

Control violation in Russian converbs

According to the Academic Russian Grammar (Shvedova (ed.) 1980), there is a strict requirement for the null subject of a converbial clause (that is PRO) to be controlled by the Nominative subject of a main clause, cf. (1). However, the classical example from Anton Chekhov's novel in (2), which had been written much earlier than the grammar was published, violates this requirement. The control violation also occurs in contemporary texts of various styles and genres. Consequently, there arises the following research question which the paper aims at investigating: is control violation a frequent and acceptable phenomenon or is it perceived as a deviation from the standard requirement? Specifically, the study concentrates on the PP *u menya* (1SG pronoun in Genitive) which substitutes the 1SG Nominative NP *ya* in a main clause, cf. (3). The Genitive form is one of the two most typical forms which occur instead of Nominative in converbial clauses (the other is Dative *mne*). In order to answer the research question, we used both experimental and corpus methods.

Firstly, in two experiments, we simultaneously tested two factors: (i) The Genitive NP controlling PRO is explicit or implicit; (ii) the converbial clause is located before or after the main clause (preposition or postposition). Accordingly, we formulated two hypotheses: (A) explicit NP is better; (B) although both preposition and postposition are grammatical and attested, preposition is better. As stimuli of both experiments, we used imperfective converbs derived from mental verbs (Babenko 1999), tested them for frequencies in (Lyashevskaya, Sharov 2009) and in the Russian National Corpus. Main clauses had the following structure: *u menya* 'at me.GEN' / no controlling NP (exp. 2: also *u nego* 'at him.GEN') + verb + Nominative subject NP. Converbial clauses consisted of 3-5 words and main clauses consisted of 4-6 words. The linear position of a converbial clause was either before or after a main clause. Sentences (3)-(6) exemplify stimuli. All in all, there were 32 stimulus sentence sets (8 per condition in each list) in exp.1 and 24 stimulus sentence sets (8 per condition in each list) in exp. 2. As fillers of exp. 1, we used clauses with grammatically correct participial clauses (preposed vs. postposed) + *u menya* 'at me.GEN', whereas as fillers of exp. 2, we used sentences with converbial clauses (preposed vs. postposed) + grammatically correct vs. incorrect main clauses with 1SG or 3SG pronouns (in grammatically incorrect sentences, subject-verb agreement was violated). Exp. 1 was a grammaticality judgment task with a 7-point Likert scale, 240 participants, age 17-68. Exp. 2 was a speeded grammaticality judgment task (sentences flashed on the screen word by word) with a binary scale (yes/no), 65 participants; age 16-52. Firstly, the findings of both exp. 1&2 showed that all the sentences with control violation were judged as degraded. Secondly, the findings confirmed hypotheses (A) and (B). Moreover, the results of exp. 2 showed that grammatical fillers were judged as grammatical significantly more often than stimuli ($p < 0.001$) and preposed converbial clauses more often than postposed ($p = 0.001$). Ungrammatical fillers were judged as grammatical significantly less often than stimuli ($p < 0.001$), preposition vs. postposition was not relevant for this comparison ($p = 0.08$).

Secondly, in a corpus study, with respect to explicit NP only (cf. factor (i) and ex. (3) and (5)), we tested two hypotheses: (C) control violation (PP with a NP in Genitive) is not frequent in written contemporary and old texts; (D) but if it occurs, preposition of a converbial clause is preferred over postposition. The search queries were conducted in two subcorpora of the Russian National Corpus: the subcorpus of texts written from 1950 onwards and in the subcorpus of texts written before 1900. The queries were as close as possible to the stimuli of exp. 1&2, that is, a converbial clause of a length 3-5 words, with imperfective converbs derived from mental verbs; a main clause of a length 4-6 words. The linear position of a converbial clause was either before or after a main clause. Having received the sentences according to the queries, we browsed them all and selected 1910 relevant sentences, with 422 preposed and 1488 postposed converbial clauses. Among them, only 39 preposed and 48 postposed sentences contained control violation. In other words, control violation is not frequent in contemporary

and old texts. This finding supported hypothesis (C). Moreover, preposed converbial clauses with control violation occur more often than postposed converbial clauses with control violation ($p < 0.001$). This confirmed hypothesis (D).

To summarize, control violation is a non-frequent and degraded phenomenon, which both corpus and experimental methods demonstrated respectively. However, unlike ungrammatical sentences with subject-verb agreement violation, control violation is not perceived as strongly unacceptable.

(1) (Shvedova (ed.) 1980)

<i>Okončiv</i>	<i>Akademiju</i>	<i>khudožestv,</i>	<i>Serov</i>	<i>byl</i>	<i>polon</i>
graduate.from.CONV	academy.ACC	arts.GEN	Serov.NOM	was	full
<i>želanija</i>	<i>pisat'</i>	<i>tol'ko</i>	<i>otradnoe.</i>		
wish.GEN	paint.INF	only	something.pleasant.ACC		

'Having graduated from the Academy of arts, Serov was willing to paint only something gratifying.'

(2) (Anton Chekhov 1884)

<i>Proezzaya</i>	<i>mimo</i>	<i>siey</i>	<i>stantsii</i>	<i>i glyadya</i>
pass.CONV.PRS	by	this.GEN	station.GEN	and look.CONV.PRS
<i>na prirodu</i>	<i>v okno,</i>	<i>u menya</i>	<i>sletela</i>	<i>šlyapa.</i>
at landscape.ACC	to window.ACC	at I.GEN	flow_off.PST	hat.NOM

'Passing by this station and looking at the landscape, my hat flew off.'

(3) Exp.1&2 stimulus sentence

<i>PRO_i</i>	<i>glyadya</i>	<i>na etu</i>	<i>kartinu,</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>menya_i</i>	<i>voznikli</i>	<i>strannye</i>	<i>assotsiatsii.</i>
	look.CONV	on this	picture	at	I.GEN	appeared	strange	associations

'Looking at this picture, I had strange associations.'

(4) Exp.1&2 stimulus sentence

<i>PRO_i</i>	<i>glyadya</i>	<i>na etu</i>	<i>kartinu,</i>	<i>voznikli</i>	<i>strannye</i>	<i>assotsiatsii.</i>
	look.CONV	on this	picture	appeared	strange	associations

'Looking at this picture, I had strange associations.'

(5) Exp.1&2 stimulus sentence

<i>U menya_i</i>	<i>voznikli</i>	<i>strannye</i>	<i>assotsiatsii,</i>	<i>PRO_i</i>	<i>glyadya</i>	<i>na etu</i>	<i>kartinu.</i>
at I.GEN	appeared	strange	associations		look.CONV	on this	picture

'Looking at this picture, I had strange associations.'

(6) Exp.1&2 stimulus sentence

<i>Voznikli</i>	<i>strannye</i>	<i>assotsiatsii,</i>	<i>PRO_i</i>	<i>glyadya</i>	<i>na etu</i>	<i>kartinu.</i>
appeared	strange	associations		look.CONV	on this	picture

'Looking at this picture, I had strange associations.'

References

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