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Some English Translation Equivalents of the Serbo— Croatian Locative with Prepositions U and NA¹

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This article discusses semantic meanings of some Serbo-Croatian morphological locative constructions with the prepositions **u** and **na** and their English translation equivalents. It gives a few illustrations of how contrastive analysis of two languages can help us see more clearly phenomena that otherwise may escape our attention if working on only one language at a time. For instance, the very common Serbo-Croatian locative phrase **na trgu** has some interesting English translation equivalents, which are not mutually interchangeable in English. It is only in translation that several different meanings covered under the same surface structure are clearly disclosed.

The aim of this article is not to tackle the very difficult linguistic problem of the origin of morphological cases as such. The fact is that the development of case systems in languages that do have morphological cases has always been a puzzle for theoretical linguists. The problem can be summed up in a citation from Otto Jespersen:² "However far back we go, we nowhere find a case with only one well-defined function: in every language every case served different purposes, and the boundaries between these are far from being clear-cut. This, in

1 I am indebted to Professor Vladimir Ivir, Faculty of Philosophy, Zagreb, both for the choice of the topic and for the help in the analysis of the collected material, which was part of my M. A. thesis, written under his supervision.

2 Jespersen, Otto (1924), *The Philosophy of Grammar*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London

connexion with irregularities and inconsistencies in the formal elements characterizing the cases, serves to explain the numerous coalescences we witness in linguistic history ("syncretism") and the chaotic rules found in individual languages — rules which even thus are to a great extent historically inexplicable".

In recent times, linguists like Charles Fillmore,³ Wallace Chafe,⁴ John Anderson,⁵ Don L. F. Nilsen⁶ tried to explain cases in the light of semantic roles that nouns have within a sentence. The idea was to imagine the sentence as a play in which nouns are the actors, the verb is the plot and everything else — tense, place, manner, etc. — is the stage setting.⁷ So, Fillmore, in his case-grammar model, suggests that we should abandon analysing cases as morphological categories. Instead, he introduces semantic categories which he also calls "cases", but which have no connection with traditional morphological cases. They are semantic roles that nouns have within a sentence in any language, regardless of the parallel existence of morphological cases. His semantic case theory is an endeavour to find universals in language, which is in accordance with present-day trends in linguistics.

But morphological cases, nevertheless, have not ceased to intrigue theoretical linguists and have continued to be a source of further linguistic investigations. Within the generative transformational approach to language, a new case theory is being developed by Noam Chomsky⁸ and J.-R. Vergnaud.⁹ It is not within the scope of this article to present it, but it goes without saying that this theory — which is still in the stage of being tested — might shed new light on the complex phenomenon of morphological cases.

3 Fillmore, Charles J. (1968) "The Case for Case", in E. Bach and R. Harms, eds., **Universals in Linguistic Theory**
Fillmore, Charles J. (Manuscript, s. a.), "The Case for Case Reopened",
University of California, Berkeley

4 Chafe, Wallace (1970), **Meaning and Structure of Language**,
Chicago, The University of Chicago Press

5 Anderson, John M. (1971), **The Grammar of Case: Towards a
Localist Theory, Cambridge Theory**, Cambridge University Press

6. Nilsen, Don Lee Fred (1972), **Toward a Semantic Specification
of Deep Case**, Mouton, the Hague

7 Reer, Lynn (1982), "A New Way to Look at (and Explain!)
Language Problems", **English Teaching Forum**, Volume XX, Number 2,
April 1982, Anne Covell Newton (editor), Washington, D. C., USA

8 Chomsky, Noam (1982), **Lectures on Government and Binding —
The Pisa Lectures**, Foris Publications, Dordrecht, Holland

9 Vergnaud's case theory, developed within the Chomsky "Government and Binding" framework, exists in the form of his — so far — unpublished work:

Linguistic theories furnish various possible starting points for analysis. Each linguistic school has its own preferences and tries to show how one or another procedure or method of analysis can be of a particular advantage. This article attempts to show — on a limited corpus — how translation-based contrastive syntactic and semantic study can be of help in disclosing more clearly phenomena that may have escaped us in working on only one system at a time.¹⁰ It tries to show how such translation-based study furnishes an empirical foundation for building conscious control of the structure of languages under examination.¹¹

But what is translation actually and what are the translation equivalences on which such contrastive analysis via translation is built?

Translation deals with the physical realization of language, with *parole*, while what we contrast in contrastive analysis are language systems in the abstract, i.e. *langue*.¹² Ideally, translation means bringing two texts into a relation of equivalence, so that the text in the target language carries an amount of information identical to that carried by the text in the source language.¹³ We take a certain structure in the source language, define its function and look for corresponding translationally equivalent structures in the target language; we compare them and try to establish similarities and differences both from the point of view of their structure and their function. We can never be sure though, — no matter how big our corpus — that we have covered all relevant aspects.¹⁴ We should be content if we have discovered at least some revealing points.

J. R. Vergnaud (1979): "Case and Binding" (unp. paper)

J. R. Vergnaud (forthcoming): "Quelques éléments pour une théorie formelle des Cas".

The theory was partially presented by the lecturers at the 3rd International Summer School in Linguistics, 1982, Salzburg, Austria

10 Filipović, Rudolf (1970/71), "Problems of Contrastive Work: The Yugoslav Serbo-Croatian Contrastive Project So Far", *Studia Romanica et Anglica Zagrabienis*, Filozofski fakultet, Zagreb, Num. 33—36

11 *Ibid.*: 23

12 Ivir, Vladimir (1970a), "Contrasting via Translation: Formal Correspondence vs. Translation Equivalence", The Yugoslav Serbo-Croatian — English Contrastive Project (Director: Professor Rudolf Filipović, Ph. D.), Institute of Linguistics, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Yugoslavia, Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, D. C. USA, *Studies* 1: 14

13 *Ibid.*: 13

14 *Ibid.*: 14

Translation equivalence serves merely to help us isolate items of structure with shared meanings in the two languages.¹⁵ The analyst isolates certain elements of structure in one language and observes what elements of structure correspond to them in the other language — under conditions of semantic equivalence.¹⁶

In every text there are a number of points at which formal grammatical correspondence can be established. But there are cases where the source language can have different translation renderings. We shall demonstrate this on the examples of our corpus.

Our corpus has been collected mainly from pieces of modern Croatian prose translated into English by native speakers of English.¹⁷

In Serbo-Croatian the morphological locative case is an exclusively prepositional case. It appears in construction with the prepositions *u*, *na*, *o*, *po*, *pri* and *prema*. It is not our intention in this article to enumerate exhaustively all possible English translation equivalents of the Serbo-Croatian locative case (if this were at all possible); we only want to focus on some examples in order to demonstrate how the same morphological surface structures can be shown in contrastive analysis, by means of translation, to have different meanings.

As our first example, we shall take a very common locative construction in Serbo-Croatian, *na trgu*.

- (1) *Na malom Kapucinskom trgu ... stoji kuća bana Petra Zrinjskog* (MS : 16)
On the small Square of Capuchins stands ... the house of Ban Petar Zrinski (MS₁ : 60, 61)
- (2) *Matija Gubec okrunjen je usijanom krunom na Markovu trgu.* (MS : 2)
Matija Gubec ... (was) ... crowned with a red-hot crown in the square ... in front of St. Mark's Church. (MS₁ : 59)

It is not by chance that in the first example (1) *na trgu* has been translated into English as *on the square*, while the

15 Ivir, Vladimir (1970 b), "Remarks on Contrastive Analysis and Translation", The Yugoslav Serbo-Croatian-English Contrastive Project, *Studies 2*: 19

16 Ivir, Vladimir (1970 a): 14

17 Contemporary Croatian Prose, Part I, *The Bridge* 2/24, Zagreb, 1970, Ranko Marinković, *Ruke*, Mladost, Zagreb, 1972 ... (RM) Marijan Stilinović, "Skica jedne kronike — Zagreb kroz stoljeća — Podaci i dokumenti" ("The Outline of a Chronicle—Zagreb Through the Centuries — Fact and Documents"), Zagreb, Matica Hrvatska, 1961. (MS)

translation equivalent of the same locative prepositional phrase *na trgu* in the second example (2) is *in the square*.

In Example (1) the translation could not possibly have been “in the square” because that would mean that the house of Ban Petar Zrinski stood in the middle of the square, like a church or a monument, which in the above context is not the case.

In Example (2) the translation had to be “in the square”, because the “crowning” of Matija Gubec took place in the open space of the square, and not in a building facing the square i.e. overlooking it.

In other words, the Serbo-Croatian locative phrase *na trgu* covers in fact two different meanings, of which a native speaker of Serbo-Croatian becomes aware only through translation. In English, namely, *in the square* can either mean “in the middle of the square” or “in the open space of the square”; in contrast, the English prepositional phrase *on the square* in contexts like

My house is *on the square*

or

My apartment is *on this square*

does not have the meaning of “being on the surface of something”, but implies direction of “facing something”. So the translation of the above sentences as

Moja kuća je *na trgu*

Moj stan je *na tom trgu*

although possible, because of the structural ambiguity of this locative phrase in Serbo-Croatian, does not convey the precise meaning, which is

Moja kuća *gleda na trg*

or

Moj stan *gleda na taj trg*.

Another example of two different meanings hidden in the same surface structure can be seen in the Serbo-Croatian locative expression *u kinu*.

The most usual translation of a sentence like

Gledao sam to *u kinu*

would be, in British English,

I saw it *at the cinema*.

In American English, though, a more natural translation of the same sentence would be

I saw it *at the movies*

instead of:

I saw it *at the cinema*.

But in British English, there is another possibility of translating the above sentence as

I saw it *in the cinema*

like in the following example that we took from our corpus:

(3) Gledao sam Ben-Kura *u kinu*¹⁸ (RM : 162)

I saw "Ben-Kur" *in the cinema* once (RM₁ : 167)

Here, again, it is not by chance that the English translator decided that in the above context the translation equivalent of "u kinu" was "in the cinema", and not "at the cinema". The translator realized that the person speaking made reference to the actual building in which he saw "Ben-Kur" and not to the cinema as a general place of mass-communication, just as one could say in British English

I met a friend *in the cinema* yesterday.

So, again, it is obvious that the Serbo-Croatian locative expression *u kinu* covers two meanings which can be made distinct in English translation.

Similarly, we found in our corpus two different translations of seemingly the same locative phrase *na Griču*:

(4) Ex Musaeo meo Graecomontii (Iz muzeja svoga na brdu Gracu) — tako je nazivao Ritter svoju tiskaru *na Griču* (MS : 14)

Ex Musaeo meo Graecomontii (from my museum on the Hill of Gradec) was the name given by Ritter to his printing house *on Grič* (MS₁ : 59)

(5) Infiltracijom plemstva, koja je tekla polako i stalno, rasle su *na Griču* i pozicije velikaške (MS : 15)

(By) Slowly but continuously infiltrating, the nobility gained a position *in Grič* (MS₁ : 60)

While in the first example (4) the translator had in mind the hill of Grič, in the second example (5) the reference is to the town situated on the hill of Grič.

When referring to space, English translation equivalents of the preposition *u* or *na* can be *on*, *in* or *at*, depending on whether one has in mind 2-dimensionality — implied in the English preposition *on*, 3-dimensionality — implied in the

¹⁸ The name is mispronounced by the person speaking.

English preposition *in*, or no dimensions implied, if the translation equivalent is the English preposition *at*.¹⁹

Accordingly, the Serbo-Croatian locative phrase *na uglu* has three possible English translation equivalents: *at the corner*, *on the corner* and *in the corner*:

- (6) ... kuća *na uglu* Demetrove (MS : 18)
... the house *at the corner* of Demetrova (MS₁ : 62)
- (7) čekao me *na uglu*
he waited for me *on the corner*
- (8) Najljepši barokni ansambl u urbanističkom i arhitektonskom smislu formiran je *na jugoistočnom uglu* samog Griča. (MS : 15)
The finest baroque in the urbanistic and architectural sense, was built *in the southeast corner* of Grič (MS₁ : 60)
- (9) ... pokopan je negdje *na Rokovu groblju* (MS :

In translation from one language into another it shows up how sometimes speakers of different languages perceive the same space differently:

- (9) ... pokopan je negdje *na Rokovu groblju* (MS : 18)
... and was buried somewhere *in St. Rock's graveyard* (MS₁ : 62)

It is obvious that the speaker of Serbo-Croatian perceives the graveyard as a surface having only 2 dimensions, while the speaker of English perceives it 3-dimensionally, taking also into consideration the depth in the ground at which the dead are buried.

Even more interesting are English translation equivalents of the Serbo-Croatian prepositions *u* and *na* in locative phrases when the governing verb implies movement, either of motion or of a process. In such cases the English corresponding equivalents are not the prepositions *on*, *in* and *at*, which are static, but are those implying movement, such as *from*, *along*, *to throughout*:

- (10) ... a trobojka, mala, neugledna, lepršala je *na puški* jednog domobrana (MS : 32)
... and a single tricolour, small and undistinguished, fluttered *from the gun* of one of the home-guards (MS₁ : 69)

¹⁹ Leech, Geoffrey N. (1969), *Towards a Semantic Description of English*, Longman, London.

In (10) the verb "lepršati" — "to flutter" implies quick and irregular motion of the flag — a tricolour.

- (11) Oгледа се жандар по старим kamenim kućama
na obali (RM : 162)
The policeman looked round (at)²⁰ the old
stone houses *along the shore* (RM₁ : 166)

In (11) the verb "ogledati se"²¹ — "to look round at" is also understood as implying movements of the eyes.

- (12) Strah od Turaka natjerao je jedne da bježe iz
Zagreba, druge da se naseljavaju *u njemu* (MS :
15)
Fear of the Turks led some to fly from Zagreb,
others to fly *to it* (MS₁ : 60)

In (12) the imperfective aspect of the verb "naseljavati se" also implies movement, although the preposition here is governed by the verb chosen by the translator.

- (13) Snage otpora rastu *u cijeloj zemlji* (MS : 39)
The forces of resistance grew *throughout the*
country (MS₁ : 72)

The verb "rasti" — "to grow" implies a process.

If a locative phrase in Serbo-Croatian with the preposition *na* denotes time, its English translation equivalent can be a temporal clause:

- (14) ... *na prijelazu* iz 18. u 19. stoljeće Zagreb do-
bija nove goste (MS : 18)
As the eighteenth century gave way to the
nineteenth new guests came to Zagreb (MS₁ : 62)
- (15) Financ je oklijevao, kao da je još nešto htio
reći, saopćiti žandaru, nešto *na rastanku*, nešto
važno (RM : 164)
The revenue officer hesitated, as though there
were something else he wanted to say, to convey
to the policeman, *as they parted*, something
important (RM : 168)

20 The preposition *at* has been omitted in the translation probably by error; without it, the meaning of the English verb would be different and would not correspond to the meaning of the Serbo-Croatian verb "ogledati se".

21 Cf. Ivić, Milka (1954), *Značenja srpskohrvatskog instrumentala i njihov razvoj (sintaksičko-semantička studija)*, Srpska akademija nauka, Beograd

If a locative phrase with the preposition *u* denotes manner, its English translation equivalent can be either an adverb or a past participle:

- (16) Na prijedlog I. Kukuljevića... hrvatski Sabor *u slavlju* svečano zaključuje (MS : 21)

On the proposal of I. Kukuljević... the Croatian Sabor *jubilantly* passed a solemn decree (MS₁ : 63)

- (17) ... vidi mokri, ljepljiv duhan, pa se ogleda *u čudu* (RM : 152)

... he sees wet, sticky tobacco, then he looks round, *perplexed* (RM₁ : 159)

English translation equivalents of locative phrases with *u* denoting place can also be adverbs:

- (18) A šjor Bernardo, tu *u susjedstvu*, uzeo brusiti britvu kad te ugledao (RM : 149)

But Signor Bernardo, here *nearby*, picked up his razor to sharpen it when he caught sight of you (RM₁ : 156)

- (19) ... ispod planine *u kojoj* su se kotile medvjedice i veprovi (MS : 9)

... below mountains *where* bears and wild boars bred (MS₁ : 57)

If a locative prepositional construction with *u* denotes circumstances, its translation equivalent is a construction with the preposition *under*:

- (20) Trebalo je *u kompliciranim političkim uvjetima* afirmirati svoja socijalistička shvatanja. (MS : 38)

It had, *under complicated political conditions*... to affirm its socialist conceptions (MS₁ : 72)

- (21) *U nimalo ružičastim uvjetima* primio se Bartol Felbinger posla (MS : 18)

The conditions under which B. Belbinger went to work... were far from rosy (MS₁ : 62)

If in the locative phrase with *u* the nuance of duration is felt by the translator to be present, its translation equivalent will be the prepositional construction with *during*; otherwise, it can also be a construction with the preposition *in*:

- (22) mnoge su ocjene ljudi i događaja bile krive i pretjerane, izgovorene *u vatri* političke borbe (MS : 28)

... many judgments on people and events wrong or exaggerated, were forced out *during the heat* of political battles (MS₁ : 67)

- (23) *U tom razdoblju od pedesetak godina* (MS : 29)
In this fifty year period (MS₁ : 68)

The locative construction *u (tom) času* can also be translated into English with two different nuances of meaning. If time only is implied, the preposition *at* is used; if the nuance of circumstances is also present, its translation equivalent is the construction with the preposition *in*:

- (24) *Ustreba li, znat će i ginuti u neodgodivom času* za veliku stvar (MS : 31)

If need be, she will know how to die, *in some inescapable moment*, for a great cause (MS₁ : 69)

In conclusion, we may add that it is obvious that the English translation equivalents of the prepositions *u* and *na* in Serbo-Croatian locative constructions do not have an automatic one to one translation correspondence (*u* translated by *in*, an *na* translated by *on*). There are instances in which this holds, but very often it does not, as shown in the above corpus.

NEKI ENGLSKI PRIJEVODNI EKVIVALENTI SRPSKOHRVATSKOG MORFOLOŠKOG LOKATIVA U KONSTRUKCIJI S PRIJEDLOZIMA U I NA

U članku se raspravlja o semantičkim značenjima nekih srpsko-hrvatskih morfoloških lokativnih konstrukcija s prijedlozima *u* i *na* i njihovim engleskim prijevodnim ekvivalentima. Primjeri ilustriraju na koji način kontrastivna analiza pomaže u boljem i potpunijem sagledavanju nekih jezičnih sadržaja koji bi nam inače mogli promaći u analizi pojedinačnih jezika odvojeno. Tako, na primjer, lokativna konstrukcija u srpskohrvatskom *na trgu* ima u engleskom nekoliko različitih prijevodnih ekvivalenata, svaki sa svojom točno određenom upotrebom. Tek se u prijevodu jasno razabiru različita značenja sadržana u strukturalno višesmislenoj, ali površinski istoj strukturi.