

DISCOURSE FUNCTIONS OF POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS IN RUSSIAN

Two main functions of possessive pronouns (PossPrn) in Russian are identifying the possessor (*моя собака* ‘my dog’) and filling an argument slot of a noun (*ее возвращение* ‘her return’). Sometimes possessive pronouns, especially the reflexive ones, bear additional components of meaning (see [Paducheva 1983: 6-7]). This paper focuses on cases when a PossPrn doesn’t have such additional components, and yet the possessor is unambiguously determined by the context. In such cases the PossPrn seems to be redundant:

- (1) *Он_i прищурил строгие серые глаза свои_i...*

Lit. *He_i squinted his_i strict grey eyes...*

One could suppose that such usages of PossPrn are nothing more than just duplication of information, which is a normal property of human languages; however, two observations can be made here. First, possessive markers are well known to be used in discourse functions (for examples from Uralic and Turkic languages see [Fraurud 2001, Nikolaeva 2003]). And second, if we consider a corpus of such “redundant” usages of PossPrns, we may notice that their distribution is not random but rather can be reduced to certain contexts. Two main functions of possessive pronouns can be distinguished in these contexts: (i) maintaining the referential coherence of the text, and (ii) creating of additional focus of attention.

One of the marked positions of a possessive pronoun is the position before its antecedent:

- (2) [*Речь свою_i*] *шкаф-Петрович_i произносил с большим затруднением...* [*Коваль Ю. Самая легкая лодка в мире*]

‘It is with great difficulties that Shkaf-Petrovich was making his speech...’ (Lit. [Speech **his_i**] **Shkaf-Petrovich_i** pronounced with great difficulties.)

Such examples apparently violate the Principle of referential compactness as formulated in [Paducheva 2004:355]:

“A referentially autonomous NP (in particular, a NP the reference of which is known to the speaker) must be introduced into denotative space of the utterance earlier than its referentially dependent NPs.”

According to this principle, the referentially dependent noun *речь* ‘speech’ should be introduced after the referent which expresses its Agent (*шкаф-Петрович* ‘Shkaf-Petrovich’). When this principle is being violated, it is the possessive pronoun which indicates to the hearer that the referentially underspecified NP will be specified later on. Most of such usages of PossPrns only seem redundant if we consider contexts as a whole; but as soon as we take into account the unfolding of the discourse in time (i.e. the linear order of elements), they turn out to be the first markers indicating the possessor or filling an argument slot, and are thus ensuring the **referential coherence** of the text.

Another typical context for “redundant” PossPrn are NPs with modifiers. In [Podlesskaya, Rakhilina 1999: 515] reflexive PossPrns in such contexts, being used with body-part nouns, are said to indicate that the body-part deserves a special characteristic. In examples like (1) the reflexive PossPrn has the meaning ‘inherent to X, characteristic of X’. It serves as an operator which attracts the hearer’s **attention** to the whole NP. On the semantic level, this operator creates a new predication: ‘X (Subject = Possessor) has strict grey eyes.’ As a result, the presupposed status of the possessive relation switches to asserted. The hypothesis that a PossPrn may have different meaning in NPs containing modifiers is partially supported by evidence from other languages, e.g. Kosraean (a Micronesian language), where according to [Fox 1981: 339] different possessive constructions are used depending on whether an NP has any modifiers.

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