Communicative Perspective of the Composite Sentence in the Context of Linguistic Interpretation

Nikolay Boldyrev, Svetlana Vinogradova*

FSBEI HPE “Tambov state university named after G. R. Derzhavin” 33, Internatsionalnaya St, Tambov 392000, Russia

Abstract

The authors discuss communicative perspective of the composite sentence in the context of interpretation as a linguistic cognitive activity of an individual. Involved in the process of interpretation, the speaker configures his or her knowledge of the composite sentence shaped like a linguistic knowledge format wherein communicative perspective is regulated by an interpreting language function of determining the status of knowledge. This function reveals metainterpretation being a cognitive-linguistic basis for communicative sentence perspective and conceptually organizes various linguistic means aimed at marking the given and the new knowledge in the process of communication. The authors argue that the transfer of the given and the new through composite sentences is governed by at least two principles: the conceptual representation and the conceptual hierarchy of meanings. Regarded as an essential stipulation of successful communication, communicative perspective of the composite sentence requires a deep linguistic research, on the one hand, and application of the research outcomes in language teaching, on the other hand.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +7-915-676-0611.
E-mail address: vinogradova.sg@yandex.ru
1. Introduction

Communication, a dialogue, an exchange of ideas, presupposes human interaction in the course of cognitive, labour, social and cultural activities (Yartseva, 1998). In the process of communication, information is exchanged through language messages. The basic unit of information processing is a proposition as a specific form of knowledge representation (Givón, 1990; Pankrats, 1992), and its linguistic expression is usually a message shaped as a sentence-utterance (hereinafter – sentence).

It is proved that communication depends on the movement of thought from the known to the new. In this regard, communication is primarily based on the laws of apperception in knowledge assimilation (Miller, 1990), iconicity (Jakobson, 1966; Haiman, 1985), and focusing (Halliday, 1967; Kuno, 1976; Deane, 1992).

Therefore, being aware of the ways to assess communicative sentence perspective, i.e. to verbalize the given and the new information or recognize it in the process of interaction, should be considered an essential stipulation of successful communication. This requires a fairly deep linguistic research, on the one hand, and application of the research results in educational sphere, e.g. in the course of foreign language and translation teaching, on the other hand.

However, at present communicative sentence perspective remains a matter of theoretical rather than practical syntax. Hardly the existing manuals on English or Russian grammar in practice can offer you a section fully devoted to communicative sentence perspective. Typically, this issue boils down to a short discussion concerned with the features of information structure of a simple sentence due to a certain order of its constituent parts. At the same time, the problem of communicative sentence perspective in different languages is analyzed at length in numerous scientific papers, and the generalization of such experience could be really valuable for the purposes of language and translation teaching.

It should be noted that communicative sentence perspective has been a subject of research performed by scientists from various schools of thought. The first time the need for a thorough study of the phenomenon under discussion was proclaimed by Mathesius (1967; 1967a) standing on the positions of functional structuralism. Mathesius distinguished between grammatical and functional types of sentence division. The scientist outlined the starting point and the core in the structure of sentence meaning generally understood as the known/given and the new, which in many subsequent studies were named theme and rheme, topic and comment, etc.

Of course, communicative sentence perspective cannot be called a purely grammatical phenomenon. It is determined by factors of different nature: linearity, grammatical forms of sentence parts and sentence as a whole, context, semantics, intonation, contractiveness, empathy, pragmatic presupposition, conceptual specifics of the speaker and the hearer interaction, discourse factors, etc. (Kuno, 1976; Chafe, 1976; Paducheva, 1985; Apresyan, 1988; Dijk, 2000). In addition, each sentential element promoting the process of communication shows a certain degree of communicative activity or dynamism (Firbas, 1992). These factors already suggest that communicative sentence perspective is a complicated phenomenon to study and cognize. However, there is no common approach to its consideration.

At the current stage of linguistics development, we need to consider communicative sentence perspective taking into account cognitive foundations behind this phenomenon, as nowadays a cognitive approach offers the most efficient ways to analyze language and communication through the prism of human mind procedures.

In this regard, composite sentences are of particular note because in the theory of communicative sentence perspective this kind of sentences is less well studied than simple ones, and in cognitive perspective composite syntactic units still need a major conceptual development. (By composite sentences here we mean both compound and complex sentences, i.e. syntactic units combining coordinated and subordinated parts respectively.) Besides, composite sentences should be recognized as basic structural elements of written speech; and written speech comprehension within the framework of academic writing in high school, for instance, ensures future success of a professional in his or her field.

2. Objectives, methodology and research design

Proceeding from the above, in this article we would like to show what communicative perspective of composite sentences is like, what it is caused by in cognitive context, what cognitive processes can be called the driving forces
behind it, and what principles and mechanisms provide the speaker with the opportunities to construct composite sentences.

As part of the cognitive theory of language (to be dwelt on hereinafter), in which the central role is given to linguistic interpretation, we examine the composite sentence as a linguistic knowledge format including both individual and collective knowledge and communicative perspective of the composite sentence as a conceptual part of such format. In conjunction with the elements of general linguistic methods, methods of component analysis, contextual, conceptual analyses and cognitive modeling, this shapes a cognitive study of the considered phenomenon in view of the anthropocentric nature of language. Through the interpretive aspect of language cognition, the study is contiguous with construction grammar (Diessel, 2004; Goldberg, 2006).

The study of communicative perspective of the composite sentence is presented in the section Discussion of research outcomes in relation to the English language. Illustrations are borrowed from the British National Corpus. The results of the study discussed in this article are aimed at indicating the problem and should not be viewed as exhaustive. Although, they emphasize the fact that communicative sentence perspective as an essential stipulation of successful communication is to be given considerable attention for the purposes of language cognition and teaching language acquisition.

3. Discussion of research outcomes

3.1. Interpretation of the world in language

In the process of cognitive activity, an individual turns to understanding the world and finding ways to convey ideas about it, correlating non-linguistic and linguistic facts. Simultaneously, he or she is constantly mastering a linguistic picture of the world represented by a wide range of language knowledge as knowledge of linguistic units, categories, syntactic structures, their meanings and functional specificity (Boldyrev, 2009). A linguistic picture of the world is always open not only for internal replenishment: because language shapes the picture of the world and thoughts and does not just express them (Fearing, 1954), it enriches a conceptual picture of the world with new ideas in the short or long run perceived by an individual. This cycle reflected in human consciousness is possible due to the phenomenon of interpretation.

Chafe (1983) argues that interpretation does not occur during perception only; it takes place when we speak. Interpretation covers virtually all activities with language when the reason for these activities is speaking. If it is necessary to speak, your inner world is interpreted as speech. When speech is defined as a perception target, it is interpreted (Demiankov, 1994).

In a broad sense, interpretation is one of the major aspects of human consciousness. It coincides with something that in recent years in the framework of cognitive linguistics was called language cognition (Demiankov, 1985). Speaking of language cognition, we can hardly have in mind the so-called human cognition associated with the notion of language as a specific human way of being. Language cognition is rather a human cognitive activity. It is reflected in the attempt of an individual to develop a linguistic picture of the world and in his or her ability to apply the results of such cognition in the process of communication, in which it is possible to consolidate both known and new linguistic knowledge.

By now, much contribution has been made to the development of the concept of language as an interpretive aspect of human consciousness. Interpretation is thoroughly considered in the framework of an integrated theory of representation and operating knowledge in language or a cognitive theory of language proposed by Boldyrev (2013). Let us dwell on some of the provisions of this theory.

The theory implies that interpretation is one of the planes of the linguistic cognitive activity of an individual (Boldyrev, 2011). So, speaking about interpretation of the world in language, we mean linguistic interpretation. In the context of interpretive activities, linguistic expressions including information about various types of knowledge of the world in language, as well as cognitive and linguistic mechanisms of meanings and implications, acquire particular meanings and implications in accordance with a definite conceptual system of an individual. Interpretation is based on the secondary conceptualization and categorization of objects and events and is individual in nature. Methods used by individuals to interpret objects, events and knowledge about them are transferred through modus
concepts and categories, the specificity of which is marked by their connection with a certain function (evaluation, negation, expressiveness, evidentiality, etc.) within the major interpreting language function. It is important to emphasize that interpretation is always based on typified schema of collective knowledge (Boldyrev, 2013).

It is logical that, defined by the statics and dynamics of cognition, composite sentences are predetermined by the interpretive aspect of language cognition. The interpretive aspect of language cognition in relation to the composite sentence works as follows.

3.2. Composite sentence as a linguistic knowledge format

The speaker creating composite sentences always operates some collective knowledge shared with the hearer. Conceptually, the composite sentence expresses a package of two or more propositions reflecting a fragment of reality that combines two or more events in their relationships. This propositional package includes basic predicates, a set of their arguments and a linking element uniting propositions: coordination and/or subordination concepts. In addition, the composite sentence comprises knowledge of vocabulary and grammar (morphology and syntax) categories of linguistic resources needed to transfer information about related events.

Thus, the composite sentence can be viewed as a linguistic knowledge format, the idea of which is available both to the speaker and the hearer. By the term ‘linguistic knowledge format’ we mean a form of presentation and organization of any data about the world in language, a form accumulating language knowledge as a result of the speaker’s awareness of the system and structure of language, its basic units and categories, principles and mechanisms used to shape and transfer ideas through language (Boldyrev, 2009).

The format of the composite sentence includes not only potential systemic language knowledge, but also the knowledge of interpretive nature as a result of an individual’s cognitive activity based on his or her ability to exercise linguistic creativity. Hence, the ability to interpret allows the speaker to construct a particular sentence in order to transfer information to the hearer. Relying on his or her conceptual picture of the world, the speaker creates a sentence in view of the opportunities of systemic language knowledge configuration within the above-mentioned format.

Together with the linguistic knowledge participating in the realization of the interpreting language function in its different variations (evaluation, negation, expressiveness, evidentiality, etc.), the speaker deals with the knowledge concerning the given/new information distinction within communicative sentence perspective aimed at the realization of the function of determining the status of knowledge, the conceptual structure of which acts as a scheme to organize different means expressing communicative perspective of the composite sentence (Vinogradova, 2014).

3.3. Metainterpretation as cognitive-linguistic basis for communicative perspective of the composite sentence

The individual, the secondary character of linguistic conceptualization and categorization, which is the basis of interpretation in relation to communicative sentence perspective, is expressed in metainterpretation. Metainterpretation is a kind of conceptual modification of ontological knowledge concerning some fragment of reality the speaker gets interested in in the process of interpretation in order to assess this knowledge as given or new for its subsequent transfer in the course of communication due to the speaker’s cognitive needs (Vinogradova, 2014a).

In the speaker’s consciousness, metaintepretive processes switch on the function of determining the status of knowledge that is ranked higher than other variations of the interpreting language function, as no matter what the functional aim a composite sentence has: the most important for understanding the meaning inherent in it to promote communication is the status of knowledge definition behind this semantic-syntactic unit. Thus, the fact that interpretation is always based on typified schema of collective knowledge makes us realize that mental representations of composite sentences in their propositional form are the base for constructing metarepresentations of these sentences as a result of the function of determining the status of knowledge in action.

From the cognitive point of view, in human consciousness the given and the new knowledge is organized as a cluster of conceptual features reflecting primarily:
- the dynamics of referents – participants of the events described, events and their relationships;
• the peculiar properties of human consciousness related to processing of non-linguistic or linguistic information;
• the degree of knowledge sharing by the speaker and the hearer.

The above-mentioned features associated with the function of determining the status of knowledge are of modus nature, which also reflects the interpretive aspect of an individual’s activity in the course of communicative perspective recognition. Modus conceptual features or concepts imply the heterogeneity of the means to objectify communicative perspective, and the integration of these means is possible within a modus category.

For example, in the scale of the composite sentences below the new knowledge in the parts selected by underlining is transferred by profiling the conceptual feature ‘a weak degree of knowledge sharing by the speaker and the hearer’. Heterogeneous language means used to objectify this feature as well as the participation of other variations of the interpreting language function along with the function of determining the status of knowledge reflect a multifaceted interpretive character of communicative perspective of the composite sentence and its modus conceptual nature:

*He was leading up to something, but she had no idea what.*
*What they need is centralized control…*
*I’m looking for a school friend; her name is Mary.*

In the above examples, the conceptual feature ‘a weak degree of knowledge sharing by the speaker and the hearer’ is objectified primarily by:
• the lexical unit *have no idea* meaning ‘not to know’ in the second part of the corresponding compound sentence;
• the structure of the complex sentence, in which the clause *What I need* serving as the subject of the sentence contains a new information request, and the main clause *is centralized control* – the predicate – is a response to this request;
• the indefinite article before the noun *school friend* in the opening part of the corresponding compound sentence.

Processing the information contained in the examples as given or new is respectively accompanied by the interpreting functions of negation; expressiveness and evaluation; a marking (naming) function in action.

### 3.4. Cognitive principles ruling communicative perspective of the composite sentence

The interpretive aspect of human consciousness is signified by the fact that one of the basic principles to judge communicative perspective is **the principle of conceptual meaning representation** consisting in the interaction of the so-called thematic and operational concepts (Boldyrev, 2011a). The given knowledge generally reflects thematic concepts as a result of quantitative and qualitative accumulation of linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge in all cognitive activities of the society. The new knowledge generally reflects operating concepts, namely situational meanings, which are outcomes of the speaker’s particular configuration of thematic concepts in the course of his or her interpretive activities while communicating.

For example, in the complex sentences below where the information flow is traditional – from the left to the right – the information activated in the speaker’s consciousness serving as a reference point, the given knowledge is concentrated in the main clauses. In the subordinate clauses, operating concepts based on thematic concepts carry the new knowledge. The new knowledge is the result of the speaker’s configuration of the given knowledge under the process of metainterpretation primarily due to the cognitive mechanism of conceptual development.

*It is important therefore that any reorganization should better facilitate this task.*
*How wonderful that at 62 she won Britain’s speed shooting championships.*
*It seems that ‘differentiation’ is being redefined once again, so as to include democratic institutions and a market economy.*

The given and the new line up united by completivity as a concept of subordination linking the propositions objectified by the main and the subordinate clauses of each of the above sentences. On the one hand, the concept of completivity fixes communicative and structural inferiority of the information in the main parts because the main
The principle of conceptual hierarchy of meanings presupposes that at the moment of speaking in the speaker’s consciousness thematic and operational concepts conveying different kinds of knowledge about events, their participants and relationships within the events as a composite fragment of reality are subject to a specific treatment. They are 1) evaluated from several points of view, for instance, analyzed for their activation/accessibility in the memory of the speaker and the hearer (Chafe, 1987; Lambrecht, 1994), 2) configured in the process of interpretation as a human linguistic cognitive activity, and 3) arranged in a certain conceptual hierarchy that is then displayed in the speech in the form of a composite sentence. The hierarchy of conceptual components of a composite sentence suggests that it is filled with active basic level concepts that reflect the known or given information about the world in language carried by a composite sentence. The middle level of the hierarchy is presented by semi active and accessible concepts. The highest level is occupied by the concepts conveying the new knowledge about the world in language inherent in a composite sentence.

The degree of concepts activation is primarily due to the activity and the accessibility of referents, i.e. their degree of markedness in the context of figure-background perception of the world. Figure-background distinction allows the speaker to reflect the hierarchy of conceptual components of a composite sentence built in the course of the given and the new knowledge transfer thanks to foregrounding or backgrounding of relevant participants, events, and their relations.

For example, in the complex sentence *He stopped, as though a sudden thought had struck him* the basic level of the hierarchy that reflects the prominent or the given knowledge in particular is represented by the argument he. *He*, unlike the argument *a…thought* designed to carry the new knowledge and thus considered the highest level of the hierarchy, shows signs of animation, certainty and specific reference.

Besides, formal possibilities of coding in language are also of great importance. For referents – events participants – these are the ways to express the following traits of linguistic knowledge: certainty/uncertainty, agentivity/non-agentivity, singularity/plurality, animation/inanimation, concreteness/abstractness, etc.). Thus, active concepts reflect information about marked or flashed referents on the language level characterized by certainty, agentivity, plurality, animation, and concreteness. These concepts primarily relate to the sphere of the given knowledge. Inactive concepts reflect information about inactive or dark referents on the language level characterized by uncertainty, non-agentivity, singularity, inanimation, and abstractness. These concepts mainly relate to the field of the new, unknown, or unused knowledge. In turn, accessible concepts are in the middle position related to above-mentioned concepts; they can be more or less active in a particular textual or situational context.

Referent participants are an integral part of referent events in our case complexly objectified by the composite sentence. Presentation of both groups of referents through concepts with varying degrees of activation is largely dictated by the ability of the speaker as the subject of cognition to establish conceptual relationships among referents (separate objects of the world and fixed events). These relationships are mostly logically oriented, as events and objects within them do not make themselves bound; it is an individual who sees that they are linked and transfers the perceived information using logic and linguistic means (Wittgenstein, 2008). And to construct a composite sentence based on the information perceived, the speaker configures the data of the linguistic knowledge format of this sentence.

Projecting these relationships in language in order to inform the hearer about a certain state of affairs is possible, for example, if the speaker designates anaphoric bonds needed to organize thoughts via marking the information mentioned earlier. In the context of communicative perspective of the composite sentence, establishing anaphoric bonds allows the speaker to indicate the degree of activation of referent participants and referent events through the
'antecedent – anaphor' correlation and contributes to referent participants and events facilitation. The anaphor makes the antecedent become more accessible. In the composite sentences below, antecedents are underlined and anaphors are in bold.

Both products have been produced specifically for permed, damaged hair and they replenish moisture lost in the perming process.

They helped to make him unmistakable, which he liked.

We all have hopes for the future and that is why supporting CND is so important.

On the contrary, cataphoric bonds, in which code giving elements are proceeding in the line, make it possible for an individual to concentrate his or her consciousness on the new, non-active knowledge. In the composite sentences below, code giving elements are in bold.

There are hints, there are passages here and there where she goes into the present tense.

After breakfast came the one happy moment of the day, when the pupils could play and talk freely.

Establishing relationships reflecting the conceptual interaction of events and their participants and depending on their degree of activation in human consciousness, relationships realizing a general scheme of modality or temporality of the composite sentence, relationships concerning structural interaction of events concepts objectified by the composite sentence, etc., an individual tends to convey information distribution rather than the information about the ontology of the fixed fragment of reality. The speaker evaluates the existing conceptual content that is why the ways to transfer communicative perspective of the composite sentence, linguistically speaking, are quite different, which on the whole presupposes a modus nature of these ways.

4. Conclusion

So, communicative perspective of the composite sentence is predetermined by an individual’s ability to interpret and metainterpret, the specifics of the composite sentence as a linguistic knowledge format, the conceptual nature of the given/new, a set of thematic and operational concepts controlled by the function of determining the status of knowledge, relationships within the hierarchy of the composite sentence conceptual components.

A full study of communicative perspective of the composite sentence in particular and linguistic interpretation in general is important to develop the theory of the composite sentence, the communicative and cognitive syntax theories, the theories of conceptualization and categorization, etc. At the same time, the results of the study especially composite sentence formatting with the accent on the anthropocentric nature of language could be extremely useful in developing a new practical course of cognitively and communicatively oriented syntax that would allow language learners to easily produce, perceive and translate composite sentences following the accepted rules of encoding and decoding of the given and the new information.

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