

DIACHRONIC ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH SYNTAX IN RELATION TO NEWSPAPER STYLE

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Abstract. The paper is devoted to the study of diachronic syntax in the Economist magazine at the level of composite and semi-composite sentences. The purpose of this research is to study functioning and interaction of composite and semi-composite sentences in modern English newspaper style, as well as identifying trends in the development of syntactic structures. Additionally, problems of definition, form and semantics, criteria of classification of composite and semi-composite sentences were identified. The relevance of this study is justified by the fact that there is no sufficiently clear and complete picture of English newspaper style syntax as the studies are mainly based on the texts belonging to belles-lettres style

1 Introduction

Syntax has been at the core of linguistic studies over the past decades. The problem of composite and semi-composite sentences is observed by many scholars however the studies are mainly based on the analysis of texts belonging to belles-lettres style thus there is still no sufficiently clear and complete understanding of diachronic syntactic change in English newspaper style at the level of composite and semi-composite sentences. The object of this paper is to study structure, functioning and interaction of composite and semi-composite sentences in modern newspaper style, as well as to identify trends in the development of syntactic structures in the Economist magazine of 1950 and 2017.

A sentence is the immediate integral unit of speech built up of words according to a definite syntactic pattern and distinguished by a contextually relevant communicative purpose [1]. The assignment of the sentence context to reality is carried out by a syntactic category – predication. The functional essence of predication has hitherto been understood in linguistics as the expression of the relation of the utterance (sentence) to reality, or, in more explicit presentation, as the expression of the relation between the content of the sentence and reality [2]. According to Russian scholars predication is understood as referring the utterance to reality. Holding the traditional opinion that a proposition in natural language consists minimally of a distinguished nominal expression referred to as the “subject” and another expression referred to as the “predicate” M. Baltin considers predication as the relation between these two constituents [3].

The question about structural types of sentences is quite controversial [4]. Scholars distinguish two or three basic structural types of sentences. In the dictionary by J.C.

Richards, the author clearly distinguishes between simple “as a sentence with one predicate” and “composite - all other sentences” [5]. According to D. Crystal, simple and multiple sentences are clearly differentiated, which include composite and semi-composite sentences [6].

Some foreign researchers define semi-predicative constructions mainly as one of the clause type [7]. But it is noteworthy that there is also no unity in terminology in relation to semi-composite constructions, for example, a number of researchers use the term “small clause” [8]; others divide sentences into composite and simple sentences, but separate clauses of several kinds: a finite clause and a non-finite clause, S. Greenbaum, A. Downing, also distinguish between non-finite clauses. It should be noted that only structures with an impersonal form of the verb (non-finite clause) and verbless clause are included [9; 10].

According to a Russian professor M.Ya. Blokh depending on the predicative complexity, sentences can feature one predicative line or several (more than one) predicative lines; in other words, sentences may be, respectively, “monopredicative”, which are also called “simple”, “semi-predicative”, which are “semi-composite” and “polypredicative” – “composite” [1]. From this point onward the authors of this paper apply the terms introduced by professor Blokh.

Clause linkage strategies are traditionally divided into two basic types: subordination and coordination. Coordination connects clauses as syntactically equal; by subordination one clause is categorically dominated by the other. Subordination is usually identified on the basis of a number of criteria such as dependency, clausal embedding and possibly the type of semantic relationship linking the two clauses.

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English grammarians consider composite sentences built up on the principle of subordination as complex, while composite sentences built up on the principle of coordination are called compound [1].

The methodological framework of this research is based on the main theoretical positions, principles and scientific apparatus developed in theoretical grammar.

2 Results and Discussion

As part of this study a diachronic investigation of the syntactic units was conducted. The units were selected by a continuous sampling method from the Economist magazine. The volume of the selected units included 10567 sentences from the Economist magazine of 1950 and 10618 sentences from the Economist magazine of 2017.

The results of this research determined that the texts from the Economist magazine are characterized by their structural complexity. The syntax of this magazine is notable for the abundant use of semi-predicative and poly-predicative sentences. Syntax of both time periods is characterized by a high percentage of composite sentences that in the 1950 edition constitute 66% and modern edition – 76%. What is more syntax of the 1950 Economist magazine has 70% of complex sentences with subordinate clauses while the 2017 Economist magazine has 82% of the sentence type mentioned above.

The proportion of clauses and changes to which complex sentences were subject are presented in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2.

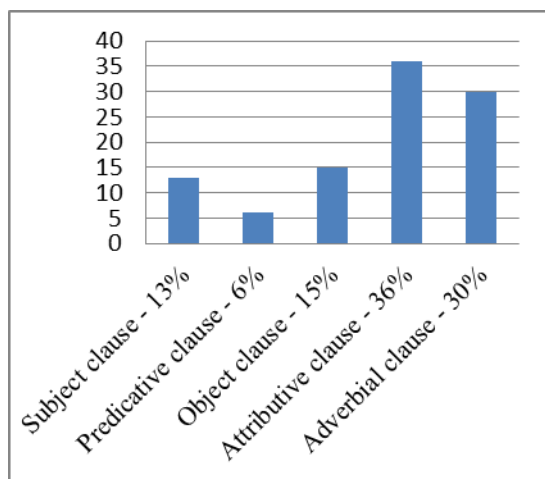


Fig. 1. Proportion of subordinate clause types in complex sentences (The Economist, 1950)

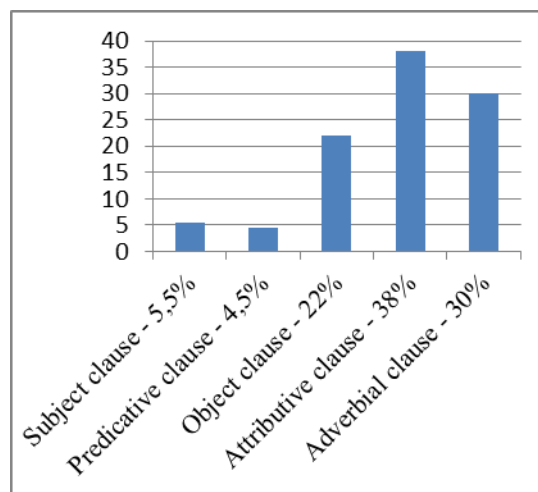


Fig. 2. Proportion of subordinate clause types in complex sentences (The Economist, 2017)

Taking the functional classification of complex sentences as a basis for the study it was discovered that the Economist magazine has a high percentage of attributive clauses namely, in the syntax of the magazines of 1950 and 2017 their number is 36% and 38% respectively. It is worth noting that a significant number of attribute clauses violate the structure of the main sentence, thus adding additional information or explaining to the reader information about the antecedent, for example: *After accounting for other factors, firms that bore their largest shareholder's name enjoyed a return on assets (ROA) that was three percentage points higher than other companies* [The Economist. 2017. August 19th].

This is accounted for the fact that there is the need to state a large number of facts in one sentence.

It is noteworthy that the increase in the number of complex sentences in the 2017 magazine is due to the fact that the Economist not only describes the events, but also analyzes them, i.e. the articles of modern edition are analytical in nature [11]. Semantics of complex sentences presupposes that these sentences not only contain information about events, but also reflect relationship between them. Thus, complex sentences contribute to such a logical description of a thought so that a reader has time to understand further path to logical consequences arising from it.

Syntax of the analyzed magazines of 1950 accounts for 30% of compound sentences, and modern edition – 18%, so a tendency to simplification is observed. As an example of the most common type of a compound sentence in the Economist magazine, the following construction can be provided: *The directors have invited Mr. W. E. Eadie to join the board and his name will come before the annual general meeting for election* [The Economist, 1950. October 21st].

A compound sentence contains at least two independent clauses and it is structured multivariably. It can comprise two or more coordinate clauses which can be joined syndetically, asyndetically (without connectives) or in a mixed way. The texts of the magazine under analyses of 1950 are peculiar for the prevalence of

syndetic connection. The modern edition is noticeable for the increase in the percentage of sentences with asyndetic connection with the rise from 33% to 54%. From the point of view of the relationship between coordinate clauses, scholars distinguish four kinds of coordinate clauses: copulative, adversative, disjunctive and causative-consecutive. The highest percent of asyndetic connection accounts for copulative clauses, for example: *The European Commission's economic-sentiment index is at its highest since 2011; euro-zone unemployment is at its lowest since 2009* [11]. The Economist. 2017. August 19th.

The increase in the number of sentences with asyndetic connection can be explained by the tendency towards a more economical use of newspaper space in modern newspapers.

Proportion of clause types in compound sentences is demonstrated in Fig. 3 and Fig. 4.

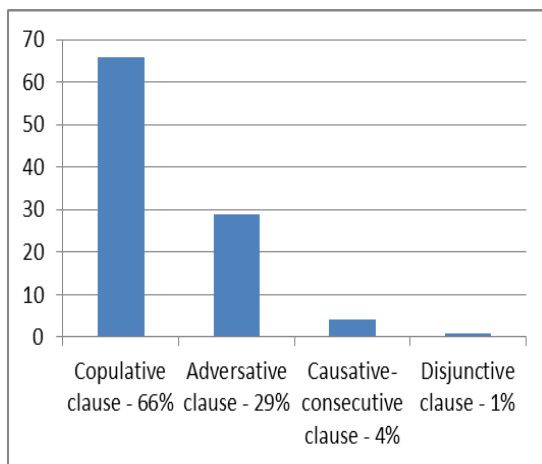


Fig.3. Proportion of clause types in compound sentences (The Economist, 1950)

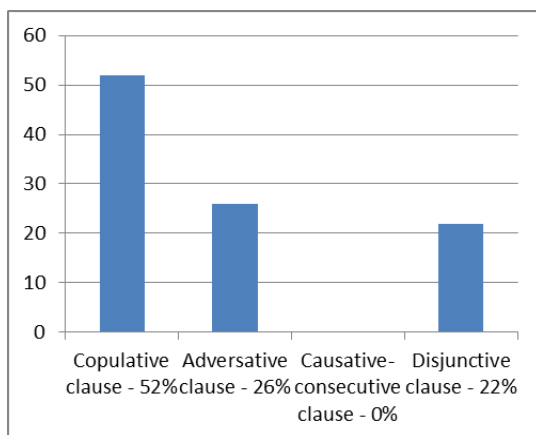


Fig.4. Proportion of clause types in compound sentences (The Economist, 2017)

As it can be observed from Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 copulative type of connecting coordinate clauses is the most widely used. Copulative clauses possess the most common meaning and in this case semantic relations between sentences can be various. It is notable that causative-consecutive clauses are not being used nowadays owing

to the fact that there are subordinate clauses with such semantics introduced by conjunctions as, because, since etc. *The directors have invited Mr. W. E. Eadie to join the board and his name will come before the annual general meeting for election* [The Economist, 1950. October 21st].

When analyzing the Economist magazine of 2017 it was discovered that syntactic structures are getting more expanded due to the introduction of semi-predicative constructions. It is notable that in the Economist of 2017 the percentage of semi-predicative constructions is higher than in 1950 magazines, 54% and 44% respectively.

The difference between composite and semi-composite sentences lies in the degree of independence of predicative lines: in a composite sentence predicative lines are expressed separately, each of them has its own subject and predicate, therefore these sentences are fully-predicative. Semi-composite sentence can be described as a sentence with more than one predicative lines which are expressed in fusion. Semi-composite sentences can be subordinate and coordinate [12].

The highest percent of all semi-predicative sentences is accounted for subordinate clauses due to the fact that constructions with infinitive, gerund and participle perform a specifying function and describe temporal, spatial, causal-resultive parameters of denotative situation.

According to M.Ya. Blokh subordinate semi-predicative sentences fall into a number of subtypes. Their basic division is dependent on the character of predicative fusion: this may be effected either by the process of position-sharing (word-sharing), or by the process of direct linear expansion. The sentences based on position-sharing fall into those of subject-sharing and those of object-sharing. The sentences based on semi-predicative linear expansion fall into those of attributive complication, adverbial complication, and nominal-phrase complication.

Semi-predicative sentence with attributive complication is the most frequently observed type in the Economist magazine of 1950 and 2017. On the one hand, these constructions by composition and semantics are similar to a sentence; on the other hand, they are more compact and economical than the corresponding fully predicative units. For example: *The newspaper had a bankruptcy agreement with the government of the United States* [13]. Furthermore object-sharing constructions in the Economist magazine of 1950 take 17% as well as the Economist of 2017 take 17%. The third place is occupied by constructions with nominal-phrase complication: 15% in the 1950 Economist and 16% in the 2017 Economist.

3 Conclusions

According to the results of the study syntax of both time periods is characterized by a high percentage of polypredicative structures with subordinate clauses prevailing. The increase in the percentage of complex sentences in the modern edition is due to the fact that

modern articles offer insight and opinion, give additional details to news, focus on good surveys.

As regards compound sentences there is a tendency to simplification, since asyndetic method of joining parts of compound sentences predominate in the modern edition, which can be explained by the tendency to more economical use of newspaper space.

Comparing syntax of texts belonging to the two time periods, we came to the conclusion that in the articles from the Economist magazine of 2017 we can observe a more frequent use of semi-composite sentences that contribute to a more compressed, vivid description of the events, which indicate that on the syntagmatic level, there is a tendency to simplification.

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