

## Idioms, NP position and control: evidence from Russian

**Background:** Recent work on the syntax of Russian infinitival clauses has argued that a subset of structures traditionally analysed via object control are to be reanalysed in terms of either raising or exceptional case marking (ECM). The main evidence for this claim comes from the availability of idiomatic readings when a subpart of an idiom inside an infinitival clause appears in the matrix clause as a main-clause object, as in (1) from Burukina (2020).

- (1) Ja ne velel [ černoj koške probegat' meždu nimi. ]  
I NEG ordered black cat.DAT run.INF between them  
'I did not order them to quarrel.' (lit.: 'I didn't order the black cat to run between them.')

The reasoning is this: if, as frequently assumed, all constitutive parts of an idiom must be adjacent at some point in the syntactic derivation, the availability of the idiomatic reading indicates the adjacency of what on the surface looks like the matrix object with the remainder of the idiom inside the infinitival clause.

**Aims and claims:** The present paper shows that, just like in English, idiom chunks appearing in control environments in Russian give rise to idiomatic interpretations. If Burukina's (2020) logic were followed through, one would be forced to postulate an additional ECM-like structural source for accusative object-control verbs as well as subject control with the putative controller inside the infinitival clause. This effectively amounts to restating the original question of why idiomatic readings are compatible with some verbs under some circumstances without actually answering it. It would also require the postulation of an additional mechanism of accusative case assignment and nominative case assignment.

**Data:** Traditional subject and (accusative) object control predicates are compatible with idioms; these include the subject-control predicates *xotet'* 'want' (2), *rešit'* 'decide' (3) and the adjectival *gotov* 'ready', and the accusative object-control verb *zastavit'* 'force' (4). Idiomatic readings in such structures are no less available than with *pomogat'* 'help' and *mešat'* 'hinder' argued by Burukina (2021) to occasionally require an ECM-like structure (5).

- (2) Delo ne **xotelo** [ PRO dvigat'sja s mërtovoj točki ]  
business not **wanted** move from dead point  
'Things wouldn't get moving.' (lit.: 'didn't want to move from the dead point')
- (3) Včera u menja na duše vnezapno koški rešili [ PRO zaskresti ]  
yesterday at me on soul suddenly cats decided scratch.INF  
'Yesterday, I suddenly started feeling really sad.'
- (4) Naprjažennoe molčanie **zastavljalo** atmosferu [ PRO sguščat'sja vsë sil'nee ].  
tense silence **was making** atmosphere solidify all stronger  
'The heavy silence was making people in the room feel more and more uneasy'.
- (5) Nikakie utešenija ne **mešali** slezam [ PRO lit'sja v tri ruč'ja ]  
no comforting NEG **hinder** tears.DAT pour in three streams  
'No comforting could prevent (somebody) from crying...'

The predicates above are genuine control predicates, as witnessed by their incompatibility with argumentless weather-predicates such as *smerkat'sja* 'get dark' etc., as in (6), which suggests that they require a nominal argument and therefore are not raising predicates. Other tests, not illustrated here, such as independent temporal reference and the ability to host negation show that they do not attach their infinitival complement via restructuring.

- (6) \* rešilo/xotelo/gotovo/zastavilo smerkat'sja  
decided/wanted/ready/forced get.dark.INF  
(‘It decided/wanted/is ready/forced to get dark.’)

- (7) Dver' rešila zakrýt'sja / ne xotela zakrývát'sja  
 door decided close.INF NEG wanted close.INF  
 'The door closed all of a sudden/ wouldn't open.'

While requiring the presence of a nominal argument, all of *rešit* 'decide', *zastavit* 'force' and *gotov* 'ready' impose no animacy requirement on it, whereas *xotet* 'want' allows inanimate arguments in downward-entailing environments (7), just like *velet* 'order' from Burukina 2020.

**Analysis:** To capture the data above showing full compatibility of some control verbs with idiom chunks we adopt Bruening's (2015) Constraint on Idiom Chunks, according to which an idiom chunk appearing in position 1 and anaphorically related to position 2 must not receive an interpretation either in position 1 or position 2 that is inconsistent with its interpretation in the idiom. The subjects of the idiomatic expressions in (2–5) are all nonsentient NPs *delo* 'business', *atmosfera* 'atmosphere' and *slězý* 'tears'. They are nonsentient both in position 1 in the matrix clause, because the control predicates *rešit* 'decide', *zastavit* 'force' and *gotov* 'ready', and *xotet* 'want' in a subset of contexts do not impose a sentience requirement on their nominal argument, and in the corresponding idioms. Position 2 is occupied by PRO in the infinitival clause. The constraint is not violated, and the idiomatic interpretations obtain. The same constraint rules out idiomatic interpretations with other control verbs such as *ubedit* 'convince' (8), which do impose a particular interpretation on their nominal argument: *ubedit* 'convince' requires an NP (position 1) capable of being persuaded by arguments. Because that interpretation is inconsistent with the interpretation of the inanimate nonsentient *delo* 'business' in the idiom, the idiomatic reading is unavailable in (8).

- (8) \* Menedžer ubedit delo [ PRO sdvinut'sja s mërtovoj točki ]  
 manager convinced business move from dead point  
 ('The manager convinced things to get moving.')

As regards the difference between *xotet* 'want', *zastavit* 'force', *rešit* and *gotov* 'ready' on the one hand and *ubedit* 'convince' and its ilk on the other, we propose that, even though they are syntactically identical control predicates, the observed differences come from their lexical semantics/encyclopaedic knowledge. What sets control predicates apart from raising and ECM ones, then, is the requirement that they syntactically introduce a nominal argument in the sense of Kratzer (1996) and Pylkkänen (2008), while the particular and sometimes highly specific theta-roles are handled by the meaning component, *contra* Collins (2021).

We therefore reject the premise that the availability of idiomatic interpretations in control contexts necessitates the postulation of an additional structural source such as placing the controller NP in the embedded subject position, and nor does the apparent absence of the animacy/sentience requirement occasionally characterising mandative verbs. Control can handle the idiom facts and the animacy/sentience facts from Burukina 2020 all by itself.

**Implications:** Our results support the conclusion of Ruwet 1991, Nunberg, Sag & Wasow 1994 and Bruening 2015 that idiom interpretation does not identify an NP's position and can therefore not be used to diagnose A- or  $\bar{A}$ -movement of any kind.

**References:** ♦ Bruening, Benjamin. 2015. Idioms, anaphora and movement diagnostics. Unpublished ms. ♦ Burukina, Irina. 2020. Mandative verbs and deontic modals in Russian: Between obligatory control and overt embedded subjects. *Volume 5* 5(1). ♦ Burukina, Irina. 2021. On the syntax of the Russian control verbs *pomoč* 'help' and *pomešat* 'hinder'. Unpublished ms. ♦ Collins, Chris. 2021. Principles of argument structure: A merge-based approach. Unpublished ms. ♦ Kratzer, Angelika. 1996. Severing the external argument from its verb. In ed. by Johan Rooryck et al., *Phrase structure and the lexicon*, 109–137. Dordrecht: Springer. ♦ Nunberg, Geoffrey, Ivan A. Sag & Thomas Wasow. 1994. Idioms. *Language* 70(3). 491–538. ♦ Pylkkänen, Liina. 2008. *Introducing arguments* (Linguistic Inquiry Monographs 49). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. ♦ Ruwet, Nicolas. 1991. On the use and abuse of idioms in syntactic argumentation. In *Syntax and human experience*.