

## SYNTACTIC CHANGE AND SELECTIONAL PROPERTIES OF THE RUSSIAN VERB *BOJAT'SJA*

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This work is a generative analysis of a change process still in progress, which affects the selectional properties of the Russian verb *bojat'sja* 'to be afraid'.

### 1. THE DATA:

- **V selecting DP + inherent genitive case > DP + structural case:**

- *Bojat'sja* 'to be afraid' is supposed to be an inherent-case assigner (agreement-selector), but in present-day colloquial language can behave like a categorial-selector:
- Usually, inherent genitive case assignment (1a).

Some colloquial uses show an accusative case, as regular direct objects (1b); as noted by Comrie, Stone & Polinsky (1996: 145), *sluŝat'sja* 'to obey' undergoes the same change.

- (1) a. Ja *ničego* ne bojus'.  
I<sub>NOM</sub> nothing<sub>GN</sub> not fear  
'I am not afraid of anything.'
- b. On ne boitsja *ženy* / % *ženu*.  
he<sub>NOM</sub> not fear wife<sub>GN / %AC</sub>  
'He is not afraid of his wife.'

-Butorin 1966: *bojat'sja* demands accusative case on animate objects (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> classes) in colloquial Russian. Not only animates: examples from the National Corpus of Russian Language ([www.ruscorpora.ru](http://www.ruscorpora.ru)):

(i) the majority of accusative uses with animate objects (straightforwardly in the case of accusative-genitive syncretism), but there are further extensions too:

- (ii) with other forms of the 1<sup>st</sup> declension class, in *-a/-ja* (masculine and inanimate: 2a),
- (iii) feminine nouns of the 3<sup>rd</sup> class (ending with a consonant: 2b),
- (iv) inanimate masculine nouns of the 2<sup>nd</sup> class -ending with a consonant (2c).

- (2) a U nas inogda daže bojatsja *bumagu*.  
 at us sometimes even fear paper<sub>AC.FEM</sub>  
 ‘In our country, they are sometimes afraid of some piece of paper.’  
 (S. Alešin *Vstreči na grešnoj zemle* 2001)
- b. Razve možno bojat'sja *myš'*? –udivilsja Biriukov.  
 maybe possible fear mouse<sub>AC.FEM</sub> –surprised Biriukov  
 ‘Is it possible to be afraid of a mouse? –asked Biriukov with surprise.’  
 (Ju. Petkevič *Živye cvety zimoj* 2001)
- c. Ved' oni bojatsja ne pensionerov, a *Kreml'*.  
 because they are afraid not pensioners<sub>GEN.MASC</sub> but Kremlin<sub>AC.MASC</sub>  
 ‘Cause they are not afraid of the pensioners, but of the Kremlin.’  
 (*Russkij Newsweek* # 33, 2005)

1- Regular use of *bojat'sja* = agreement-selector: case checking on the complement (inherent genitive) + theta-role assignment (Agr on Merge).

2- Proposal about the new uses of *bojat'sja* = categorial-selector: no case assignment to the complement (Chomsky 2000); the selected NP checks its Agr features with a higher functional head, small v → accusative is valued.

## 2. EVIDENCE FOR A CHANGE IN PROGRESS:

**Morphological evidence:** a new and an old syntactic pattern coexist (2).

**Structural evidence** that the objects are higher than [Comp, V]; they are structurally in the same position as regular objects:

a) **Coordinated DPs:** you can coordinate an animate DP and an inanimate DP with *bojat'sja* → both can be accusative.

- (3) a. Oni bojatsja Kremlja.  
 they are afraid Kremlin<sub>GN</sub>  
 ‘They are afraid of the Kremlin.’
- b. Ved’ oni bojatsja ne pensionerov, a Kreml’.  
 because they are afraid not pensioners<sub>ACC-GN</sub> but Kremlin<sub>ACC</sub>  
 ‘Cause they are not afraid of the pensioners, but of the Kremlin.’

**b) Ellipsis and gapping:** coordinate *bojat’sja* with a V selecting a regular acc. object  
 → ellipsis of the genitive object (4a).

▪ coordinate a V selecting inherent genitive DPs with a V selecting a regular acc. object  
 → no ellipsis of the genitive object (4c).

- (4) a. % Ja tëtju ne xorošo znaju, no bojus’ (ejë).  
 I aunt<sub>AC</sub>. not well know but am afraid (her)  
 ‘I do not know my aunt very well, but I am afraid of her.’
- b. Ja tëtju ne xorošo znaju, no obožaju (ejë).  
 I aunt<sub>AC</sub>. not well know but adore (her<sub>AC</sub>)  
 ‘I do not know my aunt very well, but I adore her.’
- c. Etot vopros nas ne interesujet, no \*(nas) kasaetsja.  
 this problem us<sub>AC</sub> not interests but us<sub>GN</sub> touches  
 ‘We are not interested in this problem, but it concerns us.’  
 (M.O. Geršenzon *Èpoxa Nikolaja* 1826-1905)

**c) Case marking in secondary predication:**

▪ Bailyn (2001): agreeing secondary predicates are appositions to a DP, while instrumental predicates are not attached to the DP, but selected by a special separate Pred head → oblique NP/PPs are lower than PredP and therefore cannot c-command the PRO subject in the Pred phrase → instrumental predicates are not eligible to modify obliques (5b).

▪ *Bojat’sja* selects ‘non-accusative’ objects with a predicate instrumental (5a).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Non-verbal predicates can be instrumental or agree in case with their antecedent. The first option is available only for subjects and accusative objects, (ia), but not for obliques (ib):

- (i) a. ’Vse ljubjat Ivana p’janym.

- (5) a. Ja bojus' Ivana<sub>i</sub> p'janogo<sub>i</sub> / % p'janym<sub>i</sub>.  
 I fear Ivan<sub>AC-GN</sub> drunk<sub>AC-GN/INST</sub>  
 'I fear Ivan when he is drunk.'
- b. Ja kasajus' Ivana<sub>i</sub> p'janogo<sub>i</sub> / \* p'janym<sub>i</sub>.  
 I touch Ivan<sub>AC-GN</sub> drunk<sub>AC-GN/\*INST</sub>  
 'I am touching Ivan who is drunk.'

**d) Case marking of subordinate completive clauses introduced by *to*, *čto*':**

- Regular transitive verbs force dropping of pronoun *to* (6a). Verbs selecting an inherent case object force the use of the pronoun in the corresponding case (6b).

- (6) a. Rovšan govorit (\*??to), čto Marusja pridët posle obeda.  
 Rovshan says (that) what Marusia will-come after supper  
 'Rovshan says that Marusia will come after supper.'
- b. Sledujuščee obvinenie kasaetsja \*(togo), čto vy jakoby ne predstavili  
 next charge touches that<sub>GN</sub> what you seemingly not presented  
 deputatam spravku o doxodax.  
 to-deputies certificate about income  
 'The following charge concerns the fact that you have not provided the  
 Members of the Parliament with a certificate about your income.'  
 ('Kto-to pytaetsja kogo-to kupit'" *Izvestija* 14/6/2002)

- *Bojat'sja* allows dropping the genitive pronoun *togo*, but not obligatorily -(6a) and (7)  
 → natural for a syntactic change in progress: the coexistence of the old and new structure makes both patterns possible:

- (7) On boitsja (togo), čto ego otdadut obratno.  
 he fears that<sub>GN</sub> what him will-give back  
 'He is afraid of the fact that they will send him back.'

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- a. all love Ivan<sub>AC</sub> drunk<sub>INST</sub> ('All love Ivan when he is drunk.')
- b. Vse smotrjat na Ivana p'janogo / \*p'janym.  
 all look at Ivan<sub>AC</sub> drunk<sub>AC/\*INST</sub> ('All look at Ivan, who is drunk.')

### 3. HISTORY AND BACKGROUND OF THE CHANGE

▪ Evolution of case selection by verbs in Indo-European (Meillet 1964 [1906], Savčenko 2003 [1974]):

(i) Initially, case morphemes on the NPs were not determined by verb government, but by the semantics of the case itself; case was almost adverbial;

(ii) later on, verbs are grouped in lexical sets we called verb families, which share semantic features and select objects with a specific inherent case, adequate to the theta-role the family was associated with.

▪ Verbs of departure point: governed ablative case in Indo-European.

Some I-E languages conserved the ablative case (Latin, Sanskrit); others collapsed it with the genitive → ablative-genitive case (Greek, Balto-Slavic).

Metaphoric use of the notion of departure point: verbs of “fear”. They also governed ablative-genitive case in Sanskrit, Balto-Slavic (Meillet 1965 [1924]).

### 4. THE PROPOSAL:

▪ When learners cannot parse an input because of previous changes in the PLD → there is a readjustment in the lexical entries during acquisition (Lightfoot 1999, Longobardi 2001, Pintzuk, Tsoulas & Warner 2000, Uriagereka (in press)).

▪ The mismatching between acquired features and special inputs → **conflicts**.

Theta role conflicts - the PLD seem to violate the universal correlation “theta-role assignment associated to inherent case checking”.

Change: loss or gain of structural vs. inherent case

▪ Variation in *bojat'sja* is a diachronic answer to a theta-role conflict. Learners cannot parse inputs that are crucial to acquire *bojat'sja*, because the cues to acquire it disappeared and new cues arise → they arrange a new lexical entry (different from the previous generation's one), creating a “reanalysed grammar”.

THETA-ROLE CONFLICT + NEW CUES WERE TRIGGERED

▪ **New cues:**

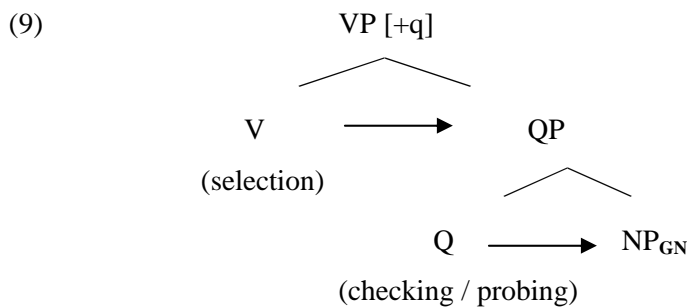
1) **Morphological** or first-level cue: Genitive and accusative cases underwent morphological syncretism in structural cases for masculine animate singulars and animate plurals of all genders (Borkovskij 1978, Meillet 1965 [1924], Igartua 2005) → genitive morpheme = structural animate case.

- (8) a. Prizovi *možb tvoi*. (OCS: *Codex Marianus*, Jn. 4:16)  
 call [husband your]<sub>AC-NOM</sub>  
 ‘Call your husband.’
- b. Prizovi *moža svoego*. (OCS: *Codex Zographensis*, Jn. 4:16)  
 call [husband your]<sub>AC-GN</sub>

*Bereči kogo*<sub>GN</sub>. ‘to take care of someone’ externally similar to *videt’ kogo*<sub>ACC-GN</sub>. ‘to see someone’, *ljubit’ kogo* ‘to love someone’...

2) **Syntactic** of second-level cues: weakened the perception of the genitive as an inherent case because of the loss of the old system of inherent genitive objects in favour of a system of configurational genitive – lexical inside PPs / other obliques.

Configurational genitive: quantificational / partitive nature. It is checked against a Q head (Babby 1986, Bailyn 2004, Pereltsvaig 2006).



(i) Genitive configurational cases:

1- Genitive of negation → marks objects and intransitive subjects under negation.

It is old, but its uses were extended after the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Old Russian (Borkovskij 1978: 347).

- (10) a. Ne obretoša *ničto* že. (Moscow Chronicle, 15<sup>th</sup> c., 413)  
not found nothing<sub>AC</sub> part.  
'They found nothing.'
- b. Ne našel on *ničego* / \**ničto*. (Present-day Russian)  
not found he nothing<sub>GN</sub> / \*<sub>AC</sub>  
'He found nothing.'

2- Verbs + prefix *na-* selecting a QP configurational genitive (Pereltsvaig 2006).<sup>2</sup>

- (11) a. Al'bert sobiral cvety dlja Jaroslavy.  
Albert collected flowers<sub>AC</sub> for Yaroslava  
'Albert was collecting flowers for Yaroslava'
- b. Al'bert nasobiral cvetov dlja Jaroslavy.  
Albert na-collected flowers<sub>GN</sub> for Yaroslava  
'Albert collected lots of flowers for Yaroslava.'

3- Verbs of aim and desire (*iskat* 'search', *ždat* 'wait'...) started to accept either accusative or genitive objects, depending on semantics (Straková 1961) → Ac. + concrete object (12a) vs. Gn. + abstract object (configurational related to Q, 12b).

- (12) a. Ingeborga ždět pis'mo ot Igorja.  
Ingerborga waits letter<sub>AC</sub> from Igor  
'Ingeborga is waiting for a letter from Igor.'
- b. Viktor Coj ždal peremen.  
Viktor Tsoi waited changes<sub>GN</sub>  
'Viktor Tsoi was waiting for changes.'

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<sup>2</sup> Other configurational cases related to Q: adnominal genitives replaced the old adnominal datives and possessive adjectives in Old-Middle Russian (Zaliznjak 2004).

*Bereči kogo*<sub>GN</sub>. ‘to take care of someone’ similar to *ne vižu kogo* ‘I do not see someone’ / *nasobirat' cvetov*<sub>GN</sub> ‘to collect a lot of flowers’ / *ždat' otveta*<sub>GN</sub> ‘to wait for an answer’, *iskat' podderžki* ‘to seek for help’.

(ii) Genitive lexical cases inside PPs:

NP genitives were replaced by whole PPs or other obliques in many verbs (Borkovskij 1978) from the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Lomtev 1954, Vinogradov 1938):

A- Verbs of departure point (‘to run away’, ‘to avoid’, ‘to be afraid’): genitive complement replaced by PPs *ot / iz* ‘from’:

- (13) a. *Otstupi voleju Kyeva.* (1<sup>st</sup> Novgorod Chronicle, 36)  
left by-will Kiev<sub>GN</sub>  
‘(Mstislav) moved away from Kiev of his own free will.’
- b. *Otstupi voleju is Kyeva.* (1<sup>st</sup> Novgorod Chronicle Com, 112b)  
left by-will from Kiev<sub>GN</sub>

B- Verbs of governing (‘to govern’, ‘to rule’): instrumental case already in OCS:

- (14) a. *Kai Iliou iphi anassein.* (Ancient Greek, Homer *Iliad*)  
and Troy<sub>GN</sub> possible govern  
‘And it is possible to govern Troy.’
- b. *Vladoštju s'irejō kirinju.* (OCS: *Codex Marianus* Lk. 2: 2)  
governing<sub>DT</sub> Siria<sub>INST</sub> Cyrenius<sub>DT</sub>  
‘When Cyrenius was the governor of Siria.’

C- Verbs of ‘held’ part (‘to grasp by’, ‘to hold by’): replaced in OCS with the preposition *za* ‘for, by’ + accusative case:

- (15) a. *Kheiros helōn Odysēa daifrona.* (Ancient Greek, Homer *Odyssey*)  
hand<sub>GN</sub> taking Ulysses brave  
‘While taking Ulysses the brave by his hand.’
- b. *Јѣтъ јō за рѣқо.* (OCS: *Codex Marianus* Mt. 9: 25)

took her<sub>AC</sub> by hand<sub>AC</sub>

‘He took her by her hand.’

D- Verbs of thinking and saying (‘to say’, ‘to think’, ‘to remember’, ‘to respond’...):  
accusative DP and PP *o* ‘about’ + locative already in Old Russian.

(16) a. Jaroslavъ usumněsja brata svoego Jurgja. (Laurentian Chronicle, 156)

Yaroslav thought [brother his Georgi]<sub>GN</sub>

‘Yaroslav thought about his brother Georges’

b. Jaroslav podumal o svoëm brate Jurii. (Present-day Russian)

Yaroslav thought about [his brother Yuri]<sub>LOC</sub>

‘Yaroslav thought about his brother Yuri.’

*Bereči kogo*<sub>GN</sub>. ‘to take care of someone’ contrasted with *izbavit’sja ot* +DP<sub>GN</sub>. ‘to get rid of’, *praviti’ čem*<sub>INST</sub> ‘to rule something’, *deržat’ za* + DP<sub>AC</sub> ‘hold by something’, *vspomnit’ o* NP<sub>LOC</sub> ‘remember about something’...

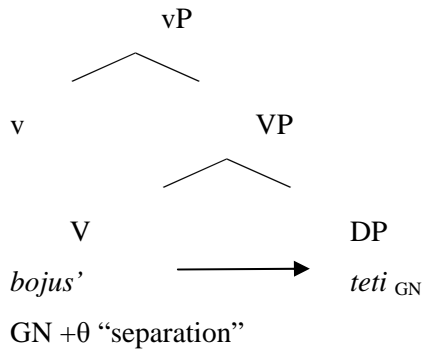
▪ The change process:

1) The system of inherent genitive objects (17) weakened, because of the replacement of genitive objects either with PPs / other obliques or with configurational genitives inside QPs;

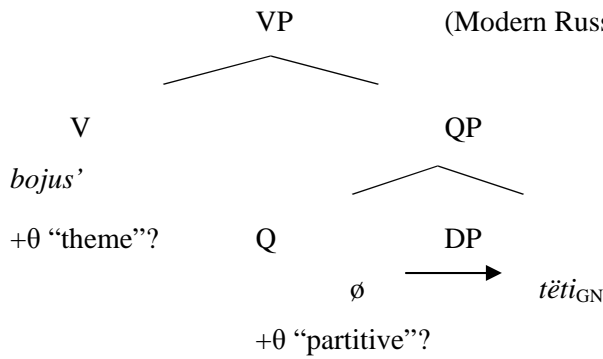
2) Genitive morphemes as inherent cases become difficult to acquire, → the learner must acquire a seemingly configurational case (selected by Q), with a theta-role “theme”, not “quantification” or “partitive” (as expected for Q) → theta role conflict (18) → selectional properties are learnt by heart as a special subcategorization of the verb.

3) *Bojat’sja* was finally reinterpreted as c-selecting a structural DP (19), innovating with respect to previous grammars, which subcategorized it as an a-selector: case checked against small *v* (change from structure 17 to structure 19).

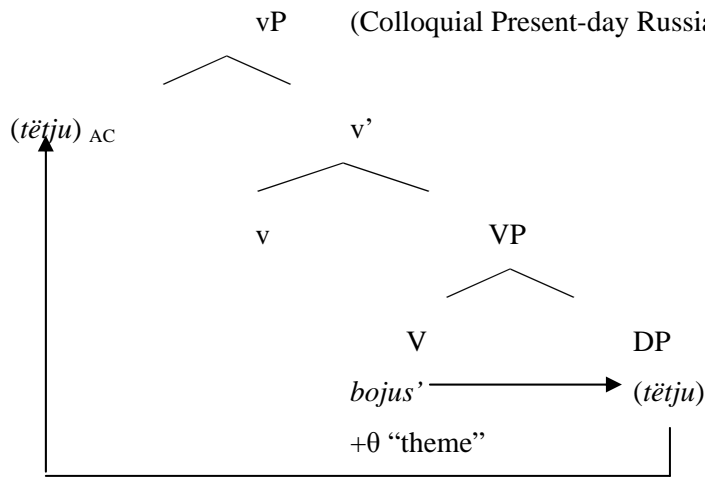
(17) (Old Russian: a-selection)



(18) (Modern Russian: theta-role conflict)



(19) (Colloquial Present-day Russian: c-selection)



(20) Change in the subcategorization of *bojat'sja* ‘to be afraid’



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## 6. APPENDIX: SOME ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT SYNTACTIC CHANGE

- (i) Changes in syntax take place during the language acquisition period in children – the grammar is still fixing (Pintzuk, Tsoulas, Warner 2000, Uriagereka (in press)).
- (ii) Syntactic change is random and unpredictable (Lightfoot 1999).
- It is due to sociologic, functional or stylistic factors (fashions, language contact, phonetic weakening...), to any external or frequency changes of the input a child scans in order to converge with her parents' grammar (Lightfoot 1999, Uriagereka (in press)).
  - The intervention of sociolinguistic factors in syntactic change is due to the duality competence – performance (Chomsky 1965): performance is governed by frequency, functional and communicative needs, can condition the external appearance of an adult's output.
- (iii) Syntactic change is not an "extra" mechanism included in our acquisitional device (Longobardi (2001). Our acquisitional device is optimal (Lightfoot 1999, Fodor 1998).
- (iv) Reanalysis is feature reassignment: the child fails to apply the Operation of the lexicon in the same way their parents did → new relation between features and lexical items (Pintzuk, Tsoulas & Warner 2000).
- (v) Acquiring a feature or an item as a special morpho-syntactic fossil (special subcategorization) is not economic → additional effort, fed only by robust positive evidence (cues –Lightfoot 1999- or triggers –Fodor 1998).

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