



Linguistic parameters of null subjects in Bulgarian

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Plan

- Introductory words
- Views on null subjects
- Problems
- Summing up

Introductory words

- According to certain criteria *null subjects* are classified as non-prototypical subjects (Циммерлинг 2017):
 - Criteria for prototypical subjects:
 - Marked with syntactic nominative case
 - Agreement with the predicate
 - **Non-null form**

Introductory words

- A number of researchers consider:
 1. The conditions of appearance/blocking of null subjects, and
 2. The problem of ‘removing the subject’

These are, among others: Иванова, Градинарова (2015); Савова (2014); Пенчев (1998).

- My thoughts focus more on the issues in 2. than on the ones in 1.

Views on null subjects in Bulgarian grammars

- Null subjects are considered in the section on the simple sentences with null subjects:
 - definite-personal (**DP**)
 - indefinite-personal (**IP**)
 - general-personal (**GP**)
 - impersonal (**IM**)

Academic Grammar (1983)

- Typology (**semantic**):
 - With a subject (**DP, IP, GP**)
 - Without a subject (**IM**)

DP: only 1 и 2 p. – syntactically not-required

IP: 3 p. plural – syntactically not-required, but depending on the semantic context; indefinite subject

GP: 2 p. singular or 1 and 2 p. plural. Generality.


IM: 3 p. singular. Isolation of the activity from the subject.

Penchev (1998)

- According to Penchev (1998: 595) „*this classification takes into account the verbal flexion as well as its semantic content*”.
- However, he also adds that a text survey is needed.
- He introduces the *pro* as a null subject of a finite verb, and the *PRO* as a null subject of a non-finite verb.

Penchev (1998)

- He considers the null subject sentences in parallel to the subject-predicate ones (with thematic role vs. without a thematic role), **i.e. his approach is semantic:**
 - With a thematic role
 - **pro**
 - There exist two views: a) DP sentences are only those in 1 and 2 person, or b) the sentences that cover all the paradigm (Penchev 1998: 597). For that reason Penchev thinks that DP sentences are not null subject ones, but rather subject-predicate ones.

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- **pro indef [0 PEOPLE]**
 - No antecedent
 - The referent is always a person. Thus, not every verb can have such an usage.
 - **pro generic**
 - Considered a variant of DP
 - The crucial category here is Person
 - Limited to non-actual present tense

- Without a thematic role
 - expletive - **pro ex** (*разказват се вицове; капе ми; студено ми е*)
 - Arbitrary agent – **pro arb** (*Тук се събуват*)

Sum up: IP and IM with arbitrary agent are very close to the passive!!!

Grancharov and Grancharova (under press)

- The null subject usually appears in morphologically rich languages, but this is not always the case. Compare French with rich morphology and explicit subject, and Chinese with no morphology and null subjects.
- Usually when a language has a null subject, it also has an explicit counterpart. However, in Bulgarian: **Съм* учуден (*Учуден съм*; *Бях учуден*); **Е* тук (*Тук е*; *Беше тук*).
- Bulgarian null subject influences the linear realization of the object (*Ти я уби* -> **Я уби* -> *Уби я*)

Циммерлинг (2009)

- *pro* with Chomskian characteristics[-*anaphoricity*; +*pronounness*] is too general to describe the null subject
- works with ‘Melchuk’s zeros’ :
 - The man as an agent[0 PEOPLE] (=IP) and
 - The nature as an agent [0 ELEMENTS] (= IM)
- In Bulgarian the situation is different from Russian since the null subjects are non-marked. On the other hand, the IM is also a matter more of a dictionary than a grammar.

Иванова, Градинарова (2015: 172-189)

- GP: non-marked in comparison to Russian
- IP: the subject is unknown or not relevant to be mentioned
 - Competition between the IM constructions and the reflexive passive: *Как плащат тук?* vs. *Как се плаща тук?*
 - Typical verb groups: speech verbs (*казват, съобщават*); naming verbs (*наричат я някак, викат ѝ някак, казват ѝ някак*); physical impact verbs: *награждават, карат, откарат, влачат*

- GP:

- The generalized subject can be expressed by grammatical as well as lexical means:

- 2 p. sg: *Никога не знаеш какво те чака.*

- 2 p. pl: *Ако искате да познаете света, пътувайте.*

- 1 p. pl: *Оценяваме тогава, когато загубим.*

Competing with constructions with *човек*:

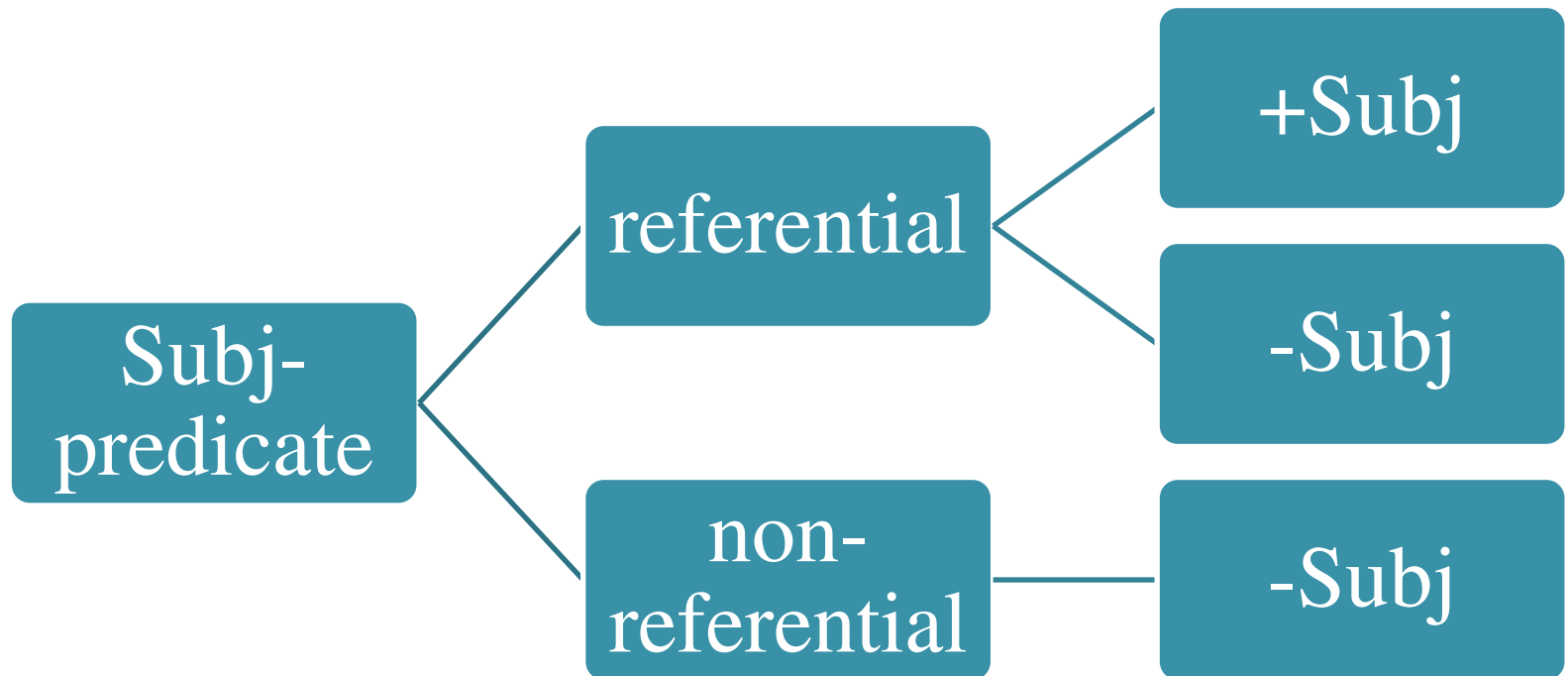
Човек никога не знае какво го чака.

- **IM** – In Bulgarian there are more ways of formation than in Russian:
 - Media verbs: *Не ми се връща въщи.*
 - In positive and negative contexts: *Ходи ми се/ не ми се ходи на ресторант.*
 - Freedom in lexical, temporal and stylistic aspects
 - The Patient becomes a formal subject: *Допи ми се кафе.*

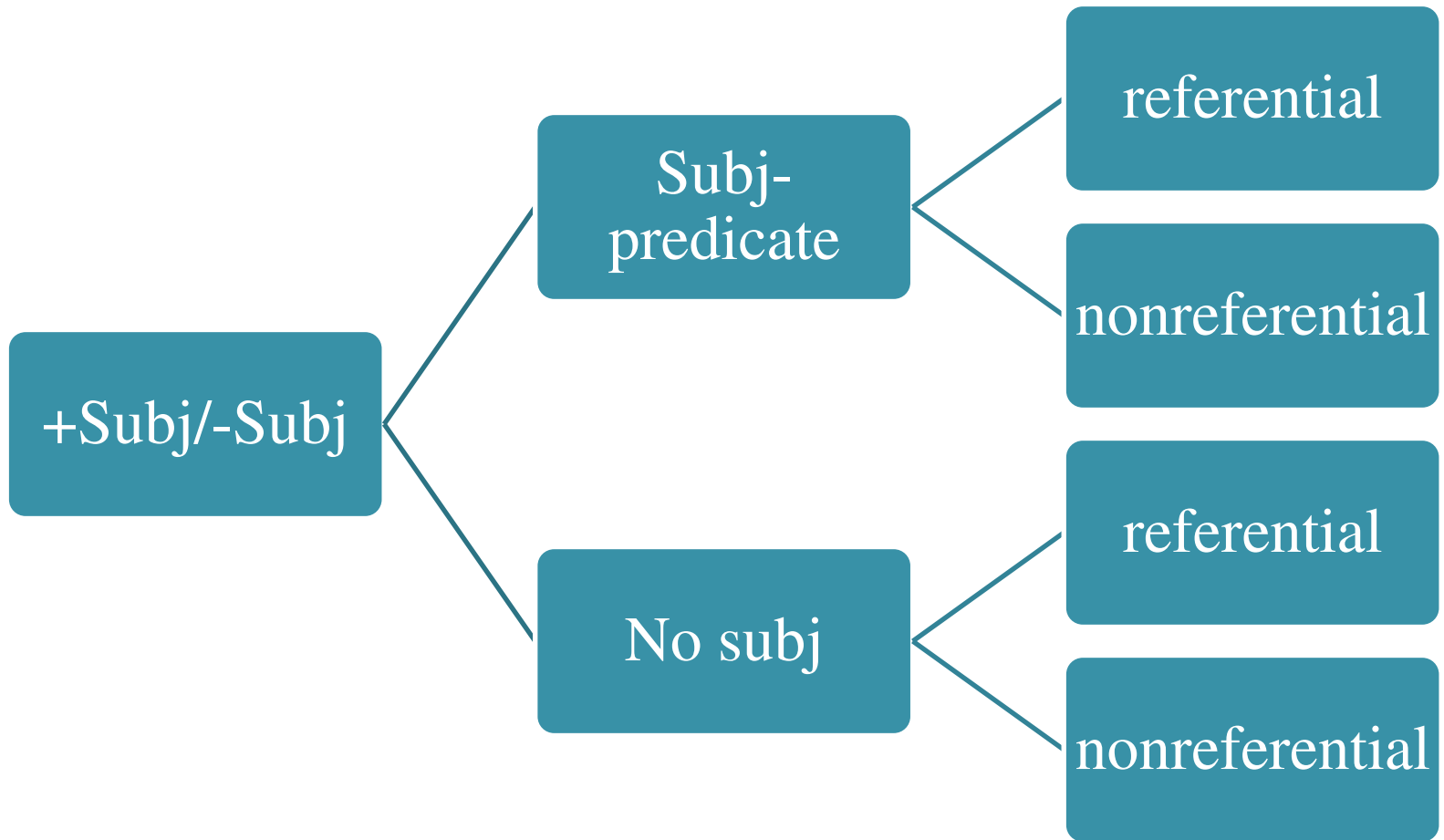
Problems

- The composition of the null subject sentences (*DP* and *IM*)
- The criteria are of different levels (*grammar, semantics* and *discourse*)
- The role of the linguistic theory
- Typological aspects
- Degrees of null subject-hood

One point of view



My approach



Null subject characteristics

- *Referential*
 - Nominative
 - Controls the agreement with the predicate
 - Controls the non-finite verb forms
 - Binds the reflexives
- *Nonreferential*
 - Nominative
 - Controls the agreement with the predicate

Grammar deficiency?

- DP – 1 and 2 p. sg and pl (or all the paradigm) -> *there are equivalents with existing subjects*
- IM – 3 p. sg -> the subject is formal but it can be explicit
- IP – 3 p. pl (now also in 3 p. sg) -> implied subject that varies between ‘some people’ to the more specific ones (*арестуваха го [полицайте]*)
- GP – 2 p. sg (2 p. pl; 1 p. pl) -> there is an equivalent with ‘a man/one’ in 3 p. – *One never knows.*

New examples: *Кърти. Чисти. Извозва.* -> 3 p. sg

Degrees of null subjects (1)

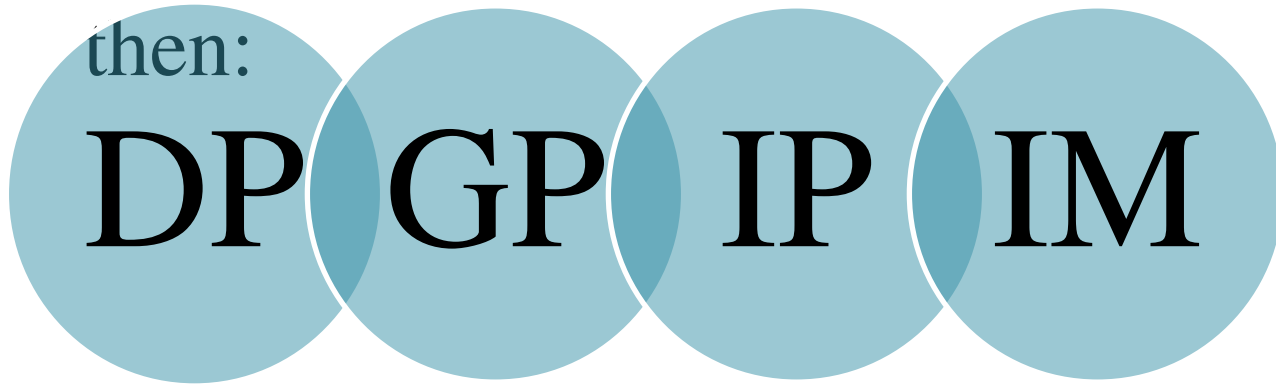
- The question of semi-personal/semi-impersonal constructions (PIM) (*боли ме ръката и болят ме ръцете; яде ми се ябълка и ядат ми се ябълки*)
- Всички [3 л.] отидохме [1 л.] там
- If the **semantics** is taken into account wrt generality to specificity:

GP (0 generic) > IP (0 unknown/unimportant) > DP (0 specific) > PIM (semi-specificity) > IM (0 expletive)

Degrees of null subjects (2)

- If the **active/passive** way of expressing subject removal is taken into account,

then:



active

passive

The role of context

DP and IM [syntactic conditions] >
GP > IP > IM with arbitrary agent
[communicative strategies]

All-time-hold truths: 1, 2 (GP) or 3 p. (one can do something)

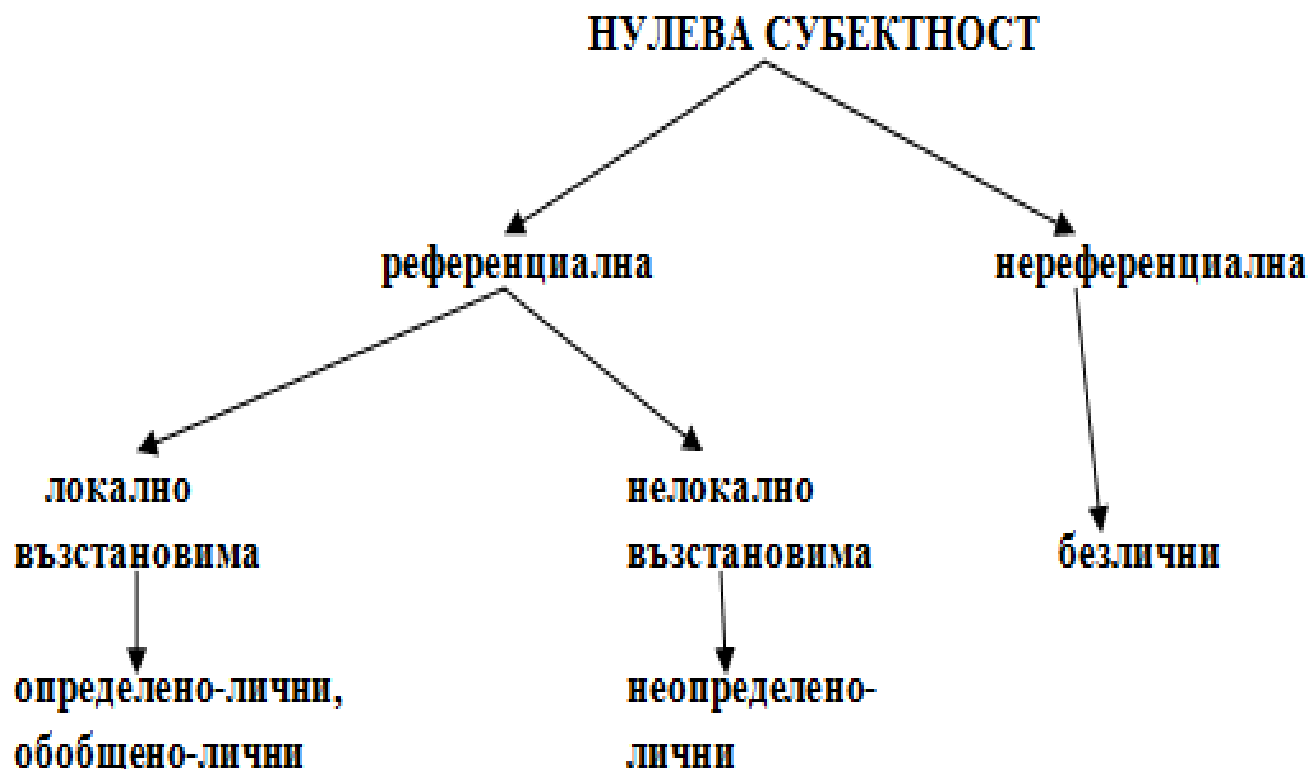
Unknown or unimportant agent: 3 p. (IP and with 'some people/somebody')

Arbitrary agent: 3 p. (IM and IP)

Summing Up

- *The grammar* allows null subjects due to the rich inflection.
- The null subject types are determined by grammatical as well as semantic factors:
 - Null subjects are optional and obligatory.
- The semantics defines the grammatical forms (including deficiency): such as, the lexical semantics of the verb.
- From a semantic point of view the real null subject sentences decrease in number. From a syntactic point of view it is good to keep the separation but to keep in mind that there are various competing constructions for the same meaning. The speaker/utterer/author... decides what to use.
- Thus, null subjects are a matter of grammatical and semantic restrictions as well as a matter of speaker's choice on communicative strategy.

The following table adheres to this specification:
semantics > pragmatics > syntax/morphology



Some diachronic glimpses

- The blurred distinction between personal and impersonal verbs (ЦИММЕРЛИНГ)
- The Old Bulgarian grammars (Academic one, R. Zlatanova's book) on null subjects:
 - The same classification with a remark that the null subjects were used more with stylistic function than with syntactic.
 - There are constructions with a finite verb and an infinitive. In such constructions the finite form agrees with the null subject (Имам ти нещо решти; кротокъ есмъ)
 - In GP a very typical pattern is the obligatoriness: ()
 - It seems that бо́гоу тво́е́моу покло́ниши са the most interesting patterns are in the IM sentences – especially modal verbs; with infinitive and dative

Thank you for your attention!



Literature

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