SUBJECT SEMANTIC AND SYSTEM ORGANIZATION OF INDEFINITE-PERSONAL SENTENCES

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Abstract: The paper discusses a complex problem of modern syntactic science – the structural and semantic organization of the Russian sentence; this determines the relevance of the research. The paper aims at considering the peculiarities of the semantics and functioning of simple one-component sentences traditionally regarded as indefinite-personal. The semantic and formal features of the main member of these structures, as well as their mandatory components, predetermine a wide range of internal meanings; indefiniteness here does not play the decisive role. The functional analysis is the dominating principle of the research; transformational and contextological analysis and methods of semantic and pragmatic interpretation are actively used as well. The resulting conclusion is as follows: the simple sentence of the aforementioned type possesses complex internal structure and complex system organization.

Keywords: semantics, sentence, indefiniteness, subject, object, verb, person.

The complex and multidimensional problem of the semantic organization of the sentence leads to a deeper research of the seemingly well-studied language phenomena and reveals the ambiguity of those provisions that are considered generally accepted and well established. Such are the structural-semantic types of one-component sentences, as their study has a long history (A.A. Shakhmatov, V.V. Babaytseva, A.G. Rudnev, V.S. Yurchenko et al.). Both the system of one-component sentences in general and the individual types of such structures in particular are well investigated (E.M. Galkina-Fedoruk, K.A. Timofeev, Yu.T. Dolin et al.). A more detailed research into the structural organization and the internal content of these sentences indicates their complex systemic arrangement.

The authors of the present study believe that the systemic internal organization of indefinite-personal sentences such as *В дверь постучали; Мне об этом уже рассказали* has little in common with an expression of indefiniteness. Definiteness/indefiniteness as a lexico-grammatical category has long been in the field of focus – famous works include those by V.G. Admoni, N.D. Arutyunova, A.V. Bondarko, V.V. Vinogradov, V.G. Gak, B.A. Serebrennikov, M.P. Alekhin, V.V. Gurevich, T.M. Nikolaev and many more (see the review in the article by I.N. Efremova and T.M. Belkova, where methods and means of expressing indefiniteness in Russian and French are analyzed [Efremova, 2017, p. 27-30]).

The traditional approach to the above-mentioned sentences emphasizes that "the subject is thought of as indefinite, and the predicate is expressed by a verb in the 3rd person plural of the present or future tense or the past tense of the indicative mood"

[Babaytseva, 1968, p. 34]. This description of expressing the main member is quite exact; however, the author further clarifies various instances expressing the action of an "indefinite person" and indicates that the actor may be: a) "unknown to the speaker, yet this does not seem important for the message"; b) "may be known to the speaker but is not named for various reasons"; c) "cannot be accurately indicated by the speaker"; d) "the actor themselves is the speaker" and e) "in some cases the actor is indicated in the context, yet the refusal to name a particular actor contributes to the expression of indefiniteness and generality" [Babaytseva, 1968, p. 35-37].

Let us consider the definition: "**Indefinite.** 1. Not exactly identified. 2. Vague, unclear. 3. Expressing nothing" [SAD, Vol.2, 1986, p. 460] and a number of synonyms "**Indefinite**. 1. vague, imprecise, not concrete, fuzzy; streamlined (new coll.); indefinable (obs.), extensible (about a concept)..." [Alexandrova, 1998, p. 217]. In this case, one can hardly speak of an unidentified, unclear subject in the following sentences: *И за столом у них гостям **Носили** блюды по чинам* (A.S. Pushkin); ***Пишут** мне, что ты, тая тревогу, загрустила шибко обо мне* (S.A. Yesenin); *На братских могилах **не ставят** крестов* (V.S. Vysotsky). Here, one should rather speak about the general concentration on the action but not on the subject known to the author (the second example), not important for the author (the first example) and is generalized in case of the widely accepted state of affairs (the third example); there is no vagueness, lack of clarity or indefiniteness in these cases. Moreover, none of these examples allows using a subject represented by characteristic ways of expressing an undefined figure(s): *stranger(s)*, *an/the unknown*, *secret/mysterious* (lexical means); *someone, they* (morphological means); *someone mysterious, unknown, unnamed, unspecified*, etc. (lexical and syntactic means).

The authors of the present study believe that the semantics of the third person, as a whole denoting a person who does not participate in the conversation, is much wider than the semantics of the first person (the speaker themselves) and the second person (the immediate interlocutor). The third person's plural form and the past tense plural (*they speak, they spoke, they will speak*) provides even more opportunities. In this case, the idea of a subject, an active doer is necessarily present, in contrast to the singular form, where the formants *-ет*, *-ит* and *-ло* can also point to a specific person: *Мальчик читает*; *Солнце светило* (besides, these forms imply mandatory indication of the person – they are not present in personal one-component sentences. Indefiniteness takes place exactly when the subject is absent in these forms and is 'made up for' the context or situation, hence the usage of such forms in riddles: *Светит, но не греет*, and this one presupposes the answer 'who'), and to impersonality (complete detachment of the action from activity): *Смеркается; Морозит; Вечерело*. The formants *-ат/-ят*, *-ут/-ют* (endings) and *-ли* (suffixes and endings) obviously represent the person, a particular active doer(s) and are able to express the semantics of the first person: *Вернись, тебе **говорят**!* (the speaker themselves), of the second person: *Слышишь, что тебе **говорят**, если мне не веришь?* (the second and third direct participants are quite possible), the semantics of a person participating in a regular, constantly recurring situation: *Вчера **давали** стипендию*, and the semantics of a generalized person: *Дни поздней осени **бранят** обыкновенно* (A.S. Pushkin). In addition, a person may be known, obvious from the situation or not indicated materially but necessarily present in the context or situation; it is not possible to imagine impersonality in these cases.

In these cases, one cannot speak of an indefinite person either Indefiniteness of the person: in the first example, the construction *Вернись, **я** тебе говорю,* not *кто-то тебе говорит* is synonymous. In none of the examples, indefinite pronouns or

constructions (such as *someone mysterious*, *a certain person*, *someone unknown* and even *well-known* cannot be used instead. Next, let us consider the specific semantics of the sentences named indefinite-personal in both the scientific and educational literature. The first group includes constructions that exclude non-subjectiveness both by the form of the main member and by the required structural components that extend the structural scheme, or, in another interpretation, by context data.

The subject is well defined, known, but not named:

a) *Замолчи, тебе говорят* – most likely the subject is the speaker, or the presence of several persons is possible, but they are quite known to the speaker, as the speaker is in any case a participant in the situation.

b) *Мне говорят… Меня спрашивают… Мне / нам пишут…* etc. – very common constructions where the subject is undoubtedly known.

c) *Меня / тебя ждут*; *Ко мне / к маме должны прийти*; *Мне / Татьяне будут звонить* and the like – the subject is also known to the speaker but for some reason is not named.

Note that the mandatory structural component in the considered constructions is pronominal and nominal forms in indirect cases denoting the object of action. In addition to the independent position of the verb-predicate in the plural form of the third person and the past tense plural, the object component – the target object (personal pronoun or proper noun in the dative or accusative case, less often other cases are possible) is semantically and structurally obligatory. The authors of the present research believe this target object to a certain extent removes the indefiniteness of the subject: if the object of action is designated, then its subject is completely clear or is quite clearly guessed; there is no need to define it. The structural scheme and semantic model of the considered structures can be summarized in the following formulas:

$$V_{pl3} - N_{3.4}^{obj}$$
$$P - O.$$

Cf.: in the artistic text: И вот слышу я: *за мной идут – Открыли дверь и сонного подняли – И вот сейчас, вот прям сейчас меня куда-то повезут – А вот куда – опять, паскуды, не сказали!* (V.S. Vysotsky) – if the author does not see who is coming, yet he clearly seen the ones who opened the door and woke him up to take him somewhere (he may not know them, not be familiar with them, which is most likely, but he sees very specific people, knows their position and occupation, so there is no need to name them in such situation). In sum, there is no need for the author to indicate who speaks, writes, waits or will them; even the quantity is not important here - the author either deliberately does not name these people, or they are unknown, or the author for some reason cannot name them. In any case, the situation is framed so that the action itself is relevant, while the actors are unimportant.

d) We can speak about some indefiniteness (in the meaning of vagueness, unidentifiedness, lack of clarity) in interrogative constructions of the type *Мне не звонили*? *Меня не спрашивали*? *Ко мне не приходили*? Here, we can replace the subject with 'no one' (negative pronoun) in the first sentence and 'no one' along with 'someone', 'anyone' (indefinite pronouns) in the following examples – cf.: *Мне никто не звонил? Мне кто-нибудь звонил / никто не звонил? Меня кто-нибудь спрашивал / никто не спрашивал?* The situation has a twofold interpretation: the speaker does not know whether anyone called or asked for them the question is about the event, not the

actors, or the speaker is waiting for a call from someone they do not or cannot name (in this case, we can talk about indefiniteness). Importantly, all the constructions are negative. It may be noted that the interrogative form and negative particles are structurally required in these models.

These constructions can be summarized as:

$$\text{Neg V}_{pl} - \text{N}_{3.4}{}^{\text{odj}}?$$
$$\text{Neg P} - \text{O}?$$

The second group is represented by constructions with a subject conditionally designated by a group of persons or a location of a person/group of persons.

The subject is conditionally defined and indirectly named:

а) *В беседке тихо **разговаривали**; У Ивановых этой ночью **не спали**; В группе его **недолюбливали**.* As the researchers note, in such constructions "some secondary members can indirectly 'hint' at the subject with their specific content. ... An indication to the sphere of the subject usually contains circumstances if, together with the spatial meaning, they contain a 'hint' at the probable doer. This is especially characteristic of word forms denoting a group of persons, a collective, an institution" [Lekant, 2004, p. 139]: *У Петровых громко **спорили**.* A 'hint' at the probable doer may be contained in those adverbial modifiers of place that have the additional meaning "those who are here (there)" [Lekant, 2004, p. 139-140]: *За стеной вдруг **замолчали**.*

Cf.: *Меня вчера **отметили** в приказе: **Освободили** раньше на пять лет. – И подпись:* "Ворошилов, Георгадзе". (V.S. Vysotsky). The context includes the word form *в приказе*; besides, the author points to specific individuals (historical figures in this text). It is clear that it was not Voroshilov or Georgadze who specifically freed the storyteller – specific people / particular person who made this order cannot be named (most importantly, this is not necessary), however, the circle of persons involved (taking into account the institution that is understandable to all) in giving the order is, in fact, designated.

b) The authors of the present study believe such constructions are used for the purpose of mitigation: when they say 'the group', it can be assumed that not the whole group is meant: cf. *Группа его недолюбливала* and *В группе его недолюбливали*. When they say: *У Ивановых не спали*, we can assume that at least someone was asleep; besides, there is an extension of the subject: the Ivanovs themselves were not asleep and, quite possibly, someone else who was at that time in the Ivanovs' house was also awake. From this point of view, one can note the indefiniteness of the subject, yet this is not important here: in these structures, the fact itself, the situation itself are important and not the subject of this action: it is generally indicated (for mitigation, expansion, contraction), but a certain person / persons are unimportant in this case, otherwise the phrase would have been structured as follows: *Петров и Сидоров к нему неплохо относились, остальная часть группы / остальные члены группы его не любили*, and the subject's indefiniteness would look like this: *Некто / кое-кто в группе его недолюбливал*; this is not at all the same as *В группе его недолюбливали*.

Cf.: in the artistic text: *Мою фамилью – имя – отчество Прекрасно **знали** в КГБ; А что у нас в части **едят**?! ...Вверх таких **не берут** и тут Про таких **не поют*** (from the works by V.S. Vysotsky).

In these constructions, **the determining object-adjective component** (most often nouns in the genitive or prepositional case) is structurally obligatory – it removes

the indefiniteness and introduces additional semantic nuances in terms of the subject's representation; here, the action is important. The structural scheme and semantic model of the considered sentences can be summarized in the following formulas:

1. $V_{pl3} - N_{2.6}^{loc}/Adv^{loc}$
   P – Adverbial;
2. $V_{pl3} - N_4^{odj} - N_{2,6}^{loc}/Adv^{loc}$
   P – O – Adverbial.

The third group is represented by the constructions where the action itself, and not the subject, is actualized.

The subject is unknown and is not named:

a) *В дверь **постучали*** (in a situation when those who are in the room truly do not know who is knocking and how many people are there). Let us note that in this case we do not observe expressions of indefiniteness either, otherwise the phrase would be *В дверь кто-то постучал*, which focuses on an unknown doer. Our example, not synonymous to the construction with the pronoun 'someone', emphasizes the fact itself, the action itself which is the causative factor for the situation - the door must be opened, it is necessary to react to the situation one way or another, the doer is not interesting to anyone at least at first, and is not important yet. The sentences *В дверь **стучат*** and *В дверь **кто-то** стучит* represent different situations and are representations of different forms of thought, where in the first case the action is relevant, and in the second an unknown person, an unidentified person. The doer(s), the person(s) are obligatory in both cases, but in the first example they are irrelevant, just as the degree of their indefiniteness – here, it does not matter at all who they are. Since in these cases the action is relevant, and the person is not relevant, a more successful definition of such structures will be 'irrelevant-personal'. The authors of the present study believe this term is more successful than the generally accepted 'indefinite-personal', since it more accurately determines their semantics and functional significance.

b) Often, regularly repeated actions are presented in this form: *Вчера давали / дали стипендию*; *Сегодня дают стипендию*; *Завтра дадут / будут давать стипендию*. Is it important who exactly distributes the scholarship? Constructive-obligatory are **adverbial and objective determining** members of the sentence. It is important to use **the present tense** form of the predicate, while in case of other forms, lexical (lexemes) and syntactic means (introductory or comparative constructions) with certain semantics are used: *Сегодня в Большом **дают** «Травиату»; У них, как обычно, дамам **преподнесут** цветы; У нас в бухгалтерии эту проблему **решили**, как всегда, быстро.*

c) The following announcements can be presented in the form of the aforementioned constructions: *По газонам **не ходят**; У нас **не курят**; Здесь принимают посуду*, as well as the headings in the ads: ***Продают***; ***Меняют***; ***Покупают***, etc. There may be no obligatory structural components here: the situation itself presupposes an independent action that is carried out regularly, constantly by persons who do not interest anyone, they are irrelevant.

Interestingly, these constructions are synonymous not to two-component sentences with the main member which is the representative of an indefinite person(s) (*here someone unknown accepts dishes*). The first two examples are synonymous to two-component sentences with negative pronouns as subjects: *По газонам никто не ходит;*

У нас никто не курит. Structurally mandatory is negation expressed by negative particles.

The following examples are more synonymous to two-component passive structures: *Дом **возводится** в центре города* – cf. *Дом **возводят** в центре города*; *Статья **принята** к печати* – *Статью **приняли** к печати* and regular action: *Магазин **закрывается** в 22 часа* – *Магазин **закрывают** в 22 часа*. The actor(s) are present in all cases: the house is not built by itself; the article is accepted by quite specific persons; the shop is closed by persons who are obliged to do this. None of the cases cited shows indefiniteness of the person(s) – the fact itself is important, the action itself is actual or regularly repeated. It can be assumed that structural components are **objective components** (nouns or pronouns in the accusative case), less often **adverbial** (*here, at our place*, etc.)

The structural scheme and semantic model of the considered sentences can be summarized in the following formulas:

1. V_{pl3} - N_4^{obj}

P – O;

2. V_{pl3} – N_4^{odj} - N^{loc}/Adv^{loc}

P – O – Adverbial.

Cf.: in the artistic text: *Красивых **любят** чаще и прилежней, Весёлых **любят** меньше, но быстрей, И молчаливых **любят**, только реже, зато уж если **любят**, то сильней* (V.S. Vysotsky).

These examples show a high degree of generalization of ordinary situations, so many indefinite-personal sentences become semantic generalizations / semantically generalized. If we recognize the generalized-personal sentences as an independent type, then these examples will be included in it. The meaning of the third person thus includes a generalization.

Therefore, the specific semantics and semantic-structural organization of sentences, traditionally defined as indefinite-personal, testifies to the diversity of the internal meanings embedded in them, and often they are not connected with the indefiniteness of the person. In most cases, the person(s) are known or conditionally designated: intentionally not named or not really known and cannot even be known; this is not important. The fact itself, the action itself, the situation itself which can be single, unique, regular, common or generalized is important. Thus, a more accurate name for the indicated constructions is **__irrelevant-personal__**. The person(s) are mandatory but for various reasons not important (relevant). The semantics of an unnamed person includes the widest range of meanings, from specific to generalized. Together with the 3rd person form of the plural (with inflections -**ат**/-**ят**, -**ут**/-**ют** for present / future tense and past tense formants (suffix and ending -**ли**)), the obligatory object and circumstance components (considered above with an indication of specific morphological forms) actively and consistently participate in the representation of these meanings. The authors of the present study believe this is the peculiarity of the semantic-structural organization of this kind of constructions and of their uniqueness as a language structure.

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