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Diachronic changes in *pro*-drop and subject pronominalization in Russian and Czech

Modern Russian and Czech differ considerably in their use of referential null subjects of finite predicates (*pro*-drop) on the one hand, and of thematic pronominal subjects on the other. According to the majority of current analyses, Russian does not seem to be a true *pro*-drop language in the same sense as Czech (cf. Franks 1995, Lindseth 1998); but see Müller (1988, 2005) and Kosta (1991) for the opposite view. *Historical* studies have pointed out an higher frequency of referential null subjects in Old Russian than in modern Russian, as well as a diachronic rise of thematic pronouns which are unmotivated by information-structural or referential factors. However, the actual time-course of the alleged changes has not been pinned down yet; e.g., Borkovskij (1968) – the most detailed treatment of the issue available – holds that Old Russian was a null subject language throughout its history, and proposes a sort of reanalysis of the relevant sentence types around the 18th century. Unfortunately, previous studies of the phenomenon failed to do full justice to the fact that discourse factors, referential properties, but also syntactic constructions like correlatives or appositions may dictate the use of a subject pronoun even in a true *pro*-drop language. Absolute frequencies of pronoun uses vs. *pro*-drop are confounded by all these variables, which are by no means indicative of grammatical development, but rather of the individual styles of given authors. What *is* informative is the *relative* frequency of zero subjects vs. subject pronouns in those cases where there was a choice of using *pro*-drop, a pronominal or, possibly, a nominal subject. The present paper analyses such relative frequencies, based on annotated samples of narrative texts from the 12th to 18th century. As a major result, it is demonstrated that the distinction between 1st and 2nd person vs. 3rd person pronouns is essential: While the amount of subject pronominalization in 1st and 2nd person is on the rise already around the 16th century, the changes in 3rd person take place only about 200 years later.

Most previous treatments assume some connection between the richness of verbal inflection and the option of dropping a pronominal subject cross-linguistically. With the

decline in frequency of past tense auxiliaries in early Old Russian and of the present tense copula somewhat later, pronominal subjects seem to appear more and more often. However, many unclear cases remain, such as instances of both auxiliary and subject pronoun in early chronicles (Lindseth 1998) and of neither auxiliary nor subject pronoun e.g. in 17th century texts (Avvakum). Czech, with *pro*-drop and a fully specified auxiliary system, forms an important reference point for comparison here.

A second line of analysis concentrates on the development of grammatical and referential properties of subject pronouns both in Russian and in Czech (see e.g. Roberts 2006 on diachronic changes in French vs. Portuguese). Grammaticalization theory (Lehmann 1995) provides important insights into the changes that occurred in 3rd person subject pronominalization, where the introduction of a new, formerly demonstrative pronoun, and its semantic bleaching into a coreference marker, may have blocked *pro*-drop in Russian. However, it is unclear how to fit Czech into the picture, where *pro*-drop continued to exist after the rise of *on/-a/-o*. Furthermore, 1st and 2nd person pronouns in Russian, which were not newly introduced, but nevertheless gradually replaced verbal (auxiliary) markers have to be treated differently. The present paper discusses the relevant changes and their theoretical consequences, using data from the Regensburg diachronic corpus of Russian, from the diachronic part of the Czech National Corpus, and from the Old Czech collections of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

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