SOME ASPECTS OF THE SO-CALLED VERBAL DELETION IN ENGLISH AND POLISH

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The aim of the present paper is to show some aspects of the phenomenon which might tentatively be called verbal deletion; an attempt will be undertaken to demonstrate the relations obtaining among lexical items, semantic concepts and particular transformations in English and in Polish. The data, which are limited to a few structures and a few lexical items, will be used as a starting point for a discussion concerning the possible nature of semantic representation and the ways in which specific meanings result from the interaction of semantic elements.

First let us consider the following set of sentences:

I 1. He refused an offer.
  2. He refused an invitation.
  3. She refused a gift.
  4. She refused a proposal.
  5. He refused supper.
  6. *She refused the cloud.
  7. *She refused a table.

Obviously some of the sentences above are ungrammatical; their surface structures are identical and differ only with respect to the objects (e.g. *an offer* vs *a cloud* or *a table*). Sentences 6 and 7, although ungrammatical in this set, would be perfect if we inserted verbs into them:

6'. She refused *to accept* (or: to paint, to buy) a cloud.
7'. She refused to make (or: to buy) a table.[1]

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[1] Sentence 6, although semantically odd, is grammatically possible. It seems justified to ignore this semantic oddity, since in the context:

He dreamt that *he refused to accept a cloud*.

the item *a cloud* acquires a new feature which is not its inherent property, namely the

We have noticed in set I that in all sentences except 6 and 7 (which are deviant) the verb *to accept* is understood, or rather a more general concept expressing somebody's will to take something which is being given to him is incorporated in the sentence. Thus we can paraphrase sentences in set I as follows:

II He refused TO ACCEPT an offer, a gift, an invitation, etc.

Deletion of this verb from the surface structure results in a grammatical sentence:

He refused to accept an offer = He refused an offer.

In other cases, however, deletion of verbs produces ungrammatical strings:

III 1. *He refused the lesson ≠ He refused to accept the lesson.
    2. *He refused the radio ≠ He refused to accept the radio.
    3. *He refused the song ≠ He refused to accept the song.

Sentences 1, 2 and 3 do not include the verb *to accept*, but other verbs which cannot be omitted if the sentence is to be grammatical:

He refused *to prepare* the lesson.
He refused *to accept* the radio.
He refused *to sing* the song.

In none of the above sentences can the underlined verb be deleted without the sentence becoming ungrammatical.

In order to understand why verbal deletion operates in some cases and fails in others which are seemingly very similar, it may prove helpful to analyse the objects which appear in grammatical sentences:

IV an offer
   an invitation
   a gift
   a proposal

Since the main verb and the deleted verb are the same in all cases, it must be the nouns which are responsible for the deletion because of some inherent properties they have in common and which they share with both the main

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feature: (something that can be taken as a present); in this way for most cases which seem semantically peculiar an appropriate context may be found in which they sound acceptable. Thus this type of selectional restriction is of no importance for the present discussion (cf. McCawley 1971, Lakoff 1971b). As is well known, the notion of grammaticality is far from being clear at that moment and reasonable criteria are nonexistent. Some authors (Lakoff 1971b) tend to take recourse to extralinguistic factors, others try to rely on the intuition of native speakers, which fails in many cases. It may seem justified, then, that in the present paper no consistent definition is given.

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and the deleted verb. All the nouns enumerated in IV seem to denote the following concept:

something that can be given or offered by one person to another one and, consequently, something that can be accepted

This notion of being given with the purpose of getting it accepted is an inherent property of these nouns and one of the factors that define their semantic behaviour.[2]

In this way we have come to the point where it is convenient to assume that in the meaning of at least some nouns there is a verbal notion (in this particular case the notion of accepting) which is one of the factors making deletion possible. However, while a noun may be used with different verbs in different contexts, there is only one verb (or sometimes two) which is an inherent property of a given noun and as such is semantically relevant,[3] e.g.:

a book — something intended mainly to be read; les frequently also to be
            written;
a present — something given to somebody with the purpose of its being
            accepted, etc.

However, the presence of an item with the feature specified above would by no means be enough for the deletion to take place. If it applied to the following sentence:

1. He agreed to accept a present.

it would yield an ungrammatical sentence:

1'. *He agreed a present.

If we compare sentence 1' with a grammatical sentence:

2. He refused a present.

we can notice that different semantic relations obtain between these two pairs of lexical items:

to agree — a present
to refuse — a present

If we state the most important aspects of the verb *to refuse* in the following way:

REFUSE (the giver, the affected)
meaning: to express unwillingness to accept something
presupposition: something that can be given and thus should be accepted
                has been offered to somebody

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[2] This concept may be optionally present in other nouns as most things in the world can be given and, consequently, accepted in some situations, but for these verbs it is an indispensable part of their semantic description.

[3] One may suggest, additionally, that most probably there are groups of nouns incorporating a verb common for all of them.

it becomes obvious that there are semantic connections of some type between *to refuse* and *a present* which are not to be observed in the pair *to agree* and *a present*.[4]

It seems that the possibility of deletion depends not only on the meaning of separate lexical items taken individually, but rather on the whole semantic structure which has been created by these items and within which they influence each other, e.g., the meaning of *to refuse* limits in a way the possible objects to very specific ones (or, in other words, it carries certain presuppositions which have to be fulfilled if the sentence is to be grammatical), while, on the other hand, the meanings of the objects limit the possible reactions to accepting or not accepting (excluding the possibility of judging or painting, for example, which are not present in the meanings of the items).

We may state tentatively that the verb which possesses the feature (+accept) may be deleted from the sentences in which it appears (set II) if it is incorporated in the meaning of the other items. Thus sentence 1 below:

1. He refused a gift.

means:

1'. He refused to accept a gift.

but not:

1'' He refused to buy a gift.

If we take our ungrammatical sentences into consideration:

*He refused the lesson.

we can see easily that these two concepts, namely refuse and lesson are not compatible with each other as far as their semantic representations are con-

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[4] We have tried to find out whether it would not be possible to classify the other occurrence of the verb REFUSE (e.g., *He refused to sing* or *He refused to come*) under one common heading, roughly speaking of the following type:

REFUSE$_1$ and $_2$ not want TO DO something

of which *refuse*$_1$ would be only a specific case. However, such an approach presents us with numerous difficulties. First of all, it is too general, since we would have to assume that it applies in all cases where we have a noun, yielding:

a) *He refused a song ← He refused to sing a song
b) *He refused a letter ← He refused to write a letter

Apart from the fact that it would produce ungrammatical sentences, it would not cover some cases (e.g., He refused to come). Thus we have decided to maintain the distinction and discuss only REFUSE$_1$, which turns out to be a different verb. Sentence a) above would be grammatical only if *a song* were understood as a type of present, thus acquiring an extra feature.

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cerned, that is to say presuppositions evoked by the verb are violated by other elements of the sentence. Thus it is necessary to retain the other verb in the surface structure:

He refused *to study* the lesson.

In some contexts, however, even these sentences can undergo the verb deletion transformation without becoming ungrammatical, e.g.:

Of all things he was given he refused only a table. It seems that this particular sentence needs certain presuppositions which are evoked by the first part of it:

something has been given to someone, the table was among the things which have been given,

In this way the item *table* acquires a new feature: *something* that can be given as a present and thus the whole sentence becomes grammatical.

Let us turn now to the analysis of Polish sentences of a similar type:

V 1. Odmówił ratunku.
  2. Odmówił pomocy.
  3. Odmówił jałmużny.
  4. Odmówił gościny.
  5. Odmówił podpisu.
  6. Odmówił utrzymania.
  7. Odmówił pieniędzy.
  8. Odmówił zaszczytu.

It seems that incorporated in sentences from 1 to 6 is the verb *dać / to give*, sentence 7 is ambiguous and may mean either:

7' On odmówił wzięcia pieniędzy / He refused to take the money.

or:

7'' On odmówił dania pieniędzy / He refused to give the money.

Finally, sentence 8 includes the verb *przyjąć / to accept, to take*.

Bearing in mind the above-mentioned examples, it is possible to modify slightly the description of the verb *to refuse / odmówić* by adding an extra feature:

REFUSE / ODMÓWIĆ: not to want, not to agree *to accept* or *to give* something which is supposed either to be given in order to be taken, or to be given without any suggestion as to the necessity of accepting it.

The objects in set V mean respectively:

assistance, help, alms, hospitality, signature, maintenance, money, an honour and they all denote something that can be given if asked for, roughly speaking

in the following context:

> Someone asks me: Help me = Give me help.
> I refuse *to give* him help.

These objects, however, do not necessarily suggest accepting, that is why in the sentence:

> On odmówił *przyjęcia* jałmużny.

The verb denoting acceptance cannot be omitted.

Thus the whole process may be tentatively presented as follows: the verb REFUSE evokes a certain semantic context which presupposes a situation in which something has been given or has been asked for; in this way the possible reactions are limited to *accepting* or *giving*, and the choice at this point depends on the other semantic concepts, e.g. podpis/signature which is a thing primarily to be given to people.[5]

The phenomenon of deleting certain verbs can also be observed in those sentences in which the verbs: *to begin, to start, to continue, to finish* appear, still the relations holding among the elements of their underlying semantic structures are even more complex. Let us analyse a group of examples:

VI 1. He began a book.   vs 1' He began a notebook.
   2. He began his tea.   vs 2' He began the snap.
   3. He started a song.   vs 3' He started a garden.
   4. He began the noise.   vs 4' He began the silence.
   5. He began a play.   vs 5' He began a window.
   6. He began supper.   vs 6' He began a gift.

In the above sentences there are examples of the verb deletion transformation, but in each case the deleted verb is different. The sentences in set VI mean respectively:

VII 1. He began *to read* a book.
    2. He began *to drink* his tea.
    3. He started *to sing* a song.
    4. He began *to make* the noise.
    5. He began *to read* a play.
    6. He began *to eat* supper.

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[5] In this particular case it is not possible to base the distinction between *accept* and *give* on the endings in the surface structure, because in both cases the endings are the same. Cf. Karolak (1975):

On wypowiada się za projektem.
On wypowiada się przeciwko projektowi.

In each case the object is different and so is the deleted verb. Thus the deletion transformation must in a way depend on the objects, but not exclusively, as will be demonstrated.

Consider the following examples:
VIII 1. He began the noise.
     2. He started the noise.
     3. He finished the noise.
     4. *He began the soap.
        *He began a gift.

In the first three sentences the verb which is "understood" is *to make* and its presence in the surface structure is not necessary for the understanding of the sentences. But sentences 4 require some specification as to their meaning, otherwise they are ungrammatical. Thus there must be a relation between *the noise* and *to begin* which does not exist between *the soap* and *to begin*.

The verbs of the begin-type suggest a situation in which an activity can last in time, so they can be used in such semantic structures which imply similar meaning; that is to say they require objects which possess this "time aspect". If we analyse the meaning of the item *the noise* we will notice that it allows for the possibility of lasting. In other words, in the meaning of the *noise* the verb *to be made* is present and only this verb can be deleted; otherwise ungrammatical sentences result or the deletion transformation is blocked:

> He began the noise ≠ He began *to increase* the noise.

The verb *to increase* cannot be deleted because the meaning of *the noise is*: (something that is made, +lasting) rather than: (something that is increased). The statement that only verbs included in nouns can be deleted is proved by the fact that if we change the object the verb "understood" in the sentence is different:

> He began the book ≠ He began to eat the book.
> but: He began supper = He began to eat supper.

So one thing the verb deletion transformation depends upon is what we shall call the "time relation" between the main verb and the object NP. It means that in the semantic structures where verbs of the begin-type appear only these nouns can be used that possess the feature (+lasting), that is they include verbs in the passive sense, e.g.:

> *a book is something to be read* — the activity of reading can last for a certain time;

The sentence *He began a book* means *He began to read a book* and the verb *to read* can be deleted as the "time relation" is preserved and the verb is included in the noun *the book*.

Let us consider now the following sentences:

IX 1. *He initiated the silence.
   2. *He began a window.
   3. *He began a notebook.
   4. *He began a cloud.

Although at least some of the items (e.g. *the silence*) have the feature (+lasting), they include no verbs idiosyncratic to them, so deletion is impossible. We cannot possibly say:

*Silence is something to be made.

while we can say:

Noise is something to be made.

Also:

A notebook is something to be written? read?...
A cloud is something to be ... made? painted?

The sentence:

He began to paint the cloud.

is grammatical but deletion is impossible because the "semantic agreement" is not preserved — the meaning of the item *the cloud* does not contain any element which would correspond to the item *to paint*.

The following sentences seem to contradict the theory:

X 1. *He began a table.
  2. The carpenter began a table.

In sentence 1 the time relation is preserved, still the sentence is ungrammatical, while sentence 2 is acceptable, although only one element is different: the subject NP. In this case we would need the presence of the "specifying relation" which must be preserved when the object is something to be made, but only by a specialist. Then the verb is contained not within the object but within the subject:

the carpenter = somebody who *makes* furniture the table = a piece of furniture which *is made* by a carpenter;

Sometimes the presence of the specifying relation is obligatory (sentences X), sometimes it is optional:

XI 1. He began supper = He began *to eat* supper
   2. The cook began supper = The cook began *to cook/to eat* supper

Sentence 2 in set XI is ambiguous because supper is:
   something to be eaten/to be prepared
and *the cook* is somebody who can either prepare or eat supper. The same phenomenon can be observed in the sentences below:

XII 1. He began a book = He began *to read* a book.
    2. The writer began a book = The writer began *to write/to read* a book.

Polish examples seem to support the above analysis:

XIII 1. On zaczął list.
     2. Zaczął zebranie.
     3. Zaczął kolację.
     4. Kucharz zaczął kolację o 8.
     5. On kontynuował rozmowę, etc.

Similar relations obtain in other sentences where such verbs as:
   zaczynać — begin
   kontynuować — continue
   skończyć — finish, stop
   zacząć — start
are present.

In the above analysis we have tried to show that transformations (in particular, the verb deletion transformation) do not depend upon lexical items but are conditioned by different types of semantic relations present in semantic structure. Thus semantic representation does not consist of lexical items but rather is a system of semantic concepts and relations, while lexical items are inserted later on in the process of lexicalization. It has been demonstrated that transformations are sensitive to semantic relations so they operate on the semantic level not taking into account separate lexical items. [6]

Now we can try to modify slightly our previous analysis. It has been stated that verbal deletion is possible in the following semantic contexts:

I the verb REFUSE — if the deleted verb (*to give* or *to accept*) is in any way contained within the sentence,
II verbs of *the begin-type* — if the "time relation" and the "specifying relation" obtain and the semantic agreement is preserved, that is if the deleted verb is included either in the object or in the subject.

Since the sentence:

He refused a gift.

and

He refused to accept a gift.

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[6] In this way the level of Chomsky's deep structure can be rejected in accordance with proposals of Lakoff, Postal, and McCawley.

mean the same and the only difference is the presence or absence of the verb *to accept*, we may assume that they are both derived from the same underlying semantic structure and then the verb *to accept* is deleted as all the conditions hold.

It is possible, however, to present the relations between these two sentences in a different way. In semantic structure there are no lexical items, but semantic concepts and relations:

HE	REFUSED	A PRESENT
He said he did not want *to accept* sth		sth given to him *to be accepted*
a)		b)

Thus in the semantic structure of sentences 1 and 2 the notion of accepting is contained within a) and b). Later on part a) gets reduced to the item *to refuse* and part b) — to the item *a present* and we get a sentence:

He refused a present.

with no verb *to accept*. This verb is inserted by the verb insertion rule which takes out the verbs included in nouns and we get:

He refused to accept a present.

In order to account now for the semantic identity of sentences:

He refused a gift

and:

He refused to accept a gift.

we do not need the verb deletion transformation but rather the verb insertion rule which can also account for other facts, e.g. the sentence:

He began a book.

means:

He began to read a book.

and the semantic structure of these two sentences may be presented in the following way:

He began [something to be read+lasting]⇒ a book

Under the conditions specified above the concept of reading, incorporated in the noun may be taken out, inserted after the verb *begin* and then lexicalized (in the same way as *a book*).

This optional rule may also account for the fact that:

He refused a gift.

does not mean:

He refused to buy a gift.

In the semantic structure of the former sentence there is no notion of bying so there is no possibility of arriving at the structure with the verb *to buy* present.

The interpretation demonstrated above is by no means the only possible one, still it seems that introducing the verb insertion rule justifies, at least partly, the assumption that transformations operate on semantic concepts and not on lexical items (as, for instance, the verb deletion transformation does).

Additionally, we have also tried to show that in spite of surface differences between Polish and English, universal concepts of similar types may apply to both languages, even though they are expressed differently (by means of case endings prepositions, gerunds or real verbs etc.).[7]

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