

A Contrastive Outline of English and Bulgarian Subordinate Alternative Interrogative Sentences

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Abstract: The article outlines the main similarities and differences between English and Bulgarian subordinate alternative interrogative sentences. These are subordinate sentences consisting of two interrogative clauses joined by means of such correlative subordinators as “whether – or” and “if – or” in English, and “dali – ili” and “li – ili” in Bulgarian. They offer a choice between two alternatives which are usually mutually exclusive. The aspects of investigation are the form of these subordinate sentences, their word order, functions (on both main-clause and phrase level), and uses.

Key words: subordinate alternative interrogatives, correlative subordinators, “whether – or”, “if – or”, “dali – ili”, “li – ili”, “da li – ili da”, “dali da – ili da”.

INTRODUCTION

This article describes in outline the basic similarities and differences between English and Bulgarian subordinate alternative interrogative sentences. The term **subordinate alternative interrogative sentence** is used to denote a combination of two interrogative clauses joined with the help of correlative subordinators like *whether - or* and *if - or* in English, and *dali - ili* and *li - ili* in Bulgarian. The sentence is called **alternative** because it offers a choice between two alternatives which are usually mutually exclusive. They are expressed by the clauses joined by means of the above-mentioned correlatives.

In this paper the emphasis is on the form of English and Bulgarian subordinate alternative interrogative sentences, their word order, functions (on both main-clause and phrase level), and uses. In the article I use the terms **subordinate alternative interrogatives** and **subordinate alternative interrogative sentences** interchangeably.

A CONTRASTIVE OUTLINE OF ENGLISH AND BULGARIAN SUBORDINATE ALTERNATIVE INTERROGATIVE SENTENCES

1. Form of subordinate alternative interrogatives

1.1. Subordinators

English subordinate alternative interrogatives are formed with the help of the correlative subordinators **whether - or** (*whether*) and **if - or** [9:1053]. In all examples below subordinate alternative interrogative sentences are underlined:

(1) He couldn't tell if she was laughing or crying. [4]

(2) I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. [4]

Bulgarian subordinate alternative interrogatives are most often formed by means of the correlative pairs **dali - ili** and **li - ili** which roughly correspond to the English correlatives **whether - or** and **if - or**. However, in Bulgarian, other correlatives are also common, especially in interrogatives functioning as direct objects in main clauses. Among them are **li - li**, **dali - dali**, **da ... li - ili da**, **da ... li - da ... li**, **dali da - ili da** [5:329]:

(3) Toj ja popita dali šte se pribira vkašti sled rabota, ili šte otide na kafe s prijatelki.

He her-PERS PRON ACC asked whether will REFL go-3P SG home after work or will go-3P SG to café with friends-FEM.

He asked her whether she was going home after work or she was going to a café with friends.

(4) Tja se čudeše dali da izčaka bankata da otvori, ili da se vārme po-kāsno.

She REFL wonder-PAST PROG whether to wait-3P SG bank-DEF to open-3P SG or to REFL come-3P SG back later.

She was wondering whether to wait for the bank to open or to come back later.

Unlike their English counterparts which function only as subordinators, the above-mentioned Bulgarian correlative pairs are used both as coordinators and as subordinators.

(As coordinators they join two interrogative clauses to form an independent alternative interrogative sentence.) In subordinate alternative interrogative sentences they perform a dual function – on the one hand, they mark the subordinate status of the sentences, on the other, they denote the relationship of coordination between the constituent clauses [5:343].

1.2. Finite and non-finite subordinate alternative interrogatives

English subordinate alternative interrogative sentences can be made up of two **finite** or two **non-finite clauses**. Hence, we can talk about **finite** and **non-finite subordinate alternative interrogative sentences**.

Finite subordinate alternative interrogatives are formed with the correlatives **whether or (whether)** and **if or** [9:1053]:

(5) *I asked him **whether he had done it all himself or someone had helped him**.* [4]

(6) *I didn't know **if it was false alarm or they got my name confused**.* [2]

Non-finite subordinate alternative interrogatives belong to the so-called **to-infinitive type**. They are formed with the correlative pair **whether or** [9:1054]:

(7) *I wasn't sure **whether to laugh or to reciprocate with a remark of my own**.* [4]

Bulgarian subordinate alternative interrogatives are only **finite** as modern Bulgarian lacks infinitive, unlike modern English. However, interrogative clauses containing *li*, *dali* and *ili* can have the form of the so-called **da – construction** which consists of *da* plus a finite verb form. In fact, **da** is treated as part of the correlative pairs **da li – ili da, da li – da li, dali da – ili da**:

(8) *Toj ne možeše da reši **dali da í kaže istinata, ili da si zamálči**.*

He not can-PAST PROG to decide-3P SG whether to her-PERS PRON DAT tell-3P SG truth-DEF or to REFL remain-3P SG silent.

*He couldn't decide **whether to tell her the truth or to remain silent**.*

1.3. Word order in finite subordinate alternative interrogatives

Unlike their independent counterparts, English finite subordinate alternative interrogatives are characterized by the **basic subject – predicator word order**, i.e. there is no subject – operator or subject – predicator inversion.

(9) Independent interrogative: ***Did it really happen or did I just dream it?*** [4]

(10) Subordinate interrogative: *Tell me **if it really happened or I just dreamt it**.*

Bulgarian subordinate interrogative clauses with *dali* and *li* are identical in word order to their independent counterparts. The same holds true for clauses introduced by *ili* (or).

(11) Independent alternative interrogative:

*Na kino **li šte otidem тази вечер, ili šte si ostanem vkášti?***

To cinema li will go-1P PL this evening or will REFL stay-1P PL at home?

Are we going to the cinema tonight or are we staying in?

(12) Subordinate alternative interrogative:

*Iskam da znam **na kino li šte otidem тази вечер, ili šte si ostanem vkášti**.*

Want-PRES 1P SG to know-1P SG to cinema li will go-1P PL this evening or will REFL stay-1P PL at home.

*I want to know **if we are going to the cinema tonight or we are staying in**.*

According to Hauge [6:236], a subordinate “clause with *dali* may always be used instead of a subordinate clause with *li* “. However, there occur some changes in the word order. Whereas *li* follows the constituent which is the focus of interrogation (in ex. 12 *li* follows *na kino* - to the cinema), *dali* always takes initial position in the subordinate clause.

The subordinate interrogative in ex. 13 below is a variant of that in ex. 12 above:

(13) *Iskam da znam **dali šte otidem na kino тази вечер, ili šte si ostanem vkášti**.*

Want-PRES 1P SG to know-1P SG whether will go-1P PL to cinema this evening or will REFL stay-1P PL at home.

*I want to know **whether we are going to the cinema tonight or we are staying in**.*

2. Functions of subordinate alternative interrogatives

English and Bulgarian subordinate alternative interrogatives have special functions to perform on both main-clause and phrase level.

Within main clauses English subordinate alternative interrogatives function as subjects (including extraposed subjects), direct objects, subject complements, and adjuncts. Their Bulgarian counterparts can be subjects (including extraposed subjects) and direct objects, but they can function neither as subject complements nor as adjuncts.

On phrase level English subordinate alternative interrogatives can be post-modifiers in noun phrases and complements in prepositional and adjective phrases. The functions of post-modifier in a noun phrase and complement in an adjective phrase are characteristic of Bulgarian interrogatives as well. However, these interrogatives cannot be complements in prepositional phrases.

2.1. Functions of subordinate alternative interrogatives on main-clause level

English subordinate alternative interrogatives formed with the correlative pair *whether* - *or* can perform all of the above-mentioned functions on main-clause-level. Unlike them, those formed with *if* - *or* can be only extraposed subjects and direct objects. This is due to the fact that "*if*" is more restricted syntactically than *whether*" [9:1054].

(14) Subject: Whether he stays or goes is immaterial to me.

(15) Extraposed subject: It is immaterial to me whether he stays or goes. [4]
It is irrelevant if she is married or not.

(16) Direct object: These factors have only a limited relationship with the reader's age but will largely determine whether a young reader 'sticks with' or abandons the reading. [2]

I can't remember if I have read this book or not.

(17) Subject complement: The question is whether you really want this job or not.

(18) Adjunct: I love milk, whether it's cold or hot.

Within main clauses Bulgarian subordinate alternative interrogatives can be subjects (including extraposed subjects) and direct objects:

(19) Subject: Dali si štastliv ili ne, e važno za men.

Whether are-2P SG happy- MASC SG or not, is important for me.

Whether you are happy or not is important to me.

(20) Extraposed subject: Za men e vazno dali si štastliv ili ne.

For me is important whether are-2P SG happy-MASC SG or not.

It is important to me whether you are happy or not.

(21) Direct object: Čudja se dali tja naistina mi se sardi, ili samo se prestruva.

Wonder-PRES 1P SG REFL whether she really me-PERS PRON DAT REFL be-angry-PRES 3P SG or only REFL pretend-PRES 3P SG (to be).

I wonder whether she is really angry with me or she only pretends to be.

According to Bärkalova [3:150], subordinate interrogatives cannot function as subject complements. Both Bärkalova [3:150] and Penčev [8:117] analyse interrogatives like the one below as subjects:

(22) Văprosăt e dali te šte otidat da rabotjat v čužbina.

Question-DEF is whether they will go-3P PL to work-3P PL abroad.

The question is whether they will go to work abroad.

Hence, subordinate alternative interrogatives cannot be subject complements either. Subordinate alternative interrogatives like the one below will therefore function as subjects in the main clause:

(23) Văprosăt e dali te šte otidat da rabotjat v čužbina, ili šte si ostanat tuk.

Question-DEF is whether they will go-3P PL to work-3P PL abroad or will REFL stay-3P PL here.

The question is whether they will go to work abroad or they will stay here.

My observations on Bulgarian subordinate alternative interrogatives up to now show that they cannot function as adjuncts.

2.2. Functions of subordinate alternative interrogatives on phrase level

English subordinate alternative interrogatives formed with *whether* - *or* can be post-modifiers in noun phrases and complements in adjective and prepositional phrases. Unlike them, those formed with *if* - *or* can function only as complements in adjective phrases. In the examples below the governing noun, adjective and preposition are in bold type, the NP, AdjP and PP are in square brackets, and the subordinate alternative interrogative is underlined:

(24) Post-modifier in an NP: *The right notation simplifies [the **problem** whether the cube has already been jumbled or has been carefully preserved] ...* [2]

(25) Complement in an AdjP: *He seemed [**undecided** whether to go or stay].* [4]
*It had black sheets on it, and George was not [**sure** if that was their original colour or just the result of years of use].* [2]

The subordinate alternative interrogatives in ex. 25, however, can also be analysed as objects to the compound nominal predicators "seemed undecided" and "was not sure".

(26) Complement in a PP: *Would it be fair to say that you accepted his decision when you thought it was the right decision, [**regardless of** whether he may have been depressed or he may have been under the influence of drugs or some other pressure]?* [2]

Bulgarian subordinate alternative interrogatives can function only as post-modifiers in the structure of noun phrases and as complements in the structure of adjective phrases.

(27) Post-modifier in an NP: *Drug e [**văprosăt** dali ti vjarvam ili ne].*

Other is question-DEF whether you-PERS PRON DAT believe-PRES 1P SG or not.

*It's [a different **matter** whether I believe you or not].*

(28) Complement in an AdjP: *Tja beše [**ljubopitna** dali toj nai-nakraja si e vzel izpita po matematika ili se e provalil za treti poreden път].*

She was curious whether he finally REFL is taken-PAST PART exam-DEF in Maths or REFL is failed-PAST PART for third consecutive time.

*She was [**curious as to** whether he had finally passed his Maths exam or had failed for the third time in a row].*

The subordinate alternative interrogative in ex. 28 is traditionally analysed as an object sentence to the compound nominal predicator "beše ljubopitna".

Bulgarian subordinate interrogatives cannot be governed directly by a preposition [6:236], i.e. they cannot function as complements in prepositional phrases. Hence, subordinate alternative interrogatives cannot be complements in PPs either. The following sentence is ungrammatical:

(29) **[**Nezavisimo ot** dali ti haresva ili ne], az zaminavam.*

Regardless of whether you-PERS PRON DAT like-PRES 2P SG or not, I leave-PRES 1P SG.

*[**Regardless of** whether you like it or not], I am leaving.*

3. Uses of subordinate alternative interrogatives

Whereas independent alternative interrogative sentences are typically used **to ask direct alternative questions**, their subordinate counterparts are primarily used **to express indirect alternative questions**. Both English and Bulgarian subordinate alternative interrogatives are most often used **to report direct alternative questions**:

(30) Direct alternative question: *Do you want full board or half board?*

(31) Indirect (or reported) alternative question: *He asked them whether they wanted full board or half board.*

(32) Direct alternative question: *Šte kupuvame li sok, ili ne?*

Will buy-1P PL li juice or not?

Are we going to buy any juice or not?

(33) Indirect (or reported) alternative question: *Popitah te dali šte kupuvame sok ili ne.*

Asked-1P SG you-PERS PRON ACC 2P SG whether will buy-1P PL juice or not.

I asked you whether we were going to buy some juice or not.

CONCLUSIONS

The outline of English and Bulgarian subordinate alternative interrogative sentences revealed the following similarities and differences in their form, functions and uses:

- a) English and Bulgarian subordinate alternative interrogative sentences consist of two interrogative clauses joined by means of correlative subordinators. In English, only two correlative pairs are used, namely *whether – or* and *if – or*. In Bulgarian, however, there are a greater number of correlative subordinators: *dali – ili, li – ili, li – li, dali – dali, da li – ili da, da li – da li, dali da – ili da*.
- b) English subordinate alternative interrogatives can be both finite and non-finite (of the so-called *to*-infinitive type). Bulgarian subordinate alternative interrogatives can be only finite. This is due to the fact that there is no infinitive in modern Bulgarian.
- c) Unlike their independent counterparts, English finite subordinate alternative interrogatives are characterized by the basic subject – predicator word order. Bulgarian subordinate interrogatives are identical in word order to their independent counterparts.
- d) English and Bulgarian subordinate alternative interrogatives perform special functions in the structure of both main clauses and phrases. Within main clauses English subordinate alternative interrogatives can be subjects (including extraposed subjects), direct objects, subject complements, and adjuncts. Their Bulgarian counterparts can be only subjects (including extraposed subjects) and direct objects. On phrase level English subordinate alternative interrogatives can be post-modifiers in NPs and complements in AdjPs and PPs. Their Bulgarian counterparts, however, cannot be complements in PPs.
- e) The typical use of both English and Bulgarian subordinate alternative interrogatives is to express indirect alternative questions. Most often these interrogatives report direct alternative questions.

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The paper is reviewed.