

Cross-dialectal variation in Northern Russian: the ‘perfect’ with past passive participle

1. Northern Russian dialects have developed a special kind of participial perfect/resultative constructions that displays interesting properties, relevant for linguistic theory in many respects – subjecthood, case assignment, agreement and, notably, the high degree of their cross-dialectal variation.

2. In these constructions, while the external argument is (optionally) expressed by the locative PP *u* + GEN, the internal argument can surface, in the different varieties where the participle carries the invariable *-n-o/-t-o* Neuter inflection, either in Nominative case, as in (1), or in Accusative, as in (2):

(1) *Muž-to u nej ubito*
 husband-NOM masc sg-PRT at her-GEN kill-prtc pst pass-neut
 ‘She killed (her) husband’ (Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971 [=KN]:35)

(2) *U dedka-to merěžu ostavleno*
 at grandpa-GEN fishnet-ACC fem sg leave-prtc pst pass-neut
 ‘Grandpa left a fishnet’ / ‘A fishnet has been left by grandpa’ (KN: 38)

What is more, in those dialects where the participle has again no agreement with the internal argument but carries the Masculine inflection in *-n-Ø/-t-Ø*, only NOM is licensed on the “object” nominal:

(3) *Osin-a u zajc-a gryze-n*
 aspen-NOM fem sg at hare-GEN gnaw-prtc pst pass-masc sg
 ‘The aspen is gnawed by a/the hare’ (Obnorskij 1953:158)

Finally, other dialects display agreement of the participle in gender and number with the argument in Nominative, yielding the canonical passive structure of (4).

(4) *Šapka-to u parnja v okno brošena*
 hat-NOM fem sg-PRT at boy-GEN in window throw-prtc pst pass-fem sg
 ‘The hat has been thrown out of the window by a/the boy’ (KN: 24)

3. Since Timberlake’s (1976) first analysis of these constructions, many proposals have addressed the issue of subjecthood, regarding the locative PP as a “quirky subject” (Lavine 1999; see also Rivero & Savchenko 2005 on anticausatives in Russian) or an “ergative” subject, generated in an intermediate projection between TP and VP (Jung 2009), in a fashion similar to Lavine’s (2005) account of *-no/-to* constructions in Polish and Ukrainian or to Sigurdsson’s (2002) proposal for Standard Russian infinitival constructions like (5):

(5) *Emu čitat’ knigu.*
 He-DAT read-inf book-ACC ‘He has to read a book’

Yet if the *u* + GEN PP is the only carrier of subject of the sentence, sentences where the PP is omitted and only an impersonal or passive reading is possible, as (6), remain unexplained. Moreover, cross-dialectal variation is taken into account only by Jung (2009) whereas the different agreement patterns of the auxiliary (with the participle (6) or with the NP in NOM (7)) in past-tense sentences have not received an explanation so far.

(6) *Perecha-n-o by-l-o dorog-a tut*
 cross-prtc pst pass-neut be-pst-neut sg road-NOM fem sg here
 ‘the road was crossed here’ / ‘they/one crossed the road here’ (KN: 36)

(7) *Krovat’ by-l-a kuple-n-o u ej*
 bed-NOM fem sg be-pst-fem sg buy- prtc pst pass-neut at her
 ‘the bed was bought by her’ / ‘she (had) bought the bed’ (KN: 43)

4. In a framework of unification of morphology and syntax (e.g. Manzini & Savoia 2007; Kayne 2010) we will adopt the idea (Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou 1998 and many others) that as far as finite verbs are concerned, the EPP can be checked directly by the agreement inflection of the verb. In the sentences in (1)-(4) and (6)-(7), we propose that the variation across dialects depends on the way in which pieces of morphology such as the inflectional head *-n-* of the passive/past participle and the endings *-o* and *-o* (for Neuter and Feminine respectively) satisfy the EPP requirement. The general idea is that once this means of satisfaction are properly understood, the notion of quirky subject can be altogether abandoned, at least for the cases at hand.

5. Before considering the various patterns in (1)-(4) and (6)-(7) we need a preliminary step concerning the nature of the agreement inflection of the perfect/ passive participle. We assume that exactly as in Italian (Burzio 1986) the participial inflection ‘picks up’ the internal argument of the verb (as in

