

# RUSSIAN ZERO COPULAS AND LEXICAL VERBS: SIMILAR OR DIFFERENT?

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**ABSTRACT:** The article is focused on Russian constructions with zero copulas. I test constructions with zero copulas for compatibility with different syntactic contexts to find out whether their syntactic behavior differs significantly from that of lexical verbs. The diagnostics used in the paper include occurrence in relative and temporal clauses, compatibility with particles, and adverbials / adverbial constructions. The differences between the zero copulas and lexical verbs turn out to be of two types: a copula allows some uses, prohibited for lexical verbs, and, in contrast, is impossible in other constructions where lexical verbs can participate. The differences are due to two properties of copulas: (1) lack of morphologically-marked categories and (2) lack of a lexical stem. Different types of copulas as distinguished by Testelets (2008) behave differently in syntactic tests, but the picture cannot be reduced to Testelets' two classes of copulas (binominative and non-binominative ones).

**KEYWORDS:** adjunct clauses, absolute tense interpretation, relative tense interpretation, Russian, zero copula.

## 1. INTRODUCTION\*

Russian (East Slavic) has two types of copulas: a morphologically expressed one and a zero one. Pustet (2003) shows that this type of variance is typologically rather widespread. According to Stassen (2013), Russian belongs to the group of 175 out of 386 languages in the sample with a zero copula. This means that languages with zero copula make up about 45% of the sample. In

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Russian, the zero copula is used in the present tense, while future and past contexts require a lexically expressed form of the verb *byt'* 'be'.

Following Pustet (2003: 5) and others, I define a copula as a semantically empty means of relating elements of clauses, most typically a subject and a complement. Another function of the copula element is to express predicative categories (e.g., absolute tense and mood) in the absence of a canonical verb. Sometimes the predicate in locative constructions like 'Peter is in London' is regarded as a special locative predicate, not a copula. In what follows, I ignore divisions of this type. The zero copula in languages like Russian is postulated due not only to the general condition that all sentences have a predicate, but also to the parallelism between the zero copula in the present indicative and explicit forms in other tenses and moods.

Problems of copula description are given much attention in linguistic research (see, inter alia, Pustet 2003, Adamou & Costauoec 2010 on the typology of copular constructions). In the Russian grammatical tradition, the main research problems related to copulas appear to be (1) distribution of zero vs. non-zero copulas and (2) semantics of copula constructions. For the first domain of research, it is important that the copula verb *byt'* 'be', along with lexical past and future tense verbs, also has a lexical present tense form *est'*, which can be used in all persons (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>) and numbers (SG, PL). The distribution of the zero copula vs. the lexical form is really far from trivial (see Kondrašova 1996 and Beaver et al. 2006 on the use of *est'* in existential contexts).<sup>1</sup> The second domain of research that has received much attention, the semantics of copular constructions, was explored, among others, by Peškovskij (1928), Širjaev (1967), Arutjunova & Shirjaev (1983), Weiss (1993) and Junghans (1997). I will adopt the classification proposed by Testelets (2008), which includes the following types of zero copula constructions:

- I. EXISTENTIAL: *V stakane moloko* [in glass.SG.LOC milk.NOM] 'In the glass is (some) milk'.
- II. IDENTIFYING: *Ubijca - Raskol'nikov* [murderer.SG.NOM Raskol'nikov.SG.NOM] 'The murderer is Raskol'nikov'.
- III. CHARACTERIZING:
  - a. TAXONOMIC: *Ivan - student* [Ivan.SG.NOM student.SG.NOM] 'Ivan is a student'
  - b. RELATIONAL: *Polina - moja sestra* [Polina.SG.NOM my.F.SG.NOM sister.SG.NOM] 'Polina is my sister'
- IV. CHARACTERIZING WITH FULL FORM OF ADJECTIVE: *On staryj* [he.NOM old.M.SG.NOM] 'He is old'

<sup>1</sup> The status of the Russian pronoun *eto* is not obvious, though it is sometimes regarded as another copular element.

- V. CHARACTERIZING WITH SHORT FORM OF ADJECTIVE: *On star* [he.NOM old.BREV.M.SG] ‘He is old’
- VI. LOCATIVE: *Sumka na stole* [bag.SG.NOM on table.SG.LOC] ‘The bag is on the table’
- VII. POSSESSIVE: *U Poliny èkzamen* [at Polina.SG.GEN exam.SG.NOM] ‘Polina has an exam’ (lit. at Polina exam)
- VIII. TEMPORAL: *Koncert segodnja* [concert.SG.NOM today] ‘The concert is today’
- IX. TEMPORAL WITH PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES: *Konferencija v sledujuščem godu* [conference.SG.NOM in following.M.SG.LOC year.SG.LOC2] ‘The conference is / will be the next year’

I further add one type to the list above: namely, constructions with predicative adverbials and PPs, which are called PREDICATIVES [*predikativy*] in the Russian grammatical tradition. This type is discussed by Testeleets but is not included in the list. It is represented by sentences like *Mne ploxo* ‘I feel bad’ (lit. to me is bad), where *ploxo* is used as a non-verbal predicate with a zero copula, and *Ja ne v sostojanii èto sdelat’* ‘I cannot do it’ (lit. I am not in the state to do it). Testeleets (2008) further shows that the behavior of negation divides the types of zero copula constructions into two large groups:

- 1) Constructions where there is a nominative constituent both in the subject and in the predicate position, termed *binominative* constructions. Type V (constructions with short forms of adjectives) are also included in this group, though short forms are not marked for case. Identification constructions (type II), which contain two nominative constituents, are not included here.
- 2) All the other construction types.

For instance, Testeleets argues that only the first group (i.e., classes III, IV and V in Testeleets’ classification) allows so-called negative concord constructions of the type *nikto ne krasiv* [nobody.NOM NEG beautiful.BREV.M.SG] ‘nobody is beautiful’. The second group does not allow them.

In what follows, I will show that the dichotomy of the two classes does not account for all aspects of the copula behavior of zero copula constructions. For some languages, the problem of differing behaviors of copulas vs. lexical verbs has already been addressed. For instance, Citko (2005) proposes that a special kind of functional head must be postulated for Polish constructions with the copular pronoun *to* due to some peculiarities in its syntactic behavior. For instance, if an embedded clause contains a copula construction (‘He thinks that physics is the most interesting thing in the world’), no question regarding the embedded clause of the type ‘What do you think that physics is’ is possible (see also Franks & Greenberg 1994, Rothstein 2004, etc. for a discussion on special properties of copula constructions).

The Russian data are mainly taken from the Russian National Corpus ([www.ruscorpora.ru](http://www.ruscorpora.ru)) or Google. Some examples are elicited and tested against my own native speaker intuition and other native speakers' judgments. The remaining sections are organized as follows. In Sections 2.2 to 2.7, I discuss the behavior of the zero copula in complex sentences, where it violates some restrictions, valid for lexical verbs. The range of contexts includes some types of temporal and relative clauses and the construction meaning 'the more X, the more Y'. Sections 3.1 and 3.2 are focused on contexts where the use of the zero copula is either prohibited or restricted, namely *praesens historicum* and fixed and semi-fixed combinations with the particle *i* 'and'. In Section 4, I summarize the differences between the zero copula and lexical verbs.

## 2. POLYPREDICATION: LIBERAL BEHAVIOR OF THE ZERO COPULA

In polypredicative constructions, copulas differ from lexical verbs in their use of tense forms. In what follows, I first sketch the way Russian subordinate clauses are marked for tense before switching to zero copulas.

### 2.1 Tense marking in Russian subordinate clauses

Russian delimits argument embedded clauses from adjunct clauses by using different strategies for tense marking in subordinate clauses. In adjunct clauses, absolute tense marking is used. In other words, the past tense form indicates that the event preceded the speech act, whereas the present tense denotes the simultaneity of the event and the speech act; finally, the future tense signifies the fact that the event will follow the speech act.<sup>2</sup> For example, in (1), the future tense denotes that the event in the adjunct clause will follow the speech act:

- (1) *Ja pried-u                    kogda zakonč-u                    rabot-u.*  
 I    come-FUT.1SG    when    finish-FUT.1SG    job-SG.ACC  
 'I will come when I finish with my job / when I am finished with my job.'

Contrastingly, in argument clauses, both relative and absolute tense marking is possible. Under the relative interpretation, the event in the embedded clause is anchored to the 'main' event in the matrix clause. When past tense forms are used, the event is described as preceding the main event.

<sup>2</sup> I do not go into detail concerning the notion of simultaneity and its applicability to generic contexts like *When I went to school, my father was already a professor.*

The present tense denotes the simultaneity of the embedded event to the main one. Finally, the future tense marking is understood to localize the event as happening after the main one. The absolute interpretation is the same as in adjunct clauses such as (1). In (2), where the matrix verb *znat* 'know' is marked for past tense, the embedded verb *pereživat* 'worry' can either be in the past or the present with the same meaning: the mental state *znal* '(I) knew' takes place at the very moment when the embedded situation *bolet* 'be ill' occurs. In the first version, the present tense has a relative reading (simultaneity to the matrix clause event). In the second version, the past tense is interpreted absolutely (precedence to the speech act):

- (2) *Ja zna-l-Ø što on bole-et/bole-l-Ø.*  
 I.NOM know-PST-SG.M that he.NOM be.ill-PRS.3SG/be.ill-PST-SG.M  
 'I knew that he was ill.'

In what follows, I will show that the zero copula, contrary to lexical verbs, can have a relative, and not absolute, interpretation in adjunct clauses.

## 2.2 Temporal clauses with the zero copula

In clauses with temporal subordinators *poka* and *kogda*, the zero copula can be used, even if the main verb is marked for past tense. Example (3) is found via a Google search, while (4) is composed and accepted by 66,67% (20 of 30) of native speakers:

- (3) *E-l-a poka ego doma net.*  
 eat-PST-SG.F while he.GEN at.home no  
 '(I) ate while he was not at home.'
- (4) *Ona obyčno gotovi-l-a ed-u*  
 she.NOM usually prepare-PST-SG.F food-SG.ACC  
*poka muž-Ø na rabot-e.*  
 while husband-SG.NOM at job-SG.LOC  
 'Usually she cooked when her husband was at work.'

No parallel construction seems to be possible with lexical verbs. For instance, in (5), the change of the construction to something like 'while he is gathering his things to go to work' yields a stylistically poor or even ungrammatical sentence. This impression is confirmed by the native speakers' judgments of (5), which is parallel to (4) in all components except for the presence of the lexical verb *sobiraetsja* 'prepares himself':

- (5) *??Ona obyčno gotovi-l-a ed-u*  
 she.NOM usually prepare-PST-SG.F food-SG.ACC  
*poka muž-Ø sobira-et-sja na robot-u.*  
 while husband-SG.NOM prepare-PRS.3SG-REFL at job-SG.ACC  
 Intended: 'Usually she cooked when her husband was preparing to go to work.'

Contrary to (4), only 33,3% of native speakers (10 of 30 native speakers) regarded (5) as correct. What makes (5) unacceptable is the 'illegal' (relative) interpretation of the tense form. Since the marker *poka* denotes simultaneity of the two events, and the main clause contains a past tense form, the embedded clause should also contain a past tense form. It turns out that the rule of absolute tense marking in adjunct clauses can be violated by the zero copula, which is interpreted relatively in (4) and denotes simultaneity to the main event (*gotovila* '(she) prepared') in the past. The default temporal subordinator *kogda* 'when' also allows for the 'illegal' relative interpretation of the zero copula (6) and prohibits the same in present tense forms of lexical verbs (7):

- (6) *On kogda pjan-yj neupravljaem-yj*  
 he.NOM when drunk-M.SG.NOM uncontrollable-M.SG.NOM  
*by-l-Ø sovsem.*  
 be-PST-SG.M totally  
 Intended: 'He was totally uncontrollable when he became drunk.'
- (7) *\*On kogda stanov-it-sja pjan-yj*  
 he.NOM when become-PRS.3SG-REFL drunk-M.SG.NOM ...  
*neupravljaem-yj by-l-Ø sovsem.*  
 uncontrollable-M.SG.NOM be-PST-SG.M totally  
 Intended: 'He was totally uncontrollable when he became drunk.'

### 2.3 A remark on Stage-Level vs. Individual-Level predicates

The data representing the 'illegal' relative interpretation proves that Stage-Level vs. Individual-Level properties are relevant for the tense choice in copula constructions. Carlson (1977) introduced the idea of a contrast between Stage-Level and Individual-Level predicates. Individual-Level predicates introduce essential and permanent properties of the participant, which characterize the participant in the whole reference period and are not seen as variable (e.g., if a person or a thing is beautiful, we expect it to retain this property). In contrast, properties coded by Stage-Level predicates are able to change a number of times over time (a person who is drunk can become sober and then drunk again). The Stage-Level vs. Individual-Level distinction is shown to be relevant for numerous language processes and phenomena:

for instance, according to Carlson (1977: 124ff), English constructions like *John saw the president naked* are only acceptable with Stage-Level predicates. This is why examples like *John saw the president intelligent*, with an Individual-Level predicate are semantically (and grammatically) unacceptable. The distinction is also relevant for the copula choice in some languages, e.g. *ser* vs. *estar* in Spanish (see Escandell & Leonetti 2002 and Marín 2000, 2004 for details). In the adjective types of zero copula constructions which are tolerant to the ‘illegal’ zero copula with a relative reading, the zero copula is mainly used with Stage-Level predicates such as *pjanyj* ‘drunk’. The same is impossible or dubitable with Individual-Level predicates like *krasivyj* ‘beautiful’: they normally require absolute tense marking. The locative type of copula constructions also allow for relative tense marking (see (3) with the adverb *doma* ‘at home’). The same type of relative tense interpretation, however, is impossible with the taxonomic type of copula constructions:

- (8) \**On by-l-Ø sportsmen-om poka on student-Ø.*  
 he.NOM be-PST-SG.M sportsman-SG.INS while he.NOM student-SG.NOM  
 Intended: ‘He was a sportsman when he was a student.’

The example in (8) becomes acceptable if we change the zero copula to the past tense form of copula *byl* ‘(he) was’.

Table 1 below indicates those types of copulas that can have the ‘illegal’ relative interpretation in temporal clauses.

TYPE OF COPULA CONSTRUCTION	POSSIBILITY OF RELATIVE TENSE INTERPRETATION
existential	+?
identifying	-
taxonomic	-
relational	-
characterizing with full form of adjective	+
characterizing with short form of adjective	+
locative	+
possessive	-
temporal	not applicable
predicative	+

TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF ZERO COPULA TYPES WITH AN ‘ILLEGAL’ RELATIVE INTERPRETATION IN TEMPORAL ADJUNCT CLAUSES.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> + means that the particular type of copula with the ‘illegal’ relative interpretation is possible either in constructions with *poka* ‘while’, or with *kogda* ‘when’. The two subordinators are not distinguished here.

Notably, the two subtypes of copulas distinguished by Testeletts do not account for the variation in temporal clauses. For instance, the types of binominative constructions with an adjective in the predicate position are compatible with the ‘illegal’ zero copula, while other binominative constructions (taxonomic, relational) prohibit this. The Stage-Level vs. Individual-Level distinction seems to better predict the copula behavior: the locative and predicative types, as well as some constructions with an adjective, tend to have a Stage-Level interpretation (location or mental state are prototypically Stage-Level properties).

#### 2.4 Relative clauses

Constructions with an ‘illegal’ relative interpretation are also found in relative clauses. In Russian, the most stylistically neutral and textually frequent relativization marker is *kotoryj* ‘which’. It is used in various types of relative clauses. In (9), *kotoryj* is used in a restrictive relative clause:

- (9) *Vot kniga, o kotor-oj ja mečta-l-Ø*  
 PART book-SG.NOM of which-F.SG.LOC I.NOM dream-PST-SG.M  
 ‘It is a book which I dreamt about.’

At the same time, there are several alternative relativization strategies. One of them employs the marker *čto* ‘which, that’, which is mainly used as an interrogative pronoun ‘what’ but is highly polysemic. This marker (just as *kotoryj*) can be used either with or without a pronoun *tot* ‘that’ in the main clause:

- (10) *(Te) ljudi čto èt-ogo ne ponimaj-ut...*  
 that-PL.NOM people.PL.NOM that it-GEN not understand-PRS.3PL  
 ‘Those people who do not understand it....’

The ‘illegal’ zero copula use is found in constructions with *tot* ‘that’ + *čto* ‘which’:

- (11) *Tot čto v kresl-e podnja-l-Ø ruk-u.*  
 that.M.SG.NOM that in armchair-SG.LOC raise-PST-SG.M hand-SG.ACC  
 ‘The person who was (lit. is) in the armchair raised his hand.’

In (11), the matrix clause contains a past tense form: someone raised his hand in past. In the embedded clause, the zero copula is interpreted relatively, denoting a situation simultaneous to the main one. This interpretation is not possible for present tense forms of lexical verbs. Example (12) presupposes that the person who raised his hand still sits in the armchair at the moment of speech (i.e., the present tense of the lexical verb can only be interpreted absolutely):



- (12) *Tot čto sid-it v kresl-e*  
 that.M.SG.NOM that sit-PRS.3SG in armchair-SG.LOC  
*podnja-l-Ø ruk-u.*  
 raise-PST-SG.M hand-SG.ACC  
 ‘The person who sits (when I am saying that) in the armchair raised his hand.’

Only certain copula types are possible with the ‘illegal’ relative interpretation in relative clauses. For instance, the identifying, existential, possessive and taxonomic types rarely occur in relative clauses in general and seem to never be found with the illegal zero copula. In contrast, characterizing constructions with a comparative degree of adjectives can also be used with a zero copula interpreted relatively (in (13), we find the comparative form). Other degree forms are used more rarely:

- (13) *Tot čto starše vs-ex posovetova-l-Ø*  
 that.M.SG.NOM that old.COMPAR all-PL.GEN advise-PST-SG.M  
*mne id-ti otsjuda*  
 I.DAT go-INF from.here  
 ‘The person who (was) the oldest advised me to go away.’

TYPE OF COPULA CONSTRUCTION	POSSIBILITY OF RELATIVE TENSE INTERPRETATION
existential <sup>4</sup>	-
identifying	-
taxonomic	- or very rarely
relational	-
characterizing with full form	+ comparative degree, other forms are rarely found
characterizing with short form	
locative	+
possessive	-
temporal	- or very rarely
temporal with prepositional phrases	-
predicative	-

TABLE 2. DISTRIBUTION OF ZERO COPULA TYPES WITH AN ‘ILLEGAL’ RELATIVE INTERPRETATION IN RELATIVE CLAUSES.

In other words, the behavior of zero copulas in relative clauses is not predictable from Testelet’s subclasses either. The three classes which tend to be compatible with ‘illegal’ zero copulas are characterizing sentences with short and long forms of adjectives (binominative subtype), and locative constructions (non-binominative subtype). Other constructions of the two subtypes do not allow for the relative interpretation.

<sup>4</sup> Since the subject NP in existential constructions typically has a non-specific interpretation, it tends to not be a controller of relative clauses. Constructions like ‘The milk which is / was in the glass’ have another interpretation: ‘The specific milk which we know was in the glass’.

2.5 *čem ... tem* ('the more ..., the more') construction

Finally, the construction using the marker *čem ... tem* 'the more (+ comparative) ..., the more + (comparative)' is also compatible with an 'illegal' zero copula. Normally, the tense in both parts of the *čem ... tem* construction is interpreted absolutely, as in the first variant of (14). In the second variant, the present tense *sobiraetsja* 'gathers' cannot be interpreted relatively, and the sentence is senseless:

- (14) *Čem bol'se*                    *sobira-l-o-s'*                    / \**sobira-et-sja*  
 more many.COMPAR gather-PST-SG.N-REFL / \*gather-PST-SG.N-REFL  
*ljud-ej,*                    *tem stanovi-l-o-s'*                    *xuže.*  
 people-PL.GEN more become-PST-SG.N-REFL bad.COMPAR  
 'The more people came, the worse the situation became.'

However, with a zero copula, this restriction is negated. The part with *čem* can contain a zero copula, interpreted relatively: in (15), the zero copula construction *čem xolodn-ee* 'the colder it is' denotes that the situation is simultaneous to another one. The lexical form *bylo* 'was' with the absolute interpretation is also possible in this example:

- (15) *Čem xolodn-ee*                    (*by-l-o*),  
 more cold-COMPAR be-PST-SG.N  
*tem dol'se*                    *zavodi-l-a-s'*                    *mašin-a*  
 more long.COMPAR switch.on-PST-SG.F-REFL car-SG.NOM  
 'The colder it was (lit. is), the more time it took to switch on the car.'

The *čem ... tem* construction is only possible with those types of copula that are compatible with a comparative degree, namely, the characterizing and 'predicative' types. 'Illegal' zero copulas are mainly used with predicatives, as in (15), although examples with adjectives are also sometimes found:

- (16) *Čem ja*                    *starše*                    *tem bol'se*  
 more I.NOM old.COMPAR more many.COMPAR  
*pryšč-ej*                    *stanovi-l-o-s'*.  
 pimple-PL.GEN become-PST-SG.N-REFL  
 'The older I was (lit. am), the more pimples I had.'

TYPE OF COPULA CONSTRUCTION	POSSIBILITY OF RELATIVE TENSE INTERPRETATION
predicatives	+
adjectives	+

TABLE 3. DISTRIBUTION OF ZERO COPULA TYPES IN 'THE MORE ..., THE MORE ...' CONSTRUCTION.

## 2.6 'Illegal' zero copula and clausality

The (im)possibility of 'illegal' zero copulas being interpreted relatively, in terms of simultaneity to the main event, correlates with another parameter: this interpretation is easier if the copula construction does not show the whole set of clausal properties. An important piece of evidence for this claim comes from adverbial modification. In many cases, the construction with an 'illegal' zero copula differs from its minimal pair with a past tense form *by-l-* 'was' in that it is impossible for adverbials to modify the copula construction. For instance, in 'the more ... the more' construction, a temporal adjunct can only be added if there is an explicit past tense form, as in (18). In (17), a zero copula construction with an adjunct is ungrammatical:

- (17) \**Čem xolodn-ee t-oj zim-oj*  
 more cold-COMPAR that-SG.INS winter-SG.INS  
*tem dol'se zavodi-l-a-s'*  
 the.more long-COMPAR switch.on-PST-SG.F-REFL  
 'The colder it was that winter, the more time it took to switch on (the car).'
- (18) *Čem xolodn-ee by-l-o t-oj zim-oj*  
 the.more cold-COMPAR be-PST-SG.N that-SG.INS winter-SG.INS  
*tem dol'se zavodi-l-a-s'*  
 the.more long-COMPAR switch.on-PST-SG.F-REFL  
 'The colder it was that winter, the more time it took to switch on (the car).'

The impossibility of (17) cannot result from incompatibility of the adverbial with present tense forms in general. Adverbials like *toj zimoj* 'that winter', which normally denote past events, are compatible with present tense forms in *praesens historicum*, as in (19).

- (19) *Idu včera viž-u sto-it Petj-a.*  
 go-PRS.1SG yesterday see-PRS-1SG stand-PRS.3SG Petja-SG.NOM  
 'Yesterday while I was walking I suddenly saw Petja standing down there.'

Thus, (17) is ungrammatical due to the fact that the embedded copula construction does not show the full set of clausal features – it cannot contain its own adjuncts, contrary to the construction with *by-l-* 'was' in (18).

Certain other contexts of 'illegal' zero copula have this same feature. For instance, in (11), it is impossible to add (in the relevant meaning) any adjunct to the relative clause with a copula – either with past tense reference, e.g. *togda* 'then', or with present tense reference, such as *sejčas* 'now'.

## 2.7 Conclusions of Section 2

In Section 2, I addressed cases when (certain) types of zero copula are possible, while explicit present tense forms of lexical verbs are impossible. Whereas normally in these contexts in Russian the tense in the embedded clause is interpreted absolutely, in embedded clauses, the zero copula can be interpreted as an expression of the relative present tense (simultaneity to the main event). This peculiarity of the zero copula seems to result from the lack of overt tense marking on the zero copula. While lexical verbs are explicitly marked for tense, zero copulas do not contain any explicit markers. In this sense, they do not come into conflict with the main verb form if the latter is marked for past tense.

Another factor that facilitates the appearance of an ‘illegal’ zero copula is the lack of some properties of the clause in the part of sentence where the copula occurs. Clauses with a zero copula exhibiting an ‘illegal’ relative interpretation cannot take adjuncts and thus drift toward non-sentential adjuncts. The two subclasses distinguished by Testelet (2008) do not account for the whole variety of properties of zero copulas. Taxonomic constructions like ‘Peter is a student’ do not allow ‘illegal’ zero copulas, whilst characteristic constructions of the type ‘Peter is ill’ admit them, even though both constructions belong to the binominative type referred to in Testelet’s terminology.

## 3. CONSTRUCTIONS WHERE COPULA USE IS PROHIBITED OR RESTRICTED

### 3.1 *Praesens historicum*

One of the contexts where the use of the zero copula is restricted is in the *praesens historicum*. In Russian, the present tense is widely used to denote past events (see Kuznetsov 1949 and Panzer 1963 for the Russian data, and Stunová 1994 for a comparison between Russian and Czech). The use of *praesens historicum* can be illustrated by the following example:

- (20) *V*    *ét-o*                      *vremj-a*                      *pisatel’-Ø*  
 in    this-N.SG.ACC            time-SG.ACC            writer-SG.NOM  
*uže*            *znamenit’-Ø*.  
 already    famous-BREV.SG.M  
 ‘By this time, the writer was (lit. is) already famous.’

In general, zero copula constructions are compatible with the *praesens historicum*: e.g., (21) contains a construction with a locative adverbial:

- (21) *Prixož-u,*            *Vasj-a*                      *doma*.  
 come-PRS.1SG    Vasja-SG.NOM    home  
 ‘When I came, Vasja was at home (lit. I come, Vasja is at home).’

However, some constructions with zero copula and the *praesens historicum* are definitely ungrammatical. Combinations of zero copulas with adverbials of frequency, such as *často* ‘often’, *neredko* ‘not rarely, often’, *postojanno* ‘consistently’, *vremja ot vremeni* ‘from time to time’ are examples of this point. In some of these expressions, the zero copula is fully prohibited. There are expressions, however, which can be used with the zero copula, but not in the *praesens historicum*. For example, the adverb *postojanno* ‘consistently, continuously’ is freely used both with lexical verb forms and with the zero copula in the standard interpretation of the present tense. However, the adverbial becomes ungrammatical if the zero copula is used in the context of the *praesens historicum*, as in (22). Parallel examples like (23) with the lexical verb *žit* ‘live’ are grammatically correct:

- (22) \**V* *ét-o* *vremj-a* *pisatel'nic-a*  
 at this-N.SG.ACC time-SG.ACC woman.writer-SG.NOM  
*postojanno* *v* *Moskv-e*.  
 constantly in Moscow-SG.LOC  
 Intended: ‘At this time (in past), the writer constantly lives in Moscow.’
- (23) *V* *ét-o* *vremj-a* *pisatel'nic-a*  
 at this-N.SG.ACC time-SG.ACC woman.writer-SG.NOM  
*postojanno* *živ-et* *v* *Moskv-e*.  
 constantly live-PRS.3SG in Moscow-SG.LOC  
 ‘At this time (in past), the writer constantly lives in Moscow.’

The restrictedness of the copula use in the *praesens historicum* interpretation could be a result of the absence of morphological markers. The *praesens historicum* interpretation is determined by the general strategy employed by the speaker: this strategy manifests itself clearly in the parallelism of the temporal forms of verbs. The zero copula shows no parallelism to lexical verbs, since it does not contain the same present tense markers as lexical verbs. There is a group of expressions where restrictions on the use of the zero copula are more evident, namely, expressions containing the particle *i*.

### 3.2 Constructions with the particle *i*

The marker *i* is the default and most frequent coordination marker in Russian. It can be used both for clausal coordination (*Dver' otkrylas', i vošla moja mat'* ‘The door opened and my mother entered’) and NP coordination (*Petja i Polina* ‘Petja and Polina’). At the same time, *i* is used as a particle, occurring either separately or as an element of a phraseological unit. The latter class includes, for instance, *tak i* ‘still’ and *tol'ko i* ‘only’. Both ex-

pressions are nearly incompatible with zero copula constructions, but the precise rules are different for the two units.

In the expression *tol'ko i*, all zero copula constructions from Testeleťs' (2008) list are prohibited (cf. a characterizing construction in (24a)), while their variants with the lexical form of the copula *byl* 'was', as in (24b), are acceptable:

- (24) a. \**Tol'ko Petj-a i trezv-yj.*  
 only Petja-SG.NOM and sober-M.SG.NOM  
 Intended: 'Only Petja is sober.'
- b. *Tol'ko Petj-a i by-l-Ø trezv-yj.*  
 only Petja-SG.NOM and be-PST-SG.M sober-M.SG.NOM  
 'Only Petja was sober.'<sup>5</sup>

In contrast, the class of 'predicatives' such as *ploxo* 'bad(ly)', *možno* 'possible (possibly)' and 'predicative PPs' such as *v sostojanii* 'capable' (lit. in state), *v kurse* 'aware' (lit. in course) are compatible with this unit:

- (25) *Tol'ko et-im i možno ix ob'jedini-t'.*  
 only this-SG.INS and possible.PREDIC they.ACC unite-INF  
 'It is only by this thing that they can be united.'

The construction *tak i* 'still' (lit. so and) is organized more simply: it seems to be incompatible with all copula types, even with predicatives, as in (27).

- (26) \**Ty tak i v Moskv-e?*  
 you.NOM so and in Moscow-SG.LOC  
 Intended: 'Are you still in Moscow?'
- (27) \**Tebe tak i ploxo?*  
 you.DAT so and bad.PREDIC  
 Intended: 'Are you still feeling bad?'

The fact that many combinations of the particle *i* with the zero copula are ungrammatical seems to result from the clitic status of the particle *i*. It seems to require a stressed lexical element as an anchor, and the zero copula lacks any lexical material. A problem which I cannot account for to date is that the two constructions under analysis differ in their compatibility with 'predicatives'.

<sup>5</sup> The word *tol'ko* 'only' without the particle *i* is compatible with all types of zero copula constructions.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The article focused on specific properties of zero copula constructions. Surprisingly, zero copula constructions differ in many respects from constructions with lexical verbs. Two types of differences between the zero copula and lexical verbs are found in Russian. First, there are constructions where the zero copulas do not obey restrictions that are valid for lexical verbs: certain types of adjunct and relative dependent clauses where the zero copula can be interpreted relatively ('the event takes place simultaneously to the main event') are examples of this, while lexical verbs only allow for an absolute interpretation. Second, constructions where the use of the zero copula is restricted or prohibited can be found equally. They include the *praesens historicum*, expressions of frequency, and combinations with the particle *i*. Both types of differences are the result of certain features of zero copulas. On the one hand, zero copulas do not show explicit tense marking, this is why their 'relative' use in adjunct clauses does not conflict with the tense form of the main verb. On the other hand, zero copulas lack an overt lexical stem. This fact leads to the ungrammatical nature or the restricted use of a zero copula in certain contexts, for instance, in combinations with the particle *i*, which is a clitic and needs a lexical stressed stem as an anchor.

An interesting contrast emerges between the possibility of the zero copula with a relative interpretation in adjunct and relative clauses (Sections 2.2 through 2.5) and the impossibility of some zero copula constructions in the *praesens historicum* (Section 3.1). The lack of morphological categories allows zero copulas to be interpreted relatively, based on the interpretation of the main clause. The *praesens historicum* interpretation is not based on any precise context element such as, for instance, the main verb, but follows from the general speaker's strategy and the parallelism of verb forms. This interpretation is often blocked due to the fact that the zero copula is not morphologically parallel to other present tense forms. The 'illegal' relative interpretation of the zero copula may result from a re-analysis of copula constructions. I showed that clauses attesting an interpretation for zero copulas that is unavailable to the present tense of lexical verbs exhibit some signs of non-clausality (they cannot contain their own adjuncts). In such cases, the copula construction is perhaps re-interpreted as a non-sentential adverb. Notably, the opposition of two subtypes of zero copula constructions, as distinguished by Testelet (2008), seems to be relevant to but insufficient for their comprehensive description. The 'illegal' relative interpretation of a zero copula is much more felicitous with adjective characterizing constructions than with NP taxonomic constructions, both of which are of the 'binominative' type in Testelet's terms. The Stage-Level vs. Individual-Level opposition is even more relevant to the (im)possibility of cer-

tain copula constructions (mainly Stage-Level predicates are felicitous with ‘illegal’ zero copulas).

I conclude that Russian zero copula constructions significantly differ from constructions with lexical verbs. Many, though not all, features of the copula result mainly from two facts: (i) zero copulas lack a lexical head which could serve as an anchor for clitics; (ii) zero copulas lack morphological TAM markers which can conflict with the TAM markers of other lexical verbs or participate in context-dependent interpretations.

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