

## Artículo de investigación

**Formation of the verbocentric theory of sentence in the late XIX – second third of the XX century**

Formación de la teoría verbocéntrica de la oración a finales del siglo XIX - segundo tercio del siglo XX  
Formação da teoria verbocêntrica da sentença no final do século XIX - segundo terço do século XX

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**Abstract**

The development of some provisions of the verbocentric theory of sentence covers the article. The interdisciplinary nature of the theory is proved, since it is realized at the intersection of lexicology, semantics, morphology, word formation and syntax. The provisions of the verbocentric theory in the works of Russian and foreign scientists of the late XIX - second third of the XX century are analyzed. The main approaches to determining the role of the Russian verb in the structure of the sentence are revealed. According to the first approach, the subject is the top of the sentence. According to the second approach, the subject and predicate are equal members of the sentence. According to the third approach, there is no equality between the subject and the predicate, since the verb in the sentence occupies a dominant position.

**Keywords:** Verb, subject, predicate, verbocentric sentence theory, syntax, predicate.

**Resumen**

El desarrollo de algunas disposiciones de la teoría verbocéntrica de la oración cubre el artículo. La naturaleza interdisciplinaria de la teoría está demostrada, ya que se realiza en la intersección de lexicología, semántica, morfología, formación de palabras y sintaxis. Se analizan las disposiciones de la teoría verbocéntrica en los trabajos de científicos rusos y extranjeros de finales del siglo XIX - segundo tercio del siglo XX. Se revelan los principales enfoques para determinar el papel del verbo ruso en la estructura de la oración. Según el primer enfoque, el sujeto es la parte superior de la oración. De acuerdo con el segundo enfoque, el sujeto y el predicado son miembros iguales de la oración. Según el tercer enfoque, no hay igualdad entre el sujeto y el predicado, ya que el verbo en la oración ocupa una posición dominante.

**Palabras claves:** Verbo, sujeto, predicado, teoría de oraciones verbocéntricas, sintaxis, predicado.

**Resumo**

O desenvolvimento de algumas disposições da teoria verbocêntrica da sentença abrange o artigo. A natureza interdisciplinar da teoria é comprovada, uma vez que é realizada na intersecção entre lexicologia, semântica, morfologia, formação de palavras e sintaxe. As disposições da teoria verbocêntrica nas obras de cientistas russos e estrangeiros do final do século XIX - segundo terço do século XX são analisadas. As principais abordagens para determinar o papel do verbo russo na estrutura da sentença são reveladas. De acordo com a primeira abordagem, o assunto é o topo da frase. De acordo com a segunda abordagem, o sujeito e o predicado são membros iguais da sentença. De acordo com a terceira abordagem, não há igualdade entre o sujeito e o predicado, uma vez que o verbo na frase ocupa uma posição dominante.

**Palavras-chave:** Verbo, sujeito, predicado, teoria da sentença verbocêntrica, sintaxe, predicado.

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## Introduction

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the verbocentric theory of sentence began to take shape in linguistics. European and American scientists L. Tenier and C. Fillmore formulated its main provisions. The ideas were further developed in the works of Russian scientists V.V. Vinogradov, A.A. Holodovich, S.T. Lomteva and their followers. Within the framework of this approach, the question of the centrality of the sentence members and their hierarchy is solved. Despite the long history of formation, the verbocentric theory of the proposal continues to evoke research interest due to the openness of many key questions. That is why a retrospective analysis of the development of the theory is of undoubted interest (Tenyer, 1988; Fillmore, 1971; Vinogradov, 1971; Pocheptsov, 1971; Lomtev, 1972).

## Research Methods

The variety of factual material led to the application of a comprehensive method that combines elements of semantic, grammatical and logical approaches.

## Discussion of the Research Results

Appeal to the theoretical understanding of the formation of the verbocentric theory of the sentence in the late XIX - second third of the XX century is not accidental. This is primarily due to the desire of the authors to show the prerequisites for the formation of the theory from the moment of the problem designation. Summarizing the different opinions on this issue, we can distinguish three approaches, each of which offers its own decision.

**Proponents of the first approach** regarded the subject as the meaningful “top” of the sentence. This decision is based on a logical approach to the facts of the language. According to this point of view, the predicate in the sentence expresses only signs that do not have an independent being. The subject expresses independent entities therefore, it is necessary to determine the name. A.A. Shakhmatova, S.O. Kartsevskogo, A.I. Smirnitsky, M.M. Gukhman, B.N. Golovin and others, represents this direction (Shakhmatov, 1941; Kartsevsky, 1928; Smirnitsky, 1957; Gukhman, 1981; Golovin, 1973).

A prominent representative of this direction is S.O. Kartsevsky. His syntactic theory is based on the concept of syntagma. According to the

scientist, human speech is divided into statements, each of which consists of special phrases, which in turn break up into syntagmas. At the same time, one of the words is also “does not serve to any other word”. The defining word is subordinate with respect to what is being defined and the relations between them are reflected in various types of subordinate communication: coordination, control, and contiguity. A special type of syntagma is a predicative syntagma, where “the determinant is attributed to the definable thanks to the intervention of the speaker's face” (Kartsevsky, 1928). The scientist considers the relationship of the subject and the predicate as the relationship between the absolute definable and predicative determinative, interconnected subordinate connections. In this concept, the combination of the subject and the predicate appears as a subordinate, where the subject is the dominant member (Barreto & Alturas, 2018; Kheiri et al, 2013).

**Proponents of the second approach** believe that the subject and the predicate are equal members of the proposal. Many modern researchers see the connection of this approach, like the first, with logic. The difference lies in the fact that the second theory is based on the logic of judgment. In each judgment there are two main elements - the subject and the predicate, therefore the sentence, being a linguistic reflection of the judgment, is composed of equal and mutually complementary members - subject and predicate. However, the real situation obliges us to make a reservation that supporters of the second approach interpret the concept of equality in different ways: the majority believes that the subject and the predicate mutually depend on each other; some scientists consider them mutually independent. Representatives of this direction are the researchers N.D. Arutyunova, L.S. Barkhudarov, V.A. Beloshapkova, N.Yu. Shvedova, I.F. Vardul, G.G. Pocheptsov, I.I. Meshchaninov (Arutyunova, 1979; Barkhudarov, 1973; Beloshapkova, 1979; Shvedova, 1983; Vardul, 1964; Pocheptsov, 1971; Meshchaninov, 1982).

The famous researcher of the Japanese language I.F. Vardul wrote: “Of the two mutually subordinate members of a sentence, the member dependent on the verbal member is the subject, and the member dependent on the substantive member is the predicate. As a rule, these members designate the subject and the form of being” (Smirnitsky, 1957).

E.S. Skoblikova explains mutually subordination as follows: “The agreed forms of the genus and the number of the predicate reflect its submission to the subject, and the nominative case is established in the subject in the order of its submission to the predicate” (Skoblikova, 1971) N.Y. Shvedova rejects the idea that the predicative link (that is, the link between the main members of a two-part sentence) is a subordinate link variant, similar to agreement. Relations between the main members in a two-part proposal are based on coordination, which only looks like a coordination link. Coordination is typical of a phrase, while Shvedova does not consider the main sentence members as elements of the phrase combination, but as components of the supply structure scheme, which is a model for building a minimal independent message. In the sphere of the structural scheme of the proposal, subordination connections do not work. Consequently, in combination of the subject and the predicate one cannot single out the dominant or dependent word” (Russian grammar, 1980).

The starting point of the proponents of the third approach is the idea that there is no equality between the subject and the predicate, and the verb completely dominates the sentence. It should be noted that the first attempts to substantiate such a decision and on the basis of it to further develop a more detailed theory were made in Russia in the first half of the 19th century, while linguists resorted not only to linguistic, but logical reasoning (Ajallooeian et al, 2015; Kutuev et al., 2017).

In many ways, the views of V.I. Klassovsky: “In terms of its meaning in a sentence, the predicate is more important than the subject. Owing to this importance of the predicate, the whole sentence can be expressed by one predicate, for example: “It was getting dark. Zaryabilo eyes. Here the subject is so vague that in the grammar they even consider it to be completely non-existent”. The researcher notes that “in meaning ... its predicate is more important than the subject,” while “the subject is more important than the predicate in relation to grammatical, it is the predicate that takes the number and gender of the subject, and not vice versa” (Klassovsky, 1969).

Somewhat later, in the 70s. XIX century. A.A. Dmitrievsky argued that the proposal has two main members: the predicate and the subject, but only one is the predicate. “The predicate is an unlimited lord, the king of a sentence: if there are other members in the sentence other than it, they are strictly subordinate to and from it only get their meaning if they are not even subject, the

predicate by itself expresses a thought sufficiently and constitutes a whole sentence. In other words, the sentence itself is nothing but a predicate, or one, or with other members attached to it (Fillmore, 1981).

Consequently, if we talk about the achievements of linguistic thought in Russia in the 19th century, then in the field of syntax not only was the idea of opposing secondary members as essential and semantically important, but the idea of the predicate's superiority over the subject was also expressed. The latter, from the point of view of semantics, is not as important as the predicate and is not always present in every sentence. As a result, the status of the subject in the hierarchy of the members of the sentence decreases, and the subject itself becomes in opposition to the predicate, just as the subordinate members of the sentence are opposed to the main members. From this we can conclude that the idea of the uneven position of the subject and the predicate, which arose in the first half of the nineteenth century, is not something too unexpected, new and completely alien to Russian philology. However, it should be noted that in the XIX century, these views did not receive a deeper development, and already the next generations of linguists saw new perspectives in these ideas.

The above theory allows you to create new classifications of verbs. The appearance in the preposition of a certain type of verb predetermines the role of arguments and their number. However, according to many researchers, although the verb has a strong influence on the composition of the arguments and their character, we should not forget about the semantics of the surrounding names, which play a significant role in the formation of the case frame.

In the process of generating statements, the interaction of the verb and names generates complex changes in the semantic structure of the first, revealing the explicit implicit structure of the word. Therefore, many researchers, resorting to the theory to study the deep sentences, strive to take into account not only the purely semantic factor, but also the data of grammar, syntax (actual division in particular), etc. V.V. Bogdanov in one of his works. However, the requirements of semantic roles are not indifferent to the specific vocabulary, which takes argument positions; otherwise, it will not be able to fulfill the necessary roles. For example, “if there is an agent under a locative predicate, then an anthroponym noun must correspond to this argument, then one of the

following occurs: either the noun acquires a sign of anthropomimity, or the predicate itself is subject to semantic modification” (Bogdanov, 1983).

N.D. Arutyunova, noting that the subject not only indicates the subject of speech, but also “has another quite important task - to explicate the value of the predicate, creating a semantic background for it” (Arutyunova, 1979).

As mentioned earlier, the opinion about the dominance of the verb in the hierarchical structure of the sentence was expressed by some scientists in Russia in the first half of the XIX century. Therefore, the verbocentric approach found its followers in our country. Therefore, V.V. Grapes considered the verb “the most complex and most capacious grammatical category of the Russian language.” At the same time, he drew the attention of researchers to the fact that “verbal constructions have a decisive influence on nominal phrases and sentences” (Vinogradov, 1971).

It should be called A.A. Holodovich – a scientist who was one of the first not only in Russian, but also in world linguistics, outlined the main approaches to the detailed development of verbocentric theory. In one of his works, the scientist wrote that in addition to words, in the process of communication, we use verbal lines, and every verbal line consists of a core and its environment. A.A. Holodovich limits the scope of analysis to the study of only those verbal lines that include a finite verb. In these types of statements, the verb acts as the core of a verbal series. Further, the author points out that, in interaction with the verb, “each member of the environment in relation to its row and indirectly, through the core, in relation to the other members of the sentence, performs a specific function. This feature is the only one. Member of the environment does not carry two functions. The functions of the members of the environment are non-coincident. Performing a certain function, the member of the environment is marked with a function sign” (Holodovich, 1960).

Although the author does not specify either the content of the functions or their total number, the article outlines approaches to the problems of the valence theory. In some later works by A.A. Holodovich is even more definitely in favor of the verbocentric theory. So in 1979, analyzing various linguistic arguments both in favor of the dominance of the subject and the predicate, he comes to export that even in favor of equality of the subject and predicate there is no linguistic

evidence. The very idea of equality of the main members of a sentence is a legacy of formal logic. He believes that the strongest argument in favor of this idea is the sign of representation, in which he draws the conclusion that in the “predicative syntagm, the predicate has the same function as the attribute in the syntagm performs the definable; this is the host function: the stars: twinkle = red: the rose” (Holodovich, 1960).

Verbocentric theory developed in his later works, T.P. Lomtev. “In one of his last books, the sentence is considered as a system with relations, and here there are as many constitutives as there are subjects (actants) in his predicate, plus another constituent that expresses the relations between them”. In one of his last books, the sentence is viewed as a system with relations, and there are as many constituents as there are subjects (actants) in his predicate, plus another constituent that expresses the relations between them” (Lomtev, 1972).

In an earlier work, T.P. Lomtev wrote: “A predicate is that which predetermines the number of subject places in a statement and sets the function of each object that occupies a place in a predicate. The function is performed by the item, but is set by its predicate. In the statement “Hunter killed a deer”, the predicate defines the fiction of the object called the name “hunter” and the object called the name “deer” (Lomtev, 1972).

Further study of the structure of the proposal is connected with the development of the theory of deep and surface syntax. In this regard, it is impossible not to refer to the works of such scholars as L. Tenier, W. Chafe, C. Fillmore and others (Tenyer, 1988; Chafe, 1975; Fillmore, 1981).

## Conclusion

L. Tenier was a strong supporter of the verbocentric theory, which became the cornerstone of his entire syntactic concept. First, he sharply criticized traditional grammar for the reason that it introduces the notions of logic into linguistics. That is why he believes that such a theory should be regarded more as a logical rather than linguistic one (Tenyer, 1988).

Speaking against the traditional theory, he opposes her own, emphasizing the linguistic nature of the new approach. “Any arguments that can be put forward against the concept of a verbal knot, i.e. in favor of the opposition, the subject / predicate comes from a priori formal logic that is

not related to linguistics. As for purely linguistic observations of the facts of language, they make it possible to draw a conclusion of a completely different nature: not a single language, not a single purely language fact leads to the opposition of a predicate". In the concept of L. Tenier several fundamental ideas stand out. In almost every sentence, in the analysis, a certain number of dominant and subordinate words are singled out. The dominant words together with the subordinates form the so-called nodes. Depending on the belonging of the dominant word to a certain lexico-grammatical category, the verbal, substantive, adjective, etc. bridges are distinguished. In the verb sentence, the verb core, which subordinates all other nodes of the sentence, is dominant. In a simple sentence, the central node does not have to be a verb. However, if there is a verb in the sentence, it is always the center of this sentence. L. Tenier considers the entire proposal and its structure as the sum of dependencies between its members (Tenyer, 1988).

The ideas expressed by Tenier caused a lot of controversy and served as the beginning of the formation of the theory of valency, as well as the theory of role and case grammar. The latter is closely connected with the names of C. Fillmore, W. Chafe and others (Fillmore, 1971; Chafe, 1975). As the theory evolved, the emphasis shifted more and more towards the recognition of the decisive role of semantics in shaping the formation.

If in the early works of C. Fillmore semantics is not considered as the core of the model, and the verb as the decisive element of the deep structure, later attention is drawn to the dominance of the verb in the structure of the sentence and the deep-semantic correlation of cases (Fillmore, 1971). The verb, according to the scientist, has the property to be combined with certain semantic cases.

The positive side of this theory is not only the idea of a verb as a factor that has a great influence on the production of a statement and combines various semantic roles into a single whole, but also a thought with a close connection arising in the case between the verb and names.

Summarizing the above, we note that the first approach is related to the description of the laws and rules for the functioning of linguistic units in speech, the second approach examines the possibilities of language from the point of view of semantic organization in the process of communication. On the one hand, the

verbocentric theory of sentence is characterized by a functional approach to linguistic facts; on the other hand, the deep cases express the semantic functions of the participants of the utterance, which form its semantic-role structure, which is connected with the reflection of the situations themselves. The third approach is based on the recognition that the production of a statement is a complex process of transition from deep structures to superficial ones. Knowledge of these mechanisms contributes to a deeper study of surface structures.

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