THE SEMANTIC AND SYNTACTIC RELATION BETWEEN SUBJECT AND PREDICAT IN SOME ATYPICAL STRUCTURES

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Abstract: *This paper aims to point out that there are several complex syntactic structures in contemporary Romanian which require a special analysis as the predicate consists in a nonfinite verbal form. The relation between these types of predicates and their subjects is a particular issue that has been dealt with in this paper.*

Key words: *complex syntactic structures, subject, predicate.*

1. As some complex syntactic structures in Romanian are described in GALR (2008 II: 368 sqq.), it is asserted that the type of structures which is analyzed in this paper is atypical and opaque. We consider that these structures can be named *atypical*, but not *opaque*. However, the atypical character is not always manifest, due to the fact that some of these syntactic patterns are quite frequent in use.

In the present paper we deal with that type of syntactic relation which is established inside the subject – predicate phrase in those structures where the predicate is expressed by a nonfinite verbal form (infinitive, gerund, participle or supine)[1]. Here are some examples: *Înainte de a se lăsa seara, George şi-a ajutat părinții la treburile gospodăreşti. Ajungând Roxana consilier financiar, s-a angajat la o bancă prestigioasă. Chiar plecați părinții de acasă, copiii s-au descurcat foarte bine.*

The aim of the present study is to point out the complexity of the syntactic relation between subject and predicate, as well as to argue that the predicative phrase is built by *adherence*, juxtaposition/paratactic means.

Adherence means simple adjoining of two syntactic elements, without imposing restrictions and, as a consequence, the verbal agreement cannot be called a phenomenon.

2. **Subject + nonfinite verbal predicate Phrase**

2.1. The "absolute construction" and the subject in the "absolute nominative" connect logically, semantically and grammatically, even if the inter-propositional connectives are missing (with gerundial and participle structures), respectively when the grammatical agreement inflection morpheme is absent (in subject – gerundial predicate and subject – infinitive predicate phrases). These syntactic phrases cannot function if a relation is not established. At inter-propositional level[2], when the dependency relation is not marked in the expression level (with absolute gerundial and participle constructions), subordination is accomplished by *adherence*. The same type of dependency occurs with adverbials and the similitude of the situations renders out of the

[1] Similar situations occur whith adverbial and interjectional predicate, which will be studied separately.

[2] The idea that, at inter-propositional level, subordination is achieved by nonfinite forms morphemes (gerund and participle suffixes) appears in generative – transformational grammar, in Pană Dindelegan (1999: 125) and Vasiliu, Golopenția-Eretescu (1969: 244).

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circumstantial meaning which both structures express (adverbial and absolute construction).

2.2. Those constructions which have an infinitive as a verbal head are called **pseudo-absolute**[1], as the junction element is lexicalized (preposition or prepositional phrase followed immediately by the proclitic *a*). So, the "absolute" feature refers only to the **inter-propositional** level and the type of subordination of gerundial and participle constructions which are or can be isolated, endowed with circumstantial meaning. As for the subject, this is "absolute" in no context, its relation with the nonfinite verb being always marked either only by the nominative form combined with infinitive or with gerund, or by the nominative form and the verbal agreement with the participle.

2.3. Subject in the pseudo-absolute infinitive construction, as well as subject in the absolute gerundial construction combines with the nonfinite verbal form (with infinitive or gerund) when the inflection morpheme of verbal agreement (number and person) is absent: *În loc de* ***a fi detensionată*** **atmosfera,** *s-a optat pentru tăcere.* ***Obligându****-l* **tatăl** *său, Ion s-a apucat de învățat.* The relation of inter-dependency does not manifest itself bilaterally, like with finite verbs, in other words both from subject to predicate, by the agreement of number and person imposed by the subject, and from predicate to subject, by imposing the nominative case. The cohesion of subject – predicate phrase relies on regimen in these constructions, as the predicate – verb imposes the nominative case to the subject. An argument for accepting regimen as a syntactic means of connecting the subject to the predicate – infinitive or gerund consists in the analogy: the verb, although it has got a nonfinite feature, still has a semantic capacity of assigning the subject – nominal a thematic role.

2.4. In other languages grammars there has been admitted the existence of a so-called **"absolute nominative"**, a terminological meta-phrase which designates the fact that the subject – nominal of a nonfinite verbal form is *free, unconnected* to the verb. Such a situation is in contradiction with the very behavior of the nominal, and the arguments are the following: the nonfinite verb has the capacity of assigning its own subject a thematic role; even if the verbal agreement between these two syntactic positions (subject and predicate) is missing, a relation of accordance still manifests; as the nominal has a syntactic role, subject, it can not be considered *free, independent of any relation, absolute*. To have an "absolute" feature means to place the significance away from the concepts of case and syntactic role, which is not applicable to the researched structures. In other words, because the nominal in the nominative combined with a nonfinite verbal form has a semantic restriction as well as a syntactic restriction, both of them imposed by the verb, there can not be considered an "absolute nominative" or an "absolute subject"[2].

2.5. The verbal agreement does not represent the only decisive factor in making up a subject – predicate phrase and, implicitly, constituting predication, as the

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[1] *Enciclopedia limbii române* (București, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 2001, ELR) is the only academic work where circumstantial constructions with an infinitive verbal head are not ranged as "absolute constructions", but no details are given (ELR 2001: s.v. *(construcții) absolute*).

[2] Also *Pomian (2008,* infra ***Construcțiile gerunziale absolute*** **1.2.3.**).

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impersonal verbs are predicates, even if they can not select a nominal – subject in the structure (*Îmi pasă de tine. Mâine se merge la biserică.*

D. Irimia (2000: 338) considers the (pro)noun – subject of an absolute gerundial phrase (and, by extrapolation, of any absolute complex phrase) an *internal subject*: *Căci **voi murind** în sânge ei pot să fie mari*. (M. Eminescu). This formulation can not be accepted because:

a. there is no distributional criterion for defining this syntactic position, as it is generally agreed that all subjects are syntactically integrated, they occur inside a grammatical structure, even if a marked syntactic relation is missing, like with "absolute constructions";

b. although the ground of defining such a type of subject has been the fact that the "absolute" nominal is a constituent element of a "developed adverbial of reason", there is no categorizing into internal vs. external syntactic positions;

c. as a syntactic pattern, the "absolute construction" is a complex one and it functions as a real subordinate clause, as it is inferior to the independent clause, but compulsory superior to a part of a sentence; its constituents are organized on the ground of a special kind of cohesion.

2.6. The absolute participle selects a subject which it agrees in gender, number and case, as a special feature of Romanian: *Oricât m-aş strădui, mi-este cu neputinţă să-mi imaginez că, odată* **verdictul *pronunţat***, *voi putea adresa lumii un tandru adio nepăsător.* (M. Preda, *Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni* I: 33-34); *Chiar a **ajuns** **cuţitul** la os, băieţii au continuat să sfideze legea.*; ***Rămaşi** **copiii** singuri acasă, au şi lăsat cărţile deoparte.*; ***Ajunsă** **Enia** manager general, colegii o privesc cu alţi ochi.*

2.6.1. The verb agreement with the subject in gender, number and case weakens its verbal significance, but it does not cancel it. This phenomenon is similar to the participles in the passive voice: **Televiziunea** *publică **a fost subordonată** puterii mulţi ani.* **Proiectele** ***vor fi realizate** anul acestea, cu sprijinul sponsorilor.* Inside the absolute construction, the participle manifests its verbal significance even more powerfully than in the passive voice. The main arguments are the following:

2.6.1.1. The participle in the absolute clause combines with a nominal – subject, placed next to it (as a there is a high degree of cohesion), imposing the nominative case to it (*Odată **Alexandru devenit** redactor-şef al gazetei, s-a observat o schimbare radicală în bine.* – an absolute construction – vs. ***Colegul** nostru M. C., pe care mulţi îl considerau genial, **a fost numit** de profesori liderul echipei olimpice naţionale.* – passive voice).

2.6.1.2. While the participles in the passive voice structures with the auxiliary *to be* accept marks of degrees, progression, approximation or modals specific to adjective: *Diamantele **sunt** **cele mai căutate** pietre preţioase din lume. Clădirile **au fost** **foarte avariate** de tornadă. Dintotdeauna, televiziunea publică **a fost** **mai subordonată** puterii decât televiziunile particulare. Cartea în discuţie **este** **cam nerecomandată** minorilor*, participles in the absolute construction may be marked this way only as an exception: **Foarte** ***ruşinat** eu însumi de cele întâmplate, mi-am cerut scuze în numele colegilor.*

2.6.2. The participle variability by taking from the nominal–subject the categories of gender, number and case (!) and its combining with the comparison morphemes diminish the verbal nature of the participle, so that some researchers deny the existence of a passive voice with a participle in its structure or consider this verbal form unable to be a predicate. Nevertheless, inside the absolute participle structure there could be distinguished a relation of inter-dependency between the participle verbal form

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and the nominal-subject, due to the bilateral constraints: on one hand, imposing nominative case to the nominal-subject by the participle verbal form, on the other hand, imposing agreement in gender, number and case by the nominal-subject. Agreement in case is evident, as long as the participle-predicate can not occur in the genitive or dative form: ***Odată* plecate** [G.D.] ***copila*** [N.Ac.]***,*** *am rămas singur.* Although the verbal nature of the participle is diminished, as the nonfinite verbal form shifts to adjective, we consider that, accepting its own subject and preserving the combinatory possibilities of a prototypical verb (even if not entirely), the participle has the capacity of organizing a nonfinite clause.

2.7. As the participle predicative capacity has not been accepted, there has been proposed to name this structure **abbreviation, reducing or reduced clause** (DRAŞOVEANU 1997: 256-259; 263-267; NEAMŢU 2001, 2003). **The abbreviation** differs from the **contraction** because both the verb *to be* and the subordinating inter-propositional connector are deleted. Thus, analyzing the absolute participle constructions, also called reduced clauses, there has been proposed to "retrieve" a gerund, "we must <go up> from *Red* [reduction] to *Ctr grz* [gerund contraction]" (Draşoveanu 1997: 258): *Odată ei **sosiți**, noi am putut începe. > Odată **sosiți fiind** ei, noi am putut începe.* By introducing a gerund, there appears a "forging" of relations, on one hand, and there may appear an incorrect grammatical structure, on the other hand. Not all participle constructions allow introducing the liking verb *to be*, as it may happen to linking verbs participles: **Chiar* **fiind *ajuns*** *cuțitul la os, băieții au continuat să sfideze legea.*; ***Fiind *rămaşi*** *copiii singuri acasă, au şi lăsat cărțile deoparte.*; ***Fiind *ajunsă*** *Enia manager general, colegii o privesc cu alți ochi.* Except the linking verb *to be*, other verbs, copulas or predicative ones, can be implied: ***Ajungând / Devenind / Părând / Arătându-se*** *fascinat de prăpastia păcatului, Constantin îşi descleştă mâinile.* (POMIAN 2004: 38-39). Trying "to disguise" this exception particularity of the verbal participle (namely the agreement in gender, number and case) and the predicate capacity of the nonfinite verbal form, some researchers (Berceanu 1971: 204) accept the possibility of a second nonfinite copula in the absolute structure with a participle head (!):***Fiind *ajuns*** *calfă la găitănărie, vorbea frumos şi cu patimă.* The subject of the variable participle is mentioned also by Şt. Iacob (1969: 510), who admits that this syntactic position may be interpreted as a predicative of an invariable gerund that has been deleted: *Odată această condiție* **[fiind] *împlinită***...; *Dionis* **[fiind] *devenit*** *călugărul Dan.*

2.8. In contemporary Romanian, the subject which goes with the nonfinite verbal form (infinitive, gerund or participle) in a (pseudo)absolute construction is always in the nominative, carrying out the role of *main semantic adverbial* offered by the nonfinite verb (IRIMIA 2000: 262, 279, *passim*).

In the nonfinite verbal clauses[1] (absolute, pseudo-absolute or infinitive relative clauses), the syntactic relation of predication is a complex one and the inter-dependency manifests in a particular manner. It is interesting to notice how, inside the atypical predicate phrase (subject + a nonfinite verbal form), the formal restrictions do not function bilaterally, as the subject does not have the capacity of imposing the agreement.

However, we may assert that the nonfinite predicate (infinitive, gerund, participle or supine) preserves its capacity of attributing to its main semantic object (the

[1] V. Pomian 2008.

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subject) a thematic role (Agent, Beneficiary, Experiencer, Possessor, Patient), in other words the capacity to impose the nominative case.

2.9. **Subject + Supine Predicate**

GALR (2008 II: 350-351) admits that, in the supine impersonal constructions, the subject of the supine may appear in three situations, as it follows:

2.9.1. The subject of the supine which is not expressed is controlled by the personal indirect object of the governor: *Nu mi$_i$-e uşor de făcut (e$_i$) acest lucru. Îi$_i$ este greu de înțeles (e$_i$) o asemenea teorie.*

2.9.2. Those structures where supine is followed by an Agent object, constructions where the nonfinite verbal form can have only a passive meaning: *E periculos de folosit de către necunoscători* ***asemenea substanțe.***

2.9.3. Impersonal constructions where there is neither indirect object, nor Agent object: *E necesar de cumpărat* ***alimente.*** *Este important de citit* ***cartea.***

The grammatical analysis interpretations vary due to a lack of transparency, as the syntactic position of subject, empty or expressed is ambiguous and difficult to be argued for if the Deep Structure is not taken into account.

Pe mâine, ***băieții de pregătit*** *pentru aruncarea mingii de oină, iar* ***fetele de pregătit*** *pentru proba de handbal!*

De ținut minte [SBØ]*: fapte, nu vorbe!* ***De memorat*** [SBØ] *două poezii de Nichita Stănescu, la alegere!*

Cf.: ***La alergat*** [SBØ] *cu voi!* vs (?) ***La fugă*** *cu voi!*

3. In those atypical subject – predicate phrases, when the predicate is expressed by a nonfinite verb (infinitive, gerund, participle or supine), verbal agreement is blocked up[1] because of predicate morphemes missing, as with nonfinite verbal forms functioning as predicates: *Înainte de* ***a pleca*** *George, petrecerea era în toi.* ***Venind*** *vremea urâtă, turiştii s-au risipit. Odată* ***ajunşi*** *şi noi la destinație, ne-am simțit mai bine.* This is a morphological and syntactical obstruction, whereas that obstruction triggered by the adverb and interjection incompatibility to have inflection, even if they function as predicates, is only morphological. On the one hand, the obstruction inside the *subject – nonfinite verb predicate* phrase is *in praesentia*, contextual, extrinsic, determined by speaker's choosing the finite verbal form (personal) or the nonfinite one, at a certain moment: *Înainte* [***să plece***] $_{\text{PV finite}}$ / *Înainte de a* [***a pleca***] $_{\text{PV nonfinite}}$ *George, petrecerea era în toi*. On the other hand, the obstruction inside the *subject – adverb/interjection predicate* phrase is *in absentia*, non contextual, intrinsic, determined by these morphological categories (adverb and interjection).

4. Another ambiguity/difficulty is related to the answer of the following question: to what extent does the nonfinite verb functioning as predicate impose the nominative case to the nominal-subject, since these forms do not have the syntactic category of case which is specific to a nominal.

When considering a syntactic role, it is implicitly and necessarily admitted that a case exists, while the other situation is not valid in any context (cf. absolute nominative or genitive, which do not require the existence of any syntactic roles: *Ce* ***naiba*** */* ***naibii*** *tot îndrugi acolo?*). While the verb paradigm does not have the category of case at a morphological level, it imposes formal and case restrictions to its objects at syntactic level. The reason consists in the occurrence of relations at syntactic level.

[1] In GALR (2005 II: 373) the phenomenon of blocked agreement is discussed only with those structures where the predicate is a nonfinite (non personal) verb

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Thus, the verb requires accusative case to its direct object or formal restrictions such as prepositions (prepositional object). In addition, at semantic level, the verb gives thematic roles. Examples: *Înainte de a pleca George* [Agent], *petrecerea era în toi.* The position of thematic roles attributor is confirmed as long as sentences such as:**Mama fierbe pianul de bijuteriii.* (vs *Mama fierbe carnea de trei ore.*) are not semantically coherent.

Adherence, as one of the means of expressing the syntactic relation between subject and predicate in such atypical complex structures, can be argued by:

- **a.** semantically, the nonfinite predicate is fundamentally conditioned by the presence of subject, but it may also have other dependency relations;
- **b.** if special relational elements (agreement, regimen, junction) are missing, the co-occurrence of the terms which function as subject and predicate is enough to materialize and identify the syntactic relation;
- **c.** inside the **subject – nonfinite predicate** phrase, the relation of inter-dependency manifests unilaterally, as the predicate may select exclusively the subject in the nominative case, or bilaterally, if we accept the fact that the prosodic elements (intonation, stress and pause) contribute to forming predicate. **Adherence** as a means of expressing the predicative relation in such complex and atypical syntactic patterns is discussed only by Viorel Hodiş (2006 1: 90+91).

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