

MODIFIERS OF BARE NOUNS IN RUSSIAN

The present talk explores the advantages of the representational theory by Bouchard (2002) for the account of nominal expressions in Russian. Bouchard assumes that in determinerless constructions the determiner is absent at any level, overt or covert. In contrast to proposals by Szabolcsi (1983), Stowell (1989) or Longobardi (1994), which take all nominal arguments to be necessarily headed by a determiner, Bouchard argues that bare NPs can function as arguments and be referring under certain semantic/ pragmatic conditions (cf. Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 1996, Engelhardt 1999, among others). This semantics-driven approach seems particularly appealing for the analysis of determinerless Slavic languages like Russian or Polish, for whose bare NPs no consensus has been reached in literature till today. While some maintain that these languages lack determiners altogether (see Corver 1990, Zlatić 1997, Lyons 1999, Bošković 2005), others claim that a null DP is a viable option for Slavic languages (e.g. Rappaport 1998, Trugman 2004, 2007a/b, Pereltsvaig 2007).

This talk starts with investigating semantic Number encoding in nominal expressions. It shows that Russian does not neatly align either with Germanic or Romance languages explored in Bouchard (2002), exhibiting mixed properties with respect to the tests proposed therein. On the surface, Russian seems to pair with English rather than French, since nouns are overtly inflected for number (in addition to other ϕ -features), and there are no overt, number-bearing articles in the language. This predicts highly limited noun omission in Russian, as in English. Yet, this prediction is falsified by the data, as shown in (1):

(1) Mne ne nraivjatsja želtje rozy, ja ljublju krasnye.

‘I don’t like yellow roses; I love red (ones).’

In a similarly intriguing way, Number encoding on N is expected to preclude postnominal bare adjectives, as happens in English. This contention is also defied by Slavic data—Russian scientific terms discussed in Trugman (2007a) allow for bare postnominal adjectives:

(2) žavoronok stepnoj bol’šoj
lark field.adj large
'a large field lark'

These facts call for a modification of the representational theory, divorcing morphological number marking on Slavic nouns from semantic Number interpretation. In particular, it is argued that mandatory morphological number marking on all agreeing elements of a nominal expression, including the head noun (cf. ‘unavoidability of morphological marking’ in Deprez 2005), may but does not automatically imply semantic Number-encoding. We show that some morphologically singular NPs, being an unmarked form, can be actually nonspecified for semantic Number, similarly to their French counterparts (see Bouchard 2003:283). This seems to be the case in modifying *N1 de N2* constructions in French and *N+GenP* in Russian, where the nominal in genitive usually surfaces in unmarked Number form, as in (3):

- (3) French: a. les dents de cheval de Juliette (from Bouchard 2002, (30a))
Juliette’s horse teeth
Russian b. Mašina poxodka baleriny (from Trugman 2003, (1c))
Masha’s step ballet-dancer.GEN ‘Masha’s ballet-dancer step’

Both underlined modifiers do not refer to either some horse or a ballet-dancer, notwithstanding their singular number marking. Instead, they plainly characterize the head noun, similarly to *NN* compounds in English (see the translations in (3)).

We further demonstrate how such a modification of Bouchard’s theory allows us to accommodate some empirical facts that initially appeared to invalidate it (see (2)). Specifically,

Russian scientific terms allow for postnominal bare adjectives because the latter merge with Ns underspecified for semantic Number (and establish a whole-to-whole modificational relationship with N in postposition). Such NP expressions denote kinds and are predicted to be grammatical as arguments of kind predicates, as discussed in Trugman (2007a). On the other hand, scientific terms with prenominal adjectives, which are less restricted in distribution (see Kovtunova 1969, Iomdin 1990), are taken to merge with Number-bearing Ns and can also denote instantiations of kinds:

- (4) a. Šalfej muskatnyj isčez iz srednej polosy Rossii. (Trugman, 2007a, (11a))
 sage muscat.adj disappeared from middle region Russia.gen
 'The muscat sage died out in the middle region of Russia.'
- b. Muskatnyj šalfej zamenili v recepte na majoran.
 muscat.adj sage was replaced in a recipe by majoran

This analysis of scientific terminology with alternating pre- and post-N classifying adjectives seems to be conceptually superior to the one proposed in (Trugman 2007a) since it does not postulate a null Det, nor does it involve a roll-up N-to-D movement via adjunction to intermediate As in Spec, NPs, which is poorly motivated.

We also show how distinct referential properties of determinerless N+Adjs scientific terms, in (2), and equally determinerless GenPs, in (3b), are derived in the representational framework and what conditions license such bare NPs in Russian. We extend our account to non-referring possessive modifiers, as in (5) (modified after Trugman, 2007b, (1b)) and argue that they merge with non-atomized Ns on a par with other modifiers discussed above.

- (5) Tvoj mamen'kin synok mne dejstvuet na nervy!
 Your mummy_{POSS} sonny me_{DAT} acts on nerves
 'Your mama's boy gets on my nerves.'

To conclude, recognizing modifier merge with nouns unspecified for semantic Number appears to allow for a uniform account of three morphologically distinct types of N modifiers in Russian—postnominal adjectives (2&4a), modificational GenPs (3b), and modificational possessives (5). Moreover, the present approach seems to accomplish this task without postulating the obligatory null Determiner projection in Russian.

Selected references:

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