

Predrag Piper, Milivoj Alanović, Slobodan Pavlović, Ivana Antonić, Marina Nikolić, Dojčil Vojvodić, Ljudmila Popović, Sreto Tanasić, and Biljana Marić. *Sintaksa složene rečenice u savremenom srpskom jeziku*. Edited by Predrag Piper. Novi Sad: Matica Srpska; Beograd: Institut za srpski jezik, SANU, 2018. 766 pp. ISBN 978-86-7946-231-2.

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This 766-page syntax of the complex sentence in Serbian is a feat of thoroughness and attention to detail. It shows deep insight into the structure of sentences and their combinations. It provides a wealth of lucidly presented and described data that amply illustrate each type of imaginable combination, not only with the authors' own examples, but primarily with carefully selected passages from literature, mostly fiction, by prominent writers, as well as from newspapers. The examples from these sources were so carefully selected for each phenomenon discussed that it must have taken the authors days upon days just to find and integrate them. But each author of each chapter took the time to do that, and the chapters are quite uniform in their data coverage and the level of detail that the book reads as almost written by a single author. I have to admit that I was initially terrified when this book that I agreed to review arrived at my door, with its 766 packed pages. But I quickly realized that what I held in my hand was a treasure, with every page rewarding me with rich, often unexpected data and insight.

The authors consider the description and the analysis of each phenomenon from multiple angles. They offer evidence for their view, while leaving the door open for the reader to explore alternative views. They acknowledge the complexity of the choice in each case, and this is especially welcome in the case of ambivalent forms that straddle the boundaries of traditional classifications, such as conjunctions vs. subordinators, parataxis vs. hypotaxis, and adjuncts/adverbials vs. arguments/complements. The sheer volume and detail of the data provided is disarming, listing quite possibly every single conjunction and subordinator, and a myriad of ways in which they can be used, and then citing relevant examples from the literature to illustrate various subtle differences in usage and in nuances of meaning. The authors often appeal to diachronic considerations, which is why the book can also be of relevance to historical linguists, specifically those interested in the changes in meaning and usage of particular words and expressions in Serbian.

This is a descriptive grammar that does not make much use of modern theoretical frameworks, but it offers the modern theoretician of syntax a wealth of data that often surprises and poses good, potentially productive challenges for various theoretical postulates. One of the common threads is a characterization of syntactic combinations of clauses/sentences as paratactic or hypotactic, offering sharp insight into this overarching topic, with each particular phenomenon receiving careful attention, including various correlative constructions. The theoretical syntactician is provided with endless possibilities for new ideas and projects, and made aware of how much rich data is out there to tap into. The content of this book, while not theoretical, is neither dull nor naïve; the analyses are deep, and the insights inspiring.

It is also commendable that the authors resisted a prescriptive approach. They show the Serbian language as it is naturally used, with all the rich possibilities and nuances, rather than as a desideratum of some prescriptively minded scholars. To take just one illustrative example, there is a discussion of the naturalness and special effect of starting a sentences with a conjunction, quoting many carefully selected examples from the best literature. Although in some chapters there are subtle recommendations as to which form is more natural in Serbian, this is based on naturalness of usage, i.e., on what ordinary speakers of Serbian perceive as more natural or common, rather than on some prescriptive ideal having to do with logic, or proscribed by some “higher” authority. Faced with some of the data presented in the book, I realized that many phenomena that sound marginal to me in English, such as certain dangling modifiers and run-on sentences, both of which relate to parataxis, in fact can sound completely natural in Serbian, offering nuances of meaning that are not possible to express with “better”-structured alternatives. Here are some examples (p. 598):<sup>1</sup>

- (1) Svetlana je ušla u kuhinju, pristavila kafu.  
Svetlana AUX entered in kitchen put.on coffee  
'Svetlana went into the kitchen, she put the coffee on.'
  
- (2) Sunce se pomolilo iznad brda, biće lep dan.  
sun REFL appeared above hill be<sub>FUT</sub> beautiful day  
'The sun came up over the hill, it will be a beautiful day.'

<sup>1</sup> The English translations of Serbian examples are sometimes imperfect as they mimic the Serbian examples, thus showing the difference between the two languages when it comes to acceptability of this type of sentences.

- (3) Deca se opiru, neće da začute.  
 children REFL resist will.not that<sub>COMP</sub> be.quiet  
 ‘The children are resisting, they won’t be quiet.’
- (4) Pisma je bila vesela, pa i drska, malo je  
 song AUX was cheerful and even sassy little AUX  
 prizoru odgovarala.  
 scene suited  
 ‘The song was cheerful and even sassy, it suited the scene very little.’
- (5) Ne borim se ja za tvoju i vašu slobodu, ja se za  
 not fight REFL I for your<sub>SG</sub> and your<sub>PL</sub> freedom I REFL for  
 svoj narod borim.  
 own people fight  
 ‘I am not fighting for your freedom and that of all of you, I fight for my people.’

This begs the question of whether this is a consequence of the different syntaxes of the two languages, with one allowing more freedom with paratactic attachment than the other. Perhaps this is related to the null subject parameter or the flexibility of word order. In any event, this is just one place that shows that carefully selected and (pretheoretically) considered data, and an abundance of it, can surprise you and raise some deep questions.

The book also introduces some perhaps unexpected, novel classifications of sentence combinations. To take one example, there is a section on “gradacijske rečenice” (gradational sentences) (76–86), where the term pertains to complex sentences whose components seem to be combined in order to express some difference (or lack thereof) in the degree of some property, resembling in this respect traditional comparative and equative constructions. Some examples from that section are given below:

- (6) Niko ih čestito i ne pogleda, a kamoli da  
 nobody them honestly even not looks.at and much.less that  
 ih upita za cijenu.  
 them asks for price  
 ‘Nobody even looks at them properly, let alone asking them about the price.’

- (7) Vreme ne samo što ga je uvek zbunjivalo  
 weather not only that<sub>COMP</sub> him AUX always confused  
 nego ga je i zamajavalo.  
 but.rather him AUX even irked  
 ‘The weather didn’t just always confuse him but it even irked him.’
- (8) Nemačke pojave i stvari ne samo da nisu  
 German phenomena and things not only that<sub>COMP</sub> are.not  
 bezbojne, već su, naprotiv, puno, gusto šarenilo,  
 colorless but are on.the.contrary full dense colorfulness  
 često oporo, i, baš zato, nezaboravnije.  
 often pungent and precisely because.of.that more.unforgettable  
 ‘German phenomena and things not only are not colorless, on the  
 contrary, they are a full, dense rainbow of color, often pungent, and  
 all the more unforgettable exactly because of that.’
- (9) Ne voli goste, ne voli nikoga.  
 not loves guests not loves nobody  
 ‘(S)he doesn’t like guests, (s)he doesn’t like anybody.’
- (10) Našla je što je tražila, to jest poklon za sestru.  
 found<sub>FEM</sub> AUX what AUX sought<sub>FEM</sub> that is gift for sister  
 ‘She found what she was looking for, that is, a present for her sister.’
- (11) Oni su tada odlučili da presaviju tabak iliti  
 they AUX then decided that<sub>COMP</sub> fold stack that.is  
 da se obrate sudu.  
 that<sub>COMP</sub> REFL go.to court  
 ‘They then decided to “turn the page”, that is, to go to court.’
- They surely have some common ground with a variety of comparative constructions, some correlative, raising again many questions regarding their precise classification/differentiation, as well as syntactic analysis (398–99):
- (12) Što više, to bolje.  
 what more that better  
 ‘The more, the better.’

- (13) On je srećniji nego (što je) pametniji.  
 he is luckier than (what is) smarter  
 'He is more lucky than (he is) smart.'
- (14) Ona je šira nego (što je) duža.  
 she is wider than (what is) longer  
 'She is wider than she is long [i.e., tall].'
- (15) Uzela sam (onoliko) hrane koliko mi treba za put.  
 took AUX<sub>1SG</sub> (so.much) food as.much me<sub>DAT</sub> needs for journey  
 'I took as much food as I needed for the journey.'
- (16) Čovek hoće bar onoliko koliko si bubama dao ...  
 man wants at.least so.much as.much AUX<sub>2SG</sub> insects<sub>DAT</sub> gave  
 'A man wants at least as much as you have given to insects ...'

One thing that puzzled me was the lack of any scholarly references for the claims and analyses offered. One can find a good number of references at the end of each chapter, as well as at the end of the book itself, where there is a long and informative list. But these references are not given in the text, so it is not clear which particular claims in the chapters relate to which references listed at the end of the chapters. The book really reads as some kind of collective accumulation of important syntactic knowledge, with no perceived need to distinguish what has already been claimed and by whom, and what are the new claims by these authors. This may be a matter of cultural preference. Nonetheless, I note that the same is not true of the quotes taken from the literary works or newspapers. There, every quote is diligently ascribed to the writer, perhaps because the sentences were taken from these sources verbatim, or perhaps because they often take words from the pens of some true giants of Serbian literature. I must say that this lack of acknowledgement of who said what in previous scholarly work was initially worrisome to me. But as I continued reading, it stopped bothering me, as I relaxed and told myself that it is perhaps less important who said what and more important to achieve such a great depth in describing and documenting the remarkable richness of detail and nuance when it comes to sentences and their combinations in Serbian. It is thus fitting, perhaps, for my review not to give specific credit to individual authors of this book and their claims, but instead to consider this book as a true collective, cumulative masterpiece of a descriptive grammar.

It is also inconvenient that this book does not have a single index of terms for the whole book, but instead offers several brief indexes, one for each chapter. Thus, if you want to search, for example, for correlatives, you have to either know in which chapter they are discussed, or just go through the index of

each chapter. It struck me that it would be quite easy to collapse these indexes into one. But then it also struck me that this would be just a bit more effort on the part of the reader, and the effort is well worth it. What I am trying to say is that this book leaves a lot to the reader to find on his/her own, but, at the same time, it offers so much more than a reader can even imagine. I hope that *The syntax of the complex sentence in contemporary Serbian* gets consulted also by linguists working on other languages, especially Slavic languages, as it is there that one would be likely to find many fruitful comparisons and new inspirations.

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