

A FEW OBSERVATIONS ON THE SO-CALLED ABSTRACT SENTENCES IN LITHUANIAN AND ENGLISH

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1. Delimitation of abstract sentences. Depending on the function of the subject, sentences may be concrete and abstract. Concrete sentences are predicative structures whose subject is a noun referring to a concrete object of reality. In other words, they are sentences with a denotative meaning. Abstract sentences, on the contrary, do not refer to a concrete object of reality, i. e. they have a significative meaning¹. E. g. 1. *Šis šuo yra protingas: This dog is clever* (a concrete sentence). 2. *Šuo yra protingas: The dog is clever* (an abstract sentence). That concrete sentences serve as a source for nominalisations has never been called into question. Doubts have only been expressed in regard to abstract sentences. Before we proceed to analyse transformational potentialities of abstract sentences, let us first examine their semantic-structural properties.

As already mentioned, the subject of abstract sentences does not refer to any concrete object of reality. Functionally, it may be both a noun denoting the class as a whole and a noun denoting an individual member of the class². E. g. 1. *Šuo yra žinduolis: The dog is a mammal*. 2. *Kiekvienas šuo yra žinduolis: A (any) dog is a mammal*. Sentence (1) and sentence (2) are alike, viz. in both cases the subject is abstract, i. e. it refers to the class as a whole. The difference lies only in the way the class is represented. When we say *Šuo yra žinduolis: The dog is a mammal* or

¹ See Н. Ф. Иртеньева, Синтаксис ситуаций и именная фраза, — In: Вопросы теории английского языка, Издание Московского педагогического института им. Ленина, выпуск первый, Москва, 1973, p. 3—11. This does not mean, however, that all sentences may be divided into denotative and non-denotative. As has been pointed out by J. D. Апресян, the semantics of a linguistic sign can be examined on two levels, i. e. on a denotative level and on a significative level (see Ю. Д. Апресян, Значение и оттенок значения, — In: Серия литературы и языка, т. 33, № 4, p. 322). The denotatum of a sign is the class of objects denoted by the sign; the significatum of a sign — the features common to all the objects of the class. As can be seen, the two meanings are inseparable. When we say that a particular sentence has a denotative meaning, we express ourselves inaccurately. What we mean in such a case is that in a particular sentence the denotative or the significative meaning is made more prominent.

² For a fuller analysis of the functional properties of the noun, see L. Valeika, Some Functional Aspects of Noun Modifiers in Lithuanian and English, — In: Kalbotyra, XX III (3), 1972, p. p. 81—91.

Kiekvienas šuo yra žinduolis : *A (any) dog is a mammal* we mean the class as a whole: the first sentence represents the class with no reference to its composition, i. e. its individual members, while the second sentence represents the class through its individual members. In both cases however, the ultimate aim is the class as a whole³. Sentence (2) is identical with *Šunys yra žinduoliai* : *Dogs are mammals*, since the latter also represents the class through its individual members. Semantically, abstract sentences have one feature in common, viz. they denote properties characteristic of the class as a whole.

Abstract sentences can be constructed with any verb-type, e. g. *būti*: *be, turėti*: *have*, transitive and intransitive. E. g.

3. *Šuo turi keturias kojas* *The dog has four legs.*

4. *Žmogus kovoja su gamta* *Man struggles with Nature.*

5. *Strutis greitai bėga* *The ostrich runs quickly.*

Special mention should be made of the tense of the verb in abstract sentences: some abstract sentences (e. g. classifying and possessive — 1, 3) are constructed with the verb in the present tense, only (Cf. 1. *Šuo yra žinduolis* — **Šuo buvo žinduolis* : *The dog is a mammal* — **The dog was a mammal*. 2. *Šuo turi keturias kojas* — **Šuo turėjo keturias kojas* *The dog has four legs* — **The dog had four legs*). It is but natural, since these sentences are essentially static, i. e. they merely denote a zoological idea. The other sentence-types can be constructed with the verb in the present, past or the future. E. g. *Žmogus kovojo (kovoja, kovos) su gamta* : *Man struggles (struggled, will struggle) with Nature*. This is in keeping with the nature of the sentences: unlike classifying and possessive sentences, they denote actions that are characteristic of the subject in general. If a definite type of action is characteristic of the object in general, the time of the action becomes irrelevant, i. e. what is true of the object now, was and will be true in the past and future⁴.

2. Nominalisation of abstract sentences.

In the cited article prof. N. Irtenyeva points out that abstract sentences of a classifying nature do not generally yield nominalisations. Thus, according to the scholar the transforms *a wolf's being an animal, for a wolf to be an animal, for gold to be a*

³ The reason for the two-way representation of the situation should be sought in the duality of a linguistic sign. Owing to this feature, one and the same object of reality can be represented in two ways. To put it in another way, the duality of a linguistic sign makes it possible to achieve the denotative identity of signs with a difference in their significative aspect (Cf. Ю. Д. Апресян, *op. cit.*, p. 322).

⁴ The apparent exception is taken by sentences constructed with verbs of motion. Cf. 1. *Strutis greitai bėga*: *The ostrich runs quickly* (abstract). 2. *Strutis greit bėgo*: *The ostrich ran quickly* (concrete).

metal, gold's being a metal, though presenting grammatically correct structures, are meaningless⁵. Indeed, it would be difficult (but not impossible) to find the context in which the said transforms might occur. The reason is that the use of such sentences as *Vilkas yra žinduolis: The wolf is a mammal* is restricted from a communicative point of view. As far as the other classifying sentences are concerned, the reasons for the unacceptability of certain transforms should be sought elsewhere. So, for instance, *baltasis cukrus: white sugar* is impossible, since the transform would refer to the sort of sugar which is white. As a result, *baltasis cukrus: white sugar* is self-exclusive: the sort of sugar does not exist; only concrete sugar may be more white or less white. E. g. *Cukrus pabalo → cukrus yra baltas → baltas cukrus: The sugar has become white → The sugar is white → White sugar*. A different situation is observed when we analyse abstract sentences with two or three predicates denoting different varieties of the same object. E. g. *Vynas būna saldus ir rūgštus: Wine may be sweet and dry → Saldus vynas: sweet wine (rūgštus vynas: dry wine)*. The transforms *saldus vynas: sweet wine* or *rūgštus vynas: dry wine* are possible, since they stand in opposition to each other. Cf. also *gabalinis cukrus – smulkus cukrus*. This seems to be in keeping with the functional peculiarities of the adjective, viz. the use of adjectives is based on contrast, e. g. *baltas – juodas, geras – blogas*, etc. Sometimes, however, one of the two members of the opposition may be missing (as, for instance, in the case of *cukrus: sugar*). This suggests that the constraints on the use of certain transforms can be accounted for extralinguistically.

It would be wrong to think that abstract sentences should be „written off“ as unproductive. Thus, the transforms *cukraus baltumas: the whiteness of sugar* or *anglies juodumas: the blackness of coal* seem to be quite possible in the two languages. The same applies to the transforms *anglies nauda (naudingumas): the use of coal*, *žmogaus sąmoningumas: the intelligence of man* and many others. That abstract sentences derive nominal constructions can be proved by examining sentences constructed with the other verb-types:

3. *Namas turi stogą: A house has a roof → Namų stogas: the roof of a house.*
4. *Žmogus kovoja su gamta: Man struggles with Nature → Žmogaus kova su gamta: Man's struggle with Nature.*
5. *Strutis bėga greitai: The ostrich runs quickly → Stručio bėgimas: The running of an ostrich.*

To sum it up, nominalising properties of an abstract sentence are determined by the frequency of occurrence of the underlying abstract sentence and extralinguistic factors. The recognition of the fact that abstract sentences can yield nominal

⁵ Н. Ф. Иртеньева, op. cit., p. 9.

constructions makes it possible to distinguish two types of nominal-deriving sentences, viz. sentences with a concrete subject and sentences with an abstract subject.

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KELETAS PASTABŲ APIE ABSTRAKČIUS SAKINIUS LIETUVIŲ IR ANGLŲ KALBOSE

Reziumė

Pagal veiksnio funkciją sakiniai skirstomi į konkrečius ir abstrakčius. Pvz.: *Strutis greitai bėga* (abstraktus), nes veiksnys reiškia visą klasę; *Šis strutis greitai bėga* (konkretus), nes veiksnys reiškia konkretų objektą. Straipsnyje bandoma parodyti, kad lietuvių ir anglų kalbose ne tik konkretūs, bet ir abstraktūs sakiniai teikia daiktavardinių junginių. Daiktavardžių derivacija yra sąlygojama dvejopo pobūdžio faktorių: komunikatyvinių ir ekstralingvistinių.