

Predicate nouns in Russian

Предикативные существительные в русском языке

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Аннотация В статье рассматривается изменение в падежном маркировании предикативных существительных со связочным глаголом *быть* в русском языке девятнадцатого и двадцатого веков. Известно, что такие существительные могут иметь форму как именительного, так и творительного падежа. Проанализировав различную частотность альтернативных форм в текстах, написанных между 1801 и 2000 годами, авторы исследовали факторы падежного варьирования для различных временных периодов, что позволило определить характер изменения морфосинтаксической модели в целом.

Считается, что существительные в предикативных конструкциях, передающих темпоральные или определенные модальные значения, чаще маркируются творительным падежом. Такие значения могут порождаться семантикой предикативного существительного, компонентами фразы, порядком слов, либо вытекать из более широкого контекста. Исследование показало, что подобный взгляд отражает ситуацию в языке девятнадцатого и первой половины двадцатого веков, в то время как во второй половине двадцатого века использование творительного предикативного с существительными выходит за рамки указанных ограничений и становится преобладающим, вытесняя характерную для более ранних периодов зависимость падежа от множества

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разнородных факторов. Хотя в отдельных классах лексем (в таких, как этнонимы) изменения протекают медленнее, чем в языке в целом, статистика свидетельствует, что тенденции к обобщению творительного падежа в предикативной функции является общей для всех лексико-семантических классов существительных.

Таким образом, язык постепенно переходит от семантически обусловленной модели к единому синтаксическому правилу, определяющему падеж предикативных именных групп.

1 Introduction

It is well known that nouns in predicate position with the copular *быть* ‘to be’ in Russian may take either the nominative or the instrumental case, as in (1):

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| (1) а. <i>Он был врач.</i> | b. <i>Он был врач-ом.</i> |
| he was doctor:NOM.SG | he was doctor-INSTR.SG |
| ‘He was a doctor.’ | ‘He was a doctor.’ |

The commonly held view is that predicate nouns with more specified temporal, referential or evidential properties favour the instrumental (Potebnja 1958; Ovsjaniko-Kulikovskij 1912; Patokova 1929; Bulaxovskij 1958; Borkovskij and Kuznecov 2006 [1963]; Røed 1966; Nichols 1981; Timberlake 2004). These properties may be linked to the semantics of the predicate noun itself, or to aspects of clause structure (such as the presence of dependents on the predicate, word order, mood, or negation). On the basis of a corpus of 19th and 20th century texts, we find that while this view is correct with regard to 19th century and early 20th century Russian, in the second half of the 20th century the instrumental with predicate nouns becomes dominant and exceeds the bounds of the just mentioned constraint. Thus, while in earlier periods the case choice was variable, contingent on multiple competing factors, by the late 20th century case choice was mainly invariant and syntactically determined.

2 Research background

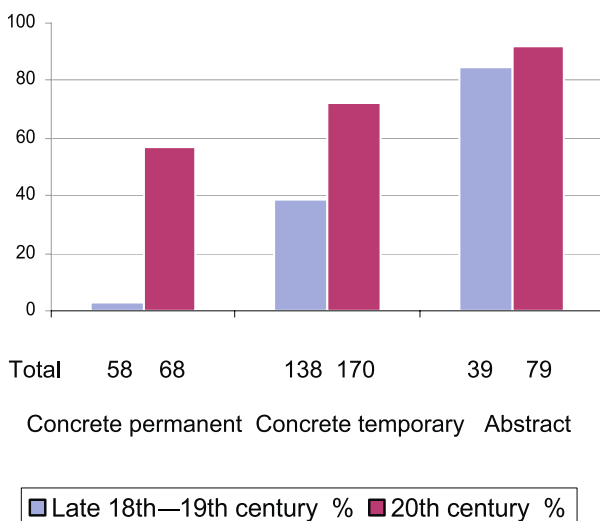
Several domains have been considered to be relevant for competition between predicate cases, both from a diachronic and a synchronic perspective. One tradition is to associate marking on predicate nouns with grammatical factors, namely with the effect of tense/mood on the diachronic shift from nominative to instrumental, and on the synchronic variation between the two cases. Patokova (1929) and Borkovskij and Kuznecov (2006 [1963]) claim that the spread of the instrumental in early Old Russian was more noticeable with the past tense copula (in particular the pluperfect), than with other copular forms. Røed (1966) showed that the instrumental was firmly established with the future in copular constructions in the 19th century and slightly increased in use in the early 20th century (78% and 88% respectively, although the calculations are based on relatively small numbers, 16 instances in each of the two samples). Nichols (1981) points out that the preference for the instrumental with predicate nominals is greater in the future tense than in the past (in the present the instrumental with predicate nominals is ungrammatical). For predicate nouns with copulas this means that variation is possible primarily in the past tense, where lexico-semantic factors have some impact on morphosyntactic choices, while in the future these factors are irrelevant (Nichols 1981, 152).

Another line of investigation is related to lexical and sentence semantics. Since Potebnja (1958) and Ovsjaniko-Kulikovskij (1912), there has been a tradition of connecting predicate cases to the lexico-semantic classes of nouns. The general view is that predicate nouns that denote permanent properties of a subject take the nominative, whereas occasional, non-typical properties are associated with the instrumental. This pattern is already found in Old Russian, where the predicate instrumental is restricted to nouns denoting temporary or acquired properties of a subject, such as nouns of occupation or dignity (Patokova 1929, 5; Moser 1994, 65). Subsequent texts (17th and 18th centuries) show an increase in the number of lexemes that allowed instrumental case marking in predicate position, e.g. deverbal nouns defining subjects from the point of view of their regular or occasional actions (e.g. *свидетель* ‘witness’). Following the same line of investigation, Røed (1966) distinguished between nouns denoting essential permanent properties of a subject (*он был мерзавец<NOM>/мерзавцем<INSTR>* ‘he was a scoundrel’), and those denoting non-essential temporary properties (*я был свидетель<NOM>/свидетелем<INSTR> этого события* ‘I was a witness of this event’). According to his statistics, derived from a corpus of late 18th–19th and 20th century literary texts (looking only at sentences with the past tense copula *быть* ‘to be’), the two groups show a drastic difference in case marking preferences when they occur in predicate position: for late 18th–19th century the frequency of the instrumental is 3% (of a total of 58 instances) for permanent-property nouns as opposed to 39% (of a total of 138) for temporary-property nouns. In the first half of the 20th century the instrumental occurs with 57% (of 68 instances) for permanent-property and 72% (of a total of 170 instances) for temporary-property nouns (Røed 1966, 36). These statistics are based on calculations for concrete nouns, as Røed treats abstract nouns separately.

In late 18th–19th century, the two groups clearly contrasted, with predicatively-used abstract nouns taking the instrumental in the vast majority of instances, as opposed to concrete nouns. The spread of the instrumental, according to Røed, may be presented as in Fig. 1.

As Nichols (1981) has shown, in the 20th century a number of lexico-semantic classes show clear case preferences.

Figure 1 Spread of the instrumental with copular predicate nouns in the 19th and 20th centuries (based on Røed 1966)



Predicate nouns favouring the nominative:

- Nouns of nationality
- Evaluative nouns: *дурак* ‘fool’, *красавица* ‘beauty’, *весельчак* ‘merry person’
- Semantically bleached (empty) nouns used with modifiers: *человек* ‘person’, *мужчина* ‘man’, *девушка* ‘girl’

Predicate nouns favouring the instrumental:

- Nouns of occupation, status and function: *учитель* ‘teacher’, *председатель* ‘chairman’
- Abstract and deverbal nouns: *цель* ‘aim’, *причина* ‘reason’, *занятие* ‘occupation’
- Kinship terms

A number of researchers have emphasized that the distinction between temporally restricted and temporally unrestricted nominal predicates may arise from sentence and contextual semantics. Thus, Lomtev (1956) argued that morphological choices are determined not by the mere properties of predicates, but rather by the way speakers view these properties. In other words, either they identify the subject and the predicate and see the property as inherent to the subject, or they see the property as one that originated at some point within a subject (Lomtev 1956, 93). Writing along these lines, Mrazek (1964) pointed out that speakers make the choice between one of the alternative cases on the basis of their communicative goals, irrespective of the properties of the denotatum. The instrumental will emphasize the resultative nature of the predicated property while the nominative will establish a syntactic relation between the subject and the predicate, without emphasizing the resultative nature (Mrazek 1964, 223–229).

Further insight into the problem has been provided by the idea that, to choose between the nominative or instrumental, speakers evaluate relative temporal characteristics of predicated properties with respect to a certain reference point implicitly or explicitly included into the context. Nichols (1981) discusses in particular two conditioning factors, which she generalizes as covert tense-aspect parameters: marked relative tense and implicit change of state. The former signals the “departure in tense from their immediate context” (Nichols 1981, 155). The latter implies that the reported state is the result of some recent change and formerly did not hold (Nichols 1981, 156). Timberlake (2004, 286–288) points out that the instrumental with predicate nouns limits the state in time-worlds (as in *он доказывает, что Пушкин в последние годы жизни был монархистом*_{<INSTR>} ‘he attempts to show that Puškin in the last years of his life was a monarchist’; *брат две зимы подряд был в Туле пенетитором*_{<INSTR>} *у мальчиков Лопухиных* ‘brother worked two winters in a row in Tula as the coach for the Lopuxin boys’). The nominative is used with temporally unrestricted states (e.g. identifications), meaning that the statement is generally true (*ведь он был членом*_{<NOM>} *Политбюро* ‘after all he was a member of the Politbureau’). The instrumental is also used to indicate the fact that the individual in question, not others, fits a certain definition (*Ланцелот был самым храбрым рыцарем*_{<INSTR>} *из всех, кто собирался за Круглым столом* ‘Lancelot was the bravest knight among those who gathered at the Round Table’), whereas the nominative is used when the subject is “presumed known and the predicative subject contributes little, the communicative weight carried by the adjective”, as in *он был всесторонне талантливым человеком*_{<NOM>} ‘he was a man of many and varied talents’ (Timberlake 2004, 288).

On the whole, it is generally agreed that semantics has been a significant factor in nominative–instrumental competition, at least up until recently. This raises the question of the exact role that semantics has played in the changes that have taken place. Have the changes been driven by semantics, or is semantics simply a filter that independently

motivated changes pass through? To provide an answer, we need first to address the question of whether the impact of semantic factors changes over time.

3 Analysis

We investigate the expansion of the predicate instrumental with the copula *быть* ‘to be’ over the 19th and 20th centuries.¹ The study is based on the analysis of 1853 instances distributed among four fifty-year time periods between 1801 and 2000. The data have been extracted from a corpus of fiction and non-fiction texts, originally compiled by Adrian Barentsen, University of Amsterdam.² In what follows we attempt to capture the trajectory and underlying conditions of the nominative–instrumental shift, comparing the relative frequencies of the two competing forms, calculated with respect to the four fifty-year periods. Considering each of the conditioning factors separately we analyse their impact on variation within these periods and evaluate their relevance on the basis of the statistics derived.

As was discussed in the previous section, each of the predicate cases may be triggered by a set of heterogeneous factors. However, these factors may conflict. For example, according to lexical semantic criteria, nouns of occupation should be more likely to take the instrumental, since they denote properties which are viewed as temporary and non-intrinsic. But the larger context may provide conflicting cues. Thus in (2a), where there is no indication to the transience of the predicated property, the noun of occupation takes the nominative, whereas explicit time boundaries in (2b) independently require the instrumental on the predicate noun. Conversely, a noun of nationality, which denotes a temporally unrestricted property, takes the nominative, as expected, in (3a). In contrast the modal meaning of the structure (subjunctive clause) supersedes the lexical semantics and triggers the instrumental in (3b):

- (2) a. *Она была учительниц-а, очень хорошая, умная девушка.*
she was teacher-NOM.SG very nice clever girl
‘She was a teacher, a very nice and clever girl.’
- b. *Кутузов был сельск-им учител-ем два года.*
Kutuzov was village-INSTR.SG teacher-INSTR.SG two years
‘Kutuzov was a village teacher for two years.’
- (3) a. *Он был француз.*
he was Frenchman-NOM.SG
‘He was a Frenchman.’
- b. *Ах, если бы он был француз-ом!*
oh if SUBJ he was Frenchman-INSTR.SG
‘Oh, if he were a Frenchman!’

¹For the purpose of this paper we left out of consideration constructions with semi-copular verbs (*стать* ‘become’, *оказаться* ‘prove to be’, etc.) and verbs of naming (*называться* ‘to be called’, *звать* ‘name’, ‘call’) in which the instrumental became dominant much earlier than with the pure copula. The timeline of the change in these two former constructions, as well as conditioning factors, requires separate consideration. For example, see the sub-grouping of semi-copular verbs with respect to their preference for a particular case on predicate complements, suggested by Potebnja (1958, 493–495), and the discussion of the instrumental–‘independent nominative’ competition with the verbs of naming (Potebnja 1958, 183–184; Borkovskij and Kuznecov 2006 [1963], 337).

²For relatively infrequent nouns of nationality we also used data extracted from the Russian National Corpus.

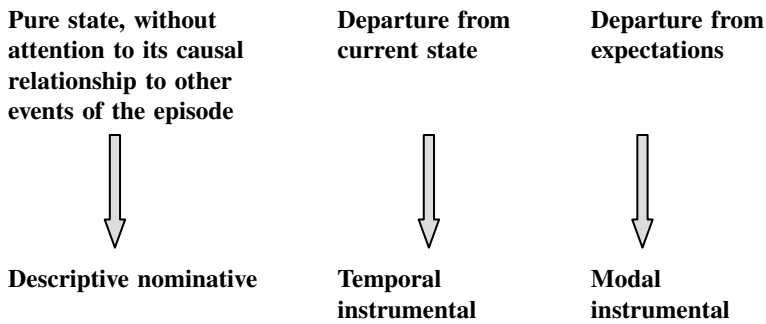


Figure 2 Relationship between contextual semantics and predicate case types (according to Timberlake 1986, 2004)

To pin down these factors under appropriate headings, as well as to evaluate their significance in different time periods, we employ the general framework proposed by Timberlake (1986, 2004). The decisive issue, according to Timberlake, is the relationship between the predicated state and possible or expected states. The state that holds, with no indication of any limitations from either a temporal or modal perspective, triggers the nominative. If a reported state represents a departure from some previous state (or results from the previous state), or an actual state contrasts with the state which is expected and holds despite expectations, then it is marked by the instrumental. This falls into two types, temporal instrumental³ and modal instrumental, whose distribution may be presented as in Fig. 2.

These senses can be illustrated by the following examples from the corpus:

- (4) Descriptive nominative
- a. *Она **была вдов-а**, бездетна и довольно богата.*
she was widow-NOM.SG childless and rather rich
'She was a widow, childless and rather rich.' (Тургенев)
 - b. *Кроме того, он **был** прям-ой и честн-ый
грубиян.*
besides he was direct-NOM.SG and honest-NOM.SG
boor:NOM.SG
'Furthermore, he was a straightforward and honest boor.' (Довлатов)
- (5) Temporal instrumental
- a. *Бопре в отечестве своем **был парикмахер-ом**, потом
в Пруссии солдат-ом.*
in Prussia soldier-INSTR.SG
'In his homeland, Bopre was a hairdresser, then in Prussia he was a soldier.' (Пушкин)
 - b. *В юности Регина **была** типичн-ой советск-ой
школьниц-ей.*
in youth Regina was typical-INSTR.SG Soviet-INSTR.SG
schoolgirl-INSTR.SG
'In her youth, Regina was a typical Soviet schoolgirl.' (Довлатов)

³Indicating the relationship of the predicated state to other events in the text, "this sense of the instrumental is not purely temporal, but has some modal flavor as well" (Timberlake 1986, 142).

- (6) Modal instrumental
- a. *Если б она была мужчин-ою, она бы наделала*
 if SVJV she was man-INSTR.SG she SVJV did
за вас тысячу глупост-ей.
 for you thousand silly.thing-GEN.PL
 ‘If she were a man, she would do all sorts of silly things for you.’
 (Л. Толстой)
 - b. *Разнесся слух, что Энн была не так-ой*
 came gossip that Ann was not such-INSTR.SG
преданн-ой жён-ой, как считалось.
 devoted-INSTR.SG wife-INSTR.SG as was.considered
 ‘The rumour came that Ann was not so devoted a wife as it was
 considered.’ (Стругацкие)

By the 19th century the instrumental had already become firmly established as a predicate case in copular constructions, appearing consistently under certain structural and semantic conditions.⁴

Structural conditions:

- Copula in the infinitive
- Copula in the future
- Copula in the non-indicative mood

Lexical semantics:

- Inanimate nouns
- Certain animate nouns which clearly denote temporary states (e.g. *свидетель* ‘witness’)

Sentence or contextual semantics:

- Temporal phrase:

Он был прежде полков-ым доктор-ом.
 he was formerly regiment’s-INSTR.SG doctor-INSTR.SG
 ‘Formerly, he was a regimental doctor.’ (Тургенев)

- Restricting adjunct or modifier:

В таком наряде они были геро-ями.
 in such attire they were heroes-INSTR.PL
 ‘In such attire they were heroes.’ (Глинка)

- Indication for the change of state in the broad context:

Он красавц-ем был.
 He handsome.man-INSTR.SG was
 ‘He was a handsome man.’⁵ (Тургенев)

⁴To avoid subjectivity, we consider here conditions that have clear overt exponents, either within a sentence or in the adjacent context. Equally, instances which did not include these exponents and could be classified only on the basis of intuition were not included in either of these groups.

⁵There is an indication in the context that the state no longer obtains.

Beyond these conditions, few predicate nouns had instrumental marking. The nominative also had two domains to which the instrumental normally was not admitted:

- Semantically bleached nouns:

Он был хорош-ий человек.
 he was good-NOM.SG man:NOM.SG
 'He was a good man.'

- Nouns of nationality:

Он был немец.
 he was German:NOM.SG
 'He was a German.'

The conditions that trigger the instrumental clearly fall into one of the two groups, depending on which kind of specification (restriction) they impose on the predicated property. Most factors that disfavoured the nominative by the early 19th century may be classified under Timberlake's headings (cf. Fig. 2). Consequently, we can arrange the factors that specified the scope of the predicated characteristic as follows:

Temporal instrumental:

- Copula in future
- Certain animate nouns which clearly denote temporary states (e.g. *свидетель* 'witness')
- Temporal phrase
- Restricting adjunct or modifier
- Indication of a change of state within a broader context

Modal instrumental:

- Copula in the non-indicative mood
- Negated copula

In the first half of the 19th century, the future, imperative, subjunctive and infinitive contrast with the past in that they strongly favour the instrumental,⁶ whereas the past tense copula allows significant variation in case marking, as presented in Table 1.

With the past tense copula, the choice is conditioned by semantic factors. First, predicate nouns split depending on animacy: the proportion of instrumental inanimate nouns is very much the same as with imperative, subjunctive, future or infinitive, cf. Table 2.

Second, with animate nouns case marking was to a large extent determined by the presence or absence of factors that restricted the scope of predication (predicated characteristic), by establishing a temporal framework within which a given state holds,⁷ such as nouns which denote temporary states (*свидетель* 'witness'), qualifiers (e.g. *уже* 'already', *еще* 'yet'), temporal phrases (e.g. *в прошлом году* 'last year'), restricting adjuncts (e.g. *в институте* 'at the institute', as in *Элиза была моим лучшим другом в институте*

⁶Vostokov observed the impact of tense/aspect properties of the copula in his contemporary language. In *Russkaja grammatika*, first published in 1831, he pointed out that forms *буду* ('to be', future), *будь* ('to be', imperative), are very likely to take instrumental predicate nouns, in contrast with *был* ('to be', past) which favours the nominative (Vostokov 1844, 214–215).

⁷Cf. Timberlake (1986, 142): "[...] the instrumental in this usage indicates that the inception of the state represents a significant departure from the prior state of affairs and, further, that it is a necessary development from the circumstances that obtain locally around the narrated time."

Table 1 Predicate nouns with the copula (1801–1850)

Form of the copula	Total number	% instrumental
Past	328	54
Imperative and subjunctive	32	81
Future	58	93
Infinitive	61	97

Table 2 Animate and inanimate predicate nouns with the copula (1801–1850)

	Total number	% instrumental
Animate nouns	216	38
Inanimate nouns	121	78

Table 3 Animate predicate nouns with the copula (1801–1850), specified and unspecified characteristic

	Total number	% instrumental
Animate nouns, unspecified	102	16
Animate nouns, specified	114	57

Table 4 Animate predicate nouns with the copula (1801–2000), unspecified characteristic

	Total number	% instrumental
1801–1850	102	16
1851–1900	136	32
1901–1950	122	32
1951–2000	140	87

‘Eliza was my best friend at the institute’), and, finally, indications of the change of state in the broad context. Characteristics specified in one of these ways required the instrumental, which in this instance was 3.5 times more frequent than with nouns denoting unspecified properties, cf. Table 3.

In other words, in the early 19th century the predicate instrumental dominated in all forms of the copula except for the past tense, where nominative–instrumental variation was semantically conditioned. States specified in terms of their modal properties or temporal restrictions triggered the instrumental, while unspecified, indefinite states triggered the nominative.

This variation continued until the middle of the 20th century without significant change. In the second half of the 20th century, however, use of the instrumental with predicate nouns increased dramatically for animate nouns denoting unspecified, indefinite states. Statistics derived from the corpus for this group do not show dramatic differences for the three periods (1801–1850, 1851–1900 and 1901–1950), and a significant increase in the second half of the 20th century, cf. Table 4.

One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the significance of the differences among the mean values for the four time periods. The results are summarized in Fig. 3.

The extremely low p value (<0.001) indicates that at least one of the means is significantly different from the others. The 95% confidence intervals for each mean are shown in Fig. 3. It can be seen that these intervals overlap for the three early time periods,

Source	DF	SS	MS	F	P
Period	3	0.0014592	0.0004864	32.33	<0.001
Individual 95% CIs For Mean Based on Pooled StDev					
Level	N	Mean	StDev		
1801-1850	5	0.002034	0.001787	(- - - * - - -)	
1851-1900	5	0.006015	0.004703	(- - - * - - -)	
1901-1950	6	0.003540	0.002903	(- - - * - - -)	
1951-2000	3	0.027540	0.006415	(- - - - * - - -)	
- + - - - - - + - - - - - + - - - - - + - - - - -					
0.000 0.010 0.020 0.030					

Figure 3 One-way ANOVA: Instrumental % versus Period

indicating a negligible difference among the occurrence of the instrumental for these periods. That of the last period, however, shows no overlap with the early three, suggesting that the occurrence of the instrumental is higher. The probability of this conclusion being wrong is <5%. A level of $p = 0.05$ (5%) is generally accepted as the cut off value for significance in linguistics.

Contrasting the three earlier periods with the last one, we can conclude that until the middle of the 20th century, the instrumental was used with predicate nouns that had temporally specified (7a) or modally restricted (7b) properties, while the nominative was typically used with predicate nouns denoting properties not restricted temporally or modally (8a), and only occasionally with predicate nouns in clauses with temporal or modal reading (8b):

- (7) a. *Если бы они знали, как-им виноват-ым*
 if SVJV they knew what-INSTR.SG guilty-INSTR.SG
мальчик-ом полчаса тому назад был их председатель!
 boy-INSTR.SG half.hour ago was their chairman
 'If they only knew what a guilty boy their chairman was half an hour ago!' (Л. Толстой)
- b. *Только позвол-те, чтоб в этот раз я был*
 just allow:IMP-2.PL so.as in this case I was
проводник-ом ваш-им.
 guide-INSTR.SG yours-INSTR.SG
 'Just allow me to be your guide on this occasion.' (Бестужев-Марлинский)
- (8) a. *Она была невест-а, и что всего важней, невест-а*
 she was bride-NOM.SG and what more.important bride-NOM.SG
богат-ая.
 rich-NOM.SG
 'She was a bride and, more important, a rich bride.' (Бестужев-Марлинский)
- b. [...] *видно, что он был тогда ребенок*
 obvious that he was at.that.time child:NOM
 '[...] it was obvious that he had been a child at that time.' (Пушкин)

In the late 20th century the instrumental is used with the majority of predicate nouns irrespective of their semantics or semantics of the clause, while the nominative may be used with predicate nouns denoting properties which are temporally and modally unrestricted, as in (9a), (9b), though the instrumental marking in such cases would be more common (10a), (10b). There are a few exceptions to this. One is sentences of identification (11), which show preference for the nominative as in (11a),⁸ another is emphatic sentences with reverse word order, where the predicate precedes the subject, as in (12) and (13). In terms of information structure, both types (12) and (13) have a foregrounded adjectival part of the predicate NP with a clearly backgrounded noun. However, along with the nominative in (12a) and (13a), the instrumental in such structures became fully acceptable in contemporary Russian (12b) and (13b), which, in our view, indicates the global nature of the nominative–instrumental shift.⁹

- (9) a. *Родился он где-то в Баренцевом море на*
 was.born he somewhere in Barents sea on
ледоколе, отец у него был капитан.
 ice-breaker father his was captain:Nom.SG
 ‘He was born on an ice-breaker somewhere in the Barents Sea, his father was a captain.’ (В. Некрасов)
- b. *Витка был серьезный работник, не то что*
 Vit’ka was serious-Nom.SG worker:Nom.SG unlike
шалопаи из отдела Абсолютного Знания.
 idlers from department Absolute Knowledge
 ‘Vit’ka was a serious worker, unlike idlers from the department of Absolute Knowledge.’ (Стругацкие)
- (10) a. *Тетя Поля была расчетливой бесребреницей.*
 aunt Polja was prudent-INSTR.SG idealist-INSTR.SG
 ‘Aunt Polja was a prudent idealist.’ (Шаламов)
- b. *Он был моряком, она уехала с ним на восток.*
 he was sailor-INSTR.SG she left with him for East
 ‘He was a sailor, she left with him for the East.’ (Стругацкие)
- (11) a. *Штеменко был именно тот начальник,*
 Štemenko was just that:Nom.SG superior:Nom.SG
который [...] изломал все арестантские котелки.
 who smashed all prisoners’ pots
 ‘Štemenko was just that superior who [...] smashed all prisoners’ pots.’ (Шаламов)

⁸Specificity of identity statements has been analysed in great detail in the linguistic literature. In this paper we are not focusing on this problem separately. The logical and semantic aspects of identity statements have been discussed in Arutjunova (1976), in particular see chapter 5. For discussion of various encoding strategies employed in identity statements see Stassen (1997).

⁹Constructions of this type are very infrequent, which could be an important factor in retaining nominative usage. Type (13) in particular occurs in our corpus of 1951–2000 texts once in 54,000 words of running text. The instrumental has been found in 5 of 22 total instances. Possibly, higher frequencies could be found in informal oral speech, but we are not aware of any statistics that would support this claim.

Table 5 Predicate nouns with the copula under different semantic conditions (1951–2000)

	Total numbers	% instrumental
Animate, past, unspecified	122	87
Inanimate, past	85	93
Animate, past, specified	84	98

- b. *Иван Михайлович был т-ем сам-ым*
 Ivan Mixajlovič was that-INSTR.SG same-INSTR.SG
человек-ом, который вырастил и выпестовал
 person-INSTR.SG who brought.up and fostered
Николая Ивановича Ежова.
 Nikolaj Ivanovič Ežov
 'Ivan Mixajlovič was just that person who brought up and fostered
 Nikolaj Ivanovič Ežov.' (Разгон)
- (12) a. *Делов-ой человек был Сталин, делов-ой.*
 practical-Nom.SG person:Nom.SG was Stalin practical-Nom.SG
 'Stalin was a practical person, indeed.' (Искандер)
- b. *Все это заняло не больше минуты, так как быстр-ым*
 all this took not more minute as quick-INSTR.SG
энергичн-ым человек-ом был Михаил Колотовкин.
 energetic-INSTR.SG person-INSTR.SG was Mixail Kolotovkin
 'All this took not more than a minute, as Mixail Kolotovkin was
 a quick, energetic person.' (Липатов)
- (13) a. *Но полководец он был гениальн-ый.*
 but commander:Nom he was ingenious-Nom.SG
 'But he was an ingenious commander.' (Искандер)
- b. *Пианист-ом Шостакович был великолепн-ым.*
 pianist-INSTR.SG Šostakovič was magnificent-INSTR.SG
 'Šostakovič was a magnificent pianist.' (Вишневская)

With the spread of the instrumental within the group of animate predicate nouns associated with unspecified characteristics, in late 20th century Russian nominative–instrumental variation in predicate nouns has been reduced to a minimum, and consequently so has the role of semantics as a conditioning factor. In other words, for the different semantic conditions the proportion of the instrumental became similar, thereby indicating their reduced relevance (Table 5).

As was mentioned above, it is generally believed that the nominative–instrumental shift left behind certain lexical classes which retain nominative use, in particular nouns of nationality and semantically bleached nouns. The common explanation for this is that predicates with NPs, headed by nouns of nationality, would hardly allow a temporal reading triggered by the instrumental. Røed (1966, 21) claims that NPs with semantically bleached nouns, such as *он был хороший человек* 'he was a good person', have a permanent reading, since they denote some intrinsic significant properties of the subject ("wesentliche Eigenschaften des Subjekts"). Nichols (1981) points out that predicate nouns which describe or characterize the subject (such as nouns of nationality and semantically bleached nouns) favour the nominative case, contrary to those designating a function (e.g. *плотник* 'carpenter', *учитель* 'teacher', *председатель* 'chairman'), which favour the instrumental.

Table 6 Nouns of nationality in predicate position

	Total number	% instrumental
1801–1850	25	4
1851–1900	63	5
1901–1950	71	28
1951–2000	190	56

If a qualitative reading of function nouns is possible, for example when they are modified by qualitative adjectives (*он был способный учитель* ‘he was a gifted teacher’), such cases favour the nominative. On the view advanced by Røed and Nichols, if the distribution of nominative/instrumental is determined by semantic properties of lexical items, it would be natural to expect the predominance of the nominative with nouns of nationality and semantically bleached nouns. Indeed, this state held in the 19th century and was maintained to a certain extent into the early 20th century.

From the middle of the 20th century, the instrumental became fully acceptable with nouns of nationality. As shown in Table 6, statistics for four fifty-year periods indicate an increase from 4% in 1801–1850 (in fact, one instance among the 25 examples found in the sample for this period) to 56% in 1951–2000.¹⁰

After the elimination of instances in which predicated properties could be read as temporally or modally restricted (14), which, as shown above, triggers the instrumental, we still arrive at 42% of the instrumental (from a total of 135 examples) with predicatively used nouns of nationality in 1951–2000.

- (14) a. [...] *уже тогда [он] был немец-ем, отчего*
already then [he] was German-INSTR.SG which.is.why
сейчас [...] живет в объединившейся ФРГ.
now lives in reunified FRG
‘[He] had been a German at that time already, which is why [he] lives now in reunified Germany.’ (Попов)
- b. [...] *если бы я была француженк-ой или*
if SVJV I was French-INSTR.SG or
англичанк-ой то они бы, пожалуй,
English-INSTR.SG then they SVJV maybe
подумали, как мне помочь.
thought how I:DAT to.help
‘If I were French or English, maybe they would have thought how to help me.’ (Васильев)
- c. *Я в России мечтала работать в такой же*
I in Russia dreamed to.work in same IDENT
конторе, но меня не взяли, потому что я
office but I:ACC not hired because I
там была евре-ем.
there was Jew-INSTR.SG
‘In Russia I was keen to work in the same office, but I was not hired because I was a Jew there.’ (Рубина)

¹⁰Statistics for nouns of nationality in the predicate position are based on samples extracted from the Russian National Corpus (www.ruscorpora.ru).

Table 7 *Человек* ‘person’ in predicate position (semantically bleached usage)

	Total number	% instrumental
1801–1850	93	5
1851–1900	165	11
1901–1950	122	45
1951–2000	136	90

A more dramatic change occurred with semantically bleached nouns with the past tense copula, the vast majority of which took the nominative in the 19th century. The instrumental in these constructions, as in (15), became fully acceptable in the early 20th century, and by the second half of the century had become dominant. As our statistics for *человек* ‘person’ show, the numbers for the instrumental in this group for 1951–2000 are similar to those in all other groups of predicate nouns (Table 7).

Instrumental with semantically bleached nouns (1951–2000):

- (15) a. *Как все легкомысленные мужчины, отец был добродушн-ым человек-ом.*
 as all light-minded men father was good-natured-INSTR.SG person-INSTR.SG
 ‘As all light-minded men, father was a good-natured person.’ (Довлатов)
- b. *Кунта был человек-ом добр-ым и, прямо скажем, глуп-ым.*
 Kunta was person-INSTR.SG kind-INSTR.SG and frankly silly-INSTR.SG
 ‘Kunta was a kind and, frankly speaking, a silly person.’ (Искандер)
- c. *Человек-ом он был незаурядн-ым и даже во многих отношениях.*
 person-INSTR.SG he was remarkable-INSTR.SG and even in many respects
 ‘He was a remarkable person, and even in many respects.’ (Климов)
- d. *Джон Брей нам понравил-ся с первой минуты, но сейчас он был лучш-им человек-ом в Аделаиде.*
 John Bray we:DAT liked-REFL from first minute but now he was the best-INSTR.SG person-INSTR.SG in Adelaide
 ‘We liked John Bray from the first moment, but now he was the best person in Adelaide.’ (Гранин)
- e. *Я в ту пору был непритязательн-ым человек-ом.*
 I in that period was unpretentious-INSTR.SG person-INSTR.SG
 ‘I was an unpretentious person at that time.’ (Довлатов)

To make sure that the high numbers of the instrumental attested in 1951–2000 are not due to the strong factors described above, we eliminated from the sample instances in which, as in (15d) and (15e), the predicated property is temporally or modally specified (in Timberlake’s terminology, ‘departure from current state’ or ‘departure from expectations’ accordingly, cf. Fig. 2). After eliminating these factors, we obtained a sample consisting of 122 instances. The frequencies of the instrumental in this group for the 1951–2000 period (89%) are similar to those for predicate nouns in general. In other words, NPs with

semantically bleached nouns, despite their tendency to indicate a pure characteristic expressed by an adjective, adopted the instrumental in the predicate position, even when temporally or modally unrestricted, which superseded the influence of this lexico-semantic factor on predicate case marking.

4 Conclusions

Until the middle of the 20th century, variation in case marking on predicate nouns with the copula *быть* 'to be' was to a large degree conditioned by semantic and syntactic factors. In the second half of the 20th century the instrumental spread to domains formerly occupied by the nominative. This change replaced multiple rules of variation with a single overall rule. Within some lexical classes, such as nouns of nationality, changes may occur more slowly than in the language in general. Nevertheless, a thorough analysis of the variation within this group across the two centuries does not indicate any fundamental differences as compared to other lexical classes. In our view, semantics had only a subsidiary role in this morphosyntactic process, supporting variation at some stages, while ultimately being ousted in favour of a single rule, namely: instrumental case marking on predicate nouns. The shape of the nominative–instrumental shift indicates that Russian is moving from a semantically-conditioned to a syntactically-determined model for predicate nouns, and that this change is at an advanced stage in the contemporary language.

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