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So-called independent infinitives in Russian: The construction of the form *Ètogo mne ne ponjat'* 'It is impossible for me to understand this'

Abstract

The paper considers the Russian construction of the form "N$_{DAT}$ ʙʏᴛʹ ɴᴇ V$_{INF}$"—one of several so-called "independent infinitive constructions." This construction represents two syntactically discontinuous idioms: [X-*u*] ´ʙʏᴛʹ**I.1** … ɴᴇ˥**1** [Y-*nut'*] 'It is/was/will be impossible that X has done Y' and [X-*u*] ´ʙʏᴛʹ**I.1** … ɴᴇ˥**2** [Y-*at'*] 'It will be impossible that X does Y'. The paper describes two illustrative sentences containing these idioms, giving and discussing their formal representations on the semantic, deep-syntactic and surface-syntactic levels; it also presents the lexical entries for both idioms with detailed linguistic comments. The problems of the "independent infinitives" in Russian and of phraseologically bound lexemes are discussed.

Keywords

Russian, syntax, phraseology, independent infinitive, discontinuous idioms, lexical entries of idioms, phraseologically bound lexemes

To the dear memory of my friend Jura

On May 12, 2024, one of the greatest linguists of our time—the Russian linguist Jurij Apresjan—completed his earthly journey. It is not appropriate to try to present here his scientific legacy and its importance; suffice it to say that the main domain of Apresjan's endeavor was lexicology and lexicography. May these pages, which present the lexical entries of two Russian idioms supplied with

linguistic comments, be a modest contribution to the body of a huge lexico-graphic project he launched: *Active Dictionary of Russian*, of which the first six issues have been published so far (A—L): Apresjan, Ju., ed. 2014–2025.

1 The paper's tasks

One of the hot topics in Russian linguistics is the so-called independent infinitive. An independent infinitive is considered to be the syntactic head of its clause, i.e., the top node of the corresponding syntactic structure. Thus, in the sentence *Ètogo mne ne ponjat'* lit. 'This to.me not to.have.understood' = 'It is impossible for me to understand this' the infinitive *ponjat'* is taken to be syntactically the top node. This construction is extensively discussed in a lot of works; fortunately, there is a relatively recent study dedicated to the phenomenon of Russian independent infinitives—Padučeva (2017), which presents a compact picture of the domain: numerous examples from *Russian National Corpus* (https://ruscorpora.ru), an exhaustive classification of the types of independent-infinitive constructions, a careful examination of their semantic, syntactic and morphological properties, as well as a good overview of the relevant literature. I will be using Padučeva's data, although I do not share her syntactic treatment of the construction.

Only one type of the independent-infinitive constructions is considered here: the infinitive with NE 'not' that expresses impossibility (Padučeva 2017: **2.1.4**); other types—9 of these![1]—are left out. The present paper is a first step toward the formal description of the Russian independent-infinitive constructions in the Meaning-Text framework and, as a consequence, it is rather sketchy: it lacks a general embracing frame.

The constructions treated below—referred to as dative-infinitive constructions—can be illustrated with sentences (1) and (2):

(1) *Ne poguljat' mne* $\varnothing_{\text{PRES}}^{\text{BYT}',\text{I.1}}$ */bylo/budet po Moskve*
    lit. 'Not to.go.for.a.walk to.me is/was/will.be in Moscow'. =
    'It is/was/will be impossible for me to go for a walk in Moscow'.

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[1]   Such as the "unavoidability infinitive" (*Krizisu* **byt'** *nepremenno* lit. 'To crisis to.be neces-sarily'. = 'A crisis is unavoidable'), the "obligation infinitive" (*Mne zavtra rano* **vstavat'** lit. 'To.me tomorrow early to.stand.up'. = 'I have to stand up early tomorrow'), etc.

(2) *Ne guljat′ mne* $\varnothing_{\text{PRES}}^{\text{BYT}′\textbf{I.1}}$ *po Moskve*

    lit. 'Not to.go.for.walks to.me is in Moscow'. =

    'It will be impossible for me to go for walks in Moscow'.

☞ **1.** $\varnothing_{\text{PRES}}^{\text{BYT}′\textbf{I.1}}$ stands for the zero wordform of the verb BYT′I.1 ('be' the copula) in the present tense, as in *Ivan sčastliv* 'Ivan is happy'.

  2. A dot between words in a literal English gloss indicates that these words correspond to one word in the Russian example.

  3. All abbreviations and symbols are explained in the table at the end of the paper, p. 14.

The three claims of the present paper are as follows:

- The infinitive appearing in (1) and (2) is by no means syntactically independent: it depends on the verb BYT′I.1 'be' as its copular-attributive complement. **NB**: The status of the verb BYT′I.1 in this role will be made more precise below—**Comment 4**, p. 7.
- There are two dative-infinitive constructions expressing "impossibility"; they are semantically and syntactically very close, but distinct: one, illustrated in (1), means 'it **is**, **was** or **will be** impossible that X has done Y' (the fact Y **is completed**); the other one, illustrated in (2), means 'it **will be** impossible that X will be doing Y' (the fact Y **is not completed**).[2]
- In both sentences (1) and (2) we are dealing with idioms: in (1), ⌜BYT′I.1 … NE⌝1 expresses the meaning 'impossible'; and in (2), ⌜BYT′I.1 … NE⌝2 expresses the meaning 'will be impossible'. Each one of these idioms fully determines the construction it implements, so that the description of this syntactic construction is reducible to the lexicographic entries of the corresponding idioms.[3]

☞ **1.** The top corners ⌜ ⌝ enclose an idiom.

  2. The three dots in the name of an idiom indicate its syntactic discontinuity: there is no direct syntactic link between the idiom's lexical components; see **Comment 5** on p. 7.

In conformity with these claims, the tasks of the present paper are:

    1. to present the semantic, deep-syntactic and surface-syntactic structures of both dative-infinitive constructions in question—that is, in fact, of both idioms;

    2. to present the lexical entries for both idioms.

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    [2]   On 'completed facts', see **Comment 3**, p. 6.

    [3]   The idioms ⌜BYT′I.1 … NE⌝1 and ⌜BYT′I.1 … NE⌝2 are homonymous with the idiom ⌜BYT′I.1 … NE⌝2, as in *Mne bylo ne do obeda* lit. 'To.me it was not up.to lunch'. = 'I could not think about the lunch, because I was preoccupied with other things'.

2 The idiom ⌐BYT′I.1 … NE¬1 1

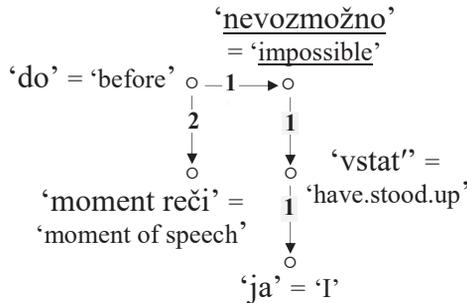The sentence (3) contains an instance of the idiom ⌐BYT′I.1 … NE¬1 1:

(3) {*Samomu*} *mne **bylo ne** vstat′* lit. 'To.myself to.me it was not to.have.stood.up'. ≈ 'It was impossible for me to stand up by myself'.

☛ The curly brackets in examples enclose the elements that are irrelevant for the topic discussed, but needed for the naturalness of the example; these elements do not appear in the formal representations of the respective sentences.

Here are the semantic [Sem-], deep-syntactic [DSynt-] and surface-syntactic [SSynt-] struc–tures [-S] of sentence (3).

Figure 1

SemS of sentence (3)

'nevozmožno'
= 'impossible'

'do' = 'before'   ○ —**1**—▸ ○

2   **1**

○   ○   'vstat′' =
'moment reči' =   **1**   'have.stood.up'
'moment of speech'

○
'ja' = 'I'

Literal reading of this semantic structure:
'before the moment of speech is.impossible that I have.stood.up' =
'It was impossible for me to stand up'

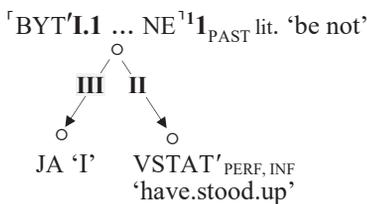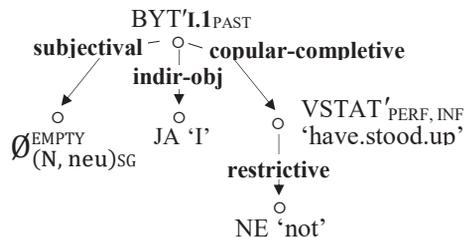**Figure 2**

DSyntS of sentence (3)

⌐BYT′**I.1** … NE¬1 **1**$_{\text{PAST}}$ lit. 'be not'
○

III   **II**

○   ○
JA 'I'   VSTAT′$_{\text{PERF, INF}}$
'have.stood.up'

Figure 3

SSyntS of sentence (3)

BYT′**I.1**$_{\text{PAST}}$
subjectival ⌐ ○ ⌐ **copular-completive**
indir-obj

○   ○   ○   VSTAT′$_{\text{PERF, INF}}$
Ø$_{(\text{N, neu})\text{SG}}^{\text{EMPTY}}$ JA 'I'   'have.stood.up'

restrictive

○
NE 'not'

The idiom ⌜BYT′I.1 … NE⌝1 lacks DSynt-actant I—it is impersonal; see **Comment 7** on p. 8.

$\varnothing_{(N,\,neu)SG}^{EMPTY}$ is a zero lexeme of Russian: a semantically empty, a.k.a. impersonal, nominal pronoun (3rd person, neuter gender, singular), equivalent to such impersonal pronouns as Eng. IT, Fr. IL and Ger. ES; it is a dummy SSynt-subject that ensures the person-number-gender agreement of the Main Verb (in this case, BYT′I.1 'be [copula]').

The semanteme 'nevožmozno' = 'impossible' is expressed in sentence (3) by the idiom ⌜BYT′I.1 … NE⌝1 (its lexicographic number 1 is due to the existence of another idiom of the same vocable—⌜BYT′I.1 … NE⌝2, see Section **3**).

The lexical entry for the idiom ⌜BYT′I.1 … NE⌝1 follows.

⌜BYT′I.1 … NE⌝1, verbal idiom, impersonal; **no** IMPER, INF,[4] PART(iciple), CONVERB; the imperative 2.SG form *bud′* is marginally possible only for the expression of the irrealis.

☞ The underscoring of a semanteme in a Sem-structure indicates its communicatively dominant role; the square brackets enclose the actants of the idiom; L('X') stands for "lexeme L that expresses the meaning 'X' "

Signified = Definition

'[X-u] $\varnothing_{PRES}^{BYT′I.1}$ ne [Y-nut′]' =

> **Textual version**
> 'nevozmožno [čtoby X Y-nul]'
> = 'impossible [that X has done Y]'
> **Formal version**
> 'nevozmožno'
> = 'impossible' ○ —**1**⟶ ○ —**1**⟶ ○ ['X'] ['Y']

1) 'Y' includes the semanteme 'completed';
2) 'Y is desirable for X'

Signifier [= the idiom's SSynt-structure]

$[\varnothing_{(N,\,neu)SG}^{EMPTY}]$ —subjectival→ [L('X')]←**indir-obj**–BYT′I.1 NE←**restr**–[L('Y')]   ⌐copular-compl→

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[4] The infinitive in the citation form of this idiom (as well in that of the ⌜BYT′I.1 … NE⌝2 idiom) is, so to speak, artificial; it cannot be used in a natural Russian sentence.

Syntactics

Government pattern

———	'Y' ↔ II	'X' ↔ III
1. $\varnothing^{\text{EMPTY}}_{\text{(N, neu)SG}}$	1. $V_{\text{PERF, INF}}$ **obligatory**	1. N_{DAT}

1) **If** 'X' does not include '<u>human</u>', **then** L('X') [= DSynt-actant **III**] cannot be elided (see **Comment 6**, p. 7).

Rebënku tam $\varnothing^{\text{BYT′I.1}}_{\text{PRES}}$ */bylo/budet ne zasnut′* lit. 'To.child there it is/was/ will.be not to.fall.asleep'. = 'It is/was/will be impossible for the child to fall asleep there'.

Pri takom šume tam $\varnothing^{\text{BYT′I.1}}_{\text{PRES}}$ */bylo/budet ne zasnut′* lit. 'With such racket there it is/was/will.be not to.fall.asleep'. = 'With such a racket it is/was/will be impossible to fall asleep there'.

Lexical functions

$\text{Conv}_{23\supset}$: *byt′* ⌐*ne po zubam*⌐ lit. 'be not for teeth' ≈ 'be such that one is unable to handle it'

$\text{Conv}_{23\cap}$: ⌐*ne svetit*⌐ ≈ 'be not to be expected'

$\text{Conv}_{32\cap}$: (*vsë*) *nikak ne* [$V_{\text{Y-PERF, FUT}}$] 'in no way' [*Ivan nikak ne zasnët* 'Ivan can in no way fall asleep'.]

$\text{Anti}_{\supset}$: *byt′* ⌐*po silam*⌐ lit. 'be within strengths' ≈ 'be doable',[5] *byt′* ⌐*pod silu*⌐ lit. 'be under strength' ≈ 'be doable', *byt′* ⌐*v* [$A_{\text{(poss)}}(N_X)$] *silax*⌐**2** lit. 'be in X's strengths' ≈ 'be doable'

$\text{Anti}_{012\cap}$: *polučit′sja* ≈ 'succeed'; *udat′sja* ≈ 'manage'

$\text{Anti}_{021\cap}$: *byt′* ⌐*v silax*⌐**1** lit. 'be in strengths' ≈ 'be capable', *byt′* ⌐*v sostojanii*⌐ lit. 'be in state' ≈ 'be in a position'; *moč′* 'can'

Magn : ⌐*ni za čto*⌐ lit. 'not for anything', *nikogda* 'never', *nikak* 'in no way', ⌐*nikoim obrazom*⌐ 'in no way' | ←V_{INF}

☛ The expression "| ←V_{INF}" means that a Magn adverbial syntatically depends on the verb in the infinitive—i.e. on DSynt-actant **II** of the idiom.

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[5] See the description of the idioms ⌐PO SILAM⌐, ⌐POD SILU⌐, ⌐V SILAX⌐**1** (*Ja v silax sdelat′ èto* lit. 'I am in strengths to do this'.) and ⌐V SILAX⌐**2** (*Sdelat′ èto – v moix silax* lit. 'To.do this is in my strengths'.) in Iomdin (2010: 171–173).

Examples

Ivanu ètu zadaču ne rešit' ni za čto 'It is absolutely impossible for Ivan to solve this problem'.

Nam budet nikak ne ujti nezametno 'It will be absolutely impossible for us to go away unnoticed'.

Ottuda ne ujti nezametno 'It is impossible to go away from there unnoticed'.

S ètim nam bylo by ne spravit'sja, esli by ne podospela pomošč' 'It would be impossible for us to manage this, if it weren't for the help that arrived'.

Comments

Linguistic comments accompanying this lexical entry are presented in four groups: comments concerning the idiom's signified, the idiom's signifier and the idiom's syntactics, as well as the idiom itself as a whole.

The signified [= the meaning] of the idiom

Comment 1

[X-*u*] ´ʙʏт′**ɪ.1** … ɴᴇˋ¹**1** means 'impossible [for X to have done Y]' rather than '[X is] unable [to do Y]'; cf. (4a):

(4) a. *Ivanu$_X$ ne kupit' ètot dom: xozjain ne prodast ni za čto*
    'It is impossible for Ivan to buy this house: the owner will never sell'.

This sentence can be uttered in case when Ivan is absolutely able to buy the house: he has the money and there are no legal obstacles.

   b. *Ivanu$_X$ ne byt' izbrannym* 'It is impossible for Ivan to be elected'.

Sentence (4b) is also by no means about Ivan's abilities—it is rather about his chances.

Comment 2

This lexical entry (and that of ´ʙʏт′**ɪ.1** … ɴᴇˋ¹**2**) uses a "double-barreled" lexicographic definition: in accordance with the proposal in Mel'čuk & Polguère (2018: **2.3.3**), it is presented both in traditional, i.e., textual, form and as a semantic network. The textual form is more accessible to the linguistic intuition of the reader while the semantic network is better for formal reasoning.

Comment 3

The conditions on the signified of the idiom do the following.

- Condition 1 requires that the fact 'Y' be 'completed'. This means that the semanteme configuration 'Y' contains along the semanteme 'Y″', which identifies the fact in question, the semanteme 'completed', which bears on 'Y″': 'Y' = 'Y′←1–completed'. The semanteme 'Y″' itself can be any type of dynamic fact that admits 'completion': an action, an event, a process. Thus, Rus. 'bolet″' = 'be sick' cannot be 'completed', but 'zabolet″' = 'fall sick' can be both 'completed' and not 'completed'; 'probolet′ [period of time T]' = 'be sick [during the period of time T]' can be only 'completed'. The semanteme 'completed' denotes the achievement of an inherent limit, after which the fact 'Y' cannot last because of its nature. This semanteme corresponds to one of the senses of the Russian perfective verbal aspect.

- Condition 2 indicates that 'fact Y is desirable for X' (from the viewpoint of the Speaker). Thus, sentence (5) tells us that Ivan wants to be killed in a war:

   (5) *Ivanu ne byt′ ubitym na vojne* 'It is impossible for Ivan to be killed in a war'.[6]

The semantic component 'fact Y is desirable for X' is also present as a condition on the definition of the idiom ˊBYT′I.1 … NEˋ1 2.

The signifier [= the SSynt-structure] of the idiom

The idiom's signifier, that is, its SSynt-structure, calls for two comments.

Comment 4

The verb BYT′I.1 'be' is used in both idioms in quite a specific way. BYT′I.1, which in the general case functions as a 100% copula verb, is in these idioms not copular at all. Semantically speaking, it does not link its SSynt-attribute to the SSynt-subject, since its SSynt-subject is semantically empty. Syntactically, this BYT′I.1 governs a dative (= indirect) object, which is impossible for a genuine copula. Morphologically, as indicated above, it lacks the imperative and all non-finite forms.

BYT′I.1 of our idioms retains only the "outer shell" of the genuine BYT′I.1. (On the verb BYT′ 'be' in Russian, see the classical work (Apresjan 2013), as well as Mel'čuk (2019: 11–16 and 2023b); on the lexicographic treatment of phraseologically bound lexemes—in particular, of the verb BYT′I.1, see **Conclusions**, Item 2, p. 13.).

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6   Sentence (5) can equally express a different speech act—namely, a prediction.

Comment 5

The idiom ⌐BYT′I.1 … NE⌐¹1 is syntactically discontinuous: its lexical components—BYT′I.1 and NE—are not linked syntactically to each other, but are connected via DSynt-actant **II** (= L('Y')); see Mel'čuk (2023a: 40–41). The idiom ⌐BYT′I.1 … NE⌐¹2 is also discontinuous.

The syntactics [= the co-occurrence properties] of the idiom

Semantic co-occurrence

Comment 6

The Sem-actant 'Y' of the idiom is necessarily a fact, and it must be a 'completed fact'. An inverse constraint is imposed on the Sem-actant 'Y' of the idiom ⌐BYT′I.1 … NE⌐¹2: here the fact must not be 'completed' (see **Comment 3** above). The Sem-actant 'X' of ⌐BYT′I.1 … NE⌐¹1, that is, the Agent, can remain unexpressed—under the condition, though, that it is human.[7] (**NB**: The Sem-actant 'X' of both idioms is not only the Agent: it can also be the Experiencer, the Patient, etc., according to the semantic nature of 'Y'; the term "Agent" is used here as a convenient abbreviation.) Russian allows the Speaker to not elaborate on the identity of the human Agent of the idiom ⌐BYT′I.1 … NE⌐¹1: if 'X' is not expressed, fact Y can be impossible for people in general, for a particular person identified by the context, for the Speaker himself, or for the Addressee. Sentence (6), just as its translation, is vague; it can mean any Agent implied by the situation:[8]

(6) *Ètot tekst srazu ne ponjat′* lit. 'This text at.once is not to.understand'. = 'It is impossible to understand this text at once'.

By contrast, Sem-actant 'X' of the idiom ⌐BYT′I.1… NE⌐¹2 cannot remain unexpressed:

(7) a. *Tam ne poguljat′* 'It is impossible to go for a walk there'. [⌐BYT′I.1 … NE⌐¹1] vs.

　　b. **Tam ne guljat′* 'It will be impossible to go for a walk there'. [⌐BYT′I.1 … NE⌐¹2] ~

　　Tam nikomu/ljudjam ne guljat′ 'It will be impossible for anyone/for people to go for walks there'.

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[7]　A non-human Agent must be explicitly expressed: *Mašine$_X$ tam bylo ne proexat′* lit. 'To.a.car there was not to.pass' = 'A car could not pass there', *Vinogradu$_X$ zdes′ ne vyzret′* lit. 'To.grapes here is not to.ripen' or *Daže slonu$_X$ budet ne spravit'sja* lit. 'Even to.an.elephant will.be not to.manage'. If the Agent is not expressed, it means that it is human (L. Iomdin, personal communication).

[8]　See Zimmerling 2021 for a detailed analysis of Russian dative-predicative constructions in which the Experiencer remains unexpressed.

Syntactic co-occurrence

Comment 7

The idiom ⌜ʙʏᴛ′ I.1 … ɴᴇ⌝ 1 syntactically corresponds to an impersonal verb: its SSynt-subject is the empty pronoun $\varnothing_{\text{(N, neu)SG}}^{\text{EMPTY}}$, which in Russian (and in several other Pro-Drop languages, such as Serbian, Polish, Spanish or Italian) is also a zero lexeme. This idiom is parallel to such Russian impersonal verbs as ᴛᴏšɴɪᴛ′ 'nauseate' (*Menja tošnit* lit. 'It nauseates me'.) or ᴢɴᴏʙɪᴛ′ 'make shiver' (*Menja znobit* lit. 'It shivers me'.). At the DSynt-level, just like these verbs, ⌜ʙʏᴛ′ I.1 … ɴᴇ⌝ 1 has DSynt-actants II and III—without DSynt-actant I. The same is true about the idiom ⌜ʙʏᴛ′ I.1 … ɴᴇ⌝ 2.

Comment 8

DSynt-actant II of the idiom ⌜ʙʏᴛ′ I.1 … ɴᴇ⌝ 1—that is, the dependent infinitive L('Y')$_{\text{INF}}$—must be in the perfective aspect, while DSynt-actant II of the idiom ⌜ʙʏᴛ′ I.1 … ɴᴇ⌝ 2, also an infinitive, must be in the imperfective. This corresponds to the semantic constraints imposed on the Sem-actant 'Y'—a completed fact in ⌜ʙʏᴛ′ I.1 … ɴᴇ⌝ 1 and anything but a completed fact in ⌜ʙʏᴛ′ I.1 … ɴᴇ⌝ 2. (As indicated in **Comment 3** above, 'completed' is one of the regular meanings expressed by the Russian perfective aspect.)

Morphological co-occurrence

The idiom ⌜ʙʏᴛ′ I.1 … ɴᴇ⌝ 1 is used in all three tenses of the indicative and in the conditional-subjunctive mood, while the idiom ⌜ʙʏᴛ′ I.1 … ɴᴇ⌝ 2 appears only in the present, see below.[9] ⌜ʙʏᴛ′ I.1 … ɴᴇ⌝ 1 has no non-finite forms and, for obvious semantic reasons, it cannot express the grammeme of the imperative; the same is true about ⌜ʙʏᴛ′ I.1 … ɴᴇ⌝ 2. However, ⌜ʙʏᴛ′ I.1 … ɴᴇ⌝ 1 has the imperative form *bud′* that expresses the irrealis, albeit its use is not quite natural (while still being grammatical):

(8) *Bud′ Ivanu ne spravit′sja, on by skazal ob ètom*
'Had it been impossible for Ivan to manage [the situation], he would have said so'.

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⁹   There is a similar expression pattern involving the so-called ʙʏ-infinitive (Rus. ʙʏ is a clitic particle that expresses the conditional-subjunctive mood), as in the sentence *Ne xodit′ by Ivanu tuda* 'It would be better for Ivan not to go there', which expresses a mild negative opinion about X doing or having done Y rather than impossibility of X's doing Y. This is one of genuine independent infinitives—the optative infinitive.

This marginal use is worth mentioning because for ´BYT′I.1 … NE⌐1⌐2 it is absolutely excluded: **Bud′ Ivanu ne guljat′ po Moskve…* 'Had it been impossible for Ivan to go for walks in Moscow…'.

The idiom as a whole

Comment 9

The idiom ´BYT′I.1 … NE⌐1⌐1 is an approximate conversive antonym with respect to the lexemes POLUČIT′SJA and UDAT′SJA, as well as to the collocations *byt′I.1 ´v sostojanii* and *byt′I.1 ´v silax⌐1*:

´BYT′I.1 … NE⌐1⌐1 = $\mathrm{Anti}_{012\cap}(polučit′sja) = \mathrm{Anti}_{012\cap}(udat′sja)$;

´BYT′I.1 … NE⌐1⌐1 = $\mathrm{Anti}_{021\cap}(byt′\mathrm{I.1}\ ´v\ sostojanii`) = \mathrm{Anti}_{021\cap}(byt′\mathrm{I.1}\ ´v\ silax`\mathrm{1})$;

cf. (9):

(9) a. *Mne_III ´bylo ne` ponjat′_II ètogo*

  lit. 'To.me it was not to.understand this.' ≅

  U menja_II ne polučilos′ ponjat′_I èto

  lit. 'At me not obtained to.understand this.' ≡

  Mne_II ne udalos′ ponjat′_I èto

  lit. 'To.me not succeeded to.understand this.'

 b. *Mne_III ´bylo ne` ponjat′_II ètogo*

  lit. 'To.me it was not to.understand this.' ≅

  Ja_I byl ne ´v sostojanii` ponjat′_II èto

  lit. 'I was not in state to.understand this.' ≡

  Ja_I byl ne ´v silax`1 ponjat′_II èto

  lit. 'I was not in strengths to.understand this.'

Comment 10

The approximate semantic equivalences based on the synonyms, the antonyms and the conversives of ´BYT′I.1 … NE⌐1⌐1 can be illustrated with the sentences in (10); all of these mean ≈ 'I cannot solve this problem':

(10) *Èta zadača mne ne po zubam.*　*Ja ne v sostojanii rešit′ ètu zadaču*
  Èta zadača mne ne pod silu.　*Ja ne mogu rešit′ ètu zadaču.*
  Ja (vsë) nikak ne rešu ètu zadaču.　*Mne ne po silam rešit′ ètu zadaču.*
  Ja nesposoben rešit′ ètu zadaču.　*Mne ne pod silu rešit′ ètu zadaču.*
  Ja ne v silax rešit′ ètu zadaču.　*Ne v moix silax rešit′ ètu zadaču.*

Comment 11

The idiom ´BYT′I.1 … NE˹¹1 has two rather infrequent variants.

- A colloquial variant without negation (Mets, ed. 1985: 205), possible in the context of strong contrast; cf. (11):

(11) *Ivanu ne vstat', a **mne vstat'!*** lit. 'To.Ivan it is not to.stand.up, but to.me
  it is to.stand.up!' =
  'It is impossible for Ivan to stand up, but for me it is possible!'

- A variant where the negation NE 'not' is replaced with one of the two synonymous idioms ´EDVA LI˼ and ´VRJAD LI˼, both meaning 'hardly' (such replacement is possible practically in all contexts):

(12) *Ivanu edva li ‹vrjad li› vstat'* 'It is hardly possible that Ivan stands up'.

For the idiom ´BYT′I.1 … NE˹¹2 such variants are less acceptable.

Comment 12

The expression of the form *byt' ne* V$_{\text{PERF, INF}}$ can be part of several idioms, which, of course, are different from our two idioms; for instance:

  [X-*u*] ´POČEMU (BY)/ČEGO (BY) BYT′I.1 … NE˼ [Y-*nut'*]?
    lit. 'To.X why/of.what it is not to.be to.do.Y?' = 'Why does X not do Y?'
    [a suggestion].
    Čego (*by*)/*Počemu* (*by*) *Ivanu ne pojti poguljat'?* 'Why wouldn't Ivan go
    for a walk?'

  [X-*u*] ´BYT′I.1 NE OTKAZAT′˼ [*v* Y-*e*] lit. 'To.X be not to.refuse in Y' = 'X
  really does have Y'.
    V izvestnoj xitrosti Ivanu bylo ne otkazat' lit. 'In certain cunningness
    to. Ivan it was not to.refuse' = 'Ivan really had certain cunningness'.

   [X-*u*] ´ČTO BY BYT′I.1 … NE˼ [Y-*nut'*]?
    lit. 'To.X what it would not to.be to.do.Y?' = 'Why wouldn't X do Y?'
    [a suggestion].
    A čto by Ivanu ne pojti poguljat'? 'And why wouldn't Ivan go for a walk?'

3 The idiom ⌜BYT′I.1 … NE⌝2

For this idiom the illustrative sentence is (13):

(13) *Mne* $\emptyset_{\text{PRES}}^{\text{BYT′I.1}}$ *ne rabotat′* {*v Moskve*} lit. 'To.me it is not to.work in Moscow'. =
'It will be impossible for me to work in Moscow'.

The semantic, deep-syntactic and surface-syntactic structures of this sentence are as follows:
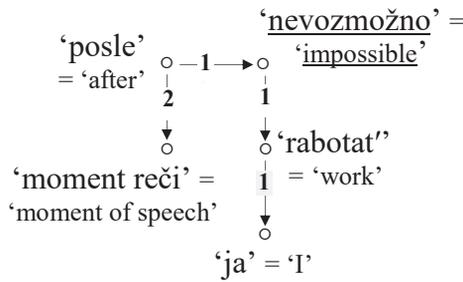
Figure 4
SemS of sentence (13)

Figure 5
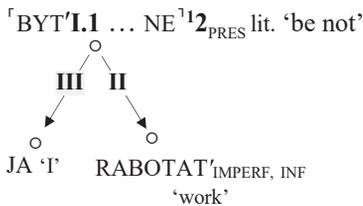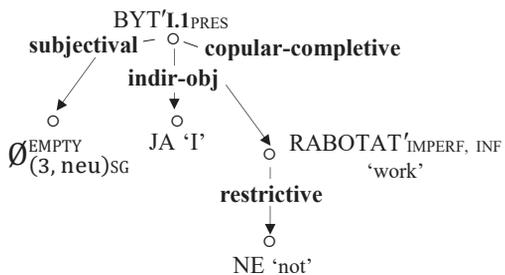*DSyntS of sentence (13)*

Figure 6
SSyntS of sentence (13)

The configuration of semantemes 'will be impossible' is expressed in sentence (13) by the idiom ⌜BYT′I.1 … NE⌝2. Here is the lexical entry of this idiom.

˹**BYT′I.1 … NE**˺**2**, verbal idiom, impersonal; **only** PRES, **no** IMPER, INF, PART(iciple), CONVERB.

Signified = Definition

'[X-u] $\varnothing_{\text{PRES}}^{\text{BYT′I.1}}$ ne [Y-at′]' =

> **Textual version**
> 'budet <u>nevozmožno</u> [čtoby X Y-al]'
>   = 'it will be <u>impossible</u> [that X does Y]'
> **Formal version**
> '<u>nevozmožno</u>'   ['Y']   ['X']
>   = '<u>impossible</u>'   ○–**1**→ ○ –**1**→ ○
>   **1**
> 'posle'   ○–**2**→ ○
>   = 'after'   'moment reči'
>   = 'moment of speech'

1) 'Y' does not include the semanteme 'completed';
2) 'Y is desirable for 'X'

Signifier [= the idiom's SSynt-structure]

┌──────── **subjectival** ───┐ ┌─ **copular-compl** ──┐
[$\varnothing_{\text{(N, neu)SG}}^{\text{EMPTY}}$] [L('X')]←**indir-obj**–BYT′**I.1** NE←**restr**–[L('Y')]

Syntactics

Government pattern

———	'Y' ↔ II	'X' ↔ III
$\varnothing_{\text{(N, neu)SG}}^{\text{EMPTY}}$	1. $V_{\text{IMPERF, INF}}$ **obligatory**	1. N_{DAT} **obligatory**

Ne pit′ Ivanu ètot kon′jak lit. 'Not to drink to Ivan this cognac'. = 'It will be impossible for Ivan to drink this cognac'.

Lexical functions

$\text{Conv}_{23\supset}$: ˹*ne svetit*˺ ≈ 'not to be expected'
$\text{Anti}_{23\cap}$: *polučit′sja* ≈ 'succeed'; *udat′sja* ≈ 'manage'
Magn : *nikogda* 'never' | ←V_{INF}

Examples

Net, ne vstrečat'sja im v dal'nejšej žizni 'No, it will be impossible for them to meet in the future life'.

Ne slyšat' mne bol'še nikogda golos Ivana! 'It will be impossible for me to hear Ivan's voice ever again!'

Comments

The comments to the lexical entry of the idiom ´ʙʏᴛ′ɪ.1 … ɴᴇ`¹1 contain much information about ´ʙʏᴛ′ɪ.1 … ɴᴇ`¹2; therefore, the comments for the latter idiom are shorter.

The signified [= the meaning] of the idiom

Unlike the meaning of the idiom ´ʙʏᴛ′ɪ.1 … ɴᴇ`¹1, the meaning of this idiom includes the reference to the time: the impossibility will take place in the future; this particularity has a repercussion on the morphological properties of the idiom, see below.

The signifier [= the SSynt-structure] of the idiom does not require any additional indications.

The syntactics [= the co-occurrence properties] of the idiom

Semantic co-occurrence

The Sem-actant 'X' of the idiom ´ʙʏᴛ′ɪ.1 … ɴᴇ`¹2 must be obligatorily specified—it cannot remain unexpressed (in contrast to ´ʙʏᴛ′ɪ.1 … ɴᴇ`¹1, where the expression of 'X' is not obligatory). The Sem-actant 'Y' of ´ʙʏᴛ′ɪ.1 … ɴᴇ`¹2 can be any fact that is not 'completed'.

Syntactic co-occurrence

DSynt-actant II of the idiom ´ʙʏᴛ′ɪ.1 … ɴᴇ`¹2—that is, the dependent infinitive L('Y')$_{INF}$—must be in the imperfective aspect. This corresponds to the semantic constraint imposed on Sem-actant 'Y': it can be anything but a completed fact.

Morphological co-occurrence

The idiom ´ʙʏᴛ′ɪ.1 … ɴᴇ`¹2 appears only in the present tense. Its instances contain only the zero wordform of ʙʏᴛ′ɪ.1, the presence of which is postulated by analogy with the idiom ´ʙʏᴛ′ɪ.1 … ɴᴇ`¹1.

The idiom as a whole

The expression of the form "*byt′ ne* V$_{\text{IMPERF, INF}}$" can manifest other idioms, for instance:

- [X-*u*] ˹ʙʏт′ɪ.1 ɴᴇ ᴘʀɪᴠʏᴋᴀт′˺ [*k* Y-*u*] lit. 'To.X to.be not to.get.accustomed to Y' = 'Y is normal/habitual for X'.
  Ivanu bylo k žare ne privykat′ 'Heat was {something} normal for Ivan'.
- [X-*u*] ˹ʙʏт′ɪ.1 ɴᴇ ᴢᴀɴɪᴍᴀт′˺ [Y-*a*] lit. 'To.X be not to.borrow Y' = 'X has a lot of Y'.
  Tebe budet krasoty ne zanimat′ 'You will have a lot of beauty'.

Unlike ˹ʙʏт′ɪ.1 … ɴᴇ˺**2**, these idioms are used in the three tenses.

Conclusions

The following three conclusions can be formulated: the first is a general lexicographic principle, the second presents a particular lexicographic recommendation, and the third concerns a specific question of Russian syntax.

1. An idiom must have its own complete lexicographic entry in the lexicon—just like any ordinary lexeme, and not be buried in the lexical entry of one of its components. Idioms were included as separate entries in the first published *Explanatory Combinatorial Dictionaries* of Russian (Mel'čuk & Zholkovsky 1984, Mel'čuk & Žolkovskij 2016) and French (Mel'čuk et al., 1984–1999), and the corresponding principle was explicitly stated and discussed in Mel'čuk (2013: 268–273). The above lexical entries demonstrate once again that an idiom necessitates, in the general case, rich lexicographic information, and therefore it must be entered in a lexicon as the headword of a full-fledged dictionary article, on the same footing as ordinary lexemes. Nothing but a dusty tradition stands in the way of this proposal. (A reminder: idioms and lexemes make up the class of lexical units).

2. A lexeme that is part of an idiom can feature some particular syntactic and/or morphological properties that are absent when this lexeme is used outside of the idiom; these properties are to be indicated in the lexical entry of the idiom. In other words, such a lexeme does not receive a special lexical entry describing it as this idiom's component. Lexemes of this type are called deviant (Mel'čuk 2023a: 46). Thus, the verb ʙʏт′ɪ.1 used as a component

of our two idioms is a deviant lexeme; it should not receive a separate lexical entry representing it as this component: all the particularities this pseudo-ʙʏᴛ′ɪ.1 shows inside the idioms are specified in the lexical entries of the idioms themselves.

Attention: The situation is different with respect to collocates. A collocate, even a unilexeme (= lexeme that appears in one or two collocations only), can have its own lexical entry characterizing it as a collocate.

3. The infinitive with the idioms ˊʙʏᴛ′ɪ.1 … ɴᴇ˻¹1 and ˊʙʏᴛ′ɪ.1 … ɴᴇ˻¹2—that is, their Sem-actant 'Y'—is not syntactically independent: as has been shown, it functions as copular-completive dependent of the verb ʙʏᴛ′. Thus, the list of controversial "independent infinitives" in Russian has one element less. The present paper, however, should by no means be construed as a global rejection of Russian independent infinitives: the language does have them. At least four types of the independent infinitive are obvious:

- Imperative infinitive (Padučeva 2017: **2.1.5**): *Vstat′!* 'Stand up!'
- Nominating infinitive (in Russian *nazyvnoj infinitiv*; Padučeva 2017: **2.1.7**):
  – *Da čto ty govoriš′? Exat′ tuda sejčas?* 'But what are you saying? To go there right away?'
- Optative infinitive (Padučeva 2017: **2.2**): *Tebe by snačala posmotret′!* 'You should first have had a look'.
- Narrative infinitive (Plungjan 2013): *A ty srazu kričat′!* 'And you up and started sceaming right away!'

Future studies will confirm or refute the existence of other independent infinitives in Russian.

Acknowledgments

Abbreviations and symbols

DSynt- : deep-syntactic

$\emptyset_{(N,\,neu)SG}^{EMPTY}$: semantically empty zero nominal pronoun lexeme—dummy SSynt-subject; cf., e.g., Eng. IT

L : lexeme

$\emptyset_{PRES}^{BYT'\mathbf{I.1}}$: zero present tense wordform of the verb BYT'**I.1**

L('X') : lexeme that expresses the meaning 'X'

[ ] : the square brackets enclose the actants of the headword

-S : structure

{ } : the curly brackets enclose the words added to the example for naturalness

Sem- : semantic

⌐ ¬ : the top corners enclose an idiom

SSynt- : surface-syntactic

… : the three dots (in the name of an idiom) indicate its syntactic discontinuity

'σ' : communicatively dominant semanteme

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