

EXAMINER'S REPORT

by

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on a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in division 2 *Humanities*

2.1 Philology

Doctoral programme: *Germanic languages: English*

Author: Maria Ivanova Anastasova

Title: *ANALYTIC CONSTRUCTIONS WITH THE VERBS BE AND HAVE AND A PAST PARTICIPLE
IN OLD ENGLISH AND IN OLD BULGARIAN*

Supervisor: Dr. Antoaneta Stefanova Dzhelyova, Associate Professor, University of Plovdiv

1. Overview of the examination procedure and introducing the candidate

I was appointed as a member of the board of examiners by the Rector of the University of Plovdiv, Letter No. ПД-21-1381 of 20.07.2022, for the defence of the following doctoral dissertation in 2.1. Philology; doctoral programme: Germanic languages: English; thesis title: *Analytic Constructions with the Verbs Be and Have and a Past Participle in Old English and in Old Bulgarian*. The author of the thesis is Maria Ivanova Anastasova, a part-time doctoral student at the English Department of the University of Plovdiv, supervised by associate professor Dr. Antoaneta Dzhelyova. Maria Anastasova completed her BA and MA at the University of Plovdiv, where she has done most of her teaching and research to date. The set of documents submitted by the candidate is in compliance with Article 36 (1) of the Statutes of the University of Plovdiv and contains all requisite documents.

2. Relevance of the topic

A vast amount of scholarly literature has been generated on the topic of analytic constructions, in earlier and in modern languages alike, both in terms of the descriptions of individual languages and in terms of linguistic theory, in particular theories of language change and grammaticalisation. These topics continue to be relevant and are far from exhausted, as evidenced by multiple recent publications and by ongoing debates at major international scholarly forums, and as demonstrated by the candidate herself – in her work, M. Anastasova has been able to come up with valuable innovative treatments of the problems under investigation, as well as fresh perspectives and a reinvigorating cross-pollination of research approaches. It is no easy task to combine two rather different research paradigms, such as the Bulgarian and the English-speaking ones. Overall, the PhD candidate has succeeded in reconciling the two traditions, thereby enriching each of them.

3. Familiarity with the topic

The very choice of this topic testifies to the solid professional background of the candidate as a well-rounded linguist with a wide knowledge of the history and structure of English and Bulgarian, historical linguistics and general linguistic theory. Although she is at an early stage in her academic career, M. Anastasova already demonstrates academic maturity and a significant amount of relevant experience. Her thesis confirms that she can skilfully and competently tackle rather challenging subjects, including several ancient and mediaeval languages (mostly Old English and Old Bulgarian/Old Church Slavonic, but also Latin and Greek), alongside a number of traditional and more contemporary linguistic theories. Throughout, the body of her work consistently evinces a deep understanding of the ideas of an impressive number of earlier scholars, good overall familiarity with her field, as well as her individual take and competent assessment of the matters under discussion.

4. Research methodology

For the purposes of her dissertation, M. Anastasova sets out to examine parallel Gospel translations into Old English and Old Bulgarian/Old Church Slavonic, sometimes alongside the Latin and Greek originals, as well as some supplementary illustrative material from the specialist literature. As pointed out above, the author has managed to bring together and reconcile two rather different research traditions, in particular the Bulgarian and English-speaking ones. Nevertheless, Bulgarian and Eastern European approaches appear to take the upper hand. It ought to be stressed at this stage that many readers are unlikely to be familiar with A. Dzhelyova's theory about the

attractor in the linguistic system – having read M. Anastasova’s dissertation, I am still uncertain whether I can grasp and fully appreciate the true nature of this theoretical construct. On p. 3 of the English synopsis, the author states: ‘The verbs *be* and *have* belong to the attractor of the complex and self-evolving language system. The attractor elements are the beginning and the center of the self-organization of the system. As parts of the system attractor, the verbs *be* and *have* are the most stable ones with the most significant functions in a language. It is through the attractor elements that both continuity and innovation in language systems are realized.’ – I am not convinced that I can quite comprehend the content of this passage. Furthermore, there seems to be an internal contradiction here – it is initially stated that the verbs *be* and *have* form part of the system’s attractor, but then the author goes on to say that they simultaneously belong both to the core and to the attractor component. It might be worth clarifying and explaining in more detail the notion of attractor (as well as that of core), justifying why the author has chosen to appeal to it in her work, further highlighting what mileage we can get from it in analysing the empirical data and how it can shed light on the linguistic phenomena at hand. As a reader, I am left with the impression that despite being introduced early on, this notion subsequently remains underexploited in the empirical part of the dissertation and in explaining the phenomena under investigation. Both the thesis and the synopses state that attractor elements, including the verbs for ‘be’ and ‘have’, maintain the stability of the system, but this seems a little puzzling to me, since in and of themselves these verbs are often subject to change and undergo grammaticalisation along various paths (for instance, coming to express a myriad of abstract grammatical categories).

One of the author’s most interesting and distinctive contributions is her bold assertion that the perfect and the passive in Old English and Old Bulgarian/Old Church Slavonic actually belong to the same unified grammatical category, not yet having split into separate categories. This assertion is fleshed out and supported much more convincingly in the body of the dissertation than in either of the synopses (which may be understandable in view of the space constraints in the latter). It is advisable at this juncture that one should acknowledge earlier treatments of these issues which at least in part overlap with the candidate’s proposal, including similar ideas articulated in work by Howard Jones and Morgan Macleod.

Since it posits a hierarchically organised network of interlinked constructions, Construction Grammar (CxG) would be especially well suited as a framework in which the author could couch her intuitions regarding the initial (near-)identity in the form and meaning of perfects and passives,

corresponding to a unified more abstract meaning and a shared slot in the linguistic system. The constructionist literature defines constructions as pairings of form and meaning, very much in the spirit of Saussure's structuralism.

5. Overview and assessment of the dissertation and its major contributions

The text submitted by the candidate brings to the fore her erudition, laudable familiarity with the literature and excellent grasp of the material, including her command of the mediaeval languages with which she works in a competent and skilful fashion. M. Anastasova engages with the specialist literature very closely; rather than simply mentioning and summarising it, she is selective in her review and critically assesses the material, which reaffirms her academic maturity and ability to make informed choices.

And yet, as in all work done by humans, there is some inevitable imprecision and lack of clarity here too. I would like to point out some of these problematic issues, not because I wish to undermine the candidate's achievements, but in order to encourage her to remove these slips and errors and avoid them in her future work. Her dissertation most definitely merits attention from the linguistic community, including careful close reading, which is what I hope my comments below are an expression of.

On p. 22, point 6), it is stated that in *beoð þine* 'will be thine/yours', the verb *be* expresses possession; however, possession here is arguably expressed by the possessive pronoun, not by the copular verb.

On p. 61 of the dissertation (p. 10 of the English synopsis), the candidate claims that participles are characterised by the grammatical category of tense; however, it should be emphasised that, being non-finite/nominal forms, participles are not marked for tense in the same way as finite verbs; it is finite verbs that actually determine the temporal reference of the relevant event/situation. Later on (on p. 67 of the dissertation), the author does admit that the term *past participle* may not be the most appropriate label, since past participles do not express time in the same way as finite preterital forms – therefore, I would suggest that the infelicitous assertions above be revised along similar lines.

It is inaccurate to talk about a true passive in Indo-European. Two voices are traditionally reconstructed for the IE proto-language – active and middle or medio-passive, not just passive (see Clackson 2007: 142, Fortson 2010: 89–90).

A claim is made on p. 159 that, according to D. Lightfoot, auxiliaries (including *habban*) arose suddenly and abruptly as late as Early Modern English – to the best of my knowledge, however, Lightfoot actually focuses on modals and explains their supposedly “abrupt” reanalysis as auxiliaries with a presumed inability of subsequent generations of language learners to perceive them as ordinary verbs due to “catastrophic and far-reaching” changes in their paradigms and usage. Needless to say, these hypotheses remain controversial.

Constructions made up of *have* + *NP* + *past participle* are described on p. 159 as typical of ‘some contemporary dialects’ of English, but they are in fact perfectly acceptable in Standard English too.

I also found the line of reasoning on p. 168 somewhat confusing: in spite of the original demarcation between *have* as the auxiliary for transitive verbs and *be* for intransitive ones, the author goes on to suggest that *habban* gradually displaced *beon/wesan* with transitive verbs [sic], and then with intransitive ones too.

I would also recommend that the candidate should remove footnote 145, because in its present form it can be misleading, since *be*-perfects in English also evolved as an innovation.

In the conclusion to the dissertation (as well as on p. 26 of the English synopsis), English and Bulgarian are considered unrelated languages with a common ancestor, which seems to be a contradiction in terms. It would be more accurate to describe them as distant relatives or as distantly related, rather than being unrelated.

As I’ve already pointed out on multiple occasions so far, M. Anastasova’s research output is rather impressive due to her observations and conclusions based on in-depth familiarity with the material and careful perceptive analyses resulting from impeccable linguistic intuitions, for instance in acknowledging the ‘pseudo-transitivity’ of *have* and its wide-ranging implications. There is only the occasional slip-up, and I have already listed some of those above. Here I should like to further zoom in on some erroneous language readings which (albeit not detrimental to the author’s main argument) ought to be put right, including the translation on p. 150 of the thesis: *Ic hæbbe gebunden ðone feond þe hi drehte* has been translated as follows: ‘I have bound the enemy that they tortured/tormented’ ÆCHom I 458.18. Since neither the relative particle *þe* nor the personal pronoun *hi* distinguishes nominative from accusative case in this syntactic environment, it is the verb’s singular form that tells us that the correct translation is in fact ‘that tortured/tormented them’.

In the first example on p. 197, the pronoun *bē* receives a wrong translation as ‘which’, while it should actually be ‘[for] thee/you’. The translations of *bæt* in the last example on the same page are likewise inaccurate.

The Old English pronoun *hig* in the example on p. 199 is plural (rather than singular) – and so are the finite verb and the participle which agree with it.

6. Assessment of the candidate’s publications and track record

The candidate has submitted a sufficient number of publications on the topic of her dissertation. Before I proceed to briefly discuss the synopsis in the next section, I would first like to highlight some of her major contributions and achievements.

It is eminently suitable to adduce parallel examples from the Old Church Slavonic and West Saxon Gospels – this shines the spotlight on the relevant constructions and throws the similarities and differences between them into sharp relief. It would moreover be advisable to consolidate the data, calculating the percentages of occurrence of the various constructions in the author’s database. The dissertation can only benefit from a statistic investigation of the gospel data – this would doubtless highlight similarities and differences between the two languages, as well as the most significant trends. A neat summary of the empirical data with accompanying tables, numerical values and percentages, would be a better illustration supporting the theoretical discussion. Without statistics, the author’s observations remain somewhat impressionistic.

The additional comparison to the Latin and Greek versions makes the text even more convincing, demonstrating the author’s solid background and her ability to work with the major ancient and mediaeval languages of Europe. More generally, comparing two (or more) languages, synchronically and/or diachronically, is bound to improve our understanding of both of them, so the comparative and contrastive approach adopted by the candidate offers considerable advantages, as opposed to what we would get by merely looking at each individual language in isolation. This enables the candidate to overcome some limitations arising from looking at Old Bulgarian only in its Balkan context, for instance, which is an undeniable contribution. As a whole, M. Anastasova’s dissertation and publication track record make a tangible contribution to Bulgarian scholarship on (Old) English and (Old) Bulgarian. M. Anastasova thus stakes a good claim to taking centre stage in this field in Bulgaria.

7. Synopsis

The synopsis reflects the content of the dissertation faithfully and accurately. Although it offers a succinct and informative review of the literature, it could have underscored the author's own contributions to the debate a little more conspicuously. The author should also reconsider the English translations of some of the terms, as her current choices are often unfortunate and misleading. For instance, it would be good to rethink the inappropriate use of *index* instead of *suffix/exponent/marker*, or the use of *determines* instead of *modifies*. In order to make the English summary of her work usable by English speakers who are not familiar with Bulgarian (or the ancient and mediaeval languages discussed), the author might want to add glosses and translations of her examples.

8. Suggestions for ways of using the dissertation material in future work

I would suggest that the candidate should present her research both in Bulgaria and at international conferences and linguistic outlets, so that her ideas can reach a wider audience. I have already had the honour of attending a talk she gave at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, which I found enjoyable and informative; I have furthermore benefited from and cited her results in my own work, so I believe that other researchers can likewise make use of her insights.

CONCLUSION

Based on all of the above, it is my firm belief that the dissertation submitted by the candidate contains *tangible academic contributions and achievements*, in line with the requirements prescribed by the Development of Academic Staff in Bulgaria Act. The dissertation amply demonstrates that the candidate has gained in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in her field, confirming that she can conduct independent research.

In view of the aforementioned facts, it is with deep conviction that I give a *positive assessment* of the candidate's research outcomes, and *I recommend that the board of examiners should admit Maria Anastasova to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 2.1. Philology; doctoral programme: Germanic languages: English.*

Date: 30 August 2022

Reviewer:

(Dr. Bozhil Hristov

Associate Professor of Linguistics)