THE LOSS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIAN: WHAT SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CAN TELL US

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1

The loss of referential null subjects in Russian: what subordinate clauses can tell us

1)

Old Russian:

Пошё-л-ø	*ес-ми*	*за*	*мор-е*	*индѣиск-ое*
poshë-l-ъ	*jes-mi*	*za*	*mor-e*	*indrъjsk-oje*
go-PTCP-M.SG	be.PRS-1SG	beyond	sea-N.LOC	Indian-N.LOC

Modern translation (1999):

| *Пошёл*	*я*	*за*	*мор-е*	*Индийск-ое*
Poshë-l-ø	*ja*	*za*	*mor-e*	*Indijsk-oje*
go-PST-M.SG	I	beyond	sea-N.LOC	Indian-N.LOC

'I have gone beyond the Indian sea'

(extract from "A journey beyond the three seas" by Afanasy Nikitin, XV)

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Present, 3p
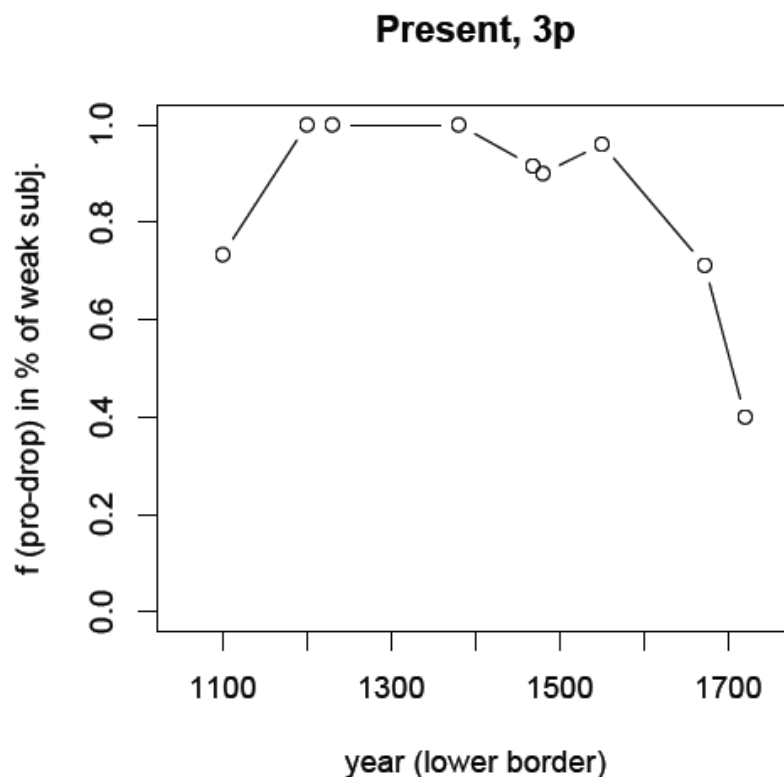
- (Meyer 2011: 123)

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Past, 3p
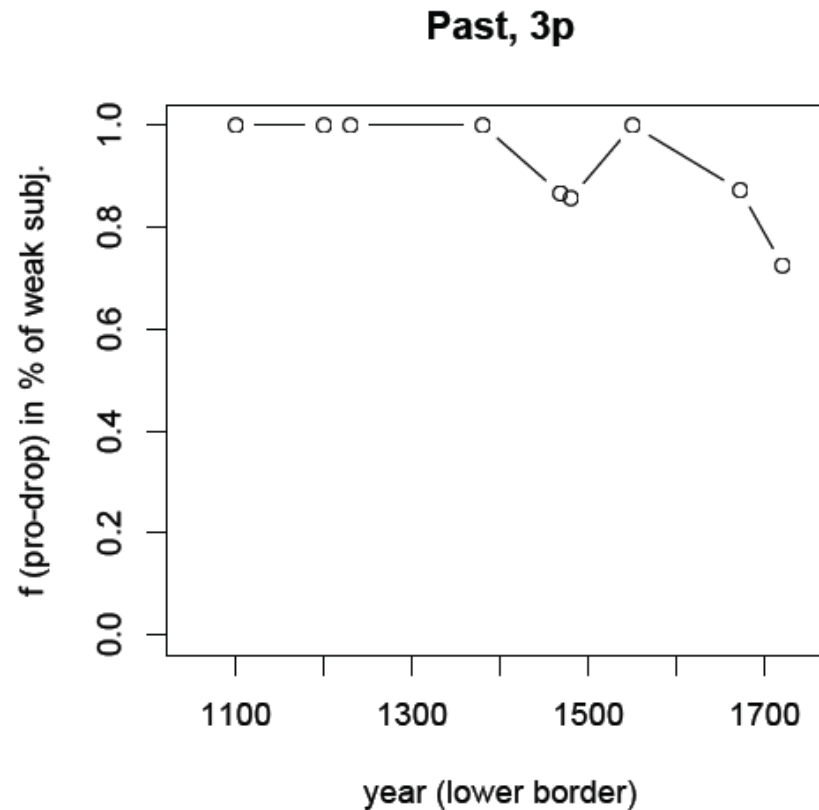
- (Meyer 2011: 124)

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| #	Abbreviation	Description	Origin
1st time span: 11th-13th c.			
1	BG1	Sample of birch-bark letters	11th-late 13th c.
2	PVL	*Povest' vremmenych let*	11th c.
2nd time span: 14th-first half of the 16th c.			
3	BG2	Sample of birch-bark letters	early 14th-15th c.
4	CC1	Sample of court charters	early 14th-2nd half 15th c.
5	CZT	*Choždenie za tri morija Afanasija Nikitina*	second half of the 15th c.
6	VZP	*Povest' o pskovskom vzjatii*	early 16th c.
3rd time span: second half of the 16th-18th c.			
7	POS	*Perepiska Andreja Kurbskogo s Ivanom Groznym*	second half of the 16th c.
8	CC2	Sample of court charters	17th c.
9	AVV	*Žitie Protopopa Avvakuma*	second half of the 17th c.
10	FSK	*Povest' o Frole Skobeeve*	18th c.

- Corpus – (Claudi 2014)

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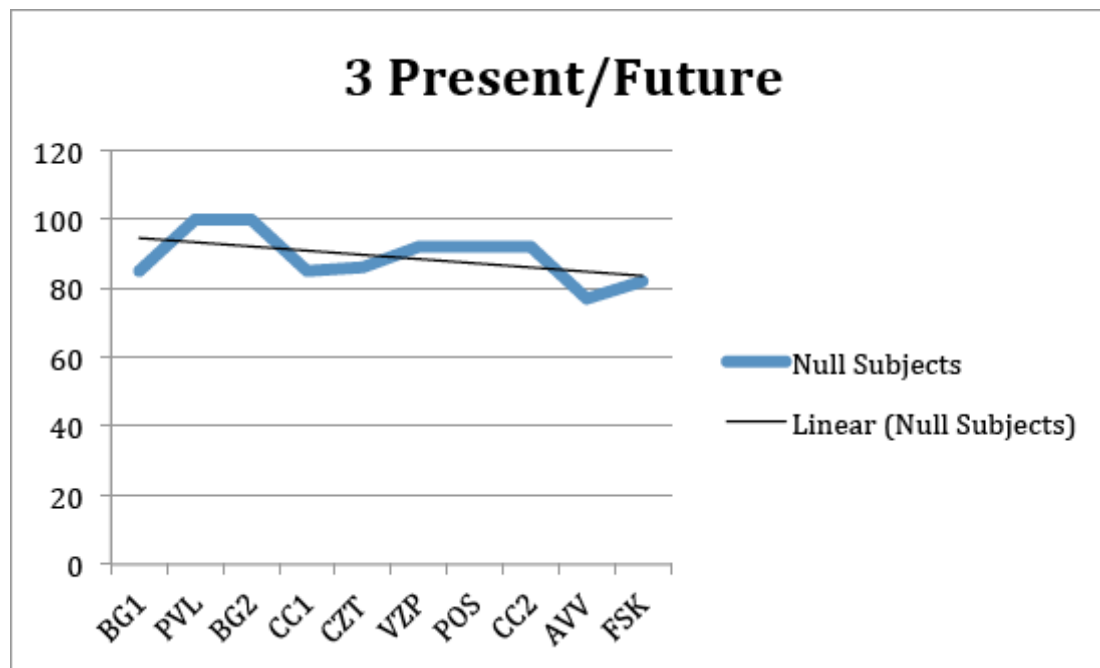
- (Claudi 2014: 151)

THE LOSS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIAN: WHAT SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CAN TELL US
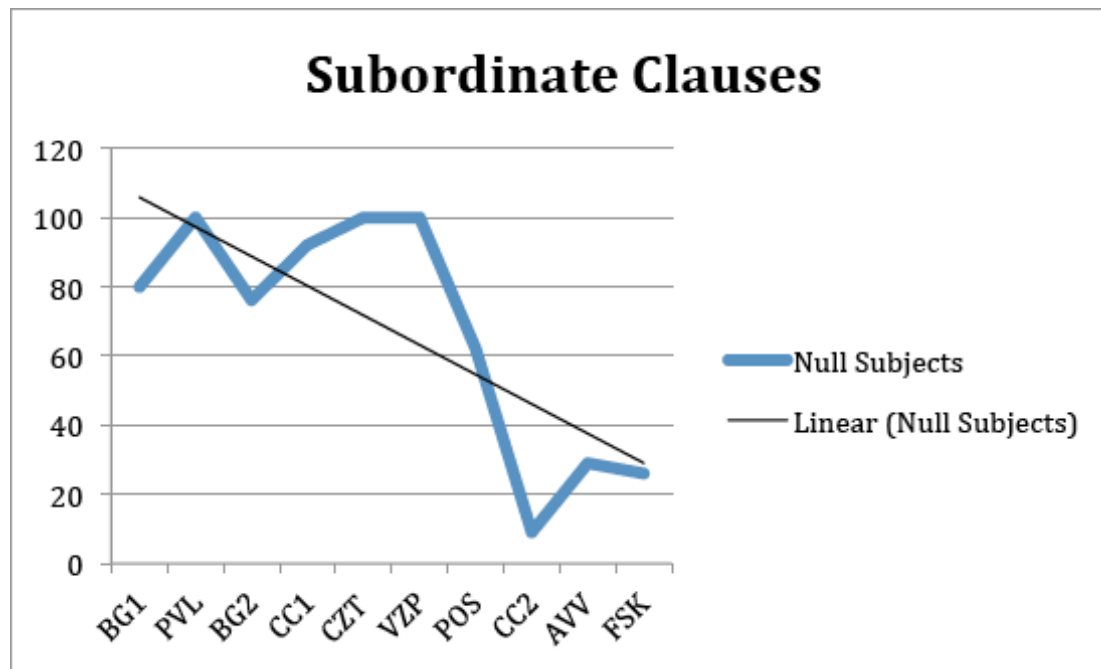
3 PerfectNoAux
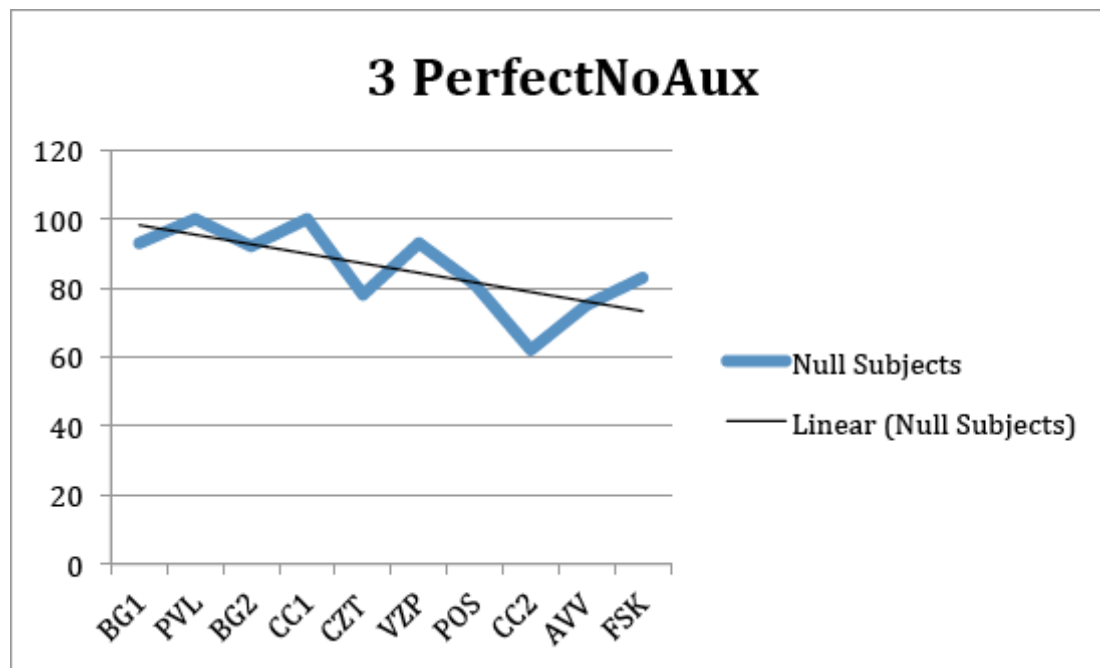
- (Claudi 2014: 156)

THE LOSS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIAN: WHAT SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CAN TELL US

- (Claudi 2014: 158)

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Past (perfect without auxiliary) (Kibrik 2013)

1st/2nd person: overt pronouns

3rd person: null pronoun

	Early OR	Middle-Late OR (12th_17th c.)	MR
1st person	*jesmǐ dalǔ*	*ja dalǔ*	*ja dal*
3rd person	*dalǔ*	*dalǔ*	*on dal*

→ In OR at the initial stage there are no weak forms of nominative third person pronouns. Overt pronouns are demonstratives (prosodically strong forms)

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2)

OR. CC1

A   vy,   pečeręne,   sloušaite   ego   i   čtite.

CONJ 2PL.NOM   P.:VOC.PL   listen:IMP.2PL 3SG.M.ACC CONJ read:IMP.2PL

a   ōn   vas   bljudet.

CONJ **3SG.M.NOM**   2PL.NOM   look.afetr:FUT.3SG

'And you, Pečerjans, listen to him and read, and he will look after you.'

- (*on* demonstrative, cf. *a* contrastive particle)

THE LOSS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIAN: WHAT SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CAN TELL US

This is probably the most plausible way of viewing the effect of impoverishment: Among the available preterite forms, the bare, impoverished one is chosen. The extent to which this happens supposedly influences the availability of pro-drop in the grammar as a whole. It is of secondary importance, what amount of *all* verb forms gets inflectionally impoverished, because this number depends on the amount of preterite vs. Present tenses, a specific textual feature outside grammar proper (Meyer 2011: 127)

… the increasing frequency of the 3rd person subject pronoun in the perfect led to a structural change in the referential system of OR, i.e. to *onŭ* being reanalyzed as semi-obligatory, and … this is most visible in subordinate clauses introduced by *čto* and *čtoby*. The new status of *onŭ* also surfaces diachronically in the present/future tense … the present … introduced it after the new status of *onŭ* was consolidated.

(Claudi 2014: 160)

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- *čto* and *čtoby* are more recent subordinate conjunctions
- They have replaced other earlier conjunctions and constructions

Old Russian texts:

- *Jako* – in knižnyj style (for this reason it is not found in birchbarks)

- In other kind of texts: *Čto, aže, ože*

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The history of Russian shows a restriction in the use of *jako* and an increasing use of *čto* in argument clauses.

3) OR.PVL (11ᵗʰ century):

I   jako poslaša bolgare   věstĭ   kŭ cesarju,
AND CONJ   AOR.3PL bulgarian:NOM.PL news:ACC.SG to Tsar:dat
***jako** idutĭ   Rusĭ   na   Cesarĭgrad (…).*
CONJ go:PRS.3PL   Russian:NOM.PL   towards   Tsargrad:ACC
'And the Bulgarians sent the news to the Tsar, that the Russians were going towards Tsargrad (…).'

THE LOSS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIAN: WHAT SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CAN TELL US

The origin of *čto* is linked to the change in the semantics and in grammatical function of the relative pronoun *čto* (Borkovskij 1979: 119). In more recent texts, *jako* and *čto* can coexist, but they are used in different contexts (Borkovskij: 124)

4) OR:BG1
600 (1220-1240)
[(…) se poslali dva mouža chotynęne k (…)]
 pro tu   tęžju   pro reku   pro   čto   to   poslale
for   DEM.ACC lawsuit:ACC for river:ACC because.of   **which** dem:ACC   send:PTCP.M.SG
negane ô   knęzę   i   ô   tebe.
N.:NOM from   prince:GEN.SG   and from 2SG.GEN
'People from the river Chotynka sent two men (to you) for the lawsuit of the river through which Negan sent (a man) in your name and in the name of the Prince.'

THE LOSS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIAN: WHAT SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CAN TELL US

čtoby replaced Old Russian *da* and *daby* (XIV century), as well as the infinitive construction with dative subject.

In Old Russian texts: *da*, *daby*

5)
OR. PVL (11th century)

*Počaša   grěci   mira   prositi, **daby** ne*
begin:AOR.3PL Greek:NOM.PL peace:GEN.SG ask:INF **CONJ** NEG

voevalŭ   grěcĭkoj   zemli.
fight:PTCP.PST.M.SG Greek:GEN.F.SG country:GEN.SG

'The Greek began to ask for peace, so that he would not wage war on the Greek country.'

6) Example from Madariaga (2015 : 23)

Bogъ že   ne xotja   [ni *edinomu* pogybnuti].   (OR: *Pechersk Patericon*, 79)

God part. not wanted not one.DT   die.INFIN

'God did not want for none of them to be destroyed.'

7)

BG2 102 (1340-1360)

*(…)Starosta   Aleksandrova   pogosta   bě/jetĭ   celomĭ   **sto**   **by***

Starosta:NOM.SG   Aleksandrov:GEN village:GEN   beat:PRS.3SG forehead:INSTR   **CONJ**   **CONJ**

jesi   gospodine okupile   ichŭ   i   slovo   položile

be:PRS.2SG lord:VOC   ransom:PTCP.PST 3PL.ACC CONJ word:ACC.SG   put:PTCP.PST.SG

so   mnoju

with   1SG.INST

'The Starosta of the village of Aleksandrov begs (you), o lord, to ransom them and to agree with me'

THE LOSS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIAN: WHAT SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CAN TELL US

8)

OR. CC1   (Early 14th– 2nd half 15th century)

[*I soudĭja vŭsprosil černĭca Semena:*]

Komou   ž   to   vĕdomo,
who:DAT.M.SG   PTC   DEM.NOM.N.SG   known:NOM.N.SG

čto   ty   *pašešŭ   tĕe   zemli*?
CONJ   2SG.NOM   plough:PRS.2SG   DEM.ACC.F.PL   land:ACC.PL

'And the judge asked the *černic* Semën: who is aware of the fact that you plough those lands?'

9)

OR.CC1   (Early 14th– 2nd half 15th century)

[*I ty, gospodine, boga radi, pokaži k nim svoju ljubovĭ i žalovanĭe,*]

čtoby   *ne   pogibli   v   zabluženii   v   tatarskich   stranach,*
CONJ   NEG   die:PTCP.PST.PL   in   mistake:LOC.SG   in   of.tatar:LOC.PL   land:LOC.PL

da   tamo by   ne   skončalisĭ
CONJ   there CONJ   NEG   die:PTCP.PST.PL

'[And you, oh lord, for God's sake, show them your love and compassion,]
so that (they) do not die in sin in Tatar lands, so that they do not die there.'

The loss of referential null subjects in Russian: what subordinate clauses can tell us

10) OR. POS (2nd half of the 16th century)

[*Mnogo otpuščeno vsjakichŭ ljudej: sprosja ichŭ, uvedaj.*]

A   pisal   sebě   v dosadu,

CONJ   write:PTCP.PST.M.SG   REFL.DAT.SG   in disappointment:ACC.SG

čto   my   *tebja   v dal'nokonyja   grady* […]   *posylali.*

CONJ   **1PL.NOM** 2SG.ACC to far.by.horse:ACC.PL town:ACC.PL   send:PTCP.PST.PL

'[A lot of men have been released: ask them, and you will know.] But you wrote to us in disappointment that we have sent you to distant towns.'

11) OR. CC2 (17th century)

[*Kŭ sej zapisi Ugleča goroda popŭ Stefan vměsto uglečanina Semena Ivanova syna Golosova po evo velěnĭju ruku priložil,*]

čto   onŭ   *proměnilŭ   svoju   poměsnuju*

CONJ **3SG.M.NOM** exchange:PTCP.M.SG POSS.REFL.ACC.F.SG   manorial:ACC.F.SG

pustoši

lot:ACC.SG

'[This record of the town of Ugleč pope Stefan wrote with his own hand on behalf of the Uglečanin Semën Ivanov son of Golosov,] because he exchanged his own manorial lot.'

THE LOSS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIAN: WHAT SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CAN TELL US

12)

OR.AVV (2nd half of the 17th century)

Vidjat   *one,*   ***čto***   ***ja***   *ne soedinjajusja s nimi,*   *prikazal*

see:PRS.3PL 3PL.NOM **CONJ 1SG.NOM** NEG join:PRS.1SG with 3PL.INSTR order:PTCP.PST.SG.M

gosudarǐ   *ugovarivatǐ*   *menja*   *Rodionu Strešnevu,* ***čtoby ja***

lord:NOM   persuade:INF   1SG.ACC   R.:DAT   S.:DAT   **CONJ**   **1SG.NOM**

molčal.

keep.silent:PTCP.PST.SG.M

'They see that I do not join them, the lord ordered Rodion Stresnëv to persuade me
  to keep silent.'

13)

OR. AVV (2nd half of the 17th century)

Skaži   *otcu,*   ***čtoby on***   *pravilo poprežnemu pravil.*

tell:IMP.2SG father:DAT.SG **CONJ 3SG.M.NOM** justly   as.before   rule:PTCP.PST.M.SG

'Ask your father to rule justly, as he did before.'

THE LOSS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIAN: WHAT SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CAN TELL US

14)

OR.FSK (18th century)

I   skazal   emu,   čtob zavtrešnej   denǐ

CONJ say:PTCP.PST.3SG.M   3SG.M.DAT   CONJ   of.tomorrow:ACC.SG day:ACC.SG

prišel   v   Uspenskoj   sobor.

come:PTCP.PST.SG.M to   of.dormition:ACC cathedral:ACC.SG

'And he told him to go to the Dormition cathedral the following day.'

15)

OR.FSK (18th century)

Podi   skaži   toj   mamke,   čto ty   budešǔ,

Go:IMP.2SG say:IMP.2SG DEM.DAT.F.SG   wet-nurse:DAT.SG CONJ 2SG.NOM be:FUT.2SG

ne   odna   [nekotorogo dvorjanina z dočerǐju, deviceju]

NEG   alone:F.SG

'Go, say, to the wetnurse that you will not be alone[with a girl, the daughter of a certain noble]'.

THE LOSS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIAN: WHAT SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CAN TELL US

16)
OR. FSK (18th century)
[*I Frol Skobeev podošel k mamke, i otdal ej poklon, i prosil eja,*]
čtob   ona   *obŭjavila*   *ob   nem   Annuške*.
CONJ   **3SG.F.SG** inform:PTCP.PST.F.SG   about   3SG.M.PREP   A.:DAT

'[And Frol Skobeev came closer to [Annuška's] mother, and bowed down to her, and asked her to tell Annuška about him.'

THE LOSS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIAN: WHAT SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CAN TELL US

The occurrences of *čtoby* in the second and third time spans.

	BG2	CC1	CZT	VZP	POS	CC2	AVV	FSK
Čtoby + pron	-		-	-	1	-	5	16
Čtoby without pron	2	1	9	1	-	-	1	2
Other subjects	-		1	2			1	2

The loss of referential null subjects in Russian: what subordinate clauses can tell us

Null subjects in Early Germanic languages

The syntactic distribution of null subjects in the earlier OHG prose texts is characterized by an asymmetry between main and subordinate clauses. Referential null subjects are almost exclusively attested in root sentences, more precisely in sentences with verb movement. (Axel 2007: 307)

In the older OHG prose texts a person split can clearly be observed … Referential null subjects are attested in all persons and numbers. However, … it is only in the third person singular and plural that the null variant is used more frequently than the overt one. (Axel 2007: 314)

17)

uuordan	*uuardh*	chihoric	untazs	zi	dode	(I 230)
become	became	obedient	until	to	death	

"he became obedient until death"

effectus est oboediens usque ad mortem

(Axel 307, main clause, OHG null subject, Lat. Null subject)

18)

Enti	[so	**aer** ·	danan	fuor] ·	quuam	in iro ·	dhinchūs ...
and	when	he	thence	went	came	to their	synagogue

"when he had departed from there, he went into their synagogue ..."

{Et cum inde transisset, uenit in synagogam eorum ...} (MF IV,19; Mt 12:9)

(Axel 309, subordintae clause, OHG overt subject, Lat. Null subject)

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clause type	Isidor pronoun subject		Monsee Fragments pronoun subject		Tatian pronoun subject	
	overt	null	overt	null	overt	null
main	61 (56%)	48 (44%)	48 (36%)	84 (64%)	1434 (60%)	960 (40%)
subordinate	85 (91%)	8 (9%)	73 (85%)	13 (15%)	1180 (92%)	95 (8%)

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How did weak overt subjects come about in Germanic?

Siewierska (2004:272) states that subject pronouns "came to be used obligatorily to avoid declarative sentences with initial verbs".

Barbosa (1995:180) proposes that there is a general connection between XP–V–S-order and the possibility of subject drop. She presents cross-linguistic evidence from modern Italian and from the historical stages of various Romance and Germanic languages, where null subjects only occur in post-finite environments.

(Axel 2007: 314)

THE LOSS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIAN: WHAT SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CAN TELL US

Old English

In all of the texts that robustly exhibit referential null subjects, including Beowulf, null variants are more common in main clauses than in subordinate clauses. The effect of clause type in Beowulf (main vs. subordinate), for instance, is clearly significant (p < .0001).

(Walkden 2013: 163)

Percentage of null subject sentences in the whole corpus:

- Main clauses: 3.3%
- Subordinate clauses: 1%

(cf. Rusten 2015)

THE LOSS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIAN: WHAT SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CAN TELL US

- Old Swedish (Håkansson2013)

Table 2. The overall distribution of overt and covert referential subjects in Old Swedish

Clauses with overt subjects		Clauses with covert subjects		Σ	
N	%	N	%	N	%
1 ,061	96	47	4	1,108	100

Table 5. The distribution of overt and covert referential subjects in main clauses vs. subordinate clauses in Old Swedish.

Clause type	W/ overt subjects	W/ covert subjects	% w/ covert subjects
Main clauses	540	31	5
Subordinate clauses	513	12	2

The loss of referential null subjects in Russian: what subordinate clauses can tell us

- The loss of null referential subjects in Swedish can be regarded as an example of syntactic grammaticalization, in the sense that a phenomenon previously controlled by non-syntactic factors has been incorporated in the syntactic structure.

- Falk (1993), is that the distinction between main and subordinate clauses was less well-developed in Early than in Late Old Swedish

- Subordinate clauses don't have an adequate topic position. In non-pro-drop languages, in the case of non-finite subordinate clauses, there is no other option than having movement of the subject to the main clause (rendering an obligatorily controlled NS), but in the case of the finite subordinate clauses, there is the option of having an overt weak pronoun, which is the preferred option for economic reasons, and in fact, the more frequent option. (Madariaga p.c.)

THE LOSS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIAN: WHAT SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CAN TELL US

- We have demonstrated that emphatic R[oot] T[ransformation]s apply in assertions, but not in presupposed clauses and questions, and we have suggested that this is because it is inappropriate in language to emphasize backgrounded or information-seeking material (Hooper & Thompson 1973: 496)

- subordinate clauses contain backgrounded information that is much less likely to be subject to topicalization, contrast and presentative focus; such manipulations are more appropriate and more commonly occur in main clauses. … subordinate clauses are constructions that are processed in relatively large chunks, which makes their constituents less independent and not so likely to change. (Bybee 2001: 2)

THE LOSS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIAN: WHAT SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CAN TELL US

OV subordinate clauses in the history of German

19) OHG

a. /... *Inti*   *thie*   *thár*   *hab&un*   *diuual*/   (T 133,1)
   and   who   PARTCL   had-PL   devil
   "and those who were possessed with the devil"
   /... *& qui demonia habebant.*/

b. /*thaz*   *in*   *mir*   *habet*   *sibba*/   (T 591,8)
   that   in   me   have   peace
   "that in me you might have peace"
   /*ut In me pacem habeatis*/

20) ModHG

a.   *... die der Teufel besass*

b.   *... daß ihr in mir Friede habt*

THE LOSS OF REFERENTIAL NULL SUBJECTS IN RUSSIAN: WHAT SUBORDINATE CLAUSES CAN TELL US

- Both fixed WO in German and overt weak subjects in Germanic languages and in OR can be conceived as instances of syntactic grammaticalization → a pattern which could be discourse motivated becomes an obligatory feature in a certain syntactic environment.

- Reanalysis is followed by actualization (Timberlake 1977:157) "the change will be actualized earlier for terms in the hierarchy which are unmarked, or more natural, contexts for the change and later for terms which are marked, or less natural, contexts for the change."

→ Why are subordinate clauses a more natural context for obligatory subjects?

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Properties of subordinate vs. main clauses

- Main clauses are asserted
- Subordinate clauses are mostly presupposed
  - Semantic notion of presupposition: The presupposed part of a sentence is that part of the sentence that must be true in order for the rest of the sentence (the asserted part) to be either true or false (McCawley 1981: 326–30).
  - Pragmatic definition: Lambrecht (1994: 51–65), what the hearer is expected to know or take for granted as a result of hearing the sentence uttered. Asymmetrical cognitive relation between SoAs, such that one SoA imposes its own profile over the whole sentence, while the other SoA lacks an autonomous profile. → non-asserted: lacking an autonomous profile (Langacker 1991: 498–501)

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- In general, subordinate clauses do not allow topicalization. They don't have an autonomous profile, and their information structure allows for less complexity than the information structure of main clauses.

- Once weak subject pronouns have been reanalyzed as obligatory, sentences that have no special information status favor their occurrence.

- This tendency is especially clear in *čto* and *čtoby* clauses which had recently been introduced, and is possibly reinforced by the high frequency of past tense forms (clauses with *čtoby* always contain past tense forms)

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→ Subordinate clauses are not more conservative, but rather less flexible with respect to main clauses. Changes that bring about a more rigid structure are favored by the information structure of subordinate clauses: as the SoA encoded in a subordinate clause lacks an independent profile, constituents of subordinate clauses are less independent. When a new, pragmatically unmarked feature comes about, it is adopted more readily in subordinate clauses.

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

The loss of referential null subjects in Russian: what subordinate clauses can tell us

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