

On The Problem of Interpreting English Syntactic Impersonal Models into Armenian

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Abstract

The merit of the paper lies in a detailed exposition of allomorphic (common) and isomorphic (differential) features of typologically different languages in English and Armenian. On the background of comparative studies of grammatically different architected impersonal sentences we will focus on highlighting some of the problematic issues in translating sentences with "it" patterns. There is undoubtedly enough ground to state that interpreters can face difficulties in finding relevant equivalents for English impersonal sentences.

Keywords: impersonal sentence, "it" models, interpretation, equivalent comparative study, semantic differentiation, structural patterning, etc.

Modern linguistics is increasingly concerned with contrastive study of languages. It has been shown that concentration of research on systematic comparison of non-cognate languages is of great significance in translation studies.

It is a well-known fact that different languages resemble one another in their vocabulary and grammatical structure. Apart from these two kinds of resemblance languages are entirely different and interpreters face difficulties in the process of translation. Each particular language provides syntactic models as mapping of worldview of the given nation. Further insights into these patternings is gained in the light of impersonal "it" sentences. Some linguists (eg A.S. Smirnitsky) distinguish definite-personal, indefinite-personal and impersonal sentences in English.

- Definite-personal: The children are playing in the garden.
- Indefinite-personal: We live and learn.
- Impersonal: It is stuffy in here. It is raining. (A. Smirnitsky. 1957)

This classification is based on the semantic function of subject.

The indefinite-personal model clearly refers the meaning of the indefinite-personal subject to the centre of secondary proximity. The attention of the speaker is drawn not to the object itself (which in fact is not named) but first of all to the perception of those generalized abstract relations which, being the unity of characteristic features, are inherent in any object of the kind. Grammatically however with the subject of generalized type in its structure this model is the constituent of the sphere of personal constructions but it can't have any additional connotational meaning.

We can find a uniform approach to classification of principal parts of the sentence. Typical structure of the verbal sentences in contrasting languages is the following model: predicate in the sentence comes after subject. Among two-axis Armenian sentences are of special significance models P+S (Predicate+ Subject), where the predicate takes the initial position before the subject, e.g. Ներս ամսով բժիշկը և խորհուրդ տվեց հիվանդին տեղափոխել հիվանդանոց. Came in the doctor and advised (them) to take the patient to hospital.

Of equal interest are one-axis sentences: In the words of L. Ezekyan and Kch. Badikyan one-axis sentences are the sentences where one of the key parts is omitted, while the other part is completely expressed. The most typical feature of an English one-axis sentence is the obligatory presence of the subject. In Armenian it may be omitted as it is implied in the finite forms of the verb (զնաւցի, զնաւցինք, զնաւց, etc.) The verbal past tense endings unveil the grammatical meaning of the subject, i.e. its person, number, tense, voice. In English a finite form of the verb (in most cases) does not make a sentence without a subject.

Being architected on the general model “subject- predicate- object” (S-P-O), English impersonal sentences include “It” as a pseudo-personal subject. It is symptomatic that the sentences of this type are perceived to have no subject (the corresponding Armenian constructions have no subject whatsoever- ինքնիկ, ցոյրն է, It got dark. It is cold.) in Indo-European languages since Modern English is a highly developed analytical language with formalized structures; it is natural therefore, that for grammatical unification the pronoun “it” was introduced as a pseudo- personal subject.

Interestingly enough, there was no *it* in oldest Germanic language (Gothic). (H. Sweet, A New English Grammar: Logical and Historical, Oxford, 1964). Evidently models with “*it*” reflected a certain definite type of initial-associative connection where the space-time correlation with the subject proceeded from the demonstrative form. Speaking of the reason for the appearance of such impersonal sentences there is a hypothesis that “*it*” is used to be looked for in the historical condition of development and formation of the nation. It is possible that impersonal sentences appeared due to a tendency not to name the totem (as a mythological creature worshiped by all the members of the primary community). It seems clear that during their formation the structure of the predicate completely included the unmentioned but at the early stage of the development easily understood subject. Now it is related to the third person singular neuter pronoun “*it*” on the principle of realizing the character of impersonality. The question arising in the frame of this article concerns the inner structure of connecting initial “*it*” and the verb that expresses the reasons for the evaluation of the sentence. It is not incidental that the division of the sentence into constituents gives birth to a number of objective difficulties in translating, proceeding from the confusion of grammatical, logical and psychological relations, namely the detection of the main and secondary members of the sentence in constructions with the introductory “*it*” on the one hand, and on the other hand, outlining isomorphic (differential) syntactic structural modifications of the two comparative languages in the process of interpreting. That's why while interpreting Armenian sentences into English the meaning of impersonality is transformed by a definite grammatical subject “*it*”. Tackling the relationship of subject and predicate it should be noted that the role of the semantically colourless verb in these models is to perform the temporal function expressing time correlation (present- past and future) and its connection with the subject. Being an independent element in subject-verb structuring, the verb firstly functions as a simple predicate expressing a temporal correlation with the object and secondly, psychological integrity and dependence of the subject on the object in certain space-time relations.

The verb thus is a link not in the grammatical but in the logical sense. Grammatically the verb is independent of the object but psychologically subject and predicate join together to form a space-time complexity.

Unlike the predicate, the subject in such patternings cannot be indifferent to the informative aspect of the object. There is a sharp controversy between the semantic insignificance of the grammatical subject (introduced by the demonstrative pronoun “*it*”) and the semantic centre of the sentence of the type:

1. It is my house.
2. It is the house, where...
3. It was *impossible* to make out what was going on (Leo Tolstoy, “War and Peace”)

It was a *special pleasure* to see things eaten, to see things blackened and changed (Ray Bradbury, “Fahrenheit 451”)
4. It was a damp, drizzly November in my soul. (Charles Dickens, “Great Expectations”)

“It's your time”, he stated looking directly into the eyes of the entrepreneur and the artist. (Robin Sharma. “The 5 AM Club”).

The semantic value of the subject in these models is different. In the first sentence, the degree of the speaker's informativeness about the object is complete. The demonstrative character of the subject hidden in the pronoun **"it"** is compensated by contents hidden in the given object (my house). (A. Hovhannisyan, Kr. Harutynyan, Linguistic Typology. p.196) In every model, the introductory **"it"** to a greater or similar extent preserves the initial meaning-the orientation of the thought to the object. The speaker denoting the space limits establishes the initial point where the object perception begins from, therefore it doesn't merely perform an introductory function of the semantic function but it is to accomplish a very important mission.

Thus in the first model "my house" (the subject) has a concrete informative character, in the second (the house where...) concrete non-informative nature. Semantically the subject appears more abstract and directing the thought to the object of the sentence, gets more detailization through **it** (some grammarians call it "emphasis"). And from the grammatical point of view the subject reveals its definitely demonstrative character by means of a complement (house) which itself gets detailization. As has been mentioned above the demonstrative subject "it" must be immanent to all languages of the Indo-European family. But in every type a considerable individualization of features can be seen alongside typological common features. Thus, in Armenian subject "uu", "qu" (this) preserves though in a different degree its initial meaning. Being different from the informative view-point the object essentially changes the syntactic pattern of the whole sentence (cf: the informatively complete structure like: *Uu hūnnūnū ē* (This is my house) and incomplete one: *Uu u hūnnūnū ē, nē...* (This is the house, where..)) A. Hovhannisyan, Kr. Harutynyan, p198)

In the third model (*impossible to make*) the subject implies abstract non-informative meaning and the all sentence is embroidered with modal meaning. As the modal-informative character of the object increases the Armenian language allows the subject "uu" (this) to be eliminated where the abstract prevails. *Անհնար էր պարզել, թե ինչ է կատարվում: Մի ուրիշ, առանձնահատուկ հաճույք էր տեսնել թե ինչպես է կրակը լսվում իրերը, ինչպես են դրանք սկանում ու ձևափոխվում:*

In the logical subject, the whole abstract character of the whole utterance runs counter to the pronoun (it). In other words, one witnesses a failing-off of the thematic part as insignificant (*Անհնար է պարզել...*) that leads to the reconstruction of the pattern. From the perspective of semantic-functional analysis to this structure it becomes evident that the adjective which appears in this frame expresses the modal stance of the speaker, and which in some basic sense is molded on an evaluative epithet.

This function of **"it"** is branded as anticipatory by H. Sweet as the function of **"it"** is to point to a following subject, that - clause or a subject infinitive clause: It is necessary that you exert yourself or (to exert yourself) (H. Sweet, A New English Grammar).

The subject **"it"** is completely desemanticized, and since any language phenomenon is a unity of the abstract and the concrete, it is natural that the abstract nature of the grammatical subject must be compensated by the concreteness of the two forms bound with it (predicate and object). (A. Hovhannisyan, Semantic and Structural Characters of Impersonal Sentences with Introductory it, p. 13-14)

In the model "It was a damp, drizzly November; It is your time" the subject is completely desemanticized as in the third utterance "It is difficult to ...". The difference lies in the following - the abstractness of **"it"** in the third sample finds its concretization in the complement while in the last adduced example, the lack of a complement (concretization) to some degree, intensifies the degree of abstractness in the pronoun **"it"**.

In the words of H. Sweet *it* in such patterns does not point to a definite or an indefinite person or thing. This *it*, though containing real meaning, serves the useful purpose of giving the statement the outward form of an ordinary declarative sentence with an expressed subject. Both in the third and in the last models **"it"** is completely omitted in Armenian translations: Հոգևս մեջ խոնավ, անձրևոտ նոյեմբեր էր: , << Ձեր ժամն

է եկել,>> նա խրոխտ հայտարարեց՝ ուղիղ նայելով բիզնեսմենների ունկարչի աչքերի մեջ>:

Thus we arrive at the conclusion that the tendency to detach the notional from the structural meanings is typical of the analytical structure of the English language. English preserves some special constructions of impersonal sentences with the subject “it”. In contrast to Armenian, impersonality in English is built up according to the general syntactic model (S+P), providing a strictly fixed word-order with the subject at the beginning. That is why while translating Armenian impersonal sentences into English the meaning of impersonality is transformed by a definite grammatical subject “it”.

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