

Russian gerundive gaps as topic drop

Abstract

Russian constructions in (1) where a gerundive adjunct contains a gap resemble English parasitic gaps (2). The sentences in (1) satisfy the licensing condition on parasitic gaps, which, by general consensus, requires that the antecedent phrase be dislocated by overt A'-movement (Engdahl, 1983). In English, violation of this condition rules out the gap in the adverbial (3).

The striking property of Russian gerundive gaps is that they do not depend on overt A'-movement of the licensing phrase (4). By the analysis proposed in Ivlieva, 2006, the null objects in (1) and (4) are true parasitic gaps which are licensed by covert movement of the antecedent (Wahba, 1995). Additionally, Ivlieva argues that the gap is a variable bound by the null operator (Huang, 1984).

To account for the movement-independent behavior of null gerundive objects, I argue against the syntactic analysis and propose instead that they are instances of object topic drop. Topic drop is an operation of PF deletion triggered solely by topichood of the element it applies to. Topic drop is attested in Russian independently and is widely employed by the language as a topic marking strategy along with dislocation (topicalization, scrambling) and pronominalization. Topic drop, however, is not unrestricted, it is affected by the information structure of the whole sentence.

The argument proceeds as follows: The first step includes evidence that the licensing phrase in (4) is indeed in situ. In the second step, I will compare the properties of null object topics found elsewhere with those of the adverbial gaps. The comparison reveals that the properties of non-adverbial topic drop pertain to the gerundive null objects. Null object topics must have a discourse antecedent, the latter can be either overtly present in the preceding context (5) or situational (6). Gerundive gaps as well require either an overt antecedent (1), (4), or a situational antecedent (7). Object topic drop is banned in the presence of an overt subject (8)A, it is licit only if the subject is also null (8)A' or if it is contrasted (8)A". Moreover, topic drop is restricted in island environments, especially in the absence of an overt linguistic antecedent (Gribanova, 2010) (9). Island effects are eliminated by subject drop in the clause containing a null object topic (10). Likewise, ungrammaticality of a gerundive gap embedded in an additional island is mitigated, in the presence of a clausemate contrastive element in addition to subject drop (11). Finally, I propose a uniform topic drop analysis for (1) and (4). The overall conclusion is that Russian lacks parasitic gaps of the English type.

- (1) Kakije pis'ma Petja sžeg [ne pročítav ø/?ix]?
which letters Peter burned neg. read.perf.prtc them
'Which letters did Peter burn without reading?'
- (2) Which document_i did John file e_i [without reading pg_i]?
- (3) a. John filed a bunch of articles [without reading *t/them].
b. Who filed which articles without reading *t/them?
- (4) a. Petja sžeg pis'ma, [ne pročítav ø/?ix].
Peter burned letters neg. read.perf.prtc. them
'Peter burned the letters without reading them.'
b. Petja sžeg kakije (imenno) pis'ma, [ne pročítav ø/?ix]?
Peter burned which exactly letters neg. read.perf.prtc. them
'Peter burned which (exactly) letters without reading them?'

- (5) Nikak ne najdu svoj košeljek, naverno ostavila ø/jego doma.
neg.-how neg. find refl. purse perhaps left it home
'I cannot find my purse, probably I have left it at home.'
- (6) [a woman enters home and shows a purchase to her family]
Vot, kupila ø/èto po-deševke.
here bought.3SG it prep. cheap
'Here, I bought it cheaply.'
- (7) [somebody is trying a new shirt which is too tight on him]
Čto, kupil ø [ne primer'aja ø]?
what bought.2SG neg. try.imprf.prtc.
'Did you buy it without trying it on?'
- (8) Q: Sergej vstretil jeë? A: Da, Sergej vstretil *(jeë).
Sergey met her yes Sergej met her
A': Da, ø vstretil ø A": Net, no ALEKS vstretil (jeë)
yes met no but Alex met her
- (9) [something falls; no one wants to get it]
Tot fakt, čto nikto ne podnjaj, menja očen' ogorčajet.
the fact that no-one neg. under-hold.3SG me.ACC very upsets.3SG
intended: 'The fact that no one picked it up very much upsets me.'
- (10) [pointing on a banknote which is lying on the floor]
- Smotri-ka, von tam, na polu. Pojdi podnimi. – Tot fakt, čto do six
look part. there on floor go pick-up that fact that till this
por ne podnjali ø,- uže podozritelen. Naverno fal'šyvyje
time neg. picked-up3PL already suspicious probably fake
' - Look, there, on the floor. Go and pick it up. – The fact that until now they
haven't picked it up is already suspicious. Probably it is fake.'
- (11) On iskal ključi VEZDE, [ne pripominaja
he looked-for keys everywhere neg. recall.imprf.prtc.
[KUDA (IMENNO) *(on) (ix) položyl]].
where exactly he them put
'He was looking for keys everywhere without being able to recall where
exactly he had put them.'

References:

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