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SENTENCE CONCEPTIONS IN FOREIGN LINGUISTICS

Анотація

У статті розглядаються різні концепції статусних характеристик речення у зарубіжній лінгвістиці. Речення як синтаксична одиниця аналізується у різних площинах: структурній, семантичній/ номінативній, прагматичній/ комунікативній, когнітивній. У сучасних синтаксичних теоріях речення досліджується у декількох напрямках. З одного боку, воно розглядається як організована система з різними рівнями у певній структурі, а не як недискретна одиниця, і аналізується у синтаксичній парадигматиці. З іншого боку, речення досліджується з проникненням у глибинні зв'язки системної організації, де використовується ряд методів (Т-метод, валентний метод, компонентний аналіз, ІС-метод і т.д.).

Ключові слова: синтаксична одиниця, когнітивний синтаксис, морфемні класи, вербоцентрична концепція, монопредикативні речення, поліпредикативні речення.

Summary

The article envisages different sentence conceptions in foreign linguistics. The main aspects of sentence studies are structural, semantic/ nominative, pragmatic/ communicative, cognitive. Modern syntactic theories embrace twofold sentence description. For one thing, sentence is treated as an organised system, hierarchically structured, but not as some indiscreet unit, and, consequently, sentence is analysed within syntactic paradigmatics. For another thing, sentence is considered within its inner immediate constituents specification where we use different methods (T-method, valency method, component analysis, IC-method, etc.).

Key words: syntactic unit, cognitive syntax, morphemic classes, verbocentric conception, monopredicative sentences, polypredicative sentences.

To use Charles Fries's words there exist approximately 300 definitions of the sentence. It is due to the fact that the sentence is connected with many lingual and extralingual aspects: logical (completeness of thought), psychological (behaviour of a man), philosophical (cognition of the world). So, there are extralinguistic and linguistic aspects in the general characteristic of the sentence.

The external approach to the definition of the sentence makes linguists concentrate their attention on the relation of the sentence to extralingual phenomena and on its functional design [6-12]. The dialectical unity of language and thought is of primary concern here since it predetermines the direct correlation of linguistic forms with the forms of thought. On this basis the sentence is characterised as a predicative unit of language which is directly related to the predicative forms of thought. From this point of view the sentence is considered as a communicative unit and its communicative types are distinguished.

The internal approach to the definition of the sentence presupposes its linguistic characteristics with regard to its internal structural and semantic properties [1-5]. In the definition of the sentence both approaches should be taken into consideration, though preference may be given to one of them.

The sentence can be studied in different aspects, the main of which are structural, semantic/nominative, pragmatic/communicative, cognitive.

Thus, if the traditional linguistics concentrates on the study of the formal, structural and semantic properties of the syntactic unit, in the cognitive linguistics the sentence, its syntactic structure or pattern, is understood in terms of conceptualisation, that is how the sentence as a particular syntactic model performs the concept structuring function. There are two main approaches to the study of the sentence in cognitive linguistics. The first focuses on the concepts represented by syntactic constructions, their nature, content and structure (A. Goldberg, L. Talmy, N.N. Boldyrev, L.A. Fours). The second trend envisages the sentence typology and principles of sentence classification.

Cognitive syntax treats the sentence as a unit of syntax viewed in terms of schematisation or profiling, or imagery. G. Lakoff, G. Taylor, A. Wierzbicka study different syntactic patterns which encode transitive events of a prototypical transitive construction. The transitive events are those which involve two participants, *an agent* and *a patient*, where an agent consciously acts in such a way as to cause a change in state of a patient, and its concept – structural pattern or scheme is *agent-action-patient*. When the speaker uses the transitive construction for naming a particular event or situation, he profiles it a transitive event, that is he conceptualises this particular event in terms of *an agent-action-patient scheme*, even if this particular event is not inherently transitive. *E.g.:*

a) *He swam across the Channel;*

b) *He swam the Channel* [J.R. Taylor].

Sentence (a) denotes the location of swimming. Sentence (b) presents the event as a transitive one and suggests its reading (conceptualisation) as follows: the Channel is a challenge to the swimmer's power. In this respect the sentence *He swam our new swimming pool* seems odd.

A. Wierzbicka analyses the use of two-object constructions, which encode events, where the patient is involved in the action, but does not undergo any structural changes, they profile the event in terms of *an agent-action-addresse – patient scheme*.

The linguistic investigations within the cognitive approach for the present tend to prioritise cognitive concepts within a simple sentence. Syntactic concepts represent linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge in its structure (N.N. Boldyrev, L.A. Fours). They observe the nature of the concepts represented by a simple sentence and suggest concepts typology. The main principle which is implied is the assumption that syntactic concepts represent linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge.

L.A. Fours claims that there are three formats of representing knowledge in the simple sentence: a configurational format, an actualisational format and a format of mixed type which combines properties of the previous ones.

Principles and methods of descriptive linguistics are systemically highlighted by Harris in *"Methods in Structural Linguistics"* published in Chicago in 1951. Harris sees the aim of descriptive analysis in studying the structure of the sentence in terms of morphemic classes and their positions. According to Harris, the sentence is a segment of speech produced by one speaker and separated from all the preceding and following speech with a pause. The scholar insists on eliminating the distinction between morphology and syntax. It should be added that, though Harris differentiates between morphological and syntactic criteria, these terms acquire in his book a specific meaning, since Harris ignores the difference between a word, its part, a phrase and a sentence. Overlooking this difference is characteristic to a greater or lesser extent of all descriptive linguists.

Descriptive linguistics deems such notions as *sentence parts, subject, predicate* as meaningless and refuses to operate with them, which leaves the notion *sentence* useless as well. Harris does not explicate the methodology of distributive analysis, but it may obviously be reduced to the following stages: 1) segmenting of a sentence into components; 2) comparing the components and referring similar components to groups.

It should be noted that the approach suggested within descriptive linguistics for syntactic studies is of use for machine translation, since it may lay the foundation for formalised symbolic syntactic description. Issues of text processing and further transferring texts to machines have become the subject of a branch of linguistics called machine translation. Thorough research into the subject has given interesting results, both positive and critical, which has corroborated certain claims of descriptive linguistics but also has revealed its inadequate or fallacious postulates. The unsolved issues are expected to be solved by generative grammar.

Charles Fries, in his turn, tries to prove that rigorous application of formal methods is impossible, if the aim is to describe the syntactic structure of a language used in various communicative situations. In his work *"The Structure of English"* published in New York in 1952, Fries defines the sentence as *singular free utterance*.

Fries applies the fundamental notions of behaviorism and classifies sentence on the ground of the notions *stimulus* and *reaction*. Depending on the type of reaction, sentences are divided into:

I. Communicative utterances:

1. Utterances stimulating only verbal reactions:

a) greetings;

b) forms of address;

c) questions.

2. Utterances, stimulating actions, i.e. requests and orders.

3. Statements, i.e. utterances that attract the communicative partners' attention without interrupting their speech.

II. Non-communicative utterances, i.e. expression of grief, joy, disappointment, etc.

Some scholars study verbocentric conception of the sentence. L. Tesniere pictured the sentence as *a small drama*, centered around an action, denoted by the verb-predicate and its participants which he termed *actants* (the subject and the object of the sentence) and *circonstants* (the time, the place, the quality of the action). This combinability L. Tesniere called the valency of the verb.

The semantic interpretation of the sentence and its structure can be given in terms of semantic cases or semantic functions of actants. In grammar it seeked the name of *case grammar*, *role grammar*, employed by Ch. Filmore in his book *"The Case for Case"*. It is the theory of semantic cases.

American linguists P. Hopper and S. Thomson associated the interpreting of the sentence with the notion of *transitivity*, defining prototypical transitive constructions. He defined semantic criteria of prototypical scale: number of participants of the event, kinesis (actional properties), aspect, affirmativeness (negativeness), mode (modality), volitionality + intentionality, degree of subject agency, degree of object affectedness, degree of individualisation of object.

Some linguists define simple sentences which can feature one predicative line or several predicative lines. Therefore they differentiate between *monopredicative*

and *polypredicative* sentences. In this respect a proper simple sentence is distinguished from a semi-composite sentence (traditional term) or complementational sentence (J.R. Taylor's term) and clause-conflational sentence (L. Talmy's term). Semi-composite sentence may include either compound subjects or compound predicates. They express two different predicative lines and can include subject clauses, object complexes.

Clause-conflational sentences are syntactic units based on clause fusion. They are polypredicative. Within cognitive approach to the sentence status they must be differentiated from complementational and clause conflational sentences, termed traditionally *composite* and *semi-composite* sentences. Traditionally, simple sentences are subdivided into personal, impersonal, interrogative, negative, agentive, patient, temporal, locative.

Personal sentences can be definite personal, general-personal, indefinite personal. Personal sentences name objects of reality, that is why they possess referential features.

Impersonal sentences have no referents in the objective reality, are expressed by *it*, semantically devoid of lexical meaning.

Interrogative sentences are specific due to their structure and meaning.

Negative sentences are specific grammatically.

Agentive sentences name the doer/source of the action, while patient name the passive participant of the action, and temporal indicate time, locative – place, etc.

Among simple sentences there also exist sentencoids.

Sentencoid is a comparatively new term in linguistics. By sentencoids we mean syntactic units that lack the structure of an independent finite clause. In Russian traditional grammar, they are usually called incomplete sentences, in English and American linguistics — elliptical sentences (G.L. Kittredge, F.E. Farley, W.O. Birk, R. Gunter), minor sentences (L. Bloomfield, Ch. Hockett, D. Crystal), or sentence fragments (J. L. Morgan, V. McClelland, J.D. Reynolds, M.L. Steet, I. Guillory).

The term *minor sentences* might lead one to the conclusion that they are of secondary importance to conventional (or major) sentences. In written language, it is really so. According to D.A. Conlin and G.R. Herman, minor sentences in written English constitute only one per cent. But in everyday conversation the so-called minor sentences are as important as major sentences.

The terms *incomplete sentences*, *elliptical sentences*, and *sentence fragments* emphasise their structural deficiency. Short fragmentary units really do not have the structure of independent finite clauses. They are used mainly in conversation. Conversation is typically carried out in face-to-face interaction with others. Speakers usually share a lot of background knowledge. Because it relies on situation and context for meaning, conversation can do syntactic elaboration that is found in written language. Consistent with this factor of syntactic non-elaboration, conversation has a very high frequency of fragmentary syntactic units that are as informative in conversation as independent finite clauses (or sentences).

Since fragmentary syntactic units are structurally different from sentences, they should not be called sentences. J.R. Aiken and M. Bryant suggested that they should be called *non-sentences*. In our opinion, we should not opt for the term because it only tells us that fragmentary syntactic units are not sentences, but it does not tell us what they are. We think the term *sentencoids* is better. By using it, we stress that, on the one hand, sentencoids are different from sentences, on the other hand, that they are similar to them (the suffix *-oid* means *similar to*). They are different from sentences in the sense that they lack independent explicit predication. At the same time, they are similar to sentences because, just like sentences, they belong to communication rendering syntactic units. The prospects for future research will cover the more in-depth study historiography of sentence conceptions both in foreign and home linguistics.

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