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What a difference a verb makes! Russian and Finnish verbless sentences[1]

1. Introduction

Much has been written about compound lexical expressions with transformational restrictions on syntax (e.g. lexical idioms such as *He kicked the bucket* that do not allow passivization: **The bucket was kicked by him*) or restrictions on word combination (e.g. collocations such as *a serious illness*, not *a strong illness). The present paper focuses on idiomatic expressions, which function as complete sentences. As such they belong to a separate class of linguistic phenomena alternately called *constructions* (Lakoff 1987), *formal idioms* (Kay and Fillmore 1999), or *syntactic phrasemes* (Mel'čuk 1995a). (1) and (2) are examples of such constructions in English, which have been extensively studied already:

(1)   The *What's X Doing Y?* constructions (*What am I doing reading the paper*? Kay and Fillmore 1999)
(2)   The *there* constructions (*There's Harry with his red hat on*; Lakoff 1987)

A plausible definition of *a syntactic phraseme* can be found in (Mel'čuk 1995a, 215, see also Mel'čuk 1995b):

> "A syntactic phraseme is a surface-syntactic tree containing no full lexical nodes (its nodes are labeled with either lexemic variables or structural words) but possessing a specific signified, having as its signifier a specific syntactic construction, and a specific prosody, and featuring as well a specific syntactics."

By expanding this definition, the subject of the present paper can be described as complete, non-elliptical context-free verbless sentences that have variables and specific pragmatic or semantic features, and are non-compositional in their nature. Specifically this paper deals with three pairs of structurally similar Russian and Finnish sentences that are traced back to the absence of a verb. Although considerable morphological differences between the two languages are here ignored, these sentences are formed with the absence of the following verbs (3-5):

The copula *byt'*/*olla* 'to be'

(3)   *Okno slomano – Ikkuna rikki* (lit. 'The window **Øcop** broken')

The full-meaning verb *byt'*/*olla* 'to be located/to have'

(4)   *Mama zdes' – Äiti täällä* (lit. 'Mother **Øbe** here')

Some full-meaning verbs (*dat'*/*antaa* 'to give', *peremestit'(sja)*/*siirtää(siirtyä)* 'to move (yourself)', *podnjat'*/*nostaa* 'to raise', etc.)

(5)   *Ruki vverx! – Kädet ylös!* (lit. '**Øv** hands up')

Both the Russian and Finnish languages have sentences without finite verbs in their surface structures. This is the result of different types of ellipsis (gapping, pragmatic and syntactic ellipsis, and the like) that have, in general, strong contextual motivation (Hakulinen 1978). However, this paper does not deal with such phenomena – rather, it presents some other syntactic structures that are diachronically derived from full verbal sentences and can be used without strong contextual support in contemporary Russian and Finnish. Thus, the questions to be answered are:

• Which of these phenomena are identified as constructions, e.g. idiomatic syntactic units?
• What is the difference between Russian and Finnish, if any?
• Are there similar processes of idiomatization in the two languages which have caused the appearance of similar constructions?

2. Russian verbless sentences

2.1. The Russian Øcop sentences

The Russian language differs from other Indo-European languages in that it has a huge number of sentences without a finite verb form. Indeed, these sentences are usually considered a distinguishing feature of the Russian language and described inside out (see e.g. Širjaev 1967, Chvany 1975, Babby 1980, Švedova 1980, Niemensivu 1991, McShane 2000). The most typical and frequent of them are the **Øcop** sentences (6).[2]

(6) *Okno slomano* (window.NOM **Øcop** broke.PCP.PASS.PAST) 'The window [is] broken'

However, the Russian **Øcop** may be considered a part of the morphological paradigm of the copula, where it functions as the present tense form (cf. 7-9).

(7) *Okno slomano* 'The window **Øcop**.PRAES broken'
(8) *Okno bylo slomano* 'The window **was** broken'
(9) *Okno budet slomano* 'The window **will be** broken'

There are no Russian constructions with **Øcop** where Ø-features cannot be described in morphological terms. This means that there is no specific syntactic construction where the **Øcop** is applicable as an inherent part of it. It is freely used in all sentences that have the position of Cop.PRAES. In formulating the morphological rule, one can say that the standard expression of the Russian 'Cop.PRAES' is a zero and – in a few cases – *est'*/*sut'*[3] (Apresjan 1995: 518-521). On the contrary, the usage of *est'*/*sut'* is highly restricted and depends on certain constructions (Cf. **Okno est' slomano* 'The window is broken'). In fact, some stylistic difference can be seen between (10) and (11), but the stylistic feature, nevertheless, does not belong to the Ø sentences. In other words, there are no *syntactic* restrictions on the usage of the **Øcop**.

(10) *Sotsrealizm – umenie hvalit' nachal'stvo v dostupnoj dlya nego forme*
      'The Socialist realism **Øcop** a way to praise authorities in a manner they can understand'

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[2] **Øcop** sentences are the most frequent type of VP-lacking structures in many languages all over the world (see Stassen 1994).

[3] The form *sut'* is diachronically 'be.PRAES.PL.P3', but it is now a stylistic variant of *est'* 'be.PRAES', unmarked both by number and person.

(11)   *Sotsrealizm est' umenie hvalit' nachal'stvo v dostupnoj dlya nego forme*
        'The Socialist realism is a way to praise authorities in a manner they can understand'

2.2. The Russian Øbe sentences

A second frequently used group of Russian verbless sentences are those lacking the verb *быть* 'to be' in its full lexical meaning. They have the following features:
- They are highly frequent in all types of discourse without any pragmatic restrictions.
- They can be considered a part of the morphological paradigm of the verb *BE*, cf.:

(12)   *Mama zdes'* 'Mother **Øbe**.PRAES here'
(13)   *Mama byla zdes'* 'Mother was here'
(14)   *Mama budet zdes'* 'Mother will be here'

But in contrast to the **Øcop**, **Øbe** cannot be counted only as a morphological form because a certain meaning is connected to the constructions with **Øbe** that differs them from "full" analogues and the reconstruction of the *BE* verb is often impossible. According to their semantics, they can be sorted out into several primary types, which are described below.

The type 'inalienable or actual possession'

(15)   ***U nego temnye volosy* (at he.GEN** Øbe **dark.NOM hair.NOM) 'He [has] dark hair'**

Structure:	PP (U+N/PRO.GEN) + NP (N.NOM)
Meaning:	Inalienable or actual possession
Pragmatics**:**	—[4]

There are several semantic kinds of inalienable or actual possession; all of them can be expressed with this sentence type:

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[4] This denotes that the construction has no special pragmatic restrictions.

- an actual possession (*U nego/mal'čika novyj galstuk* 'He/The boy [has] a new tie on')
- a part of a body (*U nego/mal'čika temnye volosy* 'He/The boy [has] dark hair');
- a mental characteristic (*U nego/mal'čika horošaja pamjat'* 'He/The boy [has] a good memory');
- an emotional experience (*U nego/mal'čika gore* 'He/The boy [is] in mourning'); and
- a corporal defect, affliction (*U nego/mal'čika gripp* 'He/The boy [has] influenza').

In fact, the Russian language draws a fine distinction between constructions with and without *BE* (16-17), but there is no room to discuss this here (see Arutjunova 1976, Chvany 1985). Cf.:

(16) *U nego novyj galstuk* 'He has a new tie on'
(17) *U nego est' novyj galstuk* 'He has got a new tie'

The type 'localization of the subject'

(18) *Stul u stola* (chair.NOM Øbe at table.GEN) 'The chair [is located] near the table'

Structure:	NP (N.NOM) + AdvP/PP (with the meaning of 'place')
Meaning:	Localization of a subject ('Where is X?')
Pragmatics:	—

This type seems to be less idiomatic and has no verbal counterpart (19):

(19) **Stul est' u stola* (chair.NOM be.PRAES at table.GEN)

The type 'determination of the subject'

(20) *U stola stul* (at table.GEN Øbe chair.NOM) 'There [is] a chair at the table'

Structure:	AdvP/PP (having the meaning of 'place') + NP (N.NOM)
Meaning:	Determination of a subject ('What is in a specified place?')
Pragmatics**:**	—

In addition to **Øbe,** another distinguishing feature of this type is connected with the communication status of the NP. Roughly speaking, the element N.NOM (or its daughter) must be in the communicative focus and the clause as a whole describes the localization of an object in a particular place. Once again, some semantic differences between verbal/verbless sentences are not discussed here (cf. 21-22).

(21)   *U stola stul* 'There [is] a chair at the table'
(22)   *U stola est' stul* 'There is.EMPHASIS a chair at the table'

2.3. The Russian Øv sentences

The constructions of this type are mostly used in colloquial speech and have – unlike the previous two – no morphological paradigm.

Structure:	NP + NP/AdvP/PP ('direction')
Meaning	'movement'
Pragmatics:	Colloquial speech

A typical manifestation at the right periphery of the sentence is a NP (with the dative case), a PP or an AdvP with directive meaning. Primarily, it has a meaning of 'physical direction' (23):

(23)   *Ja v les* (I.NOM **Øv** to forest.ACC) 'I [am going] into the forest'

However, it can be used metaphorically, as a *conduit metaphor* (24):

(24)   *Ja emu v otvet* (I.NOM **Øv** he.DAT in response) 'I [spoke] to him in response'

It can also be used metonymically: moving (part of) the body (25):

(25)   *Ja emu po licu* (I.NOM **Øv** he.DAT to face.DAT) 'I [slapped] his face'[5]

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[5] An interesting and undiscussed matter is the question of the semantic tense in the constructions under consideration. They are separated onto two groups which are best translated into English using different tense forms.

Thus, three types of Russian verbless sentences are generated by different mechanisms, building on different levels of language structure.

- The **Øcop** sentences in modern Russian are not idiomatic. They have neither syntactic constraints nor semantic non-compositionality. **Øcop** is a pragmatically neutral morphological zero form. Rather, the nonzero manifestation of the copula has some pragmatic features.
- **Øbe** is a marker of several types of constructions. They are pragmatically neutral but semantically non-compositional. **Øbe** constructions should be defined as formal idioms with semantic constraints.
- **Øv** is a marker of both pragmatic and semantic phrasemes. **Øv** constructions are formal idioms with pragmatic and semantic constraints.

3. Finnish verbless sentences[6]

First of all, it must be pointed out that Finnish expressions can be described in quite a different way. Unlike Russian, all three types of Finnish verbless sentences have a closer connection to their full verbal representation and have stronger restrictions on their usage. The corresponding verbal sentences (including those with present tense) are possible in nearly all circumstances (except in some cases validly specified in the comments). In almost all cases, the absence of a verb form is possible in a frame that can be called the *motivation frame*, which means that the main goal of the speaker is to motivate the listener to do (or not to do) something. This frame causes several types of usage with slight differences between them (announcements, ads, orders etc.) (26-28). The details are discussed below.

(26) *Läpikulku kielletty* 'Passage **Øcop** forbidden'
(27) *Uutuudet myymälöissä* 'New stock **Øbe** in the shops'
(28) *Kädet ylös* '**Øv** hands up'

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[6] The following constructions are beyond the scope of my attention here: 1) a "status construction," or "nominativus/partitivus absolutus," for example, *Me kuuntelimme laulua korvat hörössä*; 'We were listening to a song, ears [are cocking] up' (see more Ikola 1970: 50, Hakulinen *et al*. 2004: 837-838); 2) "telegraphese" phrases such as *sairastunut* '[I am] fallen + ill' (Tesak, Ahlsén, Györi, Koivuselkä-Sallinen, Niemi, and Tonelli 1995); and 3) newspaper headlines such as *Martti Ahtisaari Moskovassa* 'Martti Ahtisaari [is] in Moscow' (Hakulinen *et al*. 2004: 840). The last ones are, actually, close in form to the constructions in question, but all the types are, nevertheless, outside of the structures listed here as it is unclear whether they are complete sentences.

3.1. The Finnish Øcop sentences

Several constructions can be noted where the absence of the copula is a standard practice in Finnish. The most frequently used types are in use in written (rather official) announcements,[7] ads and the like (29).

(29)   *Ikkuna rikki* (window.NOM **Øcop** broken.ADV) 'The window [is] broken',

Structure:	NP + Participle/ Predicative Adv
Meaning:	A noun ('artifact or action') having a feature caused by somebody's activities
Pragmatics:	Written (rather official) announcements

It is common knowledge that there are no morphological animate/inanimate markers in Finnish. However, a variable N in the NP is usually a noun designating an inanimate object, most commonly a verbal noun (30) or an artifact (31). Use of nouns that denote a living creature or its body part is more restricted (32). However, in general, the list of variables is being extended.

(30)   *Läpikulku kielletty* (passage.NOM **Øcop** forbidden.PCP)
         'The passage **Øcop** forbidden'
(31)   *Johto poikki* (wire.NOM **Øcop** broken.ADV) 'The wire [is] broken'
(32)   *[?]Käsi poikki* (hand.NOM **Øcop** broken.ADV) 'The hand [is] broken'

Another constraint is that qualitative adjectives (such as *red, interesting,* etc.) are not allowed in this construction (33), while predicative adverbs go well (34). Cf.:

(33)   **Ikkuna rikkinäinen* (window.NOM **Øcop** broken.ADJ.NOM)
(34)   *Ikkuna rikki* (window.NOM **Øcop** broken.ADV) 'The window [is] broken'[8]

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[7] I cannot help citing a fragment from a Finnish novel where a girl reflects upon a posted notice that she sees for the first time.
Koirien ulkoilutus piha-alueella ehdottomasti kielletty 'Walking dogs [is] absolutely forbidden in the yard.' [She thinks about the official coldness of the sign and proposes a warmer alternative, where, among other changes, a verb plays its role.]: *Hyvä koiranomistaja: ethän ulkoiluta lemmikkiäsi lasten leikkipaikalla, kiitos!* 'Dear dog owner! Do not walk your pet on the kids' playing ground. Thank you!' (Meripaasi 2002: 6-7).
[8] In general, the whole class of the Finnish *puhki*-type predicative adverbs (such as *puhki* '[wear] away, out', *poikki* 'in two' etc. (Hakulinen *et al.* 2004: 931-932)) can be used in the sentences of that type.

The last constraint lies in the pragmatic area. It restricts the uses of the construction to announcements only. Accordingly, it cannot be used in indirect speech as an embedded clause (35).

(35)   *Hän sanoi, että tuolla läpikulku kielletty* *'he/she.NOM say.PAST.P3 that there passage.NOM **Øcop** forbidden.PCP'

3.2 The Finnish Øbe sentences[9]

The type of 'location of an object'

(36)   *Uutuudet myymälöissä* (novelty.PL.NOM Øbe shop.PL.INE) 'New stock [is] in the shops'

Structure:	NP.NOM + AdvP/PP ('place')
Meaning:	Location of an object and indirect motivation ('Where is something that you may need?')
Pragmatics:	Advertisements and announcements

The meaning of these constructions may change depending on the pragmatic context. Of course, the direct meaning of the sentence is about the location of the NP's referent. But at the same time, an advertisement motivates a consumer to make a purchase, and if the sentence is used to motivate rather than to inform, that motivation is then also a part of the meaning of the construction.

The type of 'location of a person'

(37)   *Äiti tässä* (mother.NOM Øbe here.ADV) 'Mother [is] here'

This type has two variants that differ in question/declarative modes only.

Structure:	NP (N/WH-words) + AdvP/PP ('place')
Meaning:	Location of a person ('Where is somebody?')
Pragmatics:	Dialogue (usually one-to-one communication)

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[9] Actually, the **Øcop** and **Øbe** types are not strongly separated. A sentence like *Vahtimestari sairaslomalla* 'The janitor [is] on the sick list' can be placed among both types.

The following examples show that inanimate nouns (38) and non-locative modifiers (39) sound less natural but are possible at least in some fixed expressions (40). The only reason for this is that they come into conflict with the meaning of the constructions.

(38) $^{??}$***Kirja** pöydällä* (book.NOM **Øbe** table.ADE)
(39) $^{?}$*Minä **kunnossa*** (I.NOM **Øbe** OK.ADV)
(40)   *Lääkäri **tavattavissa*** (doctor.NOM **Øbe** available.ADV) 'The doctor [is] available'

One more feature that can be described follows from the pragmatic specifications: the default interpretation demands a first-person meaning regardless of whether the NP constitutes a first person or not (41).

(41)   *Äiti tässä* (mother.NOM **Øbe** here.ADV) means 'I [am] here'

The pragmatic feature constitutes the restriction on using these sentences (at least prosodically unmarked) in indirect speech, e.g. as embedded clauses (42).

(42)   **Hän sanoi, että äiti tässä.* (*he/she.NOM say.PAST.P3 that mother.NOM **Øbe** here.ADV)

However, it is possible to use direct speech in the disguise of indirect speech as in (43), where there are both markers of indirectness (*että 'that'*) and of directness (*minä 'I'*).

(43)   *Hän sanoi, että "minä tässä".* (*he/she.NOM say.PAST.P3 that I.PRO.1.SG **Øbe** here.ADV)

The type 'astonished establishment of a fact'

(44)   *Komeat kengät sinulla* (nice.NOM.PL shoe.NOM.PL you.ADE) 'You [have] nice shoes'

Structure:	NP$_1$ (Adj + N.NOM) + AdvP/NP$_2$ (N.AD)
Meaning:	'I know that someone has something special'
Pragmatics:	Dialogue (usually one-to-one communication)

The main features of this type are connected with the communication status of their elements. Roughly speaking, the element Adj in the NP$_1$ must be in the communicative focus, and the clause describes the special feature of an object. Again, the semantic difference between verbal/verbless sentences is not discussed here (Hakulinen *et al.* 2004, 840-841).

(45) *Komeat kengät sinulla* 'You [have] nice.EMPHASIS shoes'
(46) *Komeat kengät on sinulla(kin)* 'You (also) have nice shoes'

3.3. The Finnish Øv sentences

Finnish directive constructions have been described in Hakulinen *et al.* (2004: 839-840, 1582-1584) where they are divided into at least two different types.

The type of 'direct motivation'

(47) ***Kädet ylös!* (hand.NOM.PL Øv up.ADV) 'Øv hands up!'**

Structure:	NP$_1$ + AdvP/NP$_2$ ('Direction')
Meaning:	Motivation of a person to act instantly
Pragmatics:	Commands and orders

This type of the Finnish directive construction is frequently used with nouns that designate parts of the human body, including clothes (48-49), but the use of this construction is not restricted to these nouns (50-51). Simultaneously, some expressions (50-51, 52) occupy a place between syntactic idiomatic units with a list of lexical variables and non-variable fixed expressions. Therefore, they can be treated as lexical units as well.

(48) *Pullot piiloon* (bottles.NOM.PL **Øv** hiding-place.ILL)
      'Move bottles to the hiding-place'
(49) *Housut pois* (trousers.NOM **Øv**.PL off.ADV) 'Take the trousers off!'
(50) *Ovi kiinni* (door.NOM.SG **Øv** up.ADV) 'Close the door up!'
(51) *Valot pois* (light.NOM.PL **Øv** off.ADV) 'Switch the light off!'
(52) *Vitsa sulle, palkka mulle* (twig.NOM **Øv** you.ALL, money.NOM **Øv** I.ALL)
      'A twig [is given] to you, money [is given] to me' (from an Easter song).

Yet it can be presumed that a list of words that fill the lexical variables (both in the NP$_1$ and NP$_2$) can (and will) be extended so far that a new syntactic model with a wider filler of lexical variables may be developed in the future, and the situation is gradually changing. Thus, some rare instances can be found with the shifted meaning (*'to move'* → *'to take'*) in the email discourse as well, but with stronger pragmatic support (53).

(53)   *Pipot ja käsineet matkaan* (cap.NOM.PL and glove.NOM.PL **Øv** trip.ILL)
       'Caps and gloves [are to be taken] along'

The type of 'indirect motivation'

(54)   *Kaikki Citymarketiin!* (All Øv shop.ILL) 'Everyone Øv to Citymarket'

Structure:	NP + NP ('Direction')
Meaning:	Indirect motivation
Pragmatics:	Advertisements and announcements.

Semantically this type seems to be very close to the 3.2.1 type, as both have the same pragmatic features and function caused by it. In practice, they are used interchangeably.

Thus, a large group of Finnish verbless sentences appears in similar pragmatic situations. In general, almost all of the sentences can be used without a verb within the frame of motivation in order to motivate a person for an action. Still, the absence of verbs is caused by some other factors as well.

- **Øcop** sentences in modern Finnish are either pragmatic (within the abovementioned frame) or semantic idiomatic constructions.
- **Øbe** is a marker of either pragmatic (partly within the abovementioned frame) or pragmatic and semantic idiomatic constructions.
- **Øv** is used either in pragmatic (within the abovementioned frame) or pragmatic and semantic idiomatic constructions.

4. Conclusion

As has been shown, three types of **Ø** sentences have similar formal properties both in Finnish and in Russian, namely **Øcop**, **Øbe**, **and Øv** phrases. Moreover, all three types originate in "full" verbal sentences in both languages, but should be defined as non-elliptical in modern language. However, the similarity of the surface structure does not lead either to similar usage or to identical processes of idiomatization. Table 1 illustrates this conclusion with a generalized view.

	Semantic features	Pragmatic features
The Russian **Øcop** sentences	–	–
The Russian **Øbe** sentences	+	–
The Russian **Øv** sentences	+	+
The Finnish **Øcop** sentences	+	+
The Finnish **Øbe** sentences	+	+
The Finnish **Øv** sentences	+	+

Table 1. Features of Øcop, Øbe, and Øv phrases in Russian and Finnish.

Already these summarized data show that the Russian verbless sentences are more free than the Finnish ones, right up to the non-idiomatic zero form of the **Øcop.** However, the difference between the Russian and the Finnish sentences can be traced back to the history of these constructions. The Russian verbless items appear to be the result of a prolonged and consecutive development from **Øcop** to **Øv** sentences (Borkovskij 1968, Borkovskij 1983, Kopotev 1999). As far as I could establish, the Finnish constructions have not been studied from a historical point of view so far. They might, however, be looked at in a quite different way, whereby almost every clause without a verb may be placed under the frame "motivation." Clearly, the question has to be studied further and in more detail. However, already now it is possible to postulate the essential distinctions between the Russian and the Finnish verbless sentences. 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).

Despite this clear-cut distinction, the described material allows formulating more general principles concerning syntactic idiomatization as a whole. M. Israel came up with the following idea:

> "There is no single moment we can point to and say, "This is where the construction entered the grammar." Rather, a long process of local analogical extensions led a variety of idiomatic usages to gradually gain in productive strength even as they settled into a rigid syntax." (Israel 1996: 228.)

That seems to be true, except that this process happens on the level of syntax only. An initial fixed expression that function as a unit of lexicon may be extended to an idiomatic syntactic item (by means of an extending list of lexical variables, as it occurs with the Finnish idioms *Kädet ylös* 'hands up', for example) or may even be developed into an element of a morphological repertory (the Russian **Øcop**)[10]. Certainly, it does not mean that every fixed expression extends to a morpheme – many structures are located on different levels of this process without any changes. With all of this going on, any strong separation of idiomatic expressions is mainly a matter of a theory, not the reality.

Another crucial factor of the syntactic idiomatization process is an ill-formedness of the surface structure. Thus, the peripherality, in terms of generative rules, of the elliptical sentences was the very reason for their having been coined as separate units. Generally speaking, an ill-formed surface structure (such as with an ellipsis) may be as far from the prototypical manifestation of a deep structure as another surface unit generated by means of another set of rules. In certain circumstances the process leads to the appearance of new phrasemes in the dictionary that can later be generalized as a new rule in the grammar.

By summarizing all these observations, the following principles of idiomatization can be postulated:

- *The principle of language continuum*: A fixed expression that appears as a fact of lexicon develops into a syntactic model by means of an extending list of lexical variable fillers and may, in all probability, be developed into a subject of generative rules.

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[10] An excellent example of the same nature is an old F. Bopp theory of agglutination that claims some IE verbal flexions originated from the "verb + pronoun" constructions (Bopp 1816).

- *The principle of peripherality*: A less prototypical realization of a deep structure can be coined into an idiom; the more frequent and invariable an idiom is, the more lexical it is; the more infrequent and variable, the more syntactic it is.

This list is neither complete nor indisputable. It adds, nevertheless, a new dimension to the investigation of syntactic freezes.

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