

*Intensification of the admirative meaning  
in Bulgarian and Albanian*

Ekaterina Tarpomanova

Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski

Болгарский и албанский относятся к языкам с грамматикализованным выражением адмиративности. В обоих языках формы адмиратива произошли от перфекта и обозначают новую, неожиданную информацию. Так как отличаются высокой степенью экспрессивности, они обычно употребляются в разговорной речи и часто сопровождаются лексическими единицами, усиливающими их значение. Три класса слов функционируют как интенсификаторы адмиративного значения в предложениях с глаголами в форме адмиратива: частицы, междометия и местоимения. В ближайшем контексте адмиративных глагольных форм можно также обнаружить местоимения в этическом дативе, которые указывают на отношение говорящего к объекту высказывания. В болгарском языке в качестве лексического маркера адмиратива может выступать и местоимение в нейтральном среднем роде *то* в позиции субъекта. Лексические маркеры адмиратива выполняют и другую важную функцию – снятие многозначности в адмиративных и эвиденциальных высказываниях.

Bulgarian and Albanian are among the languages with grammaticalised admirativity. In both languages the admirative forms emerged from the perfect tense and encode new and unexpected information. Being strongly expressive, they are typically used in colloquial speech and are often accompanied by lexical items that enhance their meaning. There are three classes of words that function as admirativity intensifiers in sentences with admirative verb forms: particles, interjections and pronouns. Additionally, pronouns in *dativus ethicus* are found in the nearest context of admiratives when they indicate the speaker's attitude towards the subject of his or her utterance. The neutral pronoun 'it' in subject position is also considered as a lexical marker of admirativity in Bulgarian. All the lexical markers of admirativity have another important function – to resolve ambiguity between admirative and evidential sentences.

*Keywords:* admirative, evidentiality, intensification, Bulgarian, Albanian

## **Introduction**

Within the framework of the Balkan Sprachbund, Bulgarian and Albanian share a common feature: in both languages surprise may be expressed grammatically. Admirative is defined as a grammatical form that encodes the

speaker's surprise at an unexpected event (see similar definitions in Friedman 1980: 17; Gerdzhikov 1984/2003: 101; DeLancey 1997: 36; Aleksova 2001: 1; Demiraj 2002: 318). Admirative forms have a common origin with evidentials and they are often considered as a part of the evidential systems of the two languages. In Albanian both admirative and evidentials emerged from the inverted perfect and have no formal distinction. In Bulgarian the admirative has the same form as the renarrative evidential – perfect with omitted auxiliary in 3<sup>rd</sup> person, and occasionally as the inferential, with the auxiliary preserved. The typical usage of the admirative is in colloquial speech, i.e. in everyday conversations, dialogues in fiction texts, emotional media texts, etc. In a sentence, the admirative is often accompanied by lexical items that enhance the admirative meaning expressed by the verb form. Such words may be considered lexical markers of admirativity. In combination with the grammatical admirative form they function as intensifiers of its meaning, and sometimes serve to distinguish the admirative from evidentials. In this paper I compare several groups of admirative lexical markers in Bulgarian and Albanian, and propose an analysis of their functions when combined with verb forms in admirative. I will consider the primary meaning of the admirative, i.e. 'surprise at an unexpected event', and a secondary meaning developed in both languages – expression of the speaker's subjective evaluation (positive or negative) of the event or the object he/she is talking about. I base my analysis of the admirative in Bulgarian on some of the conclusions made by Krasimira Aleksova in her paper on lexical means of intensification of the admirative meaning (Aleksova 2004).

## Particles

Particles can often be found in the nearest context of an admirative form, usually at the very beginning of the sentence. In most cases they are not in contact position with the verb, so they do not directly modify the admirative form, but the overall meaning of the sentence. According to Aleksova, they refer to the semantic content of the entire statement because they are connected to the cognitive process in the speaker's mind (Aleksova 2004: 3). Particles intensify the semantics of surprise by focusing on the previous expectations of the speaker about the situation. By combining an admirative form with a particle, the speaker: (i) expresses his or her surprise at the unexpected event through the verb form, and (ii) stresses the fact that he or she has had just the opposite expectations through the particle. This emphasising function is performed by the following particles: Bulg. *ама* (and its shortened version *ма*), *че, та* 'but'; Alb. *по, пор, ама* 'but'.

(1) *Ама ти си бил ученик! Аз си те представях като зрял мъж, с брада.* (Wikipedia, "Chernomorski far")

'So you are a student! I imagined you as a man at a mature age, with a beard.'

(2) *Реших, че е някой американски мулат музикант, каквито ги има-ше много в Стокхолм. И какво беше моето смайване, когато „мулатът“ започна да говори български с пловдивски диалект! Ами че той бил популярен и талантлив пианист от Пловдив с малко повече циганска кръв в жилите си.* (BulNC)

‘I thought he was some American mulatto musician, there were a lot of this kind in Stockholm. I was amazed when the “mulatto” addressed me in Bulgarian, with a Plovdiv accent. It turned out he was a popular talented piano player from Plovdiv with a good deal of gypsy blood running in his veins.’

(3) *Ама ку qenka Agron Kalaja! Këtë kalama e paskeni problem ju!* (24-ore.com)

‘But this is Agron Kalaja. And that kid is your problem?’

(4) *Po ky qenka më keq se Edi!* (newsbomb.al)

‘It turned out he is worse than Edi!’

The context in (1) and (2) explicitly shows the contradiction between expectations and newly found facts that evokes the speaker’s surprise. In (3) the speaker is surprised that a kid named Agron Kalaja could be a problem for a group of adults, he rather expected the problematic person to be another adult. In (4) the pronoun in subject position *ky* refers to the new mayor of Tirana who was expected to govern the city better than the previous one, Edi Rama, and the speaker is disappointed that the current mayor is even worse than Edi Rama.

Another function of the particles in combination with admirative verb forms is to emphasize a property attributed to someone or something. In such sentences admirative is used to express the judgment of the speaker about a person, an event or a situation, and particles serve as intensifiers: Bulg. *ама че, ей че, ех че* ‘such, what’, Alb. *ама* ‘such, what’.

(5) *Ама че глупак бил! Нали е глупак? – Глупак е, ваше превъзходителство!* (Nikolai Gogol, translation: Dimitar Podvarzachov)

‘He is such a fool! Isn’t he a fool? – He is a fool, indeed, Your Excellency!’

(6) *Ама qenka eurodeputetja...* (studentet.info)

‘That Eurodeputy is really something!’

In (5) the verb in the admirative is used to stress the speaker’s opinion of the person mentioned as he suddenly realises this person’s foolishness, and the particle makes that negative property more intense. In (6) the property is not even mentioned, but the whole sentence expresses admiration towards the Eurodeputy.

Addressing particles (sometimes classified as interjections), such as Bulg. *абе, бе, бре*, and Alb. *more, ore, bre*, are also commonly used in sentences with verbs in admirative. Their usual function is to draw the listener’s attention to the speaker’s statement. In combination with an admirative form, they enhance its meaning by involving the listener in the surprising discovery made by the speaker. Addressing particles can take different positions in the sentence, usually at the beginning or at the end.

(7) *Абе, то много весело **станало** в тая тема!* (forum.hobbykafe.com)

‘Lord, this topic has grown so fun!’

(8) *Ами че той **бил** ангел, **бе!*** (sedmica.sliven.net)

‘He is some angel, he is!’

(9) *Кjo **qenka** birra, **more!*** (facebook)

‘It’s really a beer!’

(10) *Ahhh **bre**, sa e vështirë **qenka!*** (facebook)

‘Oh, how difficult it is!’

As the examples show, addressing particles can be combined with other intensifiers – particles, interjections or pronouns, to highlight the speaker’s surprise at an unexpected event, as in (7) and (8), or at a surprising property – (10). (9) may have an ambiguous interpretation – the speaker either wonders at the fact that the drink is beer because he has expected another kind of drink, or finds out that the beer is really good. In both cases the particle *more* is used in order to put emphasis on his surprise.

## Interjections

Interjections are the most frequent lexical markers of admirativity. When combined with an admirative verb form, they have several functions as intensifiers: to stress the emotional intensity of the admirative meaning; to intensify the surprise of a sudden ascertainment; to indicate the speaker’s positive or negative attitude. Interjections found in the context of admirative are numerous, and some of them can be used with one, two, or all the three intensifying functions, depending on their semantics or the context: Bulg. *a, ax, o, ox, ay, oy, ex, ей, ай, ой, я, вай, брей, леле, олеле*, etc.; Alb. *a, ah, o, oh, eh, ej, aj, vaj, obobo*, etc. Some interjections loaned from English, such as *wow, ouch, woops*, have been adapted well in the languages under study and can also be used as admirativity markers. Interjections are usually placed at the beginning of the sentence and modify its semantics as a whole.

(11) *Ха, тя **била** на гърба ми, пък аз си мисля, че той е свободен.* (forum.abv.bg)

‘Hey, it (the rucksack) is on my back, I thought it was free.’

(12) *Ей, какви мъже **имало!*** (facebook)

‘Wow, what men!’

(13) *Ех, нук **qenka** e thjeshtë të jesh kryeministër!* (gazetadita.al)

‘After all, it isn’t a simple thing to be a prime minister!’

(14) *Vaj si **qenka** ba dynaja.* (song)

‘The world has become so different.’

The interjections in the examples above emphasise different aspects of the admirative meaning. In (11) the interjection expresses surprise at an unexpected discovery, in (12) – admiration (positive attitude), in (13) – irony (negative attitude), and in (14) – surprise.

The intensifying interjections include the vocatives: Bulg. *боже, господи, божичко, боже мой*, etc., Alb. *zot, o zot, zot i madh*, ‘God’; Bulg. *майко, майчице, мале* ‘mother’. They express both the speaker’s surprise and his/her emotional reaction to the newly discovered information.

(15) **Боже, това било риза, най-обикновена риза!** (Colum McCann)  
‘God, oh God, it’s a shirt, it’s just a shirt!’

(16) **O zot i madh, qenka djalë!** (botasot.info)  
‘Oh my god, it’s a boy!’

Example (15) is a sentence from a novel translated into Bulgarian with an admirative. In the novel, a suicide on the roof of a high building is about to jump. When finally in the air, the “jumper” turns out to be not a person but a shirt blown by the wind. (16) is a commentary on a picture showing the reaction of a family expecting a baby girl at the moment when they learn that the baby is actually a boy. In both examples the interjections serve to intensify the surprise and the expressiveness of the sentences containing the admirative forms.

The admirative is predominantly found in the present tense as the speaker observes the surprising event directly, at or around the moment of speaking. One way to enhance the fact that the information is perceived directly, is to use interjectional expressions of verbal origin having a meaning of visual perception. Such interjections are found in the near context of a verb in the admirative. They have a phraseological status as their head words are always imperatives in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular. These interjections intensify the semantics of surprise by “inviting” the listener to share the speaker’s amazement.

(17) **Я гледай, тук била бабата!** (Vasil Drumev)  
‘Look at that, grandma is actually here!’

(18) **Виж ти, чаят бил опасен за здравето. Май ще трябва да се откажем и от него.** (tialoto.bg)

‘So, it turns out tea is dangerous to our health. It seems we should stop drinking tea, too.’

(19) **Ooo, ja shiko, qenka një urë!** (facebook)  
‘Actually there is a bride!’

(20) **Shih shih, sa e mirë që qenka bërë vajza e gjermanit.** (facebook)  
‘Look how beautiful the daughter of the German has become.’

In all four examples the interjections enhance the speaker’s surprise caused by the unexpected discovery.

## Pronouns

In the Balkan languages several types of pronouns, pronominal adjectives and pronominal adverbs may function as intensifiers: demonstrative, interrogative, relative, and indefinite pronouns. Two of those types – demonstratives and interrogatives – may combine with verbs in the admirative so as to place

emphasis on the speaker's surprise or on a given property that evokes his/her surprise. Depending on its part of speech and semantics, the pronominal element may modify either a verb in the admirative – thus emphasising the grammatical meaning of surprising ascertainment conveyed by the verb – or a noun, an adjective or an adverb, in such a way accentuating the surprising property.

(21) *Леле, колко хубав бил животът.* (facebook)

'Wow, life is actually so beautiful!'

(22) *Ау, как съм занемарил профила си тук.* (twitter)

'Ah, I have neglected my profile here.'

(23) *Ups! Pra, keshtu na qenka puna? Ok, se do e shohim tani e tutje...* (facebook)

'Oops! So, this is the situation! We'll see what will happen from now on...'

(24) *Au, mor çun, sa shumë qenke rrit.* (facebook)

'Hey, boy, you really have grown up a lot!'

(25) *Sa më shkoka bluja, more amani!* (facebook)

'The blue suits me so well, oh my god!'

In (21) the speaker finds out that life is actually beautiful and this motivates the usage of the admirative form. In the sentence the pronominal adverb *колко* 'so' intensifies the adjective *хубав* 'beautiful'. Example (24) is similar – the surprising discovery is that the boy has actually grown a lot, and the pronominal adverb increases the intensity of the adverb *shumë* 'a lot'. In (22) the pronominal adverb *как* 'how' is used as intensifier of the sudden ascertainment of the fact that the speaker has neglected his twitter profile. Likewise, in (25) the speaker finds out that the blue color really suits her. (23) is a phraseological expression for a situation that is really unexpected, it is used with an admirative both in Albanian and Bulgarian.

The examples show that the pronominal intensifiers are often used with a particle or an interjection, thus enhancing the admirative semantics and the expressivity of the entire sentence.

### **Pronouns in *dativus ethicus***

An admirative verb form may be used with a pronominal clitic in the ethical dative. *Dativus ethicus* is a common feature of all the languages in the Balkan Sprachbund and is considered one of the characteristics of the *Balkan model of the world*. Tatiana Tsivian interprets it as a special kind of possessiveness and calls it *a language gesture with a direction to one's own self* (Tsivian 1999: 91–103). The parallel use of an admirative verb form and a pronoun in the ethical dative signals that the speaker expresses a positive or a negative attitude towards the subject or the event referred to in his or her statement. In Bulgarian the pronominal clitic is usually in the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular, while in Albanian the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural is commonly used.

(26) *Майко мила, и това ми било планинска щерка, израснала в алпинистки и сериозни туристически среди.* (planinite.info)

‘Oh my, and she is a mountaineer’s daughter raised among climbers and real hikers.’

(27) *Shih kush na qenka në ask!* (ask.fm)

‘Look who is in ask!’

Example (26) actually says that mountaineer’s daughter doesn’t have the qualities necessary for a mountain climber, so the sentence is an expression of the speaker’s negative assessment of the girl’s abilities. In (27) the speaker is pleasantly surprised to find somebody he did not expect in the social network *ask.fm* and the sentence sounds like a welcome greeting.

### **Pronoun *mo* ‘it’ in subject position in Bulgarian**

The neutral personal pronoun *mo* ‘it’ has a variety of functions in Bulgarian (for details, see Pashov 1965), and has no parallels in the other Balkan languages (Tarpomanova 2006). One of the specific contexts it can be used in, is as a subject of a verb in admirative. Aleksova (2004a: 6-7) defines several cases: *mo* can be a pro-sentence word, substituting a previous sentence or a clause, as in (28); it can be a formal subject of impersonal predicates in the admirative – in (29); it can function as a pragmatic particle to emphasise that the expectations of the speaker have not come true (30).

(28) *Опитах да не пия. Ми то било много скучно, бе.* (socialbaker.com)

‘I tried not to drink. It turned out it’s quite boring.’

(29) *Я, то валяло!*

‘Hey, it’s raining!’

(30) *Мислех, че е въображението ми. А то било съдба.* (far.bg)

‘I thought it’s my imagination. But actually it’s fate.’

The pronoun *mo* functions as an intensifier only in (30). Nevertheless, in all the cases it can be considered a lexical marker of the admirative, the reason being that both the pronoun and the admirative are used in colloquial speech, while, for instance, the renarrative is neutral with respect to text registers and the usage of *mo* as a subject of a renarrative form is rather an exception than a rule.

### **Intensification vs. disambiguation**

A survey of the examples available in internet forums, corpora of colloquial speech, spoken conversations and similar sources where admirative verb forms are frequently used, shows that in most of the cases admiratives are accompanied by one or more lexical markers that intensify their meaning. One may conclude that intensification is the primary function of this type of lexical markers. Still, there is a difference in the extent to which lexical markers are required in Albanian and in Bulgarian.

In Albanian, the admirative and the evidentials have the same form, the inverted perfect, but the admirative is much more frequently used than the evidentials. This is to say, that if such a verb form occurs without any lexical marker and in a limited context, it would be interpreted rather as an admirative than as an evidential. So, if one removes the lexical markers in any of the examples given herein, the respective sentence will lose some of its intensity and expressiveness but will be understood correctly.

In Bulgarian, the admirative form coincides with the dominant member of the evidentiality system, the renarrative, so such a verb form used without additional lexical markers will most probably be interpreted as renarrative. Consider, for instance, example (8). If one removes the intensifying particles *ами че* and *бе*, the sentence will be transformed in the following way: *Той бил ангел*. ‘He is an angel.’, and the most probable interpretation will be ‘I was told he was an angel’.

In conclusion, lexical markers of admirativity have a double function in Bulgarian and Albanian. Their main role is to intensify the admirative meaning and to make the speech more expressive and emotional but in ambiguous sentences they help the listener decide if the statement conveys surprising and unexpected information or indirect information. The disambiguating function of the lexical markers under study is particularly important in Bulgarian where the renarrative would be the likelier interpretation of the common renarrative-admirative form.

## References

- Aleksova 2001: Алексова, Кр. Значение и граматическа същност на българския адмиратив. – *Обучението по български език в началото на XXI в.* Смолян, ПУ „Паисий Хилендарски“, филиал Смолян.
- Available at: <http://georgesg.info/belb/personal/aleksova/admirativ.pdf>
- Aleksova 2004: Алексова, Кр. Интензификатори, частици, междуметия и фразеологизирани глаголни изрази в изказвания с адмиративни глаголни форми. – *Материали от Седмата национална конференция по проблемите на разговорната реч, 10–11 юни 2004 г., гр. Велико Търново.*
- Available at: <http://georgesg.info/belb/personal/aleksova/intenzifikatori.pdf>
- Aleksova 2004a: Алексова, Кр. Адмиративът в българската разговорна реч. – *Проблеми на разговорната реч. Книга VI. (Шеста научна сесия с международно участие, 31 май – 1 юни 2001).* Велико Търново: УИ „Св. св. Кирил и Методий“, 2004, 21–35.
- Available at: <http://georgesg.info/belb/personal/aleksova/admirativ2.pdf>
- BulNC: Bulgarian National Corpus
- Available at: <http://search.dcl.bas.bg>
- DeLancey 1997: DeLancey, S. Mirativity: The grammatical marking of unexpected information. – *Linguistic Typology*, 1997, Vol. 1, 33–52.

- Friedman 1980: Friedman, V. The Study of Balkan Admirativity: Its History and Development. – *Balkanistica*, Vol. 6, 1980. 7–30.
- Gerdzhikov 1984/2003: Герджиков, Георги. *Преизказването на глаголното действие в българския език*. София: Наука и изкуство, 2003.
- Demiraj 2002: Demiraj, S. (Ed.). *Gramatika e gjuhës shqipe, Vëllimi 1, Morfologjia*. Tiranë, 2002.
- Pashov 1965: Пашов, П. Наблюдения върху граматическия род в български и испански (неутрален среден род на българските местоимения в сравнение с испанските neutro). – *Годишник на Софийския университет, Филологически факултет*, том LIX, кн. 1, 89–130.
- Tarpomanova 2006: Търпоманова, Ек. Неутрален род на местоименията в балканските езици. – *Български език*, 2006, кн. 1, 13–24.

*Интензификация на адмиративното значение  
в български и албански*

Екатерина Търпоманова

Българският и албанският са сред езиците с граматикализирано изразяване на адмиративност. И в двата езика адмиративните форми произхождат от перфекта и означават нова, неочаквана информация. Тъй като са силно експресивни, те се употребяват обикновено в разговорната реч и често са придружени от лексикални единици, усилващи тяхното значение. Три класа думи функционират като интензификатори на адмиративното значение в изречения с глаголи в адмиративна форма: частици, междуметия и местоимения. В близкия контекст на адмиративните глаголни форми могат да бъдат открити и местоимения в етичен датив, които показват отношението на говорещия към обекта на неговото изказване. В български като лексикален маркер на адмиратива се среща и местоимението в неутрален среден род *то* в субектна позиция. Лексикалните маркери на адмиратива имат и друга важна функция – снемането на многозначност между адмиративни и евиденциални изказвания.

e-mail: [tochitsaaa@gmail.com](mailto:tochitsaaa@gmail.com)  
СУ „Св. Климент Охридски“, ФСлФ  
бул. „Цар Освободител“ № 15  
София 1504