APPROXIMATIVE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE CONSTITUENTS OF ENGLISH AND BULGARIAN ALTERNATIVE INTERROGATIVE STRUCTURES

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The article explores the approximative relations between the constituents of English and Bulgarian alternative interrogative structures (AISs). The research has been based on authentic examples of AISs from eight corpora of written and spoken English and Bulgarian. According to the meaning conveyed, AISs fall into five groups: AISs (mostly Bulgarian) that express approximation, AISs that have idiomatic meaning (they are testified only in the Bulgarian corpora), AISs that carry alternative conditional-concessive meaning, AISs whose final constituent (under)specifies the meaning of the AIS, and AISs whose second constituent has a causal meaning (they occur only in the Bulgarian corpora).

Key words: alternative interrogative structure, approximative relations, idiomatic meaning, alternative conditional-concessive meaning, causal meaning

I. Introduction

This article explores the approximative relations between the constituents of English and Bulgarian alternative interrogative structures (E&BAISs). The qualitative and quantitative research has been based on authentic examples of alternative interrogative structures (AISs) excerpted from eight corpora of written and spoken English and Bulgarian.

- English Fiction Corpus (EFC, 90 508 word forms) compiled by V. Spasova for the purposes of her doctoral thesis.
- English Corpus of Fiction Monologue (ECFM, 50 370 word forms) compiled by V. Spasova for the purposes of her doctoral thesis.
- Charlotte Face-to-Face Corpus of Spoken English (CFCSE, 90 630 word forms). It is part of a larger corpus of spoken English, the Charlotte Narrative and Conversation Collection (CNCC, 198 295 word forms), included in the Open American National Corpus (OANC).

- Switchboard Telephone Corpus of Spoken English (STCSE, 50 476 word forms). It is part of a much larger corpus of spoken English, the LDC Switchboard corpus (3 019 477 word forms), included in the Open American National Corpus (OANC).
- Bulgarian Fiction Corpus (BFC, 90 326 word forms) compiled by V. Spasova for the purposes of her doctoral thesis.
- Bulgarian Corpus of Fiction Monologue (BCFM, 50 508 word forms) collected by Tzvetomira Venkova, now an associate professor at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".
- Corpus of Spoken Bulgarian *Aleksova* (CSB–A, 89 959 word forms) collected by Krasimira Aleksova, now a professor at the Faculty of Slavic Studies at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".
- Corpus of Spoken Bulgarian *Nikolova–Venkova* (CSB–NV, 50 000 word forms) collected by Tsvetanka Nikolova and Tzvetomira Venkova.

Corpora data show that the constituents of 102 English alternative interrogative structures (EAISs) (39.8 %) out of the total of 256 found in the four corpora exhibit approximative relations. There are 11 in EFC, 1 in ECFM, 69 in CFCSE, and 21 in STCSE.

In their turn, Bulgarian alternative interrogative structures (BAISs) whose constituents display approximative relations are 128 (52.9 %) out of the total of 242 found in the four corpora. There are 24 in BFC, 5 in BCFM, 63 in CSB–A, and 36 in CSB–NV.

According to the meaning conveyed, these AISs can be divided into five groups:

- AISs that express approximation
- AISs that have idiomatic meaning
- AISs that carry alternative conditional-concessive meaning
- AISs whose final constituent (under)specifies the meaning of the AIS
- AISs whose second constituent has a causal meaning

II.   Approximation

As AISs that express approximation were discussed in detail in another article (cf. Spasova 2019: 408 – 420) only the key findings are recapitulated below.

These AISs indicate that the speaker does not know, or does not remember, and does not consider it important to establish the truth value of one of the alternatives.

The meaning of approximation has turned out to be much more characteristic of BAISs than of EAISs. As a matter of fact, it is 3.1 times as typical of BAISs as it is of EAISs. There is a total of 88 AISs in the Bulgarian corpora (8 in BFC, 52 in CSB–A, and 28 in CSB–NV) and only 28 AISs in their English counterparts (16 in CFCSE and 12 in STCSE).

Depending on whether their constituents have exact values or one of them has a *wh-* (or *k-*) value because it has an interrogative *wh-* word (or *k-* word) as a component, the AISs can be subdivided into:

- AISs that express approximation with exact values
- AISs that express approximation with (an) exact value(s) and a *wh-* (*k-*) value

Different types of approximation are differentiated within each subgroup.

Thus, approximation with exact values can be numerical (or quantitative), temporal (ex. 1 and 2), situational and identification. BAISs convey all the four types. Only AISs that signal temporal approximation are found in the English corpora.

In all examples henceforth the constituents of the AIS are put in round brackets, while the AIS is in square brackets and is marked with single underlining. The coordination markers are in bold type. The abbreviated name of the corpus from which the example is excerpted follows the example and is enclosed in round brackets.

(1)   *… and I don't know [(if it was in the year that the king died there in '77) (**or** if it was '78)], but a flood came and course the kids were all you know told to leave school … (CFCSE)*

(2)   *… аз съм виждала плочи на него и свирят, откакто го изгониха преди [(полвин месец **ли** беше), (един месец **ли** беше)], толкова, около един месец. (CSB–NV)*

*… az sam vizhdala plochi na nego i sviryat, otkakto go izgoniha predi [(polvin mesets **li** beshe), (edin mesets **li** beshe)], tolkova, okolo edin mesets. (CSB–NV)*

'*… I have seen records being played. He was given the sack, was it half a month ago or was it a month ago, yes, about a month ago.*'[1]

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[1] Single inverted commas indicate meaningful translation of the Bulgarian examples into English. Translation is mine.

Depending on the interrogative *k*-word (or *wh*-word) that is a component of the final constituent, approximation with (an) exact value(s) and a *k*- (*wh*-) value can be approximation with *колко/whatever*, *кога*, and *какво/what* (ex. 3 and 4). In addition, E&BAISs impart hesitation with *or* and *или*.

(3)   *-- and, uh, ladies, you know, uh, uh, I, don't know if that's [(marketing) (or what)], but they, they definitely have a, uh, I think a, a winter type wardrobe, and then a spring, and then a summer …* (STCSE)

(4)   *[(Пролетна умора ли), (какво става)].* (CSB–A)
[(Proletna umora li), (kakvo stava)]. (CSB–A)
'*Spring fatigue or what is this.*'

III. Idiomatic meaning

The second group of AISs whose constituents exhibit approximative relations consists of several AISs with idiomatic meaning. Although they are found only in the Bulgarian corpora, we can't draw a conclusion that such AISs do not exist in English.

For instance, the AIS in ex. (5) is made up of two cardinal numerals. It denotes "numerical approximation" (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1304) and can be regarded as the pragmatic equivalent of the adverb *много* (*many*).

(5)   *[(Една ли), (две ли)] бяха обидите, да ги преброиш и да ги претеглиш колко струват?* (BCFM)

[(Edna li), (dve li)] byaha obidite, da gi prebroish i da gi preteglish kolko struvat? (BCFM)

'*Were the insults one or two so that you could count them and calculate how much they cost?*'

In its turn, the AIS in ex. (6) is a coordination of two demonstrative pronouns – the proximal *този* (*this*) and the distal *онзи* (*that*). They are "directional opposites" (Cruse 1986: 223). To be more specific, they belong to the class of "antipodal opposites" (*ibid.* 1986: 224). The pronouns encapsulate the horizontal spatial opposition "near – far". The AIS itself can be interpreted as „който и да било" (Genadieva-Mutafchieva 1964: 342), „без значение кой, независимо кой" ("no matter which").

(6)   *Номерът е, че доста хора, след като попаднат в такава история, често забравят какво точно пишеше за [(този) (или онзи)] случай в мъдрите книги.* (BFC)

Nomerat e, che dosta hora, sled kato popadnat v takava istoria, chesto zabravyat kakvo tochno pisheshe za [(tozi) (ili onzi)] sluchay v madrite knigi. (BFC)

'*The point is that when they find themselves in such a situation, many people often forget what exactly was written about this or that emergency in wise manuals.*'

IV. Alternative-conditional concessive meaning

In the English and Bulgarian corpora there are some AISs that carry "alternative conditional-concessive meaning" (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 1100). Following Quirk *et al.* (1985: 1100–1101), I regard AISs like those in ex. (7) and (8) below as reductions from interrogative subordinate clauses, i.e. *топло или студено* (*warm or cold*) is a reduction from *независимо дали беше топло или дали беше студено* (*no matter whether it was warm or whether it was cold*), while *sun or freezing* is a reduction from *whether there was sun or whether it was freezing*. I agree with Quirk *et al.* that each clausal coordination denotes "an alternative condition in that logically it combines the conditional meaning of *if* with the disjunctive meaning of *either ... or*" (*ibid.* 1985: 1100), while "the concessive meaning emerges from the unexpected implication that the same situation applies under two contrasting conditions" (*ibid.* 1985: 1100).

(7) *[(Топло) (или студено)], беше облечен с куртка, чиста, добре изгладена, винаги закопчана догоре ...* (BCFM)

[(Toplo) (ili studeno)], beshe oblechen s kurtka, chista, dobre izgladena, vinagi zakopchana dogore ... (BCFM)

'*Warm or cold, he wore a tunic, clean, well-ironed, always buttoned up ...*'

(8) *I loved to go outside. Our neighbors had a big pasture. So actually I'd go sit in the pasture and read. [(Sun) (or freezing)], I loved it!* (CFCSE)

The constituents of both AISs stand in a relationship of oppositeness. *Топло* (*warm*) and *студено* (*cold*) are "polar antonyms" (Cruse 1986: 212–213). *Sun* and *freezing* belong to different parts of speech – *sun* is a noun, *freezing* is an adjective. They convey the meanings of extreme heat and extreme cold. In other words, they encapsulate the opposition "heat – cold" and for this reason they can be considered as opposites.

V. The final constituent (under)specifies the meaning of the AIS

These AISs can be further divided into three subgroups:
- AISs whose second constituent is a corrective or a restatement
- AISs whose final constituent makes the AIS less specific in meaning
- AISs whose second constituent makes the AIS more specific in meaning

1. The second constituent is a corrective or a restatement

As pointed out by Quirk *et al.* (1985: 933), "the alternative expressed by *or* may also be a restatement or a corrective to what is said in the first conjoin".

Both English and Bulgarian corpora data testify that the second constituent often corrects or restates the information provided in the first constituent. The speaker's aim is to express themselves in a clearer and more accurate way so that the addressee could better understand them and provide an adequate answer in cases in which the AIS forms or makes part of a sentence used as a direct question.

(9) *[(Do you remember any stories) (**or** do you have any stories)]* *about your grandparents?* (CFCSE)

(10) *[(Are your brothers or sisters as much of a reader as you are?) (**Or** have an interest at all in reading?)]* (CFCSE)

(11) В: *Метър и петдесет заема коминът?!*

Н: *То е така, но чупката и като се изправи, идва четиресе сантима, [(четиресе **ли**) беше, (**или** повече)], педесе.* (CSB–A)

V: *Metar i petdeset zaema kominat?!*

N: *To e taka, no chupkata i kato se izpravi, idva chetirese santima, [(chetirese **li**) beshe, (**ili** poveche)], pedese.* (CSB–A)

V: 'The chimney rises to a meter and a half?!'

N: 'That's right, but the curve and when you straighten it up, it is forty centimeters, was it forty or more, fifty.'

(12) *Аз непрекъснато съм се обърнала на, на, на един [(следовател **ли**) да ти кажа (**или** милиционер)], не мога да ти кажа, и то от колко години.* (CSB–NV)

*Az neprekasnato sam se obarnala na, na, na edin [(sledovatel **li**) da ti kazha (**ili** militsioner)], ne moga da ti kazha, i to ot kolko godini.* (CSB–NV)

'I am constantly acting like, like, like an investigator or a militiaman, I can't tell you, and I have been doing it for years.'

2. The final constituent makes the AIS less specific in meaning

In both English and Bulgarian corpora there are AISs whose final constituent includes an indefinite pronoun like *нещо* (*something*), *anything*, *something*, and *somebody*. As these "are words that replace the names of indeterminate, unspecified phenomena"[2] (Kutsarov 2007: 97), they make the AISs less specific in meaning.

For instance, the second constituent of the EAISs in ex. (13) and (14) is realized by an NP headed by the indefinite pronoun *anything* and *something* respectively, while that of the EAIS in ex. (15) is realized by an AdvP headed by the indefinite adverb *someplace* accompanied by the adverb *else*. The AISs express different types of approximation, *viz.* identification (ex. 13), temporal (ex. 14) and spatial (ex. 15).

(13) *And we'd try, we'd try to say, "Didn't you bring [(any pants) (or anything)]? We're, we're out here in the warehouse".* (STCSE)

(14) *... I think it's, uh, is it [(after, uh, Labor Day) (or something)], I don't know and, and, uh, so, you know, the, the social attitude has a little bit to do with, uh, I think the way we dress.* (STCSE)

(15) *Do you feel like, do you think it would have been different if you had gone to school [(in Boston) (or someplace else up north)]?* (CFCSE)

In the Bulgarian examples below the second constituent includes a form of the indefinite pronoun *нещо* (*something*) accompanied by an appropriate form of the adjective *друг* (*other*).

(16) *... може би сред тия укрепления (...)[(му било отсъдено да напише Книгата си на живота) (или пък нещо друго го очаквало, та бил така уверен, че вече е пристигнал)]?* (BCFM)

... mozhe bi sred tia ukreplenia (...) [(mu bilo otsadeno da napishe Knigata si na zhivota) (ili pak neshto drugo go ochakvalo, ta bil taka uveren, che veche e pristignal)]? (BCFM)

'*... maybe within these fortifications (...) he was predestined to write the Book of his life or was there anything else lying ahead of him that made him so confident that he had arrived?*'

(17) *И къде, само така [(обиколка с автобуса ли), (или и други неща слизахте да разглеждате)]?* (CSB–A)

I kade, samo taka [(obikolka s avtobusa li), (ili i drugi neshta slizahte da razglezhdate)]? (CSB–A)

'*And where, was it only a bus tour or did you get off the bus to do some sightseeing?*'

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[2] Translation of quotations from grammars and articles by Bulgarian authors is mine.

Like their Bulgarian counterparts above, EAISs can be less specific in meaning because the final constituent has the indefinite pronoun *any*, the adjective *other* and/or the common noun *thing* as a component.

(18) *Did you have any family storytelling rituals, [(a story at bedtime), (reading a Bible story) (or any of those sorts of things)]?* (CFCSE)

(19) *So what kind of reaction would she get from [(you) (or other people that heard her)]?* (CFCSE)

3. The second constituent makes the AIS more specific in meaning

As we have seen in the previous subsection, the final constituent can make the AIS less specific in meaning. Sometimes, however, it is the other way round, i.e. the second constituent can make the AIS more specific in meaning.

The EAIS in ex. (20) represents a binary AP-coordination. The adjective *weird* is a component of the second constituent. In my opinion, *the weird* denotes a specific part of *the particular* and hence the second constituent makes the AIS more specific in meaning.

(20) *Is there something [(particular) (or like really weird)] that she's told you that stands out in your mind?* (CFCSE)

VI. The second constituent has a causal meaning

The final group of AISs whose constituents exhibit approximative relations includes BAISs the second constituent of which carries different causal meanings.

For instance, the second constituent of the AIS in ex. (21) formulates the cause for the likely non-realization of the action expressed by the first constituent.

(21) *Шефът имаше ми се струва един чешки грамофон ... [(Иди го помоли)...(или греша със тоя)]. Не, той сигурно ще го даде, сигурно.* (CSB–NV)

Shefat imashe mi se struva edin cheshki gramofon ... [(Idi go pomoli)...(ili gresha sas toya)]. Ne, toy sigurno shte go dade, sigurno. (CSB–NV)

'I think the boss had a Czech record player ... Go and ask him ... or am I mistaken about him. No, he will probably give it, probably.'

The AIS exemplifies the second type of the "structural-semantic model of resultant disjunction" („структурно-семантичен модел 'следствена дизюнкция'") discussed in detail by Savina Savova (1983:

117 – 123; 1986: 173 – 176). This type of disjunction has three components. The first is verbalized. It is "an imperative sentence" (Savova 1983: 117) or "an interrogative sentence with *ли* (*li*)/*дали* (*dali*)" (Savova 1986: 174). The second component is non-verbalized and denotes result. The third component is verbalized and expresses the cause that leads to the result (*ibid.* 1986: 174). When the first component is an imperative sentence, the third one "names the cause that motivates the execution or the non-execution of the order" (Savova 1983: 121). The latter case follows the formula „*А или [не А, защото] В*" ("*A or [not A because] B*") where the element put in square brackets is the non-verbalized component (*ibid.* 1983: 121).

Now let us go back to the AIS in ex. (21). In this type of AIS we can talk about the absence of a third clause "which denotes an action opposite to and incompatible with that denoted by the first one" (*ibid.* 1983: 118), i.e. by the first component of the AIS. As the first clause is positive, the unexpressed one can be regarded as its negative counterpart that describes the non-realization of the action expressed in the first clause. In addition, the absent (or non-verbalized) clause denotes result. The clause introduced by *или* (the second constituent of the AIS) expresses the cause leading to the result denoted by the non-verbalized clause and hence the cause for the likely non-realization of the action described by the first clause.

Ex. (22) shows what ex. (21) would look like when expanded by the non-verbalized component (put in square brackets).

(22) *Иди го помоли ...* **или** *[недей да ходиш да го молиш, защото] греша със тоя.*

Idi go pomoli ... **ili** *[nedey da hodish da go molish, zashtoto] gresha sas toya.*

'*Go and ask him ... or [don't go and ask him because] I am mistaken about him.*'

Now let us look at ex. (23). The second constituent of the AIS formulates the cause for the negative consequence expressed by the first constituent (Savova 1986: 175).

(23) *[(Не пуши детето), (**или** ти не разрешаваш)]?* (CSB–A)
*[(Ne pushi deteto), (**ili** ti ne razreshavash)]?* (CSB–A)
'*Doesn't the child smoke or you don't allow her to do so?*'

The AIS is an instance of resultant disjunction "without an implicit [i.e. non-verbalized] component" (*ibid.* 1986: 175). The first constituent "formulates a negative consequence resulting from the cause [expressed by the second constituent] introduced by *или*" (*ibid.* 1986: 175). In such examples "*или* functions as a causal interrogative word" („каузално-

въпросителна дума"), i.e. it performs the function of *защото* (*because*) (*ibid.* 1986: 175). Therefore, the second constituent of the AIS can be interpreted as „защото ти не разрешаваш ли" ("because you don't allow her to do so").

Another causal meaning is communicated by the second constituent of the AIS in ex. (24). This time it formulates the cause for the action expressed in the first constituent that the speaker strongly disapproves (Genadieva-Mutafchieva 1964: 346). Once again the second constituent is introduced by *или*. And again *или* performs the function of *защото* (*because*) so that the second constituent allows the interpretation „защото ти е по-приятно така ли" ("because you like it more that way").

(24) *А, мисли си, ти ми каза, че ще дойдеш и аз те чакам. [(За какво ще ме лъжеш!) (Или ти е по-приятно така.)]* (CSB–NV)

A, misli si, ti mi kaza, che shte doydesh i az te chakam. [(Za kakvo shte me lazhesh!) (Ili ti e po-priyatno taka.)] (CSB–NV)

'*Ah, you think so, you've told me that you're coming and I'm waiting for you. Why are you lying to me! Or you like it more that way.*'

VII. Conclusions

The qualitative and quantitative corpus-based research into E&BAISs whose constituents exhibit approximative relations leads to the following conclusions:

1. The constituents of 39.8 % of all EAISs and 52.9 % of all BAISs found in the corpora exhibit approximative relations.

2. According to the meaning conveyed, the AISs fall into five groups:

- AISs (mostly Bulgarian) that express approximation

Here two subgroups of AISs are differentiated, *viz.* AISs that express approximation with exact values and AISs that express approximation with (an) exact value(s) and a *wh-* (*k-*) value. Different types of approximation are distinguished within each subgroup.

- AISs that have idiomatic meaning (they are testified only in the Bulgarian corpora)
- AISs that carry alternative conditional-concessive meaning
- AISs whose final constituent (under)specifies the meaning of the AIS.

The final (usually the second) constituent makes the AIS more specific or less specific in meaning, or it is a restatement or a corrective to the information provided by the first constituent.

- AISs whose second constituent has a causal meaning (they occur only in the Bulgarian corpora)

The second constituent formulates the cause for the likely non-realization of the action expressed by the first constituent, or the cause for the negative consequence expressed by the first constituent, or the cause for the action expressed in the first constituent that the speaker strongly disapproves.

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