

## THE TOPICAL THEME IN CLAUSES WITH COPULAR VERBS IN ENGLISH AND BULGARIAN

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### Abstract

The paper focuses on examples with topical themes of obligatory clausal elements in clauses with copular verbs. These examples were obtained from an English and a Bulgarian corpora of written texts compiled for the purposes of investigating preposing of clause elements in English and Bulgarian. The examples have been analyzed following the understanding of theme in Halliday [2] and Halliday and Matthiessen [3], and tree diagrams have been drawn following Huddleston and Pullum [4].

**Key words:** preposing of predicatives, topical theme, English, Bulgarian.

**JEL:** I29.

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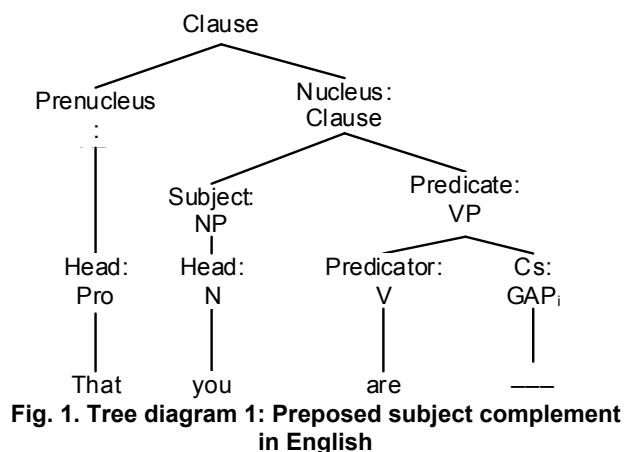
### 1. Preposing of obligatory subject-oriented predicatives in English

A subject-oriented predicative is a syntactic constituent that occurs after a copular verb. In English, most typically, a predicative of this kind is realized by an AdjP or NP; it can be a locative complement or a prepositional complement, and may be realized by an AdvP or PP.

In an English corpus of 30,000 words there were six examples of preposing of subject complements: four in main clauses and two in subordinate clauses. The examples are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Preposed subject complements in English**

N	Source	Example
a	en_1_fic	I smirk back, narrowing my eyes. "I'm resourceful." <b>"That you are,"</b> he whispers and releases my hand to circle his arms around me.
b	en_7_fic	"I've got Alex here." <b>"Fat lot of help he'll be,"</b> Ophelia muttered.
c	en_13_fic	A very tall woman, taller even than Vanessa and a few years older, stood behind the screened door. <b>A country woman,</b> she seemed, and strikingly attractive, with pale blue eyes and silken, straight blond hair cut shoulder length.
d	en_2_fic	In the early years, he was so fired up about Patty, she could do no wrong. <b>And very nice years</b> they were.
e	en_8_fic	His curiosity, <b>mild as it is,</b> has been hijacked by peddlers of fakery.
f	en_3_fic	<b>Early though it was,</b> his brain had fired up like the V12 engine in his Ferrari, Toni thought.



All examples are realized by phrasal subject complements, and, with the exception of the AdjPs in 'e' and 'f', all phrases are NPs.

Examples 'a' and 'b' contain only a marked topical theme, i.e. the respective preposed subject complement, which is given in bold in the table above. This marked theme is located in the pre-nucleus as shown by the tree diagram for example 'a'.

Example 'c', as the above examples 'a' and 'b', contains only a marked topical theme. However, this clause also presents a case of end-attachment coordination of the subtype 'addition of new element'. Huddleston and Pullum [4] analyze clauses such as example 'c' as coordinate structures "be-

tween a clause and a clause fragment”, and, for clarity, I have presented this analysis in a tree diagram below. In it, the clause fragment, which is the

second coordinate, is the filler of GAP<sub>i</sub> in the preposed NP, which, as a whole, fills GAP<sub>i</sub> in the nucleus clause.

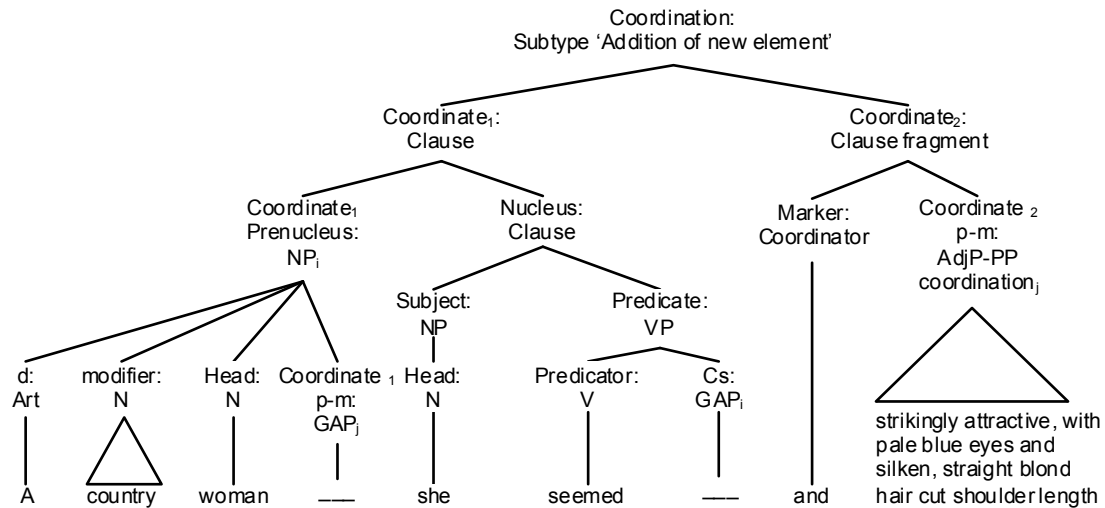


Fig. 2. Tree diagram 2: Preposed subject complement in English as an element of coordination

Huddleston and Pullum [4] explain that in coordination of the type ‘addition of new element’ the coordinator, *and*, may be dropped, and the added new element may be integrated in the clause. In our example it can be integrated in the preposed NP as a post modifier, rendering the following:

I. *A very tall woman, taller even than Vanessa and a few years older, stood behind the screened door. A country woman, strikingly attractive, with pale blue eyes and silken, straight blond hair cut shoulder length, she seemed.*

Example ‘I’, though grammatical, does sound ill-formed for a number of reasons:

- A too heavy NP is preposed;
- The preceding clause contains another heavy NP which functions as subject. A less heavy subject in the preceding clause makes preposing more acceptable:

II. *A very tall woman stood behind the screened door. A country woman, strikingly attractive, with pale blue eyes and silken, straight blond hair cut shoulder length, she seemed.*

- A canonical variant without preposing as in ‘III’ below also sounds ill-formed due to the semantics of the verb, *seem*, which cannot be followed by attributes related to appearance, obvious to an observer:

III. *A very tall woman, taller even than Vanessa and a few years older, stood behind the screened door. She seemed a country woman, strikingly attractive, with pale blue eyes and silken, straight blond hair cut shoulder length.*

What example ‘c’ shows is that preposing may be dependent on a number of factors such as heaviness of the preposed constituent, linguistic environment and semantic compatibility.

Example ‘d’ also presents an interesting case for discussion, reinforcing the significance of proposing in a given context. In addition to the topical theme, *very nice years*, example ‘d’ also contains the textual theme, *and*, which is a maker of coordination that shows that the clause itself is the second coordinate. The question is which element represents the first coordinate. As we know, to be felicitous, preposing must meet the requirement to be linked to a particular element in previous context. The function of the textual theme, *and*, is to emphasize on this link. Bearing this in mind, we conclude that the coordinate, *and very nice year they were*, belongs to the initial PP, *in the early years*. And when placed in it, the following well-formed, grammatical clause is effected, shown in ‘IV’ below:

IV. *In the early years, and very nice years they were, he was so fired up about Patty, she could do no wrong.*

However, after reading the whole paragraph, quoted below, in which the clause with preposing and its textual theme, *and*, appear as a concluding remark, the acceptability of ‘IV’ is questionable. Though, formally, the link is the element “*the early years*”, semantically, it is the fact that Walter listened, believed, etc... in Patty that made these years very good.

V. *Poor Walter. First he'd set aside his acting and filmmaking dreams out of a sense of financial obligation to his parents, and then no sooner had his*

dad set him free by dying than he teamed up with Patty and set aside his planet-saving aspirations and went to work for 3M, so that Patty could have her excellent old house and stay home with the babies. The whole thing happened almost without discussion. He got excited about the plans that excited her, he threw himself into renovating the house and defending her against her family. It wasn't until years later--after Patty had begun to Disappoint<sup>1</sup> him--that he became more forgiving of the other Emersons and insisted that she was the lucky one, the only Emerson to escape the shipwreck and survive to tell the tale. He said that Abigail, who'd been left stranded to scavenge emotional meals on an island of great scarcity (Manhattan Island!), should be forgiven for monopolizing conversations in her attempt to feed herself. He said that Patty should pity her siblings, not blame them, for not having had the strength or the luck to get away: for being so hungry. But this all came much later. In the early years, he was so fired up about Patty, she could do no wrong. And very nice years they were.

If the paragraph ended with 'IV', the culmination of the final thought would be lost. As said earlier 'IV' is a well-formed clause with different interpretation: in it, preposing interrupts the flow of the clause, and, in this sense, it results in a supplementive clause with a "content-specifying" function [4]. In the original text in 'V', the meaning of the conjunction, *and*, is to express consequence as Huddleston and Pullum [4] claim 'X' and 'Y' implicates 'X and therefore Y'. In this particular example, 'Y' is not easily definable, though it is clear that 'Y' is the element that serves to satisfy the pragmatic constraint on the familiarity status of the preposed constituent. As we can see that discourse-old element can be identified in a very broad sense. In this example, it is not solely the particular syntactic constituent, as proved by the unsatisfactory ending of the paragraph with 'IV'. The old discourse is rather an idea, a situation expressed in the paragraph, namely, as mentioned earlier, the behavior of Walter in the early years of their marriage. Easily, the paragraph above can end in:

VI. *And very nice life was.*

One more thing to add here is that ending, as suggested in 'VI', and even less the original ending, cannot occur after any sentence in the paragraph. Ending 'VI' can felicitously be placed at the end of the paragraph and in the place, shown in example 'VII':

VII. *He got excited about the plans that excited her, he threw himself into renovating the house and de-*

*fending her against her family. And very nice life was.*

The original ending, *And very nice years they were.*, cannot occur in 'VII', which proves that it requires the linkage to "the early years". But, as shown above in 'IV', placing it syntactically right next to its semantic link affects the narrative.

Thus example 'd' shows that preposing is a complex phenomenon dependent, above all, on the intent of the speaker to express content that is marked, placing this content in an appropriate environment.

The examples 'a'-'d' discussed so far, all show preposing in main declarative clauses. Examples 'e' and 'f' are not the same in this respect, because they are clauses which are part of larger constituents, part of other clauses: 'e' and 'f' are dependent adjunct clauses.

The two examples 'e' and 'f' are the only examples of preposing in English in dependent clauses according to Biber et al. [1] who claim that "fronting in dependent clauses is restricted to special structures with the subordinators *as* and *though*".

Both *as* and *though*, which are textual themes, are placed after the topical themes, *mild* and *early* in examples 'e' and 'f' respectively. Biber et al. [1] observe that it is the contrastive emphasis of the initial position that is sought in the placement of the conjunction after the preposed verb complement.

The structure I propose for the *as*-clause 'e', and by inference for the *though*-clause 'f', is given below. In Huddleston and Pullum [4] such clauses are analyzed as prepositional phrases with head and complement. The authors suggest rethinking the division between prepositions and conjunctions, and moving almost all conjunctions (the exceptions are *that*, *whether* and *if* when they introduce subordinate content clauses) into the group of prepositions. This reclassification does appear to be very logical. However, in the tree diagram below I have preserved the traditional classification of the conjunction *as*.

Tree diagram 3 below contains two gaps: one for the preposed Cs, and one for the textual theme, the conjunction *as*, at the very beginning of the clause.

The initial gap of the *as*-clause may be filled when, in an *as*-clause, the correlative conjunction 'as...as' is used as shown in the example obtained from the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, Writing Assistant Edition CD-ROM (LDCE) [5] below:

VIII. *As popular as he is, the President hasn't always managed to have his own way.*

<sup>1</sup> Capitalization in the original text.

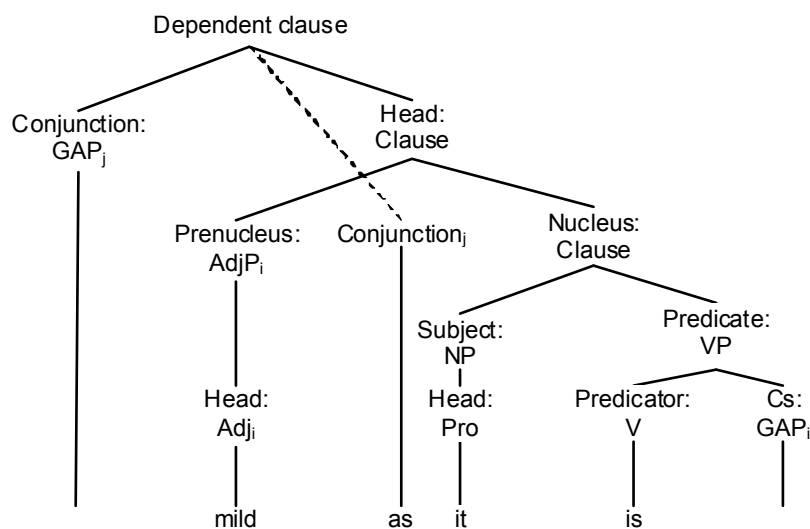


Fig. 3. Tree diagram 3: Preposed subject complements in a dependent clause in English

Before discussing from a syntactic perspective the use of the correlative pair, let us consider the meaning of the conjunction 'as' in clauses such as 'e'. The Longman Dictionary provides two more examples of *as*-clauses with preposing, which for the purposes of the analysis are given below as well:

IX. *Unlikely as it might seem, I'm tired too.* [5].

X. *Try as she might, Sue couldn't get the door open.* [5].

Example 'X' does not contain preposed subject complement but I have decided to list this type of preposed VP here. The reason is that *as*-clause with preposed VP occur almost exclusively with the full verb 'try' and the modal verb 'might'. The online British National Corpus (BNC) corpus contains only three examples with other verbs followed by the conjunction 'as', personal pronoun and *might*, and these examples are listed below:

XI. *The monsters could not get her here. But, **cling as she might** to the bolster she had taken with her to stop her screams, she could not stop shaking.*

XII. *Eventually she found them but couldn't get near -- the crowds were as dense further up and, **push as she might**, she could not make a parting for herself.*

XIII. *On the other hand, now he thought about it -- that was one of the advantages of taking time out to think things through -- there had been occasions when she had looked at him in a special way which made him think that she might not reject him. However, **evade and evade as he might**, in the end he had to come to it: did he love Jane Postlethwaite?*

*Enough to marry her? No, not enough to marry her, that was not it.*

As to the meaning of *as* in clauses with preposing such as 'e', 'VIII', 'IX' and 'X' above, it is the same of the conjunction *though*, which introduces adjunct clauses of concession. This is especially important because in 'e' *as* can be interpreted both as *though* and *because*, with logical meaning in both interpretations.

The conjunction *though* may be used to form subordinate clauses without preposing, with loss of the contrastive emphasis on the preposed constituent:

XIV. *Though he is popular, the President hasn't always managed to have his own way.*

As Biber et al. [1] note *as*-clauses do not have a basic variant without preposing, at least not without a change in meaning as the basic variant of example 'VIII' shows:

XV. *As he is popular, the President hasn't always managed to have his own way.*

In example 'XV' the conjunction 'as' has the meaning of *because*, and in this example this results into semantic ill-formedness.

It should be noted that in the analysis in this section the focus is on the Cs preposing, and the position of the dependent adjunct clauses has not been considered.

## 2. Preposing of obligatory subject-oriented predicatives in Bulgarian personal clauses

In this section the discussion of preposed subject complements in Bulgarian will exclude impersonal clauses and cases involving inversion. In contrast to the arrangement in English, when placing a subject complement in initial position in Bulgarian,

this marked topical theme is followed by subject-verb inversion when the subject is overtly expressed. Example of this construction is given below in 'XVI':

XVI. Достатъчни му бяха озадачените погледи. [bg\_2\_fic]

Enough(pl) him(dat) were puzzled-the(pl) looks.  
The puzzled looks were enough for him.

In the Bulgarian corpus of 30,000 words, subject complement preposing in clauses with null subjects was observed only in clauses with the copula *be*. Below, the four examples from the corpus, in which the subject complements are underlined, show the types of phrases that can realize the marked topical theme: an AdjP, an NP, an AdvP and a PP, respectively in each of the examples. The last two complements are obligatory locative complements:

XVII. “Няма проблем, Жожоба,” отвърнах му. “Прав си.” [bg\_8\_fic]

have(NEG, 3p. sg) problem, Jojoba, said (1p.sg) him (dat). right are (2p.sg)

“No problem,” I said to him. “You are right.”

XVIII. “Какви сте вие на Асен?”

Брат съм му. [bg\_1\_fic]

What are (3p. pl) you to Asen? Brother am (1 p. sg.) him(dat)

What are you to Asen? [I] am his brother. (I am a brother to him)

XIX. “Къде е Светослав?”

“Тука съм.” [bg\_1\_fic]

Where is (3p. sg) Svetoslav? Here am (1 p. sg)

Where is Svetoslav? [I] am here.

XX. “Но сънищата са различни, макар и да се повтарят постоянно. От различни епохи са.” [bg\_6\_fic]

But dreams-the are different, though to self(reflexive) repeat constantly. From different eras are (3p. sg)

But the dreams are different though they repeat constantly. [They] are from different eras.

In all examples XVII-XX the subject complements appear initially followed by a present tense of ‘be’ marked for the respective person and number. The structure I propose for clauses of this type is identical to the tree diagram of the typical English clause with Cs preposing with the only difference being the empty position of the unexpressed subject. However, this is not a gap because we know that the subject is made explicit by the verb inflections.

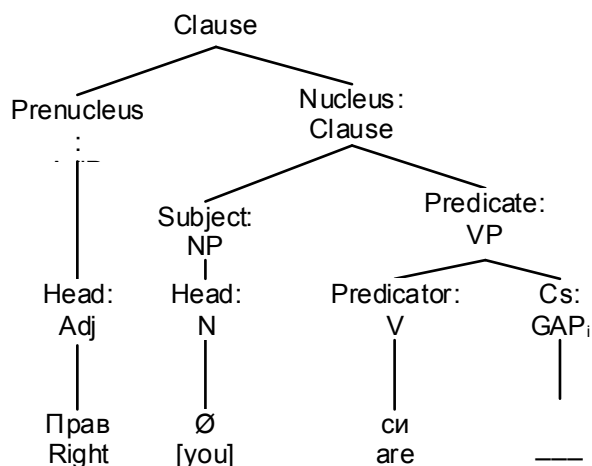


Fig. 4. Tree diagram 4: Preposed subject complements in a Bulgarian personal clause with a pro-drop subject

In addition to these four examples with subject complement preposing, the Bulgarian corpus contained six more, or a total of 10 clauses with subject complement preposing in clauses with null subjects.

Here are the other six examples with the preposed subject complement underlined in each one. Example ‘f’ is an answer to the question in ‘e’:

Table 2. Preposed subject complements in the Bulgarian corpus

N	Source	Example
a	bg_1_fic	“И от всичките останахме само аз и ти.” “Това малко ли е?” дяволито го погледна Телец. “ <u>Много</u> е.” “And of all, only you and I remained.” “Is that not enough?” Taurus looked at him playfully “That’s <u>many</u> ”
b	bg_11_fic	“Това е изкуствена стръв, която само имитира плячката. <u>Яркочервена</u> е, за да виждаш къде хвърляш въдицата ...” “This is artificial bait which only mimics prey. It’s <u>bright red</u> to allow you to see where you throw your fishing rod...”
c	bg_6_fic	“Мисля, че той [сънят] ще докаже предположенията ми, особено ако е свързан с религия.” “Да, <u>за Христос</u> е, поученията в храма, онези думи, в които Той разказва откъде е,” отвърна бързо Анита. “I think that it [the dream] will prove my assumptions especially if it’s linked to religion.” Yes, it’s <u>about Jesus</u> , the teachings in church, those words where he says where he is from,” Anita said quickly.
d	bg_9_fic	Близостта на Флорина ме отпусна. Вече нямаше защо да правя планове. <u>Тук</u> съм, където ми е мястото. Being close to Florina made me relax. I didn’t have to make plans any more. I am <u>here</u> , where I belong.
e	bg_8_fic	“ <u>Сигурен</u> ли си, че няма проблем?” изгледа ме с недоверие Жожобата. “Are you <u>certain</u> that there is no problem?” Jojoba looked at me distrustfully.
f	bg_8_fic	“ <u>Сигурен</u> съм,” отвърнах му. “I am <u>certain</u> ,” I told him.

Similarly to XVII-XX above, all examples a-f are examples of obligatory preposing of subject complement because of the constraints of the present tense of the verb *be*. Neither of these ten examples of preposing in Bulgarian is a construction with added focus on the preposed element as in the main clause preposing in the English examples discussed earlier (cf example ‘V’ above). Therefore, it must be noted that the clauses discussed here, from a pragmatic perspective, are different from the English clauses. In English, subject complement preposing in main clauses, requires specific context in order to be felicitous, i.e. the preposed constituents needs to be discourse-old. No such special conditions are required for subject complement preposing in Bulgarian though some of the preposed constituents in the examples are discourse old, i.e. example ‘f’. But, as it has already been pointed out, they do not bear the tonic prominence characteristic of preposing of subject complements in English.

Now let us consider the formal characteristics of the Bulgarian examples a-f.

In example ‘a’ the determinative, *many*, functions as a subject complement. Huddleston and Pullum [4] also note such function of degree determinatives, *many*, *much*, *few* and *little*, which is “relatively uncommon and formal” as in *Their enemies were many* (ibid). In contrast, in Bulgarian this use of determinatives is common in both its unmarked post-verbal as in ‘XXI’ and in marked initial position realizing the Cs as in example ‘a’ with un-

expressed subject and in ‘XXII’, where the subject is expressed and appears after the verb.

XXI. Друг проблем е, че учениците са много и няма стаи за отпих на децата със специални образователни нужди.

Another problem is that the students are many and there are not rooms for the children with special educational needs to relax in. [source: <http://www.psiholozi.com>]

XXII. Много са хората, които искат да крадат от енергетиката.

Many are the people who want to steal from the energy sector [source: <http://www.sevlievski.com>].

In example ‘b’ the preposed subject complement, *яркочервена* [*bright red*] is followed post-verbally by an optional adverb clause of reason, *за да виждаш къде хвърляш въдицата* [*for you to see where you throw your fishing rod*]. This leaves the impression that preposing does not make the clause marked in any way that would, for example, make inappropriate to continue with an ordinary narrative.

The subject complement in example ‘c’ is a heavy constituent, a PP with a complement consisting of three NPs: *за* <sub>NP1</sub>/*Христос*/, *поученията в храма*/, *онези думи*/, *в които Той разказва откъде е*/, [*about* <sub>NP1</sub>/*Jesus*/, *the teachings in church*/, *those words where he says where he is from*], and only the underlined part is preposed, i.e. the prepositional head and the first NP. In fact the

second and the third NPs provide additional details what the dream is about, and in that sense they are supplementary NPs [4]. The only reason for preposing part of the Cs is the heaviness of the constituent which makes impossible preposing it as a whole:

XXIII. \**“Да, за Христос, поученията в храма, онези думи, в които Той разказва откъде е, е,” отвърна бързо Аниа.*

Similar to ‘c’ in structure in the sense that only part of the Cs is preposed are examples ‘d’ with preposed head of an AdvP, and ‘e’ with a preposed head of an AdjP. In ‘d’ the part which is left post-verbally is a non-defining relative clause, i.e. the double underlined supplementary clause: *тук, където ми е мястото [here, where I belong]*. In ‘e’ the postposed constituent is the double underlined complement in the AdjP, *сигурен, че няма проблем [certain that there is no problem]*.

As it has been pointed out above, preposing in the discussed Bulgarian clauses is syntactically motivated and not pragmatically. Therefore it can be expected that, in case of discontinuous phrases, a speaker would prefer not to form such if special

emphasis is not intended on an initial element. In the past tense of *be* this is achieved by placing the copula *be* in initial position, which, as it has already been noted, is not possible for the present form of *be*:

XXIV. *Бях сигурен, че няма проблем.*

XXV. *Сигурен съм, че няма проблем.*

Statistical data in support to the claim above are the personal clauses with null subjects and the past tense of *be* identified in the compiled Bulgarian corpus. Of them, none exhibits preposing of the obligatory subject complement, neither these where the Cs is realized by minimal phrases, nor the ones with expanded phrases.

The structure I propose for clauses in which only the head of the phrase realizing the Cs is preposed is similar to that in tree diagram 4 but the GAP in the Cs is formed only by the head of the AdjP and the complement/post-modifier is left in its usual position as a declarative variant of ‘e’ shows in ‘XXV’ above with the respective tree diagram 5:

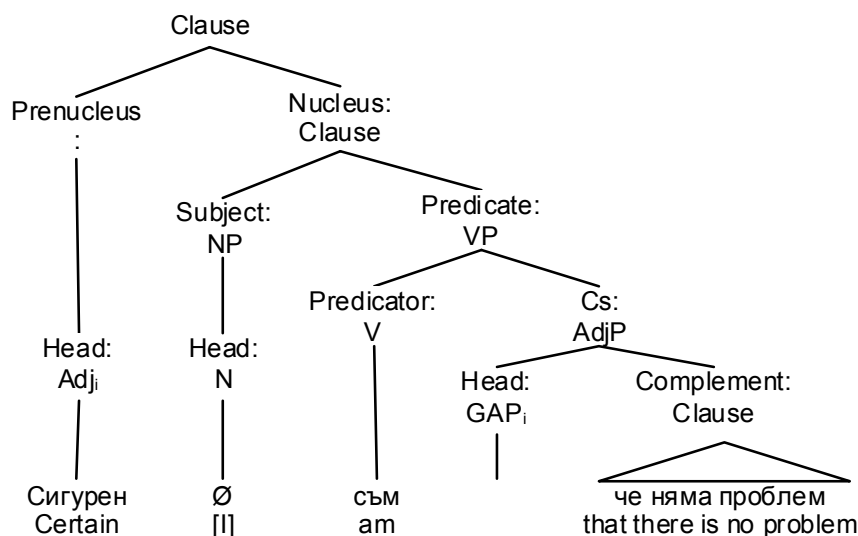


Fig. 5. Tree diagram 5: Preposed discontinuous subject complements in a Bulgarian personal clause with a pro-drop subject

In Bulgarian it is not only the head of a phrase that can be the preposed constituent in personal clauses with null subjects, forming a discontinuous phrase. Other elements, dependent ones, such as a pre-modifier and a complement/post-modifier can also be preposed with certain types of phrases. However, this description will be the focus of another publication.

**Conclusions**

1. In English, in addition to the requirement that preposing is motivated by previous discourse, it

has been found out that preposing may be dependent on a number of factors such as:

- heaviness of the preposed constituent;
- semantic compatibility;
- and last but not least the linguistic environment.

2. In Bulgarian, preposing after the copular *be* is motivated in the first place by the constraint of the verb *be* in present tense, which cannot be in initial position and obligatorily requires a constituent to be placed initially.

3. In both English and Bulgarian the preposed subject complement may be a constituent of a larger constituent: a coordinate in a coordination structure as shown by the English example or forming a discontinuous phrase as shown by the Bulgarian example.

**Appendix 1: Literary sources for the examples obtained from the English and Bulgarian corpora**

N	Corpus code	Source
1	en_1_fic	James, E. L. (2011) <i>Fifty Shades Freed</i> , The Writer's Coffee Shop Publishing House
2	en_2_fic	Franzen, J. (2010) <i>Freedom</i> , Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York
3	en_3_fic	Follet, K. (2005) <i>Whiteout</i> , The Dutton Publishing Group
4	en_7_fic	Picoult, J. (1995) <i>Picture Perfect</i> , Berkley Books, New York
5	en_8_fic	McEwan, I. (2005) <i>Saturday</i> , Jonathan Cape, London
6	en_13_fic	Byatt, A. S. (1990) <i>Possession</i> , Random House
7	bg_1_fic	Popov 2006: Попов, Ю. (2006) <i>Островът на мъглиците</i> , София: Сиела
8	bg_6_fic	Doncheva 1999: Дончева, С. (1999) <i>360 градуса преди края</i> , ИК „Бард“
9	bg_8_fic	Nikolov 2008: Николов, М. (2008) <i>Кръглата риба</i> , Жанет-45
10	bg_9_fic	Hadjiev 1989: Хаджиев, Й. (1989) <i>Семеен портрет</i> , Народна младеж, София
11	bg_11_fic	Dimitrov 2008: Димитров, Т. (2008) <i>Душа назаем</i> , Самиздат

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