The Potential Subject Properties of the Agentive Prepositional Phrase „u“ + Genitive in North Russian and Ukrainian resultative -no, -to-forms

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The North Russian perfect in -no, -to might co-occur with a logical subject expressed in the prepositional phrase „u“ plus genitive, or u-PP, that in standard Russian designates either possession or location. Early accounts like those of Potebnja (1888) and Šachmatov (1922) primarily discuss the syntactic role of nominative case marking in the structure of -no, -to: it has been interpreted as either a subject case in non-agreement with its predicate, or as an nominative object case of an active impersonal clause. Neither of the earlier accounts discuss the syntactic role of the u-PP as a possible agent expression of -no, -to predicates, or tie the lack of standard subject-verb agreement to the subject properties of an optionally employed argument u-PP. Jung (2007) remarks that u-PP can alternatively refer either to a person deprived of something, or to the person in possession of the domain or location where an action takes place. Jung (2007) further claims that it is this original locative/adesive interpretation of u-PP that has triggered ambiguity and its consequent re-interpretation into agentive, since if an action is performed in one's domain, the possessor of that domain is likely to be the performer of the described action (210). Describing u-PP as a „prominent North Russian feature“ Jung (2007, 143) is quoting Zaliznjak's (2004) two exx of u-PP in the recently unearthed birch bark manuscripts from Novgorod region, suggesting that this agent expression already existed in Novgorodian dialect(s) before the 16th c. One of the two u-PPs is construed as clearly agentive, cf. ‟внимания наша и дядька [в] (им)ана о въмологовъ господь-а имали-крепетецъ. Jung's (2007) translation goes: „Vymolians have taken away what belonged to our ancestors and taken hawk traps“ (140).

Investigating the subject properties of the agent expressed with u-PP, Timberlake (1976) claims that in sharp contrast to the instrumental oblique in periphrastic passives, the North Russian u-PP exhibits several properties of the syntactic core argument, or subject. In similar vein, Lavine (2000) has shown that, similar to nominative subjects, u-PP in North Russian perfect functions as the surface subject in terms of typical subject properties, such as binding of subject-oriented reflexives, and control of infinitival PRO (115). Also Jung (2011) argues, relying on the purely agentive reading and typical subject properties of u-PP in North Russian dialects, that this agent expression is construed as the external argument (116). In similar vein, Timberlake (1976) observes that the “promotion of the underlying object and demotion of the underlying subject are not complete” in North Russian passive structures (547). Timberlake (1976) further observes that since the underlying subject in North Russian structures is not fully demoted, it retains several subject properties (554).

The aim of this paper is to draw parallels between the agentive u-PP in the structure of -no, -to in modern North Russian dialects and its potential cognate in standard Ukrainian, relying on the Keenan's (1976) definition of the subject as a complex of properties. Since there is no universal idea of the subjecthood, and our understanding of the subject is limited, we are simply going to stick to the primary coding properties like agreement and case marking that promoted subjects exhibit, and secondary behavioral syntactic properties like binding and control, as the factors contributing to a crosslinguistic definition of a subject.
Literature:


