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The role of copula in periphrastic passives in Russian

As is well-known, Russian has a periphrastic passive construction formed by a copula verb *to be* and a past passive participle (henceforth PPP). Paslawska & von Stechow (2003:352, henceforth P&S) propose the following generalization for the interpretation of periphrastic passives in Russian:

- (1) PPPs are stative passives if combined with the present copula. They are stative or eventive passives if combined with the past copula.

Given that the present copula is never overtly realized, one of the conclusions that can be drawn on the basis of (1) is that the overt realization of the copula corresponds to an eventive reading of the periphrastic passive in Russian.

There is, however, strong empirical evidence against treating all the present PPP constructions as stative/adjectival passives. P&S themselves mention the fact that the Russian participial passives are different from English and German ones in allowing for agentive by-phrases and temporal modifiers of the event (example from P&S 2003:309):

- (2) Okno zakryto Mašej dva časa nazad.
window closed.PPP Maša.Instr two hours ago
'The window was closed by Maša two hours ago'.

In P&S's account, (2) is actually a stative sentence meaning something like "The window is in the state of being closed by Maša two hours ago". To account for the use of by-phrases and temporal event modifiers in sentences like (2), P&S propose a Result-parameter, which relies on the influential hypothesis advanced in Kratzer (1994) that external arguments are introduced syntactically in a Voice projection. The proposal of P&S (2003:347) with respect to the Russian participles is that they are built on top of the VoiceP, whereas the English and German participles are built on the basis of agentless VPs:

- (3) Russian: [_{Part} TARGET] selects a VoiceP [+passive]
(4) English/German: [_{Part} TARGET] selects an agentless VP

In this paper, I will argue both against the generalization in (1) and the Result parameter. In particular, I argue that, given the presence of a by-phrase and event-related modification all periphrastic passives in Russian irrespective of the overt realization of the copula, all PPP passives can have both a stative and an eventive interpretation. Syntactically, periphrastic passives in Russian are, indeed, formed on the basis of the VoiceP, just as proposed by P&S, as witnessed by the availability of agent and event related modifiers. However, if we call PPP constructions like the one in (2) stative, all empirical differences between the eventive passives in English/German and the Russian participial passives, which, according to P&S, are adjectival, will remain unexplained. Basically, a construction that we call 'eventive' in a language like English becomes 'adjectival' in a language like Russian. This effectively deprives the definition of adjectival passive of any meaningful content.

Contrary to P&S's proposal, I argue that the overt realization of copula is irrelevant for the eventive/stative characterization of the passive. The (non)realization of the copula in the periphrastic passive is determined only on the basis of temporal reference. In particular, I will claim that the copula becomes obligatory if and only if the condition that the reference time precedes the utterance time (i.e., the classical definition of past tense) is specified; otherwise, the copula is not overt.

My analysis includes the following components. PPPs in passive constructions are built on VoiceP, just like P&S claim. (5) provides a semantics associated with this phrasal category.

- (5) $\| \text{VoiceP} \|: \lambda s. \lambda e. \lambda y. \exists x [\sqrt{v}(e) \ \& \ \text{Ag}(e, x) \ \& \ \text{Th}(y, s) \ \& \ \text{ConsST}(e, s)]$

The representation includes an existentially bound external argument, which presumably

happens at the VoiceP level. The ConsST introduces a consequent state. This is part of the lexical representation of those verbs which allow for participle formation in the first place. Both assumptions are rather standard in the semantic literature on participle formation.

The Prt head with the semantics in (6), which forms the participle, existentially binds an event argument (cf. Kratzer 2000).

(6) $\|\text{Prt}^0\|: \lambda R.\lambda s.\exists e.\exists x [R(s)(e)(y)]$

The participial head Prt attaches to a VoiceP to form a PPP. The result of this application is a participle with the following semantics:

(7) $\|\text{PPP}\|: \lambda s.\lambda y.\exists e.\exists x [\sqrt{v}(e) \ \& \ \text{Ag}(e,x) \ \& \ \text{Th}(y,s) \ \& \ \text{ConsST}(e,s)]$

The state variable in the derivation of the PPPs remains accessible for modification until it gets existentially bound by an independent mechanism of existential closure, standardly assumed in (neo-)Davidsonian event semantics (Davidson 1967, Parsons 1990). Crucially, the event variable only allows for low-level modifiers in this kind of derivation. This is empirically correct: temporal event modifiers in PPP constructions always have a narrow scope with respect to other scope taking elements, like, for instance, negation:

(8) Okno ne zakryto v dva časa.
window not closed.PPP in two hours

‘The window was not closed at two o’clock’: $*\exists \text{dva časa} > \text{not}; \text{OKnot} > \text{dva časa}$

So far, the analysis does not differ significantly from the one proposed by P&S, apart from several technical details. The crucial difference concerns the conditions on copula realization which I claim to be purely temporal and not related to the difference between a stative and an eventive interpretation of the PPP passive.

When the representation in (7) is fed into a temporal structure (after an existential closure of the state variable), the state is the only variable that is accessible for temporal operators. This is in accordance with another claim about passive sentences in Russian: they exhibit a perfect effect, i.e. they assert a consequence state at a reference time (Schoorlemmer 1995). Tense semantics (again, standardly) orders the reference time with respect to the speech/utterance time. In the present, the consequent state expressed by the participle holds at the utterance time and in the past, it precedes the utterance time. The copula support is needed to express the past tense semantics, i.e. to express the relation of precedence between a reference time and a speech time.

The empirical support for this claim comes from two sources. The first one is the realization of the copula in standard copula sentences, where the copula is obligatorily omitted in the present tense and is obligatorily realized in the past. This pattern is illustrated in (9) for a predicative adjective:

(9) a. Irina segodnja (*est’) grustnaja. b. Irina včera *(byla) grustnaja.
Irina today (*is) sad. Irina yesterday *(was) sad.
‘Irina is sad today’ ‘Irina was sad yesterday’

If the distribution of the copula in passives is conditioned by temporal factors, we achieve a desirable parallelism in the analysis of PPP passives and copula sentences.

The second argument in favor of this analysis is the fact that if the reference time is made explicit by, for instance, a temporal subordinate clause, the copula is always obligatory in the past passive sentences, as in (10), whereas with the present reference it is impossible:

(10) Dom *(byl) postroen kogda prišlo razrešenie.
house (was) built.PPP when arrived permit
‘The house was built when the permit arrived.’

The summary of my proposal is thus the following. PPP formation operator existentially binds the event variable associated with the verbal root of the participle. Prior to this level, the event variable is accessible for modification. The presence of this event variable in the semantic representation is associated with a possible eventive reading of PPP passives. The

state variable is the only one that is accessible for the temporal operators. If the state is located in the past, then the copula is obligatorily realized. If, however, the state is in the present, the copula is zero, just like in the other copula constructions in Russian.