

## A NOTE ON *ME* SUBJECTLESS SENTENCES

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In her paper on subjectless sentences in Modern English Susan Schmerling (1973) discusses the examples of the type:

- (1) Going to lunch?
- (2) Looks like an accident

which in their outer appearance do not have any structure which can function as the grammatical subject. They are claimed to be elliptical constructions in which the deletions of appropriate NP's take place late at a level of "shallow structure" or the output of the cyclic rules, but not at a level of surface structure (Schmerling 1973: 583). Another type of subjectless sentences has been recently described by Jacek Fisiak (1976) with reference to Middle English which offers structures nonexistent any more in Modern English like

- (3) For he had power of confessioun, As seyde him-self (Chaucer, C.T.A. Prol. 218)
- (4) I rede a tale, and tellet this (Gower, C. A. III. 1331)

Accepting a somewhat extended, Fillmorean framework as the basis of his analysis and interpretation Fisiak also treats such sentences as the output of the subject deletion transformation. However, he does not speculate on whether this deletion operates on the surface or just below it; in other words, he is not interested in at which place of the derivation such a transformation occurs. In both presentations the authors set conditions for constraints imposed on subject deletion and convincingly support their generalizations with ample and specific evidence from the language data themselves. Although there are different aims, different approaches and different language materials, both papers agree in their conclusive statements that the lack of subject involves some earlier process of deletion after subjectivalization.

A completely different problem is encountered when one is faced with such ME examples as:

- (5) *Me langes* (Hampole, Lyrics 41.7)  
 (6) and eet this when the hungreth (Langland, P. Pl. C. XVI. 252)  
 (7) *Thunret full throlly* (Destr. Troy 3691)

for which no structurally corresponding sentences can be found in Modern English, since

- (5a) \* *Me longs*  
 (6a) \* and eat this when thee hungers  
 (7a) \* *Thunders very severely*

are clearly ungrammatical. Such and similar examples have been nicely accounted for by assuming that subjectivalization did not take place. There is no doubt about the optional character of this transformation; in general, a deep relation, or "deep case", can be variously topicalized in the surface structure not necessarily by subjectivalization, which results in placing the case before its appropriate verb and/or making it agree with this verb in number, person and possibly gender under special conditions in some languages, e.g. Polish. *Me langes* in

(5) *Me langes, lede me to þi lyght, and festen in þe al my thoght* expresses the relation of the experiencer which is inwardly affected by a psychological state identified by the verb *longe(n)*. *Me* in this ME sentence has the same function as ModE *I* in *I long*, where the experiencer has been subjectivalized. A number of similar examples can be explained in this way, provided they realize deep cases in one form or another. Thus there is topicalization in the ME sentence but not subjectivalization as in its ModE equivalent, and as long as there are some surface NP's the sentences would not posit further difficulties. Much more tricky is the example (7), which is explained by Fisiak similarly to examples (5) and (6) (i.e. as a sentence on which no subjectivalization operated) with additional information that this lack of subjectivalization is the consequence of the fact that "the verb was not associated with any deep case" (Fisiak 1976:266). It seems to me that this postulate is rather too far going and perhaps not sufficiently grounded within the framework adopted by Fisiak for his analysis. If I understand Fillmore correctly (1968, 1971), a verb must be associated with at least one case category. Although it is not stated so categorically, the rule which expands the P constituent does not set any condition as to the optionality of case; and for the insertion of verbs no empty case frame has been mentioned either. Since for Fillmore (1968:24) "the case notions comprise a set of universal ... concepts which identify certain types of judgments human beings are capable of making about the events that are going on around them..." it is impossible to imagine that some judgment of an event is made without identifying it by some concept (i.e. case). In short, there is no proposition which consists of a verb

and zero argument.<sup>1</sup> Since this is so, there must be some notion, or concept associated with *thunret* in (7), as well as there must be some case identified by *sniwde* in an OE sentence

- (8) *norþan sniwde* (Seafarer 31)

Compare also much more numerous examples found in Polish: *grzmi, pada, leje, dzieje, zmierzchało*, etc.<sup>2</sup> Once it is assumed on theoretical grounds which provide a basis for Fillmore's case grammar that the proposition consists of a verb and at least one argument associated with it, it remains to explain the process which results in the absence of the case form in the surface.

The examples (7) and (8), and also Polish sentences, all refer to meteorological phenomena taking place in physical world which surrounds human beings. Such verbs identify certain physically observable situations and are being used in judgments people make about such situations. The verb *thunret* typically implies a sound being the effect of a discharge of atmospheric electricity, *sniwde* clearly indicates a particular kind of weather (falling snow), *dawe* denotes morning twilight, daybreak, beginning to grow light in the morning, etc.<sup>3</sup> Following Fillmore's cases I would be inclined to associate these verbs with instrument, which is "the case of the inanimate force or object causally involved in the action or state identified by the verb" (Fillmore 1968:24), "the stimulus or immediate physical cause of an event" (Fillmore 1971:376). However, it seems to me that the term ergative may be a better concept when used in the sense defined by Anderson (1971) as the initiator of some process. That these verbs have such properties is strongly corroborated by a number of examples which overtly express such notions, e.g.

- (9) *Ye cloudes thondered, any thy arowes wente abrode* (Coverdale, Ps. lxxvi[i].17)  
 (10) [*As*] *þe snow þat is sneuwyng* (Chat. d'Amour 722)  
 (11) *Hir throte, al-so whyt of hewe*  
     *As snow on braunche snowed newe* (Chaucer, R.R. 557-8)  
 (12) *I prey to god, that never dawe the day*  
     *That I ne sterve, as foule as womman may* (Chaucer, C.T.E. Merchant 2195)  
 (13) *Tyl the day dawede these damseles dausede* (Langland, P. Pl. C. XXI. 471)  
 (14) *And farewell now, the day dayes* (Towneley Pl. 55.108)  
 (15) *Forst sceal freosan* (Gnomic Verses 138.72)

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ajdukiewicz (1974: 16) "A *proposition* (in the psychological sense of the term) is any thought which is a statement of fact, i.e., states that something is so and so, or that something is not so and so".

<sup>2</sup> For the discussion see Koneczna (1958), Klemensiewicz (1969), Doros (1975).

<sup>3</sup> Some of these verbs may be used with other cases, e.g. "preachers had thundered hatred of the South", "the watery smile dawned on Joe's face", etc. (*Webster's dictionary*).

- (16) When þe forst fresep, muche chele he byd (Man in the moon 160.5)  
 (17) Whon the forst freseth foode hem bi-honeth (Langland, P. Pl. A. VIII.115)

In normal situations, however, the events identified by the verbs referring to meteorological phenomena are perfectly well understood without NP's associated with them since the verb *snow* is conceptually the same as *the snow snows*, the verb *freeze* means *the frost freezes*, and the verb *dawn* indicates *the day dawns*. It appears that the verbs under discussion may incorporate the meaning of their appropriate cases and for this reason the latter need not be expressed by syntactic constituents (cf. Fillmore 1971:378).

I thus take the position that for each verb of this kind there exists an underlying case with which it is associated and which may be left out of the surface. This deep case may be deleted as in the examples (7) and (8) where no subjectivalization takes place; it may be actualized on the surface through subjectivalization (examples 9–17), and finally, there may be pseudo-subjectivalization, which is very common, e.g.

- (18) Hit hwilum þunrap (Aelfred, Boeth. xxix §3)  
 (19) it freseth more strongly in þo contrees þan on this half (Mandeville, Trav. 84.5)  
 (20) Hit rinc and sniwe and styrme ute (Bede's Ecc. Hist. 134. 28)  
 (21) er that it dawe, I wol go crepen in by my felawe (Chaucer, C.T.A. Reve 4249)  
 (22) Within a whyle hit dawed (Malory, Arthur 984.2)

There are many interesting facts about this particular group of verbs which have been ignored in this short note. My main concern was to show that there must be an underlying case in such examples as (7) and (8) which is deleted because it is subsumed as a part of the meaning of the verb. It is clear to me that these sentences exemplify the lack of subjectivalization for the simple reason that the appropriate cases have been deleted earlier.

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