A note on agentive and non-agentive interpretations
Keijsper, C.E.

Published in:
Studies in Slavic and General Linguistics

Citation for published version (APA):
A NOTE ON AGENTIVE AND NON-AGENTIVE INTERPRETATIONS

C.E. KEIJSPER

0. Starting from an observation about agentive and non-agentive interpretations of subjects that has been made in the literature on accent and word order, this paper tries to extend that observation to a point where agentive/non-agentive interpretations become independent of accent and word order. Then, it discusses the problem of where and why the realm of accent and word order ends.

1. The study of sentence accent and word order has at first sight little to do with the study of verb valency/semantic roles. This is probably the reason why one useful observation about agentive/non-agentive interpretations of subjects, that has repeatedly been made in the literature on accent/word order, has failed to draw the attention of students of verb valency/semantic roles (but see García 1975: 22). Using the symbol "'" for accent, this observation is A and/or B:

A. In combinations of a subject (S) and a verb (V), or, in general, a predicate (P), arrangements (S) and/or SP are associated with non-agentive interpretations, the arrangement (P)S is associated with agentive interpretations.

B. If S precedes P, sentences having the last accent not at the end of the sentence (e.g. SP) are associated with non-agentive interpretations, sentences having the last accent at the end of the sentence (e.g. S' P) are associated with agentive interpretations.

Publications in which this observation has been made, directly or indirectly, include the following (i-v):
i. Adamec (1962), as well as a number of other authors, distinguishes between "action" verbs, for which the "neutral" arrangement in, for example, Czech and Russian is presumably \((S^P)\), and verbs denoting "presence (on the scene)", for which the "neutral" arrangement is presumably \((P^S)\). Although it must be doubted whether the difference can be ascribed to the type of verb (Keijsper 1985: 88-90), there is no disagreement in the literature about the correctness of the observation that \((S^P)\) is more "dynamic", and hence at least potentially "agentive", than \((P^S)\). For example (Adamec 1962: 298), *Lidé se procházejí po parku* conveys essentially what the people did, whereas *Po parku se procházejí lidé* says that there were people in the park. In the present author's treatment (Keijsper 1985: 313 ff.), the "dynamic" character of *Lidé se procházejí po parku* is a consequence of the fact that the sentence evokes the thought of the same people not walking in the park (they were walking in the park but they could have been not walking). *Po parku se procházejí lidé*, in contrast, evokes no thought of the people not walking, walking being the way in which the people are present "on the scene" (the people could have been absent, but given the information that they are present, they are walking). Understandably, the information, in *Lidé se procházejí po parku*, that the people could have failed to walk, is close to the idea that they were walking because they wanted to, i.e. that it is up to them whether or not they walk. Hence the association with "agentivity".

ii. Sirotinina et al (1968: 99; cf. Keijsper 1985: 333-334) make the valuable observation that arrangements *byt'-přediktiv* associate with properties of whose presence the carrier is aware (*byl dovolen, zanjat, prav, spokojen* etc.), or whose presence is the result of the carrier's mental activity (*byl uběžděn, uveren* etc.). Arrangements *přediktiv-byt'*, in contrast, are characteristic of properties whose presence is not controlled by will or conscious mental activities (*vynuzděn byl, gotov byl, nel'zja bylo*, etc.). Evidently, the first group is closer to what people are inclined to call "agentive" than the second group.

iii. Šmelš (1976: 130-131), among other authors, discusses contrasts like that between *Dočka zanimala gostej* and *Dočka storonilas' gostej, žurnalist dumal ob etoj vstreče* vs. *žurnalist izbegal etoj vstreći, Ona pozvala můža vs. Ona nenavídela muža*, etc. The
sentences which naturally have the last accent on the object concern events in which the object-entity becomes involved as a consequence of the fact that the subject-entity does something. The contrasting sentences (last accent on the verb) concern relationships between subject-entity and object-entity which exist whether or not the subject-entity has the property indicated by the verb. Significantly, for the latter type of verb, the arrangement $xyvy$ - verb with last accent in mid-position - is regarded as the "neutral" arrangement, also in the style which normally has the last accented word in final position (see e.g. Adamec 1966: 69; Keijser 1985: 247, 365 - note 26 -).

iv. Contrasts like that discussed by Smelēv (point iii) have explicitly been related to agentivity by e.g. Berman and Szamosi (1972: 315-318). For example, in The magician amused the crowd (by doing tricks) the subject-entity intends to amuse the crowd, whereas in The show amused the crowd it does not (the show is just there, and happens to be amusing). Likewise (op.cit.: 316), in John got down on his knees and appealed to Mary the subject is an agent, but in John's position appealed to Mary it is not. The association between accent position and agentivity is less straightforward than Berman and Szamosi suggest: as Bolinger (1972: 640) points out, in, for example, John got down on his knees and (literally) appealed to Mary, John remains an agent. But if we are talking about tendencies, it cannot be denied that, to give the complementary observation, the verb is likely to be excluded from the scope of the last accent in The show amused the crowd or John's position appealed to Mary, if the subject is not to be interpreted as an agent.

v. Recently, Faber (1987) has pointed out a number of inadequacies in Gussenhoven's (1983) account of accent placement in $\hat{S}P$ and $\hat{P}S$. As the biggest and most important class of exceptions to Gussenhoven's proposal Faber (1987: 344-351) mentions what he calls "human-agentive" sentences: these have $SP$ rather than $P\hat{S}$. For example, Faber contrasts The professor swore with The professor fell over (1987: 345), and he differentiates between two senses of "listening" in Ssh! The teacher's listening and Shh! The teacher's listening! (1987: 350): in The teacher's listening "there is a powerful sense of the teacher's putting considerable effort into his listening, that he is listening on purpose, and that he is listening with
an object". In The teacher's listening, in contrast, "one feels that the listening is effortless, that the teacher is not, in all probability, listening to anything in particular, and that he might well be unaware that he is listening at all" (ibid.). Faber (1987: 345) also relates SP to transitive, and SP to intransitive (cf. Oakeshott-Taylor 1984: 23).

2. Arrangements SP and SP (last accent on the subject), which, as we saw in section 1, are associated with non-agentive subjects, have in common the fact that they do not evoke the thought of the subject-referent without the property indicated by the predicate (the predicate property is there at the moment when the subject-entity is there). Arrangements SP and, e.g., SVO (last accent in non-final position), also associated with non-agentive subjects, have in common the fact that they refer to a given time: the accent in SP says that, given the world at a certain time (mostly at the moment of speaking), the subject-referent is not absent (but could have been absent, at that time); the accent in SVO says that, given a relationship between S and O, the property indicated by V is not absent (but could have been absent, without affecting the existence of a relation between S and O (see Keijsper 1985: 245, 247, 313 ff.). This idea of a "given time" can also be detected in the following examples, which have (most obviously) a non-agentive subject, although the last accent is in final position:

(1) Režskij telefonnyj zvonok razbudil dramaturga-komediograфа Vologdskogo - Måslova ... (Literaturnaja gazeta 15/10/1980)
(2) Noč'ju vzryv razrušil lúčšee zdanie gõroda (Šmelëv 1976: 127)

These sentences are especially interesting because, when we translate them into, for example, English, the subject has an indefinite article, despite the fact that it does not carry the last accent. As I observed in Keijsper (1985: 137-140, 320), the necessity of using an indefinite article in SP arises if the sentence reports what happens at a given time: if the observer of the event has not yet seen the subject-referent before the moment described by the sentence, or, in general, if the subject-referent was absent (in reality or in the mind of the observer) before it participated in
the event described by the sentence. Thus, in (1), the ring of the telephone was not present "on the scene" before it woke up Maslov (the example is the first sentence of a story), and, in (2), the explosion was not there before it destroyed the building. The sentences give two pieces of information: that there was a telephone ring and that it woke up Maslov; that there was an explosion and that it destroyed the building. But there is no time about which one can say: "the telephone ring is there, but it does not yet wake up Maslov"; "the explosion is there, but it does not yet destroy the building". In the terminology used in Keijsper 1985, the two pieces of information are given in subsequent moments of projection time, but the second piece of information in each sentence is not about a new moment of world time.¹ Now, the sentences can give the first piece of information, viz. that there was a telephone ring/an explosion, by virtue of the fact that, and as long as, one does not think of the subject-referent as first not participating in the event described and then participating in it (x first did not wake up Maslov and then woke him up, or x first did not destroy the building and then destroyed it). If one imagines the latter, the sentences do not introduce the subject-referent: this referent becomes "old" information by the subsequent development.

The difference between "old" and "new" subjects has explicitly been associated with "agentive" and "non-agentive", respectively, by Van Oosten (1986: 118-119). Van Oosten gives, inter alia, the following example:

"121 A: What can you think of to amuse our three-year-old while he is recovering from pneumonia?
   B: Well, he'll probably like these blocks, and here's a few books, and ... I know! Take my kitten!
   a. ?? She will amuse him with her antics.
   b. Her antics will amuse him.

122 A: What can you think of to amuse our three-year-old while he is recovering from pneumonia?
   B: Well, he'll probably like these blocks, and here's a few books, and ... I know!
   a. The kitten can amuse him with her antics.
   b. * The kitten's antics can amuse him.
Assuming always that the speaker wishes to convey the normal scenario where the cat has no intention of amusing anyone but may succeed in doing so all the same, when the kitten is mentioned beforehand as in 121, so that the focus of attention of the continuation is already established, 121b is better than 121a because the latter makes the kitten sound too agentive. But if the kitten has not yet been established as the focus of attention, as in 122, then the property-factored form [i.e. 122a] sounds best and does not sound too agentive."

Compare also (op.cit.: 125):

"When an entity has already been introduced as focus of attention, using it in subject position makes it sound agentive; when it has not earlier been introduced, introducing it in subject position does not make it sound agentive. Thus John's speech is agentive in 140Ba but not in 141Ba:

140 A: Why did you like John's speech?
Ba: * It impressed me with its brevity.
141 A: Which speech did you like best?
Ba: Well, John's speech impressed me with its brevity."

Summarizing so far, arrangements ensuring that the subject-entity is not pictured at a time when it does not have the property indicated by the predicate are associated with non-agentive interpretations; arrangements ensuring that the subject-entity is pictured at a time when it does not have the property indicated by the predicate are associated with agentive interpretations. We will now try to apply this observation elsewhere.

3. Consider the difference between (3) and (4):

(3) Ispytaniija ukrepili ix družbu (Apreszjan-Páll 1982(2):612)

In both (3) and (4) we can say that the subject-entity strengthened the object-entity. But they do so, most obviously, in a different way: it is the mere presence of the trials that causes their friendship to become consolidated, whereas father, in addition to
being present, does something to strengthen the fence. Instead of a formulation in terms of time, as in the foregoing, we may also use Wierzbicka's (1980: 6 ff.) notion of "causal chain of events". Sentence (4) can be paraphrased by means of Wierzbicka's formula for "action" sentences:

something happened to the fence (it became stronger) because father did something (he strengthened it)

But this formula does not apply to (3). Here we must say something like the following:

something happened to their friendship (it became stronger) that can be thought of as something that the trials did because of something that can be said about the trials: they were there

Thus, here the strengthening is ascribed to the trials because the presence of the trials had a strengthening effect on their friendship. Let me call this chain: the "non-agentive hierarchy". Correspondingly, the chain for (4) may be dubbed (somewhat imprecisely) the "agentive hierarchy". In the latter, the sentence is constructed not as if father did something; he indeed did something.

Some further examples of the same difference are (5)-(8):

(5) Muzyka utešaet nas (Apreszjan-Páll 1982(2): 640)
(6) Ona utešaet reběnka (ibid.)
(7) Pobeda udovletvorila mužčin (op.cit.: 600)
(8) Tovariščeskij sud polnost'ju udovletvoril ego pretenzii (ibid.)

Before we proceed, two observations must be made. First, in non-passive sentences the "causal chain of events" in Wierzbicka's (1980) sense always starts from the subject-entity, be it the latter's presence or its activity that causes the object-entity to be affected in the way specified by the verb; this starting point is indicated in the last line of the hierarchies. Secondly, this last line specifies the time about which a statement is made. Thus, in (3), when the trials were there, they consolidated their friendship, but they could have failed to consolidate their friendship at that time, i.e. when the trials were there. In (4), in contrast, we are talking about the time when father strengthened the fence; earlier, father was not (yet) strengthening the fence.
4. Now, if the difference between the "non-agentive" and the "agentive" hierarchies always remained interpretational, it would not be of much interest. But sometimes a non-agentive hierarchy is excluded by the remainder of the sentence. Compare, for example, (9) and (10):

(9) Palka udarila po zaboru (Wierzbicka 1980: 127)
(10) Palka udarila po zaboru Ivanom (cf. Ebeling 1980: 369)

The stick in (9) most obviously does not intend to hit the fence; rather, we can say that the stick hit the fence because the fence was hit when the stick came into contact with it. Sentence (10) is odd, because it conveys that the stick did something, viz. hit the fence (using Ivan as an instrument). So we must conclude that the addition of Ivanom to (9), resulting in (10), excludes a non-agentive interpretation of the subject. Why is this so?

Note first of all that (10) cannot mean "With the stick, Ivan hit the fence" because that would make Ivan rather than the stick the starting point of the "causal chain of events" (as Ivan would then cause the stick to participate in the event). It seems to me that this is just another way of saying that the stick is the subject of a non-passive sentence (cf. section 6 below). Then, the relevant observation to make is, in my view, that the stick and Ivan must be construed as different things. As we saw in Van Oosten's examples given in section 3 (The kitten can amuse him with her antics, John's speech impressed me with its brevity), the presence of a with-phrase does not exclude a non-agentive interpretation of the subject if it refers to an aspect of the subject-referent. The same holds true for a noun in the instrumental case in Russian. Consider, for example, the pairs (11)-(12) and (13)-(14):

(12) Oni mušili plennyx golodom (ibid.)
(13) On ubil roditelej svoim otkazom (Apreszjan-Páll 1982(2): 582)
(14) Bandit ubil svoego soobščnika toporom (ibid.)

The subject-entity in (11) need not intend to torment his wife; rather, the wife is tormented because her husband happens to be jealous. In the same way, we can say about the subject-entity in (13) that he killed his parents, although he did not do anything,
because his refusal had the effect of killing his parents. If, however, the noun in the instrumental case does not refer to an aspect of the subject-entity, as in (12) and (14), the subject becomes agentive. Thus, for e.g. (11) we can give a non-agentive hierarchy:

something happened to his wife (she was tormented)
that can be thought of as something that he did
because of something that can be said about him: he was jealous

If we try to apply the same hierarchy to, e.g., (12), we obtain something like the following:

something happened to the prisoners (they were tormented)
that can be thought of as something that they did
because of something that can be said about them: they introduced the hunger

What is wrong here is that the last line is, in its turn, an abbreviation of a separate event:

something happened to the hunger (it was introduced)
because they did something (they introduced the hunger)

Therefore, the attempt at a non-agentive interpretation of (12) violates a general restriction on the use of the instrumental case: it turns the sentence into a case of "indirect causation" (Wierzbicka 1980: 9). Thus, just as

(15) Ivan ubil zmeju ruz'øm (Wierzbicka 1980: 8)

cannot mean that Ivan shot the snake dead, but only that he hit the snake with the gun, (12) cannot mean:

something happened to the prisoners
that can be thought of as something that they did
because they did something

Instead, the event affecting the prisoners and the event affecting the hunger must be construed as two aspects of the same event (Wierzbicka 1980: 9), which amounts to shifting to an "agentive" hierarchy (Wierzbicka 1980: 10, partially used here):

something happened to the prisoners
that can be thought of as something that happened to the hunger
because they did something.

5. Wierzbicka (1980) does not treat the type of sentence illustrated in (11) and (13) as a separate use of the instrumental case (as far as I can see). It is close to her "Instrumental of Personal Characteristics" (1980: 113-117), occurring in, for example, Ona byla bledna licom, but (11) and (13) are transitive rather than intransitive. Both cases differ from the "Instrumental of "Instrument"" (1980: 4-14), illustrated in (12) and (14), in the fact that the noun in the instrumental case is a "demoted subject" rather than a "demoted object". Here are some further examples of the "demoted transitive subject" case:

(16) Devuška tronula ego svoej naivnost'ju (Apreszjan-Päll 1982(2): 560)
(17) Direktor uničtožil menja jazvitel'nym otvetom (op.cit.: 622)
(18) Vy ugnetaete menja svoim velikodušiem (op.cit.: 590)

Example (17) illustrates that, if the referent of the instrumental form is there as a consequence of an action (the director answers), the difference between an "agentive" and a "non-agentive" reading is slight. In the "agentive" reading of (17), I am annihilated because the director annihilates me, and he gives a poisonous answer in order to annihilate me. In the "non-agentive" reading, the director's answer has an annihilating effect on me; although the director does not intend to annihilate me, he is to blame for the effect because it is his answer. Likewise, (19) can be understood in two ways:

(19) The man exasperated his neighbours with his singing (Van Oosten 1986: 72)

Here, either the man exasperated his neighbours with the help of his singing, or the exasperating effect of the man's singing is ascribed to the man because it is his singing that has the effect. The fact that the difference amounts to whether we construe the singing as a separate thing or as an aspect of the man can clearly be seen in (20):

(20) The car broke the window with its fender (Fillmore 1968: 23)
If we imagine the fender as a part of the car, the fender is automatically there if the car is there, so that the sentence has a non-agentive reading (we can say that the car broke the window because its fender broke the window). If, however, we view the fender as a separate thing, then, even if it belongs to the car, the sentence becomes agentive, because the introduction of the fender then "counts as" a separate event unless it is embedded in the breaking-event by the wish of the car to affect the window. The introduction of the fender must be embedded in this way because the meaning of the construction excludes indirect causation. For the same reason, if the entity mentioned in the with-phrase or in the instrumental case can only be construed as unrelated to the subject-entity, a non-agentive interpretation of the subject is excluded.

6. Another type of embedding that is relevant to agentivity is illustrated in (21):

(21) The clothes will clean with no trouble (Van Oosten 1986: 94)

Here, the clothes are things being cleaned, i.e. affected by somebody's cleaning. But they remain the things from which the causal chain starts, because it is some property of the clothes that is responsible for the occurrence of the event "somebody cleans the clothes". Thus, as Van Oosten (ibid.) observes, we might continue the sentence with: because they're machine-washable, but not with: because I have lots of time. The embedding here is one of time: during a certain time, probably during their whole existence, the clothes have some property, for example they are machine-washable. This time includes any potential occurrence of an event "somebody is washing the clothes".

Sentence (21) can be interpreted in the way indicated by virtue of the fact that it does not contain a direct object: the interpretation is that the causal chain starts and ends with the same entity: the clothes are responsible for the fact that the clothes are affected by the cleaning. In Russian the required intransitivity is introduced by -sja. To a limited extent (see Gerritsen elsewhere in this volume), such -sja sentences allow an "agent" to be mentioned, for example:
Here, the cups have some property, viz. they must be broken, which ensures that there are events "the boy breaks a cup". As Gerritsen shows, the boy performs the breaking of the cups, but he is not an initiator, because the latter idea contradicts the information that the causal chain starts with the cups. Just as in the English (21), the chain must start and end with the subject-entity. In effect, (23) is an odd sentence: it cannot mean "the cups have some property which ensures that the boy breaks the window", because that chain would start with the cups but end with the window. As we saw in sections 4-5, (23) cannot mean "the boy breaks the window with the cups" because that chain would start with the boy; and the fact that the cups and the boy are different things excludes the possibility that the cups are not agents. Hence the sentence means that the cups break the window with the boy.

In sentences (21) and (22) the causal chain of events ends with the subject-entity. The sentences remain active, however, by virtue of the fact that the chain also starts with the subject-entity. In a passive sentence the latter is no longer the case, e.g.:

That is,

something happened to the window
because the boy did something

In her description of the difference between active and passive sentences, Wierzbicka (1980: 55) differentiates between the objective hierarchy of entities based on the causal chain of events, and the subjective hierarchy based on the speaker's interest. Her explication of (24) therefore continues:

I say something about the window
not because I want to say something about anything else
I say something about the boy
because I want to say something about the window
I shall not discuss this issue here. For our present purposes it suffices to observe that *bylo razbito* in (24) ensures that even if accent/word order are such that the window is pictured both at a time when it does not have the property indicated by the verb and at a time when it does have this property, it is not the window which is responsible for the change.

7. In section 1 we started with sentences where agentive/non-agentive interpretations of subjects are associations deriving from the meanings of accent and word order. At the end we were talking about nominative vs. instrumental case, transitive vs. intransitive, and active vs. passive, i.e. cases where agentive/non-agentive interpretations are independent of accent and word order. We may now ask where and why we crossed the boundary.

What enabled me to discuss all examples more or less in the same terms is the close relationship between "x precedes y" and "x causes y". In section 1 we were talking about what I call projection time, i.e. the time in which we process a sentence. The (negations of) the elements x of which the agentive/non-agentive interpretations were discussed preceded the other sentence elements in projection time. These elements x happened to be the subjects of their sentences. In non-passive sentences, the subject is also the element from which the "causal chain of events", in Wierzbicka's (1980) sense, starts. So when in section 3 I started to use formulations à la Wierzbicka, I silently moved from "(the negation of) x precedes the other elements in projection time, and x happens to be the subject" to "x is the subject, i.e. (in non-passive sentences) the element from which the causal chain of events starts". The latter is, in Russian, in principle independent of accent/word order: our examples had the subject marked by nominative case. (In languages where we recognize, e.g., the subject and the object on the basis of word order, no such independency exists, but there remains a difference between "x precedes y in projection time" and "the causal chain of events goes from x to y". As is well-known, the two can be signalled simultaneously: a topic, for example, may simultaneously be a subject.)

Now, I had to make this move because the further discussion was to be about the difference between instrumental objects that
refer to an aspect of the subject-referent and instrumental objects that refer to things unrelated to the subject-referent. This distinction is beyond the possibilities of accent/word order. To give a simple example, consider the following joke (Winograd 1983: 313):

A: Call me a taxi
B: OK, You’re a taxi.

For accent and scope (of accent) it is quite irrelevant whether the event of calling results in my having a taxi or in my being a taxi, i.e. whether "I"/"you" and "taxi" apply to different things in reality or to the same thing (whether "I"/"you" and "taxi" are divergent or parallel, in Ebeling’s (1987) sense). What is relevant to accent and scope is that, in both cases, the referent of "taxi" is something on which attention can be focused, which is, basically, what we say when we call the word a noun; in this respect the referent of "taxi" differs from the referents of "I" and "you" (where the relation to attention is quite complicated). Thus, the possibilities of accent end at a point where the two readings mixed up in the joke cited above are not yet separated from each other. This implies that if the two readings are to be kept apart formally, other means of expression must be used, for example case endings.

In the same way, the question of whether the fender in

(20) The car broke the window with its fender

is a part of the car or a separate thing is irrelevant to accent and scope; as far as accent and scope are concerned, fender is just a noun. What is marked by accent is the difference between the two readings of (20) on the one hand, and, e.g., (25) on the other:

(25) That chair annoys me, with its ripped upholstery and its springs sticking out (Van Oosten 1986: 80)

Here the with-phrase is presented as an "afterthought"; if it contains any pitch accents, these must have a smaller pitch excursion than that on annoys if the sentence is to produce the "afterthought" effect. Evidently, sentences like (25) are likely to have a non-agentive subject, and the with-phrase is likely to refer to an aspect of the subject-entity: if it did not, it would not be presented as an afterthought. Now, if sentences like (25) always had a non-agentive subject, and if sentences like (20), with the
last accent on *fender* and with no intonation break, always had an agentive subject, we would not leave the area of the associations sketched in section 1 above. But (20) can have a non-agentive subject despite the accent on *fender*, namely if the fender is construed as a part of the car. It is this fact which ensures that agentive/non-agentive interpretations become independent of accent/word order.

What we need, then, is a notational system which, on the one hand, indicates the sameness of the constructions discussed in the foregoing for accent and scope, and which, on the other hand, keeps apart, for example, the two readings of the joke cited above. Unfortunately, no such system exists at present; more specifically, Ebeling (1978) does only the latter but not the former, and Keijser (1985) does only the former but not the latter. My notational system can conceivably be expanded for the purpose (see also below and note 4), but I refrain from doing so for the time being, because it is unclear to me which distinctions are needed, the constructions discussed in the present paper being only one case.

Other issues include the semantic properties of expressions referring to parts of the human body (cf. Wierzbicka 1979), of mobile vs. immobile referents (cf. *The general marched the soldiers* vs. *The general marched the fields*), etc. Construing a referent in one way or another clearly has comparable interpretational effects in different constructions, so they must, in my view, be treated in the same way. To give but one example (Gerritsen 1986), the referent of *sebja* "counts as" a separate participant, although it refers to the same entity as the subject; this comes to light in the fact that the subject becomes "agentive" in the second part of *Sovetskij Sojuz prevratilsja, točnee prevratile sam sebja vo vtorju promyšlen-nuju deržavu v mire* (Gerritsen 1986: 108). This is, in my view, the same phenomenon as that discussed in the foregoing, viz. that an instrumental object excludes a non-agentive interpretation of the subject if its referent cannot be seen as an aspect/part of the subject-referent. I would suggest that an analysis of the mental operations needed for construing a referent in one way or another could explain a whole series of facts usually treated under the heading of "semantic roles" or "verb valency".
8. The problem of how referents can be construed is closely related to verb valency. For example, the statement that *it* in *It rains* does not fill a valence of the verb, while that in *It is lying on the table* does, is, in my view, another way of saying that the *it* which exists if it does not rain is another *it* than the *it* which exists if it does rain (*"it" basically referring to the world at a certain time); in *It is lying on the table*, in contrast, the referent of "it" retains its identity through time. And one would not normally say that the verb in *You're a taxi* has two valences, because the meaning of *to be* ensures that the thing₁ which is and the thing₂ which the thing₁ is, are the same thing. For *You have a taxi*, in contrast, a two-valence analysis is normal, because thing₁ ≠ thing₂. Now, the question arises whether these differences are syntactic. The answer depends, of course, on what one calls syntax. Here again, a conflict arises between what an accentologist would need and what other linguists may be inclined to say. As far as accent and scope are concerned, the difference between the *it* in *It rains* and the other *it* is relevant: basically, the former cannot be accented, because there is no environment in which its referent can be absent (the referent being itself that environment). But, as we saw above, the difference between thing₁ = thing₂ and thing₁ ≠ thing₂ is irrelevant, accent and scope possibilities being clear from the information 'pronoun of the type I/you + verb + article + noun'. Since the scope of an accent in my view depends, inter alia, on the way in which the sentence elements are linked up with one another, Keijsper (1985) links up the elements of, e.g., "You are/have a taxi" without paying attention to the difference between thing₁ = thing₂ and thing₁ ≠ thing₂." It follows that these links have nothing to do with verb valency. What they do express can be illustrated here by means of an hypothetical example. Consider the sentences *An explosion destroyed the building* and *The hooligans destroyed the building*. As we saw in the foregoing, it is probably the mere presence of the explosion which causes the building to be destroyed, so that we can say about the explosion that it destroyed the building because its presence had a destroying effect (non-agentive hierarchy). The hooligans, in contrast, in addition to being present, do something (agentive hierarchy). Now, let us assume that, instead of the word *destroyed*, we
have two words, say *destroying* for the property carried by the subject and *destroyed* for the property carried by the object. Then, we could expect a difference to exist between A and B:

A. 1. the accent on the subject negates a projection of the absence of the referent involved;
2. "destroyed" is linked to the projection of the object-referent;
3. "destroying" is linked to the projection of the subject-referent.

That is:

```
1 ["subject" "destroying" "destroyed" "object"]
```

B. 1. the accent on the subject negates a projection of the absence of the referent involved;
2. "destroying" is linked to the projection of the subject-referent;
3. "destroyed" is linked to the projection of the object-referent.

That is:

```
1 ["subject" "destroying" "destroyed" "object"]
```

Further, I would say that A. is a means of staying inside the moment of world-time introduced by step 1. even if the object is accented; that, given an accent on the object, step 2. in B. relegates to the past the idea of the presence of the subject-referent (introduced by step 1.); that A. is excluded if a further accented element to the right introduces a new entity (e.g. *with a hammer*). This would be the translation into temporal order of the non-agentive (A.) and agentive (B.) hierarchies discussed in the foregoing. It would exactly parallel procedures occurring in the functioning of accent and word order, and we would not have left the area of the associations given in section 1 above. However, we had to leave this area for the simple reason that the "valences" "destroying" and "destroyed" are expressed by the single word *destroyed*. This word can be accented, it can, in Russian, occupy various positions in a sentence, and the corresponding projection can, in my view, be processed in one way or another. All this does not hold true
for the separate "valencies" "destroying" and "destroyed". The semantic components of a single word are present in our minds simultaneously, viz. when the word involved is uttered. This fact imposes severe restrictions on the type of thing that can be expressed by means of accent, word order, and order of processing, temporal ordering between the "valencies" of a word belonging to the impossibilities. If we are talking about the temporal ordering of the projection expressed by the verb (as one chunk) with respect to the other sentence elements, we are not concerned with distinctions like that in our hypothetical example, but with phenomena like the following:

- In many languages, the verb appears in sentence-final position, because the inherent temporal meaning of the verb imposes restrictions on the forward linking of verbs.
- In Dutch, for example, a non-finite verb cannot be linked forwards to an object; instead, the object is linked backwards to the preceding information. This gives rise to a "colon" type of boundary between non-finite verbs and objects in such strings. In English, no such restriction exists.
- A Russian string "object - subject - verb" has the main boundary between subject and verb, because the verb is linked backwards to the combination of object and subject. In English, in contrast, the same string first links the verb to the subject, and then the combination of subject and verb to the object, so that an accent on the verb "topicalizes" the object only.

And so on. In other words, these are some very primitive rules of information processing. Hierarchical ordering of "valences" must be expressed in a different way.

9. Primitive as they may be, the regularities of information processing, and especially their consequences for the scope of accents, present serious problems for many linguistic models. Consider, for example, the string "subject - verb - object". In, e.g., English, an accent on the subject here may include the verb and the object in its scope, but an accent on the object cannot include the subject in its scope. These facts reflect the following method of processing:
As a consequence, models which make both the subject and the object dependent on the verb (cf. Tesnière 1976 - originally 1959) cannot account for the scope relationships. Thus, although it may be correct that, as Starosta (1987: 57) remarks, the category of "verb phrase" "probably owes its existence mostly to Aristotle's subject-predicate division", it does not follow that we can dispense with it: we need it for the description of "Aristotle's subject-predicate division". For this description it is, moreover, not sufficient to have a category of "verb phrase": immediate constituent analysis, although it enables us to group, e.g., \([S[V O]]\), also fails to account for scope relationships because, although it has groupings, it does not have dependencies (Hays 1961). Unfortunately, we cannot just add dependencies à la Tesnière to immediate constituent analysis in order to have both groupings and dependencies: the "dependencies" relevant to scope, i.e. temporal order of projections, differ from dependencies à la Tesnière because, inter alia, they pay no attention to the question of whether two meanings apply to the same thing in reality or to different things, nor to hierarchical ordering of "valencies". Yet, it is possible to trace notions such as "agent" from accent and word order to, for example, case endings. So there must be a way of describing various aspects of linguistic meaning in similar terms.

University of Leiden

NOTES

---

1 The corresponding notation would be:

\[
\begin{align*}
  t_2 & \rightarrow \text{"p"} & t_2 \\
  t_2' & \rightarrow \text{"not p"} & t_2
\end{align*}
\]

I mistakenly skipped this possibility on page 324 of Keijsper 1985. The sentence (ibid.) "In such sentences [i.e. SV] the next accent [on V] relegates the non-concurrent negation of the first element to the world of a preceding moment; it does so because the negation of the second element, which has a referent in the world of another moment than the second element itself, links up with the
first element" should be: "[...] it does so because the negation of the second element, which belongs to another moment of projection time than the second element itself, [...]"

Only the latter formulation covers the observations on pages 137-140 and 320 of op.cit., because it leaves open two possibilities for the referent of the second element: the referent also has a negation belonging to another moment (just like the projection), or the referent has a negation belonging to the same moment (in contrast to the projection). The second possibility is given above; the first is:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
t_2 \rightarrow \square \neg P \rightarrow t_3 \\
t_1 \rightarrow \square \neg S \rightarrow t_2
\end{array}
\]

As the main text of the present paper indicates, the subject can be just as "new" as the predicate if the predicate remains inside the world of \(t_i\); it remains "in sight" at \(t_i\). If, in contrast, the predicate introduces \(t_i\), the subject becomes "old" information. This is an example of the "two moments restriction" discussed on pages 253-258 of Keijsper 1985.

2 Wierzbicka bears no responsibility for the way in which I am using her ideas.

3 Wierzbicka (1980: 127) has "that can be thought of as something that happened to the stick" rather than my "that can be thought of as something that the stick did". The difference derives from the fact that Wierzbicka discusses the subject as an illustration of an "instrument" that is not in the instrumental case, whereas I am discussing it here as a subject that is not an "agent". I do not think that the difference is substantial.

4 The difference could be added in the following way. In Keijsper 1985 a notation such as

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\square "y" \rightarrow 2 \\
\neg x \rightarrow 1
\end{array}
\]

means that "x" \(\neg y\) is replaced by "x" \(y\). The "x" can simply be repeated in level 2 (which is probably clearer anyway), so that a distinction can be made between, e.g., It rains and It is lying on the table:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
"i" "rains" \rightarrow \neg "i" "\neg rains" \\
"i" \neg "rains" \rightarrow \neg "i" "\neg rains"
\end{array}
\]

In the same way, the following distinction can be made:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
"x" \neg "y" \neg "y" \\
\neg x \neg "y"
\end{array}
\]

Here, the concurrence of "x" \(\neg y\) ("x without y") with "y" says that x and y are construed as different things, the absence of "not y" in the level containing "y" says that x and y are the same thing. A forward link, in contrast, is:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
"x_1" \neg "y_2" \\
\neg x \neg "y_2"
\end{array}
\]

That is, \(x_1\) and \(x_2\) are different things (existing at the same moment, in contrast to if, and \(i\), in It rains).

The issue relevant to scope is whether or not the "x" which combines with "y"
concerns with "not y": it does in backward schemes (leaving aside it rains), it
does not in forward schemes. But, as indicated in the main text, I refrain from
making such additions for the time being, because I have not yet decided which
distinctions are relevant for issues not pertaining to accent and scope.

REFERENCES

Adamec, P.

Apresjan, J.D., E. Páll
1982 Orosz ige - magyar ige, Vonzatok és kapcsolódások 1+2 (Russkij
glagol - vengerskij glagol, Upravlenie i sočetaemost' 1+2). Budape-
pest.

Berman, A., M. Szamosi

Bolinger, D.
1972 "Accent is predictable (if you're a mind-reader)", Language 48,
633-644.

Ebeling, C.L.
1980 "How Many Valences?", Voz'mi na radost', To honour Jeanne van

Faber, D.
1987 "The accentuation of intransitive sentences in English", Journal
of Linguistics 23, 341-358.

Fillmore, Ch.J.
1968 "The case for case", Universals in Linguistic Theory (E. Bach,

Garcia, E.C.
1975 The Role of Theory in Linguistic Analysis: The Spanish Pronoun

Gerritsen, N.
1986 "-sja and sebja", Dutch Studies in Russian Linguistics (A.A. Bar-
rentsen, B.M. Groen, R. Sprenger eds.)(Studies in Slavic and Gen-
eral Linguistics 8), 87-113. Amsterdam.

Gussenhoven, C.

Hays, D.G.
1961 "Groupings and dependency theories", Proceedings of the National
Symposium on Machine Translation (H.P. Edmundson ed.), 258-266.
Englewood Cliffs, N.J.

Keijzer, C.E.
1985 Information Structure, With examples from Russian, English and

Oakeshott-Taylor, J.
1984 "On the location of "tonic prominence" in English", Linguistische
Berichte 91, 3-24.

Sirotinina, O.B., R.T. Žuk, L.I. Tokareva
1968 "O leksiko-semantičeskoj obsuslovlennosti porjadka slov (na materi-
ale pis'mennoj reči)", Voprosy slavjanskogo jazykoznaniya, 88-100.
Saratov.
Smelev, D.N.  

Starosta, S.  

Tesnière, L.  

Van Oosten, J.  

Wierzbicka, A.  


Winograd, T.  
1983  Language as a Cognitive Process, Volume I: Syntax. Reading etc.