13th Conference on Typology and Grammar for Young Scholars
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THE ACCUSATIVE ARGUMENT
OF THE 'REQUEST' NOMINALIZATION IN RUSSIAN

1. Starting point

- The noun *pros'ba* 'request' sometimes takes a complement in the accusative:

(1) ***Provožajuščix***   *pros'ba*   *pokinut'*   *vagony*
see.off.PTCP.PL.**ACC**   request   to.leave   carriages
'Non-travellers please leave the train'. (standard anouncement)

- *Pros'ba* 'request' (noun) ← *prosit'* 'ask', nominalization of low productivity (Švedova 1980: § 266);
- The complement is in most cases ambiguous between genitive and accusative, but the contexts which do distinguish it show it's clearly accusative:

(2) a. *Pros'ba*   ***pobeditel'nicu***   *svjazat'sja*   *s*   *administratorom gruppy*
request   female.winner.ACC   get.in.touch   with   admin   of.the.group

    b. #*Pros'ba*   ***pobeditel'nicy***   *svjazat'sja*   *s*   *administratorom gruppy*
request   female.winner.GEN   get.in.touch   with   admin   of.the.group
'We kindly ask the winner to get in touch with the group admin'. (Yandex)

- As is well-known, some languages allow nominalizations to retain accusative complements (Koptjevskaja-Tamm 1993), but it's normally not the case in Russian:

(3) *priglašenie*   *pobeditel'nicy*   /   **pobeditel'nicu*
invitation   female.winner.GEN   female.winner.ACC
'Inviting the winner.'

- *Pros'ba* 'request' seems to be the only noun with this kind of syntactic behavior.
?   When is it possible?
?   What makes the noun *pros'ba* 'request' so special?

2. Parallels and suggestions

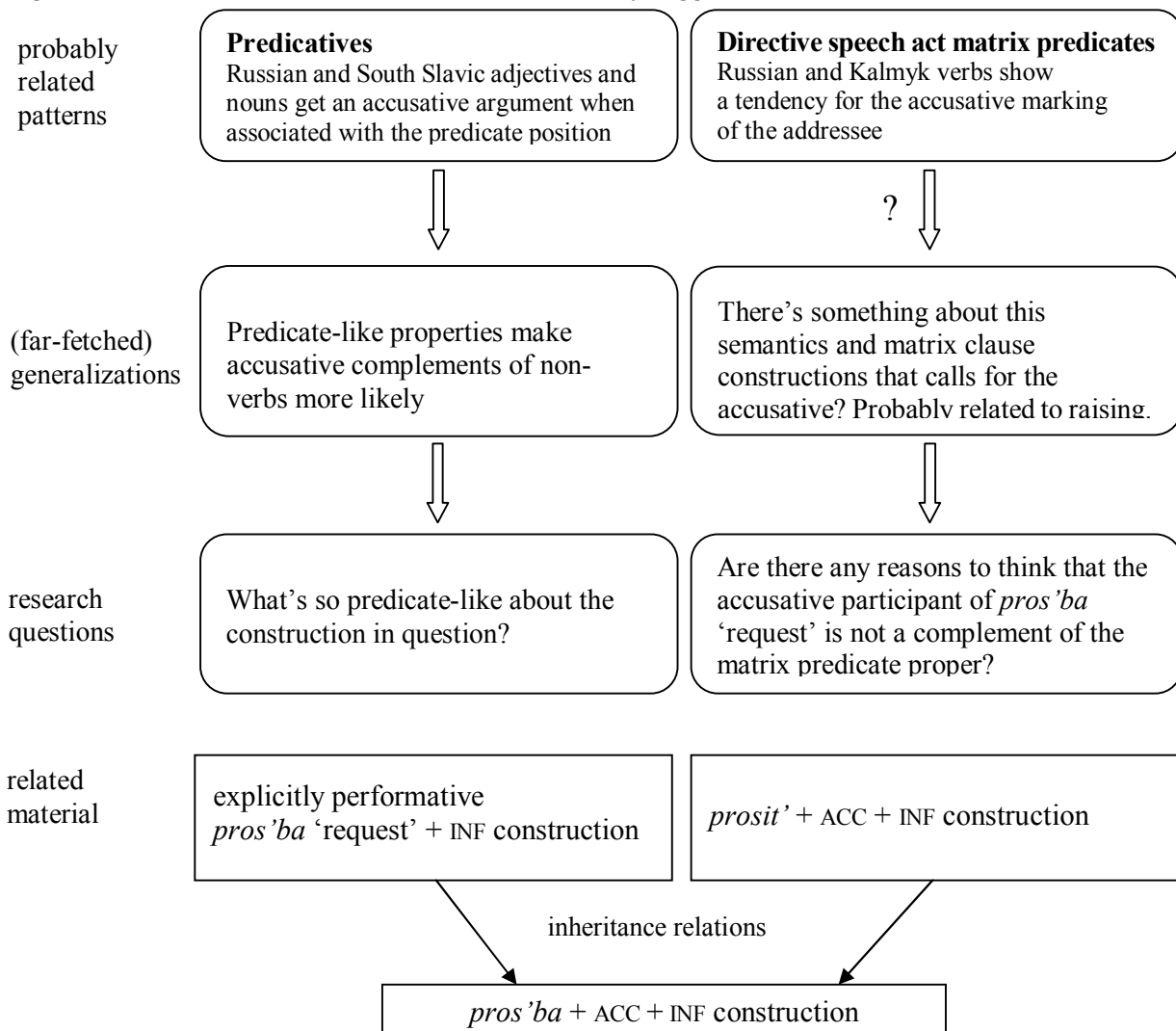- Two probably related patterns:
1) Predicatives of nominal origin with accusative complements
RUSSIAN: erstwhile adjectives, like *видно* 'visible', *слышно* 'audible' (Say 2014: 600), *nužno* 'necessary' (Knyazev, ms.), *zametno* 'noticable', *ugodno* 'desirable', *bol'no* 'painful' (Švedova 1980: § 2435).
cf. also SOUTH SLAVIC (Uhlik, Žele 2016: 390): erstwhile nouns, eg. Slovene *strah* 'fear', *sram* 'shame'.

2) Accusative marking "out of nowhere" when
a) the predicate is a matrix verb with **directive speech act semantics**;
b) it normally takes a non-accusative animate complement;
c) the animate participant acquires accusative marking when the verb takes a complement clause;
d) the process is unlike raising in that the semantic restrictions on this argument still hold.

RUSSIAN: *trebovat'* 'demand':
- the animate argument is usually marked by a preposition (*u* 'at' or *ot* 'from'), (4a);
- accusative marking is usually impossible (4b);

(4) a. *Ja   trebuju   **u**   **Vas**   otveta.*
  I   demand   at   you   an answer.GEN

  b. **Ja   trebuju   **Vas**   otveta.*
  I   demand   you   an answer.GEN

  'I demand that you answer'.

- if the verb takes a dependent clause, accusative marking does appear (5a) and is obligatory (5b).

(5) a. [OK]*Ja   trebuju   **Vas**   otvetit'.*[1]
  I   demand   you   to.answer

  b. **Ja   trebuju   u   **Vas**   otvetit'.*
  I   demand   at   you   to.answer

  'I demand that you answer'.

- Russian does not have any (other?) clear instances of subject-to-object raising.
- And, crucially, the accusative-marked participant still has to be the addressee (which is unlike the typical raising):

(6) **Ja   trebuju   otvet   byt'   ozvučennym.*
  I   demand   answer   to.be   articulated

  'I demand that the answer should be given.'

  KALMYK: *gi-* 'say' (Prokhorov 2009; Knyazev 2015): largely similar morphological marking in contexts of speech causation ('tell smb. to do smth.').

Figure 1. Patterns with some resemblence and what they suggest

probably related patterns

Predicatives
Russian and South Slavic adjectives and nouns get an accusative argument when associated with the predicate position

Directive speech act matrix predicates
Russian and Kalmyk verbs show a tendency for the accusative marking of the addressee

?

(far-fetched) generalizations

Predicate-like properties make accusative complements of non-verbs more likely

There's something about this semantics and matrix clause constructions that calls for the accusative? Probably related to raising.

research questions

What's so predicate-like about the construction in question?

Are there any reasons to think that the accusative participant of *pros'ba* 'request' is not a complement of the matrix predicate proper?

related material

explicitly performative *pros'ba* 'request' + INF construction

prosit' + ACC + INF construction

inheritance relations

pros'ba + ACC + INF construction

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[1] UPD correction (*not part of the original handout*): some speakers find this example ungrammatical.
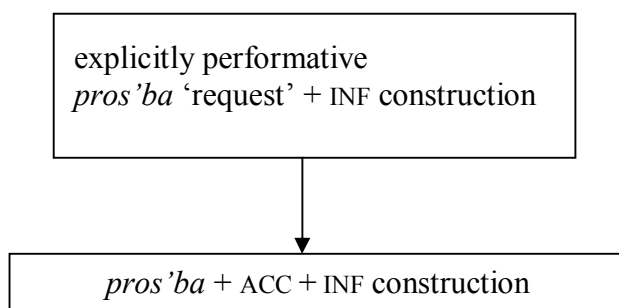
- An infinitive clause is a essential part of this construction:

(7) *Pros'ba   k   **pobeditel'nice**   /   ***pobeditel'nicu:**   svjažites'...*
request   to   female.winner.DAT   female.winner.ACC   get.in.touch.IMP
'We kindly ask the winner to get in touch...'.

(8) *Pros'ba   k   **pobeditel'nice**   /   ***pobeditel'nicu,**   čtoby   kto-nibud'   zabral   priz*
request   to   female.winner.DAT   female.winner.ACC   that   somebody   took   prize
'We kindly ask the winner for someone to take the prize.'

3. What's so predicate-like about *pros'ba*?

- My answer: **illocutionary force**.
- It's already there in the construction without the accusative complement, like (9).

(9) *V   pis'me   **pros'ba**   ukazat'...*
in   letter   request   to.specify
'Please specify in the letter...'

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┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│ explicitly performative         │
│ pros'ba 'request' + INF         │
│ construction                    │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
              │
              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│ pros'ba + ACC + INF construction│
└─────────────────────────────────┘
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- *pros'ba* + INF is a **losely understood performative:**
  - pronouncing this utterence is a speech act denoted by the word;
  - the first person is not necessarily the grammatical subject, but rather the denotative subject (Padučeva 2011: 162);

- This semantics is normally preserved in the *pros'ba* + ACC + INF construction:

(10) Yandex
  a. *Na   kartočke   byla   vyskazana   **pros'ba   našedšemu**   etu   butylku*
  on   card   was   expressed   request   find.PTCP.DAT   this   bottle
  brosit'   ee   snova   v   more...
  to.throw   it   again   in   see

  b. constructed, not quite grammatical
  *ˀNa   kartočke   byla   vyskazana   **pros'ba**   našedšego   etu   butylku*
  on   card   was   expressed   request   find.PTCP.ACC   this   bottle
  brosit'   ee   snova   v   more...
  to.throw   it   again   in   see
  'The card contained a request for the one who finds this bottle to throw it back into the sea.'

Table 1. Case marking of the argument of the noun *pros'ba* 'request' (Yandex)

	ACC *našedšego*	DAT / preposition *(k) našedšemu*	ratio of ACC
performative contexts (a sample of 100 examples)	64	36	0,6
a non-performative context: subject of the verb 'to be'	0	7	0,0

- *pros'ba* + INF does not clearly fit into the definition of requests;
  "The action called for by a genuine RQUEST is to be performed for the benefit of the requester ..." (Sadock, Zwicky 1985: 177).
- Canonical request situation:
  - the request is on behalf of the speaker;
  - the speech act is oral;
  - there's one specific addressee.
- *Pros'ba*-constructions in most cases:
  - either written,
  - or not fully on behalf of the speaker.

(11) RNC (I. Ilf, E. Petrov. The twelve chairs), oral & not a personal request
*A   potomu **pros'ba** po   okončanii tiraža   ne   rasxodit'sja, ⟨…⟩*
and therefore request after end   of.lottery not to.drift.apart
{The bureaucrat who manages the lottery:} 'So please don't go away after the lottery.'

(12) RNC, written & a personal request
*Uvažaemyj BS-Lider, ⟨…⟩ Bol'šaja **pros'ba** svjazat'sja   so   mnoj po e-mail ⟨…⟩*
respected BS-Lider,   big   request to.get.in.touch with me via e-mail
{A personal forum message} 'Dear BS-Lider, ... please get in touch with me via e-mail.'

- not just formalness distinction, the modus (written vs. oral) does seem to matter, cf. (12) and (13)

(13) constructed, oral & a personal request
a. *Ivan Ivanovič, očen' prošu Vas svjazat'sja   so   mnoj po   počte*
   Ivan Ivanovich very I.ask you to.get.in.touch with me   via mail
b. #*Ivan Ivanovič,   bol'šaja **pros'ba** svjazat'sja   so   mnoj po   počte*
   Ivan Ivanovich big   request to.get.in.touch with me   via mail
   {I need some data from a colleague I barely know.} 'Ivan Ivanovich, please get in touch with me via [e-]mail.'

- Grammaticality judgments could be not quite reliable, hence a corpus micro-study:[2]

Table 1. The frequency of canonical and non-canonical requests
for different expressions (Russian National Corpus[3])

	Canonical	Other	Ratio of canonical requests
pros'ba 'request' + INF	0	50	0,0
prošu 'I ask' or *prosim* 'we ask' + INF	10	40	0,2
požalujsta 'please' + IMP	38	12	0,8

- Arguably, illocutionary force → a clearer predicative status → some syntactic changes
- Syntactic changes:
  - Left-dislocation out of the clause is freely available, even though it is expected to constitute an island, namely a Complex NP (Ross 1967: 118). It isn't (14a)=(9).
  - Possessive modifiers are ungrammatical (14b).

(14)a. *V   pis'me   **pros'ba** ukazat'...*
      in   letter   request to.specify
b. *V   pis'me   **pros'ba**   (??administacii)   ukazat'...*
   in   letter   request   of.administration to.specify
   'Please specify in the letter...'

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[2] The difference between 1) the first and the second group and 2) the second and the third group is statistically significant, Fishers' exact test, two-tailed, $P < 0,01$.
[3] ruscorpora.ru.

- NB: In all these constructions *pros'ba* is definitely a noun and not a verb;
  - (some of the) nominal modifiers are grammatical:

(15) ***Ženščin*** *ubeditel'naja pros'ba ne otvečat'*.
women   convincing   request   not   to.answer
'Women, please don't answer.'
  - (standard) verbal modifiers are ungrammatical;

(16) ****Ženščin*** *ubeditel'no pros'ba ne otvečat'*.
women   convincingly   request   not   to.answer
'Women, please don't answer'.

  - [??] modifiers, less strictly associated with verbs.

(17) Yandex, attested, but grammatically marginal
([??])Očen' pros'ba otvetit'.
very   request   answer
'I really ask you to answer'.

4. Is the accusative argument a clear case of a complement?

- My answer: not quite.
- It's already this way in *prosit'* + ACC + INF construction.

- Minor (2007), see also (2013): the accusative argument of *prosit'* 'ask' can be interpreted as not coinciding with the set of addressees:

(18) (Minor 2007: 108)
Učitel' poprosil dvux mal'čikov sbegat' za pomošč'ju.
teacher   asked   two   boys   run   for   help
lit. 'The teacher asked two boys to run and get some help.'
a. [OK]'There were only two boys all along.'
b. [OK]'There could be more addressees, but only two boys were needed for the action.'

- The second reading is probably the only one available for the *pros'ba* + ACC + INF construction.
- The more usual definite addressees of requests are ungrammatical even if they are possible with *pros'ba* + INF.

(19) a. RNC (Sergey Soloviev. Rescuer)
*Graždanka v belom plašče! **Pros'ba** byt' ostorožnee!*
female.citizen in white cloak   request to.be more.careful
{At the beach, the rescuer sees the addressee and says through a loudspeaker} 'The woman in a white cloack! Please be more careful!'

  b. Constructed

*****Graždanku** v belom plašče pros'ba byt' ostorožnee!*
female.citizen in white cloak request to.be more.careful
{At the beach, the rescuer sees the addressee and says through a loudspeaker} 'The woman in a white cloack, please be more careful!'

5. Summary

1. What makes *pros'ba* + ACC + INF special and likely to have accusative arguments is probably

- associated illocutionary force and related syntactic properties;
- an accusative argument of the base verb which at least semantically belongs partly to the subordinate clause;

2. Both properties are inherited from "upper-level" constructions:

- performative *pros'ba* + INF;
- *prosit'* + ACC + INF.

3. It naturally occurs only if an infinitive clause follows. The infinitive form is necessary for the second construction and nearly necessary for the first one.

4. By-product results: no other matrix verb nominalization in Russian seems to share any of these two properties, which explains why this pattern is not recurrent.

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