The Semantics and Syntax of Russian Pronominal Structure: a feature breakdown

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Abstract

Elaborating one of the points of his Coling Bonn 1986 paper, the author discusses pronominality, which is due to a special semantic stratum, singulative identificational deixis. Personal, reflexive and interrogative pronouns have additional transmissional deictic markings, but singulative identificational pronominality alone has a direct anaphoric effect and tends to reinforce syntactically. This explains, for instance, German sich selbst.

1. In several publications of mine /van Schooneveld 1982/, /idem forthcoming-A/, /idem forthcoming-C/ I have had occasion to mention in passing the special nature of pronouns. Pronouns have their own type of deixis.

2. Deixis is traditionally used for the type of meaning which results from the once-occurring speech act, Saussure's parole, being recodified, that is, being incorporated back into the langue. In adverbs like here and now the code refers to actual applications of itself. We cannot identify the referent of here and now without taking recourse to our having identified the given speech act. The speech act becomes a part of the narrated situation /Brugmann 1904/, /Lyons 1977, pp.636 sqq./.

3. It is an empirical fact, however, that language can also indicate an identification act which takes place during the narrated situation. Thus we have to do in the preposition out with a space which has been identified (an in-space) and subsequently discarded as irrelevant in the next identification, so that "out" is the resulting meaning. What is important here is that all identifications, subsequent ones as well as the first, may take place in the narrated situation, not necessarily during the speech (the transmission) act.

Do we have to do with deixis in the case of identification in the narrated situation? That depends on how we use the word deixis. If we understand by deixis the reincorporation of an identification act into the code, that is, the prerogation, by the first identifier, of the identification of the referent, then we can speak of deixis also in the second case, when the entire identification procedure takes place in the narrated situation alone. But that is not the way the term deixis has been used traditionally by linguists. In the traditional conceptualization, deixis is of a transmissional nature.

If, however, we are to use the term deixis for any recodification of the initial identification of the referent, including identification in the narrated situation, then we must distinguish between mere identificational deixis (in the narrated situation), and the traditional type of deixis, which I call transmissional deixis. In pronouns we have to do with a deixis of the identificational variety.

4. Of both types of deixis, transmissional and identificational, there exist two varieties: an unmarked type and a singulative type /van Schooneveld forthcoming-A/. In the singulative type, all identifications take place at the same moment. Pronominal deixis is singulatively identificational.

Singulative transmissional deixis gives rise to references to the process of the transmission, that is, the process of pronunciation itself. It regulates, for instance, the relation between grammatical

morphemes (endings) and lexical morphemes. In singulative identificational deixis all identifications in the narrated situation must take place simultaneously with the first one.

5. It is obvious that singulative transmissional deixis is the type of deixis which is at the basis of demonstrative pronouns. In the framework of the demonstrative pronouns our vantage point is that of an identifier operating within the narrated situation; in the personal pronouns the speech situation is involved at the same time.

In the personal pronouns, we have to do with a semantic mechanism more complex than that of the demonstrative pronouns. The personal pronouns set up objects as being on a par with speaker and receiver, since they define these objects (referents) further in terms of the speech situation. In using the first person the speaker looks at his own image in the mirror of the singulative narrated situation. Mutatis mutandis the same happens in the second and third person.

6. Pronouns in general are marked by singulative identificational plurality (plur'''). Singulative identificational plurality means that there is multiple synchronized identifiability of the referent. A singulative (mini-)narrated situation is created. The referent of the demonstrative pronoun 'that' equals a (mini-)narrated situation.

Personal pronouns are, being pronouns, marked by plur''', but a further specification (subclassification) is done by transmissional semantic features.

7. At this point, I should mention that I have empirically concluded that Russian semantic values can be expressed in terms of six semantic features which occur on each of the four deictic levels mentioned; i.e., by 24 semantic features. These features constitute an ordered set in that each succeeding feature incorporates the information given by its predecessor /van Schooneveld 1983/, /idem forthcoming-C/.

Plurality, the first feature, instructs the receiver to perform more than one identification on one object or to identify more than one object. Dimensionality singles out from a plurality of identifications a subset which is distinct from its peers. Preidentity indicates that the first identification must be assumed to have been performed earlier than other identifications in the narrated or speech situation. Extension reidentifies an identified element and implies its relative unaffectedness by the identification situation; cancellation signalizes the complement of an originally identified set, and objectiveness indicates that the referent can be at any distance from the element initially identified.

8. The third person is, additionally to plur''', marked by transmissional plurality (plur''). In the pronouns, plur'' creates a reference in the speech situation which must not necessarily be identified with the speaker or the receiver but can be repeatedly (i.e. a multiple of times) identified.

The second person is, additionally to plur''', marked by (non-singulative) transmissional dimensionality (dim''). Dim'' says that there is a subset of elements in the speech situation which have a property in common. What else constitutes a more conspicuous subset of actants in the speech situation than those who actively participate in it? The second person indicates the direct participant in the speech situa-

tion.

The first person is, in addition to plur''', marked by (non-singulative) transmissional preidentity (preid''). The identity of the referent (the speaker or the central actant in the speech situation) has been established beforehand by an actant (participant) in the speech situation: the speaker himself.

The next feature in the hierarchy of semantic features is extension. Extension signifies that the referent has already been identified and hence is minimally independently characterized by this (repeat) identification. It is obvious that the reflexive pronoun is nothing else but the variety of personal pronoun that is marked by (non-singulative) transmissional extension (ext''). Its referent has already made an appearance in the speech situation.

Is there a personal pronoun marked by (non-singulative) transmissional cancellation? It would signify an object which in the speech situation would not be immediately identifiable. It is evident that the indefinite/interrogative pronoun kto 'who' čto 'what' is the personal pronoun marked by canc''.

9. Singulative identificational plurality (plur''') means a multiple synchronized identifiability which is valid only during the synchronized identifications. The demonstrative pronoun that is marked by plur'''. One of its combinatory variants is anaphora. As Lyons has concluded, anaphora is but a combinatory variant of the ostensive signification of pronominality /Lyons 1977, pp.657 sqq./. Anaphora is per definitionem contextually conditioned.

Pronominal dimensionality (singulative identificational dimensionality [dim''']) will mean that the anaphor is seen as distinct from its background. One might say the full extend of the referent up to its outlines becomes crucial. The pronominal adjective all conveys this meaning.

Pronominal preidentity will mean that with regard to a given narrated situation and its components the referent will be once-occuringly unexpected; evidently it is the pronominal adjective other that carries singulative identificational preidentity (preid''').

Singulative identificational extension (ext''') will mean that the referent has already been identified and is, in synchronization with this original identification, reidentifiable an indefinite number of times. The referent is indefinitely reidentifiable. The pronominal self (Russian sam [long form samyj], German selbst), is marked by ext'''.

Singulative identificational cancellation (canc''') will mean that at a moment preceding a once-occurring narrative situation, there has been an identification of a referent but this referent is in the time period synchronized with this identification no longer available for identification. In English, the pronominal which, Russian kotoryj, indicating the identifier's incapability of identifying the referent directly, is used either in appeals for elucidation (that is, in questions, as an interrogative pronoun), or anaphorically, that is, as a relative pronoun. In German, the corresponding welch can in addition be used as an indefinite pronoun. Kotoryj, which and welch work off the narrated situation, whereas the (personal) interrogative/indefinite pronouns kto/čto, which/what and wer/was work off the speech situation.

Objectiveness indicates a referent which is identifiable at random. In the pronominal category, the pronoun any is marked by obj'''.

10. In conclusion, a few words on the interrelation between semantic structure and syntax.

The interrogative pronominal kotoryj, which, welch (marking: canc''') that is a contextual variant

of the relative pronoun refers to an already identified narrated situation, as it should do given the general properties of the cancellation feature. This pronominal is essentially coreferential. Thus Russian kotoryj 'which' means 'which member(s) of an already given set' and English which itself also implies membership in a set already identified; the claim of some grammars that which implies a choice between two items is obviously based on the most frequent instantiation of its interrogative usage. German welch used as indefinite pronoun also is coreferential. In Ich habe kein Geld. Has du welches? 'I have no money. Do you have some?' welches can refer only to money, whereas was 'what' ('something') is inappropriate. In contrast to the singulatively identificational pronominals discussed in section 9, personal pronouns (see under 8) are not coreferential. For instance, in Russian, the specifically interrogative (personal) pronouns kto 'who' and čto 'what' (plur''' + canc'') are not coreferential except in a few explainable cases (e.g. vse kto 'all who').

Coreferentiality also occurs in the (singulatively identificational) pronominal expression marked by ext''', in Russian the short form adjective sam, long (adjectival) form samyj, in English self and in German selbst. The Russian reflexive (personal) pronoun sebja, Latin se, German sich is merely the personal pronoun marked by plur''' + ext'' (see above under 8). It is the pronoun with minimal referentiality and hence maximal coreferentiality, seen directly from the speech situation as orientation point. The reflexive (personal) pronoun reminds the audience of the existence of a person in an exclusive narrated situation (plur''') and says that this referent is nothing new in the speech situation -- it is not a person mentioned for the first time. The reflexive pronominal adjective discussed in 9: Russian sam, English self, Latin ipse, German selbst, on the other hand, which is marked by singulative identificational extension (ext'''), does not create the illusion of an individual, but merely signalizes the quality of introvertivity. It signalizes coreferentiality limiting its range of reference strictly to stay within the confines of the given narrated situation. Obviously the referent of the reflexive pronoun is the likely carrier of this introvertivity. Thus arise in various languages expressions which are emphatic parallels to the reflexive pronoun: Russian samogo sebja, German sich selbst. Singulative identificational deixis creates a second layer of anaphora. Incidentally, singulative identificational deixis can be shown also to provide the structural basis of the system of number words, like two, three and so on, which are, again, typically anaphorical /van Schooneveld forthcoming-B/.

The conclusion suggests itself that for a description of syntactic relations involving pronouns singulatively identificational features are a crucial and effective tool.

The cardinal structure of Russian and English pronouns and pronominals

Russ.	Engl.	adjec-tive	substan-tive	plur'''	dim'''	preid'''	ext'''	canc'''	obj'''	plur''	dim''	preid''	ext''	canc''	(obj'')
tot	that	+		+											
ves'	all	+			+										
inoj	other	+				+									
sam(yj)	self	+					+								
kotoryj	which	+						+							
	any	+		+						+					
on	he		+	+							+				
ty	you		+	+								+			
ja	I		+	+									+		
sebja	German sich		+	+										+	
kto	who		+	+											+

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