



# Topics in Bulgarian morphology and syntax: a minimalist perspective

María Luisa Rivero

*University of Ottawa, 70 Av. Laurier East, Ottawa, Canada K1N 6N5*

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## Abstract

This paper offers a minimalist view of a variety of topics that in Bulgarian are at the crossroads of lexicon, syntax, morphology, and phonology. It discusses syntactic characteristics in periphrastic tenses with biclausal structures and the formal properties of Balkan control/raising constructions. It sketches accounts for clitic templates, person restrictions, and reflexive hapology that combine syntax and morphology, and assign an important role to person in postsyntactic morphology. It reviews some minimalist-oriented displacement analyses of the distribution of interrogative *li*. It examines the construction with an obligatory clitic *Trese me* “I am shivering,” proposing that lexical structure and syntactic conditions on clitic pronouns and doubling account for its characteristics. It compares two prominent GB/minimalist views on reflexive marking and applies them to inherent reflexive verbs. It ends by discussing word order in auxiliary complexes, and touches on left branch phenomena, and on the relation between displacement and information structure.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper offers a minimalist view of some selected topics that in Bulgarian are at the crossroads of lexicon, syntax, morphology, and phonology. The paper was originally written for a *Lingua* Gauntlet Issue proposed by Andrew Spencer, who gathered the database in [Appendix A](#) as a basis for discussion by linguists working on different theoretical frameworks. Here I use such a database to explore phenomena that in some cases have received little attention in the literature on Bulgarian. In some instances, I offer

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*E-mail address:* [mrivero@aixl.uottawa.ca](mailto:mrivero@aixl.uottawa.ca) (M.L. Rivero).

new answers combining the spirit of minimalism and distributed morphology (Halle and Marantz, 1993, among others). In other cases, I summarize and update earlier GB/minimalist proposals without being exhaustive, citing references from the framework that directly impinge on the specific topics I discuss (see Bošković, 2001; Franks and King, 2000 for more exhaustive lists of references).

In Section 2, I stress syntactic characteristics in tense formation in Bulgarian, arguing that some periphrastic tenses have biclausal structures with the formal properties of Balkan control/raising constructions. I do not discuss many important topics regarding clause structure for lack of space and energy, and a prominent omission is the analysis of Negation. In Section 3, I sketch accounts for clitic templates, person restrictions, and reflexive haplology, suggesting as unifying factor the effect of person in a postsyntactic morphological component. In addition, I review three minimalist-oriented displacement analyses of the much-debated distribution of interrogative *li*, without coming to a definite conclusion. In Section 4, I examine two constructions with obligatory clitic pronouns. Constructions such as *Trese me* “I am shivering” display an obligatory accusative clitic in Bulgarian, and I argue that principles of lexical structure and conditions of a primarily syntactic nature on clitic pronouns and doubling account for this situation. Some constructions contain ‘inherent’ reflexives, that is, an obligatory *se*, and I compare two prominent GB/minimalist views on reflexive marking, suggesting that each faces problems concerning this type of clitic. In Section 5, I apply some proposals in Sections 2 and 3 to the complex word order patterns of auxiliary complexes, I briefly examine the rather restricted left branch phenomena of Bulgarian, suggesting that they involve (syntactic) Gapping, and I conclude with some minimalist proposals on displacement and information structure, which I exemplify with auxiliary verb complexes.

## 2. Basic tense/aspect constructions

Bulgarian has a particularly rich system of tenses, including many periphrastic formations considered complex verb forms in traditional grammar. In GB/minimalism, such periphrastic tenses are viewed as syntactic formations regulated by phrase structure principles, as in the early (Rivero, 1988) or the more recent (Krapova, 1999).

Let us begin by mentioning three syntactic factors that contribute to formal complexity in the Bulgarian tense system. The first one is the general structure of Balkan clauses, since Bulgarian shares with other Balkan languages an unusually rich inventory of functional categories that can combine in building up clauses. The second and the third factors concern auxiliaries. On the one hand, it is a characteristic of Bulgarian auxiliaries to share properties with control and raising verbs. In the languages of the Balkans control and raising verbs take conjunctive complements, so as a result tense formation in Bulgarian displays syntactic recursivity. On the other hand, Bulgarian auxiliaries resemble *be*-auxiliaries in other Slavic languages, which take other nonfinite *be*-auxiliaries as complements. The rich inventory of (Balkan) functional categories in combination with auxiliaries makes Bulgarian tenses rather complex from the syntactic perspective.

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