

Distributive and collective reading of comitative
constructions with animate nouns in Russian

Viktoriiia Osovskaiia

MA, English Studies

Structure

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Introduction

In Russian a plural noun phrase can be built in two different ways: combining two nouns either with a preposition *s* ‘with’ (comitative construction) or with a coordinate conjunction *i* “and” (coordinate construction). Depending on a type of a construction, a sentence can have two readings: collective or distributive. In general, it is said that coordinate constructions allow both types of reading whereas comitatives can be only interpreted collectively. However, the proposition about comitatives is still arguable. Thus, this paper examines what is the most acceptable type of reading for comitatives.

Comitative constructions in general terms

The *comitative construction* is a phrase which includes a noun and a prepositional phrase consisting of a preposition *s* ‘with’ and a noun in the Instrumental case.

(Dalrymple, 1998)

(1) Petja s Vasej vyigrali \$100

Petja-NOM with Vasja-INST won-pl \$100

‘Petja with Vasja won \$100.’

(Dalrymple 1998: 597, (1))

(2) a Muzhchiny s zhenschinami vyigrali \$100.

men-Nom with women-Inst won-pl \$100

‘(The) men with (the) women won \$100.’

(Dalrymple 1998: 597, (2a))

b Otec s det’mi vyigrali \$100.

Father-Nom with children-Inst won-pl \$100

‘(The) father with (his) children won \$100.’

(Dalrymple 1998: 598, (2b))

(3) c Deti s otcom vyigrali \$100.

Children-Nom with father-Inst won-pl \$100

‘(The) children with (their) father won \$100.’

(Dalrymple 1998: 598, (2c))

(4) [NP-NOM [with NP-INS]] V-PL

(Kasyanenko 2018: 125, (1))

(5) Anna i Petja napisali/*napisala/*napisal pis'mo

Anna-NOM and Petja-NOM wrote-pl/*fem.sg/*masc.sg letter

‘Anna and Petja wrote a letter.’

(Dalrymple 1998: 598, (3b))

Types of comitatives (Larson, 2014):

- comitative VP-adjunction

(6) Masha [_{VP} s Dashej xodit v shkolu].

Masha with Dasha go_{sg} to school

‘Masha goes to school with Dasha.’

(Larson 2014: 13, (2))

- comitative coordination

(7) [_{DP} Masha s Dashej] xodjat v shkolu.

Masha with Dasha go_{pl} to school

‘Masha and Dasha go to school.’

(Larson 2014: 14, (3))

Types of comitatives (Feldman, 2001)

- comitative adjuncts
- comitative conjuncts

[adjunction]

(8) (a) Masha s Dashei xodit v shkolu.

Masha.Nom with Dasha.Instr go.3SG to school

‘Masha goes to school with Dasha.’

(Feldman 2001: 3, (5a))

[coordination]

(b) Masha s Dashei xodjat v shkolu.

Masha.Nom with Dasha.Instr go.PL to school

‘Masha and Dasha go to school.’

(Feldman 2001: 3, (5b))

Existing analyses of comitatives

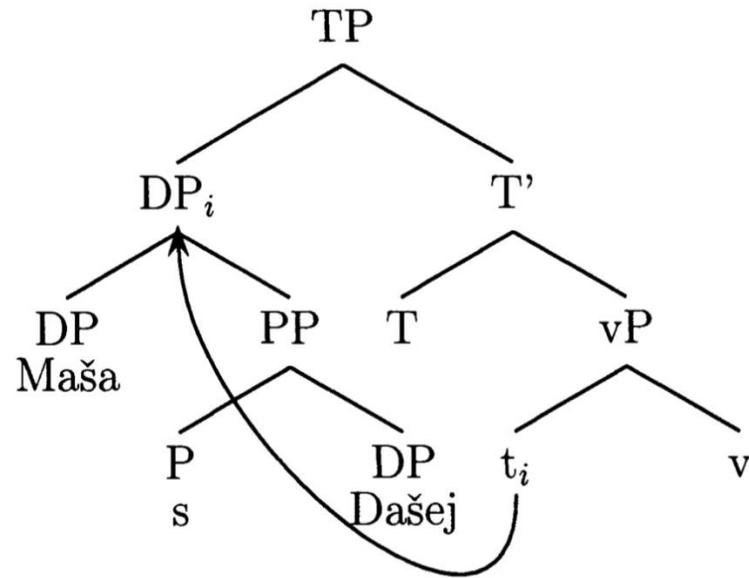
Larson (2014): *traditional analyses* and a *Unification Approach*, a *decomposed Merge analysis*

Traditional analyses

- [_{VP} [_{DP} [_{DP} Masha] s Dashej] V ...] - *comitative coordination*.
- [_{VP} [_{DP} Masha] [_V, s Dashej V ...]] - *comitative VP-adjunction*.

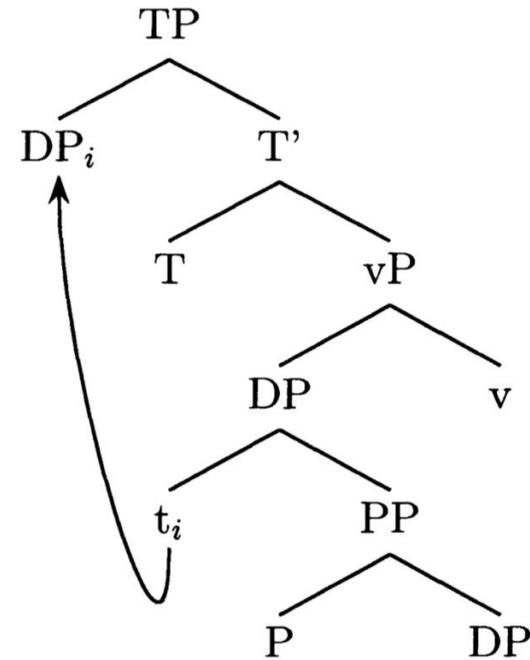
A Unification Approach: Ionin and Matushansky

(9)



(Larson 2014: 18, (14))

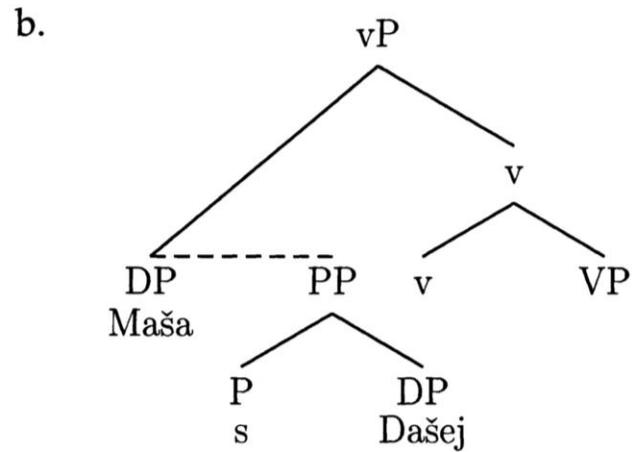
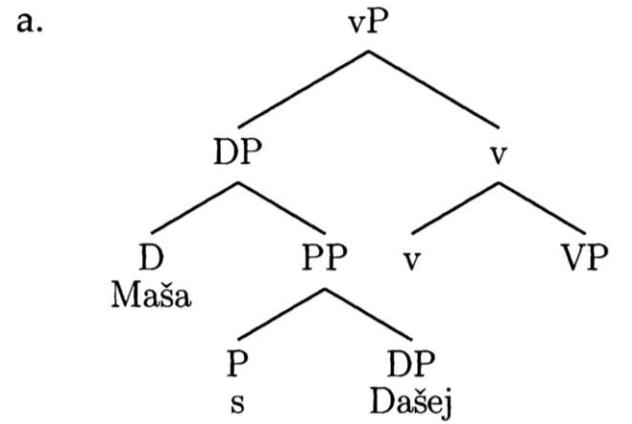
(10)



(Larson 2014: 18, (15))

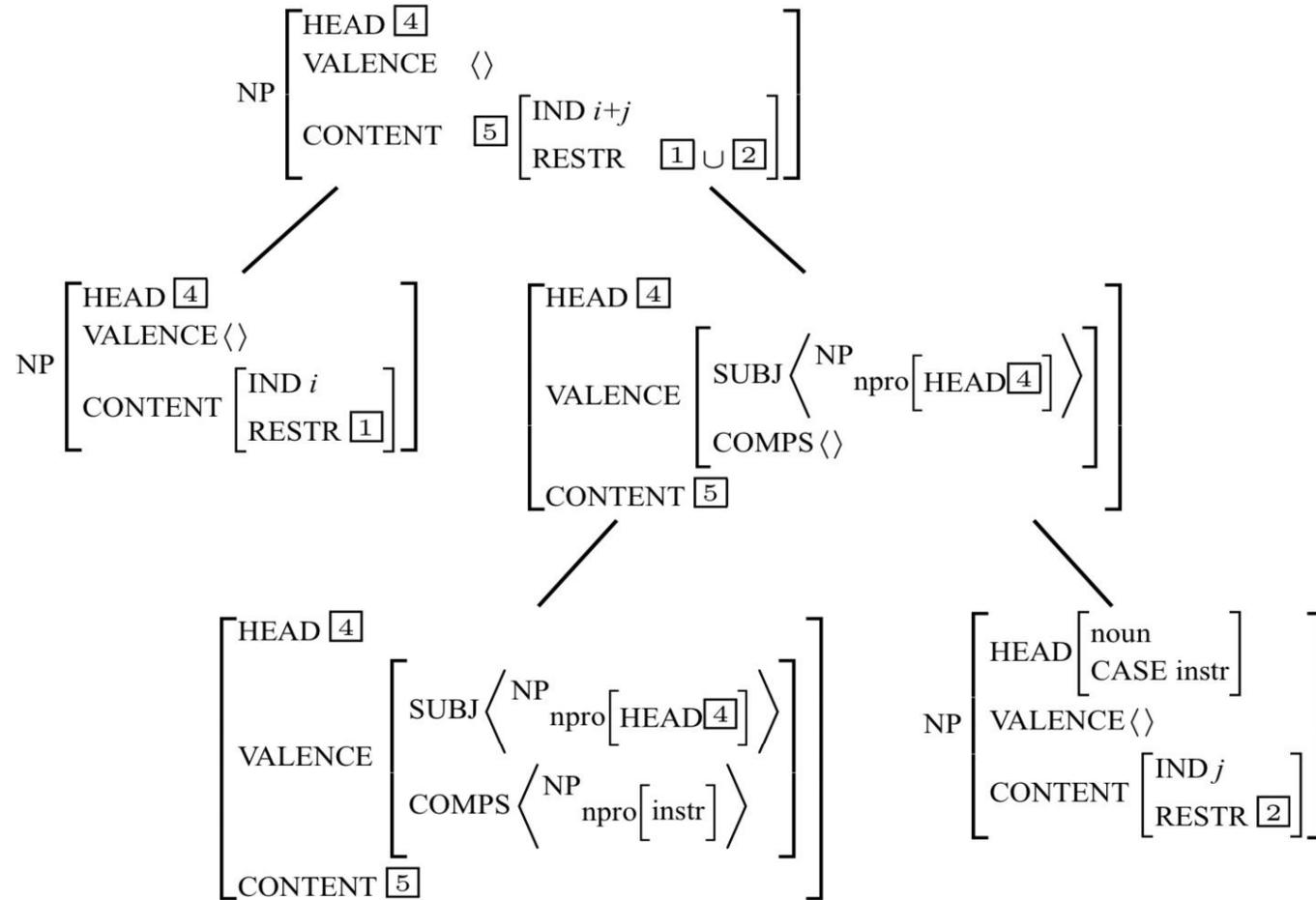
Hornstein's *decomposed Merge* analysis

(11)



(Larson 2014, 31, (47a, b))

Stefan and Feldman (2008): *Feldman's analysis* within the framework of HPSG



(Stefan and Feldman, 2008, p. 20)

Collective vs. Distributive Reading

Kasyanenko (2018): four possible strategies to interpret comitatives: *collective*, *relational*, *spatiotemporal* and *contrastive*.

1. Collective strategy

(12) Masha s Petej postroili plot.

M-NOM with P-INS built-PL raft

‘Mary and Peter built a raft (together).’

(Kasyanenko 2018: 128, (18a))

2. Relational strategy

(13) Context: Mary is Peter's daughter.

Mash-a s Pet-ej postroil-i plot.

M-NOM with P-INS built-PL raft

(Kasyanenko 2018: 129, (19a))

3. Spatiotemporal strategy

(14) Mish-a s Pet-ei voshl-i v klass.

M-NOM with P-INS entered-PL in classroom

‘Mike and Peter entered the classroom (together).’

(Kasyanenko 2018: 129, (20a))

4. Contrastive strategy

(15) (a) Mish-a s Pet-ei pechatal-i-s v NLLT a ja tol'ko v LI.

M-NOM with P-INS published-PL in NLLT but I only in LI

Collective ✓ Distributive ✓

(Kasyanenko 2018: 130, (21a))

(b) Mish-a s Pet-ei pechatal-i-s v NLLT

M-NOM with PINST publishedPL in NLLT

Collective strongly preferred

(Kasyanenko 2018: 130, (21b))

Larson (2014):

comitatives

(16) Anna s Mashej vyigrali 1000 rublej.

Anna with Masha won-pl 1000 rubles

‘Anna and Masha won 1000 rubles in total.’

*‘Anna won 1000 rubles and Masha won 1000 rubles.’

(Larson 2014: 40, (63))

coordinate constructions

(17) Anna i Masha vyigrali 1000 rublej.

Anna and Masha won-pl 1000 rubles

‘Anna and Masha won 1000 rubles in total.’ Or

‘Anna won 1000 rubles and Masha won 1000 rubles.’

(Larson 2014: 40, (62))

Dalrymple (1998): sums or impure atoms

(18) a Masha s Dashej zarabotala tri rublja.

Masha with Dasha earned-SG three rubles

‘Masha earned three rubles with Dasha.’

(Stefan and Feldman 2008: 14, (60a))

b Masha s Dashej zarabotali tri rublja.

Masha with Dasha earned-PL three rubles

‘Masha and Dasha earned three rubles/Masha and Dasha each earned three rubles

(6 rubles in total).’

(Stefan and Feldman 2008: 14, (60b))

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that comitative constructions in Russian are quite common to build a plural noun phrase, moreover, they are more preferable to coordinate constructions by the speakers. Comitative constructions are analyzed by different linguists from different sides and using different approaches. The most significant question about comitatives in Russian is how they should be interpreted: either collectively or distributivity. Based on the analyzed literature, it can be said that they should have a collective reading regardless their type whereas coordinate constructions that they are similar to can have both types of readings. Nevertheless, relying not only on a syntactic side of the question but on a semantic and pragmatic one, it can be claimed that depending on a context and relations between the individuals in a sentence in some cases comitatives can have both collective and distributive readings.

In this article I tried to explore the most appropriate way to interpret comitative constructions in Russian and to study the relevant literature on this topic. However, there is still remain a lot to study in this field.

References

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Thank you for your attention!