The Syntax of Russian

The study of Russian is of great importance to syntactic theory, due in particular to its unusual case system and its complex word order patterns. This book provides an essential guide to Russian syntax and examines the major syntactic structures of the language. It begins with an overview of verbal and nominal constituents, followed by major clause types, including null-copula and impersonal sentences, Wh-questions and their distribution, and relative and subordinate clauses. The syntax behind the rich Russian morphological case system is then described in detail, with focus on both the fairly standard instances of Nominative, Accusative and Dative case and the important language-specific uses of the Genitive and Instrumental cases. The book goes on to analyze the syntax of "free" word order for which Russian is famous. It will be of interest to researchers and students of syntactic theory, of Slavic linguistics, and of language typology.

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CAMBRIDGE SYNTAX GUIDES
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To the memory of Aleksandra Arzhakovskaya

Contents

Preface

Russian is an East Slavic language spoken in the Russian Federation, in countries of the former Soviet Union and in many other countries. It is the most widely spoken Slavic language and one of the five or six most widely spoken languages in the world (after Mandarin, Spanish, English, and Hindi/Urdu, and on a par with Arabic), with over 275 million speakers worldwide, including second language speakers. It ranks in the top ten in terms of numbers of native speakers as well, with estimates varying from 140,000,000 to 170,000,000.

Russian is the official government language of the Russian Federation and one of two official languages of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and the Kyrgyz Republic, as well as one of the six official languages of the United Nations. Significant minorities (and in various regions the majority) of the population speak it at home in Ukraine, Belarus, the Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Estonia, and Latvia, and it is spoken commonly in various parts of the rest of the former Soviet Union. Emigré communities have brought Russian to cities around the world, especially in Western Europe, North America, and Israel. In Israel, there are over 700,000 Russian speakers and Russian is one of six official court languages in New York. It has also served as the basis for various language mixes and creoles.

Russian has a fascinating set of core syntactic properties. It is a configurational Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) language, but one with considerably free word order both within and among constituents. It has a highly inflected case system that uses a relatively small set of case categories to encode a wide range of meanings and relations. Cases alternate under subtle circumstances, and some of these alternations have significant consequences for syntactic theories, such as the option of both Accusative and Genitive of Negation on direct objects in negative sentences. The freedom of word order allows Information Structure notions such as old and new information to be encoded in the sentence's linear order, although this freedom is more constrained than is generally thought.

A major goal of this book is to describe in detail these essentials of the syntax of the modern Russian language in a way that could illuminate its structural properties both for those who know and use the language regularly, and for those who do not have any practical knowledge of the language. These descriptions should be of value for anyone with interest in the language, be it practical, cultural, or scientific. A parallel, and perhaps narrower, goal is to present the most important recent theoretical discussions about Russian syntax, especially the controversial ones, so that interested linguists can orient themselves quickly with regard to the key research issues in Russian syntax and where future investigations should take us.

The descriptions and analyses offered are presented using the generative framework, though no extensive knowledge of syntactic theory is assumed. In fact, the only background I assume is familiarity with basic grammatical notions (case, agreement, parts of speech, and so on). The book is structured in such a way that it can be used in place of a traditional descriptive grammar, albeit with more emphasis on grammaticality contrasts than traditional grammars usually contain. All technical linguistic machinery that is required for the discussion is introduced as it becomes relevant. And although it will be clear from the outset that I am a believer in *configurationality* and *derivationality* in explaining syntactic possibilities, I try to justify all basic assumptions about syntactic processes through their empirical coverage, rather than by simply assuming prevailing theoretical models. I do not adhere to one particular theoretical stance exclusively and have drawn on various linguistic traditions, including the Prague School, Russian/Soviet Functionalism, American Functionalism, and various generative approaches.

In describing and analyzing the syntax of any language, one encounters the issue of variation across speakers. In terms of dialects, Russian is a fairly homogeneous language. The standard written and spoken language is nearly the same in Kaliningrad in the West as it is in Vladivostok in the East, despite the tremendous geographic distance in between. There are, of course, some regional dialects, such as the Northern dialects, whose distinct syntactic properties I do not attempt to address here (some are treated in Timberlake 1974 and Lavine 2000). There is also the issue of register. Russian linguists speak of standard literary Russian (referred to in English as Contemporary Standard Russian [CSR]) vs. Colloquial Russian, referred to in Russian as *Russkaja Razgovornaja Reč'* ('Russian Conversational Speech' as in the title of Zemskaya's well-known 1973 book and later works). Zemskaya's definition of *Russkaja Razgovornaja Reč'* is that of the "unprescribed oral speech of native speakers of the literary language" (*neprinuždennaja reč' nositelej literaturnogo jazyka*) (Zemskaya 1973: 5), a definition that I assume here as

well. Zemskaya and others have shown that the colloquial language differs
in various syntactic properties from the literary norm, especially in the range
of word order possibilities. Because my discussion of Russian word order in
Chapters 6 and 7 crucially involves intonational patterns, I do discuss a fairly
wide range of syntactic possibilities there, some of which might be considered
available only in the colloquial language. However, I do not discuss in detail
any colloquialisms that are entirely unavailable in CSR; for those the reader
is referred to Zemskaya's detailed and fascinating descriptions.

The book is divided into three major parts: (I) Basic configurations
(Chapters 1–3), (II) Case (Chapters 4 and 5), and (III) Word order (Chapters
6 and 7). As the book progresses, and as a set of assumptions about basic
phrase structure and syntactic relations is motivated, more theoretical issues
of syntactic analysis are presented and discussed. This gradual development
from the more descriptive to the more theoretical mirrors the historical devel-
opment of the field of Russian grammatical studies in a useful way, and also
allows students and other readers without thorough grounding in theoretical
grammar to become acquainted with the descriptive situation before delving
into topics that are more controversial and pertain more to theoretical issues
than purely descriptive ones.

In Part I I motivate a configurational approach to basic Russian phrasal
structure, based on simple principles of syntactic combination. I first look at
verbal structures in Chapter 1 followed by nominal structures in Chapter 2. I
show that Russian verbal and nominal structures are hierarchical, built up by
combining lexical items whose grammatical *features* dictate their combina-
torics, in ways similar to many other languages (possibly all). Grammatical/
functional structures above VP and NP are introduced, as well as modifica-
tion. Standard constituency tests are introduced, basic structures are dia-
grammed, and theoretical complications are identified. Chapter 3 expands
the coverage to the clausal and sentential level, including subordinate and rel-
ative clauses, showing how larger structures are created from smaller ones by
processes similar to those presented in Chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 3 contains
configurational descriptions of most of the construction types identified in
traditional Russian and Soviet grammars. Chapter 3 also introduces various
derivational issues and theoretical debates, such as the nature of question
formation (wh-movement), and sets the stage for the more theoretical discus-
sions to come in the next chapters.

Part II of the book concerns the syntax of case in Russian. Chapter 4 intro-
duces the syntactic nature of Russian structural case assignment (Nominative
and Accusative) and then turns to a discussion of Dative case and the inter-
nal structure of VP. I show that each case reflects the feature make-up of

a particular grammatical (functional) category, such as T for Nominative and *v* for Accusative. Basic derivations are sketched out, building on earlier chapters. Many non-canonical Russian-specific constructions involving NOM, ACC and DAT are analyzed here as well. The chapter includes a discussion of the controversial issue of the structure of ditransitive constructions. Chapter 5 turns to the famous Predicate Instrumental and Genitive of Negation in Russian, providing a configurational account for those cases (and various related case phenomena), building on Chapter 4. Here, too, we see that the source of most instances of these cases, though not all, involves a particular grammatical category, Predication for Instrumental and Quantification for Genitive. I also discuss case doubling effects and case-marked adverbial expressions. The resulting case system is both highly configurational, and capable of accounting for important major semantic case correlates.

Part III deals with Russian word order. Chapter 6 describes the various surface word order possibilities in Russian in terms of basic (neutral) orders and orders with specific discourse/functional effects. I show that Russian is well behaved typologically and patterns in basic orders with other SVO languages. The neutral order for transitives is SVO and for intransitives is VS. Deviation from these orders is typically associated with a distinct arrangement of old and new elements and/or with a particular intonational pattern. Various controversial claims in the current literature about the syntactic position of Topic and Focus phrases are discussed at the end of the chapter. I argue against accounts that posit a single fixed position for these elements and in favor of a system using relative ordering, in combination with intonation, to determine discourse relations within a sentence. I do not discuss issues of *textual* organization beyond the level of the individual sentence and its immediately preceding context. Chapter 7 turns to the technical issues of how non-neutral orders are related to neutral ones. I show that a derivational account is the most accurate – movement rules (of kinds familiar from other constructions and other languages) serve to scramble the basic word orders and achieve a particular functional result. After discussing the mechanics of such derivations (and some of the controversial debates surrounding them), I turn to their motivation. I argue for functionally motivated movement and provide annotated derivations for all the basic word order patterns. There is also an extensive discussion of the theoretical debates involved in word order derivation.

Many linguists have contributed to the ideas in this book, far too many to mention individually, other than John Whitman, who introduced me to the beauty of syntax, Leonard Babby, who introduced me to the beauty of Russian syntax, and John Bowers, whose example taught me that a love

of syntax can, in fact, be integrated into an otherwise healthy life. I am especially thankful to those who read through and gave written comments on an earlier version of the entire manuscript (Svitlana Antonyuk-Yudina, Nerea Madariaga, and Yakov Testelets), and to the various other Russian linguists (in both senses) who commented on parts of it at various conferences and other forums. I am grateful to my students and colleagues at Stony Brook and in St. Petersburg and Moscow and in many other places, especially my friend and colleague Anna Maslennikova, who always encouraged me to focus on this book even at the height of our frenzied work on many other projects. Thanks to Wayles Browne for discussion of transliteration issues, and to Poppy Slocum for invaluable help with the index.

Portions of Chapter 3 appeared in articles in the *Journal of Slavic Linguistics* (1995) and *The Linguistic Review* (1995). Parts of Chapters 4, 5, and 7 have appeared in articles in the *Formal Approaches to Linguistic Theory* series (volumes 4, 12, 14, 15 and 18), and parts of Chapter 7 appeared in articles in *Linguistic Inquiry* (2001) and *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* (2004). I am grateful to Sarah Green and Jodie Barnes at Cambridge University Press and especially to Series Editor Helen Barton for her patience and support, particularly at the outset, and to Jacqueline French for superb and tireless copy-editing.

On the personal side, I should start by thanking Jim McFarland for pointing out Dostoevsky to me when we were 16. It's a fairly straight line from there to the situation I am in now – when I find that there is simply no way to adequately thank the Russian-speaking friends who have been so central in my life for over 28 years. Treating me as one of your own has defined who I am.

The musicians and composers who continue to motivate me deserve special mention – they really made it all possible: David, Elvis, Melissa, Borya, Bob, Melanie, Wolfgang, Craig & Charlie, Hedwig, Franz, Joe, Vitja, Sasha, Dave, and everyone else – you know who you are!

I am so lucky to have had such intellectual inspiration and personal love and support from my immediate family: Mitzi; Bud and Lotte (aka Mom and Dad); Charles, Becky, and Janey; Vuky and Matiska; Milka, Dušan, and Dragana; and most of all, Dijana, and now Sava Marie (who arrived just in time to be mentioned here).

This book is dedicated to the memory of Aleksandra Arzhakovskaya, who loved this language as much as she loved life itself. Her subversive wisdom and incredible thirst for life will inspire me always.

Note on transliteration

In transliterating Russian phrases and sentences, I follow the Scientific Transliteration system for Cyrillic, used widely in Slavic linguistic traditions, whereby each Russian *letter* is represented by a unique letter or combination of letters (some with diacritics). The only place where I deviate from this system is in transliterating the Russian letter *ë*, where I do not use the two dots, rendering it as *e* (in keeping with most modern Russian printing traditions), except in cases where that would cause ambiguity, such as *vsë* ('all'-neut.sg), where the two dots are used, as opposed to *vse* ('all'-plural), where they are not.

For a complete description of the system, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_transliteration. For more information on Scientific Transliteration (and other) transliteration systems for Cyrillic, see Wellisch (1977).

List of abbreviations and symbols

Abbreviations

1/2/3	first/second/third person
A	adjective
ACC	Accusative case
ADV/adv	adverb
AGR	agreement
AP	Adjective Phrase
Appl	applicative
ApplLP	Low Applicative Phrase
ApplP	Applicative Phrase
ARG	argument
Asp	aspect
AspP	Aspect Phrase
aux	auxiliary verb
C, COMP	complementizer
CFC	Complete Functional Complex
COND	conditional
COP	copula
CP	Complementizer Phrase
D	determiner
D-linked	discourse-linked
DAT	Dative case
Dem	demonstrative
DIST	distance
DO	direct object
DP	Determiner Phrase
DUR	durative
ECM	Exceptional Case Marking
EPP	Extended Projection Principle (Subject Condition)
EXP	Experiencer
F	feature

F	feminine
FF	Functional Form
+F / Foc	Focus
FP / FocP	Focus Phrase
FR	Focus Raising
FSP	Functional Sentence Perspective
FUT	future
GB	Government and Binding
GEN	Genitive case
GER	gerund
GTS	Generalized Tree Splitting
IK	Intonation Contour
IMPER	imperative
IMPF	imperfective
INDIC	indicative
INFIN	infinitive
Infl	inflection
INSTR	Instrumental case
INTERROG	interrogative
IO	indirect object
IS	Information Structure
KP	Case Phrase
LBE	Left-branch Extraction
LD	Left Dislocation
LF	Logical Form
LF	long-form
LI	Locative Inversion
LOC	locative
M	modal
M	masculine
M-FOC	Middle-Field Focus movement
M-TOP	Middle-Field Topicalization
MFL	Movement-to-the-Far-Left
MFS	multiply-filled specifier
MOD	modifier
ModP	Modification Phrase
N	noun
N	neuter
NEG	negative marker
NOM	Nominative case
NP	Noun Phrase
NPI	negative polarity item

Num	number
NumP	Number Phrase
OI	Object Inversion
O / obj	object
OBL	oblique
Op	operator
OpP	Operator Phrase
P	preposition
PF	Phonological Form
PF	perfective
PL	plural
Poss	Possessive
PossP	Possessive Phrase
PP	Prepositional Phrase
Pred	predication
PredP	Predication Phrase
PREP	Prepositional case
PRES	present tense
PRO	null subject of non-finite phrase
PST	past tense
Q	quantification
q	interrogative feature
QI	Quotative Inversion
QP	Quantification Phrase
QR	Quantifier Raising
Quant	quantifier
rel	relative
Rh	*Rheme*
S	subject, sentence
SG	singular
SF	short-form
+SF	stress focus
SUBJ	subjunctive, subject
Spec	specifier
t	trace
T	tense
TEMP	temporal
TH	*Theme* (the discourse notion)
THM	Theme (the thematic role)
TP	Tense Phrase
TOP	Topicalization
TR	*Theme* Raising

xviii   List of abbreviations and symbols

u	uninterpretable
V	verb, main verb, vowel
v	little verb, auxiliary verb
VP	Verb Phrase
*v*P	little Verb Phrase, auxiliary Verb Phrase
WCO	Weak Crossover
Wh	question phrase

Symbols

*	ungrammatical
#	infelicitous
?	marginal
θ	thematic role
Δ	elided material
Ø	null element
Φ	phi-features (person, number, gender)
∀	universal (quantifier)
∃	existential (quantifier)