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TRANSITORY CATEGORIES AND THE METALANGUAGE OF SYNTAX

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Abstract

The first part of the paper constitutes an analysis of the term “transitory category” as presented by Adam Heinz, and a justification of the view that there is a need to eliminate the term from the metalanguage of syntax. The second part of the paper is a reconstruction of the reasoning mechanism Adam Heinz developed in order to postulate the existence of a transitory category between the complement and the adverbial. The last part of the text shows an effective method of analysing relations between parts of the sentence without a necessity to use the term “transitory category”.

1. The term “transitory category” has gone down in the history of Polish linguistics of the last 50 years as inseparably linked with the name of Adam Heinz (Heinz 1961, 1965, 1967; cf. also Bednarczuk 1986; Rokoszowa 1986; Smoczyński 1986). The scholar devoted a separate paper to this term (Heinz 1967). He, however, had used it earlier in reference to the characteristics of relations between subsystems of the language system, between grammar and lexicology, inflection and derivation, as well as dependencies between classes of units of particular subsystems, especially the syntactic one, e.g. between the adverbial and the predicative (*syn wrócił z wojska oficerem* ‘the son has returned from the army an officer’), between the attributive and the adverbial (*goście pytali ciekawi* ‘the guests asked interested’), between the complement and the adverbial (*mówię te słowa tobie* – ‘I am saying these words to you’ (Heinz 1967).

At the beginning of his discussion concerning transitory categories Adam Heinz (1967: 45, 47) describes them as “very elementary and simple phenomena which each

linguist encounters on a daily basis” [All translations are mine – M.G.] and defines *the transitory category* this way:

(...) kategoria przejściowa jest to kategoria x zajmująca w systemie pozycję pomiędzy dwoma innymi kategoriami względem niej skrajnymi A i B w ten sposób, że jej elementy w pewien określony sposób przynależą częścią do kategorii A , a częścią do B . (...) Istota omawianej przejściowości polega (...) na pewnym częściowym zataniu granicy między dwoma poza tym wyraźnie rozgraniczonymi kategoriami, przez co powstaje kategoria nowa, trzecia, zawierająca części elementów lub cech równocześnie kategorii A i B (...) (Heinz, 1967: 45, 47).

The transitory category is a category x that takes in a system a position between two other categories A and B which are extreme in relation to it in such a way that its elements defined in a certain way belong partly to category A and partly to category B (...) The essence of the discussed transitoriness consists (...) in some partial obliteration of the boundary between the two otherwise clearly separate categories, as a result of which a new, third, category containing elements or features of simultaneously category A and B arises (...).

Adam Heinz a priori assumes the existence of transitory categories in language which are situated between two other stable categories of the already specified characteristics, and thus what he assumes is that the existence of the former is also unarguable. These assumptions are, however, too strong, they do not have and cannot have an axiom status. In linguistics as a discipline of the humanities and an ideography (and not a nomothetic science, cf. Bogusławski 1986) absolute obviousness is very infrequent and the existence of transitory categories does not belong there. It is in fact confirmed by an argument the scholar provided himself. Firstly, despite his declarations that transitory categories are “very elementary and simple phenomena,” Heinz introduces a term “transitory category” into the language of linguistics by means of a definition, he therefore does not treat it as a pre-theoretical term (Lyons 1977). Secondly, the scholar assumes that a transitory category is a consequence of an obliteration of a boundary between “two clearly separate categories” A and B . The distinction between these categories and a transitory one is a result of the scholar’s reasoning, and thus his decision. Incidentally, since the scholar “clearly separated” the two categories, there is no need to create a third one.

The “transitory category” is a tool in the researcher’s hands, it therefore belongs to the metalanguage of linguistics, and not to the language of the subject, whose existence is independent of linguists. This diametrically changes the point of departure for the whole reasoning because an answer to the question as to whether the “transitory category” is an element of a given metalanguage or not depends solely on the will of the person who uses it. As can be concluded, there are thus two possible answers, a positive and a negative one. None of them, however, should be arbitrary, each, therefore, requires a justification. Adam Heinz, however, did not justify the need to use the “transitory category” most probably because he recognised that value as evident. Nevertheless, due to the fact that my own position in this case is different, I will present its justification below.

Enthusiasts of “transitory categories” often express astonishment at the fact that the categories may be questioned. In order to avoid misunderstandings I want to stress once again that for me the absolutely overriding axiom is the opposition between language facts and the way facts get interpreted. Facts form the language of the subject and thus cannot be questioned. Both types resemble each other, and they are in some way related to the each other (e.g. the preposition *niedaleko* ‘near’, which does not occur with a noun despite a slot open for it, resembles an adverb). Such perfunctory observations lead to a conclusion that language categories are fuzzy. All this (together with such individual, loose associations), however, is still not an interpretation of language facts. An interpretation requires an a priori acceptance of a specific metalanguage. Besides, the fact that boundaries between some observed facts appear to be fuzzy to us does not implicate that facts are to be interpreted in a fuzzy way too.

What follows in this paper consists of two parts. In the first one I will quote some arguments from the field of general methodology and methodology of linguistics which support the fact that the “transitory category” is to be rejected. In the other I will attempt to reconstruct the reasoning mechanism Adam Heinz developed in order to formulate the transitory category between the complement and the adverbial. Finally, I will demonstrate how at present the opposition between these parts of the sentence may be analysed without referring to the transitory category.

The temptation to form a third value, e.g. C, at the border line between two others, A and B, is a natural consequence of the fact that those two have not been determined as a result of a sharp delimitation sample, on the basis of a clear and verifiable criterion. A counterargument at times put forward by the opponents of this condition, which states that boundaries between language values (and particularly between the referents of these values) have fuzzy borders, does not excuse us from making an attempt to make the analysis precise and its results confirmed. A natural consequence of aspiring for a delimitation of linguistic phenomena is a preference for classification over typology. If as a result of a division of a given set, apart from two subsets a third one is formed as well, this means that conditions for a logically accurate division (i.e. a dichotomous one on the grounds of contradistinctive features) have not been satisfied.

A creation of a new class, a borderline one (and an inevitable need to give it a name that it leads to) is not in keeping with the principle of reductionism (by means of Ockham’s razor). One may not abide by this principle, however, this will inevitably cause an increase in false and empty (analytically true and analytically false) judgements.

A class formed at a border of two others is in all probability a heterogenic class, which requires further divisions. Such operations may be conducted ad infinitum. Divisions resulting from enumeration, which threaten with an infinite regression, are well known in linguistic literature, e.g. a division of parts of the sentence in handbooks concerning Polish syntax, especially the traditional approaches, cf. Klemensiewicz (1963), Jodłowski (1976).

What speaks against the formation of transitory categories is a maxim formulated by Ferdinand de Saussure, which is in my view a superior one in relation to all

his other theses concerning the essence of language and its units. It may be briefly named a maxim of difference.

In a language, as in every other semiological system, what distinguishes a sign is what constitutes it (Saussure 1983: 119).

Morphologically there are neither *signs* nor *meanings* but *differences* in signs and *differences* in meanings, (1) each of which exist solely in their relations to others, hence inseparable, but (2) never come into direct contact with each other (Saussure 2006: 46).

What stems from the above is a most general methodological postulate, in keeping with Saussure's maxim. One needs to look for an adequate criterion confirming the existence of a relation of exclusion between categories A and B until the need to identify an intermediate category C disappears. Such a positive example, which corroborates the claim that such a search is possible and effective indeed is a theory of Polish conjunctions by Wajszczuk (1997). Among others, it falsifies a view, repeated for decades (cf. e.g. Pisarkowa 1974; Walczak 1978; Ruszkowski 2001a, 2001b), that there exist various types of complex sentences representing transitory categories between parataxis and hypotaxis. The author has built a hierarchised semantic system of Polish conjunctions whose background is a continuously perfected conception of lexeme classification (Wajszczuk 2005, 2010). Wajszczuk's conjunctions theory is one of the most significant achievements of Polish syntax of the last couple of decades.

2. When building his theory of parts of the sentence, Adam Heinz approved of the theory of primary and secondary parts of speech by Kuryłowicz (1979) as well as the theory of syntactic functions of grammatical cases and semantic functions of concrete cases, also authored by Kuryłowicz (1948). Following the latter, grammatical cases may appear in concrete roles and vice versa (Heinz 1965: 48). The scholar assumed that:

Istota rekcji branej ze stanowiska poprzednika polega na tym, że dany poprzednik postuluje pewną określoną formę, czyli konkretnie morfem flekcyjny swego następnika nie biorąc pod uwagę jego funkcji. (...) W składni przynależności, na odwrót, relewantna jest tylko funkcja (semantyczna), a nieistotna jest forma gramatyczna następnika (Heinz 1965: 59).

The essence of the government approached from the position of the antecedent consists in the fact that a given antecedent postulates a certain defined form, i.e. in concrete terms, an inflectional morpheme of its consequent, without taking its function into consideration. (...) In the syntax of non-concordial modification, on the contrary, what is relevant is only the (semantic) function, whereas the grammatical form of the consequent is unimportant.

In connection with the above the scholar recognised the fact that the relationship between basic dependencies in a sentence, i.e. the government and the non-concordial modification, is analogous to relations between grammatical and concrete cases.

He presented his thought in a form of a proportion “grammatical case : concrete case = government : non-concordial modification” (Heinz 1965: 78). It became the foundation for the definitions of the complement and the adverbial proposed by the scholar:

(...) **dopełnienie** jest to pozycja adverbialna, której zawartością prymarną jest zależny przypadek gramatyczny (accusativus, genetivus), a sekundarnie przypadek konkretny (dativus, instrumentalis, etc.); przypadki te (...) podlegają rekcji, która w wypadku, gdy określnikiem jest przypadek konkretny, niweluje, a w każdym razie czyni nierelevantnym jego znaczenie stosunkowe; natomiast **okolicznik** jest pozycją tak samo adverbialną, ale jej zawartością prymarną są poza przysłówkiem przypadki konkretne, zaś sekundarnie mogą nią być również zależne przypadki gramatyczne; pozycję tę łączy z członem określanym zasada semantycznej przynależności, a więc kontekst, który w wypadku przypadku gramatycznego narzuca mu jednostronnie określone znaczenie stosunkowe (Heinz 1967: 59).

(...) the complement is an adverbial position whose primary content is to mark an oblique grammatical case (accusative, genitive), and, secondarily a concrete case (dative, instrumental); these cases (...) are subject to the government which in the event of the determiner being a concrete case, eliminates, and in any case, makes its relative meaning irrelevant; on the other hand, the adverbial is likewise an adverbial position, however, its primary content are, beside an adverb, concrete cases, whereas grammatical cases may also constitute secondary ones; this position is connected with the element defined by the principle of semantic non-concordial modification, and thus a context which in the event of the grammatical case imposes a one-sidedly defined relative meaning on it.

In these definitions a key role is played by mutually exclusive concepts of government and non-concordial modification, the former excluding the existence of a semantic dependence between the verb and a suitable nominal form, the latter the existence of a grammatical dependence. The opposition between grammatical and concrete cases is for the juxtaposition between the complement and the adverbial – against the given proportion – irrelevant, as both parts of the sentence allow for both case forms, and the distinction between their primary functions and the secondary ones amounts to precisely the distinction between the government and the non-concordial modification. This opposition, however, is fuzzy, and the assignment of particular expressions to specific parts of the sentence is based exclusively on the scholar's intuition. Problems with distinguishing a complement from an adverbial were characterised by Adam Heinz this way:

Choć sytuacja [rozróżnienie rekcji i przynależności – M.G.] pod względem teoretycznym wydaje się jasna, to jednak w praktyce istnieje tu pewna ilość określników takich, co do których zachodzi niepewność i wahanie, czy podlegają one jeszcze rekcji, czy też chodzi w nich już o znaczenie stosunkowe i na odwrót. W takim zaś wypadku określniki te zajmują pozycję przejściową czy pośrednią między wyraźnym dopełnieniem z jednej, a wyraźnym okolicznikiem [podkreślenia moje – M.G.] z drugiej strony (Heinz 1967: 59–60).

Although the situation [i.e. the differentiation between the government and the non-concordial modification – M.G.] in theoretical terms appears to be clear, in practice there exist a certain number of such determiners which cause doubt and hesitation as to whether they are still subject to a government or whether they already concern the relative meaning and vice versa. In such a case, on the other hand, these determiners take a transitory position or an intermediate one between a clear complement on the one hand, and a clear adverbial [my emphasis – M.G.] on the other.

In the transitory class the scholar placed e.g. nouns used after verbs like *chępić się* ‘brag’, *smucić się* ‘grieve’, *brzydzić się* ‘loathe’, *cieszyć się* ‘enjoy’, where “the determiner in the form of the instrumental is at the same time subject to the government and contains a relative meaning of the cause” [my translation – MG] (in his monograph Heinz 1965: 86 recognised these as adverbials) and “prepositional determinations in which the relational meaning has been obliterated partly, cf. *śmiać się z kogoś* ‘laught at somebody’, *placić za coś* ‘pay for something’, *zapomnieć o czymś* ‘forget about something’, *zastanawiać się nad czymś* ‘think over something’, etc.” [my translation – MG] (Heinz 1967: 60). My intuitive evaluation of all these enumerated expressions is different, as I undisputedly consider them to be complements. However, as is known from general methodology, see, among others, the classical works of Karl Popper or Hans Reichenbach (cf. his oppositions between the context of discovery and the context of justification), the intuitive evaluation of hypotheses is only the beginning of the scholar’s reasoning.

The objective of a scientific study, also one like linguistics, is to justify and explain what is being claimed. A proposal of a classification of linguistic phenomena does not in itself constitute a solution to a problem. Let us assume that we decide to recognise expression A as a complement, and expression B as an adverbial. The awareness that we still have a third class at our disposal, a transitory one, in which expressions C, D and others can be placed, does not force one to justify such and not another classification of these expressions in any original way, and all the more so to clarify its foundations, that is what the criteria and the juxtaposition between the government and non-concordial midification constitute.

3. In Adam Heinz’s works one can find numerous proposals for classifying adverbial determiners (cf. especially Heinz 1965: 86–88), it is, however, difficult to argue against such proposals because they are limited to the provision of the name of a part of the sentence which a given determiner represents. The main reason for such a state of affairs has its source in a significant difference between the linguistic methodology in Poland of the mid 1960s and the methodology of the later decades.

It is only at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s that methods of justifying results of an introductory syntactic and semantic analysis began to be searched for (Linde-Usiekniewicz 2008). Substitution and transformation methods, methods of semantic componential analysis, contrastive methods which involve searching for deviations, among them the method of reducing sentences to contradictions and tautologies were not used in Polish linguistics when Adam Heinz presented his conception of transitory categories.

The opposition between the government and the non-concordial modification, and at the same time between the complement and adverbial in the understanding assumed in Adam Heinz's works does not find a confirmation in theories of semantic syntax *sensu largo*, formed under the influence of generative linguistics and formal logic. It is already the example of the theory of semantic roles by Fillmore (1968), assuming the existence of a semantic dependence between the predicate and the argument (disregarding the evaluation of this theory; cf. e.g. Karolak 1975, 1993), and defining this dependence in terms of the so called deep cases, that cannot be reconciled with Adam Heinz's assumption (taken from Kuryłowicz) that grammatical cases do not perform semantic functions. Contrasting the form and the function of expressions (Heinz 1967: 48–50, which, by the way, does not have a justification in the light of the dual character of the linguistic sign) and as a consequence a separation of the syntactic description from the semantic one were the main source of difficulties in classifying parts of speech.

In predicate-argument structures the problem of the complement and the adverbial can be solved by means of answering the question as to whether a given constituent of a sentence represents an argument of the predicate or not. A positive answer to this will allow for the recognition of this constituent as a “former” complement, a negative answer as a “former” adverbial. The argument is a concept which is semantically implied by the predicate (Bogusławski 1973). The implication is an entirely clear relationship, a non-gradable one: either it occurs or it does not. There are therefore no obligatory or facultative arguments: obligatoriness doubles the sense contained in the concept of the implication, and facultativeness is contradictory to it. If in the light of this reasoning one applies the criterion of the implication to the opposition between the complement and the adverbial, then automatically all the prototypical or clear complements and adverbials will cease to exist, as well as any transitory forms between elements of this opposition. An argument of a given predicate must have its representation in its semantic explication. A hypothesis that a given unit fulfils the condition for a semantic component of the predicate is corroborated by means of a falsification test. Obtaining a contradiction as a result of the test supports the truth of the postulated thesis.

A method of scientific investigation cited briefly here has been known in Polish linguistics since the 1970s, and has been used in semantic analysis many times, particularly in works devoted to the description of numerous classes of verbs, e.g. epistemic ones (Danielewiczowa 2002), visual perception (Dobaczewski 2002), auditory perception (Żurowski 2012), and agentive and causative ones (Duraj-Nowosielska 2007), which express knowledge unverified by the speaker (Stępień 2010).

In the history of syntactic research one of the controversial types of nouns from the point of view of the opposition between the complement and the adverbial have been nouns in the instrumental case. The analysis of semantic relations (by means of the method very briefly adduced here) between particular verbs and a class of expressions in instrumental makes it possible to answer a question as to whether instrumental represents an argument of the predicate or whether it is added to the predicate (and thus has a status of the adverbial). For instance verbs like *ktoś rąbie*

(*kraje, łupie, szatkuje, trze*) *coś czymś* ‘somebody chops (cuts, cracks, shreds, grates) something with something’ take three arguments, and one of their arguments is an instrument of the action (Grochowski 1975). On the other hand, verbs like *ktoś dzieli (suszy, je, pije) coś* ‘somebody divides (dries, eats, drinks) something’ do not imply an instrument of the action. Sentences like *Piotr je ciasto widelcem* ‘Piotr is eating a cake with a fork’, *Ewa pije herbatę łyżeczką* ‘Ewa is drinking tea with a teaspoon’ only apparently question the presented hypothesis: *widelcem, łyżeczką* ‘with a fork, with a teaspoon’ represent arguments of predicates *wkładać* ‘put in’ and *wlewać* ‘pour in’, and not *jeść* ‘eat’ and *pić* ‘drink’ (Grochowski 1986).

In the presented paper I have tried to justify that the “transitory category” is an empty entity and that its elimination from the metalanguage of syntax is not only possible and desirable, but it should allow to make the interpretation of language facts follow principles of logic, and be more accurate and in-depth.

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