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Construction *za* + *infinitive* – evidence from the Croatian corpora

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Outline of the talk

- prepositions in Croatian
 - *preposition za*
- infinitive in Croatian
- construction *za + infinitive*
 - evidence from the corpora
 - *za + infinitive* and syntactic structures
 - the replacement (im)possibilities
 - syntactic functions
- concluding remarks

Prepositions in Croatian

- function words which denote relations among entities
- prepositions complement case system (Raguž 1997)
- always followed by nouns or pronouns in specific cases > prepositional phrases
 - one preposition = one, two or three cases
 - only prepositions *u* ‘in’ and *za* ‘for’ can be followed by three cases
 - *u* + *genitive, accusative, locative*
 - *za* + *genitive, accusative, instrumental*
- according to Croatian grammars:
 - prepositions are never followed by a noun or a pronoun in nominative or vocative case
 - prepositions are never followed by verbal or adverbial or prepositional phrases
 - corpora analysis shows that the preposition *za* is a counterexample

Preposition *za*

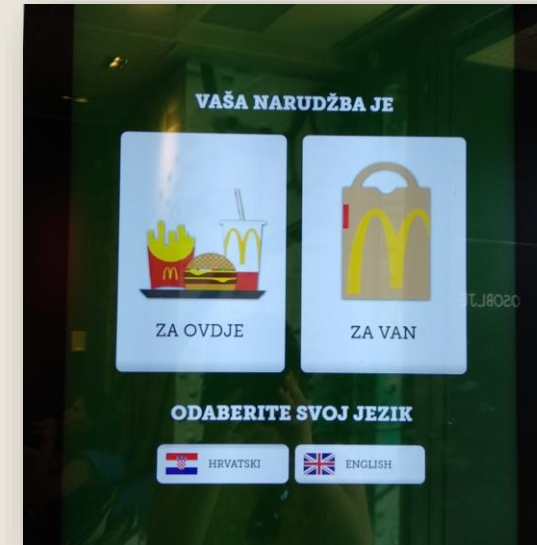
- „genuine preposition”(Barić et al. 2003), diachronically non-motivated word
- very diverse meanings
 - **temporal** (+G, + A, + I)
 - + G: *za rata* ‘during war’, *za moje mladosti* ‘during my youth’
 - + A: *za Božić* ‘at Christmas’; *za pet minuta* ‘in five minutes’
 - + I: *dan za danom* ‘day after day’
 - **locational**
 - location; usually at the back (+ A, + I): *sakriti se za ormar* ‘to hide behind the closet’, *sjediti za stolom* ‘to sit at the table’
 - directionality (+ A, + I): *ići za Zagreb* ‘to go to Zagreb’, *dodite za mnom* ‘follow me, lit. come after me’

Preposition za

- **purpose, attribute (+ A)**
 - *meso za juhu* 'meat for the soup'; *stroj za pranje* 'washing machine'
- **intentions, efforts (+ A)**
 - *boriti se / žrtvovati se za slobodu* 'to fight / sacrifice for freedom'
- **indirect object (+ A)**
 - *rekao sam mu za tebe* 'I told him about you'
- **price, measure, exchange (+ A)**
 - *sve za 10 kuna* 'everything for 10 kunas', *duži za metar* 'one meter longer', *daj mi lutku za autić* 'give me the doll for the car'
- **junction point (+ A)**
 - *drži se za mene* 'hold on to me'
- **cause (+ A, + I)**
 - *platit ćeš mi za to* 'you'll pay me that', *poludjela je za njim* 'she went crazy after him'
- **aspirations (+ I)**
 - *žudnja za životom* 'lust for life'

Preposition *za*

- can co-occur with prepositional phrases (Raguž 1997)
 - *Dao mu je to za u kuću.* 'He gave him that for the inside of the house.'
- can co-occur with non-declensional parts of speech – verbs and adverbs (Pranjković 1987):
 - *za ovdje* 'for here'
 - *kava za van* 'coffee to go, lit. coffee for out'
 - *za danas* 'for today'
 - *za deset* 'for ten'
 - *za plakati* 'to cry for, lit. for to cry'



- evidence from Croatian corpora: only the preposition *za* co-occurs with verbs in infinitive
- moreover, the infinitive is the only verbal form it co-occurs with – WHY?

Infinitive in Croatian

- indefinite verbal form (Babić et al. 2007)
- in the borderline area between nouns and verbs
 - infinitive denotes verbal actions without marking person, tense or mood
 - this is why it is close to nouns
 - infinitive marks aspect and voice – inherent verbal categories
 - this is why it is considered to be a verb
 - Proto-Indo-European (PIE): **no infinitives** (Matasović 2006):
 - verbal roots + different suffixes > verbal nouns
 - infinitive in IE languages originates from the generalization of one type of verbal nouns in PIE
 - infinitive in Slavic languages < nouns derived with suffix *-t-; dative singular
- both imperfective and perfective forms can co-occur with the preposition
 - *nešto za jesti* – *nešto za pojesti* ‘something to eat’

Construction *za* + *infinitive*

- Croatian prescriptive linguists claim that this construction is **ungrammatical** (cf. Rišner 2007, Pranjković 1987, Vukojević 2009)
 - Pranjković (1987) lists numerous linguists who claim that this construction is syntactically incorrect, starting from the beginning of 20th century
- the construction is not dealt with in Croatian grammars
- however, it has been used since the 12th century
 - first attested in 1198
 - older Croatian grammars recognize it as a special verbal form
 - e.g. Relković (1767) claims this construction is gerund
 - it is still in use, both in literary texts and oral speech
- linguistic experts claim that this construction should not be used
 - pure infinitive or gerund should be used instead
 - is it always possible?

Construction *za* + *infinitive*

- research questions:

- Is there evidence of the contemporary usage of this construction in the Croatian corpora?
- In which syntactic structures is this construction used?
- Can the construction *za* + *infinitive* be replaced with some other syntactic elements without the change in meaning?
 - as prescribed by 'language advisors'
- What are the syntactic functions of these structures?
- Should this construction be considered as ungrammatical?

Evidence from the corpora - frequency

- two biggest corpora of the Croatian language:
 - HNK – Croatian National Corpus (Tadić 2009)
 - balanced corpus mainly consisting of edited and proofread texts
 - newspapers, literature, textbooks,...
 - hrWaC (Ljubešić & Erjavec 2011)
 - Croatian web corpus
 - texts crawled from the .hr domain

- frequency of the construction:
 - HNK – absolute frequency: **3,337**; relative frequency: **15.4** per million
 - hrWaC – absolute frequency: **147,211**; relative frequency: **105.3** per million
 - Croatian speakers tend to use *za + infinitive* more frequently in informal discourse
 - proofreading interventions in texts from HNK – cause of low frequency?

Evidence from the corpora – syntactic structures

- the data from the corpora indicates that this construction is still used in Croatian
- therefore: this construction should be more thoroughly described
- the analysis is based on:
 - 1.500 sentences containing the construction *za + infinitive*
 - two large Croatian corpora
- the analysis shows that *za + infinitive* can be used:
 - as a nominal complement
 - as a verbal complement
 - as a part of an idiom (as nominal or verbal complements)

Evidence from the corpora – syntactic structures

Nominal complement I

■ noun + za + infinitive

- *teški uvjeti za igrati* ‘difficult conditions to play’
- *zalihe za preživjeti godinu dana* ‘supplies for a whole year’
- *uvjeti za dobiti lokacijsku dozvolu* ‘conditions required to get a location permit’
- *tri lekcije za naučiti* ‘three lessons to learn’

■ replacement possibilities:

- construction *za + N_{ACC}*:
 - *teški uvjeti za igrati* > *teški uvjeti za igru* (*igra* = ‘play’); **teški uvjeti igrati*
 - *uvjeti za dobiti lokacijsku dozvolu* > *uvjeti za dobivanje lokacijske dozvole* > gerund, IMPERFECTIVE verb
- attributive clause:
 - *tri lekcije za naučiti* > *tri lekcije koje se moraju naučiti*; **tri lekcije naučiti*

Evidence from the corpora – syntactic structures

Nominal complement II

■ pronoun + za + infinitive

- *imati što za prodati/reći* ‘to have something to sell/say’
- *nemati što za izgubiti* ‘to have nothing to lose’
- *nešto za raditi/jesti/pojesti* ‘something to do/eat’
- *nemati ništa za prijaviti* ‘nothing to declare’

■ replacement possibilities:

- bare infinitive when it complements relative/indefinite pronouns
 - *imati što za reći* > *imati što reći*
 - it cannot be replaced by the construction *za + N_{ACC}*
- construction *za + N_{ACC}* when the pronoun is followed by an adjective
 - *imati što toplo za popiti* ‘to have something warm to drink’ > *imati što toplo za piće* (*piće* = ‘drink’),
**imati što toplo popiti*

Evidence from the corpora – syntactic structures

Nominal complement III

- **adjective + za + infinitive**

- *idealna za utažiti žeđ* ‘ideal to quench your thirst’
- *stvorena za osvježiti se* ‘made to refresh’

- **replacement possibilities:**

- construction *za + N_{ACC}*
 - *idealna za utažiti žeđ* > *idealna za utaživanje žeđi*
 - the gerund formed from the imperfective verb has to be used; **utaženje*
- adverbial clause
 - *stvorena za osvježiti se* > *stvorena kako biste se osvježili*
 - purpose, intention

Evidence from the corpora – syntactic structures

Verbal complement I

- **za + infinitive as a copula complement**
 - *bilo je za očekivati* 'it could be expected, lit. it was to expect'
 - *nije za zamjeriti* 'not to blame smb.'
 - *vijesti su nam za povratiti* 'the news were disgusting'
- **replacement possibilities:**
 - different constructions with modal verbs
 - *bilo je za očekivati* > *moglo se očekivati* 'it could be expected'
 - *nije za zamjeriti* > *ne može se zamjeriti* 'it cannot be blamed'
 - bare infinitives or verbal nouns / gerunds cannot be used as a nominal part of the predicate

Evidence from the corpora – syntactic structures

Verbal complement II

■ *za* + *infinitive* as a part of a **complex predicates**

- *ostaje nam za pitati se* ‘we were left wondering, lit. it remains to us to wonder’
- *realno je za očekivati* ‘it is plausible to expect’
- *smiješno je za čuti* ‘it is funny to hear’
- *bilo je ugodno za gledati* ‘it was pleasant to watch, lit. it was pleasant for watching’

■ replacement possibilities:

- bare infinitive:
 - *ostaje nam za pitati se* > *ostaje nam pitati se*, **ostaje nam za pitanje*
 - *realno je za očekivati* > *realno je očekivati*, **realno je za očekivanje*
- construction *za* + N_{acc} :
 - *bilo je ugodno za gledati* > *bilo je ugodno za gledanje* (but also: *bilo je ugodno gledati*)
 - in this case the construction determines the meaning of the nominal part of the predicate
 - in some cases it cannot be replaced at all, e.g. *smiješno za čuti* ‘funny to hear’

Evidence from the corpora – syntactic structures

Idiomatic constructions

- *za* + *infinitive* as a part of idiomatic constructions

- *to je za krepat od smijeha* ‘this is to laugh one's head off’
- *to je Bogu za plakati / ovo je za plakati* ‘it’s a crying shame’
- *ovo je za poludjeti* ‘this drives me crazy’
- *vonja za popizditi* ‘it fucking smells’
- *ekipa/nedjelja/dijete za poželjeti* ‘team/Sunday/child to wish for’
- *ružno za vidjeti* ‘ugly to see’

- replacement possibilities:

- *za* + *infinitive* cannot be replaced with other syntactic structures in these examples

Syntactic functions

- construction *za + infinitive* can have different syntactic functions:
 - **Subject**
 - *ostaje nam za pitati se* ‘it remains to wonder’
 - some authors (e.g. Smailagić) consider this construction as a predicate
 - *to be / to remain + za + infinitive* expresses modality = a complex predicate
 - **Object**
 - *koliko mentalne energije treba za napraviti bilo što* ‘how much mental energy is needed to do anything’
 - **Predicate**
 - *to je za krepat od smijeha* ‘this is to laugh one's head off’
 - **Adverbial**
 - *ali danas za preživjeti u umjetnosti, treba raditi na promidžbi* ‘nowadays, you have to promote yourself if you want to survive in art’
 - **purpose, intention**
 - **Attribute**
 - *teški uvjeti za igrati* ‘difficult conditions to play’

Syntactic functions

- according to Croatian grammars, infinitives can function as subjects and predicates
 - they exclude other three possibilities: attribute, object, adverbial
 - however, our corpus driven research has shown that this is also possible
- preposition *za* "nominalizes" infinitives
 - by adding a case
 - by adding additional meaning components
 - *za* in NP phrases – all three above mentioned syntactic functions are possible (attribute, adverbial, indirect object)

Conclusion

- construction *za + infinitive* is frequently found in contemporary Croatian corpora
 - regardless of the "instructions" of linguistic experts to avoid it
- it is very frequent in spoken language
- it occurs in specific syntactic environments and it can have all major syntactic functions
 - unlike the „bare infinitive”
- in some cases it can be replaced by other syntactic structures
 - the replacement possibilities are not straightforward
 - when it can be replaced, the meaning of constructions is usually altered
- in numerous cases it cannot be substituted by any other variants
 - especially in idiomatic structures
- this construction should not be regarded as ungrammatical:
 - the combination of the preposition and the infinitive expresses meanings that can hardly be expressed by other syntactic elements
 - it has been in use for more than 800 years and it survived

Thank you!