

# Epistemic Immediacy as a Common Denominator for Unauxiliated Preterits and Mirative Utterances in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian: An Accessibility Approach

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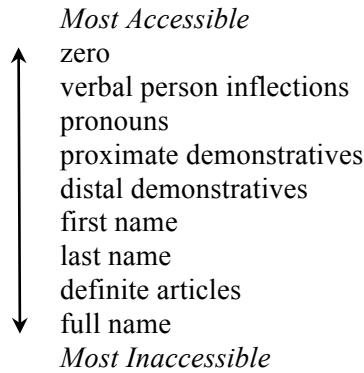
This paper examines two kinds of constructions in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian: unauxiliated *I*-participle constructions (1a; analyzed in Dickey and Stanojević 2017), and mirative utterances (1b).

- (1) a. ***Evo o odlučila i ja napraviti blog i konačno napisati svoj prvi post.***  
'Here I too have decided to make a blog and finally write my first post.'
- b. ***Odakle o tvoj konj ovdje?***  
'How did your knight [get] here?!'

The shared formal feature of unauxiliated preterits and mirative utterances in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian is the omission of a present-tense form of *biti* 'be' variously an auxiliary in (1a) or a copula in (1b). In preterits such as (1a), the effect is either one of a hot-news perfect (which is the case here) or of narrative foregrounding, which is primed by other elements (e.g., narrative present-tense forms). Mirative statements such as (1b), though they take the form of questions, are not exclusively or even primarily requests for information, but expressions of surprise.

The semantic common denominator of such unauxiliated preterits and mirative utterances is that of epistemic immediacy: in both cases the speaker refers to some state of affairs which is on-hand in the ground (discourse situation). In the case of the hot-news perfect unauxiliated preterits, it is the result of the action, which is accessible to all interlocutors (the case of unauxiliated preterits in narratives is slightly more complex, but these nevertheless refer to an event that is epistemically immediate to the narrator); in the case of mirative utterances, it is a state of affairs that is present in the ground and accessible to the interlocutors that causes surprise. Conversely, auxiliated preterits and existential statements containing copulas do not express epistemic immediacy, but are unmarked in this regard.

I propose an analysis following the work of Ariel (1988, 2001), who has developed a unified approach to the referential properties of nominal grounding elements such as pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, and definite articles, which she terms *Accessibility Theory*. According to her, zero marks the most highly accessible referents, as shown in Table 1, a simplified version of her hierarchy.



**Table 1. Simplified Accessibility Hierarchy**

A good example of a highly accessible referent marked by zero is  $\emptyset$  *Contains sulfites* on the label of a wine bottle, in which case the wine is on hand in the discourse situation (here: the reading of a label).

I suggest that the “zero” in unauxiliated preterits and copulaless mirative utterances is a verbal analogue to Ariel’s zero marking for nominal referents. That is to say, the lack of auxiliation in the preterit signals the high (immediate) accessibility of the result (or the event in the narrator’s conceptualization in the case of narrative uses), and the lack of a copula signals the high (immediate) accessibility of the situation described. Conversely, the auxiliary in the compound preterit signals low accessibility, as does the copula in existential statements. If auxiliated preterits are employed in contexts of high accessibility in formal registers, the redundancy is part of the high register style.

The same basic approach can be taken to unauxiliated perfects expressing mirativity in Bulgarian and Macedonian.

#### References

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- \_\_\_\_\_. 2001. Accessibility Theory: An Overview. Ted Sanders, Joost Schliperoord and Wilbert Spooren, eds. *Text Representation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins: 29–87.
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