

Reconstruction and Idiomaticity: the Origin of Russian Verbless Clauses Reconsidered*

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Three types of (Old-)Russian verbless clauses are observed as the result of the ellipsis of the copula and other verbs, where their consecutive development corresponds to degrees of their idiomaticity. The Uralic languages were repeatedly prioritized and vice versa as a source for Russian, although the situation is more complicated. The first variety of clauses (represented by Finnish) partly repeats the sequence given in Russian. They, however, are newer, thus, highly idiomatized. The second variety (in Samoyedic languages) uses predicate nominal suffixes. An influence on Russian from this variety is more plausible, but the counter-arguments are that: (1) a world-wide prevalence of Øcop makes the idea of local borrowing less likely, and (2) other Russian verbless clauses reflect an internal extension of syntactic idioms, which has merely been triggered by neighbors. In general, a verbless clause can be developed, if a meaning of a governed phrase overlaps a frequently used semantically bleached verb, and pragmatic factors support condensed forms of expressions.

0. Introduction

One of the lengthiest discussions in Russian-Uralic comparative studies is that about Russian verbless clausesⁱ, which are widely known as a distinguish feature of the modern Russian language. The Uralic languages (most often Finno-Ugric) were repeatedly prioritized and vice versa as a source for Russian. The influence is grounded on the existence of verbless clauses in some Uralic languages and claims that corresponding clauses in Russian are possibly the result of ancient contacts (R. Gauthiot (1908-1909); W. Veenker (1967); R. L'Hermitte (1978) among others). An opposite view is that arguments of influence are rather weak in this case (G. Décsy (1967); V. Kiparsky (1969); H. Birnbaum (1984) among others). As a rule, investigations were restricted to clauses that have a copula left out. The present article continues this discussion by adding new data and new explanations to the topic.

In modern Russian, there are three types of clauses that have no conjugated form in their surface structure. They are complete, non-elliptical context-free clauses, which have variables and specific pragmatic or semantic featuresⁱⁱ. Some of them

* The author deeply thanks M. Lounela, and the participants of Prof. A. Mustajoki's seminar for all their comments and assistance.

are idiomatic, which means that their semantic properties are non-compositional in their nature. Undoubtedly, all of them are diachronically traced back to the lack of a verb; nevertheless, they cannot be considered as elliptical (i.e. verb-restorable) clauses in the modern language. Originally, they were formed with the lack of the following verbsⁱⁱⁱ:

- 1) The copula *byt'* 'to be'
Okno slomano (lit. 'The window **Øcop** broken')
- 2) The full verb *byt'* 'to be located/to have'
Mama zdes' (lit. Mother **Øbe** here')
- 3) Some full verbs (verbs of motion and their semantic extensions)
Tatyana – v les (lit. Tatyana **Øv** to the forest')

These constructions have essential distinctions that can be roughly described as different degrees of syntactic idiomacity: from syntactically free \emptyset cop-clauses to expressions more restricted with words that fill lexical variables, that is \emptyset v-clauses. Below I will argue that the degree of idiomacity is a marker of syntactic development. In so doing I will describe the gradual transition of the (Old-)Russian syntactic system from being verb-centered to being more nominal. Then, I argue that both the form-function similarity and regularity in change are valuable for inner syntactic reconstruction as well (Barðdal 2010). The proposed reconstruction allows one to reconsider the main issue of the article, which is a possible contact-induced change. I will show both the diachronic Uralic context and the typological perspective in order to determine possible points of interaction between Russian and Uralic languages in this case.

1 The history of the Russian constructions

Verbless clauses feature in several Slavic languages, among which Russian occupies a special place owing to the fact that there are a huge number of these in modern Russian written and oral communication (see Mrazek 1990; McShane 2000). According to the research literature, there is a considerable amount of evidence that traces this development to a long time ago (Isačenko 1976; L'Hermitte 1979).

1.1 The development of *Ø*cop-clauses

The usage of the copula in the early Old-Russian language was, in effect, close to that found in modern Indo-European (IE) languages. It had two main functions:

- in copulative constructions like Eng. *The book is interesting*.
- in analytical tense forms (perfect and pluperfect) close, for example, to the English perfect tense, except that the English analytical tense is formed with *have* (*have written*), while the Old-Russian ones are formed with *be* (*есмь писалъ* ‘[I] have written’).

At the same time, it has been established that the copula had been falling out of use in the oldest sources^{iv}. One of the first examples of this has been found in a Novgorodian birch-bark letter dating back to the first half of the XI century (see example 1, below):

- (1) *а замъке Øcop кѣле а двъри Øcop кѣлѣ*
And lock *Øcop* intact and doors *Øcop* intact
‘And the lock [is] intact and the doors [are] intact’
(Birch-bark letter # 247, XI cent.)

The same process is characteristic of the Old-Russian perfect tense. The original common Slavic perfect was formed with a copula and so-called *l*-participles and represented as such a close parallel to the above-mentioned compound predicate, formed with the copula and an adjective/participle. The example (2) illustrates the point:

- (2) *Се повѣсти временныхъ лѣт. откуда естъ пошла руская зема. кто въ киевѣ нача первѣе княжити и откуда руская земля стала естъ.*
‘These tales of the bygone years, whence **has come** the land of Rus’, who first began to rule at Kiev, and whence the land of Rus’ **has come about**’
(Tale of Bygone Years, The Laurentian codex, 1377)

However, reduced perfect tense forms have been recorded very early on. That is, for example, the Tmutarakan Stone – a marble slab with an Old-Russian inscription dating from 1068 – where the analytical perfect tense [*есть*] *мериль* ‘has measured’ had been used with no *est* ‘cop.3.sg’ (3):

(3) Въ лѣто 7576 индикта 6 Глѣбъ князь Ѧсор мѣрилъ море по леду отъ тьмутараканя до кърчева 10000 и 4000 сяженъ

‘In the year of 7576, 6th indict, Prince Gleb [**has**] **measured** the sea along ice from Tmutarakan to Kerch, 10,000 and 4,000 sazhen’s

(Tmutarakan Stone, 1068)

In general, the lack of the copula has been discovered in the oldest of sources, started with Ѧcop.3 and extended to other person markers. The Ѧcop-constructions have spread widely in the Old-Russian language since then. In fact, a complicated set of rules with morphological, pragmatic, and semantic parameters regulated the zero / non-zero usage for the first and second opposed to third person (see Zaliznjak 2004: 178-183^v). The lack of the copula has come to be regarded as the first and crucial sign of long-time changes leading to appearance of the new syntactic models and to the complete rebuilding of Russian verbal morphology.

1.2 The development of Ѧbe-clauses

Among the first of the new constructions to emerge as the result of the copula’s falling-out were those that lacked the full verb ‘to be’^{vi}. The oldest sources such as the earlier birch-bark letters demonstrate a regular usage of the full verb ‘to be’ (4-5):

(4) а **естъ** мѣжъ съ нимъ

And **be.3.sg** man with him

‘There is a man, then with him [send the money]’

(Novgorodian birch-bark letter #296, the end of 12th cent)

(5) занода оу насо коупла **есте** беле

because at us rush **be.3.sg** squirrel-fur

‘Because there is a rush for squirrel fur’

(Pskovian birch-bark letter #6, 13th cent.)

With regards to the full-meaning *be*-verb, elliptic clauses gradually became more frequent until they eventually occupied a place as a regular model in the Russian language. The first examples, which date back to 12th-13th cent., are idiomatized and ambiguous, and can hardly be distinguished from those with Ѧcop (6-7):

(6) ѡже ми отць даалъ и роди съдали а то Ѧcop / Ѧbe

What me father gave and relatives gave and that **Øcop / Øbe**
за нѣмь
after him

‘What the father and relatives gave me, that all he possesses’

(Novgorodian birch-bark letter #9, 1160–1180)

(7) *А богъ Øbe за мѣздою или ладивьса*
and God **Øbe** for reward or agree.1.du

‘Either the God [is] as a reward, or we agree between us’

(Novgorodian birch-bark letter #549, 1180–1200)

According to my own investigation having widely spread in Old-Russian they became in their own right a regular part of the Old-Russian syntactic repertory by the 14th century, forcing out if not replacing the corresponding verbal clauses. It is hardly possible to say when exactly they entered the grammar, but they were used more frequently than their corresponding verbal counterparts already in Old-Russian texts from the 16th century. Again the first in this line was the form *est* ‘be.3.sg’ (8-9):

(8) *Суд ему Øbe в Новѣгородѣ въ Великом или Торжску*
Court he.dat **Øbe** in Novgorod.loc in Great or Torzhok.loc

‘There [is] a court for him in Novgorod the Great or in Torzhok’

(A contract charter, 14th cent.).

(9) *Лѣтѣ кормъ Øbe на полѣ*
summer.loc fodder **Øbe** on field.loc

‘There [is] fodder in the field in summer’

(Domostroj, 16th cent.)

1.3 The development of *Øv*-clauses

The third type of constructions in question, with a full verb omitted, were the last to start spreading in both Old-Russian and modern Russian languages (Borkovskij, 1968; Struktura predloženiya 1983; Kopotev 1999). This situation was not as clear as those with *Øcop* and *Øbe*, because a much wider list of verbs was included in the process. Primarily, they were verbs that had the meaning of ‘motion’ and later its semantic extensions.

To be precise, some of the oldest examples can, in all probability, be classified into this group. The overwhelming majority of them are the standard initial words of birch-bark letters in the form of ‘from [name] to [name]’. They are a kind of title that functioned as clichés, not as complete, context-free clauses.

(10) *грамота ѿ ѿнѣга къ ставърови.*

letter ѿ ѿнѣга from Voneg to Stavr

‘The letter ѿ [was sent/is] from Voneg to Stavr’

(A birch-bark letter № 613, 11th cent.)

In any case, even if the earliest Old-Russian sources contain some rare and ambiguous instances of ѿv-clauses, a drastic change in their usage has been traced to between the 14th century and 15th century. The frequency of their usage doubled during that period and remains more or less constant since then. It is significant that one of the first clear appearances of ѿv-clauses (11) has been found in the Journey beyond the Three Seas (a text prepared by a merchant Afanasy Nikitin during his journey to India and written in highly colloquial language):

(11) *Все товаръ бѣлой ѿ на бесерменьскую землю.*

All good.N toll-free.adj ѿ to Moslem land

‘All toll-free goods [go] to the Moslem land’.

(A. Nikitin, Journey beyond the Three Seas, 15th cent.)

It is then from this time onwards that these constructions came to occupy a distinctive place in the language. They are idiomatic and mostly used in colloquial speech. A typical manifestation at the right periphery of the clause is an NP (with the Dative case), a PP or an AdvP with directive meaning. Primarily, it has a meaning of ‘physical motion’ (12):

(12) *Татьяна ѿ в лес; медведь ѿ за ней.*

Tatyana ѿ to forest; bear ѿ behind her

‘Tatyana to the forest [walked]; the bear behind her [stalked].’

(A. Pushkin, Evgeny Onegin, 1823-1831)

However, they can be used metaphorically, as a conduit metaphor (13), or metonymically, ‘moving (part of) the body’ (14):

(13) *Ja ѿ ему в ответ*

I.nom Øv he.dat in response.acc

‘I [speak] to him in response’

(My own example)

(14) *Ja Øv emu po licu*

I.nom Øv he.dat to face.dat

‘I [slapped] his face’

(My own example)

Speaking in more details, the initial expansion of verbless clauses did not develop evenly through the language as whole; first of all they appeared in less restricted, in terms of language styles, genres and subsequently occupied other pragmatic zones step by step (Diagrams 1-2). The left diagram shows that in colloquial genres the choice between corresponding verbal and verbless counterparts was undoubtedly in favor of verbless constructions: they were notably in use much more frequently than the corresponding verbal constructions. On the other hand, the right diagram shows that in more official texts verbless clauses won the race over verbal ones later on, they equaled to those in colloquial genres only in the early modern Russian language of the 18th century^{vii}.

@ @ Insert Diagrams 1-2 here

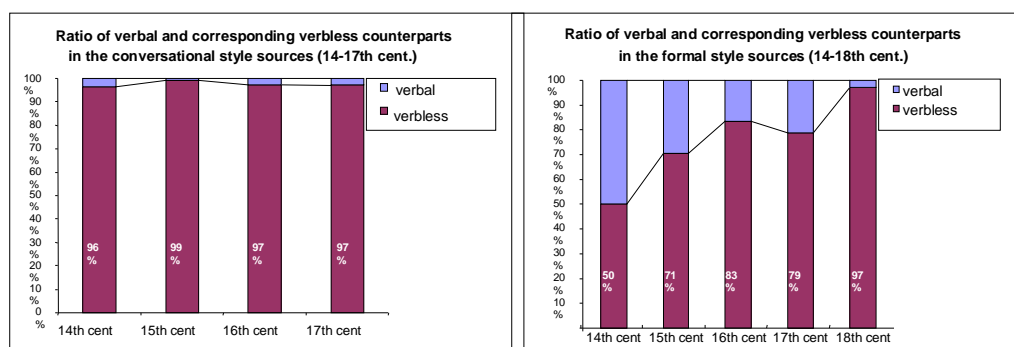


Diagram 1-2: The ratio of verbal and corresponding verbless counterparts in different styles.

Thus, the history of Russian verbless clauses can be described as one of a consecutive development of the Øcop-, Øbe-, and Øv-clauses. The degree of their idiomacity in the modern Russian language corresponds to this chronology. The first on this path were clauses that lost the copula (the reasons will be discussed in detail later). These clauses are non-idiomatic in the nowadays language (Bezdeněžnyx 1972; Chvany 1975). They have neither syntactic constraints nor semantic non-compositionality. Øcop is a pragmatically neutral morphological zero form. Rather, the non-zero manifestation of the copula has some pragmatic features. The second step, naturally, has been made with 'to be' in its full meaning. Øbe-clauses are pragmatically neutral, but semantically non-compositional, that is, more idiomatic. The third type, those lacking the verbs of motion, is a newcomer compared to the above-mentioned items and possess more idiomatic features in the modern language, having both pragmatic and semantic restrictions.

2 The Uralic verbless constructions

There is a consensus among experts in the Uralic languages that the nominal clause was an original feature of the protolanguage (Klemm 1928; Ravila 1943, 1964; Hakulinen 1946; Collinder 1960; Hajdu 1970; Rédei 1970; Honti 1992). In the modern languages the situation is much more complicated due to their inner developments and contacts with other languages. Two extremes with respect to nominal clauses in modern Uralic languages became established. One concerns the Samoyedic languages, which are investigated to preserve better ancient Proto-Uralic syntax (Serebrennikov 1987; Honti 1992); the second concerns Finnic, Lappi and Hungarian, which show newer, in fact more Indo-European, syntactic features (Korhonen 1982; Campbell 1990). A generalized overview is presented in

Table 1^{viii}.

LANGUAGES	Contacts since	Øcop	Øbe	Øv
Finnic and Samic groups	VI-VII cent.	+ (idiomatic)	+ (idiomatic)	+ (idiomatic)
Mordvinic group	IX-XI	+ (nominal conjugation)	+ (nominal conjugation)	-
Mari language	XI	+ (3.Sg)	+ (3.Sg)	-
Permian group	XIV-XV	+	+	-
Ugric group	XVII	+	+	-
Hungarian language	VI-VII cent.	+ (3d person)	+ (3d person)	+ (idiomatic)
Samoyed group	XVIII-XIX cent.	+ (nominal conjugation)	+ (nominal conjugation)	-

Table 1. Verbless clauses in Uralic languages

2.1 Samoyedic languages

Samoyedic languages (Nenets, Nganasan, Enets) possess predicate suffixes, which can be added to any nominal parts of speech to mark Number, Person and even Tense; they have copulative clauses too (for more data, see (Honti 1992; Tereshchenko 1973)). Below are Enets examples of nominal (15) and (16) and copulative (17) clauses, where these suffixes are clearly shown.

(15) *Модинь' эсэй'*

we.du fathers.du-prs

'We two [are] fathers'

(Tereshchenko, 1973: 155)

(16) *Модинь' эсэбидь*

we.du father.du-pst

'We two [were] fathers'

(Tereshchenko, 1973: 155)

(17) *Модинь' эсээсь набидь*

we.du father.du cop.du-pst

'We two [were] fathers'

(Tereshchenko, 1973: 160)

The nominal predicate is, obviously, not derived from the ‘full’ copulative counterpart; for example, the same suffix ‘*буды.ду-pst*’ is used to mark a predicate, regardless of whether a noun or a verb occupies the predicate position. Whatever the origin of these suffixes might be, there is no question about their *syntactic* idiomacity, because they are *morphologically* well-formed items, which points to their relatively old origin, if compared to Russian syntactic zeros. Following P. Hopper & E. Traugot’s course (*content word* → *grammatical word* → *clitic* → *inflectional affix* (2003: 7)), I can say that the grammaticalization path has gone to the end in this case. This means that Samoyedic (and presumably Proto-Uralic) and Russian nominal clauses are fundamentally different. The first are formed with clearly distinguished morphological markers, which originated earlier and in a different way than the Russian syntactic ellipsis of a verb. What is also important is that Russian verbless clauses do not formally match any those in Samoyedic and, thus, cannot be explained in terms of form-function pairing, which is essential for any reconstruction, including a syntactic one (Barðdal 2010).

2.2 Finnic languages

A quite different situation is found in Finnic languages (Finnish, Karelian, Veps, etc.) and Hungarian, which are alike in this respect. Below I describe in detail the situation in Finnish, because it has a rather long written history (see Kettunen (1943) for Veps data; Zlobina (1971) for Karelian, and Hetzron (1970) for Hungarian).

2.2.1 *Øcop-* and *Øbe-*clauses

Only a few examples of *Øcop-* and *Øbe-*clauses have been found in the collection so far^{ix}. It can hardly be claimed that one type was more frequently used than another. Nevertheless, they were already in use in the earliest of M. Agricola’s works (18) and later (19-20):

(18) *Nin mös itze Øcop Templin wastan.*

so also myself **Øcop** Temple for.

‘So, I [am] myself for the Temple also’

(KOTUS; M. Agricola. *Weisut ja Ennustoxet*, 1551)

(19) *Läpikulku* **Øcop** *kielletty*
passage.nom **Øcop** forbidden
'Passage forbidden'
(SKP, 20th cent.)

(20) *Uutuudet* **Øbe** *myymälöissä*
novelties **Øbe** shop.pl.inessive
'Novelties [are] in the shops'
(SKP, 20th cent.)

There is a small number of Øcop- and Øbe-clauses in the Finnish sources; all of them seem to be highly constrained and infrequent. This does not allow me to come to a plausible decision, about how often they were used in more informal genres, as we have no sources to hand. In any event, these kinds of clauses are in use today in colloquial speech and in some restricted pragmatic situations such as announcements and advertisements (Kopotev 2007).

2.2.2 *The Øv-clauses*

The oldest Finnish texts contain not a single example of clauses where a verb with a specific meaning is absent. A few examples were extracted from texts beginning from the end of the 18th century (21) up to now (22-23):

(21) **Øv** *Mitat* *pois!*
Øv yardsticks away
'[Take] yardsticks away!'
(KOTUS; G. A. Hippus. Piirustusopin alkeet, 1867)

(22) *Pullot* **Øv** *piiloon*
bottles.nom-pl **Øv** hiding-place.illative.sg
'Move bottles to the hiding-place'
(SKP, 19th cent.)

(23) *Kaikki* **Øv** *Citymarketiin!*
All **Øv** shop.illative
'Everyone Øv to Citymarket'
(My own example)

Again, it is impossible to say how often Øv-clauses present in oral communication among Finns in the distant past. In any case, no detailed description of the development of verbless clauses can be traced in the Finnish data. Nevertheless there was not a single example of Øv-constructions in the Old Finnish texts and only a small number in later ones, while the Øcop- and Øbe clauses were (and are) used more regularly, but far less free than they are in Russian. As far as I could establish, the Finnish constructions might be looked at in such a way that almost every clause without a verb could be placed under the Motivation Frame (Kopotev 2007). Thus, I can postulate the essential distinctions between Russian and Finnish verbless clauses. Roughly these distinctions can be described as different degrees of syntactic ‘frozenness’ ranging from syntactically free sentences (Russian **Øcop** sentences) to more restricted constructions with words that fill lexical variables (Finnish and Russian **Øv** constructions). This difference can be traced back to the history of these constructions, where the Russian items are much older than the Finnish ones. Thus, verbless clauses in Finnish and other Finnic languages can be considered as a rather new process, partly developing under the direct influence of Russian (Kettunen 1943; Zlobina 1971).

3. Hypotheses of borrowing

In Russian, an inner reconstruction reveals the gradual diffusion of verbless clauses, which strongly corresponds to the degree of idiomacity. Thus, Øbe- and Øv-clauses appeared to be an extension of the path, initiated by Øcop-clauses, rather than the result of independent influences from any external sources. In the Finnic language group, the sources register syntactic structures close to Russian, but they are definitely newer^x. They are occasionally used in both the oldest and modern texts. Again, these facts strongly correlate with the idiomacity of the constructions. Historical-comparative linguistics reconstructs nominal clauses in the Proto-Uralic language. They are best preserved in the Samoyedic languages, in which both Øcop- and Øbe-clauses are detected. Some other Uralic languages (Mordvinic, for example) save some traces of these constructions to the present day. Their crucial feature is the morphological marking of a predicate nominal. It would not be out of place to say that the degree of their idiomacity (in fact their full morphologization) supports the view that they are ancient in origin. All this

means that Finnic clauses are hardly good candidates to be borrowed by Russian, because they are in process of developing later. Samoyedic-like clauses are, from a unbiased point of view, better candidates; and they cross with Russian ones at two points, in \emptyset cop- and \emptyset be-clauses.

3.1 Hypothesis of \emptyset cop borrowing

The first argument against this hypothesis is that original structures as such did not transfer from Uralic languages, because there are no morphological markers of the nominal predicate in Russian. In Uralic, a reach set of morphological items is used to mark Person (1, 2, 3), Number (sg., du, pl) and Tense (prs, pst) in a predicate. In Russian, a starting point is the ellipsis of a certain verb form, which is **Cop.3.Prs.**

One more, though weaker, argument is connected with the Uralic negation system, which is a distinct feature of these languages (see more Laakso, 2011; Wagner-Nagy 2011). Almost all modern Uralic languages (and supposedly Proto-Uralic) form negation clauses using a conjugated negative marker. For example, the Finnish negation is as follows:

Person	Singular	Plural
1.	en 'I am not'	emme 'we are not'
2.	et 'You are not'	ette 'yo are not'
3.	ei 's/he is not'	eivät 'they are not'

Table 2. Finnish negation markers

According to Campbell (1990: 71-73), a Proto-Uralic Perfect Tense in negation was formed with a participle in a verbless clause. These traces are clearly distinguished in some languages, for example in Finnish. Cf. 24a and 24b:

- (24) a. *Minä olen tullut*
 I be.1.sg come.prt
 'I have come'
- b. *Minä en tullut*
 I NEG.1.sg come.ptcp.act
 'I haven't come'

In Russian, there is neither a conjugated negative marker nor a difference between verbal and verbless negation in present and past tenses. Cf. 25a-b and 26a-b.

(25) a. *Я не пишу*

I not write

'I do not write'

b. *Я не художник*

I not artist

'I am not an artist'

(26) a. *Мы не писали*

we not write.pl.pst

'We did not write'

b. *Мы не были художниками*

we not be.pl.pst artists.instr

'We were not artists'

Thus, if we suppose \emptyset cop borrowing, we would agree that Uralic negation system has been totally ignored. In general, ancient Uralic non-verbal predication had the following features:

- no conjugated verb;
- suffixes attached to nominal predicates and marked Person, Number and Tense;
- a complicated negation system traced back to Proto-Uralic verbless clauses.

From all this wealth of evidences, only one point, a lack of the copula, initially **\emptyset cop.3.prs**, had its equivalent in Old-Russian. Could this be regarded as an influence, and why was only this zero form initially developed? Quite to the contrary, investigations show that **\emptyset cop.3.prs** appears too often in different languages all over the world to be explained in terms of a simple local language contact. Typologically, the same processes caused the deletion of the copula in African American Vernacular English (Cf. *He is working* → *He workin'*; for more, see Ferguson 1971; Bender 2000). \emptyset cop has been established for many languages of Oceania, Central and South America; Afro-Asiatic and Nilo-Saharan ones (see Hengeveld 1992; Stassen 1994 for more data and further discussion.^{xi}) As we

know, the ancient IE languages (and probably the Proto-language) had that kind of \emptyset cop usage (see Meillet 1906-1908; Gauthiot 1908-1909; Benveniste 1950). What is more important in this case is that Old Church Slavonic, the oldest written Slavic language, provides evidence of the regular use of \emptyset cop-clauses (Zlatanova 1972):

(27) *Господь \emptyset cop мнѣ помощникъ*

God \emptyset cop me.dat helper

‘God [is] my helper’

(Codex Suprasliensis, XI cent.)

Leo Stassen generalizes this idea in the following words:

If a language allows a zero copula at all, it will minimally select this option for predicate nominal sentences in the Present Tense with a Third Person subject (Stassen 1994: 111)

Thus, a more plausible, typologically grounded hypothesis claims that there is a similar typological process, caused by similar usage-based strategies in many languages all over the world.

At the same time, the only point where an influence from Uralic can be accepted is a noticeable increase in frequency. In fact, the \emptyset cop in Russian and other IE-languages do not differ in structure, but what distinguishes them is the rising quantity of those found in early Old-Russian texts. Having been half-dead syntactic idioms close to those in other IE languages (proverbs, headlines, and “telegraphese” messages), they quickened in contact and overcame their pragmatic constraints. It led not to slight stylistic, or as one might say, extra-linguistic modifications, but had a direct effect on syntactic structures, modifying them and creating less idiomatized ones (for theoretical discussion, see Kemmer & Barlow 2000).

3.2 Hypothesis of \emptyset be borrowing

One can suppose that at least this type developed under the influence of Permian or Ugric groups, where they are well preserved even today. The problem is that the earliest contacts with these languages were established in the XIV-XV centuries, in

other words, at a time when the Øcop → Øbe shift in Russian had already happened. Additionally, bearing in mind the geography, I am far from thinking that a sharp language change in Central Russia was provoked by linguistic minorities located thousands kilometers to the east, around the Ural Mountains. An often cited hypothesis points to assimilated Finno-Ugric tribes, who had lived in Central Russia before the arrival there of the Russians (L'Hermitte 1973). This could be correct, but cannot as yet be proven since no syntactic data has been made available to date that would allow such speculation. More importantly, the path from Øcop- to Øbe-clauses in Russian can be explained much better as an inner extension, rather than as a chronologically and geographically unclear interference.

Taking all these sound judgments into account, I came to the conclusion that instead of seeing ancient Uralic influence and typological resemblance as alternative explanations, it would be better to recognize that they might both contribute part of the answer, providing that is we make the distinction between the direct transfer and the activation of a construction:

If it is sometimes difficult to draw a sharp line between what must be considered live and literary influences in syntax, the same is probably true to an even higher degree of the suggested distinction between a mere mechanical transfer of foreign syntactic patterns and the activation and intensification of the pre-existent indigenous syntactic models or formal-functional means, inherent in the affected language but triggered by foreign influence. (Birnbaum1984: 38)

On the one hand, specific form-function pairs in Russian and Samoyedic languages are different and do not directly correspond to each other; therefore any “mechanical transfer” is unconfirmed. On the other hand, the Russian language usage changed in a way that is too close to Uralic to be ignored^{xii}. Thus, the contact-induced syntactic modifications were not the result of cross-linguistic interference. Rather, the increasing frequency and stepping over of pragmatic constraints became the crucial points in coining new verbless constructions.

4. Cognitive observation

Bearing in mind that a possible interference seems to be less attestable in this case, one has to look for other explanations, by means of a more specific line of questioning:

- why did precisely these three types appear?
- why is it hardly possible to imagine examples like (28)?

(28) *Я \emptyset v кашу
*Minä \emptyset v puuroa
*'I [eat] porridge'

In Perlmutter and Postal (1974) a Relational Succession Law has been formulated with the following wording:

An NP promoted by an ascension rule assumes the grammatical relation borne by the host out of which it ascends (quoted from: Perlmutter and Postal 1983)

Although this law concerns an alternative syntactic theory and cannot be directly transferred to our framework, it nevertheless provides a starting point for further discussion. In fact, it postulates that an ellipsis is an interrelated change between verb and its governed NP. To examine the question let's first consider arguments based on the analysis of deleted verbs, and then on the analysis of the dependent phrases.

4.1 Verb arguments

Looking at the verbs that have been deleted in the constructions, one should say that the first to go were the copula and the full verb 'to be'. Obviously, their semantic emptiness was the first reason for their deletion, because only a tad would be lost in terms of semantic information.

Yet, there was a second reason, namely the frequency of the verb that was the

subject of deletion. Although it is difficult to calculate what verbs were the most frequent in the Old-Russian, it would seem to be close to the truth to say that the word *byt* ‘to be’ would be in the ‘most frequent’ category. Thus, the frequent usage of semantically defective light verbs leads to its deletion from the surface structure. Another group of verbs were those of motions, “the most characteristically verbal of all verbs” (Miller & Johnson-Laird 1976: 527). Not-surprisingly, they are the prototypical subject of deletion in Øverb-constructions. They are also frequently used and easily grammaticalized in many languages (Maisak 2005). The Table 3 shows the most frequently used verbs (Lyashevskaya & Sharoff 2009), with almost half of them being potentially a subject of deletion (they are marked with bold).

byt	‘to be’
moch	‘can’
skazat	‘to say’
govorit	‘to speak’
znat	‘to know’
stat	‘to became’
hotet	‘to want’
idti	‘to go’
imet	‘to have’
videt	‘to see’

Table 3. The most frequent Russian verbs

Thus, the deletion is strongly back-grounded by a well-described cognitive explanation according to which verbs should be regularly and frequently used. Even so, this fact does not explain why other frequently used verbs that have a more or less degraded meaning such as ‘to see’ cannot be deleted from the surface structure. There is the second crucial factor to support the process – the meaning of the dependent phrase.

4.2 Dependent phrase arguments

The second motivation is connected with the semantic features of the deleted verb and the dependent phrase that takes the place of the verb. In fact, both have corresponding semantic elements that allow a phrase to replace a verb without an essential distinction in so far as it concerns the meaning of the whole construction. With all this going, on the overlapping meaning is trivial both for the deleted verb

and the phrase. Let's look at the following artificial example (29):

- (29) *Окно есть сломано*
window is broken
'The window is broken'

The main function of the copula is to mark a predicate. However, this information is superfluous, as the nominal part of the predicate is a short participle, and therefore predicate-oriented in itself. Thus, the meaning of a verbal form is overlapped by the main function of the copula.

- (30) *Книга есть здесь*
Book is here
'Book is located here'

In (30) both the restored verb 'to be' and the adverb contain the same semantic component designating the place:

est' 'to be' \approx 'is located'
zdes' 'here' \approx 'place'

- (31) *Татьяна [бежит] в лес*
Tatyana [run.3.sg] into forest
'Tatyana [is running] into the forest'

In (31), again, both the restored verb 'to run' and the NP contain the component that designates the movement:

to run \approx 'move'
to forest \approx 'movement to forest'

Thus, a phrase that functions as a predicate in verbless clauses has a meaning corresponding to a deleted verb. As a result, the verb's deletion does not destroy the construction, because the phrase shifts and catches the meaning. In general, these clauses may develop into syntactic idioms, because there is a light verb that has been lost in their structure, and yet nothing is lost in the meaning of the clauses. Additionally the words that have been omitted are verbs that are frequently used in language, and, therefore, are subject of semantic bleaching. Thus, the new

constructions, idiomatic by origin, are semantically complete even without a verb. The same cannot be claimed for my artificial example (28), **I Ø_v porridge*, where the verb and NP do not overlap in this sense.

Generally speaking, the frequency of the verbs that are subject of deletion and the semantic concurrence of the deleted verb and the substituting phrases allow the constructing of a common explanation for languages. In a generalized way one can say that:

A verbless clause can be developed, if (1) a frequently used verb has a bleached meaning and the meaning of a dependent phrase overlaps it, and (2) pragmatic factors support condensed forms of expressions.

In particular cases, chronology, specific pragmatic conditions and even a neighborly support may, of course, vary considerably. Overall, the common cognitive prerequisites create conditions for similar syntactic items to be developed, while specific pragmatic factors define when and how these items will be developed.

4. Conclusion

There are three types of verbless clauses in Russian, which are the result of an ellipsis of the copula and other, complete, verbs. They have essential distinctions that can be roughly described as deferent degrees of idiomacity, from free to frozen expressions restricted with lexical variables, and possessed of different pragmatic and semantic features. Their development is well documented and represents a consecutive and lengthy process from Ø_{cop}- to Ø_{be}- and finally to Ø_v-constructions. Their idiomacity corresponds in outline to this constructive order: Ø_{cop}-constructions are non-idiomatic at present, while Ø_{be}- and Ø_v-constructions are still syntactic idioms to date. The level of idiomatization is a projection of a time slice during which a syntactic item is being developed. Of course, there are some factors, which cause stepping up or down the process of idiomatization.

Two Uralic syntactic verbless varieties do not match Russian in all circumstances.

The first option is represented in Finnish. Despite the lack of clear evidences in old- and modern Finnish sources it seems that the Finnish language only repeats, at least partly, the sequence given in Russian. This does not lead to the idiomatic difference of the Finnish constructions, since they are relatively new in origin. The second variety is represented in the Samoyedic languages, which possess a sophisticated system of predicate suffixes and verbless negation. In all probability, an influence does seem to be possible in view of both the long co-existence of the languages and some other syntactic borrowings discussed in previous studies. However, the data presented in this article impels me to be cautious in claiming that direct borrowing clearly has been proved in this case. The main counter-arguments are (1) the degree of idiomacity that reflects the intralingual extension, which was most likely merely initiated by the frequency of analogous constructions in neighboring languages; and (2) a typological near-universality of the Øcop.3.prs, which makes the idea of the local structural changes less founded.

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ⁱ Following K. Hengeveld, I distinguish non-verbal clauses ("construction with a main predicate of the non-verbal category"; 1992: 47) and verbless clauses, where a verb (incl. copula) is omitted.

ⁱⁱ All languages have clauses without finite verbs in their surface structure that are the result of different types of gapping, which have a strong contextual motivation. The present paper does not deal with such syntactic phenomena – rather, it presents some other syntactic structures that can be used without strong contextual support.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hereafter \emptyset cop, \emptyset be, and \emptyset v mean zero of the copula, of the full verb 'to be', and of other full verbs, respectively.

^{iv} The Old-Russian sources (more than 1500 pieces, including birch-bark letters) have been investigated mainly *de visu*; in the last stage some electronic corpora were used as well.

^v In short, the copula was partly reanalyzed into a personal pronoun or an emphatic particle (Zaliznjak 2004; Sheveleva 1993).

^{vi} In this article I do not address the complicated question of the Russian copula / verb distinction (see Chvany 1975; Apresjan 1995). In general, I'd rather agree with K. Hengeveld (1992) in that both the copula and the verb 'to be' are considered as parts of common non-verbal predication, and there is no sharp border between the two. Whatever my opinion may be, according to the data, there are distinctions in frequency and chronology of the \emptyset cop- and \emptyset be-clauses.

^{vii} Three of the seventeen 17th century sources are, in fact, old-fashioned in terms of the language, in which they have been written. They do in fact contain most of the clauses in question. Later data for the Russian language from the 18th century clearly confirm the general tendency.

^{viii} In the table, the earliest contacts of a certain group with (Old-)Russian are marked according to G. Decsy (1988: 632). In order to save the space, I use \emptyset cop, \emptyset be, and \emptyset v in the table, which is, obviously, an oversimplification, in so far Uralic clauses can be non-elliptical in terms of their origin. Some languages are shown separately, if they demonstrate important particular features. Minimally the nominal clause expresses the third person, but sometimes it also shares the first and second person (for more, see Turunen 2010: 45-57).

^{ix} The data have been collected from the Old-Finnish corpus prepared by the Center of the domestic languages (KOTUS; www.kotus.fi/aineistot) and from the Finnish language bank (SKP; www.csc.fi/tutkimus/alat/kielitiede).

^x Researchers suppose Germanic and Russian languages are the sources for the Finic-Lapp copula's arising (Korhonen 1981: 304) and its falling out of use (Kettunen 1943, Zlobina 1971). This issue, however, is beyond the scope of this article.

^{xi} The World Atlas of Language Structures (WALS) gives comparable figures for use of zero and non-zero copula: 175 and 211 languages respectively (wals.info/chapter/120). Needless to say, these figures are partly inaccurate, since even English and Finnish have been found to have a zero copula in some cases.

^{xii} Most of the syntactic parallels are considered as functioning in the Uralic-to-Russian direction (Timberlake 1974; Veenker 1967, Tkačenko 1979, Künnap 1997; Thomason&Kaufman 1989; Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wälchli 2001; Weiss (TBP), among others), though some of the phenomena remain the subject of criticism for now. Cf. (Petruhin 2007, Seržant (TBP)).