In favor of an abstract copula in Russian

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Proposal
- there is no lexical copula in Russian (and other North Slavic languages)
- there is ‘only’ an abstract copula meaning
- the latter is stored in the mental lexicon as an infinitival verbal head without phonetic form
- it follows that the overt forms of być do not represent the copula
- rather, they are auxiliaries to spell out finiteness and agreement features
- Instrumental case is optionally assigned to the predicate nominal by this abstract head
- case marking on the predicate nominal is disconnected from the forms of być

Advantages
- allowing a unified treatment of all forms of Russian być “to be”
- defining the notion of “predication” in semantic/referential terms (implying a straightforward connection to the lexical category of Verbs and to the grammatical categories of Mood and Tense)
- avoiding specialized categories for “predication” such as:
  - PredRef (Bowers 1993; Bailyn 2001, 2012; Bondaruk 2013); PredEv (Markman 2008);
  - Ref (den Dikken 2006); v* (Geist 2006); π* (Citoč 2008)
- following Minimalist assumptions (in the literal sense)
- clearly distinguishing “auxiliary” from “copula”
- no need for a separate lexical entity involved in secondary predication

Lexical Entry

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Syntax

(2) CP > IP … (NegP) > VP* (> XP)

CP Sentence Mood and Sentence Type
IP Verbal Mood and Tense
NegP Sentential Negation (if present)
VP descriptive content (predicate) and argument expressions
VP* more than one VP is possible (periphrastic forms, copular structures: VP, … > … VP)
XP only in copular sentence: predicate expression (with X ∈ {A,N,P})

(3) [VP … V_AUX [VP ∅_COP XP_PRED]]

XP_PRED predicate expression
∅_COP abstract copula meaning
V_AUX tense auxiliary (inflected form of być)

- Haider (1988): in syntax, Matching of Projections might take place
- Matching means that empty projections fuse with similar categories located above in the structure (‘telescope’)
- hence, the structure in (3) could match (⇒a) as shown in (4):

(4) [VP … V_AUX [VP ∅_COP XP_PRED]] ⇒la [VP … V_AUX+COP XP_PRED]

- the forms of być are auxiliaries by nature, but they may ‘incorporate’ the abstract copula meaning by syntactic Matching
- in copular sentences, a być-form combines the copula semantics (situation reference) with the function of a Tense auxiliary
- thus, the forms of być can eventually have the following ‘meanings’, depending on the need for a mere Tense auxiliary or non-copular sentences ⇒ (5)

(a) a Tense auxiliary including the semantics of the copula = copular sentences ⇒ (6)

(5) …/… [VP ∅_COP] λP [P] – identity function, does not assign Instrumental case

(6) …/… [VP ∅_COP] λP [P] λx λf ∃z [[x ⊆ π(c)] : z ≈ [P x]] – includes the (basically abstract) copula meaning
- may assign Instrumental case

1 Cf Geist’s (2006, 160) ‘variable’ lexical entry for być, which implies that być is lexically variable. In my model, its variability is achieved syntactically and needs, hence, less complex assumptions wrt what is stored in the mental lexicon.
**Illustrations**

(7) Ivan był studentom
   'Ivan was a student.'

(7') Ivan był studentom
   (Matching)

(8) Ivan bude studentom
   'Ivan will be a student.'

(8') Ivan bude studentom
   (Matching)

(9) Ivan był ubit
   'Ivan was/has been killed.'

(10) Ivan的学生
    'Ivan is being honored.'

(11) Ivan studentom
    'Ivan returned as a student/being a student.'

(12) Ivan studentom
    (secondary predication)

**Summary**

- copula semantics should be represented by an abstract lexical item (\(\varphi_v\));
- by this, all inflected forms of był can be treated as Tense auxiliaries;
- case marking on the predicate nominal is dissociated from the był-forms;
- “predication” is reducible to situation reference (against Rothstein 1992; Bailyn 2012, 198);
- instances of secondary predication can be analyzed the same way as examples exhibiting primary predication;
- using Matching (Haider 1988), the intuitively given dual function of the forms of był (auxiliary: copula) can be accounted for without assuming two homonymous lexemes (był; był\(\varphi\)) in the mental lexicon!

**References**