A comprehensive account of pragmatic resources of any language is hardly possible without an analysis of the ubiquitous “small words” that mark the constituent’s information status, clarify or emphasize relations between clauses, and otherwise help the listener navigate through the discourse. Yet the meaning of discourse particles and conditions on their use are extremely hard to define. The task of precise analysis is especially challenging in the case of ancient languages, where textual evidence tends to be both limited in scope and severely restricted in genre and register. This paper explores the encoding of interclausal relations by discourse connectors in Old Church Slavonic translations of the New Testament, relying on mismatches between the original and the translation as crucial evidence for differences in the pragmatic organization of discourse.

Old Church Slavonic translations of the New Testament are known to follow closely the language of the original, to the extent that a number of Old Church Slavonic constructions, such as the dative absolute and praesens historicum, have been argued to be a result of direct calquing of Greek structures (MacRobert 1986; Uspenskij 2002: 57-62, inter alia). The tendency of the translation to copy the original in every detail makes discrepancies in the rendering of interclausal relations particularly remarkable. I focus on three major types of such discrepancy.

The first – by far the most frequent type – involves the use of an interclausal connector that does not correspond to an explicit marker in the original. Interclausal connectors introduced in the Old Church Slavonic translation include i ‘and’, bo ‘since’, že ‘as for’, and nû ‘but’. Some of the connectors are introduced regularly in specific constructions (for example, constructions with participles are commonly rendered in the translation by coordinated finite verb forms); others have no structural motivation, cf. example (1).

(1) a. élegon dé : en têi heortêi, hína thórubos
    say:IMPF.3PL PRT not in ART feast:DAT so.that not riot:NOM
    génêtai en tôi laôi (Matt 26.5)
    happen:SUBJ.AOR.MID.3SG in ART people:DAT.SG

b. g~lxó že nû ne vû prazdînikû da ne mlîva
    say:IMPF.3PL PRT but not in feast:ACC PRT not riot:NOM
    bôdetî vî ljudexû
    be:FUT.3SG in people:LOC
    ‘But they said: [but] not on a feast day lest there be an uproar among the people’

Secondly, in rare cases, the Old Church Slavonic translation omits an interclausal connector that is present in the original. Compared to the first type of discrepancy, such examples are rare, and mostly restricted to specific contexts. For example, the majority of examples where the translation omits the particle gâr ‘since’ describe sequences of events within a narrative, as in (2).
The distribution of such omissions suggests that they were most likely due to a difference in the use of the Greek connector and its Old Church Slavonic equivalent. For example, the common translational equivalent of Greek ἐλεγεν – the Old Church Slavonic particle bo ‘since’ – is rarely attested in descriptions of event sequences without a strong causal relation; instead, it is commonly introduced in rhetorical sections (e.g., where the connector relates parts of an argument).

The third type of discrepancy involves a seemingly “unusual” choice of an interclausal connector. While most Greek connectors have regular translational equivalents (δὲ ~ ἥ, ἐλεγεν ~ bo, μὲν ~ ἥ, etc.), such correspondences are far from absolute (cf. Brock 1976 for similar observations on Old Syriac particles). Greek ἐλεγεν, for example, sometimes seems to correspond to connectors other than bo ‘since’ (3a vs. 3b). On closer inspection, however, the majority of such cases turn out to be due to discrepancies between different NT manuscripts. In particular, ἐλεγεν in the Tischendorf version corresponds with some regularity to δὲ in the Byzantine text-type (cf. 3b); the latter is commonly assumed to stand closer to the original from which the Old Church Slavonic translation was made (Metzger 1963, 1968, inter alia).

In sum, the use of interclausal connectors in NT Greek and Old Church Slavonic differs in systematic ways. Most remarkably, the way interclausal connectors are introduced into the Old Church Slavonic text points to the translator’s concern with making some of the implicit rhetorical relations explicit. The abundant “insertion” of interclausal connectors most likely points to an affinity of the style of the Old Church Slavonic translation with the style of Classical (and Byzantine) Greek rhetorical prose, distinguishing it more sharply from the unsophisticated language of the Greek New Testament. Symptomatically, manuscripts of the Greek New Testament differ considerably in the use of interclausal connectors, suggesting that the “insertion” of explicit connectors characterized both the work of NT translators and the Greek text’s transmission (cf. Elliott 1976 on Attic influence in NT editing).

On the other hand, instances of omission of an interclausal connector seem to be restricted to specific types of context, and provide important evidence for differences in pragmatic conditions on the use of seemingly equivalent Greek and Old Church Slavonic connectors.