

When Bulgarian ‘Still’ Meets Ukrainian ‘Already’

Ivan Derzhanski, Olena Siruk

Institute of Mathematics and Informatics

Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

{iad58g,olebosi}@gmail.com

Abstract

Languages vary in whether and how they use words for ‘still’, ‘already’, or both, for expressing the meaning ‘as early/soon as’ (‘no later than’). If both can in principle be used, the eligibility of one or the other may depend on the syntactic category and lexical choice of the modified constituent, the position of the event on the time axis and the speaker’s view of the situation. Some questions arise: What does the latter point include? How is this meaning of a ‘still’ or ‘already’ word related to its other uses? If the same word can also express the contrary meaning ‘as late/recently as’ (‘no sooner than’), is the ambiguity tolerated, or how is it resolved? Finally, in a translation, can the word choice in the original play a part too?

We look at pairs of sentences in which Bulgarian *още* ‘still’ corresponds to Ukrainian *вже* ‘already’ from a parallel Bulgarian–Ukrainian corpus, containing both texts written in one of these languages and translated into the other and texts translated into both from six other languages. We compare them to similar sentences where Ukrainian also uses its ‘still’ word, *ще*. We observe that the correspondence *още* : *вже* is more frequent in translations from languages which actively use their ‘already’ word for ‘as early/soon as’ than from those which do not. But a strong dependence on the semantics of the modified constituent can also be established. We discuss the details of the distribution and its presumable reasons.

Keywords: Bulgarian language, lexical semantics, parallel corpus, particles, temporal adverbials, translation, Ukrainian language.

1 Introduction

Languages vary in whether and how they use words for ‘still’, ‘already’, or both, as modifiers of time adverbs, temporal subordinate clauses and other expressions with temporal semantics in the meaning

‘as early/soon as’ (‘no later than’). As Galton (1976: 383) puts it, ‘we should not be surprised if what is objectively the same date, at the same measurable distance from the present, can be depicted in contrasting ways in different languages’. He comments on the comparison of the Russian sentence (1a) with its German counterpart (1b):¹

- (1) a. Впрочем ещё Августин указывал ...
b. So wies schon der hl. Augustin hin.
‘Already Augustine pointed out ...’

‘In Russian, the saint falls still within his period of antiquity, known to be far removed from the present, whilst it was still ongoing; this distance need not even be explicitly stated. In the German rendering, on the other hand, it is noted as remarkable that such a statement was already made by Augustine much earlier than one might perhaps expect.’

But it is not that one language exclusively uses a ‘still’ word for ‘as early as’ and another an ‘already’ one. Whilst in German only *schon* is possible with a subject noun phrase (Мустайоки, 1988: 110), other constituents also allow *noch*. Both schemes may even cooccur within the same sentence; here is an example in German as well as one in Italian:

- (2) Du wußtest damals im voraus, daß ich dir gehorsam sein würde, ich hatte es schon vor der Beichte, und noch eh ich dich kannte, versprochen. ‘You knew in advance that I would be obedient to you; I had promised it even before the confession, and even before I knew you.’ (H. Hesse, *The Glass Bead Game*)
- (3) Pare che già fanciullo fosse toccato dalla grazia divina e laggiù in Castiglia leggesse i

¹To save glossing space, words meaning ‘still’ and ‘already’ will be marked by single and double underlining, respectively. Appendix A presents the ‘still’ and ‘already’ words of all languages mentioned in the paper, including (for completeness, in brackets) words that do not themselves appear in the text.

libri degli arabi e dei dottori greci ancora im-pubere. ‘It seems that even as a child he was already blessed by divine grace, and in his native Castile he read the books of the Arabs and the Greek doctors while still in his teens.’ (U. Eco, *The Name of the Rose*)

‘Facing such parallels, a linguist cannot help but wonder whether the meanings differ’ (Мустайоки, 1988: 111).

Regarding German, Löbner (1989: 202) notes that (4a) ‘is hard to distinguish from’ (4b):

- (4) a. *Sie kommt noch heute.*
b. *Sie kommt schon heute.*

‘She is coming this very day.’

Yet in general the two are not equivalent: unlike *schon*, *noch* is restricted to time specifications which include the reference time, so that replacing *heute* ‘today’ with *übermorgen* ‘the day after tomorrow’ in (4a) is problematic ‘unless it is clear that for independent reasons reference is implicitly to the day after tomorrow’.

In Russian, too, both schemes are in use:

- (5) a. *Уже Щерба обращал внимание на необходимость изучения языковых ошибок.*
b. *Ещё Щерба обращал внимание на необходимость изучения языковых ошибок.*

‘Already Shcherba drew attention to the need to study language errors.’

- (6) a. *Уже в Твери я понял, что еду зря.*
b. *Ещё в Твери я понял, что еду зря.*

(on a journey from Moscow to St Petersburg)
‘Already in Tver [i. e., about one quarter of the way] I realised I was travelling in vain.’

The difference between them has been formulated in a variety of ways. Апресян (1979: 512–3) appeals to the concept of speaker’s time: in (5a) the linguist Lev Scherba is thought of as the speaker’s contemporary, and in (5b) as someone from another period. Богуславский (1996: 240–1) highlights the different reference points: in (6a) Tver is presented as being *near* the start of the journey, and in (6b) as *far* from the destination. Thus *уже* marks the event as having happened *early*, and *ещё* as having happened *long ago* (Мустайоки, 1988: 113–4).

That said, some languages use one of these words for ‘no later than’, but not the other. One such is Bulgarian, where only *още* has this function. This may be a regional feature. Reiter (1987) shows that the very limited use of the ‘already’ word, compared to German *schon*, is characteristic of the Balkan languages, especially the more eastern ones. Here is an example that he gives as an illustration of Bulgarian *още* translating German *schon* (p. 117–118):

- (7) *Нейният мъж ще получи още сега, приживе на папа, известно обезщетение, само четвъртинка от покупната цена на къщата...* ← *Ihr Mann bekommt schon jetzt, bei Papas Lebzeiten, eine Abstandssumme, ein Viertel bloß von der Hauskaufsumme ...* ‘her husband gets compensation already, in Papa’s life-time — a quarter of the purchase price of the house.’ (T. Mann, *Buddenbrooks*)

Note that *вече* is unable to be focussed, in particular it can’t be in the focus of interrogation and carry the interrogative clitic (9), unlike *още* (10) and in contrast to Finnish *jo* (8):

- (8) a. *Onko kirje jo valmis?* ‘Is the letter ready yet?’
b. (i) *Onko kirje jó valmis?*
(ii) *Joko kirje on valmis?*
‘Is the letter ready so soon?’ (Välikangas, 1982: 375)
- (9) a. *Готово ли е вече писмото?*
b. **Вече ли е готово писмото?*
- (10) a. *Пише ли се още писмото?* ‘Is the letter still being written?’
b. *Още ли се пише писмото?* ‘Is the letter still being written?’

The motivation of the use of ‘still’ and/or ‘already’ words for ‘no later than’ (in any language) can be assumed to be such as hinted in (Galton, 1976: 383) and elaborated in (Мустайоки, 1988: 134): beginning with ‘whilst it is *still* time *t*, *already* event *e* happens’, either ‘*still t*’ replaces ‘*already*’ or ‘*still*’ is lost and ‘*already*’ adopts (so to say) *t* as an argument (Figure 1).

The diagram in Figure 2 illustrates the first paraphrase in the style of (van der Auwera, 1993): the real situation in which *e* already happens at *t* can be thought of in contrast with an anterior or imaginary (potential or counterfactual) one in which it does

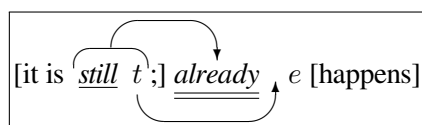


Figure 1: Reconstruction of the motivation for using ‘still’ and ‘already’ for ‘as early as’

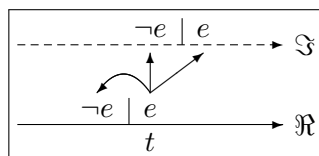


Figure 2: ‘at t , already e happens’

not (yet) do so, as well as a posterior imaginary one in which it does. And as per the second paraphrase it is still t when e happens, and one might say that the contrast is with a later situation in which it is no longer t , as well as a potential or counterfactual one where t strikes before e . But since t is a time, it makes sense to have it trade places with e and to align the times of the real and the imaginary axis, as shown in Figure 3. (Whether e can be said to hap-

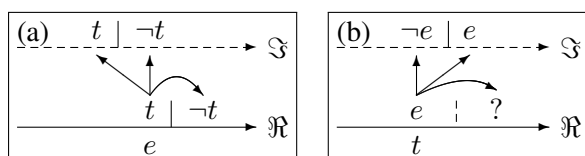


Figure 3: ‘it is still t when e happens’

pen after t depends on its aspectual characteristics, hence the question mark and the dashed border at the possible change of state.) In this way the diagram in Figure 3(b) becomes identical to the one in Figure 2 in the relation of the situation to the imaginary axis, where e only happens after t ; the difference is that on the real axis the former ‘looks’ backwards and the latter forwards. This essentially confirms Богуславский (1996)’s description, although it seems not to tell the whole story, even for Russian:

- (11) *Зевс знал, как много горя и зла принесет с собой в мир сын златой Афродиты. Он хотел, чтобы умертвили его ещё при рождении.* ‘Zeus knew how much grief and evil the son of golden Aphrodite would bring into the world. He wanted him to be killed at birth.’ (Nikolay Kun, *Greek Myths and Legends*)

What is highlighted here is not that this was *long before* a future reference point; Zeus’s idea must have

been to annihilate Eros before he has managed to work any mischief, that is, *as soon as possible* after his appearance in the world. Clearly more factors are at work, even more so in view of the cross-linguistic variation.

Lexicographers are not always attentive to these uses of ‘still’ and ‘already’ words. The multi-volume *Dictionary of the Bulgarian Language* lists the sense ‘as early as’ under the word *още* (Павлова and Гунова, 2002) as its 4th meaning, with nine illustrations of use of *още* with temporal or circumstantial adjuncts (e. g., *Още като ученик се интересувал от археология* ‘Still a school student, he was interested in archeology’). No examples of use with a subject are given. There is one – taken from an older dictionary (Аргиров et al., 1927: 277–278) – in the entry for *вече* (Чоролеева, 1979), under its 9th meaning (*Вече Априлов замисляше за български университет* ‘Already Aprilov was thinking of a Bulgarian university’); this use, however, is marked as obsolete.

The *Dictionary of the Ukrainian Language* does not list ‘no later than’ as a separate meaning of *вже* (Радченко, 1979); one example of such use of the word is given (*Уже сьогодні їх заручають, А через тиждень і повінчають* ‘Already today they are being engaged, and in a week they shall be married’), but with no mention of its being different from the others in the entry, although it is, witness the fact that it is the only one in which *още* and not *вече* would be employed if translated into Bulgarian (preserving the general structure). In the entry for *ще* (Горобець, 1980) the sense discussed here is listed as the 3rd meaning, with ten examples of use, though one of them (*Ще треті півні не співали* ‘The third cocks had not crowed yet’) illustrates a different sense from the rest. In this dictionary, too, there are no examples where the modified phrase is a subject.

We will now look at these Bulgarian and Ukrainian words more closely, and especially at the correspondences of Bulgarian *още* to Ukrainian *вже*.

2 On the Parallel Corpus

The working Bulgarian–Ukrainian parallel corpus is composed entirely of fiction (mostly novels, but also short stories), including both original Bulgarian and Ukrainian texts and translations from other languages. The material has been obtained from electronic libraries or from paper editions through scanning, optical character recognition and error correc-

tion by *ad hoc* software tools and by hand. The current version is made of ten sectors, each composed of texts with the same original language and counting approximately 15.2 mln words on the Bulgarian and 13.4 mln words on the Ukrainian side. This amounts to a total size close to 28.6 million words. Two sectors contain translations from English and two from Russian (because of the larger amount of text available); the remaining original languages are Bulgarian, French, German, Italian, Polish and Ukrainian. All texts are aligned at sentence level.²

3 Results

In the corpus we found **652** pairs of sentences in which Bulgarian *още* corresponds to Ukrainian *вже*, with both expressing the meaning ‘as early as’.

3.1 Distribution by sector

The distribution across the sectors of the corpus (that is, by original language) is very uneven: very many examples are found in translations from German, not quite so many from Polish, few from Russian, Italian and French, and very few from English (Table 1). The original text may feature a ‘still’ word (though this happens very seldom except in Bulgarian), neither ‘still’ nor ‘already’, an ‘already’ word used as a sentential modifier (this is rare, too, except in German), or one with a ‘local’ use, that is, applied to a constituent as in Ukrainian (the most common scenario):

- (12) *Но го познаха още отдалече. || Та впзнали його вже здалеку.* ← [ru] *Но узнали его ещё издали.* ‘But they recognised it from some distance away.’ (K. Bulychev, *Those Who Survive*)
- (13) *Ако дохождаш например в четири часа следобед, аз още от три часа ще почна да се чувствавам щастлива. || Якщо ти прийдеши, скажімо, о четвертій дня, то я вже з третьої години відчуватиму себе щасливим.* ← [fr] *Si tu viens, par exemple, à quatre heures de l’après-midi, dès trois heures je commencerai d’être heureux.* ‘If, for example, you come at four o’clock in the afternoon, then at three o’clock I shall begin to

be happy.’ (A. de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*)

- (14) *Всичко започна още тогава. || Це вже тоді у нього почалося.* ← [de] *Damals fing es schon mit ihm an.* ‘It all began back then already.’ (A. Seghers, *The Seventh Cross*)
- (15) *Но още първия ден се убеждавам, че съм само сянка на някогашиите египетски владетели! || Але вже в перший день переконуюсь, що я лише тінь давніх володарів Єгипту!* ← [pl] *Lecz już w pierwszym dniu przekonuję się, że jestem tylko cieniem dawnych władców Egiptu!* ‘But on the very first day I realise that I am merely a shadow of the former rulers of Egypt!’ (B. Prus, *Pharaoh*)

The zeroes in the English and French cells of the last row of Table 1 echo (Välíkangas, 1982: 392): “In Spanish and Italian, constructions such as *ya entonces*, *già da bambino* are quite common. French stands apart. It is not that *déjà* is not freely used before an attribute or an epithet (*cet homme (est) déjà vieux* ‘this man (is) already old’), or that it is not possible (alongside *dès*, which is more common) before a circumstantial phrase (*déjà au Moyen Age* ‘already in the Middle Ages’, *déjà hier* ‘just yesterday’): yet the texts give the impression – confirmed for the spoken language by my informants – that the combination *déjà*+modified phrase is relatively rare. *Déjà* frequently appears after the modified phrase (*L’an dernier déjà* ‘last year already’, *depuis longtemps déjà* ‘for a long time already’), and even more often it is detached from the rest of the sentence.” Among the *още* : *вже* ‘as early as’ examples in the corpus there is one whose French original illustrates this detachment:

- (16) *Още когато зацщавах сирачетата, побързах да се избавя от тях, отстранявайки ги от полесражението. || Уже в ту пору, коли я був оборонцем сирит, я, прагнучи здихатися їх, велів їм ховатися.* ← [fr] *Déjà, du temps que je protégeais les orphelines, je commençais par me débarrasser d’elles en les envoyant se cacher.* ‘During the period in which I was protecting female orphans, I had already begun to get rid of them by sending them into hiding.’ (J.-P. Sartre, *The Words*)

²See (Siruk and Derzhanski, 2013) for more details on the general make-up of the corpus, as well as (Derzhanski and Siruk, 2024) and (Держански and Сирук, 2025) for recent examples of using the corpus in comparative research of selected grammatical categories and function words in Bulgarian and Ukrainian.

	Bg	De	E1	E2	Fr	It	Pl	R1	R2	Uk	total
'still' (local)	73	4	0	0	0	0	6	0	1	—	84
neither 'still' nor 'already'	—	24	12	20	33	21	11	0	9	—	133
'already' (sentential)	—	17	1	2	2	2	2	1	0	—	26
'already' (local)	—	116	0	0	0	25	95	31	44	100	409
total	73	161	13	22	35	48	114	32	54	100	652

Table 1: Lexical choices in the original texts corresponding to Bulgarian *още* : Ukrainian *вже* ‘as early as’

Välikangas goes on to report that in English, too, such usage is discouraged by some style guides, e. g., (Beesley and Hart, 1963): “[Already] can only modify a verb. It cannot modify the whole sentence, another adverb or adjective. [For translating Finnish *jo*, one is advised to use] some emphatic adverb or adverbial phrase, such as ‘even’, ‘as early as’, etc.”. Again, the relevant part of the corpus provides one example in which *already* might be said to be preposed to an adverbial, but it is detached from it by a comma in the same way as *déjà* is in (16):

- (17) *Съсредоточи вниманието си върху Сермак, същият Сермак, който още през първия си мандат в Градския съвет бе обръщал неведнъж с главата надолу този улегнал орган на властта [...] || Саме на Сермаку слѣд зосередити свою увагу, ще він уже під час свого першого терміну в міській раді перевернув цей статечний орган влади догори дригом [...] ← [en] It was on Sermak that he concentrated, the Sermak who had already, in his first term in the City Council, turned that sedate body topsy-turvy more than once [...]* (I. Asimov, *Foundation*)

Thus the zeroes in the bottom cells of the E1, E2 and Fr columns in Table 1 are actually what should be expected.

3.2 Yesterday. Today. Tomorrow

For an idea of how the position of the event on the time axis affects the expression in both languages, we shall look at the use of *още/ще* and *вече/вже* as modifiers of the frequent time adverbs *вчера/вчора* ‘yesterday’, *днес/сьогодні* ‘today’ and *утре/завтра* ‘tomorrow’.

Table 2 reports how many times the word meaning ‘still’ or ‘already’ occurs adjacent to one of these time adverbs in the corpus, regardless of the syntactic structure. It is evident that in both languages the word for ‘today’, *днес/сьогодні*, is the most frequent one in these contexts; but they are followed

by Bulgarian *утре* ‘tomorrow’ and Ukrainian *вчора* ‘yesterday’ (whose totals are similar), with Bulgarian *вчера* ‘yesterday’ and Ukrainian *завтра* ‘tomorrow’ (whose totals are even closer) coming last. Let us look at these expressions more closely.

Neither language features more than a few occurrences of the word for ‘already’ next to ‘yesterday’. Both employ a postposed ‘still’, which yields essentially the same meaning analysed as modifying the sentence (‘as of yesterday, still ...’) or the adverb (‘as late as yesterday’), to describe a situation which obtained on the day before in contrast with the day of reference, although there is only one occasion on which they do so together (18). In Ukrainian a preposed *ще* can have the same effect (19), nearly always with an imperfective verb, but exceptionally with a perfective one as well (20). Bulgarian differs, according to the evidence of the corpus. The meaning ‘as late as yesterday’ is often (on 40 of 75 occasions where Ukrainian has *ще вчора* and Bulgarian neither *още* nor *вече*) expressed by *до вчера* ‘until yesterday’ (21), but by a preposed *още* only once, in a translation from Ukrainian (22):

- (18) *Този пеньоар вчера още го нямаше. || Цього халата вчора ще не було. ← [de] Den Schlafrock hatte sie gestern noch nicht. ‘She didn’t have that dressing gown yesterday.’ (E. M. Remarque, *The Black Obelisk*)*
- (19) *Вчера още ѝ казвам: Данушке, ще останеш ли вярна на Збишко? || Ще вчора я її питаю: «Данусько, будеш вірна Збишкови?» ← [pl] Wczoraj jeszcze mówię jej: Danuska, a dotrzymasz-li ty Zbyszkowi? ‘Only yesterday I said to her: “Danusia, will you keep faith with Zbyszko?”’ (H. Senkiewicz, *The Teutonic Knights*)*
- (20) *Вчера още, заплашен от заминаването на киевския воевода, князът беше решил да спре да воюва, докато не събере още сили [...] — но днес отново стоеше начело на близо дванайсетхилядна армия [...]*

	~ <u>още</u>	<u>още</u> ~	~ <u>вече</u>	<u>вече</u> ~	total
<i>вчера</i>	12	43	2	2	59
<i>днес</i>	60	203	68	1	332
<i>утре</i>	2	153	20	1	176
total	74	399	90	4	567

	~ <u>ще</u>	<u>ще</u> ~	~ <u>вже</u>	<u>вже</u> ~	total
<i>вчора</i>	14	130	6	4	154
<i>сьогодні</i>	33	82	53	58	226
<i>завтра</i>	10	6	19	32	67
total	57	218	78	94	447

Table 2: Numbers of occurrences of ‘still’ and ‘already’ words next to ‘yesterday’, ‘today’ and ‘tomorrow’ on the Bulgarian and the Ukrainian side of the corpus

|| Ще вчора князь, засмучений тим, що від нього йде київський воєвода, вирішив був уже до появи нових підкріплень війну припинити [...], сьогодні ж він стояв на чолі майже дванадцятитисячної армії [...] ← [pl] Wczoraj jeszcze książę, zagrożony odejściem wojewody kijowskiego, już był postanowił wojnę aż do chwili przybytku sił zawiesić [...] — dziś stał znów na czele blisko dwunastotysięcznej armii [...] ‘Only yesterday, through the disaffection of the Voyevoda of Kyiv, the prince had determined to defer the war until troops should come to his assistance; [...] — and, today, he stood at the head of twelve thousand men [...]’ (H. Senkiewicz, *With Fire and Sword*)

(21) Тькмо вземаше хляб от полицата, която е над полицата с чиниите, до вчера там имаше седем самуна, а днес са вече пет. ← Сами дѣставав хлѣб з полицѣ, що над мисником, ще вчора там було сім буханиців, а сьогодні вже п’ять. ‘He was just taking some bread from the shelf above the dish rack; yesterday there had been seven loaves, but today there were only five.’ (V. Zemlyak, *Green Mills*)

(22) Още вчера са пасли спокійно някъде по рътлините, а сега вървят уморени, падат и стават, препъват се в неравния паваж [...]. ← Ще вчора спокійно паслися десь по балках, а зараз ідуть виморені, поперепадавшиєсь, спотикаючись по бакаюватому бруку [...]. ‘Yesterday they had still been peacefully grazing in gullies, and now they were moving along exhausted, suffering, tripping on the uneven pavement [...]’ (O. Honchar, *The Cathedral*)

In (23) the preposition *до* connects graphically with the adverb *вчера*, yielding *довчера* ‘until yesterday’, again with the interpretation ‘as late as yesterday’.

(23) Роксолани — една дума, която за Европа довчера не означаваше нищо. ← Роксолани. Слово, яке для Європи ще вчора нічого не значило. ‘Roxolani. A word that meant nothing to Europe just yesterday.’ (P. Zahrebelnyi, *Roksolana*)

Elsewhere Bulgarian *още* *вчера* stands for ‘as early as yesterday’ (24), which in Ukrainian can also be expressed as *вже* *вчора*, but this correspondence, too, only occurs once, in a translation from Russian, and influence from the original seems likely (25).

(24) [...] аз още вчера си помислих, че ти не можеш да я приготвиш като моя готвач. || Я ще вчора знав, що ти не зумієш зробити цієї страви так, як мій кухар. ← [de] [...] das habe ich mir schon gestern gedacht, daß du diese Speise nicht machen kannst wie mein Koch. ‘I was thinking all yesterday that you could not make this pie like my cook.’ (W. Hauff, *Nosey, the Dwarf*)

(25) Сега ми е ясно — казах аз — защо още вчера вашиє сьотечественици знаеха и за Алиса, и за долитането на нашия кораб. || Тепер для мене зрозуміло, — сказав я, — чому вже вчора ваші співвітчизники знали і про Алісу, і про приліт нашого корабля. ← [ru] Теперь мне понятно, — сказал я, — почему уже вчера ваши соотечественники знали и об Алисе, и о прилёте нашего корабля. “‘Now I understand,” I said, “why yesterday your compatriots already knew about Alice and the arrival of our ship.” (K. Bulychev, *Alisa’s Voyage*)

With ‘today’, too, a postposed ‘still’ is used for ‘as late as today’ or, with negation, ‘not yet today’ (26).

(26) Днес още не мога — отговори Юлка. || Мені сьогодні ще не можна, — відповіла Юлька. ← [ru] Мне сегодня ещё нельзя, — сказала Юлька. “‘I can’t [play volleyball] today yet [sc.

so soon after my appendectomy],” said Yulka.
(K. Bulychiev, *One Hundred Years Ahead*)

Bulgarian is consistent in using *днес* *още* for ‘as late as today’ and *още* *днес* for ‘as early as today’, bar the occasional exception, whereas Ukrainian employs *сьогодні* *ще* for the former meaning, *ще* *сьогодні* for both (27) and *вже* *сьогодні* for the latter (28–29). But also often (on 76 occasions out of 137 where Bulgarian has *още* *днес* and Ukrainian neither *ще* nor *вже* the time adverb is followed by the emphatic particle *ж* (30).

(27) След малко се върна с поздрав от Лигия и с обещание, че *още* *днес* *ще* му донесе отговора ѝ. || Невдовзі він повернувся з вітанням од Лігії й пообіцяв, що *ще* *сьогодні* принесе відповідь. ← [p1] Po chwili wrócił z rozprawieniem od Ligii i z obietnicą, że *dziś* *jeszcze* odniesie jej odpowiedź. ‘After a while he returned with a greeting from Lygia, and promised to deliver her answer that day.’ (H. Senkiewicz, *Quo Vadis*)

(28) А щом жреците *още* *днес* изпращат делегация, трябва да са слаби. || А жерци *вже* *сьогодні* висилають делегацію, *отже*, вони почувають своє безсилля. ← [p1] A jeżeli kapłani *już* *dziś* wysyłają delegację, *muszą* być słabi. ‘And if the priests are already sending a delegation today, they must be weak.’ (B. Prus, *Pharaoh*)

(29) Важното е, че тя *ще* *бъде* неговa, и то *още* *днес*. || Передовсім вона *буде* йому належати, *й* *це* *вже* *сьогодні*. ← [p1] Przede wszystkim *będzie* *jego* i to *dziś* *jeszcze*. ‘First and foremost, she will be his, this very day.’ (ibid.)

(30) [...] *кълна* *се* *в* *духовете* *на* *предците*, *какво* *ли* *не* *бих* *дал* *да* *го* *сторя* *още* *днес*! || [...] *ларами* *присягаюся* — *багато* *віддав* *би* *я*, *щоб* *вчинити* *так* *сьогодні* *ж*! ← [ru] [...] *ларами* *клянусь* — *я* *отдал* *бы* *многое*, *чтобы* *сделать* *это* *сегодня*. ‘[...] by the lares I swear — I’d give a lot to be able to do so today!’ (M. Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*)

The meaning ‘tomorrow still = as late as tomorrow’ (31–32) is evidently in very low demand.

(31) *Във всеки случай и утре* *все* *още* *ще* *съм* *ранен*, *без* *пари*, *без* *ангажименти* *и* *без*

Мари — *значи* *не* *е* *належащо*. || А *втім*, *я* *і* *завтра* *буду* *сидіти* *з* *розбитим* *коліном*, *без* *грошей*, *без* *роботи* *і* *без* *Мари* — *так* *що* *нічого* *спішного* *тут* *немає*. ← [de] Al- lerdings werde ich morgen auch *noch* verletzt, ohne Geld, ohne Engagement und ohne Marie sein — es ist also nicht dringend. ‘To tell the truth, tomorrow I’ll still be injured, with no money, no bookings and no Marie — so it’s not really urgent.’ (H. Böll, *The Clown*)

(32) *Сбогувам* *се* *с* *фараона* *и* *моля* *боговете* *да* *ми* *позволят* *и* *утре* *да* *го* *поздравя* *като* *фараон*... || *Прощаюся* *з* *фараоном* *і* *благаю* *богів*, *щоб* *вони* *дали* *мені* *привітати* *його* *завтра* *ще* *як* *фараона*... ← [p1] Żegnam faraona i proszę bogów, ażeby pozwoliły mi jutro powitać cię *jeszcze* *jako* *faraona*... ‘I take my leave from the pharaoh and pray to the gods that they may allow me to greet you still as pharaoh tomorrow...’ (B. Prus, *Pharaoh*)

For ‘as early as tomorrow’, Bulgarian uses *още* *утре*, which corresponds to Ukrainian once (33); sometimes we find *вже* *завтра* (34), but more often (on 61 occasions out of 134) the particle *ж* (35).

(33) *Едната* *ще* *отиде* *още* *утре* *заран* *в* *тайника* *волво*. → *Одна* *ще* *завтра* *вранці* *буде* *в* *тайнику*. ‘One will go into the Volvo’s secret compartment first thing tomorrow morning.’ (B. Raynov, *Typhoons with Gentle Names*)

(34) *Може* *би* *ще* *се* *окаже* *още* *утре*, *че* *трябва* *да* *се* *махна*. || *Можливо*, *мені* *вже* *завтра* *доведеться* *мікати*. ← [de] Vielleicht heißt’s *schon* *morgen*: *fort*. ‘Maybe I’ll have to leave tomorrow already.’ (A. Seghers, *The Seventh Cross*)

(35) *Трябва* *да* *пиша* *на* *татко* *още* *утре*. || *Треба* *завтра* *ж* *татові* *написати*. ← [fr] Il faut que j’écrive à papa *dès* *demain*. ‘I need to write to Dad tomorrow.’ (G. de Maupassant, *Bel-Ami*)

In the exceptional example (33) one notes the adjacency of *завтра* to *вранці* ‘in the morning’, which when used alone usually combines with *ще* (and refers to the morning of the same day (36); when it refers to the following or any later morning, the choice is *вже* (37), but there are 21 occurrences of the former and 5 of the latter).

- (36) *Ами онези, Доренце, аз още сутринта ги проверих.* ← *А ти, Дорочко, я ще вранич перевіриш.* ‘As for those, Dora, I already checked them in the morning.’ (V. Drozd, *Yrii*)
- (37) *И сам Сюлейман я забрави още на другата сутрин.* ← *І сам Сулейман забув про неї уже враничі.* ‘And Suleiman himself had already forgotten about her on the [next] morning.’ (P. Zahrebelnyi, *Roksolana*)

So we see that the disbalance in Table 2 results from several factors: Bulgarian normally expresses ‘as late as’ by ~ *още* and ‘as early as’ by *още* ~, Ukrainian uses ~ *ще* for the former, *ще* ~ for both and *вже* ~ for the latter; among the combinations of these two meanings with the three time adverbs, the more frequent ones are ‘as late as yesterday’ (often marked in Bulgarian by the preposition *до* ‘until’ rather than *още* or *вече*) and ‘as early as today/tomorrow’ (often marked in Ukrainian by the particle *ж* rather than *ще* or *вже*).

An ‘already’ word postposed to a time adverb (which was not discussed above) can be interpreted compositionally, as a modifier of the sentence. But it can serve as a translation of an ‘as early as’ construction, thanks to the proximity of the meaning:

- (38) *Вчера вече започнаха на Козеличина.* ‘Yesterday, they already started in Kozelshchyna.’ ← *Уже вчора на Козельщині й почали.* (Y. Hutsalo, *The frenzied, mad Kirik*)
- (39) *А утре вече ще се натикаме в устата на звера.* ‘And tomorrow we will already push our way into the mouth of the beast.’ ← *Ось і ми вже завтра поліземо в пащеку смерті.* (M. Stelmakh, *The Four Fords*)

Note that in the following (outwardly parallel) example the meaning is different: it is not about today’s breaking of the speaker’s fast but about the breaking of today’s fast (although this is only revealed by the context):

- (40) *Аз пък днеска вече се облажих.* ← *А я вже сьогодні скоромину їв.* ‘Well, I have broken my fast already today.’ (M. Stelmakh, *The Geese and Swans Are Flying*)

Let us now turn to the distribution of Ukrainian *ще* and *вже* as bearers of the meaning ‘as early as’ expressed in Bulgarian by *още*. Table 3 summarises the numbers of their occurrences with the three time

adverbs we looked at, dividing the data for *сьогодні* ‘today’ by tense and modality (we mostly see it with future or imperative verb forms and expressions of possibility and necessity).

	<i>ще</i>	<i>вже</i>
<i>вчора</i> ‘yesterday’	45 (24)	1 (25)
<i>сьогодні</i> (past, present) ‘today’ (irrealis)	0	6 (28)
<i>завтра</i> ‘tomorrow’	1 (33)	14 (34)

Table 3: Number of uses of Ukrainian *ще* and *вже* for ‘as early as’ with ‘yesterday’, ‘today’ and ‘tomorrow’

The very strong association of *вчора* ‘yesterday’ with *ще* and of *завтра* with *вже* may be supported by the frequent opposition of something *still* being the case at an earlier time, such as yesterday or today, to something else *already* happening at a later time, such as today or tomorrow (21).

Apart from *вчора* ‘yesterday’, *ще* is preferred by, e. g., *напередодні* ‘on the day before’, *того/мої (самого/-ої) t* ‘on that (same) t’ (where *t* is a time noun), *до ...* ‘before ...’, *звечора* ‘since the evening’, *вдосвіта* ‘at dawn’. Apart from *завтра* ‘tomorrow’, *вже* is preferred by, e. g., *наступного/-ої t* ‘on the following t’, *другого дня* ‘on the next/second day’, *на третій день* ‘on the third day’, *зараз* ‘now, right away’, *тепер* ‘now, presently’, *через T* ‘T later’ (where *T* is a length of time).

In brief, *ще* tends to be chosen if the time is located in the past relative to the reference point, and *вже* if it is in the future; looking at Fig. 2 and Fig. 3(b) again, in both cases the contrast on the real axis is with the reference point. We see this in (41), where the two markers cooccur:

- (41) *Аз приключих всичко това толкова бързо, че още на следващата сутрин напуснах острова и бях в Биен преди обед. || Я так поспішав, що вже наавтра враничі поїхав з острова і прибув до Б'єна ще до полудня.* ← [fr] *Je fis une telle diligence, que dès le lendemain matin, je partis de l'île et me rendis à Bienne encore avant midi.* ‘I used so much diligence that the next morning I left the island and arrived at Bienne before noon.’ (J.-J. Rousseau, ‘The Confessions’)

Here the first event (departure from the island) is placed in the morning *after* the time thereto discussed, then the next reference point is set at noon and the second event (arrival at Bienne) is *before* it.

With time adverbs such as *сьогодні* ‘today’, which are often encountered with both particles, the difference can be elusive. But it can be said that the meaning of *вже сьогодні* is closer to ‘right now’, and of *ще сьогодні*, to ‘before tomorrow’; *вже сьогодні* is perceived as a qualified ‘already’, and *ще сьогодні* as a qualified ‘today’. This intuition is fully in line with the motivation for the two constructions (Figure 1) and the reconstruction of the former as ‘today is the time for event *e* to already happen’ and of the latter as ‘it will still be today when event *e* happens’.

4 Conclusions

Ukrainian is one of the languages in which a word for ‘already’ can be used, alongside a word for ‘still’, as a modifier of an expression with temporal semantics to express the meaning ‘as early/soon as’ (‘no later than’). These languages are numerous, but the details differ (as shown by the tangible influence of the source language in the data drawn from our corpus: the examples are by far most numerous in translations from German, where the phenomenon is most pervasive, followed by a near-tie between Ukrainian originals and translations from Polish). This adds to the complexity and theoretical interest of the issue. Notably, however, the closely related Bulgarian is not such a language: it only uses ‘still’ (*още*), never ‘already’ (*вече*), in this function.

We have shown how a study of texts in parallel Bulgarian and Ukrainian versions can serve to efficiently detect occurrences of the Ukrainian ‘already’ word (*вже*) so used as a prelude to comparing them to uses of ‘still’ (*ще*) in similar contexts and analysing the correlation with the semantics of the temporal expression – in particular, the asymmetry between past and future (exemplified by ‘yesterday’ and ‘tomorrow’) – and the effect of the choice of one of the two modifiers on the meaning of the sentence. We have also seen how in certain cases the two languages resort to alternative means, such as the preposition *до* in Bulgarian or the particle *ж* in Ukrainian, for expressing a similar sense.

Such findings are of value for language learners, translators, writers of reference grammars and compilers of mono- and bilingual dictionaries; and within NLP, for sentence- and word-level alignment in parallel corpora, for the design of bilingual lexical resources and for machine translation.

References

- J. van der Auwera. 1993. ‘Already’ and ‘Still’: Beyond Duality. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 16(6):613–653.
- A. R. Beesley and K. Hart. 1963. *A Guide to Finnish Mistakes in English: Grammatical Notes, Points to Avoid and Over 400 Practice Sentences*. Kielipalvelu ARB (2. ed.).
- I. Derzhanski and O. Siruk. 2024. The verbal category of conditionality in Bulgarian and its Ukrainian correspondences. In *Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Computational Linguistics in Bulgaria (CLIB 2024)*, pages 187–195, Sofia. Department of Computational Linguistics, Institute for Bulgarian Language, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.
- H. Galton. 1976. “Noch” und “schon” im Deutschen und Russischen. *Folia Linguistica*, X(3/4):377–384.
- S. Löbner. 1989. German *schon–erst–noch*: An integrated analysis. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 12:167–212.
- N. Reiter. 1987. “Schon”-lose Balkansprachen. *Cahiers balkaniques*, 12:102–133.
- O. Siruk and I. Derzhanski. 2013. Linguistic corpora as international cultural heritage: The corpus of Bulgarian and Ukrainian parallel texts. *Digital Presentation and Preservation of Cultural and Scientific Heritage*, 3:91–98.
- O. Välikangas. 1982. La notion de ‘déjà’ et les mots qui servent à la rendre dans quelques langues européennes. *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 83(4):371–404.
- Ю. Д. Апресян. 1979. Английские синонимы и синонимический словарь (postamble). In А. И. Розенман and Ю. Д. Апресян, editors, *Англо-русский синонимический словарь*, pages 500–543. Москва: Русский язык. [Ju. D. Apresjan. 1979. Anglijskie sinonimy i sinonimičeskij slovar’ (postamble). In A. I. Rozenman and Ju. D. Apresjan, editors, *Anglo-russkij sinonimičeskij slovar’*, pages 500–543. Moskva: Russkij jazyk].
- Ст. Аргиров, Ст. Младенов, А. Теодоров-Балан, and Б. Цонев, editors. 1927. *Български тълковен речник*, volume I. София: Печатница „Художник”. [S. Argirov, S. Mladenov, A. Teodorov-Balan, and B. Tsonev, editors. 1927. *Bâlgarski tâlkoven rechnik*, volume I. Sofia: Pechatnitsa „Hudozhnik”].
- И. М. Богуславский. 1996. *Сфера действия лексических единиц*. Москва: Языки русской культуры. [I. M. Boguslavskij. 1996. *Sfera dejstvija leksičeskix edinic*. Moskva: Jazyki russkoj kul’туры].
- В. Й. Горобець. 1980. ЩЕ, ІЩЕ́. In С. І. Головашук, editor, *Словник української мови*, volume XI: X–Б, pages 575–576. Київ: Наукова думка. [V. J. Horobec’. 1980. ŠČE, IŠČĚ́. In S. I. Holovaščuk, editor, *Slovnyk ukrajins’koji movy*, volume XI: X–Б, pages 575–576. Kyjiv: Naukova dumka].

- И. Держански and О. Сирук. 2025. Българската служебна дума *си* и нейните украински съответствия. In *Доклади от Международната годишна конференция на Института за български език „Проф. Любомир Андрейчин“* (София, 2025 година), pages 176–186, София. Издателство на БАН „Проф. Марин Дринов“.
- [I. Derzhanski and O. Siruk. 2025. Bălgarskata sluzhebna дума *si* i neynite ukrainski sâotvetstviya. In *Dokladi ot Mezhdunarodnata godishna konferentsiya na Instituta za bălgarski ezik „Prof. Lyubomir Andreychin“* (Sofia, 2025 godina), pages 176–186, Sofia. Izdatelstvo na BAN „Prof. Marin Drinov“].
- А. Мустайоки. 1988. О семантике русского темпорального *ещё*. *Studia Slavica Finlandensia*, V:99–142. [A. Mustajoki. 1988. O semantike russkogo temporal'nogo *eščë*. *Studia Slavica Finlandensia*, V:99–142].
- С. Павлова and З. Гунова. 2002. ÒШЕ. In Ю. Балтова and М. Чоролеева, editors, *Речник на българския език*, volume XI: О, pages 1235–1237. София: Акад. изд-во „Проф. Марин Дринов“, ЕТ „ЕМАС“.
- [S. Pavlova and Z. Gunova. 2002. ÒSHTE. In Yu. Baltova and M. Choroleeva, editors, *Rechnik na bălgarskiya ezik*, volume XI: O, pages 1235–1237. Sofia: Akad. izd-vo „Prof. Marin Drinov“, ET „EMAS“].
- Є. М. Радченко. 1979. УЖЕ́ (ВЖЕ). In А. А. Бурячок and Г. М. Гнатюк, editors, *Словник української мови*, volume X: Т–Ф, pages 400–401. Київ: Наукова думка.
- [Je. M. Radčenko. 1979. UŽĚ́ (VŽE). In A. A. Burjačok and H. M. Hnatjuk, editors, *Slovnyk ukrajins'koji movy*, volume X: T–F, pages 400–401. Kyjiv: Naukova dumka].
- М. Чоролеева. 1979. ВЁ́ЧЕ. In Кр. Чолакова, editor, *Речник на българския език*, volume II: В, pages 128–129. София: Изд-во на БАН.
- [M. Choroleeva. 1979. VĚ́CHE. In K. Cholakova, editor, *Rechnik na bălgarskiya ezik*, volume II: V, pages 128–129. Sofia: Izd-vo na BAN].

Appendix A Words for ‘still’ and ‘already’

English	<i>still</i>	<i>already</i>
Bulgarian	<i>още; все още</i>	<i>вече</i>
French	<i>encore</i>	<i>déjà</i>
Finnish	<i>(vielä)</i>	<i>jo</i>
German	<i>noch</i>	<i>schon</i>
Italian	<i>ancora</i>	<i>già</i>
Polish	<i>jeszcze</i>	<i>już</i>
Russian	<i>ещё</i>	<i>уже</i>
Spanish	<i>(aún, todavía)</i>	<i>ya</i>
Ukrainian	<i>ще/їще; (все ще)</i>	<i>вже/уже</i>