

Diachronic change and the nature of *pro*: a case-study in Russian language

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This is a formal analysis of the role that *pro* (what is usually labelled as *pro*) could have played in restructuring Russian subordinate non-finite clauses, and what such a change can tell us about the nature of *pro* itself. The change under study was the following: in Old Russian (OR), no syntactic control was displayed between finites clauses and their - semantically- controlled infinitive clause (1a), whereas by the 17th century, these syntactic environments show up as instances of Obligatory Control, in the sense by [5] (1b).

(OR: *Moscow Chronicle* 80)

- (1) a. (*Oni*_i) cělovali bo běxu k nemu [jako iskati *im*_{ъi} Kieva emu].
they kissed part. were at him C find_{INF} them_{DT} Kiev him_{DT}
'They promised him (lit. kissed the cross) to gain Kiev for him.'
- b. *Ivan*_i xočet [*e*_{i/*j} idti domoj *odin*_i]. (Modern Russian)
Ivan_{NOM} wants go_{INF} home one_{NOM}
'Ivan wants to go home alone'

Under a Movement Theory of Control [1, 2], Modern Russian (MR) subordinate non-finite control structures can only be instances of Obligatory Control (OC): the null infinitive subject must have an antecedent, which must be local and must c-command it [6]. These structures are headed by a subject, which needs to raise into the matrix clause in order to get (nominative) case licensed. This grammatical case is reflected also in the subordinate clause, in case we use a semi-predicative element, which always shows up in the same case as its antecedent, such as *odin* 'one' in (1b).

On the other hand, Old Church Slavonic (OCS) and Old Russian (OR) infinitive structures did not display syntactic control at all ("No-Control" - NC) and, in every syntactic context, they could be headed by null *pro* subjects (non-emphatic / non-discourse-related, ex. 2a), overt dative pronouns (emphatic / discourse-related, ex. 2b), and overt dative NP subjects (2c), whose case was licensed by the infinitive itself, and whose reference could be non-controlled at all [6]. (Incidentally, any second predicate was also marked with dative case, cf. 2a-b). This mirrored the distribution of subjects in OR matrix finite clauses: non-emphatic *pro* (3a), emphatic overt pronouns (3b), and regular NP subjects:

(OR: *Laurentian Chronicle* 71b)

- (2) a. *Molišja* [za *mja*_i] otče čestnyj [*pro*_i *izbavlenu* byti ot seti neprijazniny].
pray for_{PREP} me father honorable saved_{DT} be_{INF} from this devilment
'Honorable Father, pray for me (for me) to be saved from devilment.'

- (OR: *Laurentian Chronicle* 170b)
- b. Ty so mnoju čelovalъ kr(e)stъ [xoditi *nama* po odinoj dumě *oběma*].
 you with me kissed cross go INF we DAT by one decision both DT
 ‘You and me swore (lit. kissed the cross) to do we both the same way.’
- c. I slyšaše [byti *stuku* i *gromu veliku*]. (OR: *Novgorod I Chronicle*, 98)
 and heard be INF noise DT and thunder DT big DT
 ‘And he heard that there was a noise and a big thunder.’
- (3) a. pro Slaven že bystъ i grozenъ. (OR: *Moscow Chronicle* 179v)
 glorious part. was 3SG and terrible
 ‘And he was glorious and terrible.’
- b. Azъ že rekoхъ jej jako gražaniнъ je(s)мъ onъsičъ snъ. (OR: *Sinai Pater.* 151)
 I part. said to her C citizen am of several dreams
 ‘(And I,) I told her that I usually have certain dreams.’

[5] puts the ability of Russian matrix infinitives to license case in a [+T] feature, which is not present in control infinitive structures. The mysterious fact remains that the loss of overt dative subjects in dependent infinitive clauses could not be due to a change in the ability of Russian infinitive T to license case in general terms. In fact, infinitives licensed (and still license) dative case to their subjects in Old and Modern Russian matrix infinitive clauses, which can be headed by an overt pronoun / NP (4a):

- (4) Čto *nam / našej sem’je* togda bylo delat’? (Modern Russian)
 what US DT / our family DT then was do INF
 ‘What else could we / our family do at that moment?’

So why should that feature be lost historically in subordinate infinitive clauses, if learners had sufficient evidence of the presence of overt dative pronouns / NPs in other infinitive environments?

Independently, another change had taken place: Old Russian was a consistent null-subject language (*pro* was compulsory in non-emphatic / non-discourse-related contexts) but, by the 16th century, pronominal subjects –non-stressed non-emphatic / non-discourse-related– became overt in unmarked contexts, after an increase in the frequency and reinterpretation of expression containing marked overt pronominals, such as (3b) above [3]. The high number of those overt pronominals lead to the loss of obligatory non-emphatic / non-discourse-related *pro* in subject position (in unmarked contexts, an overt pronominal is posited), and Russian became a partial null-subject language [7, 8].

[6] accounted for the loss of controlled overt dative subjects by relating it to the overall change that *pro* underwent in Russian: *pro* stopped being the null lexical category obligatorily inserted in non-emphatic contexts (both in finite and non-finite contexts) → learners did not need any more to parse *pro* in the subject gap of infinitive controlled constructions, so that they preferred to parse the null subject as a NP-trace (“movement preferred overt pronominalization” [1, 2]) → OC structures arose in subordinate infinitive clauses, and Russian lost the possibility of having overt dative pronouns / NP subjects in these structures.

The change presented here, together with the change in the status of *pro* leads us to certain conclusions: the null-subject vs. partial null-subject stages of Russian must be characterized not from the point of view of the availability of *pro*, but from the point of view of the (non-) obligatory insertion of *pro* in non-emphatic / non-discourse-related contexts; assuming that the ability of infinitives to license case did not change in Russian, the only cue that changed for learners was the loss of this obligatory insertion of *pro*. Another conclusion is the need for referential *pro* to be a lexical item, in complementary distribution with NP-traces, as simply dropping / eliding the infinitive subject cannot account for the acquisitional / historical change presented here.

References

- [1] Boeckx, C., N. Hornstein & J. Nunes. 2010. *Control as Movement*. Cambridge University Press. [2] Boeckx, C. & N. Hornstein. 2007. On (non-)obligatory control. In W. D. Davis & S. Dubinsky (eds.). *New Horizons in the Analysis of Control and Raising*. Springer, 251-262. [3] Borkovskij, V. I. 1978 *Istoričeskaja grammatika ruskogo jazyka: sintaksis - prostoe predloženie*, Nauka, Moskva. [4] Franks, S. 1995. *Parameters of Slavic Morphosyntax*, Oxford University Press. [5] Hornstein, N. 1999. On Control. *Linguistic Inquiry* 30/1: 69-96. [6] Madariaga, N. 2011. Infinitive clauses and dative subjects in Russian. *Russian Linguistics* 35(3). 301-329. [7] McShane, M. 2009. Subject ellipsis in Russian and Polish. *Studia Linguistica* 63(1): 98-132. [8] Roberts, I. & A. Holmberg. 2010. Introduction: parameters in minimalist theory. T. Biberauer *et alii* (eds.) *Null Subjects: the structure of parametric variation*, Cambridge University Press, 1-57.