Nominal predication: Russian vs. German

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This paper proposes a unified analysis of variants of nominal predication in Russian and German at the syntax-semantics interface. While in Russian the predicate noun in a predicational copular sentence such as (1) may occur in Instrumental (Ins) or in Nominative (Nom), in German it may occur with or without an indefinite article, as in (2).

(1) a. Boris byl diplomatom. b. Boris byl diplomat. <Russian>
   Boris was diplomat.INS Boris was diplomat. NOM
(2) a. Boris war Diplomat. b. Boris war ein Diplomat. <German>
   Boris was diplomat. Boris was a diplomat.

The following questions arise: What is the difference between alternants within one language? Is the alternation in Russian semantically identical to the alternation in German?

Previous research. Although there is already much work on predicate alternation in Russian and in German, the alternations themselves have not been compared before. In the literature on Russian, a number of semantic oppositions were proposed to describe the difference between the alternants. Among them are semantic oppositions, such as temporary property (Ins) vs. permanent property (Nom), and partial characterization of the individual (Ins) vs. identification of the individual as a whole (Nom) (see Pitsch 2014 for an overview). Thus, Ins is preferred in sentences where the predicate specifies some aspect of the individual temporarily contrasting with another aspect (3), or where the predicate specifies one aspect of the individual contrasting with another one holding for the individual at the same time (4).

(3) Snačala Katja byla pevicej, potom ona stala direktorom teatra.
   first Katja was singer.INS then she became director.INS of-theatre
(4) Tagor byl ne tol’ko poetom, no i kompozitorem. (https://vk.com/wall-78819095_4067)
   Tagore was not only poet.INS but also composer.INS

Inspired by the work of Maienborn (2005) on two copula verbs in Spanish, Geist (2006) unifies the interpretational possibilities of predicate nouns in Ins. She suggests that the predicate case reflects the perspective of the speaker: Ins indicates the restriction of the predication to a specific topic situation the speaker has in mind, while Nom is neutral in this respect. Topic situation is determined by the question under discussion (Kratzer 2007). Although every sentence is made about some topic situation, not every topic situation must be specific. Reference to the specific topic situation marked by Ins indicates a contrast to another topic situation in the discourse. Since contrasts can apply in different dimensions, such as the temporal dimension, the meronymic dimension, etc., different interpretations, such as a temporary interpretation in (3) or a part-whole interpretation in (4), arise.

In German, the use of a bare predicate noun instead of an indefinite predicate noun, as in (2), indicates reference to some well-established or institutionalized social aspect, such as profession, nationality, etc. (Duden 2009). The indefinite predicate noun is used to describe uninstitutionalized properties of individuals. Thus, the indefinite NP ein Diplomat in (1b) means that Boris only tends to behave like a professional diplomat, without necessarily being a professional diplomat himself. Interestingly, only bare NPs are compatible with expressions such as von Beruf, which explicitly restrict predication to a well-established social aspect.

(6) Boris ist (*ein) Diplomat von Beruf
   Boris is a diplomat by profession.

Bare predicate nouns in German have another distinguishing property. They can get a plural interpretation if the subject is a plurality of individuals (Berman 2009). This behavior suggests that German bare NPs in the singular are semantically underspecified for number.

(7) Anna und Barbara wollen Ärztin / Ärztinnen werden.
   Anna and Barbara want doctor.F.SG doctor.F.PL become (Duden 2009: 995)

Unified analysis. Although at first glance the distinctions between the two predicate forms in
German and Russian have nothing in common, I argue that, in fact, these differences do have a common denominator: Ins in Russian and the bare form in German both indicate that predication is limited to a social aspect of the individual denoted by the subject, i.e., both forms indicate partial predication. While partial predication concerns some aspect of the individual, complete predication is a predication about an individual as a whole. NPs in Nom in Russian (1b) and indefinite NPs in German (2b) indicate the latter type of predication.

I assume that complete predication is syntactically mediated by the copula verb (10); partial predication is mediated by the functional head of the small clause (“Relator head”, den Dikken 2006) (11). In partial predication, the subject of the small clause denotes a set of social aspects of the individual bound by the sentence subject. Russian and German differ with respect to the domain of specification of this social aspect set. In German, the subject of partial predication is a set of well-established social aspects denoted by hidden expression, here von Beruf ‘by profession’, which I decompose into von seinem, Beruf her ‘by his profession’. In Russian, the set of aspects is contextually restricted by the specific topic situation $s_{top}^i$. Hence, the aspects of the individual $\alpha_i$ need not be well-established.

(8) $[\text{professional aspects of } \alpha_i]_{\text{top}^i} : \lambda x \ [x \text{ is a professional aspect of } (g(i))]$

(9) $[\text{aspects of } \alpha_i \text{ relevant in } s_{top}^i]_{\text{top}^i} : \lambda x \ [x \text{ is an aspect of } g(i) \text{ relevant in } s_{top}^i]$

German and Russian also differ with respect to the feature make-up of the Relator and the type of its complement: In German, the Relator takes an NP projected by the number neutral noun. With Krifka (1995), building on Carlson (1977), I assume that all simple (number neutral) nouns across languages denote kinds. Following Déprez (2005), it can be assumed that countable nouns in both languages project a Numerical phrase (NumP) denoting a set of kind instances. In Russian, the Relator takes the NumP as a complement. The Relator with an Ins feature introduces a situation argument and relates the predicate denoted by the NumP to the situation. The copula just supplies the theta head, introducing the external argument. In German, the bare NP is numberless, it lacks NumP projection. The Relator head maps the kind-denoting bare NP to a predicate via Chierchia’s (1998) CAP operator. The situation argument is introduced by the copula and the external argument by a non-overt theta-head.

(10) **Complete predication**

subject XP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>copula</th>
<th>NumP</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ein Schauspieler aktör.NOM</td>
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(11) **Partial predication**

subject, RelatorP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>copula</th>
<th>aspect of $\alpha_i$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NP/Schauspieler</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NumP / aktör.INS</td>
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Independent evidence for the language-specific differences in the features of the Relator comes from secondary predication. It has been assumed that secondary predicates are introduced in small clauses/RelatorPs, and that they refer to a situation temporally related to the situation introduced by the matrix predicate. This predicts that only RelatorPs referring to a situation can serve as secondary predicates. This prediction is borne out because in Russian only RelatorPs with predicate nouns in Ins, which refer to a situation, are allowed (12); while RelatorPs with bare NPs in German, which do not refer to a situation, are excluded. Instead, Relator als is inserted, since, like Ins in Russian, als introduces a situation argument (13).

(12) Boris vernulsja **millioner** om /*millioner.

Boris came-back **millioner**.INS / **millioner**.NOM

(13) Boris kam zurück *(als) Millionär.

Boris came back as **millioner**

**Conclusion.** This paper identifies a common denominator for variants of nominal predication in Russian and German. The form of the predicate noun indicates the type of predication: partial predication concerning one aspect of the individual (Ins, $\emptyset$ NP) vs. complete predication that identifies the whole individual (Nom, ein NP).