

A Unified Analysis for Russian Contrastive Imperatives and Root Infinitives

In this paper I investigate a particular non-canonical usage of Russian imperatives which I call contrastive imperative construction (1) and Russian root infinitives (2), and provide a unified account for them on the basis of the so far unnoticed remarkable similarity in their interpretation and structure, e.g., both contrastive imperatives and root infinitives show lack of agreement between the obligatorily clause-initial nominative subject and the main predicate.

(1) a. Vse otdyxajut, a on begi. (R)

all rest but he-nom run-imp2sg

'Everybody is resting, while he has to run.' (Jakobson 1984: 50)

b. My idem spokojno, a on voz'mi da upadi. (R)

we go calmly but he-nom take-imp2sg PRT fall-imp2sg

'We are walking calmly, and he, all of a sudden, falls.' (Townsend 1970: 257)

(2) Ljudi pirovat', a my gorevat'. (R)

people-nom feast-inf but we-nom grieve-inf

'People are off to feast, but we have to grieve.' (Greenberg 1991:353)

The main characteristic of contrastive imperatives is that they do not exhibit the typical illocutionary forces of imperatives (such as command, instruction, request, warning, etc.), but rather, they convey a broader range of meanings. The examples in (1) morphosyntactically differ from the regular uses of imperatives in the following three ways: First, the imperative verb form contains no distinctions of grammatical person or number, i.e., it is always the second person singular. Second, this unchangeable imperative verb form may be applied to a subject in any of the three persons in both singular and plural. Consequently, there is no agreement between the imperative verb and the subject of the clause. Third, the subject of the imperative must be overt, and it must precede the verb (as opposed to another noncanonical use of Russian imperative, i.e., the conditional use: *Bud' to sam prezident, ja ne postupil by inace*. 'Even if it were the president himself, I would not have acted differently.').

Contrastive imperatives can be divided into two subtypes: one subtype expresses obligation, as in (1a), and the other a sudden, unexpected action with respect to the state described in its conjoined clause, as in (1b).

Root infinitive constructions, illustrated in (2), contain an infinitive, which is not a complement but the main predicate of the clause, and a nominative subject NP, which does not agree with its predicate.

I shall argue that the imperative verb in (1) raises to C to check its force features in accord with the general theory of imperatives (Rivero (1994), Zanuttini (1997), or Platzack & Rosengren (1998)). On the other hand, the infinitive in (2) stays in situ in lack of any features that need to be checked.

I propose that in (1), the subject is caseless since there is no projection that could attract and check its case feature (imperatives lack a TP projection (cf. Platzack and Rosengren (1997))). In contrastive imperative constructions, the subject, despite being always overt, does not ever agree with the imperative verb in either person or number, and it never shows case distinctions. It will be thus argued that while the subject of regular imperatives has a case-feature, which is checked in Spec-AgrSP, the subject of contrastive imperatives is caseless or it receives default case (for independent evidence for syntactic caselessness in Russian copular sentences see Pereltsvaig (2001)).

This analysis will be extended to root infinitives such as (2) since they also lack a TP projection, i.e., they never express any tense distinction (the infinitive in (2) is "tenseless" in Avrutin's (1999) terms). They also lack an AgrSP (the subject does not agree with its predicate). The fact that the subject cannot be dative in (2), as would be expected with an infinitive predicate, indicates that there is no modal projection in this type of construction. Since all potential nominative case checking positions are missing, the subject can be caseless. Because the subject has no other features (such as ϕ -features) that need to be checked, it moves to the topic position only to account for the word order and meaning. Departing from Greenberg's proposal for root infinitives, however, I argue that the topic position is not an adjoined CP projection, but the Spec of CP. In contrast with Greenberg, I suggest that the subject is not base-generated in the adjoined topic position since it cannot get its theta role there. Instead, I propose that the subject raises to Spec-CP from its base-generated Spec-vP position, where it can receive its theta role. I also demonstrate that the postulation of PRO in the subject position (in order to account for the case of the nominative NP) is stipulated since it is hard to justify the existence of PRO in non-control constructions and since the indexing mechanism between the topicalized nominative NP and PRO is not clear. Moreover, if we posit PRO as the subject of infinitives in a clause without agreement (a description that fits root infinitives), we would expect the subject to appear in the dative case (cf. Babby (1998); Moore & Perlmutter (1999) and (2000)). However, the subject in root infinitives can never be dative.

In the paper I also show that Avrutin's (1999) discourse representational approach can not adequately account for root infinitival constructions.

In summary, the theoretical merit of this paper is that it accounts for two syntactically similar constructions, i.e., contrastive imperatives and root infinitives, in a unified fashion. It also provides a mechanism for Russian imperatives in one of their non-canonical uses, a topic that has received no theoretical treatment up to now.

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