

# COPULAR SENTENCES IN RUSSIAN VS. SPANISH AT THE SYNTAX–SEMANTICS INTERFACE

Ljudmila Geist  
Universität Stuttgart

## Abstract

Russian and Spanish each have two variants of the predicational copular sentence. In Russian, the variation concerns the case of the predicate phrase, which can be nominative or instrumental, while in Spanish, the variation involves the choice of the copular verb, either *ser* or *estar*. It is shown that the choice of the particular variant of copular sentence in both languages depends on the speaker's perspective, i.e., on whether or not the predication is linked to a specific topic situation.

## 1 Introduction

In predicational sentences in Russian, the predicate noun phrase can have nominative or instrumental case, provided that the copula is non-zero, i.e., that it occurs in the past tense or future tense form (cf. (1a/b) with the copula *byt'* 'be' in the past). In the present tense, where the copula is zero, the predicate NP always bears nominative case.<sup>1</sup>

- (1) a. Katja byla pevicej.  
      Katja was singer<sub>INS</sub>  
      'Katja was a singer.'
- b. Katja byla pevica.  
      Katja was singer<sub>NOM</sub>  
      'Katja was a singer.'

The difference in meaning between sentences with the nominative NP and sentences in which the NP has instrumental case is so subtle that even native speakers cannot always pinpoint what it is. In the literature on Russian, a number of semantic oppositions are proposed to describe the difference between the two variants.

Traditionally it has been assumed that the choice of the predicate's case reflects the distinction between a **temporal** and a **permanent** property (cf. Jakobson 1971). Wierzbicka (1980) uses the notions **accidental vs. essential** to describe the same dichotomy. According to this view, example (1a), with the instrumental NP, could imply that Katja changed her profession at a later point in time. In this case, Katja's being a singer is regarded as temporal and accidental, whereas in (1b), the state of being a singer is interpreted as a permanent and essential property.

Potebnja (1958:504) indicates another interpretation of the variants in (1a/b). According to him, the instrumental case in (1a) implies that the individual has further professions or occupations at the same time. In (1a) the property of being a singer is presented as one of many properties that can be attributed to Katja. Put differently, the property of being a singer in (1a) describes only one facet, one part of the person. The right paraphrase for this reading would be: "Katja was, among other things, a singer." In contrast to this, the (b) sentence, with

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<sup>1</sup> Katja pevica / \*pevicej.  
      Katja singer<sub>NOM</sub> / Katja<sub>INS</sub>  
      'Katja is a singer.'

In this paper only sentences with an overt copula verb will be considered.

the nominative NP, presents the property of being a singer as an exhaustive and identificational property of the person. The property characterizes a person as a whole. Let us call the interpretational opposition observed by Potebnja the **part vs. whole** opposition. A different interpretation of the instrumental case is triggered in the context given in (2).

- (2) Byla by Katja pevicej, ona by davala koncerty v raznych stranach mira.  
 was Conj. Katja singer<sub>INS</sub> she Conj. gave concerts in different countries world<sub>GEN</sub>  
 ‘If Katja were a singer, she would give concerts all around the world.’

The sentential context triggers the contrast between the real situation, in which Katja is not a singer, and the situation in which she is a singer. Since the sentence in (2) with the predicate NP in instrumental case does not refer to a real situation but expresses an imagined state, I will call such an interpretation triggered by the instrumental case **subjective**. In contrast to the instrumental case, the nominative normally occurs in descriptions of real situations, that is, it triggers an **objective** interpretation. The interpretations of the case alternations are summarized in (3):

(3)

	<b>Instrumental</b>	<b>Nominative</b>
Interpretation 1	temporal	permanent
Interpretation 2	part	whole
Interpretation 3	subjective	objective

Recent analyses of this case alternation as in Bailyn (2001), Bailyn & Citko (1999), Matushansky (2000) and Pereltsvaig (2001) concentrate on the morpho-syntactic difference between the (a) and (b) variants, but don’t provide an explanation of all the interpretational differences mentioned in (3).

From a typological perspective, Russian is not the only language that exhibits two variants of the copular sentence. Spanish, for instance, displays a similar contrast. However, in the case of Spanish, the distinction is not realized as a morphological case alternation on the predicate but lies in the (lexical) choice of the copula verb. In Spanish, there are two counterparts for the English copula ‘be’: *ser* and *estar*. In combination with predicate adjectives, the two copulas can be used interchangeably.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the interpretational oppositions put forward for Russian copular sentences pattern with interpretations suggested for copular sentences in Spanish.

- (4) a. La carretera está ancha.                      b. La carretera es ancha.      (Maienborn 2005:171)  
 ‘The road is<sub>ESTAR</sub> wide.’                      ‘The road is<sub>SER</sub> wide.’

It has often been assumed that the opposition *ser* vs. *estar* reflects the semantic opposition Individual Level Predicate (i.e., permanent property) vs. Stage Level Predicate (i.e., temporal property); cf. for example Diesing (1992) and Kratzer (1994). However, in addition to the opposition **temporary vs. permanent**, the grammars on Spanish propose another semantic opposition to describe the difference in interpretation between the two variants of copular sentence: the contrast **subjective vs. objective** (cf. the overview given in de Bruyne 1993). The subjective reading of (4a) is discussed in Maienborn (2005) under the term “discovery interpretation.” This reading can be triggered by the following context: It was announced that the road would be narrowed, however, the road remained wide. Under this context, the current

<sup>2</sup> Besides adjectives that can occur with either copula, there is a small group of adjectives that only combine with *estar*, e.g., *vacío* ‘empty’, *lleno* ‘full’, *ausente* ‘away’.

situation “the road is wide” contrasts with a situation “the road is not wide” expected by the speaker. The speaker uses *estar* in such a context to express the difference between the expected situation and the real situation.

Maienborn (2005) offers a third possible interpretation of (4) available in certain contexts. In her discussion she mentions that the property of being wide can be interpreted as being restricted to a local part of the subject referent *road*. The paraphrase for this reading would be: “The part of the road I am speaking of is wide.” This reading corresponds to the **part–whole** interpretation mentioned above for the Russian example (1a). The table in (5) summarizes the interpretations discussed for the examples (4a/b).

(5)

	<b>estar</b>	<b>ser</b>
Interpretation 1	temporal	permanent
Interpretation 2	part	whole
Interpretation 3	subjective	objective

It is obvious that the contrast Russian makes via two different morphological cases on the predicate noun phrase is the same one that Spanish expresses through the selection of the copula verb in predicational sentences with adjective phrases.<sup>3</sup> The question now arises of how this similarity can be accounted for in formal semantics. Could the number of interpretational oppositions of the two variants of copular sentence be reduced to one common denominator? Intuitively, *estar* predications in Spanish and predications with instrumental case in Russian imply some contrast and the predication is bounded in some respect. I will present a formal analysis based on this intuition in sections 2 and 3.

The paper argues that the difference which Russian and Spanish encode with two distinct variants of predicational sentence is the same. This difference is discourse-pragmatic in nature. The copula *estar* in Spanish and instrumental case in Russian indicate the restriction of the predication to a specific topic situation, while *ser* in Spanish and nominative case in Russian are neutral in this respect.

The paper is organized as follows: Sections 2 and 3 introduce the analyses of copular sentences in Spanish and Russian. Section 4 concludes the paper.

## 2 A discourse-pragmatic account of *ser* vs. *estar* in Spanish

As we have seen in the introduction, the interpretation of copular sentences with *estar* in Spanish and copular sentences with the instrumental case in Russian depends on the context. The question now arises of how to account for the different readings of one particular copular construction. I do not want to ascribe every reading to the copula in Spanish or to the suffix for instrumental case in Russian, thereby creating polysemy. What I want is to trace back all

<sup>3</sup> In Russian, predicate adjectives in copular constructions may come in two “flavors,” the so-called long form and the so-called short form. The short form is inflected for gender and number, whereas the long form is inflected for gender, number and case. Like predicate nouns, the long form of adjectives can occur in nominative and instrumental case.

(i) Doroga byla širokaja.                      (ii) Doroga byla širokoj.                      (iii) Doroga byla široka.  
     way    was wide<sub>LF.NOM</sub>                      way    was wide<sub>LF.INS</sub>                      way    was wide<sub>SF</sub>

Since the interpretational difference between long form adjectives in nominative and long form adjectives in instrumental is less obvious than with predicate nouns and the division of labor between the short form and the long form deserves a separate study, I restrict my analysis of Russian copular sentences to sentences with predicate nouns.



[This contrast leads to a spatial restriction. In example (4), the speaker can restrict his claim to stating that the relevant part of the road is wide, acknowledging that there might be other parts where this road is not wide.]

*Epistemic dimension*

“The current topic situation contrasts with topic situations which were expected instead” (Maienborn 2005:172).

[This contrast leads to the subjective vs. objective interpretation. In example (4), the current situation described by the sentence contrasts with a situation expected by the speaker.]

To conclude, the different interpretations provided by the selection of *ser* and *estar*, like i.e., temporary vs. permanent, part vs. whole, and subjective vs. objective, thus receive a common basis: the linking (or the lack of such linking) to a specific topic situation. The next step is the integration of these findings in the semantic representation of the copulas in Spanish.

Maienborn assumes that these copulas have basically the same meaning as their English counterpart *be* and its counterparts in many languages, but unlike the representation of *ser*, the representation of *estar* contains a free parameter, which can be specified by the context. I follow Maienborn in this assumption, but my implementation of this idea is based on the lexical representation of verbs suggested by Bierwisch (1988). I assume for *ser* (9) the lexical entry that Bierwisch (1988) proposes for the copula *sein* in German (8). The relation INST in this representation links the situation argument of the copula *z* to the proposition  $P(x)$ .  $z$  INST  $[P(x)]$  is construed as “*z* instantiates  $P(x)$ .” The variable *z* is an anchor for adverbial modifications as well as a take-up point for the temporal and aspectual characterization of the proposition.

(8) *sein*:  $\lambda P \lambda x \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [P(x)]]$  (Bierwisch 1988:46)

(9) *ser*:  $\lambda P \lambda x \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [P(x)]]$

The lexical entry of *estar* in (10) differs from that of *ser*. The difference between them is a pragmatic one: “*Estar* ... carries an additional presupposition linking the predication to a specific discourse situation” (Maienborn 2005:167).

(10) *estar*:  $\lambda P \lambda x \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [P(x)]] / \underbrace{[R(z, s_i)]}$

specificity presupposition (cf. Maienborn 2005:168)

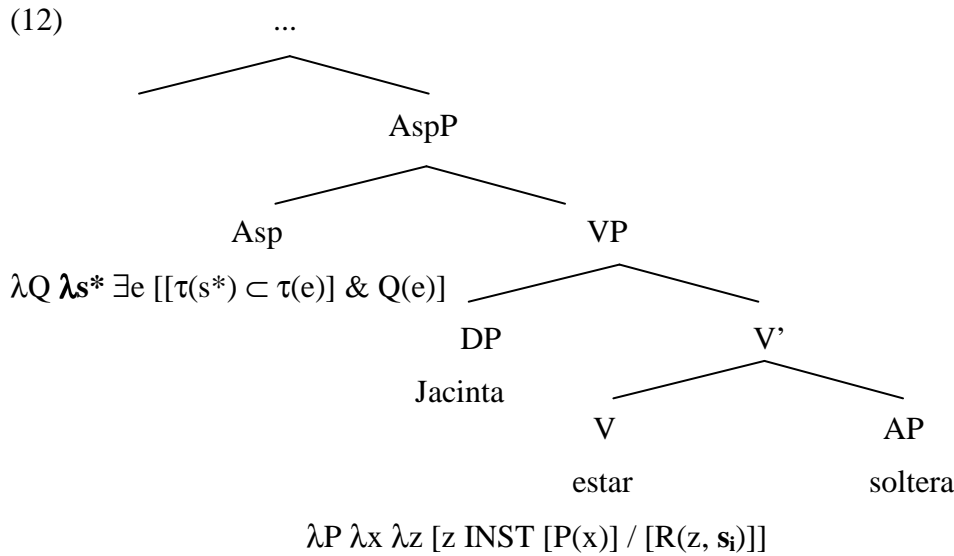
According to the presupposition of *estar* the situation argument *z* is linked to a specific topic situation  $s_i$  via the *R* relation. *R* is a free parameter, and  $s_i$  is a free variable for specific topic situations. The free variable  $s_i$  and the relation *R* can be resolved in the course of the semantic composition, as will be shown below.

To make the derivation of the meaning of copular sentences with *ser* and *estar* more precise, some background assumptions about the syntax and semantics of copular sentences from Maienborn (2003/05) need to be introduced.

- The copulas *ser* and *estar* are base-generated in the head of VP and take a predicate AP as their complement.
- As Spanish belongs to the aspect languages, a functional Aspect phrase can be assumed in which aspect is specified. Following Maienborn, I further assume that the functional category Aspect introduces a contextually determined topic situation  $s^*$  (cf. also Klein 1994).

- The semantic contribution of the functional head Asp in (12) is the establishing of a relation between the VP referent (here:  $e$ ) and the topic situation  $s^*$ . Imperfective aspect indicates that the topic time  $\tau(s^*)$  is fully contained in the situation time  $\tau(e)$ , while perfective aspect indicates that the situation time  $\tau(e)$  is fully contained in the topic time  $\tau(s^*)$  (where  $\tau$  maps situations onto their temporal extensions). The semantic representations for both aspectual features, imperfective and perfective, are given in (11) from Maienborn (2005).

- (11) imperfective aspect:  $\lambda Q \lambda s^* \exists e [[\tau(s^*) \subset \tau(e)] \& Q(e)]$   
 perfective aspect:  $\lambda Q \lambda s^* \exists e [[\tau(e) \subset \tau(s^*)] \& Q(e)]$



For the sake of simplicity, I will not consider the semantic discussion of tense, which, according to Klein (1994), establishes a relation between topic time and speech time.

We are now in a position to derive the sentences with *ser* and *estar* compositionally in the way suggested by Maienborn (2003/05). First, I will show how the semantic derivation works in a sentence with *estar*. For the sake of simplicity I will only consider the semantics of the sentence on the level of the AspP, as illustrated in (13).

- (13) Jacinta está soltera. ('Jacinta is<sub>ESTAR</sub> single.')
- (*estar*, imperfective)
- Jacinta: Jacinta
  - soltera:  $\lambda y [\text{SINGLE}(y)]$
  - estar:  $\lambda P \lambda x \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [P(x)] / [R(z, s_i)]]$
  - imperfective aspect:  $\lambda Q \lambda s^* \exists e [[\tau(s^*) \subset \tau(e)] \& Q(e)]$
  - $[_{V'} \text{ estar soltera}]$ :  $\lambda P \lambda x \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [P(x)] / [R(z, s_i)]] (\lambda y [\text{SINGLE}(y)])$   
 $\equiv \lambda x \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [\text{SINGLE}(x)] / [R(z, s_i)]]$
  - $[_{VP} \text{ Jacinta está soltera}]$ :  $\lambda x \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [\text{SINGLE}(x)] / [R(z, s_i)]] (\text{Jacinta})$   
 $\equiv \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [\text{SINGLE}(\text{Jacinta})] / [R(z, s_i)]]$
  - $[_{AspP} \text{ Jacinta está soltera}]$ :  $\lambda Q \lambda s^* \exists e [[\tau(s^*) \subset \tau(e)] \& Q(e)]$   
 $(\lambda z [z \text{ INST } [\text{SINGLE}(\text{Jacinta})] / [R(z, s_i)]])$   
 $\equiv \lambda s^* \exists e [[\tau(s^*) \subset \tau(e)] \& [e \text{ INST } [\text{SINGLE}(\text{Jacinta})] / [R(z, s_i)]]]$

In the representation in (13g), two topic situations are available: the topic situation  $s^*$  is introduced by the functional head *Asp*, while the second topic situation  $s_i$  is part of the lexical entry of *estar*. Since a sentence is a claim about a single topic situation,  $s^*$  and  $s_i$  must be identified ( $s^* = s_i$ ). According to van der Sandt (1992), presuppositions can be treated as anaphors. They can be specified by the identification with its antecedent. The identification of the two topic situations permits the resolution of the specificity presupposition. The semantics of the resulting sentence after the existential binding of the topic situation is represented in (14):

- (14) Jacinta está soltera:  
 $\exists s^* \exists e [[\tau(s^*) \subset \tau(e)] \& [e \text{ INST } [\text{SINGLE}(\text{Jacinta})]] \& [s^* = s_i]]$

The precondition for the identification of  $s^*$  with  $s_i$  is that  $s^*$ , like  $s_i$ , is specific. According to Maienborn’s analysis, only a specific  $s^*$  can serve as a suitable antecedent for *estar*’s specificity presupposition.

The sentence in (14) is true if there is a situation characterized by Jacinta’s being single whose temporal extension includes a contextually specific topic time.

The derivation of a *ser* sentence is represented in (15).

- (15) Jacinta es soltera. (‘Jacinta is<sub>SER</sub> single.’) (ser, imperfective)
- a. Jacinta: Jacinta
- b. soltera:  $\lambda y [\text{SINGLE}(y)]$
- c. ser:  $\lambda P \lambda x \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [P(x)]]$
- d. imperfective aspect:  $\lambda Q \lambda s^* \exists e [[\tau(s^*) \subset \tau(e)] \& Q(e)]$
- e. [<sub>VP</sub> ser soltera]:  $\lambda P \lambda x \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [P(x)]] (\lambda y [\text{SINGLE}(y)])$   
 $\equiv \lambda x \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [\text{SINGLE}(x)]]$
- f. [<sub>VP</sub> Jacinta es soltera]:  $\lambda x \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [\text{SINGLE}(x)]] (\text{Jacinta})$   
 $\equiv \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [\text{SINGLE}(\text{Jacinta})]]$
- g. [<sub>AspP</sub> Jacinta es soltera]:  $\lambda Q \lambda s^* \exists e [[\tau(s^*) \subset \tau(e)] \& Q(e)]$   
 $(\lambda z [z \text{ INST } [\text{SINGLE}(\text{Jacinta})]])$   
 $\equiv \lambda s^* \exists e [[\tau(s^*) \subset \tau(e)] \& [e \text{ INST } [\text{SINGLE}(\text{Jacinta})]]]$

The sentence *Jacinta es soltera* is true if there is a situation of Jacinta being single whose temporal extension includes the topic time. Again, I will not touch on the interpretation of tense.

I will leave the discussion of Spanish here. In the next section, I will develop a formal analysis of the copular sentences in Russian. The analysis of copular sentences in Spanish by Maienborn introduced in this section will serve as the basis for my analysis of copular sentences in Russian.

### 3 An analysis of Russian copular sentences

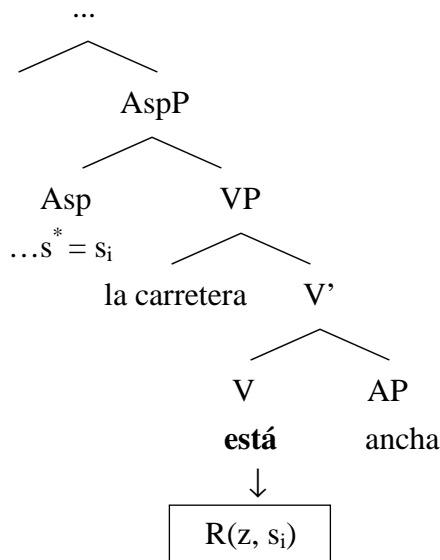
Our examination of the Russian and Spanish data in section 1 showed that the interpretative effects brought about by the choice of the respective copular sentence variant are in fact parallel. The instrumental case on the predicate noun in Russian triggers the same interpretative effects as *estar* in Spanish. The nominative case in Russian yields the same interpretations as Spanish *ser*. In order to account for the similarity between the two languages I assume the following hypothesis:

(16) *Nominative/Instrumental hypothesis*

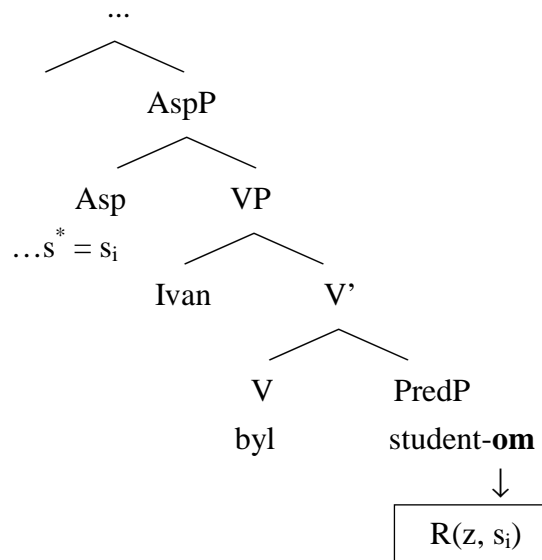
By using the predicate noun phrase with the instrumental case, speakers restrict their claims to a particular discourse situation they have in mind; by using the nominative speakers remain neutral as to the specificity of the discourse situation.

For the semantic analysis of copular sentences in Russian I assume that the instrumental suffix located on the predicate noun in Russian contains a specificity presupposition in its lexical entry, like Spanish *estar*. The following schema illustrates the main difference between Russian and Spanish:

## (17) Spanish



## (18) Russian



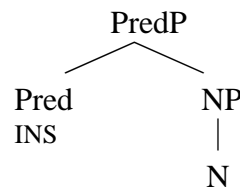
In order to develop a formal reconstruction of the difference between predicate nouns in nominative case and predicate nouns in instrumental case, I propose that there are two types of predicate phrases. The predicate phrase in the nominative case receives its case via agreement with the subject of the copular sentence, which bears nominative case. The predicate phrase in the instrumental case is more complex, syntactically and semantically. This NP is embedded in a functional projection PredP,<sup>5</sup> whose head checks instrumental case.

(19) *Two types of predicate phrases*

## a. agreement-predicate



## b. instrumental-predicate



With Bailyn & Citko (1999) I assume that the Pred head has an instrumental case feature which must be checked when merged onto a noun phrase. This instrumental feature has the following lexical content:

<sup>5</sup> This Predicate Phrase (PredP) roughly corresponds to the PredP for secondary predications in Bowers (2000), but does not contain a specifier.



(20) INS:  $\lambda P \lambda x [P(x) / [R(z, s_i)]]^6$

The instrumental feature contains the specificity presupposition. Thus, the semantic contribution of the Pred head consists of providing the link to a specific topic situation. The pragmatic-semantic difference between the NP *pevica* ‘singer<sub>NOM</sub>’ and the PredP *pevicej* ‘singer<sub>INS</sub>’ is illustrated in (21).

(21) a. [<sub>NP</sub> *pevica*<sub>NOM</sub>]:  $\lambda u [SINGER(u)]$   
 b. [<sub>PredP</sub> *pevicej*<sub>INS</sub>]:  $\lambda u [[SINGER(u)] / [R(z, s_i)]]$

(21b) means that the property of being a singer applies to the individual *u* in a specific topic situation *s<sub>i</sub>*. To derive the semantics of the whole copular sentence in Russian the semantics of the copula has to be specified. Russian differs from Spanish in that it has only one copula, as do English and German. I therefore assume the same lexical entry for Russian *byt’* as for *be* and *sein*.

(22) *byt’* / *be* / *sein* :  $\lambda P \lambda x \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [P(x)]]$

Now we are in a position to derive the semantics of a copular sentence with the instrumental; cf. (23). The corresponding sentence with nominative is derived in (25).

(23) *Katja byla pevicej*. (‘*Katja* was a singer<sub>INS</sub>’) (‘*byt’*, imperfective)

- a. *Katja*: *Katja*  
 b. [<sub>PredP</sub> *pevicej*<sub>INS</sub>]:  $\lambda u [[SINGER(u)] / [R(z, s_i)]]$   
 c. *byt’* (‘*be*’):  $\lambda P \lambda x \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [P(x)]]$   
 d. imperfective Aspect:  $\lambda Q \lambda s^* \exists e [[\tau(s^*) \subset \tau(e)] \& Q(e)]$   
 e. [<sub>V</sub> *byla pevicej*]:  $\lambda P \lambda x \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [P(x)]] (\lambda u [[SINGER(u)] / [R(z, s_i)]])$   
 $\equiv \lambda x \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [SINGER(x)] / [R(z, s_i)]]$   
 f. [<sub>VP</sub> *Katja byla pevicej*]:  $\lambda x \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [SINGER(x)] / [R(z, s_i)]] (\text{Katja})$   
 $\equiv \lambda z [z \text{ INST } [SINGER(\text{Katja})] / [R(z, s_i)]]$   
 g. [<sub>AspP</sub> *Katja byla pevicej*]:  $\lambda Q \lambda s^* \exists e [[\tau(s^*) \subset \tau(e)] \& Q(e)]$   
 $(\lambda z [z \text{ INST } [SINGER(\text{Katja})] / [R(z, s_i)]])$   
 $\equiv \lambda s^* \exists e [[\tau(s^*) \subset \tau(e)] \& [e \text{ INST } [SINGER(\text{Katja})] / [R(z, s_i)]]]$

At the level of AspP, the specificity presupposition of the instrumental suffix can be resolved by identifying *s<sub>i</sub>* with the topic situation *s\** introduced by Aspect. This presupposition resolution and the existential binding of the topic situation yield (24).

(24)  $\exists s^* \exists e [[\tau(s^*) \subset \tau(e)] \& [e \text{ INST } [SINGER(\text{Katja})]] \& [s^* = s_i]]$

The sentence is true if there is a situation characterized by *Katja* being a singer whose temporal extension includes a contextually specific topic time.

A sentence with nominative case has a similar composition but it is more straightforward since no specificity presupposition is introduced. The representation for a sentence with nominative case is given in (25):

<sup>6</sup> A more elaborated representation which accounts for other functions of the instrumental case in Russian is proposed in Geist (in print); compare also a different account in Demijanow & Strigin (2003).

- (25) Katja byla pevica. ('Katja was a singer<sub>NOM</sub>') (byt', imperfective)  
 [AspP Katja byla pevica]:  
 $\lambda s^* \exists e [\tau(s^*) \subset \tau(e)] \ \& \ [e \text{ INST [SINGER(Katja)]]$

The sentence is true if there is a situation characterized by Katja being a singer whose temporal extension includes the topic time.

Now, compare the composition results for the *estar* sentence in (14) and the sentence with instrumental case in (24) on the one hand, and the sentence with *ser* in (15g) and with nominative case in (25). Except for their idiosyncratic meaning components, the structural meaning components are identical in the compared sentence pairs. This is a desirable result.

Now, the result of the analysis of copular sentences in Russian on the basis of the analysis of Spanish copular sentences by Maienborn (2003/05) can be summarized as follows: With the choice of instrumental case in Russian and the choice of the copula *estar* in Spanish, the speaker expresses in an explicit manner that the proposition relates to a specific topic situation. This relation to a specific topic situation is embedded in the lexical entry of the case suffix in Russian and in the lexical entry of the copular verb in Spanish. The predicate noun in the nominative in Russian and the copula *ser* in Spanish are neutral with respect to the specificity of the topic situation. That is, Spanish and Russian choose different structural options to indicate the linking of a predication to a specific topic situation that the speaker has in mind.

The assumption that the instrumental case suffix in Russian serves as a link to a specific discourse situation is crucial for our comparative analysis, and one would like to have further evidence for such an assumption. An independent motivation for such an assumption comes from another use of instrumental case with predicate nouns,<sup>7</sup> namely the use in sentence initial adjuncts; cf. (26a/b). Like predicates in copular sentences, such adjuncts can also occur in nominative and in instrumental case.

- (26) a. Soldatom Boris ne imel zhalosti.      b. Soldat, Boris ne imel zhalosti.  
 Soldier<sub>INS</sub> Boris not had compassion      Soldier<sub>NOM</sub> Boris not had compassion  
 'When Boris was a soldier he was not      'Being a soldier, he was not  
 compassionate.'      compassionate.'

As the English translation in (26a) suggests, the instrumental case triggers a contrast to alternative situations in which Boris was not a soldier (cf. similar observations in Demjjanow & Strigin 2003). No such contrast is implied in (26b) with nominative case. This is what our analysis of the instrumental suffix as a link to a specific discourse situation predicts.

#### 4 Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have explored the mapping between the syntax and semantics of copular sentences in Russian in comparison to Spanish. Such a comparison makes it clear that the distinction Russian makes via two different morphological cases on the predicate noun phrase is the same as the one Spanish expresses through the selection of the copula verb in combination with predicate adjectives. The assignment of the instrumental case to the predicate noun in Russian and the selection of the copular verb *estar* in Spanish reflect the speaker's perspective on a predication in a particular discourse. By using instrumental case in Russian and the copula *estar* in Spanish the speaker restricts the predication in copular

<sup>7</sup> I consider only the combination of the instrumental suffix with predicate NPs, i.e., non-referential NPs which denote properties of an individual. The external argument of such NPs is assigned to the referential argument of some other NP in the clause. The instrumental case can also be used with non-predicate NPs. The correlation between "predicate instrumental" and other uses of the instrumental in Russian is discussed in Geist (in print).

sentences to a specific topic situation he/she has in mind. By using nominative case in Russian and *ser* in Spanish the speaker remains neutral as to the specificity of the topic situation.

This analysis leaves some questions for further research. I will mention one of them. How can we explain that the alternation *ser/estar* in Spanish is restricted to sentences with predicate adjectives while only *ser* can occur with predicate nouns? In Russian, in contrast, the situation is different. The case alternation nominative vs. instrumental applies to predicate nouns as well as to adjectives, although the instrumental occurs less frequently with adjectives than with nouns (Timberlake 1983:862).

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