COMITATIVE COORDINATION: A CASE STUDY IN GROUP FORMATION*

This paper argues that in Russian a (singular) NP can combine with a comitative PP to form a complex plural NP, and that this NP denotes a group in the sense of Landman (1989). A single-headed GPSG analysis of the construction is proposed and argued for, and the implications of the analysis for number agreement are discussed. The semantic properties of the construction (and its counterpart in Polish) are subsequently detailed and are compared with those of 'ordinary' NP coordination; the preliminary conclusion is that the construction differs both in denotation and in conventional meaning from NP coordination.

0. INTRODUCTION

This paper is a case study in a rather unusual complex NP found in Russian and Polish, which I will refer to as comitative coordination. A Russian example appears, in bold-face, in (1):  

(1) Anna s Petej napisali pis’mo  
A.-NOM with P.-INSTR wrote-PL letter  
Anna and Peter wrote a letter.

I will propose that the NP Anna and PP s Petej in (1) form a single-headed (asymmetric) constituent which nonetheless has a semantics virtually identical to that of a (symmetric) coordinate structure. The structure to be argued for is sketched in (2):

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1 Cf. Miller (1971), Crockett (1976); Nichols, Rappaport, and Timberlake (1980); and Corbett (1979, 1983) for previous discussions of this construction in Russian. See Dyla (1988) for the Polish counterpart. Very similar constructions are also attested in Hungarian (though it seems to be marginal; cf. Klemm (1954), Hetzron (1973)), and Navajo (Hale (1975) and unpublished work by Speas).

Perhaps the most obvious piece of evidence that this string forms a constituent is the presence of plural agreement morphology on the verb in (1), despite the fact that the (sole) nominative-case marked NP in the sentence is singular. This plural agreement is surprising, and necessitates a certain division of labor between syntax and semantics. The calculation of agreement feature values for coordinate NPs has often been argued to be a job for the syntax (and, perhaps, morphology). However, I will show that, given the structure in (2) and standard assumptions governing Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar (GPSG, cf. Gazdar, et al. (1985), hereafter GKPS), the syntactic framework within which the analysis is developed, the value for number agreement in comitative coordination must be semantically determined, viz. by its denotation. Since it has already been independently argued that other agreement phenomena are semantically governed, we can account for the number agreement facts at no cost while maintaining the most elegant of possible syntactic analyses for the construction.

Given the superficial similarities and differences between comitative coordination and ‘ordinary’ coordination, one obviously wonders what, if any, semantic or pragmatic differences there are between the two constructions. Indeed, there some striking contrasts between the two constructions: specifically, comitative coordination behaves as if it denotes a group in the sense of Landman (1989) (or, alternatively, an impure atom in the sense of Link (1984); these technical terms will be defined below). However, it turns out to be difficult to decide whether a difference in denotation is really responsible for this behavior because comitative coordination carries an implicature that ordinary coordination does not, requiring that the individuals in its denotation be in some relevant sense ‘together’. Since I will show that this implicature is independently necessary, it is tempting to try to make the group-like properties of comitative coordination follow from it. Nonetheless, the conclusion I will draw is that the construction has a denotation which is different from that of ordinary coordination.

Section 1 provides some descriptive background on ordinary coordination and the comitative adjunct phrase marked by s ‘with’ in Russian, introduces the syntactic differences between these two constructions and comitative coordination, and concludes with constituency arguments for the latter. A GPSG analysis of the construction is developed and argued