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SOME MORPHOSYNTACTIC AND TYPOLOGICAL TENDENCIES IN EAST POLISSIAN BORDER DIALECTS

Abstract. In Ukrainian and, more generally, East Slavic dialectology phonetics and lexis have been more systematically studied than other language levels such as morphology, syntax and phraseology. Notwithstanding the existence of primary and secondary sources such as dialectal Atlases, academic manuals and a long series of contributions on different dialectal aspects, studies devoted to dialectal morphosyntactic and typological characteristics are very limited, if not inexistent. This applies even more to border dialects.

Thus, this paper concisely outlines some morphosyntactic and typological tendencies typical of East Polissian border dialects, focusing on the area situated in the former district of Ripky (northwest of the town of Chernihiv) and extending towards Belarus. The core features of possessive constructions and the future of imperfective verbs are briefly described. Most of the reported syntactic characteristics (short sentences, ellipses, parataxis, etc.) are equally typical of spontaneous, colloquial speech and other non-standard varieties. The sample data are derived from recorded materials carried out in this specific dialect area between 2012 and 2018.

Subordination, although less complex than the respective standard languages, tends to follow the Ukrainian Belarusian pattern with some overlaps that, at a first level of analysis, could be ascribed to Russian influence on Ukrainian and Belarusian local varieties. Even though possession and futurity, especially in relation to standard languages, have already been dealt with in linguistic-typological studies, most contributions largely neglect diatopic and diastratic variation. In this sense, the analysis of recently acquired dialect data compared with already available language-typological evidence can undoubtedly improve existing classifications of (East) Slavic and, more widely, European languages.

Keywords: Ukrainian language, East Polissian dialects, dialectology, language typology, East Slavic languages.

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ДЕЯКІ МОРФОСИНТАКСИЧНІ ТА ТИПОЛОГІЧНІ ТЕНДЕНЦІЇ У СХІДНОПОЛІСЬКИХ ПРИКОРДОННИХ ДІАЛЕКТАХ

Анотація. В українській і загалом у східнослов'янській діалектології, фонетику і лексику вивчено більш систематично, ніж інші мовні рівні – морфологічний, синтаксичний, фразеологічний. Незважаючи на існування первинних і вторинних джерел, таких як діалектні атласи, академічні праці, університетські підручники, фахові публікації, що висвітлюють різні аспекти говорів, дослідження, присвячені морфосинтаксичним і типологічним характеристикам діалектів, зокрема прикордонних, обмежені, якщо не відсутні. У статті стисло окреслено деякі морфосинтаксичні та типологічні тенденції, які є типовими для частини східнополіських говорів, розташованих на території колишнього Ріпкинського району (Чернігівщина), що простягається до Білорусі. В дослідженні системно виявлено риси, які притаманні східнополіським прикордонним діалектам, схарактеризовано їх особливості та ідентифікаційні риси. Також розглянуто основні ознаки посесивних конструкцій і способи формування майбутнього часу недоконаного виду, що є закономірними для досліджуваних типів діалектів. Акцентовано, що північно-східні українські діалекти, зокрема на українсько-білорусько-російському кордоні, мають діатопічні варіації та демонструють певні специфічні риси, які висвітлено у статті. Попри те, що категорії посесивності й майбутності літературних (стандартних) мов, досліджено в лінгвістико-типологічних студіях, у більшості праць такого типу територіальної й соціальної варіативності не розглянуто. Отже, аналіз і порівняння власних діалектних даних із уже наявними результатами безумовно удосконалять мовно-типологічну класифікацію слов'янських, зокрема східнослов'янських, а ширше – європейських мов. Тематика статті відображає актуальну проблематику XVII Міжнародного з'їзду славістів, що відбудеться у серпні 2025 року в Парижі (Франція).

Ключові слова: українська мова, східнополіські говори, діалектологія, мовна типологія, східнослов'янські мови.

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Introductory remarks. The examined dialects are spoken in northeastern Ukrainian Polissia. They border southeastern Belarus in the West, including the districts of Loeŭ and Homel (region of Homel), and are not far from the region of Brjansk (Russian Federation) in the East. The core territory of the research coincides with the former district of Ripky (1923–2020), north-west of the city of Chernihiv[7]. The northeastern Ukrainian-Russian border runs near the former district of Horodnja (presently part of the Chernihiv district). This area resembles a geo-dialectal triangle wedged between the Dnipro (Dnepr), Desna, Sozh and Snov rivers. These dialects are defined by traditional East Slavic dialectology as "transitional from Ukrainian to Belarusian". Even acknowledging the functional value of the latter definition, we refer to them just as "border dialects" to avoid additional theoretical implications.

Ukrainian dialectology generally subordinates this dialectal area to the broader northeastern Ukrainian dialects, also known as East Polissian (Ukr. *pivnichno-shidni dialekty*)[8]. Belarusian dialectology, however, classifies the contiguous Belarusian dialects, spoken on the opposite side of the political border, as part of the central and southwestern Belarusian dialects and subdivides them into 1) Slucak-Mazyr dialects (Bel. *sluckaja hrupa havorak*) and 2) Mazyr dialects (Bel. *mazyrskaja hrupa havorak*).

Dialectal phonetics and lexis have been more systematically studied than other language levels such as morphology, syntax and phraseology. In our case, for example, notwithstanding the existence

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[7] Since the all-Ukrainian administrative reform of July 2020, the district of Ripky has been incorporated into the larger district of Chernihiv [cf. 15].
[8] According to a widely accepted dialectological classification, Polissia is divided into three macro dialectal areas or dialect groups: 1) Eastern Polissian; 2) Central Polissian and 3) Western Polissian [cf. 10, p. 59–61].

of primary and secondary sources such as dialectal Atlases, a few academic manuals and a long series of contributions, often fragmentary, on different dialectal aspects, studies devoted to morphosyntactic and typological characteristics of border dialects are very limited, if not inexistent.

Therefore, in this paper, which is a modified extension of an abstract prepared for the Slavists' Congress (Paris, 2025), we first outline some dialectal morphosyntactic characteristics [21]. Successively, we outline, also from a typological perspective, further dialectal specificities such as possessive constructions and the future of imperfective verbs. These points, especially in relation to standard languages, have been dealt with in linguistic-typological studies over the last few decades. Nevertheless, most contributions largely neglect diatopic and diastratic variation. In this sense, the analysis of recently acquired dialect data compared with already available language-typological evidence can undoubtedly improve existing classifications of (East) Slavic and, more widely, European languages.

Recurrent morphosyntactic features are presented in section one. The main properties of possessive constructions and the way of expressing futurity are highlighted in sections two and three, respectively. The sample data are derived from recorded materials carried out in this specific dialect area between 2012 and 2018.

1. General morphosyntactic features

Ukrainian and, more at large, East Slavic dialectal syntax seems to display less variation compared to the morphological and, particularly, phonetic levels. The syntactic organization of the sentence tends to be less organized than the standard languages spoken in this border area (Ukrainian, Russian and Belarusian). Utterances show a lower degree of textual cohesion and coherence. Syntactic pauses and shifts are usually accompanied by prosodic and paralinguistic features. Ellipsis fills informational gaps. There is a wide use of discourse markers (connectors) or "fillers" (Ukr. *vstavne slovo*), which, according to a traditional morphological classification widely used in East Slavic dialectological descriptions, are categorized as adverbs, conjunctions, interjections and particles. Among these, the most frequent and, syntactically, polyfunctional

are: *dak* 'but', 'so', 'therefore', 'then'; *šo* 'that'; *nu* 'well', 'then'; *ž(e)* 'therefore', 'instead' etc. These elements, in fact, also depending on the pragmatic-functional context, may express a different morphosyntactic and emphatic function.

The syntactic organization, like the uncontrolled spontaneous speech of other colloquial varieties, is generally characterized by limited hypotaxis and simple, often short sentences / utterances: elliptical sentences, juxtapositions, paratactic constructions; for example:

1) *zaraz   uže   harodu   tam   troxi*
[ˈzaraz uˈʒe   ɦaˈrodu   tam   tˈroxˈi]
now-ADV already-ADV garden-GEN.SG.M there-ADV a little-ADV
'Now (there is) already a little garden left (to do)'

This utterance, although decontextualized for the sake of brevity, provides incomplete information and lacks a predicate or a modal. The full meaning of this and similar utterances can be inferred contextually and in the non-verbal communication of the participants in the conversation.

The most common coordinating conjunctions are *i … i ...*; *da* 'and' (cf. Russian).

The conjunction *a* (and, sometimes, *no*) 'but', 'yet', as in the East Slavic standard languages, has an adversative function and regularly replaces the standard Ukrainian *prote* with the same semantic-grammatical function.

The most frequent disjunctive conjunction, as in standard Ukrainian, is expressed by *čy* 'or'. The alternative (implying a choice between two things) is *čy... čy* 'or...or'. The construction with *ili* 'or', as in Standard Russian, tends to be rarer in the examined dialectal area. Its use, although alternating with *čy*, seems to be more frequent in dialect-based mixed varieties such as, for example, the Ukrainian Russian mixed speech ("Surzhyk").

The most common subordinators are *šo* CONJ 'that' and *bo* 'because', 'since'. The latter usually introduces a causal clause; it may occasionally be replaced by *patamu, šo* 'because', 'since' and *tak jak* 'so that'. Alternatives to these patterns in relation to both dialects and other non-standard Ukrainian varieties are also possible.

2. Possessive Constructions

Leaving aside here the philosophical and linguistic notion of possession, we can say that the possessive constructions characterizing northeastern Ukrainian (Polissian) dialects as well as the dialects spoken across the Belarusian and Russian borders are, at least in affirmative sentences, of *esse* type. They can be schematically represented as *PP* + *possessor* + (AUX) + *possessum*, for example:

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2)   u     mien'e    lisaped
    [u    mˈĭeˈnʲe   lisaeˈpʲed]
  at-PREP  me-1SG.GEN  bike-NOM.SG.M
      'I have a bicycle'
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The same structural pattern also occurs in the past tense of both affirmative and negative sentences.

The parallel *HABERE* construction, normative in standard Ukrainian, of the type *maty* have-AUX.INF + *possessum* in the accusative, for example: *ja maju lisaped* "I have a bicycle", seems to be completely peripheral to these dialects. Thus, unlike Standard Ukrainian and, to some extent, Belarusian, which can express possession with two more or less semantically equal syntactic constructions, these border dialects, as well as the entire East Polissian dialectal area, seem to favour the *ESSE* (with external possessor) pattern which is also prevalent in Standard Russian.

3. Future Tense in East Polissian (border) dialects

The question of the future in Ukrainian and, in a broader sense, in East Slavic languages, partially including diatopic variation, has been extensively dealt with by A. Danylenko [8] and, in more recent years, with reference to the Belarusian West Palessia (Polesia), by Kristian Roncero [18]. However, the specificity of synthetic and analytic imperfective future in northern Ukrainian dialects, with a focus on East Polissian, has been just mentioned in previous studies [8, p. 172-173], thus requiring further examination.

Futurity can be semantically and pragmatically expressed by different morphosyntactic strategies. However, the most frequent formal

pattern in Ukrainian dialects essentially relies on the well-known opposition between 1) a perfective and 2) an imperfective future.

The perfective future is based on a perfective verbal base, with person and number inflection (as in the present tense), for example: *skažu* say/tell-1SG.PFV vs *kažu* say/tell-1SG.IPFV 'I will say' etc.

The imperfective future can be built in different ways. The most common is the analytic future, also known as copular or periphrastic construction, formed by the conjugated forms of the auxiliary *buty* 'to be' in the future tense and the infinitive of the required verb, for example: *budu* be-1SG.FUT.IMPF *hovorit(y)* speak-INF.IMPF 'I shall / will speak'. A parallel future is the synthetic imperfective future built by the infinitive form of the verb followed or preceded by a de-verbal clitic of the verb *maty* 'to have' (according to a traditional scholarly interpretation [7, p. 319] or *jaty* 'to take' with person and number marking [21, p. 101; 8, p. 153], for example: *hovorytymu*-1SG.FUT.IMPF 'I shall / will speak'.[9] An established scholarly view sees no functional or semantic differences in the two types of imperfective futures for standard Ukrainian [17, p. 229].

A similar observation was expressed about West Polesian (Belarusian) dialects [16, p. 203-204] and could be extended to the structurally similar northwestern Ukrainian (Polissian) counterpart. The West Polesian Belarusian dialects are, in fact, positioned on the other side of the Ukrainian northwestern (Polissian) border, and they, according to a certain interpretation, would just represent their extension [3, p. 324-327; 5, p. 293-296].

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[9] The historical development of the synthetic future in Ukrainian (whose origin could also be the consequence of induced contact-changes and areal-typological collocation of certain dialectal varieties), in relation to either Romance or earlier stages of Slavic, have been treated in relatively recent years by Tyshchenko [19, p. 42-43] and Danylenko [8]. The synthetic future construction, simplifying some historical stages and concurrent forms, has two possible explanations: a) it represents the fusion of the present tense of the historic auxiliary *imati* 'habere' ('have') + infinite imperfective of a verb X, for example: *pisati + imu / pysatymu* (*<писати + иму = писати(и)му>*) 'I shall write'. The present forms of the verb *imati* 'to have' could have originally preceded or being postponed to the infinitive; b) it represents a development of the East Slavic periphrastic construction with the determined imperfective 'to take' serving as a de-inceptive auxiliary [cf. 8, p. 171-177]. Although we already expressed a preliminary view on this issue, this point deserves further examination [cf. 9, p. 52].

The synthetic future may imply a sememe of inchoativity if compared to the analytic future.[10] In the language perception of some language conscious Ukrainian speakers this subtle semantic difference can, in certain specific contexts, still be caught. However, the regular occurrence of both types of imperfective future in contemporary standard usage, apart from some stylistic variation, seems to suggest their semantic equivalence. Yet, a growing and more systematic use of the synthetic future, probably reinforced by media discourse, can be observed since the early 2000s[11].

Most Ukrainian dialects show no substantial variation from the standard pattern in the use of the analytic imperfective future. The imperfective synthetic future is also common across large dialectal areas. It can be found in southeastern, southwestern, and in the above-mentioned northwestern (Polissian) dialects [21, p. 101].

The situation in the southwestern Ukrainian dialectal area is more articulated since there is a higher degree of variation in the making of the imperfective future. The latter can in fact be expressed by two analytic (or periphrastic = PC) constructions and two synthetic ones. The PC display the usual *buty* + INF along the *buty* + past forms of the main verb: *budu braŭ[12]* 'I will take' while the SF may have a deverbal enclitic as well as a proclitic form, for example: *bratymu* vs *mu braty* 'I will take'. Their areal distribution is well illustrated in the AUM (1988, II: map 244).

In northeastern Ukrainian dialects, particularly in the researched area (which also includes the dialectal belt extending towards the Belarusian and, to a lesser extent, the Russian territory), the imperfective future is only built analytically: *buty* be-INF.AUX 'to be' + infinitive, for example: *bud' eš znat'* [ˈbudʲeʃ zˈnatʲ] 'you will know'.

The corresponding and (almost) semantically equivalent synthetic form based on the imperfective infinitive of the main verb + affixal endings: *-mu, -meš, -me, -memo, -mete, -mut'*, for example: *znaty**mu***

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[10] This point is discussed in Bevzenko, who refers to Potebnja. However, the former admits that this point requires further research [3, p. 326].
[11] Personal observation. On this point, also see: Vyxovanec' and Horodens'ka [20, p. 254].
[12] It was historically a past participle.

know-1SG.FUT.IPFV 'I shall know', is mainly extraneous to large areas of Northern Ukrainian dialects, especially Central and Eastern Polissian. In other words, the construction on the model *ja budu brat'* 'I shall take' clearly prevails over *brat**ymu***, as well illustrated in the AUM (1984, I: map 263; also, see: ASH 2019: map 306), [13].

The fact that the synthetic future is marginally attested in East Polissian dialects has been recently confirmed by dialectologists working in a contiguous area (Dmytro Marjejev, personal communication, June 07, 2025). As displayed in the ASH (2019: map 306) and AUM (1984, I: map 263), there is scanty to no evidence of SF north of the Desna and Sejm rivers. Its presence south of this line is probably due to the contacts with the southeastern Ukrainian dialectal area, which constitutes the base of modern standard Ukrainian. Also, the adjacent Belarusian and Russian dialects show no evidence of the analytic or periphrastic future (DABM 1963: map 166). Therefore, we can say that the Ukrainian Polissia (northern Ukrainian dialects) can be roughly split into two large areas: a western part where the SF is prevalent as opposed to Central and Eastern Polissia, where this feature becomes sporadic and completely disappears in the large area placed north of the Desna and Sejm rivers (Region of Chernihiv and Sumy), Belarus (Region of Homel), and the Russian Federation (Region of Brjansk). The prevalent, if not exclusive, use of the analytic future does not fit within the nine distinguishing criteria suggested by S. Bevzenko in his attempt to differentiate Ukrainian border (or, according to the traditional terminology, "transitional") dialects based on Ukrainian from those on a Belarusian "base" [4, p. 208]. In fact, if we had to accept this criterion, most of the region of Chernihiv (along with large parts of the regions of Zhytomyr and Sumy) should be attributed to the Belarusian dialectal area.

Conclusions

In this paper some common morphosyntactic features characterizing the Ukrainian-Belarusian border dialects in the area placed northwest of Chernihiv have been succinctly highlighted. It has emerged that northeastern Ukrainian dialects and, more exactly, those spoken on the Ukrainian-Belarusian-Russian border, in

addition to the usual levels of diatopic variation, display certain specific morphosyntactic and typological features. These dialects differ primarily from standard Ukrainian, but also from the Ukrainian southwestern and southeastern groups and their respective subgroups. A similar variation, compared with the respective standard languages, can also be observed in the adjacent Belarusian dialects (region of Homel) and in some Russian dialects spoken in the neighbouring region of Brjansk.

Most of the reported syntactic characteristics (short sentences, ellipses, parataxis, etc.) are equally typical of spontaneous, colloquial speech and other non-standard varieties. Subordination, although less complex than the respective standard languages, tends to follow the Ukrainian-Belarusian pattern with some overlaps that, at a first level of analysis, could be ascribed to Russian influence on Ukrainian and Belarusian local varieties.

It was also noted that these dialects mainly express their possessive relations through locative constructions of *ESSE* type and, at the same time, the imperfective future essentially relies on the analytic or copular construction. These and other morphosyntactic aspects confirm a certain degree of linguistic-typological specificity of these dialects. Hence, a future and more balanced typological-areal classification of (East) Slavic languages – also in the broader context of European languages – should likewise consider the collocation of the examined dialectal area.

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Дата надходження до редакції – 08.04.2025
Дата затвердження редакцією – 20.04.2025