

NP ellipsis in Russian predicative long form adjectives

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The Big Question: how is φ -feature matching derived?

- The dominant response for (clause-internal) φ -dependencies is AGREE.¹
- Less common analytical option is NP ellipsis.
- It's a good explanation for grammatical gender matching in pronominal reference²—but there's no telling if clause-internal binding is different.³

¹See Deal (2025) for a recent overview.

²See Sauerland (2007) for an NPE account of gender matching in pronouns.

³See Papparounas & Akkuş (2024) for a review of the binding-as-AGREE work to date.

A case of clause-internal φ -feature matching derived by NP ellipsis.

- Takeaway: not all clause-internal φ -feature matching is AGREE
- Takeaway: NP ellipsis can be diagnosed by feature (mis)matches

Data: agreement with long form (LF) adjectives in Russian

- (1) *Eto pivo prekrasn-oj-e*
 this beer.NOM.SG wonderful-LF-NOM.N.SG
 ‘This beer is wonderful.’

Agreement with LF adjectives in Russian is concord & NP ellipsis.

- (2) *Eto pivo prekrasn-oj-e* $\langle pivo \rangle$
 this beer.NOM.SG wonderful-LF-NOM.N.SG beer.NOM.SG
 ‘This beer is wonderful.’

I argue that the NP ellipsis analysis:

- captures the full range of agreement data
- addresses other problems faced by the view that LF morphology facilitates modification

Here's our plan:

- the modification view on the SF/LF distinction
- the agreement patterns
- an ellipsis account for agreement data
- a discussion of other arguments against the modification view

The modification view

Russian adjectives come in two forms: short and long.⁴

(3) a. *Eto pivo prekrasn-o*
this beer.NOM.SG wonderful-SF.N.SG

‘This beer is wonderful.’

b. *Eto prekrasn-oj-e pivo ljubit Vanja*
this wonderful-LF-ACC.N.SG beer.ACC.SG loves V.

‘Vanya loves this wonderful beer.’

⁴See Halle & Matushansky (2006) for discussion of morphological patterns.

SF adjectives cannot modify nouns

(4) **Eto prekrasn-o pivo ljubit Vanja*
this wonderful-SF.N.SG beer.ACC.SG loves V.

‘Vanya loves this wonderful beer.’

This fact motivates the view that the role of LF morphology is to allow adnominal modification—without it, an adjective cannot merge with a noun.⁵

⁵Babby (1975); Siegel (1976); Bailyn (2012); see Shushurin (2021) for a generalized account

However, LF adjectives can occur predicatively

- (5) *Et-o* *pivo* *prekrasn-oj-e*
this-NOM.N.SG beer.NOM.SG wonderful-LF-NOM.N.SG
'This beer is wonderful.'

The usual response: there is a silent noun there.⁶

- (6) *Et-o* *pivo* *prekrasn-oj-e* Δ
this-NOM.N.SG beer.NOM.SG wonderful-LF-NOM.N.SG ZERO
'This beer is wonderful.'

⁶Babby (1975); Babby (2010) among others

The agreement pattern

A SILENT NOUN?

Which silent noun?

- (7) a. *Et-o* *pivo* *prekrasn-yj* *napitok*
this-NOM.N.SG beer.NOM.SG wonderful-LF.NOM.M.SG beverage.NOM.SG

‘This beer is a wonderful beverage.’

- b.**Et-o* *pivo* *prekrasn-yj* Δ
this-NOM.N.SG beer.NOM.SG wonderful-LF.NOM.M.SG

Int: ‘This beer is wonderful.’

The zero nominal must have the same features as the subject. AGREE?

A SILENT NOUN?

Which silent noun?

- (8) a. *Et-o* *pivo* *prekrasn-aja* *uslada*
this-NOM.N.SG beer.NOM.SG wonderful-LF.NOM.F.SG pleasure.NOM.SG

‘This beer is a wonderful pleasure.’

- b.**Et-o* *pivo* *prekrasn-aja* Δ
this-NOM.N.SG beer.NOM.SG wonderful-LF.NOM.F.SG

Int: ‘This beer is wonderful.’

The zero nominal must have the same features as the subject. AGREE?

LF adjectives do not always \varnothing -match as verbs: the honorific 2PL pronoun results in SG marking on the LF adjective but PL marking on the verb.

- (9) a. *Vy {prekrasn-yj / *prekrasn-yj-e}*
 2PL wonderful-LF.NOM.M.SG wonderful-LF-NOM.PL

‘You (hon.) are wonderful.’

- b. *Vy {vyypi-l-i / *vyypi-l} vsë pivo!*
 2PL drink-PAST-PL drink-PAST.M all beer

‘You (hon.) drank all the beer!’

Sometimes, LF adjectives do φ -match as verbs: *pluralia tantum* nouns necessarily results in PL on both LF adjectives and verbs

- (10) a. *Et-i* *nožnic-i* *prekrasn-yj-e*
 this-NOM.PL scissors-NOM.PL wonderful-LF.NOM.PL
 ‘These scissors are wonderful.’
- b. *Et-i* *nožnic-i* *plox*o {*rež-ut* / **rež-et*}
 this-NOM.PL scissors-NOM.PL poorly cut-PRES.3PL cut-PRES.3PL
 ‘These scissors cut poorly.’

Importantly, nominal predication shows no such thing.

- (11) a. *Et-i* *nožnic-i* *prekrasn-yj-e*
 this-NOM.PL scissors-NOM.PL wonderful-LF.NOM.PL
 ‘These scissors are wonderful.’

- b. *Et-i* *nožnic-i* {*prekrasn-yj* *podarok*
 this-NOM.PL scissors-NOM.PL wonderful-LF.NOM.M.SG gift.NOM.SG
 / **prekrasn-yj-e* *podark-i*}
 wonderful-LF-NOM.PL gift-NOM.PL
 ‘These scissors are a wonderful present.’

LF adjectives show mixed behavior

- An AGREE account wrongly predicts PL with honorifics
- A zero noun account wrongly predicts SG with pl. tantum

It's neither a full match to the nominal behavior nor a full match to the verbal behavior. How come?

NP ellipsis & agreement data

The idea is simple: the zero noun is the subject noun, but elided

- (12) *Eto pivo prekrasn-oj-e* $\langle pivo \rangle$
this beer.NOM.SG wonderful-LF-NOM.N.SG beer.NOM.SG
'This beer is wonderful.'

This easily accounts for lack of mismatches (possibly) predicted by the zero noun account: it's the same noun.

NP ellipsis shows both φ -matching and -mismatching.⁷

(13) **Core claim**

LF adjectives show the same φ -matching as NP ellipsis

⁷See [Ranero \(2021\)](#) for discussion and literature overview.

NP ellipsis doesn't allow for (grammatical) gender mismatches

- (14) *Maša našla moj telefon, a {tvoj/ *tvoju/ *tvoë} ona poka ne našla.*
M. found my.M phone but your.M your.F your.N she yet not
found
'Masha found my phone, but she didn't find yours yet.'

NP ellipsis doesn't allow for (grammatical) gender mismatches

- (15) *Maša našla moju zarjadku, a {tvoju/ *tvoj/ *tvoë} ona poka*
M. found my.F charger but your.F your.M your.N she yet
ne našla.
not found

'Masha found my charger, but she didn't find yours yet.'

NP ellipsis doesn't allow for (grammatical) gender mismatches

- (16) *Maša našla moë razrešenje, a {tvoë/ *tvoju/ *tvoj} ona poka*
M. found my.N permit but your.N your.F your.M she yet
ne našla.
not found
'Masha found my permit, but she didn't find yours yet.'

Neither do LF adjectives

- (17) *Moj čaj sliškom* {*sladk-ij/ *sladk-aja/ *sladk-oje*}
my.M tea too sweet-LF.M sweet-LF.F sweet-LF.N
'My tea is too sweet.'

Neither do LF adjectives

- (18) *Moja vodka sliškom {tepl-aja/ *tepl-yj /*tepl-oje}*
my.F vodka too warm-LF.F warm-LF.M warm-LF.N
'My vodka is too warm.'

Neither do LF adjectives

- (19) *Moë pivo sliškom* {*gorʲk-oje/ *gorʲk-ij/ *gorʲk-aja*}
my.N beer too bitter-LF.N bitter-LF.M bitter-LF.F
'My beer is too bitter.'

Similarly with pluralia tantum: NPE allows no mismatches.

- (20) *Ya kupil ostr-yj-e nožnic-i, a ty {tup-yj-e*
 I bought sharp-LF.NOM.PL scissors-NOM.PL and you dull-LF-NOM.PL
 / **tup-oj* / **tup-oj-e* / **tup-aj-a}*
 dull-LF.NOM.M.SG dull-LF.NOM.N.SG dull-LF.NOM.F.SG
 ‘I bought sharp scissors and you bought dull ones.’

Similarly with pluralia tantum: LF adjectives allow no mismatches.

- (21) *Et-i* *nožnic-i* {*prekrasn-yj-e* / **prekrasn-yj*
 this-NOM.PL scissors-NOM.PL wonderful-LF.NOM.PL wonderful-LF.NOM.M.SG
 / **prekrasn-aj-a* / **prekrasn-oj-e*
 wonderful-LF-NOM.F.SG wonderful-LF-NOM.N.SG
 ‘These scissors are wonderful.’

The account:

- Grammatical gender features on *n* are required to match in NP ellipsis.⁸
- One way to think about this: they provide the necessary context for the root to be effable.⁹
- Pluralia tantum behave the same way, but for [PL]—the root can't occur without it.¹⁰

A prediction: features on Num should allow mismatches

⁸Ranero (2021) i.a.

⁹Or have a particular interpretation: Kramer (2015); Adamson (2024)

¹⁰Acquaviva (2008). See references in Alexiadou (2024) also.

NP ellipsis freely allows number mismatches

- (22) a. *Moj edinstvenn-yj zont ja kupil a ty vse*
 my.M one.and.only-LF.M umbrella 1SG bought and you all.PL
svo-i ukral
 REFL.POSS-PL stole

‘I bought my only umbrella whereas you stole all of yours.’

- b. *Vse mo-i čaški pomyl ja a tvoju ne trogal.*
 all.PL my-PL cups.PL washed I but your.F.SG not touched

‘I washed all of my cups but I didn’t touch your (sg.)’

However! Overt matching noun also blocks number mismatches

- (24) a. *Et-a čaška {gr^jazn-a-ja čaška/ *gr^jazn-yje čašk-i}*
 this-F.SG cup.SG dirty-LF-F.SG cup.SG dirty-LF.PL cup-PL
 ‘This cup is a dirty cup/ *dirty cups.’
- b. *Et-i čašk-i {gr^jazn-yje čašk-i/ *gr^jazn-a-ja čaška}*
 this-PL cup-PL dirty-LF.PL cup-PL dirty-LF-F.SG cup.SG
 ‘These cups are dirty cups/ *a dirty cup.’

The effect might have an independent source, then.

A clear contender is semantic

(25) Sketch of semantics

a. *NP1 is NP2* is true if and only if $\llbracket \text{NP1} \rrbracket \in \llbracket \text{NP2} \rrbracket$.¹¹

b. $\llbracket \text{cup} \rrbracket = \{x \mid x \text{ is a cup}\}$

c. $\llbracket \text{cups} \rrbracket = \{\bigoplus(x_1, \dots, x_n) \mid x_i \text{ is a cup, } n > 1\}$ ¹²

A singular entity can't be a member of a set of plural entities and vice versa.

¹¹This is a simplification: see Roy (2013) for discussion of semantics of copular sentences

¹²I assume a Link (1983)-style mereological analysis for plurals and abstain from the issue of plurality inferences; see Sudo (2023) for a recent overview and proposal

Numeral phrases provide crucial evidence. They allow a N.SG verbal agreement option.

- (26) *Dva studenta zabolet-i/ zabolet-o*
 two student.GEN.SG got.sick.PST-PL got.sick.PST-N.SG
 ‘Two students got sick.’

LF adjectives are necessarily plural. Since they denote a plurality, the pattern is predicted.¹³

- (27) *Dva studenta umn-yje / *umn-oje*
 two student.GEN.SG smart-LF.PL smart-LF.N.SG
 ‘Two students are smart.’

¹³See [Bylinina & Nouwen \(2020\)](#) for an overview of denotation of numeral phrases

Number features on predicative LF adjectives are semantically determined.

This accounts for the honorific pronoun facts.

- (28) a. *Vy takoj glup-yj!*
2PL SO stupid-LF.NOM.M.SG
'You (hon.) are so stupid!.' (single addr.)
- b. *Vy takie glup-yje!*
2PL SO stupid-LF.NOM.PL
'You (hon.) are so stupid!.' (plural addr.)

What's elided there? Perhaps, it's a case of silent N_{Human} .¹⁴

¹⁴See citations in [Merchant \(2023\)](#).

NP ellipsis accounts for φ -(mis)matches

- NP ellipsis: gender matches, number doesn't
- Predicative LF adjectives: same thing

The modification view, supplemented with NP ellipsis, is in a good shape.

I now turn to other issues that were raised against it.

Other arguments against the modification view

LF adjectives with arguments can't be predicative.¹⁵

(29) a. *Etot otec gord svoim synom*
 this father proud.SF REFL.M.INS SON.INS
 'This father is proud of his son.'

b. *Gord-yj svoim synom otec*
 proud-LF.M.SG REFL.M.INS SON.INS father
 'Father who is proud of his son.'

c.**Etot otec gord-yj svoim synom*
 this father proud-LF.M.SG REFL.M.INS SON.INS
 Int.: 'This father is proud of his son.'

¹⁵ Borik (2014)

However, recovering a head noun also results in oddness.

(30) #*Etot otec gord-yj svoim synom otec*
 this father proud-LF.M.SG REFL.M.INS son.INS father

Int.: ‘This father is a father who is proud of his son.’

Borik notes that it’s hard to get a restrictive reading for argument-projecting LF adjectives. This account for the oddness above. Note that changing the head noun alleviates oddness (since the sentence without the adjective isn’t trivially true).

(31) *Etot mužčina gord-yj svoim synom otec*
 this man proud-LF.M.SG REFL.M.INS son.INS father

‘This father is a father who is proud of his son.’

Predicative LF adjectives lack idiomatic readings that adnominal ones have.¹⁶

- (32) a. *Molod-oj čelovek*
 young-LF.M.SG person
 Literal: ‘A young person,’ Idiomatic: ‘A boyfriend’
- b. *Etot čelovek byl dlja neë molodoj*
 this person was for her young-LF.M.SG
 Literal: ‘This person was young to her.’
 *Idiomatic: ‘This person was her boyfriend’
- c. *Etot čelovek byl dlja neë molodoj čelovek*
 this person was for her young-LF.M.SG person
 Literal: ‘This person was young to her.’
 Idiomatic: ‘This person was her boyfriend’

¹⁶Graschenkov (2022)

It is reported that eliding idiom chunks leads to oddness.¹⁷

- (33) Alex: When the news got out, the shit hit the fan.
Ben: #No, the shit didn't.

If [Adj N] complex is an idiom, my account sheds light on the effect.

¹⁷Huang & Mendes (2019). Note: *No, it didn't* is fine (Bruening 2015). The effect may be rather due to contrast / focus on the pronounced chunk.

The modification view predicts adjective stacking, contrary to the fact.¹⁸

(34) a. *Širok-oj-e sinee more*
wide-LF-N.SG blue.N.SG sea
'Wide blue sea.'

b.* *More (bylo) širok-oj-e sinee*
Sea was wide-LF-N.SG blue.N.SG
Int.: 'The sea was wide and blue.'

¹⁸Graschenkov (2022)

Russian NP ellipsis allows multiple adjectival remnants, however.

- (35) *Mne očenj nraŭjatsja vysokije kamennye doma, a Vasje nraŭjatsja*
I very like tall.PL stone.PL houses but Vasja like
nizkie derevjanye
short.PL wooden.PL

‘I really like tall stone houses, but Vasja likes short wooden ones.’

A similar contrast appears to hold for split scrambling.¹⁹

(36) a. *Ja ljublju širok-oj-e sinee more*
I love wide-LF-N.SG blue.N.SG sea
'I love a wide and blue sea.'

b. ?? *Ja širok-oj-e sinee ljublju more*
I wide-LF-N.SG blue.N.SG love sea
'I love a wide and blue sea.'

¹⁹[Sekerina \(1997\)](#). There is also apparent variation in judgements. I share Sekerina's view but [Pereltsvaig \(2008\)](#) reports that multiple adjective scrambling is fine.

There are two ways to tie the scrambling observation to the NP ellipsis account

- If it's extraction, then the ban on adjective stacking is a restriction on adjectival remnants (assuming move-and-delete approach to remnants).
- If it's scattered deletion, then the ban on adjective stacking is some restriction on partial pronunciation of a NP.

I leave this issue unresolved here—but the parallel is suggestive.

Conclusion

A defense of the modification view for predicative long form adjectives

- The novel part: NP ellipsis under identity with the subject NP
- Agreement data patterns with (mis)matches in NP ellipsis
- Other issues for the modification view are tackled too
 - Restrictions on argument-taking result from non-restrictive readings
 - Lack of idiomatic readings result from oddness of idiom chunk ellipsis
 - No adjective stacking: similar restrictions hold of split NP scrambling







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All errors:








are my own.²⁰

²⁰But I'm willing to give them away.

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The prediction is that SF adjectives show the same N.SG/PL optionality as verbs. The picture is more unclear than I would like. Some adjectives do allow the N.SG option though. Other effects I leave for further studies.

- (37) a. *Pjatj čelovek (bylo) mertvo*
five people was dead.SF.N
'Five people were dead.'
- b.? *Pjatj studentov (bylo) mertvo*
five students was smart.SF.N
'Five people were smart.'

The prediction is that SF adjectives show the same N.SG/PL optionality as verbs. The picture is more unclear than I would like. Some adjectives do allow the N.SG option though. Other effects I leave for further studies.

- (38) a. *Neskoljko studentov (bylo) krajne lenivo*
Several students was extremely lazy.SF.N
'Several students were extremely lazy.'

- b.? *Neskoljko čašek (bylo) gorjačo*
Several cups was hot.SF.N
'Several cups were hot.'