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SYNTACTIC STATUS OF THE *NCI* CONSTRUCTION IN LATIN

In the article published in 1999 in *Nowy Filomata*[1] Prof. J. Korpanty paid attention to the problems posed by the syntactic construction called *nominativus cum infinitivo* (*NcI.*) to the didactics of the Latin language. At the same time, he emphasised that also the authors of the Latin grammars explained that phenomenon in an "insufficient" way, and often even "misleadingly"[2]. And that statement is impossible to disagree with. In my opinion, problems with accurate description of that phenomenon result, first of all, from the difficulties with syntactic interpretation of that construction[3], and more precisely, from the difficulties with identifying syntactic functions of its particular components. In the said article, Prof. Korpanty wrote that *nominativus cum infinitivo* is a "kind of a sentence in which, apart from the predicate in the passive voice, there is another verb in the infinitive. Obviously, there is also a subject, i.e. *nominativus*"[4]. Thus, Prof. Korpanty distinguished in the sentence constituted by *NcI* a nominative subject, a predicate in the passive voice and "another verb

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[1] J. Korpanty, 'Nominativus cum infinitivo – same kłopoty' *Nowy Filomata* 1999, No. 3 (4), p. 287-292.

[2] *Ibidem*, p. 287: „Część winy ponoszą tu z pewnością autorzy gramatyk, Polacy i nie tylko oni, ponieważ objaśniają omawiane zjawisko w sposób niedostateczny, często ograniczając się właściwie tylko do kilku przykladów, a nawet w sposób bałamutny".

[3] *Cf. e.g.* H. Menge, *Lehrbuch der lateinischen Syntax und Semantik (völlig neu bearbeited von Th. Burkard und M, Schauer)*, Darmstadt 2000, p. 698: „Est ist fast unmöglich, die syntaktische Funktion des NcI zu bestimmen".

[4] J. Korpanty, *op. cit.*, p. 289: „*Nominativus cum infinitivo* nazwałbym raczej typem zdania, w którym oprócz orzeczenia w stronie biernej występuje drugi czasownik w bezokoliczniku. Jest oczywiście i podmiot, czyli *nominativus* – mianownik w nazwie tradycyjnej".

in the infinitive" whose syntactic function, or the relation towards "the predicate in the passive voice," was not characterised. And without such characterisation, in my opinion, explanation of the essence of *NcI* will continue to remain "insufficient" or "misleading." Therefore, below I will try to supplement the instructive article by Prof. Korpanty, which focuses mainly on didactics, by presenting a certain proposal of a more complete syntactic interpretation of *NcI*.

The term "syntax" is usually used to describe the structure of the statement the basic form of which is the sentence. A constitutive element of the sentence structure is, as we all know, the predicate. It constitutes the main exponent of the predicative content stated in the sentence about the subject of the predication, which is, in turn, represented by a grammatical (syntactic) subject. However, in Latin, the relationship between the predicate and the subject is not only of semantic, but also of the formal nature, namely, it is based on syntactical congruence determined by the subject as to grammatical values of the category of person and number, expressed by both syntactic segments (cf. ***ego dormio***, ***tu dormis***, ***puer dormit***, ***pueri dormiunt***). The fundamental role of the predicate is manifested also by that syntactic relationship, called the predicative agreement, since only within its frameworks the predicate takes into account and reveals the grammatical category of the person of the subject, identifying the status of its designate in the act of speech, i.e. identifying it with the sender, recipient or the object being neither the sender nor the recipient of the message. The attributive agreement, connecting the subject with the attribute, does not account for that category any longer (cf. *ego bonus*, *tu bonus*, *puer bonus*). Apart from that, the predicative content expressed by the predicate is presented in the so-called time and modal frameworks, which permits attributing specific temporal characteristics to it (cf. *puer dormit / dormiebat / dormiet*) and giving it a specific modal perspective, i.e. showing it as a factual or non-factual (potential, probable, hypothetical, unreal, postulative, etc) state (cf. *puer dormit / dormiat / dormiret / dormito*).

Primary text representation of the predicate is a personal form of the verb lexeme, just as in the above-mentioned examples. However, properties of the grammatical system of Latin, similarly to many other languages, permit using structures with different morphological characteristics in the predicate function. Such structures are referred to as complex predicates. They consist of a linking word called copula, represented by

a certain personal form of a verb and constituting the exponent of the syntactical predicative agreement[5], and the so-called predicative, which is the exponent of main predicative contents and can be represented by various text forms. Very often adjectives or nouns occur in the predicative function as in the following examples:

Mons est altus. – "The mountain **is high**".
Caesar magnus dux fuit. – "Caesar **was a** great **commander**".
Domus est patris. – "The house **belongs to the father**".
Consuli sunt multi amici. – "Many friends **belong to the consul**".
   (= "The consul has many friends".)
Populus Romanus Ciceronem creavit consulem. – "Roman people **established** Cicero **the consul**".
Cato erat singulari prudentia. – "Cato **was characterised by** exceptional **wisdom**".

The copula represented by a personal form of the verb, apart from expressing respective values of the category of person and number, being the basis for the syntactic predicative agreement, usually gives the predicate also specific temporal and modal characteristics, e.g.:

Caesar magnus dux fuit / est / erit / sit / esset. – "Caesar **was/ is / will be / may he be / would be / could be** a great commander".

An impersonal form of the verb, i.e. *infinitivus* or *participium*, can be a predicative as well. Also in such cases, the copula expressed by means of a personal verbal form performs the function of the exponent of the predicative syntactical congruence with the subject as well as of temporal and modal marking, however, if the *participium futuri* is a predicative, it (co)expresses also specific modal characteristics, e.g.

Vivere militare est / erat / erit / sit / esset. – "Life **is / was / will be / would be / let be / could be** fight".
Liber legendus est / erat. – "The book **should be / should have been read**".
Puer librum lecturus est / erat. – "The boy **is going / was going to read** the book".

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[5] I.e. revealing the values of the category of person and number of the subject, constitutive for the syntactical predicative agreement.

Certain verbs, which make up a class of the so-called modal verbs, such as *posse*, *velle*, *nolle*, *malle* and *debere*, express marked modality in a lexical way. Those verbs often co-create thus complex predicates, filling out the positions of copulas at infinitive predicatives, which are exponents of main predicative contents, e.g.

> *Milites **possunt intrare** urbem.* – "Soldiers **can enter** the city".
> *Dux **voluit** collem **capere**.* – "The commander **wanted to capture** the hill".
> *Populus **debet dicere** laudes imperatori.* – "People **should praise** the emperor".

It is easy to notice that in the so-called *NcI* construction, to the personal verb form in the passive one also can attribute the function of the exponent of the marked and temporally determined modality, and at the same time, the syntactic status of the copula, which – at the infinitive predicative, expressing the main and separately temporally characterised predicative contents – reveals the syntactical predicative congruence with the subject, e.g.:

> *Caesar a Gergovia **discessise auditur**.* – "Caesar **allegedly withdrew** from Gergovia".
> *Fabulae Terentii a Laelio **scribi putabantur**.* – "Terence's comedies **were thought to be written** by Laelius".
> *Hostes oppidum **eggressuri esse videntur**.* – "**It seems that** the enemies **will attack** the city".
> *Decemviri libros Sibyllinos **inspicere iussi sunt**.* – "Decemviri **were ordered to look** into the Sibylline books".

Therefore, *NcI* can be regarded as a kind of a sentence with a complex predicate consisting of the copula being a personal form of the verb in *passivum* and of the predicative in the form of a verb in the infinitive. Note that the lack of autonomy of such expressions as **Caesar auditur,* *Fabulae putantur, etc. also proves that the personal form of the verb in *passivum* in this case is not a full predicate, but only a part of it. A complete expression denoting predication occurs only after adding an infinitive predicative, and it is the infinitive predicative that might possibly imply further supplements in the form of direct or indirect objects, e.g. *Hostes **oppidum eggressuri esse** videntur, Decemviri **libros** Sibyllinos **inspicere** iussi sunt*. Such complex predicate allows including the predicative con-

tent which is expressed by the infinitive, in specific modal frameworks, i.e. it permits showing it as a possible, probable, ordered, prohibited or allowed state. And hence, such predicates as *discessisse auditur, scribi putabantur, aggressuri esse videntur, inspicere iussi sunt*, etc., can be put in the same group as the other types of complex predicates connoting marked modality, and thus e.g. *possunt intrare, voluit capere, debet dicere*. Resignation from giving marked modality to predicative contents being expressed and replacing it with unmarked (assertive) modality causes that those contents can be expressed by simple verb predicates, corresponding to infinitive *NcI* predicatives and not to personal forms in the *passivum*:

*Caesar a Gergovia **discessise auditur**.* – "Caesar **allegedly withdrew** from Gergovia".
*Caesar a Gergovia **discessit**.* – "Caesar **withdrew** from Gergovia".

*Fabulae Terentii a Laelio **scribi putabantur**.* – "Terence's comedies **were thought to be written** by Laelius".
*Fabulae Terentii a Laelio **scribuntur**.* – "Terence's comedies **are written** by Laelius".

*Hostes oppidum **eggressuri esse videntur**.* – "**It seems that** the enemies **will attack** the city".
*Hostes oppidum **eggredientur**.* – "The enemies **will attack** the city".

*Decemviri libros Sibyllinos **inspicere iussi sunt**.* – "Decemviri **were ordered to look** into the Sibylline books".
*Decemviri libros Sibyllinos **inspexerunt**.* – "Decemviri **looked** into the Sibylline books".

*Milites **possunt intrare** urbem.* – "Soldiers **may enter** the city".
*Milites **intrant** urbem.* – "Soldiers **are entering** the city".

*Dux **voluit** collem **capere**.* – "The commander **wanted to capture** the hill".
*Dux collem **cepit**.* – "The commander **captured** the hill".

*Populus **debet dicere** laudes imperatori.* – "People **should praise** the emperor".
*Populus **dicit** laudes imperatori.* – "People **praise** the emperor".

The comparison of the above examples convinces us that what functionally characterises the *NcI* sentences is just a specific kind of marked modality, and what formally distinguishes them from the others is the internal structure of their predicate, and more precisely, the shape of the modality and syntactical congruence exponent, being the personal form of the verb in the *passivum*. Furthermore, the modal perspective characteristic for *NcI* can be given also to sentences in which exponents of main predicative contents, i.e. predicatives, are nominal forms, *scil.* adjectives or nouns, e.g.:

*Mons **altus esse putabatur**. – "The mountain **was considered high**".
*Caesar magnus **dux fuisse negatur**. – "**It is denied that** Caesar **was** a great **commander**".
*Domus **patris esse existimatur**. – "**Probably** the house **belongs to the father**".
Consuli multi amici **esse videntur**. – "**Probably** many friends **belong to the consul**". (= "The consul probably has many friends".)
*Populus Romanus Ciceronem **creavisse consulem dicitur**. – "**Apparently** the Roman people **established** Cicero the **consul**".
*Cato singulari **prudentia fuisse credebatur**. – "**There was a conviction that** Cato **was characterised by** exceptional **wisdom**".

In specific sentences of that kind, if temporal characteristics of predicative contents coincides with temporal characteristics of the modality exponent, the infinitive part of the predicative may be omitted, e.g. *Consul videtur (esse) insanus* – "The consul seems (to be) crazy". Putting together such sentences as *Consul est insanus – Consul videtur insanus – Consul videtur insanire* shows probably in the clearest way that the *infinitivus* in the *NcI* construction constitutes an integral part of the (complex) predicate, occupying in it the position assigned for a predicative.

In the above-mentioned article, Prof. Korpanty pays attention[6] also to the issue of the relationship connecting *NcI* with another Latin syntactic construction, known as *accusativus cum infinitivo (AcI)*. In this context, he questions rightly the entry included in the *Słownik terminologii językoznawczej* [*Dictionary of Linguistic Terminology*] stating that the *NcI* sentence: *Discipulus scribere videtur* – "It seems that the student is writing" is "the passive equivalent of the *accusativus cum infinitivo*

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[6] J. Korpanty, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

construction (cf. *Video discipulum scribere*)"[7]. While sharing that critical opinion, we may add that both formal and functional (semantic) factors are against the interpretation presented in the above-mentioned *Dictionary*.... On the formal side, a strict "passive equivalent" of the sentence: *Video discipulum scribere* would be: *Discipulus scribere videtur a me*, and it is difficult to regard that kind of structure as representative for the *NcI* construction. On the functional side, the concept of the "passive equivalent" requires introduction of the passive diathesis, i.e. a diathesis with a syntactic order of argument expressions (implied by the predicate) different from the one in the initial structure, just as, for instance, in the sentence: *Epistula scribitur a puero* – "A letter is being written by the boy", compared with: *Puer scribit epistulam* – "The boy is writing a letter". However, the use of the passive form of the verb in the sentence: *Discipulus scribere videtur* – "It seems that the student is writing", does not introduce any passive diathesis at all, but marked modality, as has been emphasised in the above-mentioned article ("It seems that..."). And what actually determines a diathesis in the sentence with the *NcI* construction is not a passive personal verb form, but the predicative infinitive, what can be learnt from comparing such examples as *Discipulus epistulam scribere videtur* – "It seems that the boy is writing a letter" and *Epistula a puero scribi videtur* – "It seems that the letter is being written by the boy". So, although sentences with *NcI* contain a personal form of the verb in the *passivum*, it is difficult to regard them as passive equivalents of the *AcI* construction, since the diathesis indicated by them is not always a passive one, and even if it is, it does not depend on that personal verb form in the *passivum*.

In fact, the relation in which *NcI* and *AcI* remain towards each other, should be described not in terms of the diathesis (or the grammatical category of the voice of the verb), but in terms of the syntactic status of

[7] Z. Gołąb, A. Heinz, K. Polański, *Słownik terminologii językoznawczej*, Warszawa 1968, p. 381: „[...] konstrukcja nominativus cum infinitivo [...], np. łac. *Discipulus scribere videtur* 'zdaje się, że uczeń pisze'. Jest to odpowiednik bierny konstrukcji accusativus cum infinitivo (por. *video discipulum scribere*)". Let's add that a similar view can be also found in the *Encyklopedia językoznawstwa ogólnego*, Wrocław 1999 (second edition; the first edition in 1993), edited by K. Polański, where on p. 397 we can read: "Nominativus cum infinitivo [is] a syntactic structure constituting a passive equivalent of the accusativus cum infinitivo construction" („Nominativus cum infinitivo. Konstrukcja składniowa stanowiąca bierny odpowiednik konstrukcji accusativus cum infinitivo").

both constructions. This is to say that *NcI* does not imply any superior syntactic structure, whereas *AcI* is the equivalent of a subordinate clause (objective or subjective), and therefore it implies another predicate, i.e. that of the main clause (*verbum regens*). In the *NcI* sentence, both verb forms, i.e. the personal formation in the *passivum* and the infinitive, depend syntactically on the same (one) subject, whereas in sentences with *AcI* a personal form of the verb (*verbum regens*) and the infinitive refer to different subjects; compare e.g.: **Puellae** *a patre* **laudatae esse dicuntur**, with: <u>*Marcus dicit*</u> **puellas** *a patre* **laudatas esse**. In case of *NcI*, we have thus to do with one predication, whereas in sentences with *AcI*, there are two of them. In other words, *NcI* is one, single (non-complex) and syntactically independent sentence, whereas *AcI* is a subordinate part of a syntactically complex sentence.