is the structure which corresponds to the construction of complementation with catenative verbs. (see. Brdar-Szabó 1997)

Let us remind our selves that, by Ridjanovic (2012), catenative verbs in Bosnian „are those which must be used with another (implied) verb that makes their meaning complete and is therefore their grammatical complement“ (Ridjanovic 2012: 276). Also, regarding to the various types of these verbs, it should be noted that: „In addition to modal and phase verbs,...Bosnian catenatives include verbs denoting the subject's intent to do something (...) as well as her/his attitude towards a possible future action“ (Ridjanovic 2012: 277).

Note that English and Bosnian catenative verbs are not (entirely) the same types of verbs. For Bosnian catenatives it is important also the following: „Two other defining features of catenatives are (a) common subject of the catenative and its complement verb, and (b) a non-finite form of the complement verb“ (Ridjanovic 2012: 276).

What we already know about the Bosnian infinitive (here as a complement of catenative verb) is its ability to replace with a present tense, and that is one another feature of verbal catenative structures: „The complements of nearly all Bosnian catenative verbs (including modals) can be paraphrased as subordinate clauses introduced with the conjunction *da* followed by the present tense of the appropriate verb, which is in grammatical agreement with the subject of the main clause“ (Ridjanovic 2012: 277).

Regarding to the feature about „common subject“ in Bosnian catenative structures, especially in those with modal verbs, it seems that there is less chance for „the control switch“, or for more than one syntactic interpretation, i.e. for ambiguity to be present. However, the ambiguity is still present in the Bosnian catenative constructions, which can be seen below.

So, in example (1) there is possibility for more than one interpretation:

(1) *Valja im doći do utvrde,*

Should. them. Come. to fortress.

as in: (1a) *Nama valja doći do njihove utvrde*

One (we) should come to their fortress

or: (2a) *Njima valja doći do nečije utvrde*

They should come to certain fortress

Ambiguity is enabled and enhanced by using of impersonal form of the verb 'valjati' (should), than by using the infinitive as an impersonal form of complement verb (doći, come), and for real ambiguity is present in syntactic function of enclitic form of the personal pronoun 'njima' – 'im' (them/thair), which can serve as subject of the main verb „valja“ (should), or as a attribute (modifier) of the noun „utvrda“ (fortress), as in:

utvrda im > njihova utvrda

fortress (of) them > thair fortress

Also, the similar case is in example with verb „trebati“ (should, need to, have to), as in (2):

(2) *Treba im pospremiti sobu*

Need them to clean room

(2a) **One should clean their room**

(2b) **They have to clean room**

In previous example the question is how to interpret it, who need to clean whose room; ie. who is the *agens*, but not in example with Bosnian true modal, as is verb „moći“ (can), in:

(3) *Može im se dati nagrada*

They can be awarded (given award)

Although example (3) is in impersonal form, it is obvious that the pronoun “njima, im” (them) is not the subject of the sentence, because it is definitely in function of the object.²

Partial ambiguity is still present in sentence with verb „moći“ (can), but it also depends of the choice of infinitival lexeme, compare:

(3a) *Može im se kupiti poklon*

Can. them. buy. a gift.

(3a1) *Može se njima kupiti poklon*

One can buy them a gift

(3a2) *Može se kupiti njihov poklon*

One can buy their gift

(3b) *Može im se dopasti spomenik*

(Oni prema spomeniku mogu imati osjećaj dopadanja)

They may have a feeling of liking to the monument

(3c) *Može im se dići spomenik*

(Neko može njima dići spomenik)

One may erect a monument to them

Also, the same thing is with other true modals:

(4) *Mora/smije mu se na licu nacrtati osmijeh*

must/may to him on the face draw

(4a) *Osmijeh se mora/smije nacrtati (pojaviti) na njegovom licu*

A smile must/may appear on his face (He must/may have a smile on his face)

² Treba primijetiti impersonalno „se“ uz glagol *moći* u primjeru (3). To je zato što su *valja* i *treba* sami po sebi bezlično upotrebljeni, iako se i uz te glagole može upotrijebiti čestica „se“, ili, iako se *valja* i *treba* slažu s drugim licem jednine. Također, primjer (3) je mogao da glasi: *Mogu/mogu im dati nagradu*, gdje isto tako nema „prebacivanja kontrole“, odnosno, ambigviteta po vršiocu radnje.

(4a) *Neko mora/smije/umije na njegovom licu nacrtati osmijeh*

Someone must / should / could draw a smile on his face

A similar type of ambiguity as in the examples (1) and (2) we have on the use of so called phase verbs, as in:

(5) *Počinju nam izlaziti na oči*

Starting. to us. come out. on the eyes

We read here that:

(5a) *Oni počinju izlaziti pred nas/njih*

They starting to come out in front of us

(5b) *Njima nešto počinje izlaziti na oči*

Something starting to come out of their eyes

But this is a combination of syntactic and semantic ambiguity.

We have already said that the use of the infinitive tense makes ambiguity present. However, if we replace it by conjunction „da“ plus the present tense as a complement of catenative verbs, ambiguity is even more present. Look at the next example:

(6) *Želi da odmah ustane*

He/she/it won't's to. Right now. Get up.

(6a) *On želi da (on) odmah ustane*

He wants to get up right now

(6b) *On želi da neko (drugi) odmah ustane*

He wants someone to stand up immediately

In previous example there is a possibility for more than one interpretation depends on it do we see a common subject feature in it, or not.

If we back to the definition of the catenative verbs, we can conclude that in previous examples of ambiguity in catenative constructions we step away from definition by even two features: infinitive as a complement verb, and common subject of the complement and main verb, so these examples can not be considered a real ambiguity in catenative structures, but we can say

that these examples of ambiguity are paraphrased types of ambiguity in catenative constructions.

A similar ambiguity as that with verb *željeti* (*want to*), we have in the example with verb *voljeti* (*love to, like to*):

(6) *Volio bi da odmah dođe*

He would like to come immediately

(6a) *On bi volio da on odmah dođe*

He would like (himself) to come immediately

(6b) *On bi volio da neko drugi odmah dođe*

He would love for someone else to come immediately

We have seen examples of ambiguity with modal and phase verbs, and ambiguity with verbs denoting the subject's intend to do something, as well as verbs denoting someone's attitude towards a possible future action.

And, here is examples with so called verbs of speech:

(7) *On je rekao Almi da ide na plažu*

He. Told. to Alma. Not to go. To the beach

(7a) *On je rekao Almi da ona (Alma) ne ide na plažu*

He told to Alma not to go to the beach

(7b) *On je rekao Almi da on (koji je rekao) ne ide na plažu*

He said to Alma that he (who said) is not going to the beach

As in (7), in the following examples of ambiguity (8), (9), and (10) there is not catenative construction in all examples, because in (7) and (10) we can not replace „da“ + present by infinitive tense. In (8) and (9) we can have an infinitival complement, too, but in (9) in the case of infinitival complement we have paraphrased example from colloquial discourse, as in: *rekao se popraviti* < *rekao je da će se popraviti*.

Therefore:

(8) *Ona je odlučila da ostane u zatvoru*

She decided to stay in jail

(9) *Obećao joj je da će saznati sve o njemu*

He promised her that he will find out all about him

(10) *Ana mu je signalizirala da se odmah vraća kući*

Anna signaled to him that she/he immediately will return home

And, in previous examples (8), (9), and (10), the question is what is the subject of complement clause, so for interpretation we have this:

(8a) *Ona je odlučila da neko (drugi) ostane u zatvoru*

She decided that someone (else) will stay in jail

(8b) *Ona je odlučila da ona (koja je odlučila) ostane u zatvoru*

She decided to (she, who decided) stay in jail

(9a) *Obećao joj je da će ona (njoj-joj-ona) saznati sve o njemu*

He promised her that she will find out all about him

(9b) *Obećao joj je da će on (koji je obećao) saznati sve o (drugom) njemu*

He promised her that he will find out all about him

(10a) *Ana je njemu signalizirala da se ona (Ana) odmah vraća kući*

Anna signaled to him that she immediately will return home

(10b) *Ana mu je signalizirala da on odmah treba da se vrati kući*

Anna signaled to him that /he immediately has to return home

What's interesting, (9a) i (9b) have the same meaning, despite different syntactic structures.

And, at the end, what is so important for all this ten examples of syntactic ambiguity? As we seen in Lyons (1968), we can not see clear ambiguity here whan those examples are integral part of the larger text, from which in context we can see a real meaning, ie: „Many of this phrases are not subject to misinterpretation whan they are actually used in sentences, becouse either the rest of the sentence or the general context in which the language operates makes it certain, or at least very probable, that one interpretation rather than the other is the correct one“ (Lyons 1968:214).

Conslusion

Bosnian language has a feture that in some gramaticall forms there is a syncretism or grammaticall homonimy present, which is one of the main reason for a different possibilities of interpretation on syntactic-semantic level.

What is known, in present tense of verbs there is the same form for third person singular for all three gramaticall genders (masculine, feminine, or neuter), so in most of the cases we can find out what is the subject of the sentenc like that. The same result we get if in place of infinitive tense (as a impersonal form) we use the „da+present“ form.

As we have seen, syntactic ambiguity in catenative constructions is present in the main clause, as well as in the complement clause, too. Impersonal and constructions with pasive forms make ambiguity to be present in a main clause.

Syntactic ambiguity in catenative structures is based on the route subject-object-attribute, so Bosnian catenative verbs in syntactic ambiguity is the part of so called control ambiguity. Somtines, it depends on the lexicall ambiguity, too. In modal verbs there is a less possibility for ambiguity to be present.

Considering the features of Bosnian catenative verbs (unlike their English equivalentes), if we recognize the true catenative construction, it will help us to resolve control ambiguity problem.

Sažetak: Ovaj rad tretira pojavu sintaksičkog ambigviteta u strukturi s katenativnim glagolima u bosanskom jeziku. Cilj rada je da se sintaksičko-semantičkom analizom odabranih primjera upotrebe katenativnih konstrukcija pokažu određene zakonomjernosti u međuodnosu gramatike i značenja, posebno kod upotrebe infinitiva ili kod bezlično upotrebljenih katenativnih glagola, a naročito da se pritom ispita odnos subjekta i/ili objekta katenativnog i dopunskog glagola. Različite mogućnosti gramatičke analize uzrokovat će dvosmislenosti u semantičkoj ravni, što je po definiciji sintaksički ambigvitet.

Ključne riječi: sintaksički ambigvitet, katenativni glagoli, glagolska komplementacija, sintaksičko-semantička analiza

Literature:

Brendan S. Gillon (1990): *Ambiguity, Generality, and Indeterminacy: Tests and Definitions*, Synthese Vol. 85, No. (3), pp. 391-416

John Lyons (1968): *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Mario Brdar, Rita Brdar- Szabó (1997) : Towards a functional approach to infinitiva complements: control obviation strategies between syntax, semantics, pragmatics and discourse, in: Butler et. al, eds. (1997): *A Fund of Ideas. Recent Developments in Functional Grammar*. (Studies in Language and Language Use 31). Amsterdam: IFO TT, 157- 170. p. 157- 170.

Midhat Ridjanovic (2012): *Bosnian for Foreigners: with comprehensive grammar*, RABIC, Sarajevo

* Jasmin Hodžić (2013): Bosnian catenative verbs in Syntactic Ambiguity, *Proceedings: 3rd International Conference on Foreign Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (FLATAL '13)*, ed. Azamat Akbarov & Diane Larsen-Freeman, International Burch University, 2013, p. 948-958.