

"MORE ON THE VERB 'TO BE' IN RUSSIAN"¹

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1.0 In recent years one of the most controversial points of Russian grammar has been the nature and function of the form byt' to be' (Chvany 1975, Miller 1977). Chvany's excellent analysis of byt' in Russian is a striking example of an application of the earlier transformational models that has produced numerous meaningful insights and uncovered previously hidden problems. Since the publication of her book, however, developments in the transformational model have opened up even newer approaches to those yet unsolved problems. Specifically I'm thinking of Chomsky's and Lasnik's reformulation of the grammar (1977), and Chomsky's (1980), and various modified applications of the X-Bary theory, notably Akmajian, Steele and Wasow (1979). In the light of these developments, a contribution to the solution of the problems surrounding byt' can be made by positing for Russian a fixed word order in the base PG rules. Such a postulation is made on the premise that the fixed word order avoids an enormously complex set of PS rules. The premise would thus suggest that the fixed word order model is more than simply a linguistic construct or heuristic device, but rather that it has psychological reality manifested in acquisition patterns, judgments of acceptability, and perceptual strategies.

2.0 That Russian has fixed word order in the base can be reasonably suggested from an analysis of general word order in Russian, and particularly the ordering of elements in the verbal system.² Specifically, this evidence comes from three sources: 1) the ungrammaticality of certain arrangements, 2) a preference for a typical order, and 3) solutions to some tricky problems of Russian grammar of be-sentences -- solutions that can be formulated as a set of rules operating on a fixed order in underlying structure.

2.1 First, though Russian allows flexibility in the ordering of elements on the surface level there are some absolute prohibitions against certain permutations. So, for example, the majority of prepositions must stand immediately to the left of their head noun. Such forms as the following are³ ungrammatical

1)*Zavod on na posel.
factory he to sent

2)*Knige kvartire o v my govorili.
book apartment about in we talked.

2.2 A second restriction is against the ordering of genitive complements. The following sentences are obviously not the same:³:

3) Eto švljapa sestry (gen. sg) druga (gen. sg)
the (is) hat of sister of friend. (That is the hat of my friend's
sister.)

4) Eto šlјapa druga sestry.
That (is) hat of friend of sister (That is the hat of my sister's
friend)

2.3 A third restriction involves the ordering of the unmarked nominative and accusative. Thus, the following sentences are not the same:⁴

5) Gazety pokrivaly knigi.
Newspapers covered (the) books.

6) Knigi pokrivali gazety.
(The) books covered (the) newspapers.

Such restrictions, even when grammaticality is at stake, on the ordering of elements in the surface do not, of themselves, prove that the elements are fixed in an order in underlying structure. Indeed, these restrictions could be handled as interpretive filters on the surface level. Rather, they simply point to the possibility of fixed order in the underlying derivations and act as counter evidence to a too general assertion that Russian has free word order.

2.4 The second major evidence involves the existence of a preferred "neutral" word order in Russian sentences -- essentially SVO. Thus, the following sentences (8,9) are variations of a more "neutral" (7):

7) Nina pošla vo biblioteku.
Nina went ot library.

8) V biblioteku pošla Nina.
to library went Nina.

9) Nina v biblioteku pošla.
Nina to library went.

The ordering of the information in these sentences follows a theme-rheme distribution; each sentence would be an appropriate response to the following questions, respectively

- 7a) Where did Nina go?
- 8a) Who went to the library?
- 9a) What did Nina do?

Similarly, the order ADJ+N is overwhelmingly typical, and a reverse of this order, though grammatical, is extremely emphatic:

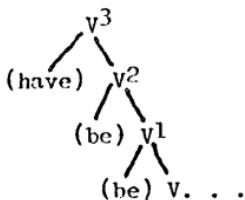
- 10) Èto bol'soj gorod.
This (is a) big city.
- 11) Èto gorod bol'soj!
This (is a) city big (This is a really big city!)

As with the first type of evidence, we are dealing here not with absolute proof, but possibility. The theme-rheme distinctions can be handled by interpretive rules near the surface level. However, in conjunction with the first type of evidence, the probability of fixed order begins to increase.

2.5 The third type of evidence I would like to present in support of an underlying fixed word order for Russian involves the possibility of simplifying some aspects of Russian grammar by positing an underlying fixed order to the Russian verbal system. To do so is to analyze Russian in a way similar to English, and though this procedure may promote theory over data, it doesn't necessarily do so. The advantage lies in the testing of notions of universal grammar as worked out in the analysis of English (ASW 1979, Chomsky 1977).

3.0 The model to be used here is from Akmajian, Steele and Wasow (1979) which attempts an analysis of the English verbal system that captures both the ordered nature of the AUX as proposed by Chomsky (1957) and the status of 'be' and 'have' as main verbs (Ross 1967). The ASW system layers the V-node and suggests restraints that can be strictly applied to each sub-node, thus avoiding over-generalized constraints on the entire VP-node:

- 12)



Adopting a similar model for Russian we would characterize the various sub-nodes as follows.

- 3.1 $v^3 \xrightarrow{+N} (\text{copula}) \begin{matrix} M \\ +V \end{matrix}$. The copula can be realized as $\begin{matrix} \text{be} \\ \text{by} \end{matrix}$

bud+ representing the so-called future stem, est' representing the stem of the present, and byv+ the stem of the past. Thus we can have the three sentences:

- 13) Lingvistika byla naukoj.
Linguistics was a science.
 - 14) Lingvistika est' nauka.
Linguistics is a science.
 - 15) Lingvistika budet naukoj.
Linguistics will be a science.

Note that the future shows person and number agreement with the subject, the present shows no agreement, and the past shows gender and number agreement. As will be shown below under certain circumstances the copula in surface structure can be optionally filtered out. Thus, (16) is a paraphrase of (14)

- 15) Lingvistika--nauka.
Lingvistics--science. (Linguistics is a science.)

The second element of the V³ node is comprised of short-form adjectives.⁵ Short form adjectives originate in the V-node on the basis of their showing verb-like agreement with plural-polite subjects that refer to only one person.⁶ Contrast (16) and (17) where yy is the plural-polite form referring to one person. Note that in (16) the NP complement can only be singular.

- 16) Nina, vy udarnica.
Nina you (pl.) shock-worker. (sg)

17) Nina, vy umny.

Nina, you (pl.) are smart (pl.)

3.2 $V^2 \longrightarrow V^{\text{modal}}$). The V^2 level is composed of modal verbs, i.e. the verbs moc' 'to be able' and umet' 'to know how to'. These verbs take the full array of verbal suffixes for person, number, and gender:

18) Tanja ne mogla éto delat'.

Tanja (fem., sg.) couldn't (fem., sg., past) do it.

19) Ja ne umeju plavat'.

I (1st., sg.) don't know how (1st sg.) to swim.

3.3 $V^1 \longrightarrow (\text{byt'})$ (ADJ). The V^1 level is comprised of existential byt' or adjective. Existential byt' shares with the copula its morphology except that under negation existential byt' obligatorily contracts to net (ne est'), whereas the copula obligatorily does not. The adjectives in this category are those that cannot take an infinitive complement, e.g. all long form adjectives which originate in a NP and some short form adjectives.¹¹ Thus, (20) contrasts with (21) in the negative:

20) V gorode net gostinicy.

In city not hotel. (There's no hotel in the city.)

21) Gorod ne (est') bol'^{KoJ.}

City not (is) big. The city isn't big.)

and (22) is ungrammatical

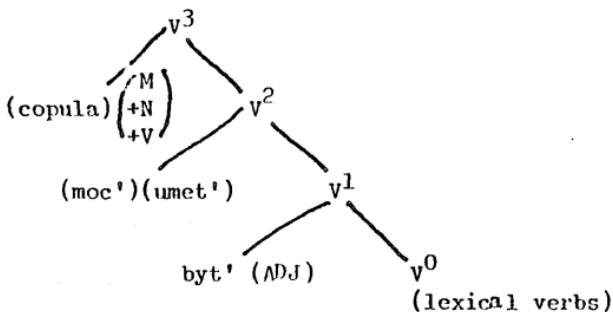
22)*On molod vodit' masinu.

He young to drive car. (He's too young to drive a car.)

3.4 $V^0 \longrightarrow (V_{\text{lexical}})$. The V^0 level is comprised of lexical verbs.

3.5 Summarizing the previous discussion we have the following;

23)



4.0 Considering now the co-occurrence possibilities, some interesting patterns emerge.

On the V³ level (considering only the verbal system⁷) the copula can occur alone (optionally deleted)

- 24) Rabota (est') rabota.
Work (is) work.

or with the short adjective

- 25) Ona byla gotova.
She was ready.

The short adjective, however, cannot occur alone without the copula

- 26)*golodna Nina
hungry Nina

Furthermore, the V³ node can be strictly subcategorized to optionally accept the V² node as complement, and since the V² will be strictly subcategorized to obligatorily take the V¹ node as complement we can have the following V³V² structure

- 27) On dolžen umet' plavat'.
He should know how to swim.
- 28) Ona objazana pojti.
She is required to go.

And, finally, following a restructuring rule, to be discussed below the V³ node can take lexical verbs originating at the V⁰ level.

- 29) Oni budut gotovy pomôc'.

They will be (copula, fut.) ready (short adj.) to help. (inf.)

4.1 As suggested above the V² level differs from the V³ level in that the former is strictly subcategorized to obligatorily take a V¹ verbal complement, i.e. the V² verbs cannot co-occur with adjectives to give

- 30)*Oni mogli gotovy(e).

They were able to ready. (short or long-form adj.).

but only with a V¹ verb, including those originating at V⁰ and restructuring into V¹

- 31) Eto možet byt'.

That can be.

- 32) Oni mogut plavat'.

They can swim.

4.2 The V¹ level is strictly subcategorized to take V⁰ complements, and only then in the absence of byt'. Thus (32) is ungrammatical

- 32)*Eto est' pomogat'.

This is (exists) to help.

but (33) with the adjective and (34) with no byt' are possible

- 33) Oni rady pomogat'

They are glad to help. (short form adj.)

- 34) Oni načinajut rabotat'.

They are beginning to work.

Based on the preceding discussion, we can now posit two rules--Tense marking and Restructuring--and a surface filter we will tentatively call a redundancy filter.

4.3 Assuming that tense originates in the AUX we propose the following rule Rule #1 Tense marking.

35) Tense copies to the first filled node.

Using the past tense as an example we would generate the following grammatical strings where later scrambling rules would operate only on the surface position of tense:⁸

- 36) a. Ona byla studentkoj. --v³
She was student.

- b. Vy byli uvereny. --v³
You were sure.

- 37) On mog èto delat'. --v²
He could it do.

- 38) Byl врач v gorode. --v¹
was doctor in the town.

- 39) Oni èto sdelali. (originating in v⁰)
They it did.

This rule would not permit the following ungrammatical strings

- 40)*On možet eto sdelal
He can (pres.) it have done. (past)

- 41)*Oni xoteli čitali gazety.
They wanted (past) read (past) the newspaper

- 42)*Nina dolžna pošla
Nina (copula pres.) should went. (past)

The rule (35) helps explain the difference between embedded clauses where tense is possible and infinitive complements arising from the same embedded clause.

Compare the following

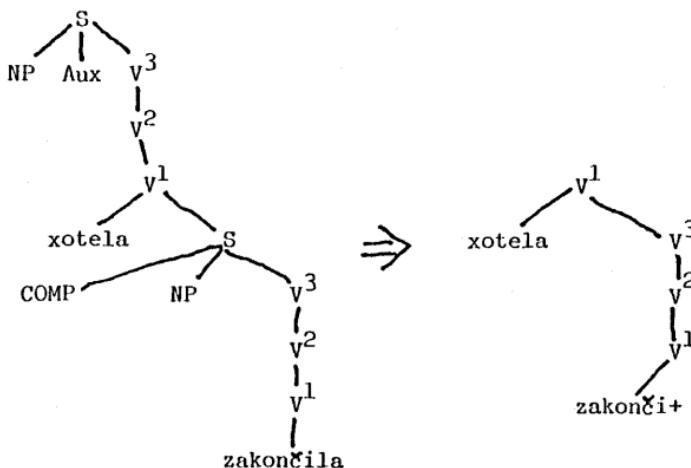
- 43) Nina₁ xotela, čtoby ona₁ zakončila rabotu.

- 44) Nina xotela zakončit' rabotu.

(43) and (44) are synonymous, but the fact that *zakončit'* in (44) lacks a tense suggests that something other than simple deletion of COMP and the Pronoun is taking place.

It seems that in the absence of COMP and NP, S also deletes and the V node of the embedded sentence collapses into the V¹ node of the matrix sentence. Using our model, the derivation of (43) to (44) would be the following

(45)

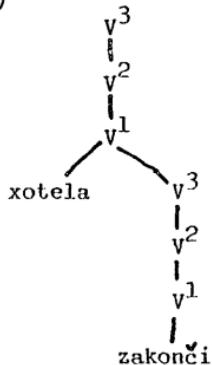


The new structure would then put the lexical verb zakonči+ in the domain of the matrix V-node and the Tense Rule would apply. It seems we might also gain added generality in the base rules by positing a restructuring rule.

(47) Restructure lexical entries to the next highest empty node.¹¹

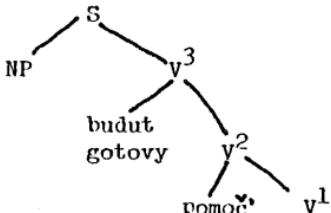
Applied to (45) and (46) we would get the following picture

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As suggested earlier the restructuring rule might be used in conjunction with the subcategorization of the V^n nodes to account for "skipped" nodes. Thus, (24) would show the following structure

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The rule would also provide a motivated way of handling an infinitive string as in (49)

49) Ona xotela načinat' rabotat'.

She wanted to start to work. (She wanted to start working)

and disallowing (or at the very least highly restricting) infinitive strings of more than two as in (50)

50) Ona xotela načinat' končat' rabotat'.

She wanted to start to stop to work (She wanted to start stopping to work)

At this point, I can only suggest that a rule like the restructuring rule may contain potential solutions to other problems of the verbal system.

5.0 Let me conclude the body of this paper by examining in the preceding framework one of the most controversial aspects of the Russian verbal system namely, the status of byt'. Chvany has postulated two byt's -- a copular and an existential based on two different syntactic frames. Chvany (1975:195) however, realizes the problem is complicated and that

"...the paradox evident in surface structure transforms remains unresolved: byt' is one word from the point of morphology: byt' is two words from the point of view of syntax."

Chvany's solution has been criticized, notably by Miller (1977) who argues for one byt' from a localist point of view. As can be seen from my earlier discussion, I am closer to Chvany's position. However, I would modify her statement to say that from the point of view of syntax byt' is the expansion of two different nodes, to which interpretive rules and filters apply differently at the surface level.

One of the several discrepancies in the syntactic frames between the two byt's relates to their respective patterns of deletion at surface level. Byt' at V¹ can never delete, whereas byt' at V³ can delete in the present tense.

- 19) Rabota (est') rabota.

Work is late.

Furthermore, if we take the bud+ of the periphrastic future as copula carrying tense, then there is another situation in which the copula will be deleted, namely when its complement is byt' of V¹.

- 51) Budu byt'
I will be.

is invariably replaced by

- 52) Budu.
I will be.

A third situation is presented by the apparent anomaly of (53)

- 52) On bylo posel
He was neut., past, sg.) left. (usually glossed as "He was about to leave."

If we generalize (53) we can then posit as an intermediate structure of the verb copula +Vⁿ.⁹ To account for the forms at surface level we can then postulate a redundancy filter that will optionally eliminate the copula at surface level. The filter would specify that the copula will be eliminated where Tense can be carried on its complement. It can reasonably be argued, I believe, that the so-called past tense in Russian, originating in a participial construction (and hence gender marking), became uniquely associated with the past tense of the copula, and, hence, tense-marking on both became redundant. A similar logic would explain why the budt form of the copula does not co-occur with perfective verbs. That is, the so-called "future" meaning is redundant in light of the fact that the verb is marked for completion.¹⁰

In conclusion, it seems obvious that the application of later models of transformational grammar to Russian can both suggest interesting possibilities and raise a number of questions. My analysis makes absolutely no pretensions to having answered any of the questions it itself may have raised. On the other hand the application of the new model may indicate some interesting possibilities for future research.

NOTES

¹The author wishes to thank Mary Tait for reading an earlier draft of this paper and suggesting fruitful revisions. All the weaknesses are, of course, the responsibility of the author.

²Chvany raises the concept of underlying word order and late scrambling rules in Chvany (1977:20).

³Technically we would say that (3) or (4) has two deep structures that can only be expressed by word order at the surface level.

⁴Again, technically (5) or (6) is ambiguous; each represents two deep structures that can only be distinguished at the surface level by word order.

⁵The short form adjectives present a sticky problem not adequately handled here. However, if we disregard morphology, they can be divided into those that can take infinitive complements (and hence in the V³ node with the feature *tidal*) and those that can't take such complements (and hence "banished" to the V¹ node where they are in complementary distribution with V⁰, i.e., V⁰ must move into V¹ and can only do so when V¹ is empty).

⁶On the status of short-form adjectives in the VP (and not in NP like long-form attributive adjectives see Chvany (1975:71).

⁷The complex question of Np and ADV complements cannot be treated here, but it may be the case that they, too, can be ordered in relation to the V-nodes.

⁸That is, sentences (36) - (39) approximate the ordering in deep structure.

⁹This intermediate structure represents the underlying form of most verbs close to the surface level, but prior to the application of a redundancy filter.

¹⁰It should be emphasized that these "semantic" facts operate at surface level. The underlying syntactic form of the verb remains Vⁿ, i.e. the layered V.

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