ALEXANDER KRASOVITSKY, ALISON LONG, MATTHEW BAERMAN,

DUNSTAN BROWN, GREVILLE G. CORBETT

# PREDICATE NOUNS IN RUSSIAN[*]

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It is well known that nouns in predicate position with the copular *byt´* in Russian may take either the nominative or the instrumental case, as in (1):

(1a) *О     был    врач*
  *н*
  he    was    doctor[NOM.SG]
  'He was a doctor.'

(1b) *Он    был    врач-ом*
  he    was    doctor-INSTR.SG
  'He was a doctor.'

The commonly held view is that predicate nouns with more specified temporal, referential or evidential properties favour the instrumental (Потебня 1899, Овсянико-Куликовский 1912, Патокова 1929, Булаховский 1958, Борковский, Кузнецов 1963, Røed 1966, Nichols 1981, Timberlake 2004). These properties may be linked to the semantics of the predicate noun itself, or to aspects of clause structure (such as the presence of dependents on the predicate, word order, mood, or negation). On the basis of a corpus of 19th and 20th century texts, we find that while this view is correct with regard to 19th century and early 20th century Russian, in the second half of the 20th century the instrumental with predicate nouns becomes dominant and exceeds the bounds of the aforementioned constraints. Thus, while in earlier periods the case choice was variable, contingent on multiple competing factors, by the late twentieth century case choice was mainly non-variational and syntactically determined.

**Research background**

Several domains have been considered to be relevant for the competition between predicate cases, both from a diachronic and a synchronic perspective. One tradition is to associate marking on predicate nouns with g r a m m a t i c a l   f a c t o r s, namely with the effect of tense/mood on the diachronic shift from nominative to instrumental, and on the synchronic variation between the two cases. Патокова (1929) and Борковский, Кузнецов (1963)

claim that the spread of the instrumental in early Old Russian was more noticeable with the past tense copula (in particular the pluperfect), than with other copular forms. Røed (1966) has shown that the instrumental was firmly established with the future in copular constructions in the 19th century and slightly increased in use in the early 20th century (78% and 88% respectively, although the calculations are based on relatively small numbers, 16 instances in each of the two samples). Nichols (1981) points out that the preference for the instrumental with predicate nominals is greater in the future than in the past (in the present the instrumental with predicate nominals is ungrammatical). For predicate nouns with copulas this means that variation is possible primarily in the past tense, where lexico-sematic factors have some impact on morphosyntactic choices, while in the future these factors are irrelevant (Nichols 1981, 152).

Another line of investigation is related to lexical and sentence semantics. Since Потебня (1889) and Овсянико-Куликовский (1912), there has been a tradition of connecting the predicate cases to n o u n s ' l e x i c o - s e m a n t i c c l a s s e s. The general view is that predicate nouns that denote permanent properties of a subject take the nominative, whereas occasional, non-typical properties are associated with the instrumental. This pattern is already found in Old Russian, where the predicate instrumental is restricted to nouns denoting temporary or acquired properties of a subject, such as nouns of occupation or dignity (Патокова 1929, 5; Moser 1994, 65). Subsequent texts (17th and 18th centuries) show an increase in the number of lexemes that allowed instrumental case marking in predicate position, e.g. deverbal nouns defining subjects from the point of view of their regular or occasional actions (e.g. *свидетель* 'witness'). Following the same line of investigation, Røed (1966) distinguished between nouns denoting essential permanent properties of a subject (*он был мерзавец*$_{<NOM>}$/*мерзавцем*$_{<INSTR>}$ 'he was a scoundrel'), and those denoting non-essential temporary properties (*я был свидетель*$_{<NOM>}$ /

*свидетелем<sub>&lt;INSTR&gt;</sub> этого события* 'I was a witness of this event'). According to his statistics, derived from a corpus of 19th and 20th century literary texts (looking only at sentences with the copula *быть* 'to be'), the two groups show a drastic difference in case marking preferences when they occur in predicate position: for the 19th century the frequency of the instrumental is 3% (of a total 58 instances) for permanent-property nouns as opposed to 39% (of a total of 138) for temporary-property nouns. In the first half of the 20th century the instrumental occurs with 57% (of 68 instances) for permanent-property and 72% (of a total of 170 instances) for temporary-property nouns (Røed 1966, 36). These statistics are based on calculations for concrete nouns, as Røed treats abstract nouns separately.

In the 19th century, the two groups clearly contrasted, with predicatively used abstract nouns taking the instrumental in the vast majority of instances, as opposed to concrete nouns. The spread of the instrumental, according to Røed, may be presented as follows:
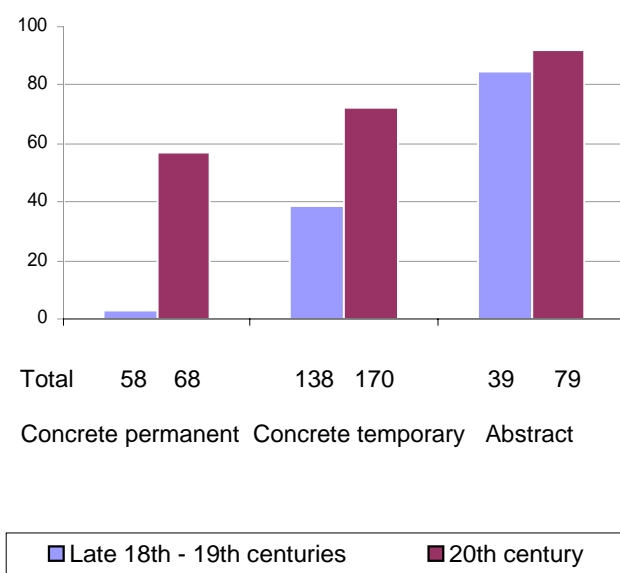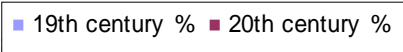


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Figure 1. Spread of the in[■ 19th century % ■ 20th century %]te nouns in the 19th and 20th centuries (Røed 1966).

As Nichols (1981) has shown, in the 20th century a number of lexico-semantic classes show clear case preferences:

Predicate nouns favouring the nominative

- Nouns of nationality

- Evaluative nouns: *дурак* 'fool', *красавица* 'beauty', *весельчак* 'merry person'

- Semantically bleached (empty) nouns used with modifiers: *человек* 'person', *мужчина* 'man', *девушка* 'girl'.

Predicate nouns favouring the instrumental

- Nouns of occupation, status and function: *учитель* 'teacher', *председатель* 'chairman'

- Abstract and deverbal nouns: *цель* 'aim' *' причина* 'reason', *занятие* 'occupation'

- Kinship terms

A number of researchers have emphasized that the distinction between temporally restricted and temporally unrestricted nominal predicates may arise from s e n t e n c e a n d   c o n t e x t u a l   s e m a n t i c s . Thus, Ломтев (1956) argued that morphological choices are determined not by the mere properties of predicates, but rather by the way speakers view these properties. In other words, either they identify the subject and the predicate and see the property as inherent to the subject, or they see the property as one that originated at some point within a subject (Ломтев 1956, 93). Writing along these lines, Mrázek (1964) pointed out that speakers make the choice between one of the alternative

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cases on the basis of their communicative goals, irrespective of the properties of the denotatum. The instrumental will emphasize the resultative nature of the predicated property while the nominative will establish a syntactic relation between the subject and the predicate, without emphasising the resultative nature (Mrázek 1964, 223-229).

Further insight into the problem has been provided by the idea that, to choose between the nominative or instrumental, speakers evaluate relative temporal characteristics of predicated properties with respect to a certain reference point implicitly or explicitly included into the context. Nichols (1981) discusses in particular two conditioning factors, which she generalizes as covert tense-aspect parameters: i) marked relative tense and ii) implicit change of state. The former signals the "departure in tense from their immediate context". The latter implies that the reported state is the result of some recent change and formerly did not hold (Nichols 1981, 155-156). Timberlake (2004) points out that the instrumental with predicate nouns limits the state "in time-worlds" (as in *Он доказывает, что Пушкин в последние годы жизни был монархистом*$_{<INSTR>}$ 'He attempts to show that Пушкин in the last years of his life was a monarchist'; *Брат две зимы подряд был в Туле репетитором*$_{<INSTR>}$ *у мальчиков Лопухиных* 'Brother worked two winters in a row in Tula as the coach for Lopukhin boys'). The nominative is used with temporally unrestricted states (e. g. identifications), meaning that the statement is generally true (*Ведь он был член*$_{<NOM>}$ *Политбюро* 'After all he was a member of Politburo'). The instrumental is also used to indicate the fact that the individual in question, not others, fits a certain definition (*Ланцелот был самым храбрым рыцарем*$_{<INSTR>}$ *из всех, кто собирался за Круглым столом* 'Lancelot was the bravest knight among those who gathered at the Round Table'), whereas the nominative is used when the subject is "presumed known and the predicative subject contributes little, the communicative weight carried by the adjective" (*Он был всесторонне талантливый человек*$_{<NOM>}$ 'He was a man of many and varied talents') (Timberlake 2004, 286-288).

On the whole, it is generally agreed that semantics has been a significant factor in nominative – instrumental competition, at least up until recently. This raises the question of the exact role that semantics has played in the changes that have taken place. Have the changes been driven by semantics, or is semantics simply a filter that independently motivated changes pass through? To provide an answer, we need first to address the question of whether the impact of semantic factors changes over time.

**Analysis**

We investigate the expansion of the predicate instrumental with the copula *byt´* 'to be' over the 19th and 20th centuries[1]. The study is based on the analysis of 1853 instances distributed among four fifty-year time periods between 1801 and 2000. The data have been extracted from a corpus of fiction and non-fiction texts, originally compiled by Adrian Barentsen, University of Amsterdam. (For relatively infrequent nouns of nationality we also used data extracted from the Russian National Corpus.) In what follows we attempt to capture the trajectory and underlying conditions of the nominative – instrumental shift, comparing the relative frequencies of the two competing forms, calculated with respect to the four fifty-year periods. Considering each of the conditioning factors separately we analyse their impact on variation within these periods and evaluate their relevance on the basis of the statistics derived.

As was discussed in the previous section, each of the predicate cases may be triggered by a set of heterogeneous factors. However, these factors may conflict. For example, according to lexical semantic criteria, nouns of occupation should be more likely to take the instrumental, since they denote properties which are viewed as temporary and non-intrinsic. But the larger context may provide conflicting cues. Thus in (2a), where there is no

indication to the transience of the predicated property, the noun of occupation takes the nominative (2a), whereas explicit time boundaries in (2b) independently require the instrumental on the predicate noun. Conversely, a noun of nationality, which denotes a temporally unrestricted property, takes the nominative as expected in (3a), but the modal meaning of the structure (subjunctive clause) supersedes the lexical semantics and triggers the instrumental in (3b)

(2a)    *Она    **была**    **учительниц-а**,    очен    хорошая,    умна    девушка*

ь    я    .

She    was    teacher-NOM.SG    very    nice    clever    girl
'She was a teacher, a very nice and clever girl.'

(2b)    *Кутузо    **был**    сельск-им    **учител-ем**    два    года*

*в*

Kutuzov    was    village-INSTR.SG    teacher-INSTR.SG    two    years
'Kutuzov was a village teacher for two years.'

(3a)    *Он    **был**    **француз**.*
He    was    Frenchman[NOM.SG]
'He was a Frenchman.'

(3b)    *Ах, если **бы**    он    **был**    **француз-ом**!*

Oh    if    particle[SBJV]    he    was    Frenchman-INSTR.SG*

'Oh, if he were a Frenchman!'

To pin down these factors under appropriate headings, as well as to evaluate their significance in different time periods, we employ the general framework proposed by Timberlake (1986, 2004). The decisive issue, according to Timberlake, is the relationship between the predicated state and possible or expected states. The state that holds, with no indication of any limitations from either a temporal or modal perspective, triggers the nominative. If a reported state represents a departure from some previous state (or results

from the previous state), or an actual state contrasts with the state which is expected and holds despite expectations, then it is marked by the instrumental. This falls into two types, t e m p o r a l   i n s t r u m e n t a l [2] and m o d a l   i n s t r u m e n t a l, whose distribution may be presented as follows:

| Pure state, without attention to its causal relationship to other events of the episode | Departure from current state | Departure from expectations |
|---|---|---|
| ⇓ | ⇓ | ⇓ |
| Descriptive nominative | Temporal instrumental | Modal instrumental |
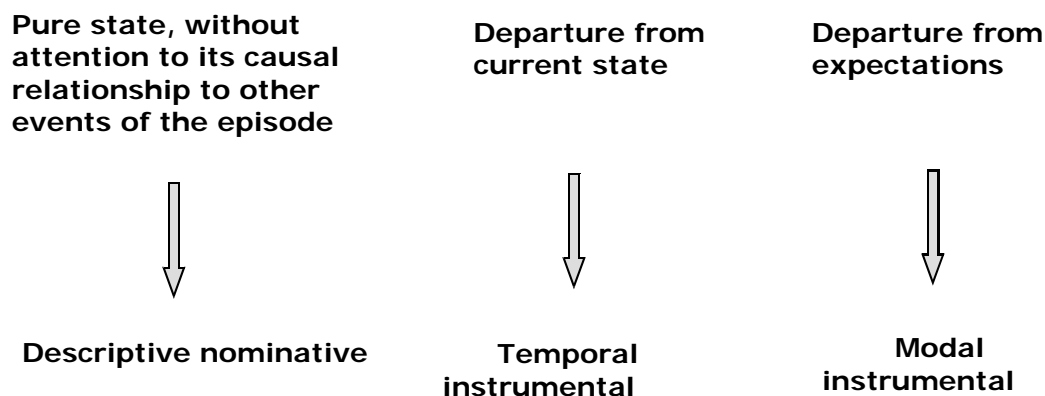
These senses can be illustrated by the following examples from the corpus:

Descriptive nominative

(4a)  *Она*   *была*   *вдов-а,*   *бездетна*   *и*   *довольно*   *богата*
      She     was      widow-NOM.SG  childless   and  rather      rich
       'She was a widow, childless and rather rich.' (Тургенев)


(4b)  *Кроме того, он*   *был*   *прям-ой*   *и*   *честн-ый*   ***грубиян.***
      Besides          he  was  direct-NOM.SG  and  honest-NOM.SG  boor[NOM.SG]
      'Furthermore, he was a straightforward and honest boor.' (Довлатов)


Temporal instrumental

(5a)  *Бопре*   *отечеств*   *своем*   *был*   *парикмахер-ом,*   *пото*   *в*   *Прусси*
                *в*  *е*                                          *м*          *и*
      Bopre  in  homeland  his   was   hairdresser-INSTR.SG  then  in  Prussia
      ***солдат-ом***
      soldier-INSTR.SG
       'In his homeland, Bopre was a hairdresser, then in Prussia he was a soldier.'

       (Пушкин)


(5b)  *В*   *юности*   *Регина*   *была*   *типичн-ой*   *советск-ой*
      In  (her) youth  Regina  was  typical-INSTR.SG  Soviet-INSTR.SG
      ***школьниц-ей***

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schoolgirl-INSTR.SG
'In her youth, Regina was a typical Soviet schoolgirl.' (Довлатов)

Modal instrumental

(6a) Если *б*      *она* ***была*** ***мужчин-ою***,   *она бы*      *наделала*
     if      particle[SBJV] she   was    man-INSTR.SG   she particle[SBJV] did
     *за*      *вас*      *тысячу*     *глупост-ей*
     for      you      thousand    silly.thing-GEN.PL
     'If she were a man, she would do all sort of silly things for you.' (Л. Толстой)

(6b) *разнесся* *слух,*   *что*   *Энн*   ***была*** ***не***   ***так-ой***      ***преданн-ой***
     came     gossip   that   Ann   was    not   such-INSTR.SG   devoted-INSTR.SG
     ***жен-ой***,      *как*    *считалось*
     wife-INSTR.SG     as     was.considered
     '…the rumour came that Ann was not so devoted a wife as it was considered.'

     (Стругацкие)

By the 19th century the instrumental had already become firmly established as a predicate case in copular constructions, appearing consistently under certain structural and semantic conditions[3]:

Structural conditions

- Copula in the infinitive
- Copula in the future
- Copula in the non-indicative mood

Lexical semantics

- Inanimate nouns
- Certain animate nouns which clearly denote temporary states (e. g. *свидетель* 'witness')

Sentence or contextual semantics:

- Temporal phrase      *Он **был** прежде полков-ым*      ***доктор-ом.***

                             He was formerly regiment's-INSTR.SG   doctor-INSTR.SG

                             'Formerly, he was a regimental doctor.' (Тургенев)
- Restricting adjunct      *В таком наряде они **были геро-ями.***

| | |
|---|---|
| or modifier | In such attire they were heroes-INSTR.PL |
| | 'In such attire they were heroes.' (Глинка) |
| ▪ Indication for the change of state in the broad context | *Он красавц-ем был.*<br>He handsome.man-INSTR.SG was<br>'He was a handsome man.' (Тургенев)<br>(There is an indication in the context that the state no longer obtains) |

Beyond these conditions, few predicate nouns had instrumental marking. The nominative also had two domains to which the instrumental normally was not admitted:

| | |
|---|---|
| ▪ Semantically bleached nouns | *Он был хорош-ий человек/*<br>He was good-NOM.SG man[NOM.SG]<br>'He was a good man.' |
| ▪ Nouns of nationality | *Он был немец*<br>He was German[NOM.SG]<br>'He was a German.' |

The conditions that trigger the instrumental clearly fall into one of the two groups, depending on which kind of specification (restriction) they impose on the predicated property. Most factors that disfavoured the nominative by the early 19th century may be classified under Timberlake's headings. Consequently, we can arrange factors that specified the scope of the predicated characteristic as follows:

Temporal instrumental

- ▪ Copula in future
- ▪ Certain animate nouns which clearly denote temporary states (e. g. *свидетель* 'witness')
- ▪ Temporal phrase

- Restricting adjunct or modifier

- Indication of a change of state within a broader context

Modal instrumental

- Copular in the non-indicative mood

- Negated copula

In the first half of the 19th century, the future, imperative, subjunctive and infinitive contrast with the past in that they strongly favour the instrumental[4], whereas the past tense copula allows significant variation in case marking, as presented in Table 1:

| Form of the copula | total number | % instrumental |
|---|---|---|
| Past | 328 | 54 |
| Imperative and subjunctive | 32 | 81 |
| Future | 58 | 93 |
| Infinitive | 61 | 97 |

Table 1. Predicate nouns with the copula (1801-1850)

With the past tense copula, the choice is conditioned by semantic factors. First, predicate nouns split depending on animacy: the proportion of instrumental inanimate nouns is very much the same as with imperative, subjunctive, future or infinitive:

| | total number | % instrumental |
|---|---|---|
| Animate nouns | 216 | 38 |
| Inanimate nouns | 121 | 78 |

Table 2. Animate and inanimate predicate nouns with the copula (1801-1850)

Second, with animate nouns case marking was to a large extent determined by the presence or absence of factors that restricted the scope of predication (predicated characteristic), by establishing a temporal framework within which a given state holds[5], such as nouns which denote temporary states (*свидетель* 'witness'); qualifiers (e .g. *уже* 'already', *еще* 'yet'); temporal phrase (e .g. *в прошлом году* 'last year'); restricting adjuncts (e. g. *в институте*

'at the institute', as in *Элиза была моим лучшим другом в институте* '*Eliza was my best friend at the institute*); and, finally, an indication of the change of state in the broad context. Characteristics specified in one of these ways required the instrumental, which in this instance was 3.5 times more frequent than with nouns denoting unspecified properties.

| | total number | % instrumental |
|---|---|---|
| Animate nouns, unspecified | 102 | 16 |
| Animate nouns, specified | 114 | 57 |

Table 3. Animate predicate nouns with the copula (1801-1850). Specified and unspecified characteristic

In other words, in the early 19th century the predicate instrumental dominated in all forms of the copula except for the past tense, where nominative-instrumental variation was semantically conditioned. States specified in terms of their modal properties or temporal restrictions triggered the instrumental, unspecified, indefinite states triggered the nominative.

This variation continued until the middle of the 20th century without significant change. In the second half of the 20th century, however, use of the instrumental with predicate nouns increased dramatically for animate nouns denoting unspecified, indefinite states. Statistics derived from the corpus for this group show similar frequencies for the three periods (1801-1850, 1851-1900 and 1901-1950), and significant increase in the second half of the 20th century.

| | total number | % instrumental |
|---|---|---|
| 1801-1850 | 102 | 16 |
| 1851-1900 | 136 | 32 |
| 1901-1950 | 122 | 32 |
| 1951-2000 | 140 | 87 |

Table 4. Animate predicate nouns with the copula (1801-2000). Unspecified characteristic

One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the significance of the differences among the mean values for the four time periods. The results are summarised below

## One-way ANOVA: instrumental % versus Period

```
Source  DF        SS         MS       F       P
Period   3  0.0014592  0.0004864  32.33   <0.001
                                   Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on
                                   Pooled StDev
Level      N      Mean     StDev  --+---------+---------+---------+-------
1801-1850  5  0.002034  0.001787  (---*---)

1851-1900  5  0.006015  0.004703      (---*---)

1901-1950  6  0.003540  0.002903     (---*--)

1951-2000  3  0.027540  0.006415                            (----*---)
                                   --+---------+---------+---------+-------
                                   0.000     0.010     0.020     0.030
```

The extremely low p value ($<0.001$) indicates that *at least one* of the means is significantly different from the others. The 95% confidence intervals for each mean are shown in the graphic. It can be seen that these intervals overlap for the three early time periods, indicating negligible difference among the occurrence of the instrumental for these periods. That of the last period, however, shows no overlap with the early three, suggesting that the occurrence of the instrumental is higher. The probability of this conclusion being wrong is $< 5\%$. A level of $p = 0.05$ (5%) is generally accepted as the cut off value for significance in linguistics.

Contrasting the three earlier periods with the last one, we can conclude that until the middle of the 20th century, the instrumental was used with predicate nouns that had temporally specified (7a) or modally restricted (7b) properties, while the nominative was typically used with predicate nouns denoting properties not restricted temporally or modally (8a), and only occasionally with predicate nouns in clauses with temporal or modal reading (8b).

(7a) *Есл    бы              они   знали  **как-им**        **виноват-ым**

*и*
if    particle[SBJV]  they  knew   what-INSTR.SG   guilty-INSTR.SG
***мальчик-ом***    *полчаса тому назад*  ***был***   *их*          *председатель*!
boy-INSTR.SG     half.hour ago         was       their        chairman
'If they only knew… what a guilty boy their chairman was half an hour ago.'

(Л. Толстой)

(7b) *только  позволь-те,      чтоб   в    этот   раз   я    **был***
just     allow[IMP]-2.PL  so.as  in   this   case  I    was
***проводник-ом***    ***ваш-им***

guide-INSTR.SG      yours-INSTR.SG
'Just allow me to be your guide on this occasion.' (Бестужев-Марлинский)

(8a) *Она **была** **невест-а**,      и    что   всего важней,  невест-а      богат-ая*
she was   bride-NOM.SG    and  what  more.important  bride-NOM.SG  rich-NOM.SG
'She was a bride and, more important, a rich bride.' (Бестужев-Марлинский)

(8b) *…видно,   что    он    **был**    тогда     **ребенок***
obvious   that   he    was     at.that.time  child[NOM]
'…it was obvious that he had been a child at that time.' (Пушкин)

In the late 20th century the instrumental is used with the majority of predicate nouns irrespective of their semantics or semantics of the clause, while the nominative may be used with predicate nouns denoting properties which are temporally and modally unrestricted, as in (9a, b), though the instrumental marking in such cases would be more common (10a, b). There are a few exceptions to this. One is sentences of identification (11), which show preference for the nominative[6], another is emphatic sentences with

reverse word order, where the predicate precedes the subject, as in (12) and (13). In terms of information structure, both types (12) and (13) have a foregrounded adjectival part of the predicate NP with a clearly backgrounded noun. However, along with the nominative in (12a) and (13a), the instrumental in such structures became fully acceptable in contemporary Russian (12b and 13 b), which, in our view, indicates the global nature of the nominative-instrumental shift[7].

(9a) *Родился   он   где-то       в   Баренцево   море   на   ледоколе*

   was.born   he   somewhere   in   Barents   sea   on   ice-breaker
   *отец      у него      **был      капитан***
   farther   his         was      captain[NOM.SG]
   'He was born on an ice-breacker somewhere in the Barents Sea, his father was a

   captain.' (В. Некрасов)

(9b) *Витька   **был   серьезн-ый      работник**,*
   Vit´ka   was   serious-NOM.SG   worker[NOM.SG]
   *не то что   шалопаи   из   отдела   Абсолютного   Знания.*

   unlike   idlers   from   department   (of) absolute   knowledge
   'Vit´ka was a serious worker, unlike idlers from the department of Absolute

   Knowledge.' (Стругацкие)

(10a) *Тетя   Поля   **была      расчетлив-ой      бессребрениц-ей.***

   aunt   Polja   was   prudent-INSTR.SG   idealist-INSTR.SG
   'Aunt Polja was a prudent idealist.' (Шаламов)

(10b) *Он   **был   моряком**,   она   уехала   с   ним   на   восток.*

   he   was   sailor-INSTR.SG   she   left   with   him   for   East

'He was a sailor, she left with him for the East.' (Стругацкие)


(11a)  *Штеменк*   *бы*   *именн*   *тот*   *начальник*,

     *о*       *л*     *о*

Štemenko   was   just   that[NOM.SG]   superior[NOM.SG]

*который*   *...изломал*   *все*   *арестантски*   *котелки.*

                                 *е*

who   ...smashed   all   prisoner's   pots

'Štemenko was just that superior who... smashed all prisoners' pots.' (Шаламов)


(11b) *Иван Михайлович* *был* *т-ем* *сам-ым* *человек-ом*,

  Ivan   Mixajlovič   was   that-INSTR.SG   same-INSTR.SG   person-INSTR.SG

  *который*   *вырастил*   *и*   *выпестова*   *Никола*   *Ивановича*   *Ежова.*

                                *л*        *я*

  who   brought.up   and   fostered   Nikolaj   Ivanovič   Ežov

  'Ivan Mixajlovič was just that person who... brought up and fostered Nikolaj

  Ivanovič Ežov.' (Разгон)


(12a)  *Делов-ой*   *человек*   *был*   *Сталин*   *делов-ой*.

                                        ,

practical- NOM.SG   person[NOM.SG]   was   Stalin   practical-NOM.SG

'Stalin was a practical person, indeed.' (Искандер)


(12b)  *Все*   *это*   *заняло*   *не*   *больше*   *минуты,*   *так как*   *быстр-ым*

     all   this   took   not   more   minute   as   quick-INSTR.SG

     *энергичн-ым*   *человек-ом*   *был*   *Михаил*   *Колотовкин*

     energetic-INSTR.SG   person-INSTR.SG   was   Mixail   Kolotovkin

'All this took not more than a minute, as Mixail Kolotovkin was a quick, energetic

person.' (Липатов)

(13a)  *Но*   *полководец*   *о*   *был*   *гениальн-ый*

                           *н*

but   commander[NOM]   he   was   ingenious-NOM.SG

'But he was an ingenious commander...' (Искандер)

(13b) ***Пианист-ом***     *Шостакович*    ***был***    ***великолепн-ым***
      pianist-INSTR.SG     Šostakovič      was     magnificent-INSTR.SG
      'Šostakovič was a magnificient pianist.' (Вишневская)

With the spread of the instrumental within the group of animate predicate nouns associated with unspecified characteristics, late 20th century Russian has reduced nominative-instrumental variation in predicate nouns to a minimum, and consequently reduced the role of semantics as a conditioning factor. In other words, for the different semantic conditions the proportion of the instrumental became similar, thereby indicating their reduced relevance.

|                                  | total numbers | % instrumental |
|----------------------------------|:-------------:|:--------------:|
| Animate, past, unspecified       | 122           | 87             |
| Inanimate, past                  | 85            | 93             |
| Animate, past, specified         | 84            | 98             |

Table 5. Predicate nouns with the copula under different semantic conditions (1951-2000)

As was mentioned above, it is generally believed that the nominative-instrumental shift left behind certain lexical classes which retain nominative use, in particular nouns of nationality and semantically bleached (empty) nouns. The common explanation for this is that predicates with NPs, headed by nouns of nationality would hardly allow temporal reading triggered by the instrumental. Røed (1966) claims that NPs with semantically bleached nouns, such as *он был хороший человек* 'he was a good person', have a permanent reading, since they denote some intrinsic significant properties of the subject (wesentliche Eigenschaften des Subjekts). Nichols (1981) points out that predicate nouns which describe or characterise the subject (such as nouns of nationality and semantically bleached nouns) favour the nominative case, contrary to those designating a function (e. g. *плотник* 'carpenter', *учитель* 'teacher', *председатель* 'chairman'), which favour the

instrumental. If a qualitative reading of function nouns is possible, for example when they are modified by qualitative adjectives (*он был способный учитель* 'he was a gifted teacher'), such cases favour the nominative. On the view advanced by Røed and Nichols, if the distribution of nominative – instrumental is determined by semantic properties of lexical items, it would be natural to expect the predominance of the nominative with nouns of nationality and semantically bleached nouns. Indeed, this state held in the 19th century and was maintained to a certain extent into the early 20th century.

From the middle of the 20th century, the instrumental became fully acceptable with nouns of nationality. As shown in table 6, statistics for four 50-year periods indicate an increase from 4% in 1801-1850 (in fact, one instance among the 25 examples found in the sample for this period) to 56% in 1951-2000[8].

| | total number | % instrumental |
|---|---|---|
| 1801-1850 | 25 | 4 |
| 1851-1900 | 63 | 5 |
| 1901-1950 | 71 | 28 |
| 1951-2000 | 190 | 56 |

Table 6. Nouns of nationality in predicate position

After the elimination of instances in which predicated properties could be read as temporally or modally restricted (14), which, as shown above, triggers the instrumental, we still arrive at 42% of the instrumental (from a total of 135 examples) with predicatively used nouns of nationality in 1951-2000.

(14a)  *...уже тогд [он  бы  немц-ем,  отчего  сейча  ...*
        *а  ]  л  с  живет*
        already  then  [he]  was  German-INSTR.SG  which.is.why  now  lives
        *в  объединившейся  ФРГ*
        in  reunified  FRG

'He had been a German at that time already, which is why [he] lives now in

reunified Germany.' (Попов)


(14b)  *…если бы          я    **была   француженк-ой**   или   **англичанк-ой**,*
       … if    particle[SBJV]  I    was    French-INSTR.SG    or    English-INSTR.SG
       *то     они     бы,           пожалуй   подумали   как   мне      помочь.*

       then    they    particle[SBJV]  maybe     thought    how   I[DAT]   to.help
       ]
       'If I were French or English, maybe they would have thought how to help me.'

       (Васильев)


(14c) *Я    в    России    мечтала  работать  в    такой  же          конторе,  но меня*
      I    in   Russia    dreamed  to.work   in    same  particle[IDENT]  office     but I[ACC]
      *не     взяли,   потому что   я     там    **была   евре-ем**.*
      not     hired   because       I     there   was    Jew-INSTR.SG
      'In Russia I was keen to work in the same office, but I was not hired because I was

      a Jew there.' (Рубина)


A more dramatic change occurred with semantically bleached nouns with the past tense

copula, the vast majority of which took the nominative in the 19th century. The instrumental

in these constructions, as in (15), became fully acceptable in the early 20th century, and by

the second half of the century had become dominant. As our statistics for *человек* 'person'

show, the numbers for the instrumental in this group for 1951-2000 are similar to those in

all other groups of predicate nouns (table 7).


|           | total number | % instrumental |
|-----------|--------------|----------------|
| 1801-1850 | 93           | 5              |
| 1851-1900 | 165          | 11             |
| 1901-1950 | 122          | 45             |

| 1951-2000 | 136 | 90 |
|---|---|---|

Table 7. *Человек* 'person' in predicate position (semantically bleached usage).


Instrumental with semantically bleached nouns (1951-2000):


(15a) *Как все легкомысленны мужчины,*

As all light-minded men

*отец **был добродушн-ым** **человек-ом**.*

farther was good-natured-INSTR.SG person-INSTR.SG

'As all light-minded men, father was a good-natured person.' (Довлатов)


(15b) *Кунта **был человек-ом** добр-ым и, прямо скажем, глуп-ым.*
Kunta was person-INSTR.SG kind-INSTR.SG and frankly silly-INSTR.SG
'Kunta was a kind and, frankly speaking, a silly person.' (Искандер)


(15c) ***Человек-ом** он **был** незаурядн-ым*
person-INSTR.SG he was remarkable-INSTR.SG
*и даже во многих отношениях.*
and even in many respects
'He was a remarkable person, and even in many respects.' (Климов)


(15d) *Джон Брей нам понравил-ся с первой минуты,*
John Bray we[DAT] liked-REFL from first minute
*но сейча он **был лучш-им** **человек-ом** в Аделаиде с.*
but now he was the best-INSTR.SG person-INSTR.SG in Adelaide
'We liked John Bray from the first moment, but now he was the best person in

Adelaide.' (Гранин)


(15e) *Я в ту пору **был непритязательн-ым** **человек-ом.***

I in that period was unpretentious-INSTR.SG person-INSTR.SG
'I was an unpretentious person at that time.' (Довлатов)

To make sure that the high numbers of the instrumental attested in 1951-2000 are not due to the strong factors described above, we eliminated from the sample instances in which, as in (15d) and (15e), the predicated property is temporally or modally specified (in Timberlake's terminology, 'departure from current state' or 'departure from expectations' accordingly). After eliminating these factors, we obtained a sample consisting of 122 instances. The frequencies of the instrumental in this group for the 1951-2000 period (89%) are similar to those for predicate nouns in general. In other words, NPs with semantically bleached nouns, despite their tendency to indicate a pure characteristic expressed by an adjective, adopted the instrumental in the predicate position, even when temporally or modally unrestricted, which superseded the influence of this lexico-semantic factor on predicate case marking.

**Conclusions**

Until the middle of the 20th century, variation in case marking on predicate nouns with the copula *byt´* was to a large degree conditioned by semantic and syntactic factors. In the second half of the 20th century the instrumental spread to domains formerly occupied by the nominative. This change replaced multiple rules of variation with a single overall rule. Within some lexical classes, such as nouns of nationality, changes may occur more slowly than in the language in general. Nevertheless, a thorough analysis of the variation within this group across the two centuries does not indicate any fundamental differences as compared to other lexical classes. In our view, semantics had only a subsidiary role in this

morphosyntactic process, supporting variation at some stages, while ultimately being ousted in favour of a single rule, namely: instrumental case marking on predicate nouns. The shape of the nominative-instrumental shift indicates that Russian is moving from a semantically conditioned to a syntactically determined model for predicate nouns, and that this change is at an advanced stage in the contemporary language.

NOTES

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*Surrey MorphologyGroup*

*University of Surrey*

a.krasovitsky@surrey.ac.uk

a.long@surrey.ac.uk

m.baerman@surrey.ac.uk

d.brown@surrey.ac.uk

g.corbett@surrey.ac.uk

[1] For the purpose of this paper we left out of consideration constructions with semi-copular verbs (*стать* 'become', *оказаться* 'prove to be', etc.) and verbs of naming (*называться* ' to be called', *звать* 'name', 'call') in which the instrumental became dominant much earlier than with the pure copula. The timeline of the change in these two former constructions, as well as conditioning factors, requires separate consideration. For example, see the sub-grouping of semi-copular verbs with respect to their preference of a particular case on predicate complements, suggested by Потебня (1889, 493-495), and the discussion of the instrumental – "independent nominative" competition with the verbs of naming (Потебня 1889, 183-184; Борковский, Кузнецов 1963 /2006, 337).

[2] Indicating the relationship of the predicated state to other events in the text, "this sense of the instrumental is not purely temporal, but has some modal flavour as well" (Timberlake 1986, 142).

[3] To avoid subjectivity, we consider here conditions that have clear overt exponents, either within a sentence or in the adjacent context. Equally, instances which did not include these exponents and could be classified only on the basis of intuition were not included in either of these groups.

[4] Востоков observed the impact of tense/aspect properties of the copula in his contemporary language. In *Русская грамматика*, first published in 1831, he pointed out that forms *буду* ('to be' future), *будь* ('to be', imperative), are very likely to take instrumental predicate nouns, in contrast with *был* ('to be' past) which favours the nominative (Востоков 1844: 214-215).

[5] cf.: "…the instrumental in this usage indicates that the inception of the state represents a significant departure from the prior state of affairs and, further, that it is a necessary development from the circumstances that obtain locally around the narrated time." (Timberlake 1986, 142).

[6] Specificity of identity statements has been analysed in great detail in the linguistic literature. In this paper we are not focusing on this problem separately. The logical and semantic aspects of identity statements have been discussed in Арутюнова (1976), in particular see chapter 5. For discussion of various encoding strategies employed in identity statements see Stassen (1997).

[7] Constructions of this type are very infrequent, which could be an important factor in retaining the nominative usage. Type (13) in particular occurs in our corpus of 1951-2000 texts once in 54,000 words of running text. The instrumental has been found in 5 of 22 total instances. Possibly, higher frequencies could be found in informal oral speech, but we are not aware of any statistics that would support this claim.

[8] Statistics for nouns of nationality in the predicate position are based on samples extracted from the Russian National Corpus (www.ruscorpora.ru).