

# Recapturing the Development Process of the Possessive Perfect: The *BE*-perfect in North Russian

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**1. Context.** While the development process of the *have*-perfect from the *have*-possessive in Romance/Germanic languages has been explored in details (e.g. Vincent 1982, Salvi 1987), the derivation of the *be*-perfect from the *be*-possessive construction, such as in North Russian (1-2), has not received due attention. Except for the unidirectionality of the evolutionary path (e.g. Kuteva and Heine 2004), various facets of the development of the North Russian *be*-perfect (in particular, language-internal conditions and motivations) have not been scrutinized. This paper is devoted to a formal analysis of innovations in the development of the North Russian *be*-perfect, with a focus on the role of relevant innovations as the preconditions and triggers of the given phenomenon.

**2. Framework.** I ground my proposal of the development of the *be*-perfect on the underlying structures of the *be*-possessive and *be*-perfect constructions in North Russian, as shown in (3-4), based on Kayne's syntactic parallel (1993) between the possessive and the perfect. The perfect construction in (2), consisting of a possessive PP subject (*u* 'at' + GEN), *be*, an indeclinable passive participle, and a nominative object, is analyzed in (4) as a parametric variant of the possessive construction in (3) in terms of the nature of the embedded clause: DP in the possessive vs. CP in the perfect. The verbs *be* and *have* appear as distinct surface realizations of the functional predicate F, with or without Case feature.

**3. Proposals.** Given the structures in (3-4), the derivation of the perfect from the possessive cannot be viewed as a case of grammaticalization of the verbs *be/have*, since in both structures *be/have* appear as purely functional predicates. I propose that the development process of the perfect, traditionally described as in (5), must be recast in terms of the change of the syntactic status of the subject.

I identify three innovations crucial in the development of the perfect from the passive in North Russian: (i) the reanalysis of the possessive-locative *u*+Gen as an agentive grammatical subject; (ii) the loss of inflection of the participle; (iii) the reanalysis of the nominative argument in the passive as a nominative surface object. Among these innovations, it is evident that the nominative object reanalysis directly resulted in the *be*-perfect construction.

Indeclinable predicates were not limited to specific regions, genres, or styles. As shown in (6), non-agreeing past passive participles first appeared in Old Russian in the 11th century and were frequently found in manuscripts from various regions. Nominative object marking in the case of the lack of nominative subject in the same clause was well established in Old North Russian in the 11th century, at the latest (7). The productive use of nominative object as well as indeclinable participle predicates must have been important conditions for the reanalysis of the originally passive construction as an active sentence. However, these two factors were only preconditions and did not directly trigger the rise of the active *be*-perfect construction. The reanalysis of a nominative argument combined with an indeclinable participle as a surface object (voice shift) did not take place until at least the 16th century.

I argue that the establishment of the possessive-locative *u*+Gen phrase as an external argument that is base-generated in Spec, $\nu$ P must have been the crucial factor that triggered the voice shift. Only when the *u*+Gen possessive-locative phrase was reanalyzed as a base-generated subject with subject properties (e.g. anaphor-binding in (8)) could the nominative object be identified as a surface object. According to the attestations in the historical manuscripts from the North Russian area from the 11th to 16th centuries, the *u*+Gen possessive phrase developed from an adjunct adessive/locative *u*+Gen phrase (9) via a high applicative causer/benefactive phrase (*à la* Pylkkänen 1999) (10) to a base-generated agentive subject (11-12). The change of the argument status of the *u*+Gen phrase must have been motivated by the agentive semantics of the given phrase, and directed by the markedness principle: the most unmarked base-position of the agentive argument is Spec, $\nu$ P.

**4. Extensions.** The proposed analysis can be extended to the development process of the *have*-perfect. Under this analysis, the development process in (5) may be reduced to the change of the syntactic status of

the subject of *have*: an applicative benefactive/causer > an external argument base-generated in Spec,vP.

- (1) U menja est' kniga  
 at me:PP<sub>GEN</sub> be:Present [-AGR] book  
 'I have a book.'
- (2) U lisicy e uneseno kuročka [Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 27]  
 at fox:PP<sub>GEN</sub> be<sub>[covert]</sub> carried off:Part.N.SG chicken:NOM.F.SG  
 'A fox has carried off a/the chicken.'
- (3) Possessive: [F<sub>be/have</sub> [DP/PP D/P<sub>[±CASE]</sub> [<sub>NP</sub> Subj n NP]]]
- (4) Perfect: [F<sub>be/have</sub> [CP/PP C/P<sub>[±CASE]</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> Subj v VP]]]
- (5) a lexical verb *have* + passive small clause > semantic bleaching of the lexical verb *have* > voice shift
- (6) medъ vъ veselieja dano bystъ bgъmъ  
 honey:NOM/ACC given:Part.N.SG be God:INST  
 'Honey was given by God for enjoyment.' [Izbornik, 1076, Filin 1972:493]
- (7) Korolju bylo ta ruxljad' dati  
 king:DAT.M.SG be:N.SG that property:NOM.F.SG give:inf.  
 'It was for the king to give that property.'
- (8) U Šrki<sub>i</sub> privedeno svoja<sub>i</sub> staraja nevesta [Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 35]  
 at Šrka:PP<sub>GEN</sub> brought:Part.N.SG own old fiancée:NOM.F.SG  
 'Šrka has brought his own old fiancée.'
- (9) [<sub>TP</sub> DP<sub>i</sub> T [<sub>VP</sub> V t<sub>i</sub>] PP ]  
 žiznobude e pogublene u syčevicъ  
 Žiznobud:NOM.M.SG killed:Part.M.SG at Syčevičes:PP<sub>GEN</sub>  
 'Žiznobud was killed by the Syčevičes/at the Syčevičes'.  
 [Birchbark No. 607/562, late in the 11th c., Zaliznjak 2004:245]
- (10) [<sub>TopicP</sub> PP<sub>i</sub> [<sub>AppIP</sub> t<sub>i</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> V .... ]]]  
 u carja pereloženo  
 at tsar:PP<sub>GEN</sub> undertaken:Part.N.SG  
 'By the tsar it was undertaken...' [PDSK II, the 16th c. Timberlake 1974:16]
- (11) A tolko mužb pripaset v god vsjakogo zapasu i postnogo -----  
 husband:NOM.M.SG prepare:3.SG all reserves Lenten food  
 A tolko u muža v god vse pripaseno, i rži i pšenicy..... i vsjakie zapasy  
 at husband:PP<sub>GEN</sub> all prepared:Part.N.SG rye wheat all reserves  
 [Domostroj No.43, the 16<sup>th</sup> c.]  
 'And only the husband prepares each year all the reserves and Lenten food...  
 And only the husband each year prepares everything, rye, wheat, .... and all the reserves.'
- (12) [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>PP</sub> P [<sub>VP</sub> DP t<sub>j</sub>]<sub>i</sub> T [<sub>v'</sub> V .... ]<sub>j</sub> t<sub>i</sub> ]]  
 u muža e pripaseno  
 at husband:PP<sub>GEN</sub> prepared:Part.N.SG

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