

MILKA IVIĆ

Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts

## **On the Serbian Verb *Govoriti* and the Modifiers of its Lexical Semantics**

**Key words:** lexical semantics, Serbian language, verb *govoriti*, modifiers, principles of conceptualization.

This study is conceived as a contribution to innovative interpretations of Modern Standard Serbian language data which could help advancing the theoretical comprehension of our principles of conceptualization.

It is well known that a verbal present tense form may occur either (a) in episodic, or (b) in generic and habitual sentences. In case (a) *govoriti* is integrated into the category of verbs denoting the act of speech, whereas in case (b) it functions as an epistemic factive verb which means ‘to know’ (cf. *On govori poljski* = ‘he knows Polish’).

If the manipulative sense ‘order’ is being expressed, i.e. if the verb *govoriti* is being used in its imperative grammatical form (cf. *Govori srpski!* = ‘Speak Serbian!’), the epistemic semantic interpretation is excluded.

Also the future tense form exclusively implies the occurrence of the speech act phenomenon (cf. *Tom će prilikom svi govoriti srpski* = ‘on that occasion everybody will speak Serbian’). As to the past tense form, the situation is more complicated.

Namely, if the information *Govorila je nemački* = ‘she spoke German’ concerns a person who is still alive, everybody has in mind her speech act. But if this is not the case, things are different. If I say, for example, of my late grandmother

*Govorila je nemački* = ‘she spoke German’ this invariable means that she was somebody who knew German. In order to make possible the other interpretation I must add the information about the occasion on which she spoke German – cf. *Tom prilikom je moja pokojna baka govorila nemački* = ‘on that occasion my late grandmother spoke German’.

When somebody wants to utter some information about the speech act, he, in principle, has two options – either (a) to stress the production of speech rather than on communication, or (b) to acknowledge that what counts is the product of speech rather than the action itself. Case (b) is signaled by the use of the preposition *na* with the lexical item which means the language in question (cf. *Ona će o tome govoriti na engleskom* = ‘she is going to speak about it in English’), whereas the absence of *na* functions as the appropriate grammatical marker of case (a) (cf. *Ona će sa njima govoriti engleski* = ‘she is going to speak English with them’).

The main conclusion to be reached from the forgoing is that grammatical features may function as regulating devices of lexical semantics. This relevant fact needs to be in an appropriate way incorporated into current theories of linguistic and cognitive representation.

### **O serbskim czasowniku *govoriti* i modyfikatorach jego semantyki**

#### **(streszczenie)**

Przedmiotem artykułu jest interpretacja elementów gramatycznych jako modyfikatorów semantyki słowa.

Kiedy chcemy przekazać informacje o akcie mowy, mamy w zasadzie dwie możliwości: (a) położyć nacisk bardziej na samej czynności mówienia niż na procesie komunikacji; (b) uznać, że istotniejszy od samej czynności jest jej skutek. Sytuacja (b) jest sygnalizowana przez użycie przyimka *na* z leksemem oznaczającym dany język (np. *Ona će o tome govoriti na engleskom* = Ona będzie o tym mówić po angielsku), brak przyimka *na* jest natomiast gramatycznym wskaźnikiem sytuacji (a) (np. *Ona će sa njima govoriti engleski* = Ona będzie z nimi rozmawiać po angielsku).

Konkluzja jest taka, że elementy gramatyczne mogą pełnić rolę regulatorów semantyki słowa. Ten ważny fakt powinien zostać we właściwy sposób uwzględniony przez współczesne teorie językoznawcze.