

MISVALUATION: ON THE BULGARIAN VERBS *ПОДЦЕНЯВАМ* ‘UNDERESTIMATE’ AND *НАДЦЕНЯВАМ* ‘OVERESTIMATE’, THEIR SEMANTIC STRUCTURE AND TRANSLATION INTO RUSSIAN

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Abstract. The article examines the semantic structure of the two Bulgarian verbs of misvaluation, *подценявам* ‘underestimate’ and *надценявам* ‘overestimate’. Attention is drawn to the ambivalence of their position in the semantic typology of predicates, notably their features/traits stemming from the presence of an interpretive component. With reference to the Bulgarian National Corpus, the article outlines the most common options for filling the positions of the participants and the main contexts in which the verbs occur. Some issues in translation into Russian are shown, which exist despite the availability of full equivalents in the target language.

Keywords: verbs of mental state; interpretive verbs; verbs of misvaluation; Bulgarian verbs *подценявам* ‘underestimate’ and *надценявам* ‘overestimate’

1. Semantics of the verbs of misvaluation. The verbs *подценявам* ‘underestimate’ and *надценявам* ‘overestimate’ have a complex semantic structure and an ambivalent place in the semantic typology of the predicates. On the one hand, their meaning is associated with the mental activity of a human, hence they are close to the verbs of persistent mental state, such as *смятам* ‘consider’, *зная* ‘know’, *мисля* ‘think’. On the other hand, they have an interpretive component, i.e. they are linked to interpretive verbs which are predicates of secondary nomination: they “do not refer to any specific action or state, but only denote interpretation (qualification) of another, quite specific action or state” (Apresyan 2004, 5). Thus, in the sentence *Вие грешите, като я наричате така* ‘You are wrong to call her that way’, an action reported in the subordinate clause is interpreted as erroneous by using the verb *греша* ‘be wrong’. However, the original action most often goes unnamed and is deduced from the context or the situation. The same is true for the verbs such as *нарушавам* ‘violate’, *излагам* ‘expose’, *злепоставям* ‘discredit’,

подвеждам 'mislead', *предизвиквам* (някого) 'provoke (sb.)', *будалкам* 'fool', *обиждам* 'offend, insult', etc. Interpretive verbs are rarely presented as a standalone semantic subclass of predicates (Apresyan 2004; Ivanova 2012), but they surface in the sight of researchers along with verbs of behaviour (Semin & Fiedler 1988; Schmid 2017) or fall under analysis among pragmatically or stylistically marked lexical units (Georgiev 1998; Stalyanova 2021).

Similarly to many other verbs with an interpretive semantic component, *подценявам* and *надценявам* are characterized by the absence of actual continuous grammatical meaning in the imperfective present tense (*Какво правиш?* – **Подценявам го* 'What do you do? – I underestimate him.') and the imposed perfectivity of the form (Apresyan 2004, 6 - 7). Thus, the statement *Вие го подценявате* 'You underestimate him' refers to an action that has already taken place – once or multiple times, i.e., if the subject underestimates something / someone, the mental act has already been completed and the evaluation has already been made. These verbs and other interpretive predicates are frequently used in the context of reproach (*Не надценявай себе си* 'Do not overestimate yourself') and are easily deniable in contexts of refutation (*Аз не го надценявам; зная, че той е доста незначителен* 'I do not overestimate him, I know he is very insignificant'; *Ти съвсем не си глупава, напразно се подценяваш* 'You are not that stupid at all, you needlessly underestimate yourself'; see the examples¹⁾ below).

In the present article, we assume a (working) definition for the subclass of the verbs *подценявам* and *надценявам* as follows:

(i) The speaker thinks that Y deserves a different assessment, higher or lower than the one that has been given to him/her by X,

ex. *Ти (X) надценяваш противника си (Y).* 'You (X) have overestimated your strength (Y).'

This interpretation presupposes, firstly, a connection (albeit not overtly expressed) with a verb of opinion (*think, consider, assume*), moreover a specific type of opinion ("opinion-evaluation" (Zaliznjak 2006, 190 - 191)), and, secondly, a relation to the concept of *error*, more specifically to erroneous opinion/ conviction/ judgement (Kustova 2004, 232 – 241)²⁾. The idea of an error here is an implication (a deduction from (i)): if X, from the speaker's point of view, gives an incorrect evaluation to Y (higher or lower), then X is wrong.

2. Who are X and Y?

X, i.e., the one whose opinion on Y the speaker considers erroneous, can only be expressed by a participant who refers to a 'person': *Петьо замълча — струваше му се, че Елизар (X) надценява противника* 'Petyo kept silent – he thought that Elizar (X) overestimated the opponent'; *Подценяваш ти (X), момче, опита на нашите прадеди* 'Boy, you underestimate the experience of our great-grandfathers'; including the generic referent (*човек* 'man, one', *хора* 'people', *ние* 'we'): *Ние (X)*

по детски надценяваме своето значение за ближния 'We (X) childishy overestimate our significance to our fellow man'.

The names of groups and organizations, as well as other nouns referring, albeit indirectly, to associations of people are interpreted as a participant with the feature 'human': *На всяка епоха (X) е присъщо да надценява своите технически възможности*. 'Each age (X) inherently overestimates its technical capabilities'. In sentences with agentless passive, X is an implicit participant (a person, a community or other type of an agent, usually interpreted as generic): *Да се подценява врагът, е, разбира се, лекомислено, но да се надценява, е пагубно*. 'To underestimate the enemy is, of course, frivolous, but to overestimate him, is detrimental'.

Y, based on our interpretation (i) of the verbs *подценявам* и *надценявам*, is the entity (human or non-human) about which X has an evaluative opinion. Although Y can be a member of different ontological classes (concrete or abstract, human or non-human), the interpretation of Y always presupposes a trait or a group of traits, the manifestation and/or significance of which is evaluated. The examples below illustrate the possible content of Y:

1) abilities, skills, capabilities of a person – specified or not: *Надценявайш интелигентността (Y) на това ченге* 'You overestimate the intelligence (Y) of this cop'; *Не подценявам качествата (Y) ви* 'I do not underestimate your qualities (Y)';

2) merits and achievements of a person (*Естествено, не подценявам победите (Y) ви, но знам, че има и нещо повече* 'Of course, I do not underestimate your wins (Y) but I know that there is something more), results of his/her intellectual activity, such as names of information products (reports, books), names of branches of science and scientific disciplines: *Не мислете, че подценявам нашия доклад (Y)* 'Do not think that I underestimate our report (Y)'; *В никакъв случай не подценявам модерната наука и нейната методология (Y)* 'By no means do I underestimate modern science and its methodology (Y)'.

3) manifestation, quality or degree of feelings and attitudes: *Защо – по дяволите! – всеки надценява любовта (Y), която внушава някому* 'Why – the hell! – everybody overestimates the love (Y) they evoke in other people';

4) the significance of the situation or its consequences: *Но аз не подценявам заплахата (Y), надвиснала над мен и отец Йойона* 'No, I do not underestimate the threat (Y) looming over me and father Yoyona'; *Не мисли, че подценявам опасността (Y), на която постоянно се излагаш*. 'Do not think that I underestimate the danger (Y) you are constantly exposed to.'

In the examples above, the semantic structure of Y include reference both to the entity (possessed) that is evaluated and to its possessor (*победите ви, нашия доклад* etc.).

If the name of the object or the entity (personal or material) is Y, some knowledge about the context or the background of the traits by which the evaluation is made is always assumed: *Много надценявайш този младеж (Y)* 'You overestimate

this young person (Y) a lot'; *Хората са склонни да подценяват пчелите* (Y) 'People tend to underestimate bees (Y)'; *Може би надценяваш своите оръжия* (Y) *и подценяваш моите* (Y) 'Maybe you overestimate your weapons (Y) and underestimate mine (Y)'. In our sample data, the reference to the object without indicating the trait(s), makes not less than 48% of all uses of these verbs in BulNC.

It is important to mention here that each of the verbs may show a preference for co-occurrence with entities of certain ontological classes. In addition, these verbs, being antonymous, show different semantic effects when interacting with negative elements in the context. All these patterns require a separate and more detailed analysis. In the present article, which mainly focuses on their overall characterisation as interpretive predicates, we only observe that the traits by which the entity is evaluated are usually positive. Negative ones are much less common and usually satisfy the valence of the verb *подценявам* referring to Y, which results in a periphrastic expression asserting the high degree of manifestation of the trait: *Но както толкова често досега, подценявам суетата ѝ. Тя така копнее да чуе, че <...> те всички са нейни и ѝ принадлежат, всички – влюбени в нея, <...> че е готова да повярва почти на всичко – дори на тази преструвка* 'But, as so often before, I have underestimated her vanity. She longs to hear that <...> they are hers, that they all belong to her, that all are in love with her, <...> that she is ready to believe almost anything – even this pretense'.

In addition to X and Y – the participants in the situation – the semantic structure of the verbs *подценявам* and *надценявам* involves the speaker, without the necessary overt syntactic expression. Nevertheless, it may be included in the structure of the proposition if he/she is co-referential with X and Y (a case to be discussed in section 3.).

3. Co-referentiality of participants and illocutionary constraints

Usually, the speaker makes a statement in regard to the X's evaluation of the object/entity Y, for example: *Ти (X) надценяваш своя противник* (Y) 'You (X) overestimate your opponent (Y)'. X and Y can be co-referential: *Той (X) се (Y) надценява* 'He (X) overestimates himself (Y)' or partially co-referential when Y is a part of X: *Ти (X) надценяваш своите сили* (Y) 'You (X) overestimate your strengths (Y)'.

In some situations, the speaker may act as X or Y: *Не мислете, че (pro X) подценявам вашия доклад* 'Do not think that I (X) underestimate your report'; *Не ме (Y) надценявай*. 'Do not overestimate me (Y)'. When the object of evaluation is the speaker himself/herself, sentences with the two verbs are perceived in the opposite way: the speaker considers it unfair when being evaluated with *подценявам*, but very positively (albeit modestly) accepts his/her evaluation when *надценявам* is used, compare: *Ти ме подценяваш – сърдито отвърна Санфорд* 'You underestimate me, Sanford replied angrily'; and *Надценяваш ме, братко – поклати глава Човекът без сянка. — И ти си се поддал на мълвата, която ме украси с какви ли не*

достойнства ‘You overestimate me, bro, said the Shadowless Man shaking his head. And you succumbed to the rumor that adorned me with all sorts of virtues.’ Only rarely, when a negative trait or feature is introduced, the evaluation of the speaker as Y in the context of the verb *надценявам* is negative: *Ти малко ме надценяваш като страхливец* ‘You overestimate me a little like a coward.’

The most interesting situation is when all participants are co-referential, i.e., when the speaker, X and Y refer to the same person, and Y is expressed by a reflexive pronoun, co-referential to the subject of evaluation and the speaker (1pSg) with the pattern *Надценявам се / Подценявам се* ‘I overestimate (myself) / underestimate (myself)’.

When the main participants and the speaker have the same referent, the interpretive verb strongly discredits the speaker and, in general, may be analysed as sign of illocutionary suicide (*Злепоставям себе си* ‘I discredit myself’; *Будалкам се* ‘I make a fool of myself.’). However, there are no overt restrictions on the use of the verbs we observe in these contexts.

First, in these contexts if the verb *подценявам* is in 1pSg, it entails a predication indicating a positive self-perception of the speaker (see also above), thus, there is no illocutionary inconsistency here: *Аз се подценявам* ‘I underestimate myself.’ Second, the contexts we have analysed with the verb *надценявам* in samples from BuINC show that most examples are associated with refutation, when the speaker either denies his/her errors in self-evaluation (*Не се надценявам* ‘I do not overestimate myself’) or analyses his/her erroneous assessment. In the latter, the most regular syntactic position is that of a complement clause: *Понякога си мисля, че се надценявам, че зад фактите и вероятностите ми се привиждат призраци* ‘Sometimes, I think I overestimate myself and I see ghosts behind the facts and probabilities’²).

Only a few examples in our sample demonstrate unconventional pragmatic patterns in the context of self-recognition: *Знаете ли, днес се надценявам ужасно*. ‘You know, I’ve awfully overestimated myself today’.

4. On the translation of *подценявам* and *надценявам* into Russian

The Russian verbs *недооценивать* and *переоценивать* are usually found as translation equivalents of the two Bulgarian verbs. However, as for the Russian verb *недооценивать*, where the prefix already contains negation, it cannot combine with the negative particle as easily as does its counterpart in Bulgarian: the translation of *Не, не я подценявайте, тя чете много* – рус. *Нет, не недооценивайте ее, она много читает* is not quite acceptable in Russian due to the superposition of negative markers. Indeed, in the core part of the Russian National Corpus (RNC), the verb *переоценивать* is found in 72 examples with a preposed negative particle, while *недооценивать* is only found in 6 examples (while the latter occurs 50 % more frequently in the RNC than *переоценивать*).

The translation into Russian of the predicate *подценявам* with the negative particle poses a serious problem, since negative contexts, as already mentioned,

account for a large proportion of the predicate's usage. One of the solutions is to use synonyms, such as *относиться пренебрежительно* or *преуменьшать заслуги*. The examples below taken from the parallel corpus within the RNC show this translation technique:

– *Не, не я подценявайте, тя чете много.* – *Не относитесь к ней пренебрежительно, она много читает* (P. Vezhinov, translated by M. Tarasova).

– *О нет, нет, Афраний! Не преуменьшайте своих заслуг!* – *О, не, не, Афраний! Не подценявайте толкова заслугите си* (M. Bulgakov, translated by L. Minkova).

The second possible solution is to increase the distance between the negative particle and the verb *underestimate*, for example by using modal verbs or through other transformations: *Но нека не подценяваме себе си.* — *Но не стоит себя недооценивать* / *Давайте не будем себя недооценивать*.

If the predicate is in the negative interrogative form, a transformation into a positive interrogative sentence may be a solution, thus avoiding the negative particle in the Russian translation: *Не подценявате ли шедьовъра на народното изкуство?* – *Может быть, вы недооцениваете этот шедевр народного искусства?*

The verbs that we have analysed, positioned at the intersection of interpretive predicates and predicates of persistent mental state, are endowed with a complex semantic structure. The article discusses some general issues with respect to their semantics, referentiality and grammar. A multi-aspect analysis of the situations in which the verbs *подценявам* and *надценявам* function, and a comparison with verbs of similar semantic structure such as *омаловажавам* 'belittle', *преувеличавам* (*нещо*) 'exaggerate (sth.)', etc. will reveal some commonalities and differences among the subclass of verbs of 'misvaluation'.

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NOTES

1. The illustrative sample is extracted from the Bulgarian National Corpus (BuNC), 450 examples. In section 4, we have used examples from the Russian National Corpus (RNC), incl. the Bulgarian-Russian parallel subcorpus which is part of the RNC.
2. Any context which involves a mental operation of the (speaker's) own assessment, would remove the illocutionary prohibition on the first-person form for the most verbs with an interpretive semantic component: *Предполагам, че ви обиждам / че ви тормозя / че излагам всички*. 'I guess I'm insulting you / harassing you / exposing everyone.'

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