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Anomalous use of definiteness and gender in some types of noun phrases in Bulgarian

The paper considers the anomalous use of definiteness and gender in Bulgarian noun phrases containing hypocoristic names, nicknames or sometimes even legal personal names. Proper names of people, being semantically definite, usually do not take the definite article in Bulgarian. But in the cases considered it is just the opposite – in informal conversation, in fiction or in ironic statements the use of a definite article is either obligatory or facultative depending on the formal and semantic features of the names. The factors to trigger the anomalous use described may be the female sex of the designee, the less typical ending of the noun, its being grammatically neuter or its inclusion in an attributive phrase. Thus the female legal personal names (e.g. *Marija*, *Elena*) may take a definite article on some special occasions (*Marijata*, *Elenata*) but male legal personal names (e.g. *Boris*) cannot. Male legal or hypocoristic names ending in *-o* (*Stojko*, *Borko*<*Boris*) never take the definite article, male names ending in *-e* may or may not take the definite article (*Bore*/*Boreto*<*Boris*) but female names ending in *-e* always take the definite article in colloquial Bulgarian (*Marčeto*<*Marija*, *Lenčeto*<*Elena*). What is more, their attributes are in the neuter and not in the feminine (*hubavoto Lenče*<*hubavata Elena*). Male hypocoristic names ending in *-a*, even those derived from family names, always take the definite article (*Penata*<*Penev*, *Vucata*<*Vucov*) but their attributes are in the masculine. Corresponding forms without an article (*Bore*, *Marče*, *Lenče*, *Pena*, *Vuca*) are used as vocatives or sometimes as predicatives. The phenomenon is stylistically marked which means that the choice of such noun phrases is pragmatic, but the rules which determine the use of definiteness and gender in them are grammatical. These are particular rules which operate in a minority of situations and contradict the general rules operating in the majority of contexts. Some of them are rigid but others are optional and introduce additional nuances into the statement. The phenomenon can be interpreted as a Balkan linguistic feature partially mani-



fested in Bulgarian. Its occurrence in folklore texts might qualify it as relatively old.

Key words: definiteness; gender; Modern Bulgarian; hypocoristic names; pragmatic choice; grammar rules; Balkan linguistic features.

1. Heuristic introduction

In the history of Bulgarian there was a transition from an all-Slav case system (dominant till the fourteenth century and Common Slavic in origin) to a New Balkan one attested in seventeenth century Early Modern Bulgarian.¹ In a case system of the New Balkan type the formal cases² have lost their concrete local meanings and are specialized to mark the parts of the sentence.³ Although such a system seems iconic enough and should have been convenient to use, in Bulgarian it has been preserved only in some peripheral dialects and elsewhere it has been steadily simplified or abandoned so that since 1945 Standard Bulgarian has had no formal cases with nouns, adjectives and some classes of pronouns. At the same time, in Modern Bulgarian relatively free word order continues to be the basic means to express the theme-rheme structure of sentences.

Thus, my work on the history of formal cases in Bulgarian lead me to the intriguing question of how Modern Bulgarian succeeds in combining its relatively free word order, inherited from earlier highly inflectional linguistic stages, with a complete lack of formal cases with nouns, adjectives and most of the pronouns. Looking for the answer to this question I concentrated on analysis of the interaction between word order, congruence,⁴ formal cases, lexical meaning, formal class mark-

¹ The notions of Early Modern Bulgarian and New Balkan case system were introduced by Gešev (2007), cf. also Gešev (2015). By New Balkan I mean a linguistic type analogous to Greek after the tenth century and to Rumanian (and, to a certain extent, to Albanian). About the development of Greek cf. Browning (1983).

² By case and case system I mean the morphological (formal) cases in a language, which are usually polysemantic and whose meaning changes in history. A significant illustration of these features of the morphological case is provided by Dina Staniševa in her book *Accusative in East Slavic* (Staniševa 1966) and in a good number of other publications of hers; cf. also Gešev (2008).

³ Cf. Gešev (2010).

⁴ Used synonymously to *agreement*. In English *congruence* is a rare and somewhat old-fashioned linguistic term. Thus, it is regularly used by Leonard Bloomfield (1970) but not by Otto Jespersen (1969) or John Lyons (1968), who prefer *concord*. Furthermore, Lyons uses congruence as philosophic but not as grammatical term. My preference for this neo-Latinism is based on its being in harmony with Central European linguistic tradition where it is widely used usually as synonymous



ers, prosody, etc. as means to explicate the concrete syntactic relations in a sentence, which I named *syntagmatic mechanisms*.

In Geshev (2013) (and other three forthcoming papers) I came to the conclusion that in Bulgarian the most important mechanism to compensate for the lack of formal cases is congruence, which is often, but not always, able to eliminate potential ambiguity in the sentence, assisted to a certain extent by animacy, definiteness, pronoun duplicates of the objects and extra-linguistic knowledge. On this ground I proposed the notion of *congruence Indo-European languages in Europe* – a typological grouping which includes a substantial part of Europe’s languages – and I classified Modern Bulgarian as belonging to the case-less subtype of these languages. So definiteness proves to be a subsidiary syntagmatic mechanism which contributes only partially to the disambiguation of the syntactic structure of the sentence (i.e. to making the parts of the sentence, especially the subject and the direct object, recognizable). Likewise, definiteness relates to theme-rheme structure of the sentence statistically (due to common elements in the semantic and functional motivation of both categories) but not absolutely. To say it in a different way, definite noun phrases are very often, but not always, syntactic subjects or themes in Bulgarian, and definiteness is a category independent of the parts of the sentence and of its theme-rheme articulation and, hence, of any functions which were previously expressed by formal cases.⁵

All this applies to the majority of cases, where the use of definiteness is conditioned by the general rules of Bulgarian grammar. Nevertheless, in a minority of cases anomalous use of definiteness is observed with noun phrases containing:

- a) hypocoristic names
- b) nicknames
- c) legal personal names (under certain circumstances).

This use is characteristic of colloquial Modern Bulgarian. It is marked stylistically, which means that you could hardly come upon it in any formal discourse – oral or written – and it is anomalous as far as it contradicts the general rules for employment of definite articles in Standard Bulgarian. Curiously enough, the anomaly considered includes specific case-like functions of the presence or lack of

to purist terms, cf. German *Kongruenz* and *Übereinstimmung*, Czech *kongruence* and *shoda*, Polish *kongruencja* and *zgoda*, Croatian *kongruencija* and *sročnost*.

⁵ A situation analogous to what J. Lyons states about the difference between psychological, logical and grammatical subjects (Lyons 1968: 344).



definite articles and is strongly dependent on gender⁶ and on morphological patterns with common nouns of the same gender. In addition, sometimes it is connected with specific changes in gender and agreement in gender.

Because of its substandard character the phenomenon considered has been referred to in works on Bulgarian morphology only recently – cf. Ruselina Nitsolova (2008: 57–58; 75–78; 97–98) with further bibliography. Since this reference is predominantly descriptive, in the present paper some additional speculation about the syntactic functions of the definite article when used anomalously and about the hierarchy of features to trigger this use are offered with certain emphasis on the interaction of definiteness, gender, case-like distinctions, parts of the sentence, diminutiveness and the theme-rheme distinction within the sentence. The pragmatic and diachronic aspects and the Balkan linguistic context of the phenomenon considered will also be mentioned.

2. Notions and approach

In the present paper the analysis of the interaction of syntagmatic mechanisms mentioned in section 1 will be virtually reduced to analysis of the features triggering the anomalous use of definiteness and gender in colloquial Modern Bulgarian. Nevertheless, the approach remains essentially the same – it considers how semantic, morphological and syntactic features influence and predetermine each other.

The interacting phenomena – definiteness, gender, case-like distinctions, parts of the sentence, diminutive forms and theme-rheme distinctions – belong to different linguistic levels, so in order to analyse their relatively complex interaction we have to refer simultaneously to semantics, morphology and syntax. In doing so it is reasonable and convenient to use a set of notions, terms and ways of description close to the traditional ones⁷, following Christian Lehmann's example – “The discussion will not be couched in terms of a specific theory of grammar... As many of the problems involved are traditional ones, they can be discussed in traditional terms” (Lehmann 2002: vii).

I hope that using notions, terms and ways of description close to the traditional ones will help the successful elucidation of the matter concerned and the cross-linguistic and cross-methodological translatability of its analysis. I also hope that

⁶ Interdependence of case, gender and definiteness is widely acknowledged in linguistics, cf. J. Lyons' (1968: 293–295) consideration of the question in terms close to the traditional ones.

⁷ By traditional I mean everything which is widely accepted and non-contradictorily understood.



such an approach makes the definition of most notions and terms involved in the analysis dispensable.

3. Common names, personal names and nicknames in Bulgarian – the general rule

There are three grammatical genders in Modern Bulgarian – masculine, feminine and neuter – formal and semantically redundant as is gender in most Indo-European languages,⁸ and there is a statistical interdependence between gender and endings of nouns. The basic form of most masculine nouns has a zero ending, a smaller group ends in *-o*, and only few end in *-a*. Similarly, the majority of feminine nouns ends in *-a* and a considerable minority has a zero ending; most neuter nouns end in *-o* or *-e*, but some end in *-i*. On the basis of this criterion I shall characterize some of the nouns considered as belonging to more or less productive morphological types.

In Modern Bulgarian definiteness is a formal morphological category inherent to nouns, adjectives, participles, some pronouns and to noun phrases in general.⁹ In speech a noun phrase may have a definite article, an indefinite article, or a zero article. The definite article is a suffix stuck to the first stressed inflected word in the noun phrase. It agrees in gender and number with the head of the noun phrase and is in a kind of vowel harmony with the gender-and-number ending of the word it is agglutinated to.¹⁰ The indefinite article precedes the whole noun phrase and is homonymous with the forms of the cardinal number *one*.¹¹ It also agrees in gender and number with the head of the noun phrase.

(1), (2) and (3) exemplify the respective forms of a masculine, a feminine and a neuter noun (and noun phrase) with no article, with a definite article (underlined and bold)¹² and with an indefinite article:

(1) *stol*; *stolǎt/stola*;¹³ *edin stol* (masc.)

⁸ About the semantic redundancy of gender in the Indo-European languages cf. Lyons (1968: 287–288).

⁹ It is worth mentioning Svetomir Ivančev's approach to the analysis of the use of definite and indefinite articles in Bulgarian in the context of the syntactic and communicative structure of sentences (Ivančev 1978: 108–118, 128–172).

¹⁰ As irrelevant to our point the vowel harmony of the definite article will not be exemplified here.

¹¹ Some linguists reject the existence of indefinite articles in Bulgarian but this is a minority opinion.

¹² The definite articles will be underlined and bold in the examples throughout the paper.



chair the-chair a/one chair

star stol; starija(t) stol; edin star stol
old chair the-old chair an/one old chair

- (2) *žena; ženata; edna žena* (fem.)
woman the-woman a/one woman

dobra žena; dobrata žena; edna dobra žena
good woman the-good woman a/one good woman

- (3) *dete; deteto; edno dete* (neuter)
child the-child a/one child

malko dete; malkoto dete; edno malko dete
little child the-little child a/one little child

In the plural the same nouns and noun phrases have the following forms:

- (4) *stolove; stolovete; edni stolove* (plural)
stari stolove; starite stolove; edni stari stolove
ženi; ženite; edni ženi
dobri ženi; dobrite ženi; edni dobri ženi
deca; decata; edni deca
malki deca; malkite deca; edni malki deca

Statistically most common nouns denoting men (persons of the male sex) are masculine, most common nouns denoting women are feminine, and most nouns denoting children are neuter. The gender of the inanimate common nouns is conventional and arbitrary. As for proper names, in formal or stylistically neutral speech their gender corresponds to the sex of their designee.

The rules which decide for the use of definite, indefinite and zero articles in Bulgarian resemble the corresponding rules in English. Of course, there is some difference – e.g. the Bulgarian for *teacher* will have no article in sentences like *She is a teacher*. and the Bulgarian for *linguistics* will have a definite article in sentences like *Linguistics is a science*. This difference is insubstantial for our topic and will not be considered in this paper. Another point which will not be discussed is

¹³ In colloquial Bulgarian the masculine definite articles with or without a word-final *-t* are simply mutual phonetic variants. The prescriptive grammars of Standard Bulgarian ascribe a case-like (nominative against oblique) distinction to these forms, but this is a rule observed only by highly educated persons and usually only in writing. This distinction is irrelevant to our topic and will not be discussed further in the paper.



the use of the indefinite article. The main object of concern will be the (anomalous) use of definite articles and the noun phrases with definite articles will be called formally definite.

It is commonly accepted that personal names are semantically definite because their referent is well known and clearly distinguishable in every concrete situation. So in languages which possess a definite article its use with personal names is irrelevant (or perhaps neutralized), that is why it has become a matter of formal convention. In Modern Bulgarian the general rule (i.e. the rule which applies to the majority of cases) is that in spite of being semantically definite personal names have zero articles irrespective of their syntactic or communicative functions and, hence, they are not formally definite:¹⁴

- (5) *Ivan idva. Vidjah Marija. Marija sreštna Ivan.*
 John is-coming. I-saw Mary Mary met John

However, it should be added that if the Bulgarian noun phrase consists of a personal name and its attributes the attribute coming first in the linear structure of the phrase may take a definite article in case the rules ascribing definiteness demand it (all the phrase accepting the gender of its head, i.e. of the personal name). Although the personal names, used alone, do not take a definite article, their attributes usually do because the semantic definiteness of the personal name makes the whole noun phrase definite:

- (6) *dobrijat star Ivan* (masc.)
 the-good old John
dobrata stara Marija (fem.)
 the-good old Mary
milata malka Marija (fem.)
 the-dear little Mary

While personal names in Bulgarian are not formally definite, the nicknames, on the contrary, usually take a definite article, especially when they are common names or adjectives used as nicknames. This contrast is especially obvious in noun phrases consisting of a (hypocoristic) personal name followed by a nickname, as in (7a) and (7b), where the definite article is incorporated in the form of the nickname, although it comes last in the noun phrase:

¹⁴ As is in English; in neighbouring Modern Greek, on the contrary, personal names go with definite articles and are concurrently semantically and formally definite.



- (7) a. *Koljo Mokrija*
Nick the-wet
b. *Sašo Grafu*
Alex the-count
c. *Dobrata stara Anglija*
the-good old England

The phrases in (7a) and (7b) contradict the common linear rule that the definite article should be incorporated in the first word of the noun phrase, as it is in (7c), just because personal names must be morphologically unmarked for definiteness and nicknames must be formally definite in spite of their position in the phrase.

4. An archaic stage in proverbs and with kinship terms

In some Bulgarian proverbs an archaic linguistic stage is preserved in which the nicknames and the attributes of personal names have no article, cf. the adjective *gol* ‘naked, i.e. very poor’ in (8) which may function as a nickname or simply as an attribute of the proper name Hasan but (in both cases) is morphologically unmarked for definiteness:

- (8) *Kakto vsite turci taka i Gol Hasan.*
as all-the Turks so and naked Hasan

We can observe a similar situation with several kinship terms. When followed by a possessive clitic they are semantically definite but formally unmarked for definiteness (9a), though all other nouns obligatorily take the definite article (and are formally definite) in the same construction (9b):

- (9) a. *majka mi; tatko ti; sestra mu*
mother my father your sister his
b. *prozorecăt mi; kolata ti; kăštata mu*
the-window my the-car your the-house his

As far as kinship terms occupy a prominent place in the referential (topicality, animacy) hierarchy – 1st person pronouns > 2nd person pronouns > 3rd person pronouns > kin > human > animate > inanimate¹⁵ – it is interesting to observe them

¹⁵ Cf. Greville Corbett (2000: 56). For a critical view on the referential hierarchy cf. Sonia Cristofaro (2013).



grouped together with personal names and complying with the same rule of blocking formal definiteness in Modern Bulgarian. This could be an argument for the personal names being in immediate proximity to kinship terms in the referential hierarchy.

5. Factors to trigger the anomalous use of definiteness and gender

The anomalous use of definiteness and gender is controlled by particular rules contradicting the general rules already stated. It is common in informal conversation, in fiction, in ironic statements, and these are its stylistic and pragmatic *raison d'être*. Its formal manifestation includes:

- a) the use, either obligatory or facultative, of definite articles with personal and especially with hypocoristic names
- b) the lack of definite articles with some nicknames
- c) a change of gender from feminine to neuter in attributive phrases.

Violations a) and c) of the general rules governing the use of definite articles and gender in Bulgarian depend on the formal and semantic features of the head of the noun phrase and are triggered by several quite heterogeneous semantic, morphological and syntactic factors, such as:

- a) the female sex of the designee
- b) the less typical ending of the noun
- c) the neuter gender of the noun
- d) its inclusion in an attributive phrase

For the time being I abstain from discussing this strange combination and hierarchy of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors but, no doubt, it deserves further speculations. If factors a) and c) may refer to the referential and animacy hierarchy mentioned in section 4, and d) has already been discussed in linguistic literature (cf. section 9), b) is too formal to be given a straightforward explanation. Factors a), b) and c) trigger anomalous use of definiteness, while d) triggers anomalous use of gender.

If the factors (or the features) to trigger the anomalous use of definiteness and gender with personal names are their female designees, their less typical endings, their neuter gender and their inclusion in attributive phrases, the features to block



this anomalous use will be their:

- a) masculine gender
- b) morphological productivity (i.e. more typical ending)
- c) inclusion in predicative phrases

Features a) and b) block anomalous use of definiteness and feature c) blocks anomalous use of gender. As will be seen in section 6, the blockage is complete only if two of the factors, i.e. masculine gender and morphological productivity, act simultaneously. If this is not so, an additional stylistic factor goes into action – the formal or neutral register of the utterance combined with the morphological productivity of the name or with its being masculine blocks anomalous use of definiteness, and combined with its inclusion in predicative phrases blocks the anomalous change of gender considered in section 9.

With nicknames it is the lack of a definite article which is anomalous (violation b), and this anomaly is triggered by the simultaneous action of the masculine gender of the nickname and its belonging to a concrete productive morphologic type discussed in section 6. So, in comparison with personal names, a reverse hierarchy of features triggers the anomalous use of definiteness with nicknames. This reversal of the hierarchy is in a way isomorphic to the reverse formal manifestation of anomaly: with proper names it is anomalous to use definite articles, while with nicknames what is anomalous is the lack of the same definite article.

6. Female and male personal names of the productive morphological types

Male personal names are always masculine in gender in Bulgarian and when they belong to productive morphological types they possess the combination of features sufficient to block completely anomalous use of definiteness, i.e. masculine gender and morphological productivity. The productive types of Bulgarian masculine nouns in general and of Bulgarian male personal names in particular end in a consonant, as in (10a) or, respectively, in *-o*. The last type comprises legal names as in (10b) and hypocoristic names as in (10c):

- (10) a. *Ivan, Stojan, Martin, Boris*
- b. *Janko, Stojko, Bojko, Spiro*
- c. *Borko < Boris, Tošo / Toško < Todor, Vasko < Vasil*



These are the only Bulgarian personal names which never take a definite article. This also applies to cases when such names are used as pseudonyms or nicknames. Even some male nicknames, deriving from hypocoristic names for animals, plants and parts of plants and ending in *-o*, as in (11), do not take a definite article and thus violate the common rule according to which nicknames should be formally definite:

- (11) *Mečo* (< *mečka*), *Vrabčo* (< *vrabec*), *Zajo* (< *zaek*),
 bear sparrow hare
Zrānčo (< *zārno*), *Klečo* (< *klečka*), *Lukčo* (< *luk*)
 grain stick onion

In Bulgarian, in stylistically neutral contexts, the female personal names are used with no definite article:

- (12) *Marija*, *Elena*, *Lora*

But often, in informal conversation, especially when women talk about women, forms with an article can be heard:

- (13) *Marijata*, *Elenata*, *Lorata*

Such forms usually bear certain additional meaning. Sometimes they express intimacy and friendly attitude, but sometimes disregard, contempt and irritation. In all cases they narrow the gap between the speaker and the referent. It should be noted that the names in (12) and (13) represent the most productive type of female personal names, and especially of Christian names, in Bulgarian – the names ending in *-a*. This morphological type is most productive with common feminine nouns, too.

The hierarchy of features which trigger the anomalous use of definiteness clearly manifests itself with the Bulgarian personal names of the productive morphological types. The female personal names of the productive type, even the legal ones, may take a definite article in a stylistically or pragmatically marked context. On the contrary, male personal names of the productive morphological types, even the hypocoristic ones, never take a definite article.

7. Male names ending in *-e*

The ending *-e* is less typical of masculine nouns in Bulgarian and this is a factor to trigger anomalous use of definiteness – the male personal names ending in *-e* – legal or hypocoristic – are characterized by a facultative use of definite articles,



which violates the general rule that personal names should be definite semantically but not formally:

(14) *Bore*(to) (< *Boris*), *Goce*(to) (< *Georgi*)

Nevertheless, the male sex of the designee blocks the change of gender and, unlike the female names ending in *-e* and considered in section 9, the male names ending in *-e* remain masculine both in attributive (15a) and predicative (15b) phrases, which is proved by the masculine gender of the adjectives involved:

(15) a. *dobrijat* *star* *Goce* (masc.)
the-good old Goce

b. *Goceto* *e* *star*, *no* *dobăr*. (masc.)
the-Goce is old but good

As for (15a), it can concomitantly serve as an illustration of how the definite article moves from the head to the first attribute in the noun phrase in the way required by the common Bulgarian phrase-structuring rule.

The use of definite articles with this group of personal names is indicative of the informal character of the speech act. In formal speech they are used with no article. Except for this pragmatic factor the syntactic contexts considered in section 11 may also be the reason for absence of the definite article with the male names ending in *-e*.

8. Unisex names ending in *-i*

For various reasons a large group of unisex hypocoristic, and even legal, personal names ending in *-i* has established itself in Modern Bulgarian.¹⁶ They can be of any of the three genders inherent to Bulgarian grammar, depending on whether the name refers to a man, a woman, or a child. Their triple gender affiliations can be easily proved by the gender of their attributes in noun phrases like:

(16) *dobrijat* (masc.) *Toni* (referring to a man)
dobrata (fem.) *Toni* (referring to a woman)
dobroto (neuter) *Toni* (referring to a child)
the-good Tony

¹⁶ Some older impulses are the Greek male names ending in *-i(s)*, the Greek female names ending in *-i* and the East Bulgarian (now substandard) merger of unstressed *e* and *i*. Subsequently the group has been reinforced by numerous international borrowings, including English ones.



When used without attributes, the personal names of this group can optionally acquire a definite article – the more informal the discourse, the more frequently. What is more, if the name is syntactically neuter¹⁷ (and refers to a child) the use of an article is practically obligatory. We may summarize this as follows:

- (17) *Toni* / *Tonito* (masculine & feminine)
Tonito (neuter)

This is clearly illustrated by predicative phrases like (18) where the predicate is marked for gender:

- (18) *Toni e došāl.* / *Tonito e došāl.* (masculine)
Toni e došla. / *Tonito e došla.* (feminine)
Tonito e došlo. (neuter)
 the-Tony is come
 ‘Tony has come’

The obligatory employment of a definite article with unisex personal names ending in *-i*, which are neuter in gender and refer to a child, shows that the **neuter gender** is one of the serious factors triggering the anomalous use of definiteness with personal names in Bulgarian and has its place in the hierarchy considered in section 5. Its importance is much greater in what is discussed in section 9.

9. A merger of vocative and hypocoristic forms of female names ending in *-e*

In Modern Bulgarian there is a merger of vocative and hypocoristic forms of female names ending in *-e*. In origin they are a hybrid of diminutive and vocative forms, but the crucial point is that they are extremely important in colloquial Bulgarian. They have practically ousted the old feminine vocatives (classical vocative forms are used now mainly with common nouns and sometimes with male personal names¹⁸). They are remarkable for their obligatory usage with a definite article (except for the cases considered in section 11) and for their being grammatically neuter, especially in attributive phrases.

¹⁷ I.e. neuter attributes and predicatives agree with it. Concerning gender the name itself is morphologically ambiguous.

¹⁸ For further details cf. Marina Džonova’s book *Grammar of Politeness* (Džonova 2014).



The female names ending in *-e* may be hypocoristic or (secondary) legal personal names¹⁹ and, as a rule, derive from other hypocoristic or legal names:

- (19) *Lenčeto* < *Lenka* < *Elena*
Marčeto < *Mara* < *Marija*
Kateto < *Katja* < (*E*)*katerina*
Veseto [also *Vesi(to)*, *Vesa(ta)*] < *Veselina*, *Vesel(k)a*

Their gender is neuter in the attributive phrase, so if we transform a phrase with a female name ending in *-a* into a phrase with the corresponding cognate female name ending in *-e* the attribute will change its form from a feminine to a neuter one:

- (20) *Hubavata Elena* (fem.) > *Hubavoto Lenče* (neuter)
the-beautiful Helen the-beautiful Helen
Umnata Marija (fem.) > *Umnoto Marče* (neuter)
the-wise Mary the-wise Mary

But in a predicative phrase they may be either neuter or feminine, which manifests itself in the gender of the predicative adjective:

- (21) *Lenčeto e hubavo.* (neuter) / *Lenčeto e hubava.* (fem.)
Helen is beautiful Helen is beautiful
Marčeto e umno. (neuter) / *Marčeto e umna.* (fem.)
Mary is wise Mary is wise

The difference in gender between attributively and predicatively used adjectives agreeing with one and the same noun is well attested in languages. J. Lyons, for instance, calls this phenomenon “a certain clash between ‘natural’ and ‘grammatical’ gender which is reflected in the syntax of the language” and specifies that it is inherent to “the more familiar European languages with anomalous gender classifications” (Lyons 1968: 286). Analysing the situation in French and Swahili he states that “In both languages ‘grammatical’ gender is dominant within the noun phrase; but ‘natural’ gender may prevail in pronominal reference and for concord with the predicate” (Lyons 1968: 287).

The morphological and syntactic behaviour of the Bulgarian female names ending in *-e* is quite anomalous – unlike the morphologically productive type they are formally definite and very often neuter. If we try to find the reason for this we

¹⁹ Female legal personal names ending in *-e* are relatively rare and in formal speech they are used with no article.



should consider the systemic pressure of the common nouns with the same ending, which exceed the proper ones in frequency and in number. The ending *-e* is completely atypical of the feminine common nouns in Bulgarian, while it is intrinsic to a large group of neuter common nouns, most of which are diminutive. The pressure of this feature is responsible for the strong tendency that the female names ending in *-e* should be grammatically neuter, while their atypical ending triggers their anomalous formal definiteness – a mechanism which also operates well enough with the names considered in section 10.

The **Muslim female names** ending in *-e* are frequently (though not always) used with a definite article in colloquial Bulgarian (in formal speech they are used with no article):

(22) *Ajše* and *Ajšeto*; *Hatidže* and *Hatidžeto*

Although they are not hypocoristic either in origin or in function, by reason of their ending they tend to join the group discussed in this section.

10. Male hypocoristic names and nicknames deriving from family names and ending in *-a*

In some professional circles (e.g. in the army) there are hypocoristic names, functioning as nicknames as well, which derive from the family names of people, especially of men. They end in *-a* and are obligatorily used with a definite article. Thus the famous ex-football players and now football trainers and managers with the family names of Penev and Vucov, being quite popular with the public, are often referred to on TV and in newspapers as *Penata* and *Vucata*, i.e.:

(23) *Penata*, *Vucata* < *Penev*, *Vucov*
[family names]

The ending *-a* is quite atypical of Bulgarian masculine common nouns. Only a few of them have such an ending and, predictably enough, the male hypocoristic names with such an atypical ending are characterized by an anomalous formal definiteness, just as the female names with the atypical ending *-e* in section 9.

11. Syntactic functions of the lack of an article

To sum up, male hypocoristic (and legal) names ending in *-e* often take a definite article, as in (24a), female hypocoristic (and legal) names ending in *-e* usually take a definite article, as in (24b), and the same applies to male hypocoristic names end-



ing in -a, as in (24c):

- (24) a. *Bore*(to), *Goce*(to)
b. *Marče*to, *Lenče*to
c. *Penata*, *Vucata*

With all these names the article is omitted when they are used in certain syntactic functions; then they have the following form:

- (25) a. *Bore*, *Goce*
b. *Marče*, *Lenče*
c. *Pena*, *Vuca*

There are two syntactic positions which require or permit the omission of the article – when the name is an address, as in (26a), or when it is the predicative in phrases like (26b) which introduce names of people unknown to the listener into the conversation. So in Bulgarian the vocative function requires the omission of the definite article, as in (26a), and the predicative function (sometimes) permits it, as in (26b):

- (26) a. *Lenče, ela tuk!*
Helen come here
b. *Vikahme mu Vuca*(ta).
we-called him (the)-Vuca

On such occasions the definite article plays a **case-like role** – the vocative and partially predicative form without an article (*Lenče*, *Vuca*) is opposed to the form with an article (*Lenče*to, *Vucata*ta) which covers all the other case meanings or syntactic functions possible. Thus, in (27) the subject, the indirect object, the direct object and the prepositional object are (and must be) formally definite, unlike the form of address in (26a) which is, or the predicative in (26b) which may be formally unmarked for definiteness:

- (27) *Vucata kaza na Penata, če e vidjal Marče*to i
the-Vuca said to the-Pena that is seen the-Marče and
*e govoril s Lenče*to.
is talked with the-Lenče
'Vucov told Penev that he has seen Mary and has talked with Helen.'

As can be inferred from (27), the anomalous formal definiteness of hypocoristic names in colloquial Bulgarian does not depend on their position in the information



structure of the sentence. No matter how we could divide this sentence into theme and rheme, topic, comment and focus, or given and new information,²⁰ all the hypocoristic names in it are formally definite. When we introduce people one to another, we may also use formally definite hypocoristic names:

- (28) *Zapoznaj se s Marčeto! Tova e Vucata!*
 get-acquainted refl. with the-Marče this is the-Vuca

12. Relative chronology

The anomalous use of definiteness and gender considered in this paper is hardly attested in texts older than the twentieth century. Its occurrence in folklore might testify to its relatively earlier chronology. In folk songs, when a woman is addressed to by her hypocoristic name ending in *-e*, the attributive epithet is often neuter in gender:

- (29) *milo* (neuter) *Lenče*; *milo* (neuter) *Kate*
 dear Helen dear Kate

There is a popular folk song whose text is a dialogue between an anonymous male character and a female character with the Muslim name of *Ajše*. In the beginning the male character addresses the female one, saying:

- (30) *Ajše, mori Ajše!*

In (30) the name *Ajše* is without a definite article because it functions as a vocative form. But further *Ajše* says about herself:

- (31) *Ajšeto e skāpa žena, da ja gledaš ima cena.*
 the-Ajše is expensive woman to her watch has price
 ‘Ajše is an expensive woman and watching her has its price.’

In this statement the form *Ajšeto* contains a definite article because, being the syntactic subject of the sentence, its function is neither vocative, nor predicative.

²⁰ I stick to the opinion that the **theme-rheme structure** of a sentence is different from its articulation into given and new information. For a detailed discussion on this problem cf. Andrzej Bogusławski (1977: 147–155). Cf. also the distinction between theme-rheme and topic-focus made by C. Lehmann – he considers topic and focus as emphatic forms of the theme and the rheme (Lehmann 2002: 105–106).



13. The Balkan context

The Balkan sprachbund comprises several Indo-European languages which have developed a certain number of convergent linguistic features among which grammatical definiteness.²¹ Unlike Modern Bulgarian, in Modern Greek all personal names are formally definite, but there is an obvious parallel between the way the “anomalous” Bulgarian and the “normal” Greek personal names lose their definite articles when used as an address or as a predicative in phrases meaning ‘Someone’s name is...’.²²

There is an impressive discrepancy between the male and the female names of the productive morphological types in Bulgarian – the first never take a definite article while the second may become formally definite in stylistically and pragmatically marked contexts. A similar formal asymmetry, based on difference in gender, exists in Rumanian – here female personal names are formally definite while male personal names are unmarked for definiteness. Rumanian academic grammar explains this in terms of homonymy of endings – the majority of Rumanian female names end in *-a*, which is homonymous with the definite article ending of the Rumanian feminine common nouns, and only in the vocative some female names end in *-ă*, which is homonymous with the ending of the feminine common nouns without an article; when feminine common names or adjectives become proper names they are transposed “in their articulated form” (*în forma lor articulată*), i.e. in their definite form ending in *-a* (Brăescu, Nedelcu, Stan, Tomescu 2005: 121).

The similar conditions under which the definite article is omitted in Greek and Bulgarian and the similar asymmetry between formally definite female names and male names without articles in Rumanian and colloquial Bulgarian raise the question of the Balkan context of the phenomenon considered. So, I think, there are reasons to make a tentative assumption about a Balkan source of the anomalous use of definiteness with proper names in Bulgarian.

A Balkan source of the change of gender from feminine to neuter, discussed in section 9, is less plausible, though the common Greek and Bulgarian tendency that

²¹ For a detailed account of these features in standard Bulgarian, Rumanian, Greek and Albanian, and in the dialectal continua related to them cf. Petya Asenova’s book *Balkan Linguistics* (Asenova 2002).

²² For Bulgarian examples cf. section 11.



diminutives should become neuter seems difficult to explain without taking mutual influence into account.²³

In spite of the tentative and incomplete character of the speculations just proposed, I think that the anomalous use of definiteness and gender with personal names can be interpreted as a Balkan linguistic feature which manifests itself in Bulgarian only partially – at a lower stylistic level and in pragmatically marked contexts.

14. A stylistically marked phenomenon with grammatical rules conditioned by a specific hierarchy of semantic, morphological and syntactic features

The choice of the noun phrases with an anomalous use of definiteness and gender in Bulgarian is pragmatic, as far as it marks the speech act as informal, narrows the gap between the speaker and the referent, expresses the speaker's intimacy and friendly attitude towards the referent or, vice versa, her/his irony, disregard, contempt and irritation,²⁴ but the rules which determine this use are grammatical. These are particular rules operating in minority contexts, which contradict the general rules operating in majority contexts. And these are rules conditioned by a specific hierarchy of semantic, morphological and syntactic features.

The extent to which every concrete feature triggers the anomalous use is different. The masculine gender and the male designee of a personal name, if it is of the productive morphological type, completely block the anomalous use considered, i.e. male morphologically productive names are always formally unmarked for definiteness in accordance with the general rule requiring that personal names should not take definite articles. What is more, even some male nicknames of the productive morphological type do not take a definite article which, on its part, violates the common rule that nicknames should be formally definite. On the contrary, the feminine gender and the female designee of a personal name of the productive mor-

²³ In Rumanian the neuter has been renovated on the basis of animacy; in Albanian it is existent but unproductive. After all, this tendency can also be observed in languages outside of the Balkan area – one of the reviewers drew my attention to the fact that “the German diminutive suffix *-chen* performs the same feminine to neuter transformation, even with common nouns (*das Mädchen, das Liebchen, das Kätzchen*)”.

²⁴ These pragmatic factors were mentioned in sections 5 and 6. Since my primary concern is grammar, I would not go into details about the complex and controversial interaction of pragmatics, modality and stylistics. For an account of this interaction cf. Stefana Dimitrova (2009: 84–127).



phological type permit anomalous use of definiteness – the name can be formally definite in stylistically and pragmatically marked contexts. Masculine gender and morphologic productivity are the factors to block anomalous use of definiteness, and if they act simultaneously the blockage is complete.

Within the personal names of the unproductive morphological types the male names may (if they end in *-e*) or has to be used (if they end in *-a*) anomalously, i.e. with a definite article, but they keep their masculine gender, while the female names are obligatorily anomalous (used with a definite article) and the change of their gender from feminine into neuter is obligatory in the attributive phrase and facultative in the predicative phrase. Neuter personal names obligatorily take a definite article, even within the group of the unisex names ending in *-i*, which are a morphological type intermediate between the productive and the unproductive ones. Neuter gender is the factor which always triggers anomalous use of definiteness within the Bulgarian hypocoristic names.

The following table is an attempt to sum up the material involved in this paper and the conclusions proposed in it. It is filled up with exemplary forms. If a form is without a definite article this means that the whole class cannot be used with an article. If the article is in brackets the use of an article is facultative within the names of the given class. If the article is not in brackets its use with the names of this class is obligatory. The definite articles are underlined in the table as throughout the paper.

+A symbolizes obligatory anomalous use with this class of names and ±A symbolizes facultative anomalous use. The downward direction throughout the table symbolizes the raise of anomalous use (employment or definite articles) with personal names and, vice versa, the upward direction symbolizes the raise of anomalous use (omission of definite articles) with nicknames. The change of gender is also included under the heading “Degree of anomaly”.

Classes of names	Examples	Degree of anomaly	
A subclass of male nicknames	<i>Mečo, Klečo</i>	+A	±A
The majority of male nicknames	<i>Mokri<u>ja</u>, Graf<u>a</u></i>		
Male names of the productive types	<i>Ivan, Stojko</i>		



Male hypocoristic names of the productive type		<i>Borko, Tošo / Toško</i>	
Female names of the productive type		<i>Marija(<u>ta</u>), Elena(<u>ta</u>)</i>	±A
Male names ending in -e		<i>Bore(<u>to</u>), Goce(<u>to</u>)</i>	±A
Muslim female names ending in -e		<i>Ajše(<u>to</u>), Hatidže(<u>to</u>)</i>	±A
Unisex names ending in -i	Masculine	<i>Toni(<u>to</u>)</i>	±A
	Feminine	<i>Toni(<u>to</u>)</i>	
	Neuter	<i>Tonito</i>	+A
Male hypocoristic names ending in -a		<i>Penata, Vucata</i>	+A
Female names ending in -e,		<i>Marčeto, Lenčeto</i>	+A neuter, especially in attributive phrases
* All names considered drop their definite article when used as vocatives or as a certain kind of predicatives.			

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NEUOBIČAJENA UPORABA ODREĐENOSTI I RODA U NEKIM VRSTAMA IMENSKIH SKUPINA U BUGARSKOM

U radu se razmatra neuobičajena uporaba određenosti i roda u bugarskim imenskim skupinama koji sadržavaju odmilice, nadimke ili ponekad čak i službena imena osoba. Vlastita imena ljudi, budući da su semantički određena, u bugarskom obično ne vežu uza se određeni član. U primjerima koje promatramo, međutim, slučaj je sasvim suprotan – u neslužbenom razgovoru, u književnim djelima ili u ironičnim izjavama uporaba određenog člana je ili obvezna ili neobvezna, ovisno o formalnim i semantičkim osobinama imena. Čimbenici koji potiču spomenutu neuobičajenu uporabu mogu biti ženski spol označenika, manje uobičajeni završni nastavak imenice ili njezino uvrštavanje u atributni izraz. Stoga se uz službena ženska vlastita imena (npr. *Marija, Elena*) pod nekim posebnim okolnostima može vezati određeni član (*Marijata, Elenata*), ali službena muška vlastita imena (npr. *Boris*) to ne mogu učiniti. Službena muška vlastita imena ili odmilice koja završavaju na *-o* (*Stojko, Borko*<*Boris*) nikada uz sebe ne vežu određeni član, muška imena koja završavaju na *-e* mogu, ali i ne moraju vezati zu sebe određeni član (*Boreto*<*Boris*), dok u kolokvijalnom bugarskom ženska imena koja završavaju na *-e* uvijek uz sebe vežu određeni član (*Marčeto*<*Marija, Lenčeto*<*Elena*). Što je i zanimljivije, njihovi su atributi u srednjem, a ne u ženskom rodu (*hubavoto Lenče*<*hubavata Elena*). Muški nadimci koji završavaju na *-a*, čak i oni izvedeni od prezimena, uvijek uza se vežu određeni član (*Penata*<*Penev, Vucata*<*Vucov*), ali njihovi su atributi u muškom rodu. Odgovarajući oblici bez člana (*Bore, Marče, Lenče, Pena, Vuca*) rabe se kao vokativi ili ponekad predikativno. Ta je pojava stilistički obilježena, što znači da je odabir takvih imenskih izraza pragmatičke naravi, ali su pravila koja određuju uporabu određenosti i roda u njima gramatičke naravi. To su posebna pravila koja djeluju u rjeđim situacijama i protive se općim pravilima koja vladaju u većini konteksta. Neka od njih su kruta, ali neka druga su neobvezna i donose dodatne nijanse u izjavu. Ta se pojava može interpretirati kao balkanska jezična osobina djelomice opojavljena u bugarskom. Njezino se pojavljivanje u narodnim tekstovima može procijeniti kao relativno staro.

Ključne riječi: određenost; rod; suvremeni bugarski; hipokoristici; pragmatički izbori; gramatička pravila; balkanska jezična obilježja.