Interpretive effects of Predicate Inversion: The syntax and information structure of the nominal copula in Slovenian

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This poster demonstrates how three distinct interpretive effects emerge from Predicate Inversion (Den Dikken, 2006) in the Colloquial Slovenian (CS) nominal domain. A discourse-anaphoric interpretation is available in definite contexts only, while a 'kind' reading is available in both definite and indefinite contexts. A third, contrastive, interpretation is associated with a null pronoun as the head of the inverted predicate.

The clitic *ta* in Colloquial Slovenian is copula-like functional head (or Linker) which, I have argued, signals that Predicate Inversion has applied (Wilson, to appear). This so-called "adjectival definite article," is not syntactically restricted to either adjectival or definite contexts. The peculiar distribution of the clitic is described in detail by Marušič and Žaucer (2006, 2008, 2010), and confirmed by my informants for the examples below. TA cannot appear in an unmodified noun phrase (1a), and it is optional in definite DPs when an adjective is present (1b). It can appear in indefinite contexts (1c) and often is inserted following a definite demonstrative or pronoun (1d). The modifier that TA is associated with may be a prepositional phrase (2) or (marginally) a full relative clause.

(1)   a. (*ta) avto   b. (ta) nov avto   c. en (ta) nov avto   d. moj/tist (ta) nov avto
           TA car   TA new car   a TA new car   my/that TA new car

(2)   una *(ta) za pred   hišo pometat   metla
           that TA for in.front.of house sweep.inf   broom
           'that broom for sweeping in front of the house'

The analysis of TA as a Linker explains this syntactic distribution as well as the range of interpretations given to constructions in which it occurs, both contrastive and non-contrastive.

The non-contrastive TA-constructions are derived from configuration in which the modifier is initially merged as the predicate-complement of a Relator head, and the NP subject as the specifier. The Linker is then merged, extending the phase and providing a position for the predicate to move into above the subject.

(3) [$_{NumP}$ *en* [$_{LP}$ [$_{AP=Pred}$ *nov*] R+L=*ta* [$_{RP}$ [$_{NP=Subj}$ *avto*] <R> <AP>]]

(The surface word order, with TA to the left of the modifier, is predicted based on the distribution of clitics in Slovenian). Inversion of the predicate *nov* ('new') around its NP subject marks it as old information. This is felicitous if 'new cars' were previously mentioned (the discourse-anaphoric reading), but the DP will always be definite in such a context. In the absence of a direct antecedent, the presupposition that the 'new' quality in question is known to the speaker and the hearer vis-à-vis 'cars' can only be satisfied by the existence of a salient type or class of new cars (the 'kind' reading).

Following the intuition of Marusic & Zaucer (2006), I hypothesize that a null pronoun introduces an alternative set in **the contrastive TA-constructions**. This is deduced from the behavior of non-predicative adjectives such as *bivši* ('former'), which can only participate in contrastive TA-constructions. 'Non-predicative' here refers to the fact that these adjectives cannot be the predicates of copular sentences, which means that they cannot be merged as the AP predicate in the complement of a Relator head as in (3). But the contrastive constructions also have reversed information structure: the phrases cannot receive new information focus but must instead be interpreted as topics. I take these facts together as pointing to the structure in (4) in which the overt AP is modifying a null pronoun. This modified NP (labeled FP here) is predicated of the overt NP in the complement position of a Relator phrase. Predicate Inversion is triggered in these cases by the need for this silent pronoun to be licensed in a derived specifier position.

(4) $[_{DP}$ *moj* … $[_{LP} [_{FP=Pred}$ *nov* F $[_{NP}$ ONE]] R+L=*ta* $[_{RP} [_{NP=Subj}$ *avto*] <R> <FP>]]

Once inversion has applied, the phrase must be interpreted with reversed information-structure.

This analysis of TA-constructions in Colloquial Slovenian illuminates the range of contributions that the syntactic operation of Predicate Inversion can make to the interpretation of phrases and sentences in which it has applied. Space permitting, I will also discuss the interaction of the nominal copula with possessive adjectives and deictic demonstratives in CS: an area of investigation which also has interesting implications for the mapping between syntax and meaning.

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