

Selected Topics in Slavic linguistics



Slavic languages are sufficiently similar and sufficiently different to provide an attractive research laboratory. (Corbett 1998)



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Semantic Maps for BE and HAVE in Slavic

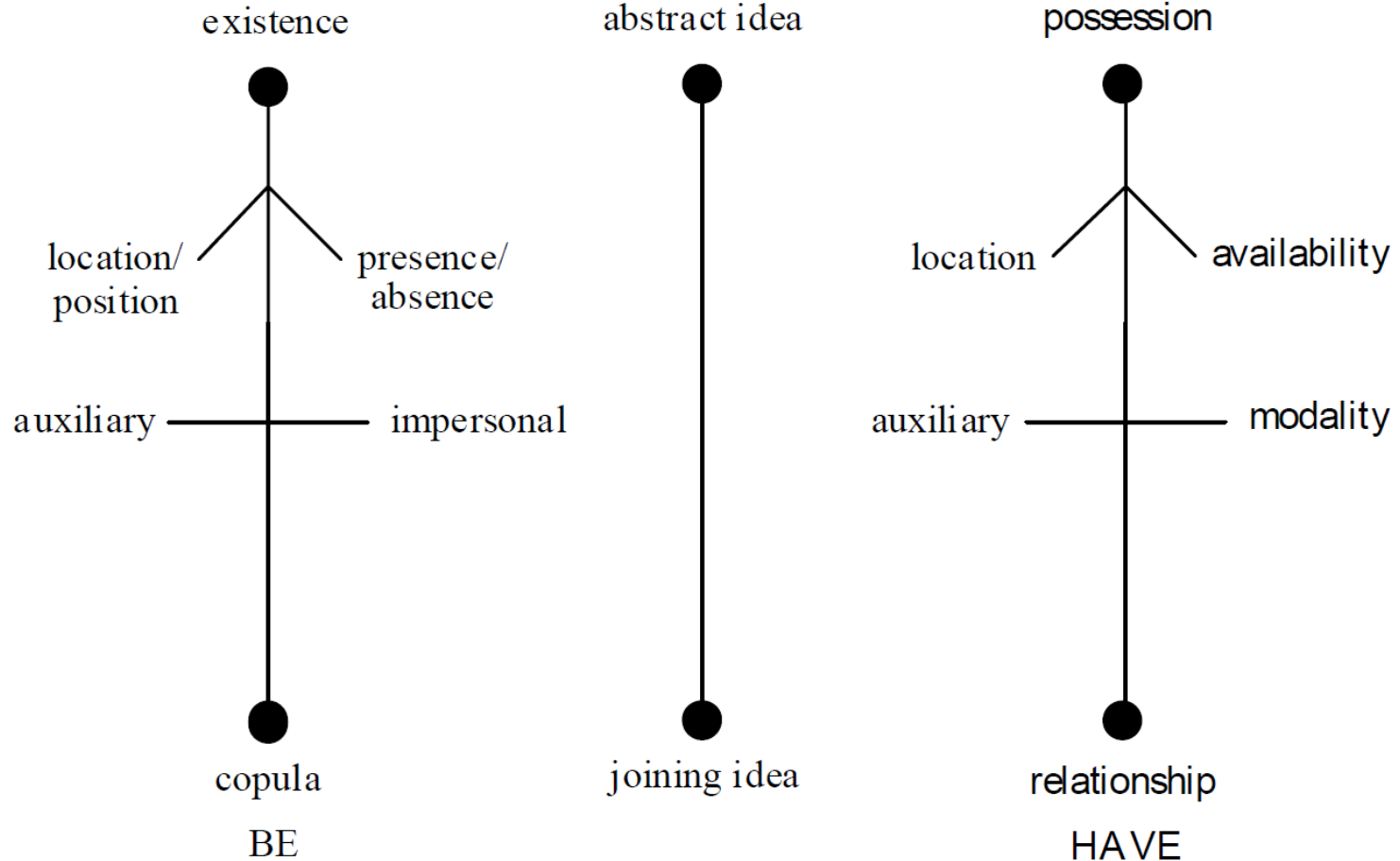


Figure 1
Blended Prototype Model

Syntactically absent full verbs



Typological, empirical and theoretical considerations



Key typological distinctions

● Structure-oriented processes (found in other languages too)

1. Gapping: She **drinks** tea, and he ___ vodka.
Ona p'ët čaj, a on vodku.
2. Stripping: She **works** at night, and we ___ too.
Ona rabotaet noč'ju, i my tože.
3. Sluicing: He **saw** someone, but I don't know exactly whom ___.
On uvidel kogo-to, no ja ne znaju točno kogo.
4. VP-Ellipsis: He's **working** today, but she isn't ___.
On rabotaet segodnja, a ona net.

→ not included in this study

Key typological distinctions (current focus)



- **Syntactic absence of the predicate** (i.e. leaving out full verbs) of certain verb classes

- **Non-verbal predication with a zero-form of the copula** (in a broad sense)



Syntactic absence of a full-verb predicate

Action verbs can be left out, as long as what remains is a bipartite structure

- often cited “classics”

Tatjana ∅ v les, medved' ∅ za neju
Tatjana.NOM in wood.ACC bear.NOM after she.INSTR

- absence with easily recoverable meaning

Ja ∅ v univesritet
ich.NOM in Uni.ACC

- more complex examples, where explicating a lexical verb, while keeping the structure, unavoidably changes the source meaning

mne by ∅ mamu sjuda
I.DAT COND mother.ACC hier-to



Leaving out full verbs

- [Weiss 1993, 2011] distills a common basis
 - action semantics, which necessitate the feature [+ controllability]
 - bipartite structure, at least two actants, or an actant and a circumstantial
 - no general negation, only special (partial) negation

- sources of reconstruction
 1. speech situation
 2. preceding text (macrocontext)
 3. lexical material in the clause (microcontext)
 - depending on circumstances, some, all or none of these can be relevant
 - in the latter case we have *fixed expressions*



Approaching the phenomenon

- two scales to consider
 - interpretability: unambiguous ↔ ambiguous / diffuse
 - degree of stability: fixed expression ↔ spontaneous arrangement
- extremes resulting from cross-classification:

	fixed expression	free arrangement
unambiguous interpretation	idiomatic <i>Kak tebe ∅ X?</i> how you.DAT X?	transparent <i>On ∅ ej: „...“</i> he.NOM she.DAT: „...“
diffuse interpretation	ambiguous <i>Ty čto ∅?</i> you.NOM what?	unspecific <i>Ty èto ∅ sama?</i> you.NOM this alone?



Approaching the phenomenon

- Hypothesis
 - semantic underspecification ↔ structural incompleteness
 - governing verb's nature is detectable at available dependents
 - syntagmatic-paradigmatic relations: so-called **micro-syntax**
 - syntactic idiomaticity, schematic constructions

cf. [Apresyan 1986]

«...трафаретные правила касаются ограниченных групп лексем с отчётливо выделяемыми общими свойствами, например совпадающими синтаксическими или прагматическими признаками, совпадающими конструкциями и т. п. Они записываются в специальном компоненте модели, который было бы уместно назвать грамматикой словаря, или малой морфологией и малым синтаксисом. В словарную статью каждой лексемы, для которой релевантно такое правило, помещается ссылка на него...»

Approaching the phenomenon



interacting components

1. **meta-lexicon-entry** with abstract features of a whole group of full verbs
2. **generalized government model** of common valence properties, as for e.g. *verbs of "making available"*:

sem. actants	X = AGENT	Y = ADRESSEE/ BENEFACTIV	Z = OBJECT
synt. actants	1. NP _{NOM}	2. NP _{DAT}	3. NP _{ACC}

3. **rule of zero-realization** – if there are no additional semantic properties that require choosing a concrete full verb lexeme, as e.g. *dat'* (to give), *odolžit'* (to lend), *podarit'* (schenken), *prisudit'* (to award)

Constructions with implicit full verbs



● Moving

● $\boxed{1} \langle NP_{nom} | NP_{dat} | AdvP_{temp} | NP_{instr} | PP_{with} \rangle \quad \boxed{2} \langle PP_{dir} | AdvP_{dir} | V_{inf} \rangle$

● Communicating and thinking

● $\boxed{1} \langle NP_{nom} \rangle \quad \boxed{2} \langle PP_{about} | NP_{dat} | AdvP \rangle \quad \boxed{3} \langle NP_{acc} | " \dots " \rangle$

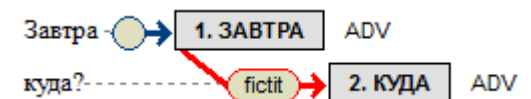
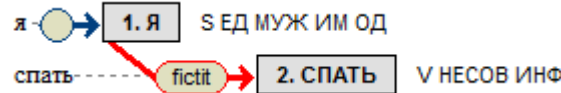
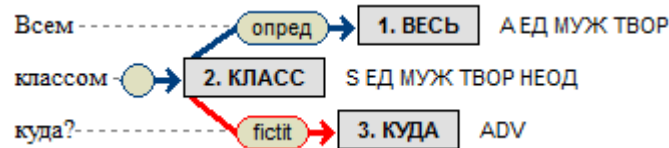
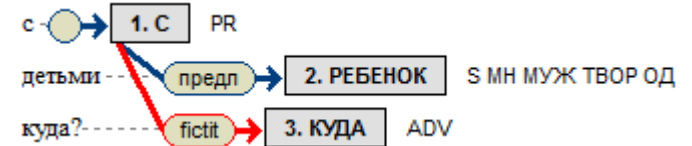
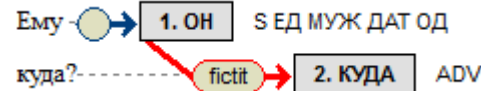
● Powerful physical impact

● $\boxed{1} \langle NP_{nom} \rangle \quad \boxed{2} \langle NP_{dat} | NP_{acc} \rangle \quad \boxed{3} \langle AdvP_{how} | PP_{how} \rangle \quad \boxed{4} \langle PP_{where} \rangle$

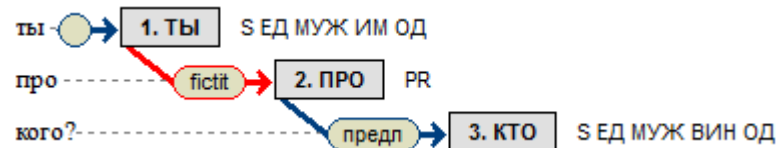
→ Lexical semantic properties of the components are crucial!



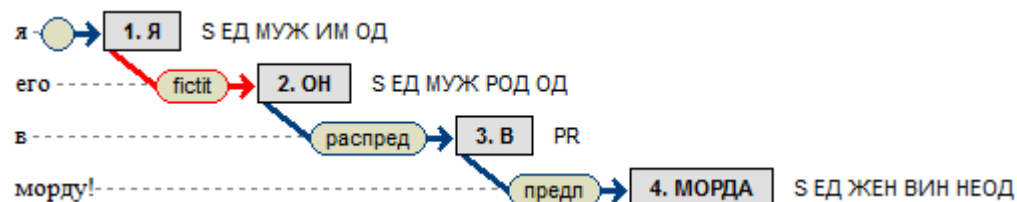
Moving



Communicating and thinking



Powerful physical impact





Empirical issues

- How to find verbless clauses?
 - Searching for non-overt material in corpora is not trivial.
 - Distinguishing types of syntactic absence is theory-biased
- Conceivable solutions go in two directions:
 - annotation (developer-driven) e.g. SynTagRus
 - search query (user-driven) e.g. HANCO
- General problem:
any frequency of verb omissions in different text types is very hard to obtain



Implications for grammar theory

● Productive strategy

available to other verb classes too, if there are two or more explicit co-dependents that are syntactically and semantically compatible and as a combination imply a verbal actions

→ valence-oriented and construction-based modeling is to be preferred

● Syntactic absence of full verbs is appropriate in two situations:

1. when the meaning of a highly frequent and semantically bleached verb intersects with the meaning of its dependents;
2. when the communicative context favors short and idiomatic forms of expression.

→ interplay of information density and linguistic encoding

● Redundancy

- acceptable , even appropriate, in both language system and language use
- provides regular means of shortening the actual expressions



Key typological distinctions (recap)

- **Syntactic absence of the predicate** (i.e. leaving out full verbs)
of certain verb classes
 1. moving
 2. communicating and thinking
 3. powerful physical impact

- **Non-verbal predication with a zero-form of the copula** (in a broad sense)
 1. copular predicator
 2. coupling operator
 - characterization (with long form adjectives and nouns)
 - localization (with local adverbials)
 3. inflectional copula (with short form adjectives)