PREDICATE ADJECTIVE CONSTRUCTIONS: A HISTORY OF IDEAS WITH DATA FROM RUSSIAN AND BULGARIAN

Snezha Tsoneva-Mathewson
Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

In this article I present the category of property predication and its instantiation by predicate adjective constructions and deadjectival verbs in Slavic languages, mainly Russian and Bulgarian. Previous analyses albeit insightful have treated these constructions as disjointed in mental space. I suggest a cognitive linguistic approach in which the adjective predicate constructions are complex and general (schematic) syntactic constructions. On the semantic map of property predication they occupy a contiguous place to the complex, less schematic and more substantive intransitive deadjectival verbs in the syntax-lexicon continuum.

Key words: property predication, predicate adjective constructions, copula, deadjectival verbs, semantic map

The Structuralist Tradition

The predicate adjective constructions have been most often analyzed under the class of copular sentences (for a more extensive discussion of pre-generative-grammar theories of the copula, see Moro 1997: 248 – 258; for generative grammar analyses see Pereltsvayg 2007), and the focus of analysis has primarily been the meaning or function of *be*. According to one tradition, *be* is a meaningless element inserted for purely grammatical purposes in specifiable environments (Bach 1967); its function is to provide the sentence with inflectional elements required by declarative sentences, in particular, tense and mood specifications.

Similar understanding underlies the invention of the term 'copula' from Latin *copulare* 'to link' by Abelard and its later use by Port Royal grammarians Antoine Arnauld and Claude Lancelot (cited in Moro 1997: 251–252 and Lepschy 1998: 167). According to this conception, the copula can turn a term into a predicate and link it with the subject.

Other analyses maintain that the copula (*be, byt', bada/sam*, etc.) is a predicate itself and it is ambiguous between two or more readings. Examples from English are given in (1) below.

(1)

a. I think consequently I am. [existential]

b. The football is under the table. [locative]

c. The fairies are small. [predicative]

d. Alice is a doctor. [equative/identity/class inclusion]

e. John is building a new house. [auxiliary]

Functional grammars (Goosens 1992 cited in Pereltsvayg 2007), Montague grammar (Montague 1973, Dowty et al. 1981 cited in Pereltsvayg 2007) also make a distinction between various types of *be*. For all these approaches the meaning of the copula is ambiguous between two or more readings, including predication, identity and expression of tense/mood. The ambiguity of the copula is related to the lexical item itself as it is encoded in the lexicon, not to the syntactic structure of the sentence in general. This point will be taken up when the cognitive linguistic analysis is presented.

Cross-linguistically, copular sentences are common although they vary in their interpretations (e.g. Hebrew and Bengali express a possessive relationship by a copula in addition to the ones already mentioned above with regard to English). Other languages, including Spanish, Basque, Irish and Scottish Gaelic use two distinct copulas in predicative (and equative) constructions with two different interpretations (quoted from Pereltsvayg (2007).

(2)

SCOTTISH GAELIC (from **Ramchand 1997:193)**

a. Is faicilleach Calum.   b. Tha Calum faicilleach.

IS careful Calum   BE Calum careful

'Calum is a careful person   'Calum is (being) careful.'

(by nature).'

Slavic languages typically use morphological case, nominative vs. instrumental to mark the contrast between the two types of copular sentences.

(3)

RUSSIAN

a. Chehov byl pisatel'.   b. Chehov byl pisatelem.

Chehov was writer.NOM   Chehov was writer.INSTR

'Chehov was a writer.'   'Chehov was a writer.'

(He is dead now.)

(4)

SLOVAK (**from Rothstein 1986**)

a. Kukuchin bol lekar.	b. Kukuchin bol lekarom.
Kukuchin was doctor.NOM	Kukuchin was doctor.INSTR
'Kukuchin was a doctor [his main characteristic].'	'Kukuchin was [happened to be] a doctor.'

Bulgarian does not make such a distinction as it has no morphological cases.

It has been long noted in the literature on Russian that the two types of copular sentences with instrumental and nominative marked post-copular phrase, respectively, do not mean exactly the same thing. However, there is an extensive debate in the literature as to the exact nature of these meaning differences. Traditional literature uses terms like "identity", "characteristic", "status", "function", "essential quality", "appearance", "concreteness", "temporal" to describe the meaning differences between sentences with nominative and instrumental post-copular phrases. Generative literature, on the other hand, focuses on describing the differences in terms of stage-level vs. individual-level predicates. The most widely accepted generalization is that sentences with an instrumental post-copular phrase denote transient, temporary, or changeable properties, whereas sentences with a nominative post-copular phrase denote characteristic, permanent, or non-changeable properties. For example, Wierzbicka (1980: 119) characterizes the meaning differences as follows:

…'the nominative case is used when the predicate nominal denotes a property seen as essential and inalienable; the instrumental case is used when the predicate nominal denotes a property which is seen as transient and inessential.'

Pereltsvayg (2007) challenges the accepted view and argues that the case alternation between nominative and instrumental in the examples above is an overt indication of deeper differences in the syntactic structure of copular sentences. According to her analysis there is no need to distinguish a copula of identity and a copula of predication in addition to the tense (and mood) marking functions of the copula. Instead, she argues that the so-called copula of identity is only a marker of tense, whereas the copula of predication is a true argument-taking predicate; thus, the differences between the copula of identity and the copula of predication reduce to properties of functional vs. lexical heads. Both NPs and APs in post-copular positions are predicative in nature, and they cannot discharge their (Theme) θ-role directly, that is, by θ-marking their specifiers. Instead, they require "help" from a special head. However, this 'helping' head is a

lexical rather than a functional category; it is a kind of verb according to Pereltsvayg.

What is amazing in Pereltsvayg's structural syntactic analysis is the similarity to Langacker's (1991) semantic analysis. She proposes a unified analysis for the copula *be* in its predicate adjective construction and predicate nominative construction. What is even more intriguing is that she assigns a lexical (semantic) value to the copula which is also in line with cognitive linguistic description. Pereltsvayg's analysis shows that formal approaches have moved in the direction of loosening the modularity principle in order to include

more semantically motivated phenomena to account for syntactic behaviour. Her apparatus of argumentation, of course, is completely different. From a cognitive linguistic point of view such an analysis is unnecessarily convoluted and unnatural. In a cognitive linguistic framework, the lexical (semantic) meaning of the copula can be accounted for naturally and in a straightforward manner (see below). In addition, such an analysis is closely connected to semantic classifications of *byt'* predicates especially in the Russian linguistic tradition (Seliverstova 1982, 1990). Pereltsvayg also excludes an important fact from Russian predicate adjective constructions, i.e. the short adjectival forms, as they do not change for case (Nominative or Instrumental).

The semantic approach in the Russian tradition

In the Russian linguistic tradition property predicates stand out as a semantic class opposed to the classes of actions, states, processes, etc. Shcherba (1974: 90) discusses three types of predicates: 1) actions (dejstvija), 2) states (sostojanija) and 3) properties (kachestva). He points out that a lexical root can appear in more than one class of predicates as in *ja bolen* (sostojanie); *boleju* (sostojanie v vide dejstvija); *ja vesel* (sostojanie); *ja veseljus'* (sostojanie v vide dejstvija); *ja veselyj* (kachestva, properties); *on shumen* (sostojanie); *on shumit* (dejstvie, action); *on shumnyj* (kachestva), etc.

Subsequent semantic classifications of Russian predicates (Bulygina 1982; Seliverstova 1982) are characterised by their search of general (possibly universal) semantic distinctions. Such distinctions are ultimately conceptual distinctions (Wierzbicka 1980: 49 – 50). Bulygina (1982) suggests that predicates should be divided into two major groups: 'properties' (kachestva) expressed primarily but not necessarily by adjective predicates and nominal predicates and 'events' (javlenija) expressed primarily but not necessarily by verbs. Such a division is based

on the presence or absence of temporal localization (vremennaja lokaliziranost' vs. vnevremennost'). According to her, property predicates (as well as nominal predicates) are somewhat independent of time, there is no clear-cut temporal boundary of the existence of the link between the subject and the assigned property, properties cannot be expressed as continuous (aktualizacija priznaka), e.g. *Sneg bel*. They are potentially atemporal which is exhibited in their use in generic statements. Conversely, the majority of verbs including the existing parallel deadjectival verbs (R. *belet', hudet'*, B. *beleya (se)*, *debeleya*, etc.) can be used in their continuous sense (aktual'noe upotreblenie), thus denoting a transitory state of affairs located in a specific moment or period of time.

Bulygina's analysis does not mention the copula *byt'*. The adjectival (and nominal) predicates in examples such as *sneg bel*; *on p'janica*, etc. are termed nonverbal predicates since there is no copula assigning the property to the Subject. Therefore, one should assume that the copula *byt'* is not treated as a verb in her analysis. It is not clear if it performs grammatical functions such as being a marker of tense, aspect, etc. since such predicates are being distinguished by their 'vnevremennost' according to Bulygina.

Seliverstova (1982), however, suggests that predicate adjectives have temporal reference, they refer to a stretch of time but they do not occupy any point on this stretch of time, i.e. they lack specific temporal localization. Seliverstova argues that the copula *byt'* in Russian is an existential verb with bleached semantics. According to her, all predicates express temporal localization but they differ in terms of phase structure (fazovosti vs. nefazovosti).

Byt' property predicates in Russian and many other languages are non-phase predicates. Objects and properties are represented in language as existing at any moment as a complete whole not in phases one after the other. Phase predicates, i.e. actions, processes and states, can be characterized in terms of phases; only a particular phase in the unfolding action or process exists at any particular point in time, not the action or the process itself as a whole (cf. Langacker's summary scanning vs. sequential scanning of events). At any subsequent moment in time the action or the process seems to 'disappear' and at the same moment 'appear' again. In other words, one phase incessantly unfolds into another. Actions and processes occupy the full length of the stretch of time within which they last. *Byt'* property predicates cannot occupy the full length of a stretch of time within which they 'move' from one point to the next as whole entities. Properties can change and objects change in that way. In Russian, there are predicates which express such a change (cf. *On umnyj* (property) vs. *On*

vse umneet i umneet (He is getting cleverer and cleverer)). The same distinction holds true for Bulgarian.

Bulygina's and Seliverstova's analyses of property predicates introduced above are parts of a bigger project which aims at a semantic classification of all Russian predicates. The present study is much more limited in scope and focuses on the possibility to find a model which may account for the meanings of adjective predicates and deadjectival verbs in a unified, principled way. However, both analyses show that the classifications they offer for predicate adjectives seem to leave certain facts unaccounted for and this necessitates various additional explanations.

In the category of property predication one has to include constructions with pseudo-copulas[1] such as *stat' /stanovit'sja, javit'sja /javljat'sja, ostat'sja /ostavat'sja,* as well as their Bulgarian counterparts *stavam, yavyavam se,* etc., which are also predicative constructions but they indicate additionally that the predicative relation changes over some boundary (Timberlake 2004). He calls these verbs host predicates. With them, the predicative is valid only in certain times or worlds; it could differ in other times or other worlds. For example, with *stat' / stanovit'sja* 'become', the state changes from one time to another, with j*avit'sja /javljat'sja* 'seem, appear, turn up', the state holds up in the speaker's world of perception, though it might not hold everywhere.

Property predication constructions from a cognitive linguistic perspective

In the next section I shall outline Croft and Cruse's analysis of predicate adjective constructions, which is essentially Langacker's analyses of *be* and the predicate adjective (and nominative) construction. I shall also suggest an analysis of the deadjectival verbs as a result of a particular construal of properties.

The form of the predicate adjective construction in many languages including English, Russian and Bulgarian is [NP be Adj]. The form differs only in the present tense in Russian, where there is no verbal element, so the form reduces to [NP Adj]. The lack of present tense copula poses a problem for Langacker's analysis as it remains unclear what provides the "temporization" of the stative relationship indicated by the stative complement. This is an issue which requires further consideration and could be the object of another study. One suggestion may rest on the fact that when used in predication with the present tense especially the short

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[1] I am grateful to Ian Press for suggesting this term.

form of the Russian adjective is preferred (Timberlake 2004). I shall provide some further thoughts on the subject below.

The predicate adjective construction is a type of predicate construction which differs from the ordinary verbal construction in requiring the copula verb *be*. The members of the Adjective category have a meaning that requires them to be combined with the copula *be* in order to be interpreted as signalling the ascription of a property to a referent. The meaning of *be*, on the other hand, requires the copula to be combined with a member of the Adjective category in order to be interpreted as doing the job of ascribing a property to the subject NP (Croft and Cruse 2004: 253). This analysis is similar to Langacker's (1987: 214 – 22; 1991: 204 – 5) who has argued that *be* is a meaningful element whose primary function is temporal and aspectual (cf. Seliverstova 1982). I shall quote his description (1991: 65) in full below.

'*Be* is schematic for the class of imperfective processes: it profiles the continuation through time of a stable situation characterized only as a stative relation: it is a true verb, all of whose components states are construed as being identical, but apart from their being relational it is maximally unspecific concerning their nature. The schematic relationship followed through time by *be* can serve as elaboration site in a grammatical construction, where it is rendered specific by the addition of a stative predication such as an adjective or a prepositional phrase (e.g. *be hungry*; *be on the counter*). Since *be* is the profile determinant, the composite expression inherits its processual character – it profiles the continuation through time of the specific relationship indicated by the stative complement. This "temporization" of a stative relationship allows it to occur as the profiled relationship in a finite clause, which would otherwise be precluded (since a finite clause always designates a process).'

Stepping on Langacker (1987: 214 – 22), Croft (2001), Croft and Cruse (2004: 253), I suggest the following unified analysis of predicate adjective constructions. Adjectives are semantically relational, stative, permanent and atemporal. When used in the propositional act function of predication they acquire an additional element, the verb *be*, which like all verbs is relational, processual and more or less transitory. When a property (or state) that the adjective designates is ascribed, asserted or predicated to an object, it is no longer conceptualized as inherent or permanent (contra Bulygina 1982); it has acquired a degree of transitoriness associated with verbs. When the additional element is missing, i.e. the zero copula in the present tense in Russian, a more 'specialized' form comes in, the short form of the adjective. Being syntactic, this type of property predication is

maximally schematic; any stative complement can form a composite expression with the schematic verb *be* (cf. Langacker's analysis of predicate nominative construction (1991). There is ample evidence that the elaboration of the grammatical construction by the addition of various adjectives renders the construction specific and provides it with various interpretations (cf. the examples in Seliverstova 1982). For example, there is a distinction between a predicate adjective construction that involves a colour adjective, which by nature is more stable, and a predicate adjective construction that involves a human propensity adjective, which is more transitory. Similarly, it is the meanings of the case markers, nominative and instrumental, that further elaborate the maximally schematic *be*. In the Russian linguistic tradition *be* has also been considered a lexical item with a bleached semantic meaning, which essentially means the same as 'schematic'. Can schematicity be pushed to such an extent that it can be marked by the zero present tense *byt'* in Russian predicate nominative and adjective constructions? Schematicity is, in fact, what gives the sense of *vnevremennost'* 'being outside time' (Bulygina 1982), but there is not a true lack of temporality (cf. Seliverstova 1982). The copula (even when it is missing) is an element (the head, the profile determinant) in the predication, which provides temporal and aspectual meanings albeit schematic. Hence, it is unacceptable to describe adjective predicates as lacking temporal localization. The juxtaposition of the subject and the post-positioned adjective can be just as meaningful as the presence of the past tense form of *byt'*, which clearly positions the predicated property in the past. It is not surprising that *byt'* is missing in the present tense, which is used to refer to inherent states such as *I am Bulgarian* or *She is tall*. Ascribing a present state or property to an object almost coincides with a description of the property, which is primarily achieved by adjectives in their modifying function. Therefore, I suggest that it is more appropriate to analyze the various property predication constructions in terms of degree of transitoriness, which is expressed as soon as properties are construed for the purpose of the discourse function of predication, although the sense of transitoriness is closer to zero when there is the zero copula *byt'* in the present tense of predicatives.

Do adjective predicates differ from their parallel deadjectival verbs? According to Pereltsvayg (2007) they are synonymous and indeed their meanings are very close. Bulygina (1982) and Seliverstova (1982) clearly distinguish between the two types of predicating properties and classify them in different semantic classes. I suggest that property predicates are mapped onto contiguous areas in the field/space of property predication.

The Russian *byt' pustoj* 'be empty, uninhabited' and *pustet'* 'be seen as empty', or the Bulgarian *sam mlad* 'be young' and *mladeja* 'look young' share the same lexical root, which belongs to a particular semantic (conceptual) class of properties – full/empty, age, etc. A division such as the one proposed by Bulygina presents the above predicates as disjointed, which cannot be the case. A proposition such as *Sneg beleet* predicates the property of colour to the NP subject as much as *Sneg bel* and that property is not simply presumed but is denoted by the lexical root. If we assume that adjective predicates (except human propensities) lack temporal reference and denote essential, inherent properties, how shall we distinguish them from adjectives as modifiers? Properties naturally modify an object and this is their prototypical function (Croft 2001). In this function they are permanent, atemporal, and essential. The moment they are used for the discourse function of predication they acquire some degree of transitoriness and have to be combined with a temporal element. In Russian and Bulgarian this can be done in at least two ways: combining with the copula or derivational morphology which turns the adjectives into verbs, e.g. *Glaza sinie* 'The eyes are blue' vs. *Glaza sinejut* 'The eyes are blue (and we can clearly see that) or *Volosy stanovilis' temnymi* 'The hair was getting dark' vs. *Volosy temneli* 'The hair was getting dark'[2]. Predicate adjective constructions may not be as transitory as the respective verbs but they certainly are not inherent, atemporal, as modifiers are. Adjectival roots as modifiers are inherent, but as predicates in adjective predicate constructions and in deadjectival verbs they exhibit various degrees of transitoriness and I believe that they are best analyzed/classified not in rigid compartments but as occupying contiguous mental spaces differing primarily in the degree of generality/specificity. Whether one and the same adjectival lexical root can be construed as a permanent property which is its prototypical meaning or will be construed as transitory and thus given the prototypical form expressing transitoriness, i.e. a verb, is a matter of a language-specific convention. Besides, in order to be expressed, such a construal must be entertained first. In some languages such a possibility may not exist (as in English in regard to the 'appearance' sense of deadjectival verbs). In other languages, e.g. the Slavic ones, it may be a well-established convention (e.g. colours, dimension, emotional states,

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[2] In English both structural means are used for the expression of 'acquire + property', e.g. *white* (adj.) vs. *become white* or *whiten* (intr.) but it is also possible the reconceptualization to be covertly expressed as in *yellow>to yellow*. Such a process is called *coercion*. In other words, there is a semantic shift from property to action which is zero marked.

etc.) or even created as nonce word forms, e.g. unusual colour verbs such as *kafeneja* in Bulgarian. Predicate adjectives also differ from their parallel deadjectival verbs in terms of specificity vs. schematicity. The former profile the situation in a most general, schematic way, while the latter profiles more details, such as the position of the speaker/observer with respect to the scene conceptualized, or the process of visual perception itself in which the speaker is involved. A notable example from Russian is Lermontov's: *Beleet parus odinokij.*

Conclusion

Russian and Bulgarian have both syntactic and morphological means to express intransitive property predication. These are the Russian [NP stat', stanovit'sja Adj] and the Bulgarian [NP stana, stavam Adj] as well as [Adj -e-TNS] in both languages. These expressions ascribe a property to an object in a 'dynamic' way; they denote the process of coming to possess the property, i.e. as a change. There is another set of expressions in Russian and Bulgarian which ascribe a property to an object in a 'static way'. These are the Russian [NP byt ' Adj], the Bulgarian [NP sam Adj] predicate adjective constructions and the same deadjectival verbs, this time in their 'appear, stand out with a property' sense. As the notations indicate, these expressions have been analyzed as constructions. The adjective predicate constructions are complex and general (schematic) syntactic constructions. On the semantic map of property predication they occupy a contiguous place to the complex, less schematic and more substantive intransitive deadjectival verbs in the syntax-lexicon continuum. The derived verbs can be analyzed as partially schematic morphological expressions of the type ADJECTIVE –SUFFIX, where the suffix is a complex marker of the predication of transitoriness of various kinds.

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