Serbo-Croatian short adjectives in definite contexts – Focus inside DP

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Abstract. This squib investigates the syntactic and information structure properties of Serbo-Croatian nominal phrases with short (indefinite) adjectives modifying DPs already introduced to the discourse, such as pomenuti sjajan džez bend (‘the mentioned great jazz band’), in cases when the properties denoted by the short adjective are non-restrictive, interpreted as additional information and speaker’s “parenthetical” evaluation. Based on these examples we advocate that a local focus can be articulated in the nominal domain, supporting approaches assuming DP:CP parallelisms.

Keywords. Serbo-Croatian, short adjectives, focus, DP:CP parallelism

1. Serbo-Croatian short and long adjectives

In this section the contrast between Serbo-Croatian (SC) short and long adjective forms is introduced. First we consider the syntactic and semantic properties of the two, as argued in the literature. In the remainder we present their main information structure characteristics.

SC has two adjective inflections, the so-called short adjective form, SAF (traditionally labeled as indefinite adjectival aspect), and long adjective form, LAF (definite adjectival aspect). The morphological difference between the two is encoded via the null, 0, (SAF) and –i ending (LAF) in nominative singular masculine, respectively, (1).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{lepo-} & / & \\
\text{lep-i} & & \text{čovek} \\
\text{handsome.SAF} & & \text{handsome.LAF man} \\
\text{a/the handsome man} & & \\
\end{align*}
\]

Linguists agree on the idea that the semantic nature of the two forms is related to the referential properties of the nominal expression they modify, but have different opinions about the exact category SAF and LAF express. Most authors assess that they are used to express indefiniteness/definiteness (Stevanović (1986), Fekete (1969/1973), Progovac (1998), Leko (1999)), but also partitive non-specificity/specificity (Aljović 2002) and epistemic non-specificity/specificity (Trenkic 2004) are proposed as their differentia specifica.

Both SAF and LAF can appear adnominally, (1), but mostly SAFs are used “bare” in predicative position. LAFs are allowed “bare” in the predicative only when different referents already introduced to the relevant discourse domain satisfy the
positive description. In (2) LAF would be used in case two different towns, a beautiful and an ugly one, are part of the so-called common ground – the discourse shared by the interlocutors.

(2) Ovaj grad je lep-о/ (?!)lep-i This town is beautiful.SAF beautiful.LAF ‘This town is beautiful / the beautiful one’

SAFs and LAFs can be combined in the same DP, (3.a), but LAFs cannot precede SAFs, (3.b) (Leko (1992), Giusti (2006), Cinque (2010)).

(3) a. siromašan bolesni dječak b. *siromašni bolestan dječak poor.SAF sick.LAF boy poor.LAF sick.SAF boy ‘a poor sick boy’

Cinque (2010) argues that adjectives are generated in two different syntactic positions: direct modification adjectives (DMA) are merged as adjective phrases (AP) in the specifier of a functional head projected immediately above NP, while indirect modification adjectives (IMA) are merged higher in a distinct projection hosting the predicate of a reduced relative clause. Based on the facts presented in (2) and (3), he establishes a correlation between LAFs and DMAs, and SAFs and IMAs, respectively:

(5) \[\text{DP} [\text{ FP1 } [\text{ AP IMA } \sim \text{ SAF} ] [\text{ FP2 } [\text{ AP DMA } \sim \text{ LAF} ] [\text{ NP }] ] ]\]

Although LAFs do not precede SAFs, SAFs can be found in definite contexts, more precisely, in post-demonstrative position, as illustrated in (6) (Rutkowski & Progovac (2005), Giusti (2006)).

(6) taj lep-о / lep-i grad That beautiful.SAF beautiful.LAF town

Stanković (2014) shows that there is a closed set of adjectives which LAFs can precede SAFs when used as definiteness (pomenuti ‘mentioned’, navedeni ‘stated’, imenovani ‘named’), (7), or specific markers (izvesni ‘certain’, određeni ‘determined, particular’). Based on the fact that these adjectives in the intended readings always precede other adjectives (including comparatives and superlatives) and cardinal numbers, that they can be combined in pseudo-oxymoronic phrases such as (7) and that they act as a barrier for left-branch (and adjunct) extractions, (8), he argues in favor of DP analysis of SC nominal expressions.

(7) pomenut-i nepomenut-о primorski grad mentioned.LAF not mentioned.LAF coastal.LAF town ‘the mentioned not mentioned coastal town’

(8) ‘Skupa; je video [pomenuta t_i kola]. Expensive AUX seen mentioned car (intended) ‘It is the mentioned expensive car that he saw / has seen’

Stanković (2015) proposes an analysis in which LAFs are the result of a special type of agreement between the adjective and positively specified definiteness and/or
specificity features in DP. However, as shown in (6) and (7), SAFs can also appear in definite contexts. Following Bobaljik & Wurmbrand (2005) in the assumption that Agree relations are evaluated at LF, Stanković postulates that SAFs in definite contexts are possible in cases when the adjective covertly moves to some projection outside the DP domain, such as the functional projection for quantifiers, aspectual component of the verb or some instance of information structure.

A generalization can be made that LAFs are usually used restrictively, as part of the definite description that a given nominal expression uses to identify its referent, and that they share the discourse function of the entire definite description. As for SAFs, they can have an own discourse role, the information focus, while the rest of the sentence is backgrounded and/or topical. This fact will be important for the analysis of SAFs in definite contexts that will be proposed in the next section. When it comes to “bare” LAFs in predicative position in (2), they are pronounced with a contrastive intonation component, which is bringing a presupposition of a closed set of referent alternatives.

2. SAFs in definite contexts

In this section we investigate the syntactic and information structure characteristics of noun phrases with the configuration similar to the one presented in (7) \((pomenuti\_LAF + SAF (+ LAF) + NOUN)\). We will concentrate on the cases where the nominal referent is already introduced to the discourse, unlike the property denoted by the SAF, which is interpreted as additional information and speaker’s “parenthetical” evaluation, as illustrated in (9).

\[ (9) \text{Gosti našeg grada su članovi [jednog džez benda iz Rima].} \]

‘The members of a jazz band from Rome are guests of our town.’

\[ [\text{Pomenuti sjajan džez bend}] \text{nastupa Večeras u „Arena“.} \]

‘The mentioned jazz band will perform tonight at the “Arena”.’

In the first sentence of example (9) the speaker is introducing (the members of) a certain jazz band from Rome. In the follow-up sentence, the locutor is referring to the same jazz band using the definiteness marker \(pomenuti\ ‘mentioned’\)\(^1\) (Stanković 2014, 2015), which bears LAF, as one could expect. However, the speaker is providing more information about the denoted DP, using SAF of the evaluative \(sjajan\ ‘great’\), which is irrelevant for identifying the referent of the modified nominal phrase. Scott (2002)

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\(^1\) Although S-C lacks definite and indefinite articles, Stanković (2014, 2015) points out that the adjective \(pomenuti\ ‘mentioned’\) behaves as a (non-mandatory) definiteness marker, given the fact that it values d-features, providing the co-locutor with information about the referential aspect of the denotation of an expression, and can serve as a barrier for left-branch and adjunct extraction in its referential reading, leading to a conclusion that there is a functional projection of the D type above S-C NPs, sensitive to discourse properties.
postulates the non-marked ordering of adjectives presented in (10), in which subjective comment adjectives always precede other adjective classes:

(10) subjective comment > evidential > size > length > height > speed > depth
> width > weight > temperature > wetness > age > shape > color >
nationality/origin > material > compound element (Scott 2002)

Although the SAF evaluative in (9) belongs to the initial subjective comment class, it must follow the definiteness marker pomenuti 'mentioned', regardless of whether it is bearing LAF or SAF:

(11) ??Sjajni *sjajan pomenuti bend nastupa večeras.
great.LAF great.SAF mentioned.LAF band performs tonight.
(intended) 'The mentioned great jazz band will perform tonight.'

This fact suggests that the adjectives pomenuti 'mentioned' is positioned high in the nominal phrase, presumably in DP - bear in mind that in its referential reading this adjective blocks left-branch (and adjunct) extractions, (8), behaving in this sense like the definite article in English (Corver 1990, 1993).

The evaluative SAF sjajan 'great' in the second sentence in (9) has a raise intonation followed by a slight pause (#), after which the rest of the DP is pronounced with intonation fall from a high (H), to a low tone (L) on the last word, as shown by Giusti (2006):

(12) L H # H L
pomenuti sjajan džez band
mentioned.LAF great.SAF jazz band

Following Giusti's (2005) postulation of a split DP with Focus (Foc) and Topic (Top) projections (parallel to Rizzi's (1997) split CP model), contra Giusti's (2006) assumption about the uniqueness of Focus in the clause (excluding the possibility of focus in the nominal domain) and in line with Aboh et al. (2010), I argue that the examples like (9) suggest that a local, intranominal focus can be articulated in the nominal domain. In the proposed analysis of (9) given in (13), the entire DP constitutes the clausal Topic, while the rest of the sentence is in information Focus, but the clausal Topic itself contains a local, intranominal focus partition (foci):

(13) [Top pomenuti [focL sjajan ]][Top' džez bend [FocP nastupa večeras ]].

It is important to notice that a reverse situation is also possible: focL, as additional information and speaker's "parenthetical" evaluation, irrelevant for the clausal Focus, can also appear inside the clausal Focus:

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2 Although the precedence of 'subjective comment' is uncontroversial, the detailed hierarchy by Scott (2002) is questionable (cf. Truswell (2009)). I thank the anonymous reviewer for this comment.

3 For clausal Topic and Focus partitions we use initial majuscule, while for the proposed local, intranominal topic and focus counterparts we use initial minuscule.

4 The analysis proposed in (13) does not necessarily exclude the possibility of a narrow Focus on the temporal adverb or on vP.
Examples (13) and (14) show that the proposed local, intranominal (topic and) focus can be configured independently of their clausal counterparts. Following Cinque (2010), I assume that adjectives are merged as IMAs (*pomenut* 'mentioned', *sjajan* 'great') or DMAs (*džež* (*sastav*) 'jazz' (band)). The previous are merged higher than the latter in distinct functional projections as APs. As already mentioned, Stanković (2015) presumes that LAFs are result of an agreement between the adjective and definiteness and/or specificity features in DP, but the adjective can also covertly move to some projection outside the DP domain (if Agree relations are evaluated at LF, as proposed by Bobaljik & Wurmbrand (2005)), resulting with SAFs in definite contexts. Taking this perspective, I propound that the adjective *pomenut* 'mentioned' agrees with the definiteness feature in head of DP and then moves to Spec_DP, thus marking the discourse-old status of the modified nominal expression, (15). In LF, the adjective *sjajan* 'great' climbs to the proposed focL projection, leaving the DP domain, so it cannot agree with the definiteness feature, (16).

(15) $\left[\text{DP} \ pomenut\text{-}\text{i} \ \left[\text{D'} \ [\text{def+}] \ \left[\text{FP}_1 \ [\text{AP} \ pomenut\text{-}\text{i}] \ \left[\text{FP}_2 \ [\text{AP} \ sjajan\text{-}\text{θ}] \ \left[\text{NP} \ džež \text{ bend}]\right]\right]\right]\right]$]

(16) $\text{LF}$

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folcL

sjajan-

pomenut-i

dP

D'

[def+]

FP1

AP

FP2

pomenut-i

AP

FP3

AP

NP

džež

bend
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Most of the corpus examples of SAFs in definite contexts can be subsumed under the proposed analysis in (13)-(16), answering the question how is it possible for SAFs to appear in definite context, (6) and (9), and explaining the intonation characteristics.
presented in (12). As the properties denoted by SAFs are discourse-new, these adjectives cannot be used restrictively, as part of the definite description for identifying the referent, and so they cannot appear as LAFs. SAFs bear the local, intranominal focus, which is not part of the clausal Topic and Focus partition either, hence, the raise intonation on SAFs and the slight pause before the pronunciation of the rest of the DP.

3. Conclusion

In the literature there is no consensus on the issue of recursivity in information structure (Kruijjf-Korbayová (2004), Tomioka (2007)). In this squib we investigated SC SAFs appearing in definite contexts and proposed an appropriate syntactic and information structure analysis, arguing for the existence of a local, intranominal (topic and) focus partition(s), which can be articulated independently of its/their clausal counterpart(s). By this we advocated that a parallel between DPs and CPs can be observed even in the information structure domain, supporting the vast number of studies conducted on the parallelism between the configuration of nominal expressions and clauses.

References


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