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### Where Russian Syntactic Zeros Start: Approaching Finnish?<sup>1</sup>

#### 0. Introduction

One of the time-honored discussions in Russian-Finnish comparative studies centers on Russian verbless sentences that are so widely known as a distinguishing feature of modern Russian. The Finno-Ugric languages have been repeatedly claimed as a source for Russian and vice versa. Most investigations were restricted to clauses that have a copula left out. The present article continues this discussion by offering new data on this topic and by suggesting new explanations.

A previous paper of mine on this topic (Kopotev 2007) described three types of Russian and Finnish sentences that share the fact that they have no verbs in their surface structures. This study showed that these sentences are complete, non-elliptical verbless sentences, having lexemic variables and specific pragmatic or semantic features. Furthermore, most of these sentences are idiomatic, which means that their meanings are non-compositional in nature<sup>2</sup>. Undoubtedly, all these are diachronically traced

<sup>1</sup> The author deeply thanks M. Leinonen, M. Lounela and A. Nikunlassi, as well as the Nordslav mailing list's subscribers, and the participants of Prof. A. Mustajoki's seminar for all their help.

<sup>2</sup> The definitions of idiomatic syntactic items, alternately called *constructions* (Lakoff 1987), *formal idioms* (Kay & Fillmore 1999), or *syntactic phrasemes* (Mel'čuk 1995a) is found, for example, in (Mel'čuk 1995a) "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" (Mel'čuk 1995a: 215; see also Mel'čuk 1995b). Hereafter I use the term "phraseme" in the article.

back to the lack of a verb. Nevertheless they cannot be considered as being elliptical (i.e. verb-restorable) in modern Finnish and Russian<sup>3</sup>. Ignoring considerable morphological differences between the two languages, these sentences are formed with the absence of the following verbs:

The copula *byt’/olla* ‘to be’

(1) *Окно сломано – Ikkuna rikki* (lit. ‘The window **Øcop** broken’)

The lexical verb *byt’/olla* ‘to be located/to have’

(2) *Мама здесь – Äiti tässä* (lit. ‘Mother **Øbe** here’)

Some lexical verbs (verbs of motion (prototypically) and their semantic extensions: *peremestit’(sja)/siirtää(siirtyä)* ‘to move (yourself)’, *dat’/antaa* ‘to give’, etc.)

(3) *Руки вверх! – Kädet ylös!* (lit. ‘**Øv** hands up’)<sup>4</sup>

Russian and Finnish constructions have essential distinctions that can be roughly described as being different degrees of syntactic idiomacity: from non-idiomatic (Russian **Øcop**-sentences) to the expressions that are more restricted to words that fill lexemic variables (Finnish and Russian **Øv**-sentences).

The Finnish verbless sentences are more idiomatic items; they have semantic and pragmatic restrictions. In almost all cases, the absence of a verb is possible in a frame that has been called the “Motivation Frame”. This 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.). Cf. 4–6.

(4) *Ikkuna rikki* ‘Window **Øcop** broken’ (written, rather official, announcements)

(5) *Uutuudet myymälöissä* ‘New stock **Øbe** in the shops’ (advertisements)

(6) *Housut pois* ‘trousers **Øv** off’ (commands and orders)

<sup>3</sup> Both Russian and Finnish languages have sentences without finite verbs in their surface structure that are the result of different types of ellipsis (gapping, pragmatic and syntactic ellipsis, etc.). These sentences have, in general, strong contextual motivation (see further Hakulinen 1978, Mel’čuk 1995c, Kazenin 2007). Even so, the present paper does not deal with such syntactic phenomena – rather, it is devoted to syntactic structures that can be used without strong contextual support in contemporary Russian and Finnish.

<sup>4</sup> Hereafter *Øcop*, *Øbe*, and *Øv* mean the zero of the copula, of the lexical verb ‘to be’, and of other lexical verbs, respectively.

The Russian verbless sentences are more free than the Finnish ones; the Russian constrictions have a smaller list of the semantic constraints and a wider list of pragmatic conditions. Examples of this are the following:

(7) *Проход запрещен* ‘passage **Ø**cop forbidden’

(8) *Новинки в магазинах* ‘New stock **Ø**be in the shops’

(9) *Татьяна – в лес* ‘Tatyana **Ø**v to the forest’ (colloquial speech).

All this has been formulated in Kopotev (2007). Some of the remaining unanswered questions are being discussed here:

- Are there any similar diachronic processes being reconstructed from both sets of facts in the two languages?
- Should the verbless sentences in both languages be explained in terms of their interference or typological similarity?

In the following, the linguistic data are presented in the original orthography, with some simplifications but without loss of relevant information. The English translations are self-explanatory, and some of them are partly literal. In extended citations, the relevant clauses are highlighted in bold; the titles and dates are given in brackets afterwards. The article begins by describing the history of the constructions, as traced in both languages. To conclude, the semantic as well as the cognitive arguments are presented in the second part of this paper.

## 1. The history of the constructions

### 1.2 The Russian case<sup>5</sup>

Verbless sentences are a syntactic feature of several Slavic languages (Večerka 1989; Mrazek 1990; McShane 2000) and among these languages, Russian occupies a special place because many of these units occur in modern Russian communication that is both written and oral (Širjaev 1967; Bezdeneznyx 1972). According to some studies, ample evidence shows that

<sup>5</sup> The *mononuclear sentences* (*односоставные предложения*), consisting of a subject or predicate alone, such as *Холодно* ‘It’s cold’, are beyond the scope of my attention here.

this development occurred long time ago; see (Borkovskij 1949; Isačenko 1976; L'Hermitte 1979; Kopotev 1999).

### 1.2.1 The Øcop-sentences

The usage of the copula in the early Old-Russian language was, all-in-all, close to many modern IE languages. The copula had the following two main functions:

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

It has been long established that the copula was dropping out as early as in the oldest sources<sup>6</sup>. The first evidence for this was found in a Novgorodian birch-bark letter dating back to the first half of the eleventh century (10):

- (10) а замъке **Øcop** кѣле а двѣри **Øcop** кѣлѣ (birch-bark letter № 247, XI cent.)  
 'And the lock [is] intact and the doors [are] intact'

The same process characterizes the Old-Russian perfect tense. The original, common Slavic perfect was formed with a copula and with what is called *l*-participles<sup>7</sup>. These forms were represented as such a close parallel to the compound predicate, formed with the copula and adjective in example (10). Example (11) illustrates this point:

Се повѣсти времяныхъ лѣтъ · откуду **есть** пошла  
**русская** земля · кто въ киевѣ нача первѣе княжити · и  
 откуду **русская** земля стала **есть**. (Tale of Bygone  
 Years, The Laurentian codex, 1377)

<sup>6</sup> The Old-Russian sources (more than 1,200 pieces (including ca. 1000 birch-bark letters) have been investigated mainly *de visu*; in the last stage some electronic corpora were used as well.

<sup>7</sup> The *l*-participles were derived with the *l*-suffix. Their indeclinable short forms were used in the Old-Russian analytical verbal forms. Later, they have formed the Russian simple past tense.

**‘These [are] the 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’**

However, the reduced perfect tense forms appeared very early. That is, for example, the Tmutarakan Stone – a marble slab with an Old Russian inscription dating from 1068, where the analytical perfect tense [*есть*] *меришь* ‘has measured’ had been used with no *est* ‘COP.3.SING’.

- (11) ВЪ ЛѢТО 7576 ИНДИКТА 6 ГЛѢБЪ КНЯЗЬ **Ўсоп** мѣришь море по леду отъ тьмутараканя до кърчева 10000 и 4000 сяжень (Tmutarakan Stone, 1068)  
 ‘In the year of 7576, 6<sup>th</sup> indict, Prince Gleb [has] measured the sea over the ice between Tmutarakan and Kerch, [obtaining the result of] 10,000 and 4,000 sazhen’s’

In general, this lack of copula had already been discovered in the oldest sources. Since then, the  $\emptyset$ cop-constructions have been widely spreading in the Old Russian language. In fact, a complicated set of rules with morphological, pragmatic and semantic parameters regulated the copulative/uncopulative usage in the Old Russian texts (Zaliznjak 2004: 178–183). In general, the dropping of the copula has become the first and crucial sign of long-term changes leading to a complete rebuilding of the Russian verbal morphology and to the appearance of new syntactic models.

### 1.2.2 The $\emptyset$ be-sentences

Among the first of new constructions caused by the copula dropping were those with the lack of the lexical verb ‘to be’.<sup>8</sup>

The oldest sources – the earlier birch-bark letters – demonstrate a regular usage of the full verb ‘to be’ (12–13):

- (12) <...> [к]ланию ти сѧ **а есть мѣжь съ нимъ** <...>  
 (Novgorodian birch-bark letter № 296, the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> cent.)

<sup>8</sup> In this article I do not address the complicated question of the Russian copula/verb distinction (see Chvany 1975; Apresjan 1995). Whatever the case may be, according to my sources, there are unambiguous distinctions in frequency and chronology of the  $\emptyset$ cop- and  $\emptyset$ be-sentences.

‘ [I] ask you, **if there is a man**, then with him [send the money]’

(13) <...> занода оу насо коупля **есте** беле <...> (Pskovian birch-bark letter № 6, 13<sup>th</sup> cent.)

<...> because there is a rush for squirrel fur <...>

As for the Øbe-sentences, they were gradually becoming more frequent until they became established as a regular model in the Russian language (14, 15):

(14) Суд ему **Øbe** в Новѣгородѣ въ Великом или Торжкѣ (a contract charter, 14<sup>th</sup> cent.).

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

(15) Лѣтѣ кормѣ **Øbe** на полѣ (Domostroj, 16<sup>th</sup> cent.)

‘There [is] a fodder on a field in summer’

According to my own investigation, these elliptical sentences having been spreading widely in Old Russian, and they became a regular unit of the old-Russian syntactic repertory by the 14<sup>th</sup> century. These elliptical sentences forced out, if not replacing, the corresponding verbal sentences. It is hardly possible to say when exactly these entered the grammar, but they already had been used more frequently than their corresponding verbal counterparts in the Old Russian texts since the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### 1.2.3 The øv-sentences

The third type of the constructions in question – the Øv-sentences – were the last that started spreading in the Old-Russian and modern Russian languages (Borkovskij 1949; Struktura predloženiya 1983; Kopotev 1999). The situation is not equally clear to those with the Øcop and Øbe sentences, because a much wider list of verbs was included in this process. Primarily, they were those verbs having the meaning of ‘motion’ and later, their semantic extensions.

One of the oldest examples has been found in a 14<sup>th</sup> century Novgorodian agreement, where a lack of the verb ‘to go’ may be established (16):

(16) то все  $\emptyset v$  къ Новугороду бес кунъ. (1307/1308, quoted from (Borkovskij 1949: 119))

That all [go] to Novgorod without martens (=‘taxes’)

In any case, even if the earliest Old Russian sources contain some instances of these  $\emptyset v$ -sentences, a drastic change in their usage has been traced to the 14<sup>th</sup> – the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, their relative quantity has been redoubled during that period and has remained more or less invariable since then.

It is significant that one of the first clear appearances of the  $\emptyset v$ -sentences has been found in the *Journey Beyond the Three Seas* (“Хождение за три моря”). This text of a merchant, Afanasy Nikitin, was written during his journey to India in a highly colloquial language:

(17) Все товаръ бѣлой  $\emptyset v$  на бесерменьскую землю (A. Nikitin, *Journey Beyond the Three Seas*, 15<sup>th</sup> cent.).

All toll-free goods [go] to the Muslim land.

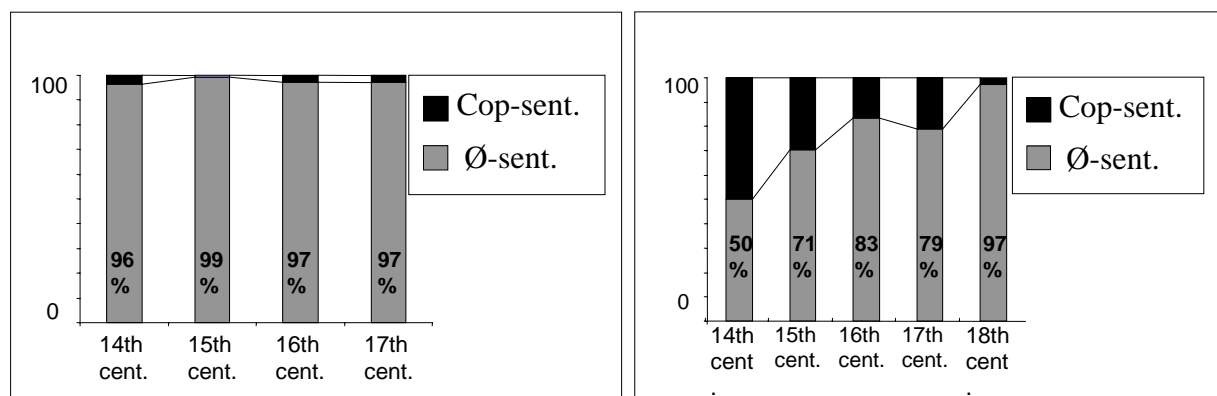
Speaking in general, the expansion of the initially elliptical sentences did not develop evenly through the whole language; first they appeared in informal genres and then gradually occupied other pragmatic zones. Diagrams 1–2 clearly illustrate this point. These diagrams present the late Old-Russian – early Russian language, separated into informal genres (on the left) and more formal genres (on the right). The columns compare the percentage each sentence contributes to a total across the corresponding non-elliptical and the  $\emptyset$ -sentences such as in (18–18a):

(18) двѣри **ѡсор** кѣлѣ ‘doors  **$\emptyset$ сор intact’**

(18a) двѣри **естъ** кѣлѣ ‘doors **are** intact’

Thus, the left diagram shows that the choice between corresponding counterparts was undoubtedly favored over the  $\emptyset$ -constructions: they were in use notably much more frequently than were the corresponding “full” constructions. On the other hand, the diagram on the right shows that in more official texts, the  $\emptyset$ -sentences have won the race later, so they became equal in number (97 %) with those in the colloquial genres only in the early modern Russian language of 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> One can see an increase of verbal counterparts up to 21 % in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. As it often happens with row language material, a general tendency can be overlapped by a

Diagram 1–2: Ratio of corresponding non-elliptical and  $\emptyset$ -sentences

To conclude, the history of the Russian verbless sentences can be described as a consecutive development of the  $\emptyset$ cop-,  $\emptyset$ be-, and  $\emptyset$ v-sentences. The real Old Russian data presented above demonstrates this point.

Moreover, one can describe the consistency of the process. The first in this way were the sentences that lost the copula. It is noteworthy that these sentences are non-idiomatic in the current language (Bezdenožnyx 1972; Chvany, 1975). The second step has been made by the homonymic verb ‘to be’ in its full meaning. It was too easy to mix the two verbs, or two meanings of the same verb. Even for a qualified linguist, let alone a naive speaker, ‘the borders between different meanings [of *be* – МК] are so vague, that a lexicographer is awaited with a snare at every step’ (Apresjan 1995: 511). As for the modern language, these sentences are in general non-idiomatic. The third type of the verbless sentences began developing last and has continued to be more idiomatic in the modern language (Širjaev 1967). Moreover, this chronological sequence in their development has a strong influence on the degree of their idiomaticity in modern Russian.

particular case. The very same is seen here: three of the seventeen 17<sup>th</sup> century sources used are, in fact, old-fashioned in the language they are written. They contain most of the verbal counterparts. The later data of the 18<sup>th</sup> century clearly confirm this general tendency.



## 2.1 The Finnish constructions<sup>10</sup>

It is well established that the Finnish language has a rather short written history, fixed in the first M. Agricola's translations and in other mostly translated manuscripts going back to the middle of 16<sup>th</sup> century. Syntactic units are typically the result of slow and gradual modifications, and – in our case – they are connected to informal, conversational speech, but unfortunately, these sources do not allow an investigation into the long-time development of these constructions.

For this article, some data have been collected using the full electronic collection of the Old Finnish texts.<sup>11</sup> However, it cannot be shown that automatic extractions have detected all the evidence due to the indigested orthography as it is presented in the texts of M. Agricola and others<sup>12</sup>.

Only few examples of the Øcop- and Øbe-sentences have been found in this collection. Thus, a part of the examples are formed according to the model Øcop + *Participle*, such as the reduced perfect form in (19):

- (19) *Suur-Försti Constantin Pawlowitsch Øcop syndynyt 1779 sinä 27:n päiw. Huhti-Kuusa* (Almanac, 1798)

Grand Duke Konstantin Pavlovich [has been] born in 1779, the 27<sup>th</sup> day of April

Although the reduced perfect form is not typical in modern Finnish, the subtype Øcop + *Participle* is a syntactic phraseme that is regularly used in a certain pragmatic context, namely in official written notes. Furthermore,

<sup>10</sup> 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 cocked] up’ (see more (Hakulinen 2004: 837–838)); 2) “telegraphese” phrases such as *sairastunut* ‘[I am] fallen + ill’ (Tesak & Ahlsén et al. 1995); and 3) newspaper headlines such as *Martti Ahtisaari Moskovassa* ‘Martti Ahtisaari in Moscow’ (Hakulinen 2004: 840). The last 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.

<sup>11</sup> The corpus is prepared by the Center of the Domestic Languages in Finland, KOTUS, and available at [kaino.kotus.fi](http://kaino.kotus.fi).

<sup>12</sup> The corpus represents all known Old Finnish texts and consists of more than three billion running words. The whole list of the sources is available at [http://www.kotus.fi/aineistot/vks\\_sahkoinenaineisto.shtml](http://www.kotus.fi/aineistot/vks_sahkoinenaineisto.shtml). The electronic corpus of 19<sup>th</sup> century exceeds 150 texts ([http://www.kotus.fi/aineistot/1800/1800\\_sahkoisetaineistot\\_teoksittain.shtml](http://www.kotus.fi/aineistot/1800/1800_sahkoisetaineistot_teoksittain.shtml)).

the very same constructions are found in the Old Russian language. On the other hand, they also exist in many other languages, including modern Swedish (Cf. 20):

- (20) SVE *Genomgång förbjuden*  
 NOR (bokmål): *Gjennomgang forbudt*  
 ICEL *Aðgangur bannaður*  
 ENG *Passage forbidden*

Another group could be considered as being a subject of both the Øcop- and Øverb-constructions, as far as the examples may be syntactically and semantically close to both (see 21–22a):

- (21) Lisä Øcop tulewana Wuonna (Almanac, 1771)  
 (22) Lisäys Øcop tulewana wuonna (Almanac, 1780)  
 (22a) Läsäys Øcop tulewana wuonna (Almanac, 1784)  
 Addition [is/comes] in the following year

But these are more likely to be lexical semi-fixed expressions than to be syntactic units with lexemic variables. Possible variables are located only in the left part of the clichés, and their list is restricted to one set of synonyms: *lisä*, *lisäys/läsäys* ‘addition’. I am far from claiming these items to be syntactic phrasemes, though they might be developed into these as a probability.

Thus, a small number of Øcop- and Øbe-sentences occur in the Old-Finnish sources; all of these occurrences are highly constrained and infrequent. This means that a plausible decision cannot be made concerning how often they were used in more informal genres, as we have no sources to consult. Today, these kinds of sentences are used in colloquial speech and in restricted pragmatic frames, such as in announcements and advertisements.

The oldest Finnish texts contain no single sentence where a lexical verb is omitted. The first examples, small in numbers, can be traced to no earlier than the 19<sup>th</sup> century (23)<sup>13</sup>:

<sup>13</sup> Many examples of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially from K. Ganander’s collection, are riddles, and for this reason, beyond the scope of this study.

- (23) *Øv Mitat pois!* (G. A. Hippius. Piirustusopin alkeet, translated by E. Soldan, 1867)  
 ‘[Take] yardstick away!’

It is impossible to say how frequent the Øcop-sentences occurred in oral communication among Finns of old, but I am inclined to think that these sentences were not typical. In any case, the observations of the data point to a set of unassuming conclusions only. In all, no detailed description of the verbless sentences development can be traced from the data. The reasons for this assumption are the short written history of the Finnish language and an actual infrequency of verbless sentences even in the existing sources, especially as compared to those of Russian. Nevertheless, the data traces that there was no single example of the Øv-constructions in the Old Finnish texts and only a low number in later ones, while the Øcop-sentences are used slightly more frequently.

All this supports the conclusion that the Finnish language represents quite different processes than Russian. The degrees of the idiomatization of these constructions in modern Finnish serves as evidence for the presupposition that these processes in Finnish date from much more modern times than in Russian. On the other hand, the same sequence order can be traced in both languages – the Øcop constructions appeared first in both languages, while the lack of lexical verbs followed them.

The next part of this paper is devoted to discussing these questions from a cognitive perspective.

### 3. Cognitive observation

It is unknown whether the Finnish verbless sentences will remain idiomatic and system-peripheral in the future, as they are for the time being. Some types might be developed into non-idiomatic constructions that are the subject of regular generative rules, similar to those occurring in Russian. Even so, despite this futuristic speculation, both Finnish and Russian certainly demonstrate differing chronology in the processes, differing pragmatic conditions, as well as differing results, as they are represented in both languages at this instant. Yet bearing in mind that a possible influence seems to be less able to be demonstrated, one has to look for other explanations for the facts, sharpening the problem into the following questions:

- Why are the very three types being developed?
- Why it is hardly possible to imagine a syntactic phrasemes such as (24)?

- (24) \*Я Ø<sub>v</sub> кашу  
\*Minä Ø<sub>v</sub> puuroa  
\*‘I [eat] porridge’

In Perlmutter & Postal (1974), a Relational Succession Law has been formulated, which was stated as:

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: 51).

Even though this law concerns an alternative syntactic theory and cannot be directly transferred to the framework adopted here, it nevertheless gives a starting point for further discussion. In fact, the law postulates an initial ellipsis is an interrelated change between a verb and a governed phrase in the right periphery of a sentence. To examine the question, let us first consider arguments based on the analysis of deleted verbs, and then on the analysis of the dependent phrases.

### 3.1 The verb evidence

Reviewing the verbs that have been deleted in the constructions, one should say that the first candidates for deletion were the copulas in both languages. Obviously, the first reason for the deletion of the copulas is their lexical emptiness. Indeed, in deleting the copula, all but very little semantic information was lost. According to L. Stassen, there is a similar minimal distribution of zero copulas in many languages all over the world:

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)

Obviously, the lexical verb ‘to be’ has been included into the process gradually. It was too close to the copula to distinguish both in all contexts. In fact, one cannot even always distinguish the COP and BE usages in real

texts, as it has been shown more than once for many languages (The Verb ‘Be’ 1967–1973; Apresjan 1995.).

The last group of deleted verbs were motion verbs, “the most characteristically verbal of all verb” (Miller & Johnson-Laird 1976: 527). These are the types of verbs that are often semantically bleached and easily grammaticalized in many languages (Maisak 2005). They also became a prototypical candidates for deletion in the Øv-constructions both in Russian and in Finnish.

Yet a second reason, closely related to the previous, is the frequency of the verbs that were the subject of deletion. It is difficult to calculate which verbs were the most frequent in the Old Finnish and Old Russian, it seems to be close to the truth that the highest rank in the BE-languages<sup>14</sup> has indeed the verb ‘be’, both the copulative and lexical. Just for reference, Table 1 shows the most frequent verbs in the modern Finnish and Russian languages. Here both *olla* and *быть* (‘be’) have the highest rank, and the motion verbs – the Finnish *tulla* ‘come’ and Russian *идти* ‘go’ – both are also in the top-ten.<sup>15</sup>

Table 1: The most frequently used verbs in modern Finnish and Russian

FINNISH	RUSSIAN
<b>olla ‘to be’;</b> voida ‘can’; saada ‘may’; <b>tulla ‘to come’;</b> antaa ‘to give’ pitää ‘to keep’; ‘to like’; tehdä ‘to do’; sanoa ‘to say’; käyttää ‘to use’; ottaa ‘to take’.	<b>быть ‘to be’;</b> сказать ‘to say’; мочь ‘can’; говорить ‘to speak’; знать ‘to know’; стать ‘to became’; есть ‘to eat’; хотеть ‘to want’; видеть ‘to see’; <b>идти ‘to go’</b>

<sup>14</sup> On be and have-languages see (Isačenko 1974).

<sup>15</sup> The frequency lists are counted according to (Saukkonen 1979) (for Finnish) and (Sharoff) (for Russian). Unfortunately, the ranks have been calculated not for the actual lexemes but for *lemmas*, where full homonyms have been combined together.

No doubt the data can be extrapolated from the perspective of chronology with more or less probability only. However, it may be assumed that the verbs have the commensurable frequency ranks at those time as well.

Thus, the frequent usage of verbs can lead to their lexemic lightening and deletion from the surface structure. But this fact does not explain why other frequently used verbs that have more or less degraded meanings cannot be deleted from the surface structure. There is the second crucial factor to support this process, the semantics of the right periphery.

### 3.2 The complement evidence

The second group of arguments is connected to the semantic of a phrase, that originally completed the verb, but finally replaced it. In fact, both have corresponding semantic elements that allow a dependent phrase to substitute a verb with no crucial loss, as it concerns the meaning of the whole construction. With all this going on, the overlapping part of meaning is trivial both for the verb and its complement, but expressed more specifically in the complement. To illustrate this point, let us consider some examples in the both languages.

#### ØCOP

The main function of the copula is to link a complement. However, this information can be superfluous when a complement has itself a predicate meaning that is built in a lexeme. This strategy is clearly displayed in Finnish by the *puhki*-type predicative adverbs, in which syntactic behavior is strongly incorporated into the lexemes as such and needs only a minimal syntactic support (Hakulinen et al. 2004: 931–932). In general, the class of the Finnish *puhki*-type adverbs (*rikki* ‘broken’, *puhki* ‘[wear] away, out’, *poikki* ‘in two’, etc.) are freely used in the Øcop-sentences.

Compare the examples (25–25a) containing two synonymous words that differ in that the first (*rikki* ‘broken.ADV’) is restricted in the predicate position only, while the last (*rikkinäinen* ‘broken.ADJ’) is an ordinary adjective:

(25) *Ikkuna Øcop rikki* (in announcements)  
 ‘The window [is] broken.ADV’

(25a) \**Ikkuna Øcop rikkinäinen*

\*‘window [is] broken.**ADJ**’

### ØBE

(26) *Äiti tässä*

*Мама здесь*

‘mother [is] here’

Both the omitted lexical verb ‘to be’, originally presented in these sentences, as well as the adverb, contain the same semantic component designating the place<sup>16</sup>:

*olla* – *есть* ‘is **placed**’

*tässä* – *здесь* ‘in/at this **place**’

### ØV

(27) *Kaikki ostoksille!*

*Все за покупками!*

Lit.: ‘All [go] for purchases’

Again, both the omitted motion verb and the phrases contain the similar components – this designates the movement. In the phrases, this meaning is represented with the case ending (in Finnish) or “preposition + case ending” (in Russian).

*go* – ‘to move [on a course]’

*ostoksille* ‘purchase. **PL.ALL**’, where allative means ‘towards’

*за покупками* – ‘for. **PREP** purchase. **PL.INST**’, where “Prep + Instrumental case” means ‘towards’

A phrase that functions as a predicate in the verbless sentences has a meaning corresponding to a deleted verb. As a result, this verb deletion does not destroy the construction, because the phrase retains the meaning and the idiomatization of the construction on the whole supports the modification. In general, both Finnish and Russian sentences are developing into phrasemes, because there is a light verb<sup>17</sup> lost, and there is next to nothing to be lost in the meaning of the sentences. Additionally the verbs that have been omitted are the frequently used verbs in the language

<sup>16</sup> Actually, a specific verb can hardly be reconstructed with certainty, but a class of verbs with specific meaning can be reconstructed rather unambiguously.

<sup>17</sup> The light verbs “appear to be semantically light in the sense that they are contributing something to the joint predication” (Butt 2003, 1).

and are therefore a subject of semantic bleaching. The new constructions, idiomatic by origin, are therefore semantically full even without a verb. On the contrary, the same cannot be claimed for constructions such as (28), where the verb and its complement are not overlapped in this sense:

- (28) \*Я  $\emptyset$ *v* *кашу*  
 \*Minä  $\emptyset$ *v* *puuroa*  
 ‘I [eat] porridge’

## 4. Conclusions

### 4.1 Concluding discussions

It can therefore be concluded that three types of sentences have similar formal properties both in Finnish and Russian. These all are a result of the ellipsis of the copula and some other verbs. Nevertheless, these sentences have essential distinctions that can be roughly described as different degrees of idiomacity, from absolutely free to frozen expressions.

The brief historical sketch presented above allows us to conclude that the history of Russian is documented much better; it represents a consecutive and long-term process from the  $\emptyset$ cop- to  $\emptyset$ be- and finally to the  $\emptyset$ v-constructions. Their idiomacity more or less corresponds to the chronology of their development: the  $\emptyset$ cop- and  $\emptyset$ be-constructions are non-idiomatic at the present, while the  $\emptyset$ v-constructions are now syntactic phrasemes. All this is connected with the well-described Russian “anti-structuring tendency”:

Russian goes to extremes in ellipsis, in destroying syntactic constituents in favour of expressive-informal-rhythmic salience, and in leaving it to the hearer to guess the logical connections between predications, even to put together the predications from a scrambled sequence. (Leinonen 1985: 138).

Despite the unclear evidence from the old-Finnish sources, it seems that the Finnish language repeats, at least partly, the chronological sequence given in Russian. The ellipsis of the copula occurred first, which was followed by the ellipsis of other verbs. This does not lead to the less idiomacity of the constructions, as far as all of them are relatively new in their origin.



Generally agreeing with the opinion stated by M. Leinonen, I should say that my data seem to refute the following general Finnish cultural strategy in this specific area:

In Finnish, the contrasting phenomena in oral communication seem to reflect the opposite principle: the interlocutors are not similar, the hearer cannot read the speaker's mind. Thus, ellipsis is less extreme. (Leinonen 1985: 139).

It is apparent that syntactic interference seems to be achievable in view of both the long co-existence of the languages and in light of some syntactic parallels discussed in previous studies.<sup>18</sup> As for the Ø-sentences, researchers claimed two contrary hypotheses to this, which have been formulated rather long ago.

The first of these hypotheses is based on the existence of verbless sentences in some Finno-Ugric languages (Hungarian, Komi-Zyrian, and Udmurt are more often cited) and on the claims that the Russian corresponding sentences are possibly a result of ancient Finno-Ugric–Slavic contacts. This view has been supported by R. Gauthiot, W. Vondrak, W. Veenker, and R. L'Hermitte among others (for further discussion, see (L'Hermitte 1979)).

The second approach, supported by G. Décsy (1967) and V. Kiparsky (1969) among others, on the contrary demonstrates that the arguments for interference are rather weak, for all the small Finno-Ugric languages were more or less too strongly influenced by Russian over the centuries for any ancient contacts to be attested (Serebrjannikov 1963; Décsy 1988). As for Russian-Hungarian parallels, there are very few of them and they do not extend a lack of the copula (for Hungarian data, see Hetzron 1970).

The Finnish data presented in this article compel me to be rather careful in calling this direct borrowing clearly demonstrated in the case. First, the data show that Finnish-Russian syntactic parallels expand from the copulaless to all sets of verbless sentences. Nevertheless parallels do not cross over all the Finno-Ugric or Slavic languages. This means that the

<sup>18</sup> This complicated question of the dominating strategies of language contacts is discussed in (Thomason & Kaufman 1989). As for the Finnish-Russian contacts, for the time being, some clear syntactic parallels have been used to demonstrate interference on this level. All of them are considered to reflect a Finnish-to-Russian influence (save for some Eastern Finnish dialects) (Timberlake 1974; Tkačenko 1979; Künnap 1997; Filppula & Sarhima 1994; Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wälchli 2001).

interference, if one agrees with this hypothesis, concerns only particular Finnish–Russian contacts. This would have to have happened a relatively short time ago. However, the written sources, even if they are far from being comparable, represent the drastically different chronology in both languages: whereas many examples have been detected in old Russian written sources, the old Finnish texts are more than conservative in this respect coinciding with Russian mainly in their lack of the copula.

Theoretically, the initial lack of copula in both can equally be either a source or a target of interference. In contrast, investigations show that Øcop appears too often in the different languages all over the world to be explained merely in terms of a simple local language contact. Typologically, the same processes caused the phonetic reduction of the copula in Standard English (cf. *He is working* → *He's working*) and deletion of that copula in African American Vernacular English (cf. *He is working* → *He workin'*) (see more (Bender 2000)). Øcop has been established for many languages of Oceania, Central and South America, as well as for the Afro-Asiatic and Nilo-Saharan languages (the data and further discussion see in (Stassen 1994)). According to L. Stassen, Indo-European and Uralic languages “constitutes a minor or the marginal option” in this respect (Ibid.: 109), but they do have that kind of copulaless usage (see Meillet 1906–1908; Gauthiot 1908–1909; Benveniste 1950). In other words, if any interference took place at all in the case, it can hardly be established for the Øcop-sentences as far as no clear evidence has emerged that has been induced by the language contact. On the contrary, a more plausible, typologically based hypothesis is of that claiming the similar typological process, caused by similar usage-based strategies.

Another point is that the Finnish the Øbe- and Øv-sentences can be better explained in terms of the inner united pragmatic “Frame of Motivation” than in terms of a one-to-one borrowing. The Russian sentences in their turn can much better be explained as an inner consecutive process from the Øcop- to Øv-sentences.

Thus, hypothetically, if one agrees with an ancient interference it would be that of an initial Øcop. Regardless of these disputable initial starting points, both languages represent independent developments with specific pragmatic and semantic features that are do not directly correspond to each other.

A generalization of the data gives many more well-founded observations. The frequency of the verbs that are subject of deletion and the

semantic concurrence of the deleted verbs and substituting phrases help us to construct a common explanation for languages:

A verbless sentences can be developed if 1) a frequently used light verb has a bleached meaning and the semantics of a phrase overlaps it; and 2) the pragmatic factors support condensed forms of the expressions.

In particular cases, the chronology, specific pragmatic conditions and even the support of the neighboring languages may, of course, vary widely. All in all, the common cognitive prerequisites create conditions for similar syntactic items could be developed, while specific pragmatic factors define when and how these items are being developed.

#### 4.2 General conclusions

On the basic of the analysis presented above, more general principles of syntactic idiomatization can be formulated:

- a. There are no strong borders between elliptical and non-elliptical expressions. Any of peripheral transformation (such as, with an ellipsis in our case) can generate a surface structure that may be as far from the prototypical manifestation, as another surface unit, generated by means of another set of rules. In certain circumstances, this process leads to the appearance of a phraseme and can later be generalized as a new rule in the grammar. So the following principle of the idiomatization can be formulated:

A ill-formed surface form of a deep structure can be developed into a new syntactic item by means of idiomatic constraints that can lay the groundwork for a new set of rules.

- b. The level of idiomatization is a projection of a time slice during which a syntactic item is being developed. Of course, there can be factors that cause the process of idiomatization to step up or down. To summarize this more generally:

The longer a syntactic item exists in a language, the less idiomatized it is.

- c. In certain circumstances, a non-idiomatic syntactic items can be developed into a syntactic phraseme. Here semantic modification always has a place. However, a meaning conservation principle can be formulated as the following:

The total amount of the meaning in an isolated syntactic item aspires to remain constant, although it may change forms. Thus, an initially compositional set of semantic information represented by lexemes can be partly delegated to the whole construction, transforming the last into a syntactic phraseme.

- d. According to an old statement, “*Tout se qui est diachronique dans la langue ne l’est que par la parole*” (‘All that is diachronic in a *langue* is only through the *parole*’, Saussure 1972: 138). The presented analysis demonstrates that pragmatic conditions (such as the Finnish “Frame of Motivation”) cause the limitation in usage. This does not lead to slight stylistic modifications, or as one can say, extra-linguistic ones, but has a direct effect on syntactic structures, modifying them and creating new and more idiomatized ones. In general, the following claim can therefore be made:

Pragmatic constraints can be the original step for a new syntactic item to appear.

Thus, pragmatics phrasemes do not constitute a periphery of language but a place, where *langue* and *parole* meet.

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