Wh-extraction, BE, and Argument Structure of Russian Existentials/Possessives

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Context. The semantic architecture of an existential sentence and its syntactic mapping have been explored with a focus on the position of the post-copula theme NP. One possibility is to view this NP as the predicate of a clause embedded under the copula BE (Stowell 1978, Chomsky 1982, 1988, Williams 1994, Hazout 2004, *inter alia*). On the contrary, Moro (1997) and den Dikken (1995), for instance, consider the post-copula NP to be the subject in an inverted copula structure. Central to this debate is the extractability of a constituent out of the theme NP, as shown in English and Italian existentials (1), which supports the view of the theme NP as the predicate (Left Branch Condition, Ross 1967; Kayne 1984). Moro (1997), however, argues that expletives *there* and *ci* turn the copula BE to an L-marker (*à la* Chomsky 1986) so that extraction out of the subject governed by BE is possible. This paper argues for the theme-as-predicate analysis by considering relative degradation of *wh*-extraction in Russian existentials (including possessives).

Wh-extraction in Russian existentials/possessives. The Russian existential/possessive sentence consists of a pre-copular location/possessor PP, BE, and a theme noun. In Russian, *wh*-extraction must involve pied-piping. While the lack of pied-piping always degrades sentences, the degree of degradation varies depending on from where a constituent is extracted. The sentences in (2-3) illustrate relative degradation caused by the movement of a *wh*-element in transitive sentences with a clear tendency: *Wh*-extraction from the object is more acceptable than that from the subject, and a sentence in which a moved *wh*-word is adjacent to the rest of the phrase is more acceptable than a sentence in which a *wh*-element and the rest of the phrase are separate. The instances of the moved *wh*-word adjacent to the rest of the phrase in (2a/2c/3a/3c) must result from the movement of the whole phrase containing a *wh*-word to Spec,CP, along with the subsequent *wh*-movement to Spec,DP within the moved phrase. In this case, pied-piping actually takes place and the *wh*-word is not extracted out of the DP, which must make (2a/2c/3a/3c) more acceptable than (2d/3d) with *wh*-extraction out of the subject. The contrast between relatively acceptable sentences (2b/3b) with *wh*-extraction out of the object and totally unacceptable ones (2d/3d) clearly reflects the asymmetry between an object and a subject in terms of *wh*-extraction.

The same relative acceptability is observed with *wh*-extraction out of the post-copula theme NP in existential/possessive sentences (4-5). The sharp ungrammaticality of (4d/5d) tells us nothing definitive about the status of the *u*+Gen possessor phrase. (4d/5d) could be ruled out either because a *wh*-element is extracted out of the subject, thus violating the Left Branch Condition, or because the possessor/location phrase is an adjunct. However, crucial to the argument structure are sentences (4b/5b), in which *wh*-extraction out of the theme phrase does not trigger sharp ungrammaticality. This indicates that the theme phrase is not the subject but the predicate. In other words, (4b/5b) are not inverse but canonical copula sentences. The weaker degradation of (2b/3b/4b/5b) is due solely to the lack of pied-piping, in contrast with the absolute unacceptability of the sentences in (2d/3d/4d/5d) due to the Left Branch Effect (or possibly due to the adjunctive status of the possessor/location in the case of (4d/5d)) in addition to the lack of pied-piping.

BE and argument structure. Moro's assumption concerning the theme NP as the subject is crucially based on his contention that expletives *there* and *ci* lexicalize the originally functional predicate BE. In the Russian existential/possessive construction, there is no expletive that fills Spec,TP. Can we, then, construe BE as lexical and not functional in the existential/possessive sentence? Although the copular in the possessive/existential sentence is overt in the present tense (*est'* 3.SG[-Agr]), in contrast with the zero-copula in other types of copula sentences, it is implausible that BE is the only verb in Russian that can be lexical or functional depending on the semantics (*à la* Harves 2002; cf. Kondrashova 1996; *contra* Chvany 1975). Furthermore, the existential semantics does not seem to derive from *est'* lexically. This semantic factor is present and brings a syntactic effect such as Genitive of Negation in non-copula sentences as well as in copula constructions. Given that *wh*-extraction out of the theme NP is consistently allowed in

Russian, English, and Italian, it is much simpler and more straightforward to conclude that the existential construction is a non-inverted structure, rather than to justify a lexical BE in varying ways across languages. The construal of the theme NP as the predicate elegantly and consistently explains *wh*-extraction phenomena in all three languages, while Moro's solution costs various additional assumptions.

(1) a. [Which man]$_i$ do you think that ***there*** was [a picture of t$_i$] in the room?
　　b. [di quale libro]$_i$ credi che ***ci*** fossero [molte copie t$_i$] nello studio?　　　　　[Moro 1997: 103]
　　　　of which book　you think there were　many copies　in the studio
　　　　'Which book do you think there were many copies of in the studio?'

(2) ?a. [[Kakogo avtora]$_j$　　knigi　　t$_j$]$_i$　　ty　　chital　　t$_i$?
　　　　what author:GEN　　books:ACC　　you　　read
　　　　'What author's books did you read?'
　　??b. [Kakogo avtora]$_i$　　ty　　chital　[knigi　t$_i$] ?
　　??c. [[Kakogo fakul'teta]$_j$　　studenty　　t$_j$]$_i$　　t$_i$　　chitali　　eti knigi?
　　　　what department:GEN　students　　　　　　read　　these books
　　　　'What department's students read these books?'
　　*d. [Kakogo fakul'teta]$_i$　　eti knigi　chitali　[studenty　t$_i$]?

(3) ?a. Ej　　　　nravitsja　tot roman,　　[kotorogo$_j$　　avtora　t$_j$]$_i$　　ja　kogda-to videl　t$_i$.
　　　　her:DAT　like　　that novel:NOM　which:Rel.GEN　author:ACC　I　once　saw
　　　　'She likes that novel, the author of which I once saw.'
　　??b. Ej　　　　nravitsja　tot roman,　　kotorogo$_i$　　ja　kogda-to videl　[avtora　t$_i$].
　　??c. Ej　　　　nravitsja　tot roman,　　[kotorogo$_j$　　avtor　t$_j$]$_i$　　t$_i$　podaril　ej　konfety.
　　　　her:DAT　like　　that novel:NOM　which:Rel.GEN　author:NOM　presented　her　candy
　　　　'She likes that novle, the author of which presented her candy.'
　　*d. Ej　　　　nravitsja　tot roman,　　kotorogo$_i$　　konfety　ej　podaril　[avtor t$_i$].

(4) ?a. [[Kakogo avtora]$_j$　　knigi　t$_j$]$_i$　zdes'/u vas　　　　　　byli　　t$_i$?
　　　　what author:GEN　　books　　here:Adv/at you:PP$_{GEN}$　be:Past
　　　　'What author's books did you have/were there here?'
　　??b. [Kakogo avtora]$_i$　　zdes'/u vas　　byli　[knigi　t$_i$]?
　　??c. [[Kakogo fakul'teta]$_j$　　v auditorii/u studentov　　t$_j$]$_i$　　t$_i$　　byli　　　slovari?
　　　　what department:GEN　　in auditorium:PP$_{LOC}$/at students:PP$_{GEN}$　　be:Past　dictionaries
　　　　'What department's students had dictionaries?/In what department's classroom were there dictionaries?'
　　*d. [Kakogo fakul'teta]$_i$　　eti knigi　　byli　[v auditorii/u studentov　t$_i$]?

(5) ?a. Ej　　　　ponravilsja　tot avtor,　[kotorogo$_j$　　knigi　t$_j$]$_i$　u nee　　　byli　　　t$_i$.
　　　　her:DAT liked　　　that author　which:GEN　books　　at her:PP$_{GEN}$　be:Past
　　　　'She liked that author, whose books she had.'
　　?b. Ej　　　　ponravilsja　tot avtor,　kotorogo$_i$　　u nee　　　byli　[knigi　t$_i$]
　　?c. Ej　　　　ponravilsja　tot roman,　[kotorogo$_j$　　u avtora　t$_j$]$_i$　t$_i$　byl　　kakoj-to vkus.
　　　　her:DAT liked　　　that novel　which:GEN　at author:PP$_{GEN}$　　be:Past　some taste
　　　　'She liked that novel, the author of which had some taste.'
　　*d. Ej　　　　ponravilsja　tot roman, kotorogo$_i$　byl　kakoj-to vkus　[u avtora　t$_i$].

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