

The grammatical *status* of Russian ‘predicatives’ when translated into English and Italian

This study will focus on Russian ‘predicatives’ and their grammatical shift in the process of translation from source language (L1) to target language (L2). They will be analysed with respect (i) to their argument structure, and, in particular, (ii) to different structures that do not show grammatical differences when translated from L1 to L2. After briefly introducing these forms and explaining, in short, what argument structure does imply, different examples of translations from Russian into English and Italian will be given; they will show the grammatical *status* of predicatives, concordances and differences.

The question of the so-called ‘predicatives’ and the grammatical category they should belong to, has long been discussed and is still unsolved. The first linguist that in 1928, in his article *О частях речи в русском языке* (*On parts of speech in Russian language*), distinguishes words as холодно (it’s cold), тепло (it’s hot), жарко (it’s very hot), including them in a specific part of speech, ‘Категория Состояния’ (‘Category of Condition’), was Ščerba. He identifies their invariable meaning of ‘condition’, not foreseen for both their homonyms adjectives, quality indicators, and verbs, action indicators [1, p. 90]. Zimmerling [2, p. 1] gives the following explanations about Ščerba’s opinion on this matter: “Новая часть речи, по его мнению, пополняется за счет специализации в функции сказуемого неизменяемых слов типа стыдно, грустно, весело, надо, жаль, пора, навеселе” (The new part of speech, in his opinion, develops at the expense of the specialization of invariable expressions, with predicate functions, of the kind of ‘it’s sad’, ‘it’s funny’, ‘it’s needed’, ‘it’s a pity’, ‘it’s time to’, ‘to be drunk’]. Nevertheless Ščerba considered the difficulty in identifying some morpho-grammatical category within which to include these words ending in-o, referring neither to the verb, nor to the adjective, nor to the adverb, but simply used as predicates (with or without a copula), within impersonal contexts [3, p. 75]. He added indeed: “В то же время их с трудом можно отнести только к наречиям, поскольку при ближайшем рассмотрении оказывается, что указанные слова не подпадают под категорию наречий, так как не относятся ни к глаголу, ни к прилагательному, ни к другому наречию” (At the same time, these words can hardly be referred only to adverbs, as a closer look reveals that these words do not fall into the category of adverbs, as well as they do not refer to the verb, adjective or any other adverb) [4, p. 74].

The question about the grammatical category these words should belong to is still open and under discussion. Within linguistic theory, two distinct positions can be distinguished. The ones who are in favour of traditional categories do not agree on the category where to include them in, for mainly morphological reasons [Šapiro, 5-6]. Those who identify, for these words, a new part of speech, do not agree on which basis to define it (semantic or syntactic) and, in any case, they can’t explain how syntax [7, 8], semantics [4, 9] and morphology [10, 11] do interact.

Independently from these different point of views, the general impression is that there is an orientation mostly based on semantic *criteria*, as indeed suggests the same definition assigned to them: ‘words of the category of condition’. In this regard, Matchanova [12, p. 48] states that:

Мы придерживаемся термина ‘слова категории состояния’, так как он наиболее полно отражает природу и сущность рассматриваемых слов. [...] состояние представляет собой особую семантическую структуру, иерархически организованную, как правило, тесно связанную с предметной ситуацией (эмоциями, физиологическими симптомами, температурными, световыми, атмосферными признаками окружающей среды); состояние может быть категоризовано в языке преимущественно лексически, преимущественно грамматически, комплексно и может быть выражено на уровне словоформы, высказывания и текста (We adhere to the term ‘words of the category of condition’, because it more closely reflects the nature and essence of the words considered. [...] the condition represents a particular semantic structure, hierarchically organized, usually, strictly linked to the objective situation [emotions, physiological symptoms, related to temperature, light, atmospheric characteristics of the surrounding environment]; the condition can be characterized in the language mainly lexically, mainly grammatically, broadly speaking it can also be expressed at the level of word-form, expression and text.

As shown in example (1), while холодно in (1a) refers to the state-condition of ‘cold’, experienced by a person, in (1b) its homonym form is an adjective, referred to the subject Мороженное, while the verb холодеет in (1c) implies an action, a process:

- (1)
- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------|--------------|
| (a) | Мне | холодно |
| | to me.DAT | cold[PRED] |
| | (I’m cold) | |
| (b) | Мороженное | холодно |
| | Ice-cream.NOM | cold.N [ADJ] |
| | (The ice-cream is cold) | |

- (c) Вода холодеет
Water.NOM gets cold[V]
(Water gets cold)

There's also the possibility to find the same word холодно in different context, with modal functions as in (1d):

- (d) Он холодно отреагировал
He.NOM coldly [ADV] reacted [V]
(He answered coldly)

As he may see from the translations given above, all the structures showed have their counterpart equivalent in English (1), or in Italian (2):

(2)

- (a) Мне холодно
A me.DAT freddo[PRED]
(Oggi ho freddo)
- (b) Мороженное холодно
Gelato.NOM freddo.N [ADJ]
(Il gelato è freddo)
- (c) Вода холодеет
Acqua.NOM si raffredda[V]
(L'acqua si raffredda)
- (d) Он холодно отреагировал
Lui.NOM freddamente [ADV] reagì[V]
(Lui rispose freddamente)

In both (1b/c/d) and (2b/c/d), the L2 equivalents exactly reflect the original grammatical structure of L1, as showed in Tab. 1:

Tab. 1 *equivalent grammatical structures*

Russian	English	Italian
(1b-2b) холодно [ADJ]	(1b-2b) cold [ADJ]	(1b-2b) freddo [ADJ]
(1c-2c) холодеет [V]	(1c-2c) gets cold [V]	(1c-2c) si raffredda [V]
(1d-2d) холодно [ADV]	(1d-2d) coldly [ADV]	(1d-2d) freddamente [ADV]

Things change when we translate (1a) into, respectively, English and Italian. Even though холодно in (1a) has functions of verbal predicate, same function shared by the verb in (1c), it is not a verb. Even though холодно in (1a) is morphologically the same as a short-form neuter adjective (1b) or an adverb (1d), it is neither an adjective, nor an adverb. In order to explain this, we need to introduce the 'argument structure', briefly described hereafter, referring in particular to the arguments these forms usually select.

Predicatives can be then considered a sort of intermediate category between adjectives and verbs; though not verbs, they share same functions, they are indeed supposed to select a certain amount of arguments, that is complements, as well as adjectives, nouns or prepositions. 'Dependency and valency theory' has been perfected, more in detailed, in the first half of the 20th century, by the French linguist Lucien Tesnière [13], precursor of the modern grammatical dependency and valence theories [14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19]. In his main work *Eléments de syntaxe structurale*, published posthumously in 1959, he writes: "The verb expresses the process [...] The actants are human beings or things that, at any title and in any way, even by way of simple actors and in the most passive way, participate in the process" [13, p. 73].

In particular, they can select a logical subject experiencing the condition they refer to, for example, of 'cold' (холодно) or of 'joy' (весело). In these cases the subject is expressed through a non-canonical dative case, referred to the person undergoing a situation or sensation lacking a semantic agent. Example in (1a) shows the use of this non-canonical subject, referring the condition of 'cold' to the dative 'Мне', who is clearly the recipient.

Tesnière developed the further idea that there is no univocal relationship between grammatical functions and semantic roles, since the role of subject can be played, in the argument theory, not necessarily by a canonical argument. He exposes his general syntactic theory through a tripartite analysis, which considers:

- (i) number of arguments-complements necessary for the construction of grammatical sentences;
- (ii) morphological form of these complements;

(iii) roles and any semantic restrictions, evaluating possible semantic (in-)consistencies.

In more theoretical terms, he addresses the question, respectively, from three different levels of analysis:

- (i) syntax: information on the quantity and syntactic functions of each constituents, on the combinability of the various elements of the sentence;
- (ii) morphology: information on the categorical (morphological) form of the various constituents;
- (iii) semantics: information on the semantic (or thematic) roles each constituents plays in the event described by the verb (in our case by the predicative) [13].

Tab. 2 exemplifies this tripartite analysis by comparing the examples in (1) e (2), in particular with respect to their subject's argument properties:

Tab. 2 *examples of syntactic-grammatical structures with respect to their subject's argument properties*

L1/L2	Examples	Semantics	Morphology (case)	Syntax
Ru L1 Eng L2 It L2	(a) Мне холодно I'm cold (Io) ho freddo	Experiencer Experiencer Experiencer	Dative Nominative Nominative	Non-canonical sub. Canonical subject Canonical subject
Ru L1 Eng L2 It L2	(b) Мороженное холодно The ice-cream is cold Il gelato è freddo	Theme Theme Theme	Nominative Nominative Nominative	Canonical subject Canonical subject Canonical subject
Ru L1 Eng L2 It L2	(c) Вода холодеет Water gets cold L'acqua si raffredda	Patient Patient Patient	Nominative Nominative Nominative	Canonical subject Canonical subject Canonical subject
Ru L1 Eng L2 It L2	(d) Он холодно отреагировал He answered coldly Lui rispose freddamente	Agent Agent Agent	Nominative Nominative Nominative	Canonical subject Canonical subject Canonical subject

It is immediately evident that the three examples in (b/c/d) have the same grammatical structure, both in the Russian original version L1, and in the two English and Italian L2 versions. Even though semantic roles vary in L1, alternatively Theme¹ in (1b), Patient² in (1c) and Agent³ in (1d), they do not vary in the relevant L2 translations, neither does vary the argument structure for all the three different examples. All subjects are canonical ones, expressed through a nominative case, filling the canonical subject position.

As regards examples in (a), on the contrary, we note, in particular, that the Russian original foresees a logical subject (not grammatical), at the dative case (мне), bearing the semantic role of Experiencer. Moreover, we realize that the same Experiencer role can be expressed, morphologically and syntactically, in different ways in the L2 translations. Indeed, it is a subject in the nominative case both in English and in Italian, compulsory in the first case, unexpressed in the second. Furthermore, while the copula in Russian is omitted in the present, it is compulsory in English, while Italian is almost different, requiring a transitive construction through the verb 'to have' (I'm cold vs Io ho freddo). Then, while in the original version the word referring to 'cold' is a predicative, in English it is an adjective, while in Italian it is a noun. It's interesting then to note that here, in the process of translation, there is a shift in the grammatical features and syntactic structure from L1 to L2, even though the argument structure remains the same.

In conclusion, we may say that in the process of translation from L1 to L2, if for certain cases there are no particular difficulties interpreting both grammatical and semantic meaning of these sentences, in other ones translation is the result of more complex meta-linguistic operations, especially when analysing languages comparatively.

Grammatical abbreviations:

ADJ = ADJECTIVE

ADV = ADVERB

¹ The person or thing the action expressed by the verb refers to.

² The person or thing that undergoes the effect of the action expressed by the verb.

³ The person that performs the action expressed by the verb.

DAT = DATIVE (CASE)
N = NEUTER
NOM = NOMINATIVE (CASE)
PRED = PREDICATIVE (FORM)
V = VERB

References

- (1) Щерба 1974 Л.В. Щерба, *Языковая система и речевая деятельность*, Ленинград, Наука, 1974.
- (2) Циммерлинг 2003 А.В. Циммерлинг, *Предикативы и качественные наречия: классы слов и направления деривации*, in "Русистика на пороге XXI века: проблемы и перспективы: Материалы международной научной конференции (Москва, 8-10 июня 2002 г.)", Москва, 2003, pp. 54-59.
- (3) Галкина-Федорук 1939 Е. М. Галкина-Федорук, *Наречие в современном русском языке*, Москва, Московский государственный институт истории, философии и литературы, 1939.
- (4) Щерба 1957 Л.В. Щерба, *Избранные работы по русскому языку. О частях речи в русском языке*, Москва, АН СССР, 1957.
- (5) Шапиро 1955 А. Б. Шапиро, *Очерки по синтаксису русских народных говоров*, Москва, 1955.
- (6) Шапиро 1955 А. Б. Шапиро *Есть ли в русском языке категория состояния как часть речи?*, "Вопросы Языкознания", № 2, Москва 1955, pp. 42-54.
- (7) Виноградов 1972 В.В. Виноградов, *Русская грамматика*, Москва, Высшая школа, 1972.
- (8) Поспелов 1955 Н.С. Поспелов, *В защиту категории состояния*, "Вопросы языкознания", № 2, Москва, 1955, pp. 55-65.
- (9) Исаченко 1955 А.В. Исаченко, *О возникновении и развитии категории состояния в славянских языках*, "Вопросы языкознания" № 6, Москва 1955, pp. 48-65.
- (10) Тихонов 1960 А. Н. Тихонов, *Категория состояния в современном русском языке*, Самарканд, Самарканд. Гос. Ун-т, 1960.
- (11) Галкина-Федорук 1948 Е. М. Галкина-Федорук, *Безличные предложения с безлично-предикативными словами на -о*, "Ученые записки МГУ", Вып. 128, Москва, 1948, pp. 70-85.
- (12) Матханова 2001 И. П. Матханова, *Статальные ситуации и статальные предикаты*, in *Теоретические проблемы функциональной грамматики: Материалы Всероссийской научной конференции (Санкт-Петербург; 26-28 сентября 2001)*, Санкт-Петербург, Наука, 2001, pp. 69-75.
- (13) Tesnière 1959 L. Tesnière, *Éléments de syntaxe structural*, Paris, Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1959.
- (14) Comrie 1989 B. Comrie, *Language universals and linguistic typology*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1989.
- (15) Grimshaw 1990 J. Grimshaw, *Argument Structure*, Cambridge (MA), The MIT Press, 1990.
- (16) van Valin, La Polla 1997 R. D. van Valin e R. J. La Polla, *Syntax: Structure, Meaning and Function*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 97-121.
- (17) Salvi e Vanelli 2004 G. Salvi, L. Vanelli, *Nuova grammatica italiana*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2004.
- (18) Donati 2008 C. Donati, *La sintassi. Regole e strutture*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2008.
- (19) De Santis 2016 C. De Santis, *Che cos'è la grammatica valenziale*, Roma, Carocci, 2016.