

## ABSTRACT

### The passive in Molise Slavic and the role of language contact

Molise Slavic is a South-Slavic micro-language, spoken by less than a thousand persons in three villages in the Italian Region of Molise near the Adriatic Sea. Molise Slavs have lived for 500 years in strong contact with Romance varieties (local Molise dialects, colloquial southern Italian, standard Italian). As a consequence it has been transformed substantially from a Croatian-like dialect to a rather different minority language with a percentage of 25% of loanwords in everyday usage. From a grammatical point of view it has changed in many respects to a mixed Slavic-Romance structure with an article system, a highly productive imperfect, which also has counterfactual meaning as in colloquial Italian, and a very special past perfect, with two modally differentiated futures, with a locative being replaced by the accusative, a completely analytic comparison, postposition of attributes, doubling of clitics, verb-centred position of the clitics and so on. But there are also conservative phenomena as, for example, the conservation of the case system and of the Slavic derivational type of verbal aspect (opposition of perfectivity), a perfect exclusively formed by means of the auxiliary *bit* ‘to be’ etc.

As for passive voice, there are two formal passives, the participle type and the reflexive type, corresponding, in principle, to similar types both in Slavic and Romance. But when it comes to details, Romance characteristics dominate over the traditional Slavic ones. For example, in Molise Slavic the reflexive passive does not allow for the combination with an agent, contrary for example to Russian and the Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian varieties. An important feature in this respect is also the strict differentiation between a dynamic passive and a passive of state/result in the past. Still another one is transitivity as the only condition for forming a passive, even with modal verbs like *tīt* ‘to want’ and stative verbs like *amat* ‘to love’.

While the dynamic passive in the past is expressed by the perfect (formed by the perfect of *bit* ‘to be’ + passive participle, as in *je bija činjen* literally ‘has been made’), the passive of state/result is expressed by the imperfect of *bit* + passive participle (*biša činjen* ‘was made’), i.e. exactly like in Italian *è stato fatto* vs. *era fatto* and contrary to Russian and BCS, where the passive is ambiguous for both functions. If it is true that the perfect may also express the passive of state, it is also true that this is possible only when the delimitative function of the perfect interferes, i.e. we are confronted here with a voice-aspect interaction, and again, in both contact languages in Italy alike.

The passive in the present, formed by the present of *bit* + passive participle (*je činjen*), is ambiguous for both types, in this case again like in Italian *è fatto*, but here the Slavic languages show the same situation. There is, however, in Molise Slavic a strong tendency towards avoiding this construction as a dynamic passive. In both contact languages the reflexive passive is preferred: *sa čini* = *si fa* ‘is being made’, literally ‘makes itself’.

However, just like in Italian, and contrary to other Slavic languages, another way of disambiguation exists, namely by means of the verbal lexeme (aspectual pair) *hodit/dokj* ‘to come’ as an auxiliary. For the present its suppletive progressive form *gre-* is used. So, the construction *gre-* + past participle exactly corresponds to the Italian dynamic passive of the type *viene fatto* ‘is being made’. In the past, this calque is also possible, again like *veniva fatto* in Italian. Actually, in Molise Slavic, due to its aspect system, both the imperfective and the perfective partner verbs on the auxiliary are possible, allowing for a formal difference between iteration, as in *dojaša činjen* (perfective imperfect) ‘used to be made’ and the ambiguous *gredaša činjen* (imperfective imperfect), expressing both the process ‘was being made’ and the iteration of this process. A perfect of the *come*-passive is excluded in both languages.

There are also interesting differentiations going back to the voice-aspect interaction in the passive participle itself, not only in the auxiliary. First of all, the perfective participle cannot express a dynamic passive in the present, where either the reflexive passive is used (see above) or the perfective participle is replaced by an imperfective one. There are, however lexical restrictions for the formation of

the latter, as for example that it can never be formed from secondary imperfectives of the *iva*-type, very productive in loan verbs. But at least the imperfective passive participle does appear in dynamic passive constructions, contrary to, for example, Russian,

Another case of the imperfective participle being used in the dynamic *bit*-passive is the case of iteration in the past, while for single events the perfective participle is used.

Thirdly, only the perfective participle appears in the passive of state/result. Nevertheless the imperfective participle also expresses states in passive-like constructions, but only if they cannot be seen as the result of an action. In other words, in this case the imperfective passive participle rather marks qualitative states, only formally derived from verbs. Therefore, while it is possible to combine a perfective passive of state/result with an agent, though this action is no longer at issue in the present moment, an agent is completely excluded for the same construction with an imperfective past participle. See example (1) for the perfective passive of state/result and (2) for the corresponding predication with the imperfective participle. In the latter case the Molise Slavic construction resembles Italian “participle” constructions with the participle functioning as an adjective. But, contrary to Molise Slavic with its Slavic aspect opposition preserved, such constructions are ambiguous for the passive of state/result and for simple predications in Italian. But again only in the first function it is possible to add an agent.

- (1) *Ova hiža je **kupljena**.PFV.PASS.PTCP (do mena).*  
Ital. *Questa casa è comprata (da me).*  
‘This house is (=has been) bought (by me).’
- (2) *Ova hiža je **kupovljena**.IPFV.PASS.PTCP \*do mena.*  
Ital. *Questa casa è comprata \*da me\*. (≠ affittata).*  
‘This house is (=has been) bought (“is a bought house” ≠ a rented one)

There are also other important parallels between Molise Slavic and Italian, but I think that those given above already show that language contact has been, indeed, the main motor of change in the Molise Slavic passives, in spite of the complications coming from the preservation of Slavic verbal aspect. In my talk, I will document my findings with the help of original examples from Molise Slavic texts.