

# Case and agreement patterns in Northern Russian participial constructions in *-n-/-t-*

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## 1. Relevant data and literature on the topic

Several proposals have been put forward, in recent generative literature, to account for constructions of the type in (1) and (2) that are found in several Northern Russian dialects and were first discussed by Timberlake (1976). In these participial sentences the external argument corresponds to a locative PP while the internal argument can either be NOM, as in (1), or ACC, as in (2). In both cases the “participle” has the invariable *-n-o/-t-o* Neuter inflection or, in some dialects, the Masculine inflection in *-n-Ø/-t-Ø*, (in the latter case licensing only NOM morphology on the the internal argument, as in (3)).

- (1) *U lisicy unese-n-o kuročk-a*  
 at fox-GEN carry off-prtc pst pass-neut chicken-NOM fem sg  
 ‘A fox has carried off a chicken’ (Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971 [=KN]:27)
- (2) *U bat'k-i u tvo-ego saže-n-o berězk-u*  
 at father-GEN at yours-GEN plant-prtc pst pass-neut birch-ACC fem sg  
 ‘Your father has planted a birch’ / ‘A birch has been planted by you father’ (KN: 38)
- (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)

Other dialects display agreement of the participle in gender and number with the argument in NOM, yielding the more canonical passive structure of (4).

- (4) *U nej by-l-a privede-n-a snoch-a*  
 at her be-pst-fem sg bring-prtc pst pass-fem sg daughter in law-NOM fem sg  
 ‘the daughter-in-law was brought by her’ (KN: 20)

Many proposals rely on the notion of “quirky subject” for the sentence-initial locative PP (Lavine 1999; cf. also Rivero & Savchenko 2005 about anticausative constructions in Standard Russian) and/or see it as an “ergative subject” generated in an intermediate projection between TP and VP (Jung 2009), in a way similar to accounts proposed for infinitival dative construction of the type *Mne uxodit'* (Sigurðsson 2002) or for *-no/-to* constructions in Polish and Ukrainian (Lavine 2005).

However, these proposals, in assigning the *u*+GEN locative PP the role of subject of the sentence, seem not to take into account that this PP may be omitted, thus allowing impersonal or genuinely passive readings, as in (5). Moreover, the variation across different dialects with respect to the morphological case of the the internal object is hardly taken into account (cf. Jung 2009), such as the different agreement patterns with copula in past-tense sentences (cf. the contrast between (5) – copula agreeing with the participle – and (6) – copula agreeing with NP in NOM).

- (5) *Pereecha-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)
- (6) *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)

## 2. Proposal

We will work in a framework of unification of morphology and syntax (e.g. Manzini & Savoia 2007; Kayne 2010) adopting 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 (5)-(6), 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.

Before considering the various patters in (1)-(4) and (5)-(6) 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 ‘ergative’ or to be more precise ‘active’ languages). Consider then (1) (and (5)-(6) as well) where the

(7)  $[_{IP} [_{I} \text{ unesen}_{(x,y)}] [_{D} \text{ o}_{(y)}]] [_{DP} \text{ kuročka}_{(y)}]]$

(8) *Il vient des enfants*

We are left with examples of the type in (2), where the internal argument shows up as ACC. The presence of ACC case in an environment with apparently no overt agent nominal is reminiscent of existential constructions in some languages, like Spanish (9) (cf. the ACC clitic in (9b))

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