



UNIwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

**STUDIA
GERMANICA POSNANIENSIA
XIII**



POZNAŃ 1984

UNIWERSYTET IM. ADAMA MICKIEWICZA W POZNANIU

**STUDIA
GERMANICA POSNANIENSIA**

XIII

Sprachwissenschaft



POZNAŃ 1984

Redaktor naukowy
ANDRZEJ Z. BZDEGA



429176 II/

T. 13
1984

Redaktor: Anna Gierlińska

Redaktor techniczny: Michał Łyssowski

PL ISSN 0137-2467

WYDAWNICTWO NAUKOWE UNIWERSYTETU IM. ADAMA MICKIEWICZA W POZNANIU

Nakład 520+80 egz. Ark. wyd. 11,50. Ark. druk. 9,50+1 wkł. Papier druk. sat. kl. III. 80 g.
70×100. Oddano do składania w sierpniu 1983 r. Podpisano do druku w listopadzie 1984 r. Druk
ukończono w grudniu 1984 r. Zam. nr 173/38. A-3/711. Cena zł 120,-

DRUKARNIA UNIWERSYTETU IM. ADAMA MICKIEWICZA - POZNAŃ, UL. FREDRY 10

Bibl. UAM
85 10723

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GRZEGORZ SKOMMER

SOME TERMINOLOGICAL INCONSISTENCIES IN NORWEGIAN SYNTAX

Abstract. Grzegorz Skommer, *Some terminological inconsistencies in Norwegian syntax*, Studia Germanica Posnaniensia, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, Poznań, vol. XIII: 1984, pp. 129–132, PL ISSN 0137–2467.

The subject of the author's considerations is the lack of agreement in the classification of subordinate sentences in Polish and Norwegian grammar.

The author suggests that there is a need to base this classification on the relevant parts of a sentence, and not on parts of speech. In this way one can avoid confusion in the acquisition of subordinate clause of the Norwegian language by Poles learning Norwegian.

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As emphasized by Zabrocki (Zabrocki 1966), the task of neophilological studies is not to teach the language but to study it. As far as practical language teaching is concerned, the direct method is used by which students acquire grammatical rules without being aware of it. The indirect method provides students with grammatical categories before they are introduced in practice and students of Norwegian are taught both the language and the grammar.

For example, a student of Norwegian will find out that the sentence:

Alle visste at gutten var flink

is rendered in Polish as

Wszyscy wiedzieli, że chłopiec jest mądry.

In Norwegian as well as in Polish both subordinate clauses function as objects. In his course on theoretical contrastive studies he will not, however, find the category "object subordinate clause" in Norwegian.

The differences between two languages originate in different terminology and classifications. In the example given above the Norwegian subordinate clause belongs to the nominal clauses.

Students may find it difficult to estimate a given category correctly simply because they are provided with different terms denoting it. It seems necessary to establish common terminology of the category before students meet it in practice. It would make them conscious of differences even before they had to deal with them.

I have come across a number of such inconsistencies while studying the problem of Polish and Norwegian subordinate clauses. As we will see later, these terminological inconsistencies have greater significance than it may seem.

There are three different terms for subordinate clause in Norwegian — each of them implying a different conclusion. This simple fact already indicates the nature of the problem we have to deal with. The three terms are:

- bisetning (compare German 'Nebensatz')
- leddsetning
- undersetning

'Undersetning' is used in the grammars of New-Norwegian (nynorsk).

'Bisetning' carries only one piece of information — that we have to do with subordination. The term is used by Næs (Næs 1972). 'Leddsetning' is a term created by Jespersen (Jespersen 1913:39) and a great number of linguists have used it (Western 1921:21, Vinje 1970:74, Lie 1976:98, Borgstrøm 1964:56). This term¹ seems to be the most suitable for my paper as it perfectly fits the definition of the subordinate clause. The definition — generally accepted by the majority of Norwegian linguists — terms the subordinate clause as a clause functioning as a part of sentence:

"En bisetning kan sies til å være IC i en av helsetningens syntagmer. Den er subjekt, objekt, predikativ, adverbial eller attributt, og kjennes på sin tilknytning til hovedsetningen." (Næs, 1972:355)

"En setning (som) kan stå som ledd i en annen setning (neksus) eller i junksjon." (Borgstrøm 1964:56)

"En setning som er eget setningsledd eller del av et setningsledd, kalles leddsetning." (Lie 1976:98).

"...og bestemt leddsetning som en setning som fungerer som ledd." (Vinje 1970:75)

To a large extent Polish definitions are similar as they consider the subordinate clause an 'expansion' of the logical part of a sentence. It should be remarked that Polish definitions are also far from being exact. Bąk maintains (Bąk 1977:367) that in a subordinate compound sentence the clauses are so firmly fastened together that they cannot be understood in isolation. But in the sentence: "Korzenie są pełne wody, z których rośliny korzystają w czasie suszy" the main clause is grammatically independent, the subordinate clause provides only additional information. Norwegian grammars distinguish two types of sub-

¹ ledd — Norw. for part, link.

ordinate clauses: necessary (nødvendige) and unnecessary (unødvendige) denoting grammatically inescapable or inessential clauses. It seems reasonable to introduce such a distinction in Polish. Jodłowski (Jodłowski 1976:183) considers the subordinate clause a clause giving explanatory or additional information to the main clause. Not always since in the sentence: "Słyszałem, że byłeś wczoraj w Warszawie" the subordinate clause is main source of information.

Three different terms denoting a single linguistic fact may be troublesome for students of Norwegian. There are also many various theories referring to the nature of subordinate clause, one of them going as far as to claim that it is non-existent! Yet they are not the object of my consideration. According to the main Norwegian grammars, the subordinate clause exists and replaces a part of a sentence i.e. subject, predicate, object, adverbial, attribute. But the classification of Norwegian subordinate clauses is as follows:

Leddsetninger (subordinate clauses)

- substantiviske (substantival)
- adjektiviske (adjectival)
- adverbiale (adverbial)

The division is based upon parts of speech and this stands in obvious opposition to the definition mentioned above. There is a gap between teaching practice and theory, a gap which requires an explanation.

It seems to me that Norwegian grammars lack an overall approach to the subordinate clause. On the one hand, as a part of a compound sentence, the subordinate clause is nothing but a part of the sentence which has the form of a sentence. On the other hand, considering subordinate clauses in isolation, they are divided into substantival, adjectival and adverbial: "...alt efter som de utfylder et Substantiv, Adjektiv, eller Adverbs Plads i Sammenhængen." (Knudsen 1856: 43). And it is quite true; a substantive performs different functions in a sentence but it is the function of substantive that counts for syntactic analysis not the substantive itself.

The inconsistency just mentioned is an obstacle in a comparative analysis of Polish and Norwegian subordinate clauses simply because there is no common basis for such an analysis. Polish descriptive grammar distinguishes five types of subordinate clauses according to what part of the sentence they refer to: subject, object, predicate, adverbial or complement. There is no correspondence between the five Polish types and the three Norwegian since the approach to the subordinate clause is different in both languages.

Inconsistencies are quite obvious. Strangely enough, Norwegian grammars emphasize the necessity of parts of speech being separated at an early stage of teaching grammatical rules. Vinje says: "Et ords klassesethørighet er eller bør være fast, men et ords setningsleddfunksjon kan variere (selv om ordklassene prefererer visse leddfunksjoner)." (Vinje 1970: 80).

It should be mentioned that some attempts have been made to eliminate these evident deficiencies. Næs avoids the terms mentioned above by using designations: nominal, relative and adverbial. He is also among those few who introduce adverbial clauses of place to the Norwegian syntax. Lie introduces a new division:

- implikative (entangled) sentences
- eksplikative (disentangled) sentences.

''Boka du gav meg, var fin'' is an example of entangled sentence (one part of sentence 'bok' is common for both main and subordinate clause as it is subject for 'var' and object for 'gav'). In the example: ''Jeg sa at Per kjente Ola'', there is no such a common part.

It appears to me that to change the status quo, a new classification should be introduced. In the classification one should avoid using terms denoting parts of speech. All parts of the sentence should be considered at the same level of significance. Finally, one should try to omit the terms 'undersetning' and 'bisetning' and use 'leddsetning' only to denote the subordinate clause.

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