SOME FURTHER EVIDENCE AGAINST AN IMPERSONAL PASSIVE ANALYSIS OF POLISH IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTIONS

Stefan Dyla

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

In his unpublished paper, Neubauer (1979) argues that sentences like

1. Tu się pracuje.
   here REFL works
   "There is work going on here."

2. Tej książki nigdy nie opublikowano.
   this book/GEN never NEG published/IMPERS
   "This book has never been published."

---

1 In this paper, I assume the reader's familiarity with basic tenets of Relational Grammar as advocated by Perlmutter and Postal (1974, 1977), Postal (1976, 1977), and Perlmutter (1978, to appear). No definition of grammatical relations like "Subject of", "Direct Object of", etc., will be offered here, since it is assumed in RG that grammatical relations are primitive notions of the theory. This, of course, does not mean that intuitions about Subjecthood, Direct Objecthood, etc., are not verifiable. For this purpose, a number of syntactic tests can be used, which are, in fact, syntactic rules whose applicability is restricted to Subject NP's.

2 I claim here that sentences like (1 - 2) are not subjectless at the initial stratum. To be more specific, their initial Subjects are unspecified nominals referring to humans. That this is indeed the case follows from the ungrammaticality of sentences like (i) vis-a-vis the well-formedness of sentences like (ii).

i.a. * Na podwórzu szzeką się.
   in yard/LOC barks REFL
   "There is some barking in the yard."

b.* Na podwórzu szzekano.
   in yard/LOC barked/IMPERS
   "There was some barking in the yard."

i.a. Tu się pracuje.
   here REFL works
   "There is work going on here."
which Comrie (1977) considers to be instances of Impersonal Passive in Polish, cannot be considered Passives in any sort of Relational Grammar (RG) treatment, since they involve neither promotion nor demotion of any of their nominal dependents. Although generally correct, the arguments cited by Neubauer are not particularly compelling because Quantifier Floating, which he uses as a test for final termhood, shows only that sentences like the above ones involve no demotion of Direct Object. In this paper, I will attempt to provide more evidence for Neubauer's claim by showing that such sentences involve no demotion of subject either. More precisely, I will argue here that the initial Subject of sentences like (1–2) is also their final Subject. To achieve this end, I will demonstrate that the initial Subject of sentences like (1–2) behaves exactly in the same way as other final Subjects with respect to the ability to control Equi into participial clauses which function as adverbials of time or adverbials of reason.  

Consider the following pairs of sentences:

3a. Poszedł pieszo, ponieważ nie mógł doczekać się he-went on-foot because NEG he-could to wait REFL taksówki.
taxi-cab/GEN

“He went on foot because he couldn’t wait for a taxi.”

b. Poszedł pieszo nie mogąc doczekać się taksówki.

he-went on-foot NEG beingable to wait taxi-cab/GEN

4a. Kiedy wracać do domu został pogryziony when he-was-returning to home/LOC he-got bitten przez psy.

by dog/ACC

b. Tu pracowałem.

lTur worked/IMPER3

“There was work going on here.”

Although superficially subjectless, sentences like (1–2) are assumed here to have Subjects at the final stratum, a level of representation which corresponds to that of shallow structure in transformational grammar. The lack of surface Subjects in such sentences is then said to be due to an uncontrolled deletion rule which final Subjects marked [+unspecified] human] obligatorily undergo.

* This class of participial clauses in question does not include any of those in the following examples:

i. Ulotki zostały rozsiane pocztą, wzywając naród do walki.

ii. Powracając do samego meczu, to trwało zażle czwierć minut.

iii. Nie dochodziąc do rogu ulicy jest herbaciarnia.

This follows from the fact that in none of the above examples does the participial clause function either as an adverbial of time or as an adverbial of reason.


“When he was returning home, he was bitten by a dog.”

b. Wracać do domu został pogryziony przez psy.

returning to home/LOC he-got bitten by dog/ACC

5a. Kiedy wracać do domu pogryżł go pies.

when he-was-returning to home/LOC bit him/ACC dog/NOM

“When he was returning home, a dog bit him.”

b. *Wracać do domu pogryżł go pies.

returning to home/LOC bit him/ACC dog/NOM

6a. Powiedział mi o tym ponieważ wydawałem się

he-told me/DAT about it/LOC because I seemed REFL
to be trustworthy

“He told me about it because I seemed to be trustworthy”.

b. *Powiedział mi o tym wydając się być

he-told me/DAT about it/LOC seeming REFL to be

godnym zaufania.

trustworthy

The ungrammaticality of the (b)-forms of (5–6) vis-à-vis the well-formedness of the (b)-forms of (3–4) shows that Equi into participial clauses functioning as adverbials of time or adverbials of reason can be controlled by final Subjects but not by final Direct Objects and final Indirect Objects.

Note, however, that for some speakers of Polish this variety of Equi can also be controlled by Inversion (nominals, i.e. final Indirect Objects which are Subjects at the immediately preceding stratum). Such speakers can get sentences like

7. Ułyszałem, że na przyjęciu była Małgorzata,

having-heard that at party/LOC was NOM

zrobilo mu się żal, że nic nie czyniwał

made/IMPERSONAL him/DAT REFL sorry that NEG he-decided

to go

“Having heard that Małgorzata had been at the party,

he felt sorry that he hadn’t decided to attend it.”

as well as perfectly well-formed sentences like

8. Kiedy usłyszałem, że na przyjęciu była Małgorzata,

when he-heard that at party/LOC was NOM

* This argument also works for the minority dialect. What must only be done is show that sentences like (1–2) do not involve Inversion. This possibility can be rejected on semantic grounds, as Inversion clauses are always stative and Inversion nominals are semantically Experiencers, Cognizers, etc., but never Agents, as it is the case in sentences like (1–2).
Impersonal passive analysis

12a. Ponieważ uwzględniono konieczność szybkiego because took-into-account/IMPERS necessity/ACC rapid 
opowolanina mowy potocznej, wybrano teksty mastery/GEN speech/GEN colloquial selected/IMPERS texts/ACC 
na tematy codzienne i polityczne. 
on topics everyday and political

"Since the necessity of rapid mastery of colloquial speech was taken 
to into account, texts on everyday and political topics have been selected".

b. Uwzględniając konieczność szybkiego opanowania 
taking-into-account necessity/ACC rapid mastery/GEN 
mowy potocznej, wybrano teksty 
speech/GEN colloquial selected/IMPERS texts/ACC 
na tematy codzienne i polityczne. 
on topics everyday and political

"Taking into account the necessity of rapid mastery of colloquial 
speech, texts on everyday and political topics have been selected."

The perfect well-formedness of the (b)-versions of (11–12), taken together 
with the condition on controllers of Equi into participial clauses stated in (10), 
very strongly suggests that sentences like (1–2) are not subjectless at the 
final stratum.

Now, consider the following sentence:


whistled/IMPERS

"Someone whistled".

At the initial stratum, the Subject of this sentence is a nominal referring to an 
unspecified human being.

Comrie's (1977) Impersonal Passive analysis assumes that the initial Subject 
is put en chomage. Were Comrie's analysis of sentences like (13) correct, a sentence 
like (14) should be ill-formed, as there is no candidate for the final 
Subjecthood other than the initial Subject.

14. Gwizdano nie zgadzając się z decyzją 

whistled/IMPERS NEG agreeing REFL with decision/INST 

sędziego. 

referee/GEN

"People whistled disagreeing with the referee's decision."

But (14) is perfectly well-formed, which indicates that the Impersonal Passive 
analysis makes false predictions, and simply does not work. It follows from 
the above that the initial Subject of sentences like (1–2) is also their final Subject. 
Q.E.D.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Paul Neubauer for his help and patience during the long hours of discussion on this problem. My thanks are also due to Miroslaw Nowakowski, who has read an early draft of the present paper and provided insightful comments. All remaining errors, are of course, mine.

REFERENCES