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THE OBLIGATORIUM OF UNEMPHATIC
PRONOUN SUBJECTS IN THE GERMANIC LANGUAGES

It is common knowledge that one of the important differences between the modern Germanic languages and most other well-known languages is in the use of unemphatic (personal) pronoun subjects. In most Slavic languages, for instance, unemphatic pronoun subjects are usually omitted, whereas in the modern Germanic languages, they are best described as obligatory, unless the subject is expressed otherwise. E. g. the Slovenian *prihajam* 'venio' (without overt subject NP) can be translated into English as *I am coming*, containing the overt subject *I*.

The present paper discusses the origin of unemphatic pronoun subjects' obligatorium in the Germanic languages.

(I) There exist five hypotheses on the origin of the obligatory pronoun subjects in the Germanic languages (cf. Kuen 1956):

(1.1) Koegel 1882, and later many others concurring (most recently Strunk 1975: 321), saw the reason for the obligatorium of unemphatic pronoun subjects in the indistinctness of certain person markers in finite verbs.

(1.2) Baesecke 1919 ascribed the obligatorium of unemphatic pronoun subjects to the latter's loss of weight in the Germanic languages.

(1.3) Wartburg 1943 connected the obligatorium of unemphatic pronoun subjects (in German only) with the inclination of native speakers of German towards pleonasm.

(1.4) Schwarz 1951 mentioned the possibility that the Germanic languages had borrowed the obligatorium of unemphatic pronoun subjects from the neighbouring Romance languages.

(1.5) Kuen 1956 saw in the obligatorium of unemphatic pronoun subjects a trait of native speakers of the Germanic languages, who were action-oriented, and therefore believed that every activity originates in an acting subject.

My criticism of the above hypotheses is that they do not take into account the following relevant facts based on the Gothic, Old High German, and Northumbrian material:

(2.1) The GOTHIC pronoun subjects were investigated by Schulze 1924, and he concluded that there was a tendency towards a more frequent use of pronoun subjects in Biblical Gothic dependent clauses, than in the Greek original; the same tendency was much weaker in Gothic main clauses.

(2.2) The OLD HIGH GERMAN facts (known partly since Held 1903, and especially since Eggenberger 1961):

(2.2.1) The pronoun subjects were almost obligatory in main clauses characterised by normal word order (= pronoun subject before finite verb, the two not necessarily in contact) and in most connective-introduced dependent clauses.

Since connective-introduced dependent clauses are also characterised by normal word order, (2.2.1) can be reformulated as

(2.2.1)' The pronoun subjects were almost obligatory in clauses characterised by normal word order.

(2.2.2) In main clauses characterised by inverted word order, there was only a tendency towards the obligatorium of pronoun subjects. (This statement does not apply to questions characterised by inverted word order, seeing that the material does not allow any precise statement about questions.)

(2.2.3) In main clauses characterised by inverted word order, the pronoun subjects were more frequent in the first and second persons than in the third persons.

The above three points (2.2.1—3) refer only to the prose texts Isidor and Tatian, and to the pronoun subjects accompanied by finite verbs, excepting the first person plural, which is (for good reasons) a special case with respect to pronoun subjects in Old High German. The pronoun subject of the imperative, likewise disregarded here, is discussed in Orešnik (forthcoming).

The presentation of facts sub (2.2) above, the result of a rereading of Eggenberger 1961, especially of his chapter on Isidor, supersedes the corresponding portion of Orešnik 1984, which work is therefore replaced in toto by the present paper.

(2.3) The NORTHUMBRIAN pronoun subjects were investigated by Berndt 1956, and he concluded that the use of pronoun subjects in Northumbrian was more frequent in the first and second persons than in the third persons.

The facts mentioned sub (2) above refer to emphatic as well as to unemphatic pronoun subjects. This, however, is not likely to hinder our study of unemphatic pronoun subjects. Consider Rosengren's (1974) results concerning the frequency of pronoun subjects in written standard Spanish (a language lacking the obligatorium of pronoun subjects); Rosengren shows (1974: 68, 131) that *yo* 'I' comes out as more often expressed than *él, ella* 'he, she,' regardless of whether their emphatic usage is included in the statistics or not.

(II) I now propose to account for the facts mentioned sub (2) above.

In what follows, I will base my remarks on the Old High German material, which offers the most hints for the solution of our problem. The Gothic and the Northumbrian facts stated sub (2.1) and (2.3) above, point in the same direction, but are of smaller depth, in the Gothic case probably because the material does not allow deeper insights, in the Northumbrian case either for the same reason, or the pertinent investigations have not been precise enough.

We can begin (a) with the observation that the pronoun subjects' obligatorium (2.2.1) and the observed difference among the verbal persons (2.2.3) are in complementary distribution, and (b) with the known fact that the obligatorium (2.2.1) was an innovation of the Germanic languages. On the basis of this, I suggest that the difference among the verbal persons (2.2.3) represents the inherited state of affairs, partly (i. e. with non-inverted pronoun subjects) covered up by the obligatorium (2.2.1).

The hypothesis assumes, then, such a state in the pre-literary development of the Germanic languages in which (A) there was no obligatorium of unemphatic pronoun subjects, and (B) the difference among verbal persons (2.2.3) obtained everywhere, both under normal and inverted word orders.

The assumption (A) is here deemed indisputable. We turn to (B).

To account for the difference among verbal persons (2.2.3), it is necessary, I believe, to assume that the addition of an unemphatic pronoun subject to the finite verb is technically a STRENGTHENING. — The theory of strengthenings (and weakenings) was first developed in the so-called NATURAL PHONOLOGY by the American linguist David Stampe in the sixties. Later, it was applied to morphology as well, notably by the Austrian(-based) linguists Dressler and Mayerthaler, and by their DDR-colleague Wurzel. (For the bibliography, see Dressler 1985.) In my opinion, the theory is applicable in syntax as well, and it is of course with the latter that we are dealing here.

Strengthenings have been defined as linguistic changes aimed at facilitating the task of the hearer in the communicative situation, that is, at facilitating the decoding of messages. Therefore, strengthenings are also called CLARIFICATIONS. Here belong, for instance, all periphrastic constructions. Our unemphatic pronoun subjects also belong here. They are clarifications in the sense that they make it unnecessary to compute the unexpressed subjects from the context and/or from the communicative situation (cf. Rein 1961: 193).

A characteristic trait of strengthenings is that they first spread — if at all — into the so-called STRONG positions. Hence, a possible explanation of the difference among verbal persons (2.2.3) is that the non-third persons may be felt as 'stronger' than the third persons, for which reason unemphatic pronoun subjects, being strengthenings, spread quicker into the first and second persons than into the third persons.

From a different angle, it is also worth pointing out that the least marked items are least likely to change. As for instance Benveniste had

insisted, and many others concurred, the third person is the least marked verbal person. Consequently it should be the third person that is the least likely to become strengthened, i. e. in our case, to accept additional syntactic encoding by aid of an unemphatic pronoun subject. As a parallel I can mention the known fact that the third person singular present indicative in modern English has been the least of all verbal persons willing to give up its old morphological encoding (namely its ending -s).

The theory of strengthenings makes at least three empirically verifiable predictions, in our case:

(3.1) Seeing that the literary language favours constructions that are clarifications, to a greater extent than does the colloquial language, it can be predicted that the literary language will utilise unemphatic pronoun subjects to a greater extent than the colloquial language. As corroboration, consider the following detail which demonstrates that the obligatorium of unemphatic pronoun subjects is laxer in non-standard speech. As is well known, in a number of German dialects, the sound laws have eliminated the inverted unemphatic pronoun subject *du*, e. g. *kommst du* > *kommste* > *kommst*, but those dialects do little to remedy the situation, i. e. to reintroduce an unemphatic pronoun subject in such cases.

(3.2) In our hypothesis, there is nothing to tell why the difference among the verbal persons (2.2.3) should obtain in the Germanic languages only. The hypothesis, if anything, predicts that the same state of affairs will obtain in ALL languages that lack obligatory pronoun subjects. And indeed, in so far as the grammatical literature about the languages that lack the pronoun subjects' obligatorium makes statements about the difference among the verbal persons, that literature asserts exactly this: the use of unemphatic pronoun subjects is more frequent in non-third than in third persons. I know of such statements for classical Greek (Schwyzer 1950: 187—8), for Latin (Hofmann-Szantyr 1965: 173—4), for Spanish (Rosengren 1974). — I am not referring to the morphological verbal persons, but to semantic ones: the honorific pronouns of address are included irrespective of the formal verbal person that they combine with. — Rosengren's exact statistical data on Spanish are very much like Eggenberger's for Old High German, but little can be built on this circumstance, seeing that Eggenberger's sample is essentially smaller than Rosengren's so that the similarities may be due to chance.

(3.3) There is nothing in our hypothesis to tell why the strengthening of verbal persons should involve pronoun subjects only. The hypothesis, if anything, predicts that all kinds of syntactic strengthenings, if they critically involve verbal persons, first appear in the non-third persons, and spread only more slowly to the third persons. Consider periphrastic constructions, which are typical strengthenings. With those, our hypothesis ought to be relatively easily verified in practice, given the wealth of periphrastic constructions in the languages of the world. However, the pertinent syntactic studies (can) only seldom reach such depth that the difference among verbal persons would become evident. I know at present of only one periphrastic construction that has been scrutinised in suffi-

oient detail, and that is the German perfect tense, e. g. *ich habe gelesen*. It can indeed be seen from the statistics in Hauser-Suida & Hoppe-Beugel 1972 and in Latzel 1977 (the two monographs are devoted to the use of the perfect and preterite tenses in standard German) that the use of the perfect tense is almost invariably more frequent in the non-third persons than in the third persons, and conversely for the synthetic preterite tense, *ich las*. These data are promising, and should stimulate further research in this direction.

To summarise, (3.1—3) above support the theory of unemphatic pronoun subjects being cases of strengthening.

There is nothing in our explanation of the difference among verbal persons (2.2.3) to preclude the existence of unemphatic pronoun subjects in all languages that lack the obligatorium of pronoun subjects. Thus the prediction is that unemphatic pronoun subjects do obtain in all such languages. It is in fact the case that unemphatic pronoun subjects are reported from a variety of languages and dialects. Examples: spoken Slovenian (my observation, but cf. also Toporišič 1976: 242) standard Italian (Rohlf's 1949 § 451).

In my opinion, the sporadic use of unemphatic pronoun subjects has arisen on analogy with other words. As is well known, most words of any language can be used both emphatically and unemphatically, as the need arises. I suggest that this state of affairs was extended, by analogy, to the emphatic pronoun subjects, sporadically making them utilisable also when they needed no emphasis.

As can be seen from the above, there is nothing in the explanation of the difference among verbal persons (2.2.3) to predict that that difference will be limited to inverted pronoun subjects, as it is in Old High German. On the contrary, the expectation is that the difference will obtain with both inverted and non-inverted subjects. Witness the state of affairs in the languages enumerated sub (3.2) above. The limitation of the difference among the verbal persons to inverted subjects that obtains in Old High German (see 2.2.3 above) must be of a different origin. I suggest, I repeat, that the limitation to inverted subjects is due to the obligatorium of non-inverted pronoun subjects that covered up the difference among verbal persons.

(III) What remains to be discussed, is an explanation of the OBLIGATORIUM of unemphatic pronoun subjects in the Germanic languages. I begin with my following observation:

(4) The languages and dialects in which the use of unemphatic pronoun subjects is obligatory or almost obligatory, can be divided into two classes:

(4.1) The languages and dialects that owe the said obligatorium to the indistinctness of some of the accompanying finite verbs. An example is standard Russian. The unemphatic pronoun subjects of such languages are typically accented.

(4.2) The languages and dialects that owe the said obligatorium to some reason or reasons other than the indistinctness of some of the accompanying finite verbs. Here pertain the standard Germanic languages, standard French, a number of French dialects, Rhaeto-Romance of Switzerland, Friulian, and a number of northern Italian dialects. The obligatorium of those languages arose at a time when they possessed (and some of them still possess) mutually distinct verbal endings. Consider the following observation made by Kuen (1956) as proof that the indistinctness of certain verbal endings cannot have been the prime motor behind the obligatorium of pronoun subjects in French: at the time when the said obligatorium arose, Spanish possessed more mutually indistinct verbal endings than French, yet the latter, not Spanish, developed the obligatorium of pronoun subjects. — The unemphatic pronoun subjects of the enumerated languages are typically not accented.

Given the above observation (4), I suggest (elaborating Baesecke 1919, cf. 1.2 above) that there is a causal relationship between the obligatorium of pronoun subjects and their unaccentedness, in the Germanic languages, such that the unaccentedness caused the obligatorium, as will be explained below.

As is well known, the unemphatic pronoun subjects of the Germanic languages (with the possible exception of Gothic, whose situation is not clear in this respect) have been unaccented throughout literary times. Unaccented pronoun subjects were even assumed for Common Germanic, by Streitberg (1896) 1943: 165, Meillet 1908—9: 90, and Kluge 1913: 101—2, among others. More recently, the pertinent evidence from the old Germanic languages has been discussed in Hopper 1975: 33—6, with references, especially to Kuhn 1933.

I will now address the question of the origin of the subject pronouns' unaccentedness.

I assume that the unaccentedness of pronoun subjects first developed in connective-introduced dependent clauses, in which the (sporadically used) unemphatic pronoun subjects lost their accent through the assimilation of that accent to the lack/weakness of accent in the immediately preceding unaccented or weakly accented connective. (As is well known, the prevailing word order in connective-introduced dependent clauses containing pronoun subjects, at the beginning of the literary period, was, connective — pronoun subject — the rest, so that, in such clauses, the pronoun subject was almost invariably preceded by the connective. Example: *Hildebrandlied* 43 *dat du habes heme* 'dass du hast zu Hause.' For the word order of the subject in Old High German dependent clauses, see Wunder 1965: 485, 524.)

Thus two conditions seem to have to obtain in connective-introduced dependent clauses for the loss of accent to take place in the unemphatic pronoun subjects: (a) strong prevalence of the word order, connective — pronoun subject — the rest, and (b) the unaccentedness/weakly accentedness of the connective. — It must be assumed that the unemphatic pronoun subjects of the Germanic languages (except possibly Gothic) lost their accent before literary times.

Beside being unaccented, the unemphatic pronoun subjects have also been redundant; redundant in the sense that languages can do without them, in that the information contained in them can in most instances be computed from the context and/or from the communicative situation (cf. Rein 1961: 193).

As the next stage in the development of pronoun subjects' obligatorium, I suggest that sporadic unaccented pronoun subjects became more or less obligatory, in the dependent clauses introduced by an unaccented (weakly accented) connective. I propose to explain this with my observation that redundant unaccented words tend to spread from the locus of original usage, and to become obligatory, or almost obligatory. By way of example, consider the spread of the pre-infinitival particle English *to* (German *zu*, Danish *at*, etc.). There is a comparable spread of unaccented pre-infinitival particles in Romance languages.

Most dependent clauses not introduced by a connective still lacked the obligatorium of unemphatic pronoun subjects as late as Otfriid (Eggenberger 1961: 51—4).

From connective-introduced dependent clauses, the now obligatory pronoun subjects began to spread into main clauses, as can be expected since unemphatic pronoun subjects had received the character of redundant unaccented words. Probably the situation in dependent clauses supported the spread of unaccented pronoun subjects especially into those main clauses characterised by normal word order, seeing that, in dependent clauses, the subject likewise preceded the verb (although the subject and the verb were not necessarily in contact, but the same held true of some main clauses).

(IV) We are now in a position to answer the following questions:

(5.1) Why were the inverted (non-obligatory) unemphatic pronoun subjects more frequent in the non-third than in the third persons?

Because the use of unemphatic pronoun subjects was technically a strengthening, and strengthenings spread earlier to non-third than to third persons.

(5.2) Why were the inverted unemphatic pronoun subjects not obligatory?

Because the obligatorium arose under normal word order, and had not yet spread into inverted word order by the time of Isidor and Tatian.

(5.3) Why were the unemphatic pronoun subjects of those clauses characterised by normal word order obligatory?

• Because the obligatorium arose under normal word order in the first place.

(5.4) How did that obligatorium arise?

See the extensive explanation above.

(V) As the last stage of the development of unemphatic pronoun subjects I posit the following: in the main clauses characterised by inverted word order, the redundant unaccented pronoun subjects became obligatory even in the main clauses characterised by the inversion of the subject. (The completion of the spread of pronoun subjects qua redundant unaccented word.) Witness the state of affairs in the modern Germanic languages.

Essentially the same stages of development as in the present paper have been tentatively assumed by Eggenberger (1961: 143) »Der Weg des SP [= Subjektspronomen, JO] beim Eindringen in die geschriebene Sprache könnte also so skizziert werden, dass es seine Position zuerst im NS [= Nebensatz, JO] festigte, hernach in der geraden Wortfolge des HS [= Hauptsatz, JO] (und zugleich zuerst in der 1. und 2. Person, mit deutlicher Tendenz aber auch in der 3. Person), zuletzt auch im HS generell, nur dass das SP in den restlichen Fällen nach das Verbum zu stehen kam.«

For lack of evidence, nothing can be said about the spread of pronoun subjects in clause types other than those discussed here. Anyway, I assume that the old Germanic languages and dialects other than Old High German and Northumbrian have also undergone the changes just described, likewise mostly in pre-literary times, whereas the Gothic situation probably reflects the initial stage of the development.

My hypothesis about the origin of unemphatic pronoun subjects' obligatorium in the Germanic languages predicts that the use of such subjects, if they are unaccented, does not depend upon whether the accompanying finite verbs contain any person markers or not. This prediction is borne out: obligatory unemphatic pronoun subjects are now used in languages such as German and Icelandic, whose finite verbs to a great extent do display person markers, as well as in languages such as Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, whose finite verbs do not any longer display person markers.

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S a ž e t a k

**OBAVEZNA UPOTREBA NENAGLAŠENIH ZAMJENIČKIH SUBJEKATA
U GERMANSKIM JEZICIMA**

Autor proučava porijeklo obaveznog nenaglašenog zamjениčkog subjekta u germanskim jezicima. Polazeći od pet postojećih hipoteza o porijeklu tog subjekta koje su iznijeli mnogi lingvisti od kraja 19. stoljeća do 1956., autor kritički pobija te hipoteze oslanjajući se na jezični materijal iz gotskog, staro visoko njemačkog i northhumbrijskog. Poslije iscrpne analize autor zaključuje da upotreba obaveznog nenaglašenog zamjениčkog subjekta u germanskim jezicima ne zavisi od toga da li prateći finitni glagol sadrži oznaku lica ili ne. Ti se subjekti javljaju u njemačkom i islandskom u kojima finitni glagoli pokazuju u velikoj mjeri oznake lica. Ali ti se subjekti javljaju i u danskom, norveškom i švedskom, u jezicima čiji finitni glagoli više ne sadrže oznake lica.