RUDOLF RŮŽIČKA
(Berlin)

REMARKS ON UNPRONOUNCEABLE SUBJECTS

The paper addresses the issue of representing and licensing covert subjects as unpronounceable, mute and phonologically empty categories functioning as subjects. Licensing includes distinct locality to be explained by positional constraints, structural and interpretative as well as comparative-typological ones.

Keywords: unpronounceable subjects, subjectless sentences, Slavic languages, reflexive clitic.

Academician Milka Ivić has distinguished herself by an inclination for selecting intricate problems and by her outstanding capacity to clear them up and offer solutions to them. Having exceptionally large-scale detailed knowledge, she has displayed great art by the synthesis and judgment of earlier and contemporary linguistic theories. Her book "Pravci u lingvistici", translated into many languages, is a text-book example of how linguistics should be studied.

In this paper, I will touch upon some side issue in the treatment of unpronounceable (henceforth mute) subjects, that is, subjectless sentences, joining M. Ivić (Ivić 1978) in discussing this problematic area. In particular I would like to address the question of positioning a structurally constituted mute subject, the locality of its emergence. Is the position where it is inserted dependent on the constraints of the "accepting" structural environment, or does it determine itself the basic local structure, the resultant effect on the clausal structure? In other words, given a potential mute subject, how does it get involved in the sentential structure, retain its legitimacy in modifying the structure?

I will single out a few sentential examples from Slavic languages for illustration and discussion of the problems I try to raise. For a start, complement control is a simple illustration of them:

(1) *Он$_i$ обещал* PRO$_i$ *приехать*.
(2) *Они уговорили его$_i$* PRO$_i$ *участвовать в конференции*.

The mute subject of the embedded infinitival clause shows up as the symbol PRO, which is controlled, that is, identified with the help of matching relevant thematical assignments. Clearly, the phonologically null category PRO is intrinsic to both involved clauses and, satisfying their structural and interpretive needs, it is not available for creating or repairing anything that is the result of its own emptiness. If PRO is intrinsic to particular structural constraints, it does not allow being varied in its functions.

It is more problematic to look for relations between postulating non--pronounceable subjects and manifesting thematically assigned arguments by inserting them in standard subject positions. I have in mind subjectless sentences like (3):

(3) *Šlo se domů. U klubu se pevalo i igralo.*
    Najviac sa dnes umiera na srdcové choroby.

I assume that in all examples (3) a mute subject is as legitimate and intrinsic to the construction as PRO is in complement control (1), (2). But whereas PRO is in a relatively immovable position, structurally and in semantic interpretation, a mute subject representation in (3), which naturally differs from PRO, would have to find its place, needs to be localized and should also be "licensed" by delivering or plausibly construing a thematically assigned argument.

Without the help of the reflexive clitic, this purpose cannot be served. Without the reflexive clitic, clausal structures (3) and the like are uninterpretable. It is the key role of the clitic to save them from this consequence by allowing them to constitute an "abstract" NP-structure for a mute subject to be inserted. But positing a mute subject is an instance of the reflexive clitic fulfilling its key role, which consists in constituting a relationship to an antecedent under well-known particular conditions. Thus, the reflexive clitic does not do it all by itself when it produces in our examples (3) correct structures. We might say that the presence of the reflexive clitic triggers the emergence of an antecedent NP, or DP, which bears only the selectional feature [+person] and agreement V-features [−1 pers / −2 pers], [singular], [tense], [neuter]. The reflexive clitic by *pevalo*, in legalizing the mute subject, performs an instance of its general paradigmatic function of being interrelated to an antecedent, and provides for a mute subject argument, which may be assigned the symbol *pro*. The verbal agreement features which result in the "impersonal" verbal form on the one hand and the contextual semantic feature [+person], which is lexically constituted, on the other, are not incompatible considering the respective different sources of the lexical basis of selection and the sentential agreement conditions of the functional frame.

Sentence types (3) also show a pragmatic side aspect of veiling or covering the referential or / and conceptual identity of the subject. The subject is not suppressed, but the knowledge of its identity is veiled, maybe intentionally. A very similar and pragmatically relevant verbal form is [+3 pers / + plural] (*говорят*), if accompanied by a mute subject. However, the form is on the verge of systemic use of an instance of pro-drop and / or intentional pragmatic use, as in the sentence types (3) above.

It is just a step to try to pursue analogous but opposite communicative intentions, when a dative object is added to identify the person(s) affected in impersonal clausal structures that use the reflexive as in (4):

(4) *Ему не пишется.*

The reflexive clitic may be assumed to be instrumental in veiling or covering the motive power or the reason that a desirable physical or psychological state is not reached at all or only to a certain degree.

Literature

Ivić, Milka (1978) On empirical evidence for positing a deep subject form in some subjectless sentences, *Studia Linguistica Alexandro Vasilii Issatschenko*, Lisse.

Z u s a m m e n f a s s u n g

Rudolf Růžička

BEMERKUNGEN ÜBER UNAUSSSPRECHBARE SUBJEKTE

Das Problem, ein unaussprechbares Subjekt in der Repräsentation des Satzes zu generieren und zu positionieren, wird analysiert in untrennbarer Verbindung mit dem reflexiven Klitikon (*se*, *sa*) slawischer Sprachen. Die entscheidende Präsenz des Klitikons für die Grammatikalität und die Interpretierbarkeit des Satzes wird in einen allgemeineren Begründungszusammenhang gebracht. Pragmatisch-kommunikative Aspekte der Identifizierung oder Verhüllung des Subjekts werden berührt.