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About the Term “Dependent Taxis” in Modern Linguistics

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyze the reasons for the disappearance of one of the basic terms from the terminological apparatus of the modern taxis theory. This refers to the term “dependent taxis”, which is traditionally used in aspectological studies of home and foreign linguists since the late 50s of the 20th century. Providing a brief overview of the history of the term emerging, the authors attempted to identify the specifics of its application in modern research practice. According to the authors, terminological inconsistency that we see in present papers devoted to the dependent taxis study is often caused by mixing of taxis categorical and related phenomena, as well as fuzzy distinction of semantic and grammatical nuances in taxis itself. The last condition often leads to incorrect methodological conclusions applying for versatility.

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1. Introduction (historical background)

Taxis is one of the few terms, which has its exact “date of birth”, and it is, we can say, documented. It entered the linguistic usage in 1957 after the publication of an article by R.O. Jakobson, dedicated to the issues of verbal semantics categorization “Shifters, Verbal Categories and the Russian Verb” (Jakobson, 1957; in Russian language (1972). The author proposed to call it a grammatical phenomenon known in the literature as “*relative time*”, “*time correlation*”, “*correlative use of tenses*”, “*sequence of tenses*”, “*category of simultaneity / prematurity*” and so on. The merit of Jakobson was not, however, in the fact that he devised a new term, but that for the first time extensive grammatical region possessing a common semantic domain, gained categorical status.

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It is fair to say that such attempts had been made earlier. Thus, already in the 40s American ethnolinguists Bloomfield and B. Lee Whorf, independently, expressed the idea of the possibility of allocating the same category, they offered to call it “order” (in the Bloomfield terminology – “order” (Bloomfield, 1946), in Whorf’s interpretation - «mode» (Whorf, 1946)). But their theoretical assumptions did not receive the broad scientific resonance in the European linguistics, and exclusively exotic language material used as an illustrative material played the last role but not the least one (Nivkh language and the language of the Hopi). Serious structural and typological research, accompanied by no less serious theoretical generalizations, as it is known, began to appear in the European linguistics a little later, and in this respect Jakobson’s article illustrated, by the way, a number of provisions by the same Nivkh language was more interesting for the scientific community.

Despite of the term *taxis* existence in scientific use for half of the century the category, however, never received general recognition. Numerous studies of typologically heterogeneous linguistic material of different structure now, perhaps, raise more questions than answers. One such issue concerns just term designation, but a more fundamental problem affecting the theoretical foundations of *taxis*, as it seems to us, hides behind it. The purpose of this article is to try to find the cause of terminological discrepancies in the description of the *taxis* semantic sphere, which in Russian linguistics, after R. O. Jakobson, is traditionally qualified as *a dependent taxis*. Note that clarification of the causes on the one hand brings us to the problem of distinguishing between two adjacent, but not equal categories – poly predication and *taxis*, and on the other hand, with the need to clarify the relationship of these categories with poly proposition.

So how is the linguistic use of the term *dependent taxis* applied now? We can state with certainty that home science freely operates the term, but its meaning is not permanent: different scientists mean various parameters by “dependence”. Some believe that the dependence of the *taxis* form is primarily based on its formal grammatical lack of independence, others believe that in this case the semantic dependency is a question. And Jakobson himself qualified dependent *taxis* as expressing different types of relationships towards the independent verb - simultaneity, precedence, interruption, etc. (Jakobson, 1972). Not difficult to see that the marker of “dependence” was understood by Jakobson primarily as a formal one, originally he had in mind the formal grammatical lack of independence of certain verbal word form among others. As an illustration, Jakobson gave as example of Russian verbal participle constructions as the most consistently conveying the idea of a formal grammar dependence based in the verbal sphere. This, certainly, meant that formal grammatical dependence involves establishment of some special types of semantic relations between correlating predications. Thus, it can be stated that the possibility of both formal grammatical and semantic interpretation of dependent *taxis* already assumed in the original Jakobson’s definition and home aspectological direction has implemented this possibility by emphasizing the proposed interpretations differently, as it will be discussed below.

In foreign linguistics term *dependent taxis* has never held much favour and is almost never used as such at present. In the analysis of the relevant linguistic phenomenon generic term *taxis* is used, and hardly with full confidence we can say that its scope extends to all language constructions, falling within the scope of *dependent taxis*. Scope of the study of the *taxis* phenomena is usually either closed on the utterances of the perfect class forms (with rare mention of gerund structures properties), or in those languages where there are corresponding impersonal forms on the utterances with gerunds and participles. Thus involuntary substitution of concepts occurs. Firstly, under the general term “*taxis*” only a part of *taxis* phenomena is actually studied represented by syntactic constructions with dependent predicative component. Secondly, with regard to languages that have at their disposal “relative tenses of precedence”, only time difference relations traditionally steal the scene. This situation mainly arises when material of Indo-European inflected languages is being analyzed.

Applied to the same material of languages with different structures, for example, incorporating or agglutinative, *taxis* is analyzed more consistently, but is considered as a specific grammatical category inherent to the given structure of language. In this case, as a rule, only the dependent *taxis* matters, and very often not the *taxis* itself but poly predication is studied.

Echoes of this “view of things”, however, can always be found in the home linguistics, particularly in its typological direction where a question was raised about the degree of language “*taxis*” solely on the basis of development of dependent *taxis* forms in a particular language (and mainly participles and adverbial participles were meant) (in the 90th years). A little later, this view transformed into an opinion about the possibility of dividing world languages according to the method of their *taxis* expression into two groups. The first group V. A. Plungyan

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