The Concept of Subjectivity in Language

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1 Introduction

This work deals with the problem of subjectivity in language in the first place and the Modesty Principle in Russian in particular. It is based on the analysis of the study “Semantics and Pragmatics of the „Reflexive“ Verbs in Russian” by Alina Israeli who tries to advance understanding of both -sja verbs and –sja forms by classifying the various semantic groups of these verbs and forms and by explaining the peculiarities of their formation and usage.

Special attention is devoted to Chapter 1 which lays out the theoretical foundation for Israeli’s study, namely two concepts of subjectivity, a classification of types of knowledge and the Modesty Principle, and applies them to Russian examples. Most of the data used in the book is newly collected by the author, primarily from contemporary literary works and media. Israeli uses some particular conventions in the text. She makes a distinction between “subject” as a grammatical subject of a sentence and “Subject” as a logical subject of a sentence.

2 Subjectivity

2.1 Subjectivity Defined

Subjectivity is the key concept of Israeli’s study. There are different approaches to language “which do not treat language entities as arbitrary (Saussure) or as derived from a series of formal rules independently of use (Chomsky). Contrary to Chomsky (1965, 3), who views the speaker as an abstract, ideal entity unaffected by interests and limitations, a great many linguists have been examining "human factor" in language.” (Israeli 1997, 13)

This "human factor" is at least two-fold. First, language is not merely a direct reflection of the world (Jackendoff 1983), but represents reality viewed through a conceptual prism. Linguistic concepts are affected by culture which in turn is affected by linguistic concepts. For example, the morphological language pattern of the numerals from 13 to 19 in English affects the social division among youth in the English-speaking world by creating the concept of “teenager”.

Wierzbicka (1988, 14) points out that “in natural language, meaning cannot be defined in terms of a relationship between linguistic units and elements of extra-linguistic reality… In
natural language meaning consists in human interpretation of the world. It is subjective, it is anthropocentric, it reflects predominant cultural concerns and culture-specific modes of social interaction as much as any objective features of the world "as such″.

The second facet of the "human factor" is related to what Saussure calls parole, that is the actual manifestation in speech. Israeli deals with subjectivity not as the opposite of objectivity, but in two senses that language is subjective. Both types of subjectivity (she calls them S1 and S2) result from the fact that language is the product of the collective national linguistic consciousness. It is the grid of concepts through which a speaker of a given language sees the outside world and his own inner feelings or states. Apresjan (1986) calls this "the naive view of the world."

Wierzbicka (1979, 313) emphasizes that "every language embodies in its very structure a certain world-view, a certain philosophy." According to Wierzbicka (1979, 313) "since the syntactic constructions of a language embody and codify certain language-specific meanings and ways of thinking, the syntax of a language must determine to a considerable extent this language's cognitive profile", which constitutes a manifestation of S1. This type of subjectivity (S1) refers to the particular view of reality embodied in a language and its syntax.

Israeli (1997, 14) defines the second type of subjectivity (S2) as “the result of the speaker's choice when the language offers different ways of describing given facts, and the speaker, naturally, chooses one of those ways. S2 involves his/her personal judgement and attitude towards the narrated event and/or the participants of the narrated event.” Being the product of an individual human mind, any utterance bears some elements of subjectivity.

S2 is present in discourse participant's assessment, in choice of information and in mode of information. For example, according to Jakobson (1959/1971), the speaker is presented with a choice between active and passive, while at the same time there are rules of language and communication.

Israeli’s view of subjectivity is broader than previous definitions given, for example, by Apresjan (1988), Maynard (1993) or Yokoyama (1986). She analyses “the human factor” in language on two levels and comes to the conclusion that “S1 does not require S2 (the language may only provide a single way for speakers to describe something), but S2, as a
choice granted to the individual speaker, must by definition reflect an S1 containing dual or multiple possible views of a particular aspect of reality.” (Israeli 1997, 36)

### 2.2 Subjectivity and Types of Knowledge

Israeli (1997, 15) also modifies previous classifications of types of knowledge based on the means of acquiring the knowledge: “Subjectivity manifests itself not only in assessment or mode of expression. The way that certain prepositional knowledge may be attained has bearing on grammar. A number of linguists, including Russell (1940), Kuroda (1973), Coppeters (1982) and Vogeleer (1987), have noted that there are three types of messages and that not all statements represent the same type of perception of or knowledge about the Object.”

The following four statements (1) - (4) are quite parallel in syntactic structure but they do not represent the same kind of knowledge:

(1) John is tall.

(2) I am hungry.

(3) John is hungry.

(4) John is stupid.

Statements (1) and (2) represent *perceptual* knowledge. The speaker relates information acquired through observation and personal experience.

In (3), there are three possibilities. The first possibility is that the narrator has omniscient power and knows just as much about the character's feelings as about his/her own. In this case, the sentence represents the same type of statement and knowledge as in (2), except that the third person is used instead of the first.
The second possibility is that the narrator somehow came to the possession of his/her knowledge through ordinary means, such as being informed by someone. Kuroda (1973) calls this "reportive style." It is epistemological knowledge.

The third possibility is that the narrator is observing John, who either is eating at the moment of speaking or else has a starved look in his eyes that suggests hunger to the onlooker. In this case, the speaker deduces that John is hungry. This is deductive knowledge.

Statement (4) represents the speaker's opinion and may not be shared by anyone else. This is conceptual knowledge.

The distinction between (1) and (2), both of which represent perceptual knowledge, is especially important for Russian: “This distinction can be formulated as "objective" vs. "subjective." Whether John is tall or not can be observed by anyone (even though conclusions may differ), whereas no one else can directly observe my hunger or any other inner feelings; these can only be deduced, rightly or wrongly.” (Israeli 1997, 16)

An example of this distinction may be seen in the two ways that a Russian speaker can say "My feet are cold." If the speaker views the knowledge as perceptual subjective, s/he puts the Subject in dative.

(5) Moim nogam xolodno.
   'My feet/legs feel cold.'

If the speaker views the knowledge as perceptual objective, s/he expresses the Subject in nominative:

(6) U menja xolodnye/zamerzli nogi.
   'My feel/legs are cold/are freezing.'

Thus, the speaker's view of the type of knowledge has an effect on Russian grammar as well. Since the speaker makes a choice, this is a case of S2.
2.3  **External Forces and Impersonal Constructions**

Israeli shows how the types of knowledge affect the language by giving additional examples of both types of subjectivity (S1 and S2) in Russian. She discusses the use of impersonal constructions to signify the external forces are the Agent.

Russian, like other European languages, has a large number of impersonal constructions. However, Russian, in addition to weather/time conditions, has other impersonal constructions which have no equivalents in other European languages. Mel'čuk (1974a and 1979) analyses constructions of the type of (7) and shows that the implied meaning is that the action was propelled by "natural forces" or "elements".

\[(7) \quad \text{Ulicu zasypalo peskom.} \\
\quad \text{'The street was covered with sand.'}\]

Wierzbicka (1988, 223-234) ascribes the action in such constructions to "unknown" forces not initiated and not controlled by the Subject, while Siewierska (1988, 275) ascribes it to "supernatural phenomena".

While there are actions that can be indeed ascribed to the forces of nature (8), in (10) no obvious natural force could be responsible for the actions:

\[(8) \quad \text{Ego ubilo molniej.} \\
\quad \text{He was killed by lightning.'}\]

\[(10) \quad \text{a. Vdrug ego osenilo. (Ožegov)} \\
\quad \text{'All of a sudden it dawned upon him/he got an idea.'}\]

\[\text{b. Otkuda ee prineslo?} \\
\quad \text{'Where did she come from?'}\]

\[\text{c. Slava Bogu, proneslo!} \\
\quad \text{'Thank God it's over (it bypassed me/us).'}\]
There are many such examples. In addition, there are phrases that designate non-natural disasters, as in (11):

(11)  a. Vrača kontuzilo vo vremja vojny.
     'The doctor had a (severe) concussion during the war.'

c. Ee sbilo mašinoj.
     'She was hit by a car.'

All of the above examples indicate action carried out by forces external to the Subject. Since most of these examples do not have personal counterparts, the conception that outside forces are the Agents of the various actions can be considered part of the S1 of the Russian language.

A counterpart for (11c) changes the connotation by putting the blame on the car:

(11’c) Ee sbila mašina,
     'The car hit her.'

The problem we deal with here is two-fold:

1) Who or what is responsible for the actions?
2) What is the role of the human Subject described in such constructions?

With respect to the first question Wierzbicka (1988, 233) asks: "Is there any connection between stixijnost', the anarchic (and at the same time fatalistic) Russian soul, or the novels of Dostoevskij, and the profusion of the constructions in Russian syntax that acknowledge the limitation of human knowledge and human reason, and our dependence on 'fate', and hint at subterranean uncontrollable passions that govern the lives of people?"

Wierzbicka gives no definitive answer, but she claims that the impersonal constructions mentioned above, particularly those which do not have "natural forces" overtones, do point towards this conclusion. What else but fate could be responsible for the following result:
(12) Razmetalo/razbrosalo druzej po svetu.
'The friends got scattered around the world.'

Israeli (1997, 18) gives an example from Dostoevsky which also plays on supernatural overtones and illustrates the contrast between personal and impersonal constructions with the same verb:

(13) [Kak ona v ee položenii perelezla čerez vysokij i krepkij zabor sada, ostavalos' v nekotorom rode zagadkoj.] Odni govorili, čto ee "perenesli", drugie, čto "pereneslo". (Dostoevskij. Brat'ja Karamazovy) (Bulygina 1980, 328-329)

'[How she in her state climbed over the tall and sturdy fence remained in some way a mystery.] Some said that she was carried over [by people], others that she was carried over by some force.'

As far as the second question is concerned, the human Subject is portrayed as not responsible for the actions in which s/he is involved. Israeli gives examples where both personal and impersonal constructions are possible, in which case (S2) the impersonal ones portray the Subject as not responsible for the action.

Israeli (1997, 18-19) points out that “impersonals present the action as propelled by an outside force, designated by accusative of the noun and third person singular (neuter) of the verb (with no grammatical subject). In contrast, their -sja middle counterparts present the action as originating within the Subject itself/himself (or as being so perceived), designated by nominative of the noun and agreement of the verb with the grammatical subject.”

In the a-series of the following examples, it is implied that an outside force makes the Subject perform the action, while in the b-series the Subject does it himself (or itself), or so it is perceived, regardless of whether he (or it) does it willingly or not:

(14) a. Lodku kačaet.
'The boat is being rocked.'

b. Lodka kačaetsja.
'The boat is rocking.'
(15)  a. Ivana kačaet.  
'Ivan is staggering.'

b. Ivan kačaetsja.  
'Ivan is staggering.' or 'Ivan is rocking,'

(17)  a. Ego vsego skrjučilo ot boli. 
'He got all twisted up from pain.'

b. On skrjučilsja ot boli. 
'He twisted up from pain.'

It is an outside force that caused the convulsions (17a). In (17b), no such implication is made. A similar distinction can be made between (18a) and (18b). In (18a) the feeling comes from the outside, while in (18b) it come from the inside:

(18)  a. Ego tjanulo domoj.  
'He was drawn home/

b. On tjanulsja domoj.  
'He longed to go home.'

Israeli (1997, 19) sees a difference in the type of knowledge expressed in the last two examples: (17) is comparable to (1) *John is tall*, where the speaker relates perceptual knowledge acquired by observation, while (18) is comparable to (3) *John is hungry*. In (18a) the described state can represent either "focalization" or reported, epistemological knowledge. In (18b), in addition to these possibilities, the described state can represent deductive knowledge, since in (18b) the sentence with a verb may represent an action or an activity.

Wierzbicka (1988, 253-254) considers that “Russian has a syntactic contrast between 'voluntary emotions' (designated by a verb with the experiencer in the nominative), 'involuntary emotions' (designated by an adverb-like category, the so-called *kategorija sostojanija* 'category of state', with the experiencer in the dative case), and - in some cases -
neutral emotions (designated by an adjective, with the experiencer in the nominative). For example: [a-series vs. b-series]

   'Ivan is "giving himself" to shame (and is showing it).'

   b. Ivanu stydno.
   'Ivan feels ashamed,'

   'Ivan is "giving himself" to boredom/melancholy (and is showing it).'

   b. Ivanu skučno.
   'Ivan feels bored/sad.'

   'Ivan rejoices. '

   b. Ivan rad.
   'Ivan is glad'

Even luck can be perceived either as an intrinsic quality of a person (22a) or as a quality that comes from the outside, the Subject having nothing to do with it (22b):

(22)  a. Ona vezučaja (vezučij čelovek). / Ona sčastlivaja.
   'She is a lucky person.'

   b. Ej vezet.
   'She is lucky.'
2.4 Modality and Bodily Functions

There are two additional areas where the Subject is presented as not responsible for the action: modality and bodily functions. In Russian, a large number of modals can be used only impersonally. They present a need, necessity or obligation as coming from outside of the Subject, as being imposed upon him or her:

(24) a. Vam sleduet/nado/neobxodimo pozvonit' po ètomu nomeru.
   'You have to/need to/must call this number.'

   b. Mne nužno s toboj pogovorit'.
   'I need to talk to you.'

Only objazan and dolžen are personal:

(24) c. Ja objazan/dolžen vam skazat' pravdu.
   'I must tell you the truth.'

In contrast to Russian, Polish renders modality by conjugated forms:

(25) a. Muszę to przepisać.
   'I must rewrite this.'

   b. Mamy wyjechać na lato v góry.
   'We should go the mountains for the summer.'

   c. Powinniście były zrobić to wczoraj.
   'You should have done this yesterday.'

As far as bodily functions are concerned, impersonal verbs such as tošnit' 'be nauseous', rvat' 'vomit', and lixoradit' 'be feverish', as in (26), or the verbs denoting some common physiological aspects of childhood, as in (27)—(28), are rendered syntactically in Russian as simply happening to the Subject as opposed to the active personal constructions found in many other languages:
“The perception that certain actions are (SI) or may be (S2) caused by external forces - natural or supernatural forces, humans other than $P_{n1}$, fate, or subconscious passions - represents a particular feature of Russian culture's view of the world. This feature is encoded syntactically by impersonal constructions, notably with the majority of modals and with verbs denoting bodily functions; this is also the case with bodily functions experienced by children. In the S2 cases, the opposite perception - that the Subject originates an action - is encoded by middle voice.” (Israeli 1997, 22)

2.5 Body Parts and Involuntary Movements

Israeli describes briefly how both the alienability or inalienability of body parts and the involuntary movements of body parts are expressed syntactically in Russian language.

In Russian, some body parts are considered alienable and some inalienable (Wierzbicka 1988, 204 - 210): “This means, that although one cannot refer to the breaking of a person's tooth while ignoring the person himself, one CAN conceive of breaking of the tooth as an autonomous event (an event necessarily involving the owner of the tooth, but consisting of the breaking of the tooth as such). A leg on the other hand is viewed differently: one cannot conceive of the breaking of a person's leg as an autonomous event.”

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1 $P_{n1}$ - the first participant of the narrated event.
All body parts that are not made of flesh (teeth, nails and hair) have the same status, they are viewed as separate entities, the breaking of which could be perceived as an autonomous event, and only they can take a -sja verb, slomat'sja, or in the case of hair, lomat'sja.

It is impossible to use middle for inalienable parts of the human body as in (29a) or (29b), but only active as in (29c), while middle (30a) and active (30b) are both correct for separable parts:

(29)  a. *Ego noga slomalas'. 1
     'His leg broke.'
 b. *U nego slomalas' noga.
     'He got a broken leg.'
 c. On slomal nogu.
     'He broke his leg.'

(30)  a. U nego slomalsja zub.
     'He got a broken tooth.'
 b. On slomal zub.
     'He broke a tooth.'

On the other hand, non-deliberate movements of parts of the human body can be described only with middle, not with impersonal constructions:

(31)  a. U nego trjasutsja ruki.
     'His hands shake.'
 b. *U nego trjaset ruki.

(32)  a. U nego dergaetsja ščeka.
     'His cheek twitches.'
 b. *U nego dergaet ščeku.

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1 *The asterisk identifies ungrammatical statements.
Israeli (1997, 23) emphasizes that “both the view of body parts as being either alienable or inalienable and the relationship of this characteristic to breakage and involuntary motion are part of Russian S1, although the choice between (30a) and (30b) is part of S2.”

3  The Modesty Principle in Russian

Я – последняя буква в алфавите.
[I is the last letter of the alphabet.]
(common Russian saying)

“The immediately preceding epigraph is not about a letter, but about the pronoun ja ‘I’, and it is usually addressed to people who like to say ja too often. This could have been anecdotal, but compared to the capitalized pronoun I, it may deserve some attention.” (Israeli 1997, 30)

The Modesty Principle was introduced in a discussion of the laws of empathy by Kuno (1987, 233). Israeli (1997, 31) examines how the Modesty Principle is applicable in Russian: “If we turn to the Russian data, we will note that the Modesty Principle permeates the Russian language as well as Russian culture on all levels. It can be observed on the levels of langue, parole, discourse, and stylistic and cultural conventions, particularly if compared with English. Due to the hierarchy of cases (Jakobson 1958/1971, Chvany 1982), it is obvious that a noun in the nominative has higher prominence than a noun in an oblique case.”

The following examples give "modesty" vs. "me first" pairs at each of these levels:

1. Langue, where the speaker has no choice of construction for conveying his/her message.
   In none of the following sentences is the Subject in nominative in Russian as opposed to English (the b-series represents the English translation of the Russian examples):

   (61)  a. Mne nužen karandaš.
       b. I need a pencil.

   (62)  a. U menja bolit golova.
       b. I have a headache.
a'. U menja ideja.
a'''. Mne prišla v golovu ideja.
b. I've got an idea.

a. Mne ispolnilos' / stalo 30 let.
b. I turned 30.

a. U nego vyšla kniga.
b. He has a book published.

a. U nas segodnja svad'ba.
b. We are getting married today.

Israeli stresses that Russian is the only Slavic language that did not preserve the constructions related to the verbs *imeti/imati* 'have' as opposed to, for example, Polish (71b) and Ukrainian (71c):

(71)  a. U menja est' otec.
    b. Mam ojca.
    c. Maju bat'ka.
    'I have a father.'


a) The language offers options, and it is up to the speaker whether or not to use the Modesty Principle, as in the a-series.

(73)  a. Mne dolžny pozvonit'.
    b. Ja ždu zvonka.
    'I am expecting a call.'

(73)  a. Ko mne dolžny prijti.
    b. Ja ždu gostej.
    'I am expecting guests.'
In all of the above examples where the Subject does not occupy the subject position, the Subject is no longer the agent, according to Wierzbicka (1981, 46); instead, "the speaker regards himself as the quintessential 'victim' or the quintessential experiencer."

b) "Obscuring" the "I" or "I" as a part of a group.

In many cases, constructions of the type of (75a) are preferred to the type of (75b); while (75a) expresses the simultaneity of participants' actions, the disjointed construction of the type of (75c) expresses the non-simultaneity of participants' actions, and (75b) is ambiguous in this respect.

\{75\}  
  a. My s otsom xodili na rybalku.  
   'Father and I went fishing.'

  b. Otec i ja xodili na rybalku.  
   'Father and I went fishing.'

  c. I otec i ja xodili na rybalku.  
   'Both father and I went fishing.'

At the same time, there are situations where substitutions are impossible. Sentence (76a) may be said only by a student, while (76b) may be said only by the teacher:

(76)  
  a. My s klassom xodili v teatr.  
   'Our class (me included) went to the theater.'

  b. Ja s klassom xodila v teatr.  
   'I went with the class to the theater.'

Thus the feature [+ authority] blocks the Modesty Principle.

Another example is the way the possessive pronouns are used in Russian as opposed to English. English permits constructions with the possessive pronoun my in reference to objects that the person does not possess, but rather is part of, such as town, university, neighborhood etc., while Russian does not:
(77) a'. U nas v gorode ... / V našem gorode ... / *U menja v gorode ... / *V moem gorode ...

a". U nas v universitet ... / V našem universitet ... / *U menja v universitet ... :/ *V moem universitet ...

a.". U nas vo dvore ... / V našem dvore ... / *U menja vo dvore ... / *V moem dvore ...

b'. In my town ...

b". In my university ...

b"". In my neighborhood ...

c) Stylistic ban of "I". Authorial "we".

The use of "I" in non-fiction signals the author's high status. Using the "I" form would otherwise be perceived as immodest. Consider the following examples from noted linguists, all of whom avoid using "I":

(78) a. slyšano nami v molodosti. (Peškovskij. Russkij sintaksis v naučnom osveščenii) 'heard by us in [our] youth.'

b. V zaključenje ukažem ešče raz, čto ... (L. L. Bulanin. Trudnye voprosy morfologii) 'In conclusion, let us point out once again that...'

There is another way to avoid the use of "I":

(79) Zdes' sleduet priznat' dopuščennuju avtorom v pervonačal'noj publikacii ošibku, povleščuju za soboj neželatel'nye posledstvija. (G. A. Zolotova, Očerk funkcional'nogo sintaksisa russkogo jazyka)

'Here one should acknowledge a mistake committed by the author in the first publication, a mistake which led to undesirable consequences.'
3. Discourse.

a) Order of statements in a dialogue: in English the second speaker speaks first about himself/herself, then thanks the interlocutor for his/her interest, while in Russian the order is reversed (80):

(80) a. A: Kak dela?
    B: Spasibo, xorošo/ničego.

    b. A: How are you?
    B: Fine, thank you.

b) Conventions, such as formulas of request, for example asking to speak to someone on the telephone: the English speaker in (82a) speaks of his/her needs and wants, while the Russian speaker in (82b) makes requests and speaks of what he/she would like the other to do:

(82) a'. I would like to speak to Mary.
    a". Could/May I speak to Mary (please)?
    b'. Možno Mašu k telefonu?
    b". Pozovite, požalujsta, Mašu.

According to Israeli (1997, 37) “the Russian language incorporates on a broad basis the Modesty Principle. It is considered impolite to focus on oneself. In some instances, such a focus is completely prohibited (S1), while in others the choice is left up to the speaker (S2). Russian’s negative view of focusing on the self stands as a starkly different S1 to that of English.”

Israeli also examines in Chapter 6 of her study the application of the Modesty Principle in the area of agentless passive, namely the cases where the speaker is the Agent.

There are instances in languages where agentless passive is used with the deliberate goal of not “exposing” the Agent, when the Agent is the speaker or a group that includes the speaker.
Bolinger (1968) discusses an example of such a passive in English used to justify retaliation against Blacks:

(91) That’s what they get for trying to force their way where they’re not wanted.

This type of usage of passive with regard to the speaker himself or herself is not typical for Russian. Instead, Russian uses 3rd person plural subjectless constructions to convey this meaning:

(92) Vam ved’ govorjat russkim jazykom.
    'They are telling you in plain Russian (i.e. I am telling you).'

However, the reasons for not naming oneself could be other than being noncommittal. Vol'pert (1979, 31) points out regarding German passives that it is a device of modesty:

(93) Wie schon eingangs betont wurde ... ' As it was already underscored ...'

This is a common use of passive in Russian due to the Modesty Principle. Such use is particularly common in scientific/scholarly language:

(94) b  V predyduščem izloženii vnimanie bylo sosredotočeno ...
    na probleme ... (V. M. Pavlov. Sub”ekt v bezličnych predloženijax)
    'In the previous discussion attention was concentrated on the problem ...'

However, use of this type of passive is not limited to the scientific language. In sentence (95), the author talks about herself:

(95) b.  Slučilos' mne v èti dni, čto pišutsja èti stroki, polučit' po počte paket.
    (L. Žukova. Èpilogi)
    'These days, as these lines are being written, I happened to receive a package in the mail.'

She could have said (95'), using a less modest statement, attracting attention to her own action:
(95) b'. V eti dni, kogda ja pišu eti stroki, mne slučilos' polučit' po počte paket. 'These days, as I am writing these lines, I happened to receive a package in the mail.'

In all of the above examples authors use agentless passive to denote an action produced by themselves. The Agent is not mentioned in order to avoid naming oneself in accordance with the Modesty Principle. This type of usage of passive is one of the cases when Agent is deliberately not mentioned.

Thus, as we can see the Modesty Principle has wide application in Russian. However, it represents a topic which requires further studies to determine to what extent it is applicable to Russian.

4 Conclusion

In her study Israeli deals with the concept of subjectivity in language on two levels. She makes a distinction between S1 and S2. One type of subjectivity (S1) refers to the particular view of reality embodied in a language and its syntax. Another type (S2) refers to a particular speaker's choice when the language offers more than one way to describe some fact or event. S1 does not require S2, but S2, as a choice granted to the individual speaker, must by definition reflect an S1 containing dual or multiple possible views of a particular aspect of reality.

Israeli gives the following examples of S1 and S2 in Russian:

1. Perceptual knowledge, based on one's personal observation or personal experience, may be considered either subjective, when no one else shares the speaker's experience or inner knowledge, or objective, when the information presented by the speaker can be observed by another person as well. If subjective, the Subject is in dative case; if objective, the Subject is nominative.

2. Certain actions either are (S1) or may be (S2) caused by external forces. They are encoded syntactically by impersonal constructions. If, on the other hand, the cause is seen as internal forces (the Subject originates an action) middle voice is used.
3. Parts of the body are classified by Israeli as either alienable or inalienable (S1). The breaking of inalienable parts is an active act committed by the person. Alienable parts, on the other hand, can break as if by themselves, as the subject of a middle -sja. verb. However, when inalienable parts move involuntarily (as opposed to breaking), they also do so by themselves and thus are subjects of middle -sja verbs.

4. According to Israeli the Modesty Principle has wide application in Russian. It is considered impolite to focus on oneself. In some instances, such a focus is completely prohibited (S1), while in others the choice is left up to the speaker (S2). Focus is deflected from the self in a variety of ways:

- by use of oblique cases;
- by use of quasi-synonyms in reference to the self, such as plural subjects or possessive pronouns;
- by cultural conventions;
- by the order of statements in a dialogue.

The study also examines the application of the Modesty Principle in the area of agentless passive.

The examples given by Israeli demonstrate the utility of the concept of subjectivity and the possibility of using it as a basis for explanation of permissible and impermissible constructions (S1) and of the different meanings of quasi-synonymous constructions (S2). Her study contributes to the understanding of how the outside reality is structured through linguistic representation and of how speaker’s interaction affects the use of –sja constructions in Russian.
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