

“Missing” and “Misplaced” Subjects in Russian (and other Slavic languages)

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Ru sentences often have gaps in positions where a subject should appear. Apart from structural null subjects, e.g., with infinitives, null expletives, silent arbitrary pronouns, e.g., silent 3rd person plural pronouns or shared subjects in VP-coordination structures, which we will not consider in our talk, such gaps occur in sentences like (1) – (3), i.e. in coordinated sentences – (1), subordinate clauses – (2), but also in main clauses – (3).

One might be tempted to analyze those missing subjects as *pro* drop in parallel to other Slavic languages, e.g., Cz, Po or SC. However, opinions vary with respect to the characterization of Ru as a *pro*-drop language. Some authors claim that Ru is *pro* drop, treating all Slavic languages on a par in this respect (Růžička 1986, Koktová 1992, Kosta 1990, Müller 1989, 2005). Other linguists do not consider Ru as a canonical null-subject language, explaining the relevant missing subjects as instances of the more general phenomenon of contextual ellipsis (Jakobson 1939, Nichols 1985, Berger 1993, Lindseth & Franks 1994, Franks 1995, Lindseth 1998, Avrutin & Rohrbacher 1997). The decision also depends on the definition of *pro* drop. There is no general agreement in this respect – compare classical *pro* drop (Rizzi 1982, 1986) based on the condition of “rich” verbal agreement, its extension to non-agreement languages by Jaeggli & Safir’s (1989) condition of “morphological uniformity”, alternative definitions of morphological “richness” (Müller 2005), or “radical *pro* drop” (Neeleman & Szendrői 2005) which leads to approaches based solely on discourse-conditions (Butt & King 1997, Butt 2001, Grimshaw & Samek-Lodovici 1998).

We understand *pro* drop in the classical sense.

In our talk we will try to establish the true nature of the different kinds of subject gaps in Ru coming to the conclusion that Standard Ru is not *pro* drop. We follow the argumentation by Lindseth & Franks (1996) who observe that (i) overt subject pronouns do not have a marked status in Ru and can be freely interchanged with the null form – as shown in our Ru examples in (4) contrasted with Cz (5), (ii) overt pronominal subjects in Ru complement clauses can be co-referent with the subject of the embedding clause (bound variable reading), which is hardly possible in Cz – note the contrast between (6) and (7), and (iii) the omission of subjects is subject to the same conditions as contextual ellipsis of other argumental expressions.

It seems to be worthwhile looking for a connection between the *pro*-drop (or non-*pro* drop) nature of a language and other properties, e.g., the character of its pronominal system.

In Ru there exists another possibility for the expression of non-emphatic subjects that has not received much attention in the literature: they can be overtly realized as a deaccented pronoun immediately following the initial verb belonging to the focus (“Verb Subject Inversion” (VSI)) – compare the example in (8). Interestingly, such VSI structures can also be found in Po which is standardly considered a *pro*-drop language – compare (9), but not, e.g., in Czech, another canonical *pro*-drop language.

We will provide a syntactic analysis for the VSI structure considering the following possibilities. (a) The subject occupies a special position, namely that of a clitic (the similarity of postverbal subject pronouns to clitics has been pointed out for Po by Siewierska 1988; for a similar statement see the Russian Academy Grammar (1980, II, 200)). However, Ru is known to have no pronominal clitics. Another argument against a cliticization analysis is that deaccented full NP subjects are possible in the postverbal position too – compare (10). (b) The verb occupies a special position. We will propose a structure where the verb moves overtly to the head of a functional projection. The postverbal subject occupies the specifier position of an adjacent functional projection.

Finally, we will consider a possible connection between the VSI structure and *pro* drop. Is the postverbal subject located in the same position as *pro*? According to Cardinaletti & Starke (1999:175), *pro* is a weak pronoun occupying the Spec of a functional projection, not a clitic. Does *pro* drop apply in the postverbal position (as suggested by Górna 1976 for Po)?

Why do Ru and Po have VSI structures, but Cz does not? Cardinaletti & Starke (1999:198) claim that under their “Minimise Structure” principle (“the most deficient structure must be chosen if it can be chosen”), a language with two weak pronouns (one overt, one null) has free choice between one of the two forms. In Ru which has overt (homophonous) strong and weak subject pronouns, but no null form, the overt weak pronoun is chosen. The Po pronominal system provides overt strong and weak pronouns (which are also homophonous), and additionally the weak *pro*, hence the choice between *pro* and the overt weak pronoun is free. In Cz, on the other hand, overt subject pronouns are always strong, hence *pro* has to appear when a weak pronoun is required.

- (1) Kogda vy zarabotali pervye den'gi i na čto ___ ix potratili? (Ru, Put.)
 when you.nom earned.past.pl first.acc.pl money.acc.pl and for what them.acc spent.past.pl
 'When did you earn your first money and on what did you spend it?'
- (2) Ivan skazal, čto ___ pridet. (Ru)
 Ivan.nom said.past.sg.m that will-come.3.sg
 'Ivan said that he would come.'
- (3) Staršina vystavil život vpered. ___ Sprašivaet Rubaxina: (Ru, Mak.)
 sergeant-major.nom pushed-out.past.sg.m stomach.acc forward asks.3.sg Rubakhin.acc
 'The sergeant-major pushes out his stomach. Asks Rubakhin.'
 – Nu?.. Budet podmoga?
 'Well?.. Will there be any help?'
- (4) (a) A: Bud'te dobry peredat' mos'e Volandu, čto vystuplenie ego segodnja v tret'em otdelenii. (Ru, Bulg.)
 'Kindly tell Monsieur Woland that his performance is tonight in the third part of the programme.'
 B: [...] ___ Peredam, [...]
 will-tell.1.sg
 'I'll tell him.' (unmarked subject: gap)
- (b) A: Tut dvadcat' rublej. Peredajte, skažite, čto ja ešče živa. (Ru, Ryb.)
 'Here are twenty rubles. Give them to him. Tell him that I am still alive.'
 B: Xorošo, **ja** peredam.
 good I.nom will-give.1.sg
 Well, I'll do it. (unmarked subject: overt pronoun)
- (c) Nakonec **on** rešilsja. Ozaglaviv svoje pis'mo (Ru, Ajtm.)
 eventually he.nom made-up-his-mind.past.sg.m.refl having-entitled his.acc letter.acc
 "Ašiktyk kat", ___ napisal, čto [...]
 "Ašiktyk kat", wrote.past.sg.m that
 'Eventually, he made up his mind. Having entitled his document "Ašiktyk kat" [love letter],
 he wrote that [...]' (unmarked subjects: overt pronoun, gap)
- (5) (a) ___ Udělám to. (Cz, Short 1993, 470)
 will-do.1.sg it.acc
 'I'll do it.' (unmarked subject: gap)
- (b) **Já** to udělám.
 I.nom it.acc will-do.1.sg
 'I'll do it.' (stressed subject: overt pronoun)
- (6) **Ivan_j** skazal, čto **on_{j/k}** pridet. (Ru)
 Ivan.nom said.past.sg.m that he.nom will-come.3.sg
- (7) **Jan_j** řekl, že **on_{*j/k}** přijde. (Cz)
 Jan.nom said.past.3.sg.m that he.nom will-come.3.sg
- (8) [...] privezli s železnoj dorogi streločnika; (Ru, Čex.)
 'They brought the switchman from the railway line.'
 položil ___ **ja** ego na stol, čtoby emu operaciju delat', [...]
 laid.past.sg.m I.nom him.acc on table in-order-to-him.dat operation.acc do.inf
 'I laid him on the table to operate on him.'
- (9) [...] ksiądz Lasota był ulubionym bohaterem opowieści Biskupa Wantuły. (Po, Pilch)
 'Priest Lasota was the favorite hero of Bishop Wantuła's stories.'
 Kapłan ten był w ogóle kimś w rodzaju Franza Fiszera albo barona Münchhausena [...]
 'The priest was a character of the kind of Franz Fiszer or the baron Münchhausen.'
Specjalizował się on zwłaszcza w malowniczych i niekonwencjonalnych
 specialized.past.3.sg.m refl.cl he.nom in-particular in picturesque and unconventional
 mowach pogrzebowych
 speeches funeral
 'He had specialized in particular in picturesque and unconventional funeral speeches.'
- (10) I vot dolgoždannoe pojavlenie Anny Netrebko na gamburgskix podmostkax. [...] (Ru, Partner 1(24))
 'And eventually there came Anna Netrebko's long-awaited appearance on the stage in Hamburg.'
Načala Netrebko s [...] fragmentov iz oper Mocarta [...]
 began.past.sg.f Netrebko.nom from pieces.gen.pl from operas.gen.pl Mozart.gen
 'Netrebko began with pieces from Mozart's operas [...].'