# The transitive 'need' construction in Russian: A null BE analysis

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In Russian, the so-called intensional transitive *need* (see Harves 2008, Harves and Kayne 2012) corresponds to two distinct constructions: (i) with the agreeing adjectival predicate *nužno* and a nominative theme (**agreeing 'need' construction, ANC**), as in (1); and (ii) with *nužno* with default (NEUT.SG) agreement or impersonal nonverbal predicate *nado* and an accusative (sometimes genitive) theme (**transitive 'need' construction, TNC**), as in (1b).

(1)  a. Mne     nuž**n**a   lopat**a**          b. Mne     nužn**o**/**nado**   lopat**u**.
        me_DAT   need_F.SG  spade_NO               me_DAT   need_N.SG /need     spade_ACC
        'I need a spade.'                          'I need a spade.'

Although TNC has been mentioned in both descriptive and theoretical literatures (see Švedova 1980, Pesetsky 1982, see also Dobrushina 2015 for a similar construction with the subjunctive particle *by*), it has not received sufficient attention. For example, it is missing in a (formal) typological survey of 'need' predicates in Harves & Kayne 2012. TNC has a strong colloquial flavor and is less common than ANC, which might explain why it has received little attention. However, we do find TNC in the Russian National Corpus (RNC): 57 and 68 hits for *nužno* (229 and 223 for *nado*) in the written (after 1950) resp. spoken part of RNC. The aim of this paper is to characterize the properties of TNC and to provide a theoretically-informed analysis.

**Properties of TNC**   Apart from the register and frequency differences between the two constructions, TNC has some further peculiarities. First, TNC is (lexically) restricted to *nado/nužno* and does not appear with a semantically similar predicate *neobxodimo* 'necessary', cf. ANC in (1b)

(2)  a. ??Nam    neobxodimo   kuklu.            b.  Nam    neobxodima   kukla.
        us_DAT   necessary_N.SG doll_ACC            us_DAT necessary_F.SG doll_NOM
        Intended: 'We need a doll.'                 'We need a doll.'

Second, TNC has a selectional restriction on its theme argument. Semantically abstract themes, including state/event nominalizations, are banned, as shown in (3a), cf. ANC in (3b). This restriction cannot be explained by an *independent* dispreference for accusative case (and preference for genitive case) associated with abstract nominals (see Kagan 2013), as genitive is still blocked, as shown in (4a); note that genitive on the direct object is in principle possible in TNC (for certain nouns), as shown in (4b).

(3)  a. *Im       nužno/nado    pomošč'.      b. Im        nužna      pomošč'.
        them_DAT  need_N.SG/need help_ACC        them_DAT  need_F.SG  help_NOM
        Intended: 'They need help.'              'They need help.'
(4)  a. *Im       nužno/nado    pomošči.      b. Im        nužno/nado    ljubvi.
        them_DAT  need_N.SG/need help_GEN         them_DAT  need_N.SG/need love_GEN
        Intended: 'They need help.'              'They need help/love.'

Third, the dative argument of TNC shows an animacy restriction. Although inanimate dative arguments sound slightly unnatural in ANC, as in (5b), they seem to be considerably worse in TNC, as in (5a).

(5)  a. Im       / *karte    nužno    stol.     b. (?)Karte    nužen      stol
        them_DAT   map DAT    need_N.SG table_ACC      map_DAT    need_M.SG  table_ACC
        'They/the map need(s) a table'                 'The map needs a table' (RNC)

**Harves's (and Kayne's) analysis**   The challenge posed by TNC is that its analysis should be sufficiently similar to the analysis of ANC to capture the semantic similarity between the two and yet sufficiently different to capture their difference. Harves (2008) discusses ANC in Russian and argues, based on the ambiguity of the temporal modifier in (6), that it should contain an abstract possessive verb, i.e. BE or GET, see (7), but not HAVE, which is not available in Russian, given the lack of an overt productive 'have' and assuming that the lack of an overt HAVE should correspond to the lack of abstract 'have', see Harves & Kayne 2012.

(6)  Ivanu     byli      nužny              den'gi        do     sobranija.
     Ivan$_{DAT}$   were$_{3PL}$  necessary.$_{ADJ.PL}$  money$_{NOM.PL}$before  meeting
     'Ivan needed some money before the meeting.'

(7)  NP$_{DATi}$  *nužen*   [PRO$_i$ **BE/GET** NP$_{NOM}$]

I would like to argue that the analysis in (7) is unsatisfactory as it leaves no room for a proper analysis of TNC. Under Harves's (and Kayne's) framework, a possible analysis of the two constructions would be as in (8): TNC in (8b) contains an abstract predicate GET, which is able to assign accusative/genitive and is presumably associated with the selectional restrictions above, while ANC contains 'unaccusative' BE, which is not so restricted.

(8) a. NP$_{DATi}$  *nužen*  [PRO$_i$ **BE** NP$_{NOM}$]    b. NP$_{DATi}$  *nužno/nado* [PRO$_i$ **GET** NP$_{ACC}$]

The analysis in (8), however, faces a challenge as TNC in (1b) cannot be paraphrased with 'get', as shown in (9a), and requires a paraphrase with 'be' in (9b). It is also doubtful that Russian has an overt productive GET, as Russian *poluchat'* arguably has a more specific meaning than English *get* (i.e. inchoative variant of HAVE, see Harley 2002). Given Harves and Kayne's logic, GET should not exist in Russian. Moreover, it is not clear why GET but not BE should be associated with selectional restrictions and disallow *neobxodimo* 'necessary'.

(9)  a. #Mne     nužno      **polučit**    lopatu.
        me$_{DAT}$   need$_{N.SG}$  get$_{INF}$      spade$_{ACC}$
        'I need to get a spade.'
     b. Mne      nužno,      čtoby u  menja    **byla**        lopata.
        me$_{DAT}$   need$_{N.SG}$  that$_{SUBJ}$ at me   was$_{SUBJ}$    spade$_{NOM}$
        'I need to have a spade.'

**Proposal**    Assuming that there is just *one* abstract possessive verb in Russian (BE), I wish to argue that only TNC contains an abstract possessive head, as in (10b), whereas ANC is monoclausal, contra Harves 2008, as in (10a).

(10) a. NP$_{DAT}$  *nužen*   NP$_{NOM}$              b. NP$_{DATi}$  *nužno/nado* [PRO$_i$ **BE** NP$_{ACC}$]

The analysis in (10) can account for the selectional restrictions in TNC, which would follow from the presence of BE; e.g, (5a) could be linked to the infelicity of the corresponding possessive construction, cf. *U karty est' stol* '#The map has a table', and similarly for (3a), cf. *U nix est' pomošč'* '#They have help'. Alternatively, it could be assumed that null BE is different from its overt counterpart (cf. van Riemsdijk (2002)'s discussion of GO). The analysis could also account for the accusative case in TNC. Under the configurational case assignment theory in Baker (2015) (see also Lavine & Franks 2008) it follows from the presence of the unmarked NP (PRO) c-commanding the theme in (10b), leading to dependent (ACC) case marking. Finally, the ban on *neobxodimo* is expected if null Vs require licensing by functional heads (van Riemsdijk 2002) and *neobxodimo* is a lexical rather than a functional modal.

    Under the analysis in (10), we still need to understand the source of the possessive semantics in ANC and the ambiguity in (6). I wish to argue that the possessive meaning in ANC arises via a special (lexical) composition rule for *nužno/nado*, as was proposed by Fodor & Lepore (1998) for *want* (see some discussion in Harley 2004). Given that the possessive predication in (10a) arises only in the semantic interpretation but not in the syntax, adverbial ambiguity should also be treated as a semantic phenomenon orthogonal to the question of bi- vs. monoclausality (see Horvath & Siloni 2016 for a similar view).

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