

The Language Economy Principle in Albanian Syntax



Linguistics

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Abstract

The language economy principle and its appearance in communication, constantly had been present in Albanian and had been the focus of some previous works, where especially we aimed to show the economy principle in lexicon, above all its appearance in the category of abbreviations, acronyms and shortenings, as a typical expression of the economy principle. But, as a principle, that affects and influences language, the principle of linguistic economy actually is present at all levels or language fields, somewhere more and somewhere less. The purpose of this paper is to see how this principle has affected the syntax. The economy principle is not a new phenomenon in this field, if we consider elliptical sentences, that are a typical example of the economy principle in syntax. Based on the theory of Andre Martinet, the language economy principle aims at least effort, for a particular purpose. On the other hand, this principle should not prejudice the communication itself. From the syntactic view, a formal communication would be ideal, at least with two primary elements: subject and predicate. As we know, in the Albanian language we can find different clauses without subject or without predicate. We can find in Albanian language such incomplete sentences which can be considered a manifestation of principle of linguistic economy and as we shall see throughout this paper, this principle is often crucial for the creation of this incomplete units. The means of syntax in some cases suffer of shrinkage that is directly related to pure economy principle as a dominant factor, on their creation. But, the economy principle is not the only reason on the existence of the elliptical clause, but in some cases it is primary. At the end of this paper, we will aim to see the impact that this principle has in the syntax system and to the language itself.

Introduction

We are living today in a globalized society which increasingly is moving towards rapprochement and generalization. The borders between countries are mostly fused, the people are always traveling and are looking to economize the costs. It seems the language has no exception on this trend, which is influenced by the rapid development of technology, that currently has created endless spaces of communication through different virtual tools. The language reflects these phenomenon and it reflects human behavior at the same time, displaying its changes, in accordance with the principles of its development, but also in accordance with other factors which affect it. These developments, which affect language in different ways are bringing its enrichment with new words, new expressions and new tools, but also are bringing the changes and transformations that affect the language on two ways, negative or positive.

On the other hand in this society, that order to gain time and incomes, it seems that the trend for the economy is present in every area of life. The language is no exception to this trend for the economy, marking it as a visible display of social and cultural developments reflected in the language, as a part of its principles.

In fact the reasons aforementioned are not the only ones to determine the existence and the need for economy, but on the other hand are dominant on the fact that this phenomenon at least in lexical terms, but not only, appears in different languages in the same forms.

The language economy seems like a trend of modern linguistics, influenced by globalization and other factors, but the studies on the impact of this principle had been early and are treated by different researchers in different times. The purpose of this paper is to see how the principle of economy is present in the Albanian language, how does it affect the language and especially the syntax influencing the language development.

The Language Economy Principle

The language economy principle, is currently an accepted and present term on the linguistic science. What does it mean? Economy. In the “Albanian Today's Vocabulary, 1984” (Fjalori i Shqipësisë së sotme) one of the meanings for the word economy is: to be careful on spending; saving, e.g. to use something with economy. Another meaning of this word in the dictionary is: to give the possibility to save, not spending.³² The word economy, from this point of view, is directly giving the principle of saving or keeping something. The similar meaning of this term is given to the “Oxford's Students Dictionary”, 1988. The word economy is explained as a system of control or management of the money, material goods, or other resources on a community or a house³³.

The word economy has a similar meaning on the “Nouveau Larousse”, that on its first explanation, defines it as equivalent of the verb “to earn” or as antonym of the verb “to lose”³⁴. Based on this first meaning, related to management and saving, the term has been used in other areas of social or linguistic character. André Martinet is undoubtedly well-known as the founder and developer on the concept of economy in linguistics, based on the principle of less effort. According to Martinet, “language development can be conceived and directed by the permanent contradiction between human communication needs and of his tendency to reduce in minimum mental and physical action”³⁵. But, it is very important that this reducing of mental effort, must not affect the communication, which is the principal and the most important goal on this activity.

Although Martinet is the most important linguist that developed the economy principle theory, it seems that other scientists before him have said and written on this principle, not only in language areas, but also in other disciplines. In her study about “La contribution russe à l'élaboration du principe d' 'économie de l'effort' en linguistique”, Elena Simonato-Kokochkina, from the University of Lausanne notes the principle of economy as a saving energy principle, not only in linguistics, but also in biology, psychology in philosophy likewise in other areas³⁶.

This fact is important to believe, that the principle of energy saving has accompanied human beings in every area of life and in every action. One of them is linguistics.

It seems that Martinet in the development and the fulfillment of his theory on the concept of linguistic economy, had a forerunner. And he is George Kingsley Zipf. On the Zipf's theory the principle of economy plays an important and balancing role: any change not economically feasible, that brings a cost increased of the terms used and efforts made, by creating a barrier in communication, automatically will be avoided or will be removed.³⁷

On his papers and books, Zipf treated the communication as a natural phenomenon, and he underlined that economy is a regulative criterion on every field of human behavior, that is led by the principle of least effort. This principle is present in language and communication field.³⁸ “So, the principle “of least effort” does

³² Fjalori i Shqipësisë së sotme, Tiranë, 1984, p. 256

³³ Oxford Student's Dictionary, Oxford 1988, p.201

³⁴ “Nouveau Larousse”, France 1977, p.259

³⁵ A. Martinet, *Elementë të gjuhësisë së përgjithshme*, Tiranë, 2002, p.149

³⁶ Elena Simonato-Kokochkina, *La contribution russe à l'élaboration du principe d' 'économie de l'effort' en linguistique*, Cahiers de l'ILSL, n° 29, 2011, p. 129-140

³⁷ George Kingsley Zipf, “Human Behavior and the Principle of Least Effort: An Introduction to Human Ecology”, Addison-Wesley Press, 1949, p.221

³⁸ George Kingsley Zipf, “Human Behavior and the Principle of Least Effort: An Introduction to Human Ecology”, Addison-Wesley Press, 1949, p.221

it mean that, when someone is in front of an immediate problem he has to solve, he will consider the possibility to create another problem. On the other side, he has to solve all his problems, choosing the way that will reduce his efforts for solving the existing problem and the other problem that probably can be created. That does it means, the person will try to reduce his average work during the time. Doing this, he will reduce his efforts. Least effort means, least work”.³⁹

The German philologist Friedrich Max Müller in 1864, had also raised his theories about the economy principle in language. "All the developments that are the result of phonetic alterations have a physiological explanation following the general principle of simplification, also known as the economy forcing principle or the principle of "least effort"⁴⁰. On this point of view, users are inclined to economize the resources and tools to achieve communication, being directed by the principle that Martinet names: the least effort for a particular purpose.

The Language Economy Principle on Syntax

According to Martinet the language economy is in a permanent demand to balance the conflicting needs that must be met; the needs to agreement, inertia to remember and inertia to spell, while these two last outlines are in a permanent conflict; the role of this factors is limited by different taboo that tend to reduce the language tools, avoiding every evident novelty.⁴¹

On “Elements of General Linguistics”, Martinet differentiate paradigmatic and syntagmatic economy. He makes us understand that the avoidance of this kind of novelties in language is a result of the tendency to economize. He said, that the syntagmatic economy means on other words to save energy on the articulation process, meanwhile the economy on the paradigmatic field, means to save energy on the units you need to remember. This theory was part of different other studies from other linguists while it was present on all the fields of language and communication.

We can find interesting and different cases of the language economy principle on the syntactic field, although this principle is combined with other principles of language development. In the center of the syntax, remain the clause and its organization, the role of the words in a sentence and the combination of the words with each others. As we know in the Albanian language there are a lot of possibilities to realize the combination of the word in clauses and sentences.

From this point of view, we will see different kind of syntax combinations and the reduction of the language tools, to realize communication. In the Albanian language, as in English too, the perfect communication on syntax would have full clauses, with subject and predicate. But there are a lot of cases, when one of these elements is missing and the meaning of the clause is clear or doesn't change. These are examples where we can see the expression of the economy principle in the syntax field and mostly these reduction of linguistic tools are clearly for economic aims, although sometimes other factors affect it, such as context, time, dialogue, etc. We are bringing here an example of the future tense in Albanian. The future tense is created, by *do të* + verb on the present. But mostly, in verbal communication, also in the spoken language, the future tense is created by *do*+ verb in the present time, meanwhile the conjunction *të*, is no more present, for e.g:

³⁹ George Kingsley Zipf, “Human Behavior and the Principle of Least Effort: An Introduction to Human Ecology”, Addison-Wesley Press, 1949, p.221

⁴⁰ Friedrich Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 1864, p. 222

⁴¹ A. Martinet, *Elementë të gjuhësisë së përgjithshme*, Tiranë, 2002, p.150

Nesër do zgjohem herët – Nesër do të zgjohem herët.
Do dalim - do të dalim, do punoj – do të punoj, do iki - do të iki, etc.

These type of economy we can find in the English on the forms of the future tense: I will- I'll, you will- You'll, etc. There are a lot of cases, when context is helping the economy principle, almost in the spoken language or communication, where we can find the absence of lexical tools. In Albanian, not only for economic purpose, but also for stylistic one, we can find elliptic clause, or the usage of a word instead of a clause, for e.g.

E takove?
Iku?
Erdhi?

The economy principle on these cases is an important factor that influence the position and the presence of these units on the language system. There are some cases, when we can find the presence of the economy principle in the syntax system, but the economy is not the reason of these syntax's form. We need to underline here the examples of the words used as a clause, especially for stylistic purpose, on the cases such as: Natë. (Night) Shi (Rain). Dimër. (Winter) Acar (Frost). Heshtje. (Silence) etc. As we can see, the principal reason of this syntactic forms is the stylistic purpose. We aim to underline the strength of the situation we are speaking or writing for, but also we can find the presence of economy principle realized by language tools. Starting from this point of view, we can find on syntax two cases that represent the economy principle:

1. When the economy principle is responsible for the change that affects the language on the syntax field.
2. When the economy principle is not responsible for the change, but it is part of them and it is present there.

We will see on this paper both these cases where, the economy principle is appeared and we will see the way this principle is combined with other language factors and development.

We can find these demonstrations on the example below: If someone is asking us: Kur do vish? (When will you come?) the answer is economic and simple: Nesër. (Tomorrow). We are not using a full clause: Unë do të vij nesër (I will come tomorrow), but we are using only the adverb nesër (tomorrow). The context is always helping on such conditions and it is not necessary to use the full clause, with the subject and predicate. We are using the short syntax form, we are saving time and energy, but without affecting the communication itself. Another interesting phenomenon is present on the verbs like vij or iki, (come or go), where we can find many times the usage of a short syntax form instead of another form. Usually when someone is asking us to go there, we are using the perfect tense erdha, instead of the present tense po vij, or instead of the present continuous tense jam duke ardhur. These phenomenon is intensifying the meaning given by the verb, but at the same time is marking the presence of the language economy principle, because we are using only one unit (erdha) for 2 or three units, (po vij, jam duke ardhur).

In another example, when someone is asking or ordering us to go somewhere, to finish a job we are not using the present tense *po iki* or the future tense *do të nisem* but we are using the past tense *ika*. As we can understand on this example using the past tense is making our action more intense and we are telling to our interlocutor that the command or the demand he asked is accomplished just on this moment, although it is not yet. But on the other side, using these forms we can see the traces of the economy principle on the usage of a unit instead of 2 or 3 of them.

On these paper we will find other cases when economy principle on syntax is related to other linguistic circumstances. Although the economy principle may be not determinative on the choise the speaker is doing on communication, it is present and clearly visible.

There is another verb that has begun to be used by Albanians in a new short form. The Albanian speakers are using the verb *dakordoj* may be influenced by English form, agree or may influenced by the phraseology . Before we have used this verb with the auxiliary verb *jam (be) jam dakord* or with the other verb *bie, for e.x, bie dakord*. On this case we have choosed to use one unit, *dakordoj* instead of 2 units, *bie dakord* or *jam dakord*. The economy principle is combined with the principle of word formation according to an external model, but with the tools of the Albanian language.

In the Albanian language, especially for stylistic purposes, but not only for this reason, there are some cases, where we can find absence of the parts in a clause or sentence. They are called elliptical sentences. Prof. Xhevat Lloshi, “Stilistika dhe pragmatika” has considered it as a frequent pragmatic phenomenon, realized by the fall of a part of the sentence during the communication.⁴² There are e lot of cases in Albanian, especially on the spoken language, but also on the written language too. “The phonetic phenomenons are combined with the shortenings that affect the words and the group of words”, is writting Lloshi.⁴³ He gaves us some examples, on wich if we are trying to see the economy principle, we can understand better the reason of their short forms:

- In the spoken language, usually we are saying only the last two numbers when we are talking about the years and in some cases there is present the phenomenon of the fall of the phonemes: *në shtajtetegjashtën, i dystenjëshit*, etc.
- The measures are also used on their short formes: *centim, kile*, etc, for centimeter, kilograme.
- We can find also interesting short syntax forms on the grop of words or sentences, like this: *Erdha me kombinatin* (I came with the combine, but we mean the combine bus line); *S’e kam mësuar kiminë* (I haven’t learned chemistry, but we mean the book of the chemistry); *Fitoi Tirana* (Tirana won, but we mean the football team of Tirana won the match”).

In the spoken language the absence on some parts in the clause is especially related to economic purpose, meanwhile in the written language and above all on literature this phenomenon is more present beacuse of the stylistic purposes.

From this stylistic point of view, Prof. Xhevat Lloshi is saying that on the communication we can find a lot of “elliptic clauses, unfinished or incompletes. We can avoid adjectives, objects, adverbs⁴⁴. F.e.g., we say in Albanian: *Pagova dritat*, (I paid the electricity) but we mean that we have paid the bill of the electricity consumption. Although we are not using the word bill, it is understood, because it is related on the context, on the circumstances or it is part of the speaker’s knowledge about this kind of payment.

We have a similiar example on the phrase: *Gruaja po lante* (the woman was washing). On this phrase we can understand that the woman was washing the clothes and there is no Albanian people, who doesn’t understand this meaning, although the word clothes, it is not present. Giving these examples, we can understand the importance of economy principle to choose using one short form instead of an extended form, but without

⁴² Xhevat Lloshi, “Stilistika dhe pragmatika”, Tirane 1999, p .81

⁴³ Xhevat Lloshi, “Stilistika dhe Pragmatika”, Tiranë, p. 163

⁴⁴ Xhevat Lloshi, Stilistika dhe Pragmatika, p.64

forgetting the importance of other factors such as emotionality. “The most a phrase is affective, the more it aims to be in a synthetic and lexical form”.⁴⁵

Professor Lloshi, is bringing an illustration from Ismail Kadare:

*Dikush i kishte rrëmbyer një pullë poste të Belgjikës, m'u përpara portës së shtëpisë kishte ulëritur:
Mama dil se më morën Belgjikën, mama, më iku Belgjika, mama Belgjika!*⁴⁶

(Someone had stolen one his postage stamp of Belgium, before the door of his house and he had screamed: Mother, help me, they stole my Belgium, mother my Belgium is gone, mother Belgium.)

Mama Belgjika, (mother Belgium) is the final form of a short phrase represented in a difficult and tense situation, according to Prof. Lloshi. In this example, the speaker, not only because of the emotional charge, but also to be fast on the information he want to share, is extremely reducing the energy and the time spent for this operation.

On the other hand, this reduction of linguistic effort, is sometimes associated with some difficulties on the communication. There is not a logical fluency, the dialog tend to be recidivist or quicker. This is what Prof. Lloshi consider another kind of structuring as a result of two different tendencies, related to complication and simplifying.

In the example we brought, the boy aims to inform immediately his mother about the stolen postage stamp, giving us the structure of a phrase, that out of this context would be meaningless: mama Belgjika, (mother Belgium), a phrase in which we can see the reduction of linguistic tools, on a form subject-object.

In a pragmatic point of view, Prof. Xhevat Lloshi, tend to bring the idea that while they are speaking, peoples are stressing some points on their lecture. They are not thinking on long and full clauses or sentences, but they are concentrated to tell first the most important part of their idea. This phenomenon is similar in different languages, not only to Albanian.

English has also a synthetic character, not only in the lexical point of view, but also in the syntax. Sometimes the words are used instead of phrases and phrases are used instead of clauses, as in the examples: Our central teaching building is facing toward the sea. On the other side the noun phrases are used to express the meaning of clauses.

I saw the teacher's arrival.

I saw that the teacher arrived.

Conclusions

On this paper we aim to present the existence of the economy principle in Albanian syntax. We have had the opportunity to submit in some previous papers the presence and the influence of the economy principle in lexicon, but we have seen on this paper that the economy principle in syntax display some different characteristics.

The economy principle affect the order of the words in a clause or in a sentence, but this principle its not always responsible for the change on the syntax order. On the other side, although this principle is not

⁴⁵ Xhevat Lloshi, *Stilistika dhe Pragmatika*, p.64

⁴⁶ Xhevat Lloshi, *Stilistika dhe Pragmatika*, p.64

directly responsible it is present on different forms of clauses, combined with other principles of language development. We have seen through the examples the cases of the incomplete clauses, without subject, without predicate, or without objects or adverbs. They are demonstrations of economy principle.

We have seen that the Albanian syntax is influenced by the models of other languages, although less than lexicon. At the end, we can admit that the trend to economize is organic on the human character, but when we are talking about linguistics the most important element remains the communication.

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