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The Questions of a Bulgarian Indefinite Article

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The question of the existence of an indefinite article in Bulgarian is discussed by many linguists, and the answers proposed are contradictory. This paper will present the varying opinions expressed on this topic and will attempt to indicate some approaches toward a solution. The first step in such a presentation should be a definition of the term *indefinite article*. The problem of the meaning of this term for Bulgarian, however, is not treated by many scholars, who discuss only the question of its application to the Bulgarian word *edin* 'one.'¹ Because these discussions usually deal to some extent with the relation of *edin* to the indefinite articles of West European languages, it may be useful to examine one of these languages.

The English indefinite article is historically a weakened form of *one*. It is a purely grammatical marker, without lexical meaning, using referentially to denote a single specified but undefined member of a set ("some," "a certain") and nonreferentially to denote an unspecified, undefined entity ("any," or not equivalent to any lexical item).² As a part of speech it is defined as an adjective or pronoun; it does not occur in the plural. The differences between the English indefinite article and those of the other principal West European languages need not be enumerated. Further elaboration of the concept will be presented with the arguments.

Three terms applicable to the Bulgarian noun are essential to this paper: The definite form of the noun is that form which occurs with the definite article; the general form is that which occurs without the definite article; the indefinite form is the general form preceded by the indefinite article *edin*.

The answers relating to the question of the existence of an indefinite article in Bulgarian may be affirmative or negative, substantiated or not. Positive arguments with justifications may be further subdivided into those in which the indefinite article is viewed as always facultative and those in which it is sometimes obligatory. Those scholars tacitly denying the existence of an indefinite article in Bulgarian by failing to mention any such function of *edin* are Stojan Stojanov and Nikola Kostov.³ Ljubomir Andrejcin, P. S. Kalandziev, and Stefan Breziński proscribe the use of *edin* as an indefinite article, while

Svetomir Ivančev and Vera Borodič consider such usage to be required under some conditions. Jurij Maslov and L. P. Ivanovskaja also support the indefinite article, but only as facultative, while Léon Beaulieux, Stefan Mladenov, and Najden Gerov affirm the existence of an indefinite article without giving details regarding its use. Aleksandŭr Teodorov-Balan also seems to favor a positive answer to this question, but he is not altogether clear on this point. The negative opinions will be considered first.

Both Stojanov (p. 290) in his grammar and Kostov (p. 314) in his dictionary state that *edin* can be used as an indefinite pronoun, but neither makes any reference to its possible use as an indefinite article. Both equate the indefinite use of *edin* with that of *njako(-si)* 'some, a certain, someone' or *njakakŭv* 'some, a certain, some kind of,' as in the following sentence from Kostov: *Svinjata vlezna v edna gradina, / da porazgleda uz cvetjata* 'The pig went into a garden to examine the flowers.' Since neither of these scholars mentions the question of an indefinite article, it appears that, in their opinion, such an article does not exist in Bulgarian.

Andrejčin, Kalandžiev, and Brezinski all state that there is no indefinite article in Bulgarian, and then give examples of "incorrect" uses of *edin* in this function. Andrejčin (1942:141, 1961:181) argues that the use of *edin* as an indefinite article is due to West European influence, and it should be avoided since it destroys "conciseness of speech." Kalandžiev offers the same arguments, and adds that the absence of an indefinite article in Bulgarian is due to the fact that this form is not sufficiently widespread in the other Balkan languages to bring about a similar development in Bulgarian. Brezinski (49-52) restates Andrejčin's arguments and goes on to assert that the absence of the definite article after the noun suffices to distinguish the grammatical category of indefiniteness from that of definiteness. One of the examples which Brezinski gives to illustrate the stylistic inappropriateness of an indefinite article is the following sentence from *Pod igoto* (Under the Yoke) by Ivan Vazov: *Ognjanov se be prevŭrnal na edna statua* 'Ognjanov had been turned into a statue.' Brezinski (p. 52) points out that in the second edition of *Pod igoto* this *edna* was omitted. Andrejčin's examples are essentially of the same type as Brezinski's.

It is already apparent, after considering only the negative arguments, that at least part of the answer to the question of the Bulgarian indefinite article should be sought in the distinction between descriptive and normative grammar. Brezinski's and Andrejčin's examples of incorrect (in their view) uses of *edin* suggest that while theoretically a Bulgarian indefinite article may not exist, the actual use of *edin* in this capacity is widespread. It is interesting to note that most of the examples of proscribed uses of *edin* involve its nonreferential function; e.g., the *edna* with *statua* clearly has no lexical meaning and does not refer to a specific statue into which Ognjanov was transformed, whereas the *edna* with *gradina* could be replaced by *njakoja* and does refer to a specific garden which the pig entered. More will be said on the question of foreign influence below, but it should be noted at this point that, in contradistinction to Kalandžiev's statement that indefinite articles are not widespread in the Balkans, Albanian, Greek, Rumanian, and Turkish all possess indefinite articles which, in at least some of their written forms, are isomorphic with the words for "one."

According to Teodorov-Balan (88-89), *edin* has two meanings, numerical and indefinite. These two meanings are differentiated by intonation, intensity of

stress, and the fact that in its indefinite use *edin* has the plural form *edni*. Teodorov-Balan writes, "*Edin* . . . in an indefinite meaning is regarded as an indefinite article in other languages: French *un*, German *ein*." He does not, however, indicate precisely what part of speech he considers this *edin* to be in Bulgarian. Unfortunately, his examples are not helpful because they only involve *edin* conjoined with a substantive, e.g., *edin lev* 'one lion,' *edin car* 'a king.'

Beaulieux (93-94) explicitly states that the indefinite pronoun *edin* can be used as an indefinite article, but his examples are of the same sort as Teodorov-Balan's, so there is no indication of the difference between the indefinite pronoun and the indefinite article, nor of the usage of the indefinite article. Mladenov (1939:261) writes in his grammar that the numeral *edin* has the meaning of an indefinite article. In the dictionary he edited (1942:642), the definition given in paragraph four of the entry under *edin* declares that it has developed "the meaning *njakoj*, *njakoj-si*, i.e., an indefinite article." Thus in its function as an indefinite article, *edin* has a plural form *edni* (= *njakoi*), while as a number *edin* does not and cannot have a plural.

In his grammar, Mladenov (1939:261) criticizes the "indiscriminate" use of *edin* as an indefinite article by many educated Bulgarians. As an example of the type of usage which should be avoided, Mladenov cites the following sentence: *Vazov e edin goljam bulgarski poet* 'Vazov is a great Bulgarian poet.' In his dictionary, however, among the examples of *edin* used as an indefinite article are such sentences as *Toj e edin bogat covek* 'he is a rich man,' which is of the same type condemned in his grammar. Among the examples cited in paragraph four of the dictionary, no clear distinction is made between *edin* used as an indefinite article and *edin* used as an indefinite pronoun, e.g., *Edin umira ot glad, drug go ubiva da tursi v pazvata mu xlab* 'One is dying of hunger, another kills him in order to look for bread in his bosom.' Hence, Mladenov does not give any clear guidelines regarding the use of *edin* as an indefinite article nor regarding the differentiation of this function of *edin* from other functions. Gerov (p. 4) defines the various functions of *edin* not by identifying them with grammatical categories, but by giving synonyms for *edin* in the given function and then examples. In paragraph four, in which *edin* is equated with *njakoj*, all the examples are pronominal, of the type *Edin umira ot glad* . . . For paragraph five, Gerov writes, "It [*edin*] is used without having any significance," i.e., no lexical meaning, which is precisely the distinguishing characteristic of an indefinite article. Most of his examples are indeed nonreferential, e.g., *Da piem edna voda* 'Let's drink a [glass of] water.'

Once again, the problem of descriptive versus prescriptive grammar arises. Mladenov's statement regarding the use of *edin* by educated Bulgarians confirms the suggestion that the actual use of *edin* as an indefinite article is widespread. It should be noted here that the use of *edin* which Mladenov condemns in his grammar is the nonreferential use, but it is just this use which Gerov emphasizes in his dictionary. Also, Teodorov-Balan's statement that the indefinite *edin* is differentiated from the numerical *edin* by stress and intonation is suggestive of the same phenomenon in other Balkan languages, in which the indefinite article is proclitic, while the number "one" is stressed.

The principal tasks of establishing the existence of *edin* as an indefinite article in Bulgarian are two in number: (1) defining a distinction between *edin* as an indefinite pronoun or adjective and *edin* as an indefinite article; (2) demonstrating obligatory use of the indefinite article under some circumstances, i.e., when its absence would change meaning (if such a demonstration is possible).

The distinctive characteristic of an indefinite article, as indicated above, is the fact that it is a purely grammatical marker of indefiniteness. It cannot be marked for definiteness, nor should it be replaceable by some other lexical item. Thus if the *edin* in question can be made definite, e.g., *edinijat ot dvamata bratja* 'the one of the two brothers' (Beaulieux, 94), then it is clearly a pronoun or adjective.⁵ A referential indefinite article *edin* is difficult to distinguish from an indefinite adjective, since replacement by *njako* or *njakakŭv* is possible. But a nonreferential indefinite use of *edin* could be replaced only by the general form of the noun. The demonstration of obligatory use, then, can be effected by producing contexts in which the general form cannot be used to express the desired indefiniteness.

The remaining supporters of the indefinite article specify the contexts in which its use is permissible or obligatory. The facultative contexts are semantically defined. The main facultative use is the identification of a member of a class, either referentially as a specific entity or nonreferentially as a representative of an entire class. The following sentence is an example of nonreferential usage: *Edin vŭlk nikoga ne se rešava da umre ot glad pred edno stado ovc* 'A wolf never decides to die of hunger in front of a flock of sheep' (Ivanovskaja, 168). Here the wolf and flock are nonspecific, i.e., any wolf or flock. Referential examples will be discussed at length later.

The indefinite article *edin* can also be used with nouns which do not ordinarily take the definite article (proper names) or which cannot take the numerical *edin* (uncountables, plurals), e.g., *Ex zašto, zašto u nas njama edin Lenin* 'Oh why, why don't we have a Lenin' (Ivanovskaja, 169); *Edin topŭl i zadušliv vŭzdux . . . pŭlneše tova podzemie* 'A warm and stifling air . . . filled that basement' (Maslov, 1956:96); *I edni oči me gledat* 'And eyes are looking at me' (Borodič, 58). Used with proper names, *edin* is nonreferential since it refers to an unspecified member of the class "people with the name X" or "people like X." Used with uncountables, however, *edin* is referential, because it refers to a specific kind of the uncountable, a member of a class distinguished from others by a specific quality. These uses are all considered facultative by Maslov (p. 96) and Ivanovskaja (p. 170), and can therefore be replaced by the general form or an indefinite pronoun.

The contexts in which *edin* is viewed as obligatory, by Ivančev and Borodič, can be syntactic as well as semantic. The primary obligatory use of *edin*, the only use supported by both authors, is for the purpose of specifying or concretizing a context, i.e., for a referential function. In a short sentence with ordinary word order (Ivančev, 514) or in a sentence which is not set in a concrete context (Borodič, 56), the only way to denote a specific but indefinite entity is to use the indefinite form. Both authors use the sentence *Edna žena vŭrva po ulicata* 'A woman walks down the street' as an example. If the definite form (*ženata*) is used, then the subject is both specific and definite, while the general form (*žena*) is neither specific nor definite without some surrounding context. Hence, only *edin* can be used for a referential indefinite noun phrase under these circumstances, since the general form is nonreferential, while an indefinite pronoun would add lexical meaning.

In addition to the simple concretizing function, Ivančev (p. 515) specifies two syntactic environments in which *edin* is required: second nominative clauses, i.e., when a noun is separated from its modifiers, and short sentences in which the object precedes the verb and subject. In the first case, omission of *edin* would change the meaning, while in the second such omission would produce an

incorrect sentence. A sentence of the type *Po livadata tiča bosoto dete* 'The barefoot child runs about the meadow' can be contrasted to one containing a second nominative clause: *Po livadata tiča bosoto deteto* 'The child runs about the meadow barefoot.' The subject of the first sentence can be made indefinite by substituting *bosoto dete* or *edno bosoto dete*. The subject of the second sentence can be made indefinite only by using the phrase *bosoto edno dete*, because use of the general form would change the construction of the second sentence and make it indistinguishable from the first. Theoretically, however, the general form could also be used in the second sentence, if that sentence were spoken and a distinct pause placed between *bosoto* and *dete*. When an object precedes the verb and subject of a simple sentence, it must have an article, either definite or indefinite, e.g., *Ženata ja risuva edin xudožnik* or *Edna žena ja risuva edin xudožnik* 'An artist is drawing the/a woman.' According to Ivancev (p. 515), **Žena ja risuva edin xudožnik* is not acceptable. In addition to these syntactic environments, Ivancev states that *edin* is required when a proper name is used as a common noun.

While the opponents of the indefinite article claim that such usage of *edin* is a West European importation, its proponents all insist on its native Bulgarian origin. Maslov (p. 95) writes that it is a natural development of the opposition definite/indefinite. Ivanovskaja (p. 170) points out that the Bulgarian indefinite article occurs in living dialects and in the works of nineteenth-century writers, and that it has a plural form *edni*, while West European indefinite articles do not have such plural forms.

All the scholars concern themselves only with Western Europe or only with Bulgaria, but none--with the minor exception of Kalandžiev--examines the other languages of the Balkans. As was mentioned earlier, other Balkan languages do have indefinite articles. In Albanian, Greek, and Rumanian the indefinite article is isomorphic with the word for "one," except that the indefinite article is proclitic, i.e., unstressed, while the number has its own stress.⁶ In these three languages, as in English, the indefinite article is used only in the singular, and some lexical item meaning "some" may be used to convey a similar idea in the plural. The Turkish indefinite article shows more striking similarities to Bulgarian. As in the other Balkan languages, the Turkish indefinite article, *bir*, is a proclitic form of "one." The Turkish indefinite article, however, can also be used with plural nouns, e.g., *bir şeyler mırıldandı* 'he mumbled something or other' (Lewis, §4). Thus, although the development of an indefinite article in Bulgarian could arise from conditions existing in the language and without West European influence, the centuries-long intimate contact with other languages spoken in the Balkans could only have acted to strengthen the tendency toward development of such an article.

The two principal points of contention with regard to the use of *edin* as an indefinite article center on the differences between descriptive and normative grammar and between specific and nonspecific reference. It is clear that *edin* is used by educated Bulgarians with the grammaticalized, delexicalized function characteristic of an indefinite article. The real question involves the extent of this usage, i.e., the degree of grammaticalization of *edin* into an indefinite article. The kinds of usage frowned upon by Andrejčin, Brezinski, and sometimes Maslov are all nonreferential, i.e., instances in which *edin* is unambiguously an indefinite article, where its only replacement would be the general form. The kinds of usage described as obligatory by Borodič and Ivancev are referential: If the object is placed before the verb and the subject, then it is being emphasized in such a way as to be only referential, i.e., specific; the relation between emphasis and reference also seems to work for the second nominative

clause. The use of *edin* with proper names, where the usage is clearly nonreferential, might be discounted as a special case.⁷

The distinction between a referential indefinite article and an indefinite adjective or pronoun is a hazy one at best. Hence the normativists and descriptivists are not as much at variance as would first appear. *Edin* is used as an indefinite article in Bulgarian, especially in a semantic or syntactic context which demands a referential indefinite article. When functioning nonreferentially, *edin* is more readily omissible and less likely to be sanctioned unanimously by grammarians.

NOTES

¹For the purposes of this paper, it is to be assumed that *edin* represents all the rectus forms of that word, i.e., *edin*, *edna*, *edno*, and *edni*, unless otherwise specified. *Edin* is the only word which may be an indefinite article in Bulgarian.

²An example of this opposition in English is "A (specific) lion has escaped from the London Zoo," versus "The London Zoo needs a (nonspecific) lion."

³Stojan Stojanov, *Gramatika na bŭlgarskija knižoven ezik* (Sofia, 1964); Nikola Kostov, *Bŭlgarska gramatika* (Sofia, 1939). The following are other principal references used in the preparation of this paper: L. Andrejčin, *Osnovna bŭlgarska gramatika* (Sofia, 1942); L. Andrejčin, *Bŭlgarska gramatika* (Sofia, 1947); L. Andrejčin, *Na ezikov post* (Sofia, 1961); Léon Beaulieux, *Grammaire de la langue bulgare* (Paris, 1933); L. Bloomfield, *Language* (New York, 1933); Vera Borodić, "Ob obščix principax upotreblenija člennyx form i glagol'nyx vremen v bolgarskom jazyke," *Izvestija za bŭlgarski ezik*, VII (1961), 49-80; S. Brezinski, *Ezikova kultura* (Sofia, 1969); S. Demiraj, *Gramatika e gjuhës shqipe* (Prishtina, 1966); N. Gerov, *Rečnik na bŭlgarski jazyk* (Plovdiv, 1897); F. Householder, K. Kazazis, A. Koutsoudas, *Reference Grammar of Literary Dhimotiki* (The Hague, 1964); S. Ivancev, "Nabljudenija vŭrxu upotrebata na člena v bŭlgarski ezik," *Bŭlgarski ezik*, VII (1957), 499-529; L. P. Ivanovskaja, "K voprosu o neopredelennom člene v bolgarskom jazyke," *Slavjanskoe jazykoznanie* (Leningradskij universitet, Učenyje zapiski N° 250, Serija filologičeskix nauk, vypusk 44; Leningrad, 1958), 158-173; Otto Jespersen, *Essentials of English Grammar* (University, Ala., 1964); N. Kostov et al., *Rečnik na sŭvremenija bŭlgarski knižoven ezik*, I (Sofia, 1955); G. L. Lewis, *Turkish Grammar* (Oxford, 1967); H. G. Lunt, *A Grammar of the Macedonian Language* (Skopje, 1952); Ju. Maslov, [Comments reported in:] *Osnovnye voprosy bolgarskoj grammatiki* (Inst. slavjanovedenija, Kratkie soobščeniya, N° 10; Moscow, 1953), 58-61; Ju. Maslov, *Očerk bolgarskoj grammatiki* (Moscow, 1956); St. Mladenov, *Gramatika na bŭlgarskija ezik* (Sofia, 1939); St. Mladenov, ed., *Bŭlgarski tŭlkoven rečnik*, I, Part 7 (Sofia, 1942); G. Nandriš, *Colloquial Rumanian* (New York, 1953); Al. Teodorov-Balan, *Novo bŭlgarska gramatika* (Sofia, 1940).

⁴Ivanovskaja, 158. Page references in this form in text refer to sources listed in note 3.

⁵Also, if *edin* is used in an oblique form, e.g., *ednogo*, then it cannot be an article.

⁶According to Lunt (p. 43), there is no indefinite article in Macedonian, but the numeral "one" (*eden*, *edna*, etc.) is sometimes used in a "weakened sense" which is best translated by means of the English indefinite article.

⁷The use of *edin* with proper names can be explained by their being *definitiva tantum*, i.e., their inherent definiteness is not indicated by a definite article, so their use as common nouns requires their explicit indefinitizing, which is accomplished by the indefinite article *edin*.