On the status of reflexive possessives in DP-languages

The present paper is concerned with the status of reflexive possessives in Bulgarian. I will argue that Bulgarian has no specially designated PossP to accommodate *svoj*-type reflexives; rather, like adjectives, possessive reflexives are NP-adjoined.

S*voj*-type possessives have an adjectival form, exhibiting agreement in gender and number with the head noun in (1). In this property, they are distinct from possessive pronominal clitics, which have the invariable form in (2).

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| (1) a. negov/ svoj/ nov učitel.  his/ self’s new teacher(masc. sg.)  b. negov**a**/svoj**a**/ nov**a** knig**a**  his/ self’s new book(fem. sg.) | (2) a. novat**a** mu knigafem  bookdef to.him book  b. novo**to** mu spisanie  newdef to.him journalneut |

Given Despić’s (2011) implementation of phase theory, which maintains that the relations between functional projections are bidirectional, DP becomes a phase only if its head merges with PossP. In light of the claims above, this implies that Bulgarian DP with *svoj*-possessives is nota phase. On the now standard assumption that the phase delineates a binding domain, the binding of a reflexive by a subject (i.e. outside of DP) in (3) follows straightforwardly.

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| (3) Marijai četa svojai-ta kniga.  Mary reads self-def book  ‘Mary is reading her book.’ |

However, the facts in (4) and (5) introduce a complication. Bulgarian (4) exhibits a clear preference for the Refl>Adj order over its permutation (cf. (4a) and (4b)). This distribution is in line with Bošković (2013) claim that in the case of multiple edges (multiple adjuncts or Specs) of the same phrase, only the outmost edge is accessible to higher elements. In order to be bound, the reflexive must be accessible to its antecedent (i.e. it has to be the outmost edge, which means it must precede the adjective, as in (4a), but not (4b)). Predictably, the issue does not arise with pronominal possessives in (5), where either order is acceptable.

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| (4) a. Marija prodade svoja-ta nova kniga.  Mary sold self-def new book  b. ??Marija prodade nova-ta svoja kniga. | (5) a. Novi-te negovi obuvki  new-def his shoes  b. Negovi-te novi obuvki |

The paper will also discuss how to handle the impossibility of left-branch extraction and some quantifier-stranding extractions in Bulgarian, ultimately concluding that the contextual treatment of phases yields a better empirical coverage of Bulgarian and cross-linguistically.

References:

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