

To be or not to be?

*The Verbum Substantivum
from Synchronic, Diachronic
and Typological Perspectives*

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Edited by

Michail L. Kotin

in collaboration with Richard J. Whitt

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-8070-1

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8070-1

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PREFACE

Most contributors of the present volume dealing with the verbs of the *to be*-group from synchronic, diachronic and typological perspectives were participants of the workshop, the title of which corresponds to the title of this volume. This workshop was organized within the Annual Meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea that took place at the Adam-Mickiewicz University in Poznań in summer 2014. Nevertheless, the further work on this project made it necessary to revisit the original versions of the papers and to adapt them more strictly to the basic concepts and approaches presented here. Some additional articles written by researchers who did not participate in the workshop are included, thus enriching the discussion by presenting new approaches related to the basic topics of this book. Thus, the volume does not constitute a conference proceedings, but rather a treatise with a consistent concept, and its contributions are not a collection of random articles, but are interconnected with one another.

The intention of the chief editor was to present papers with explicit attempts to combine historical and typological methodologies of language research, as this is still unmeritedly underestimated in contemporary linguistics. The diachronic perspective intersects, moreover, with the diatopic one. The volume contains both theoretically-oriented issues and case studies, the majority of which involve corpus-based investigations.

The designed addressees of this book are first of all linguists working in various fields of linguistic theory, especially morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics, as well as language history, language change, language contact, language typology and language contrast. Furthermore, the papers presented here can be useful also for philosophers, philologists, psychologists as well as language teachers, translators and interpreters, as they contain information concerning the basic properties of utterances, which belong to the central conceptual sphere of the human languages.

The chief editor, Michail L. Kotin, is thankful to the Alexander Humboldt Foundation (Bonn, Germany) for having financed his research stay in Berlin in autumn 2013, which he could use for accomplishing preliminary studies on the *to be* project and preparations for future developments.

The editors

INTRODUCTION

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The verbs of the “to be”-group, also called *verba substantiva* according to the traditional terminology of the classical school of Historical-Comparative Grammar, belong to the most enigmatic phenomena of the human language. Combining a distinct suppletivity of their conjugational forms in most languages with a striking semantic and functional ambiguity, as well as unique syntactic capabilities, they form a very specific class of linguistic entities. They can be referred to, without exaggeration, as one of the conceptually gravest and “symptomatic” language formations. Typologically the *be*-verbs demonstrate, on the one hand, a set of similar features in almost every language, which is excellent evidence of their universal validity. On the other hand, the differences between these verbs in various language groups and even in particular languages are remarkable proof of language relativism. Historically, the *be*-verbs show a sequence of relevant stages in their formal, semantic and syntactic developments, which in many aspects coincide with their typological and individual, “idioethnic” features and properties. One can trace, among other things, paths and mechanisms of their development and salient changes of their functions in language systems of different types. Especially important are also changes in the form and function of the *be*-verbs arising from language contact, for they indicate essential tendencies in the evolution of these entities accelerated by the influence of language interaction triggers.

The tradition of typologically- and partly also historically-oriented investigations of the *be*-verbs is relatively rich, although there are still remarkable gaps and insufficient solutions to the problems concerning their morphological features, semantic properties and syntactic functions. Moreover, many new fields of general linguistic research prove necessary for new approaches towards the *be*-verbs, even if they seem not to be directly connected with each other. The reason for this paradox is the very specific place of these entities in the language systems, since the *be*-verbs

are undoubtedly pivotal phenomena and belong to the central sphere of every language system.

Attempts to describe the *be*-verbs from different points of view, by taking into account their universal and “idioethnic” properties, have been made by many scholars, cf. the first descriptive attempts by means of structural linguistics in Locker 1954, Busch 1960 or Benveniste 1960. A new approach based on both linguistic and philosophical resp. logical foundations was proposed in an article by A. C. Graham (1965). Graham’s ideas substantially underlay the most well-known work consisting of 16 volumes appearing in 1967-1972/73 as a result of consolidated efforts of linguists and philosophers under the title *The verb “be” and its Synonyms. Philosophical and Grammatical Studies* (cf. Verhaar 1967-1973). This includes formal, semantic and syntactic studies of the *be*-verbs and related entities in various languages of the world with a special stress on logical aspects, as well as typology and universal grammar, particularly in its Chomskyan manifestation. Numerous issues of this fundamental research project still remain relevant nowadays, e.g. those devoted to such problems as formal suppletivity of the *be*-stems and irregularity of their inflectional patterns; simultaneous encoding of existence, state and possession (i.e. “static semantics”), as well transformation and development (“dynamic semantics”); the relationship between existence semantics and copular resp. auxiliary function; the omission of the copular *be* in numerous types of sentences in many languages; the derivational potential of the *be*-verbs, especially by nominalization patterns, etc.

The above mentioned features and properties of the *be*-verbs were further analyzed by numerous linguists from diverse perspectives, cf., among many others, Chvany 1975, Clark 1978, Babby 1980, Arutjunova/Širjaev 1983, Abraham 1991, Freeze 1992, Leiss 1992, Stettberger 1993, Weiss 1993, Rouveret 1998, Huomo 2003, Maienborn 2003, Mehlig 2004, Partee/Borschev 2004, van de Velde 2005, Öhl 2009, Clancy 2010, Kotin 2014. These studies tackle traditional problems and research methods related to *be*-verbs with new questions and methods. Especially important for the analysis of the verbum substantivum are, among others, investigations into grammaticalization processes, combined diachronic-typological approaches, corpus-related resp. data-based issues and other research fields which emerged in the last decades. At the same time, relatively old and well-analyzed parts of language systems, such as, e.g. the origo-deixis concept of Karl Bühler (1934) and its development in modern linguistics, have so far not been applied to the *be*-research in a

sufficient way, although this undoubtedly exhibits salient connections with the semantics and syntax of the *be*-predicates.¹

Further aspects of linguistic theory and methodology that are crucial for *to be*-studies are modern semantic analyses, valency grammar, cognitive linguistic research, investigations into language contact and contrast, etymological and genetic studies, morphemic analyses, derivational grammar, etc.

The profile of this volume is, hence, determined by the need of the inclusion of the *be*-verb analyses into the contemporary linguistic discourse on the one hand, and by the need of the revision or correction of the established concepts concerning formal, semantic and functional aspects of the *be*-verbs in synchrony, diachrony and typology on the other. From this point of view, the book is a contribution to complex, multivalent analyses of the verbs of the *be*-group and, in a wider sense, of what Henning Brinkmann (1959) has called the *be*-perspective (*sein-Perspektive*) in particular language systems as well as in particular periods of language development, taking into consideration both universal and “idioethnic” properties and features of these verbs, their derivatives and accompanying syntactic constructions.

The following aspects of the analysis of the *be*-verb group are especially relevant in the current volume:

1. The *be*-verbs show a widely spread suppletivity of their morphological forms. Their stems emerge from different verbal roots and are mostly a result of their contamination and fusion, cf. Engl. *am, is, are, be, was*; Germ. *bin, ist, sein, war*; Russ. *jest', byt', byl, budu*; Pol. *jest, są, być*; Lat. *sum, es, esse*, etc. This is why particular forms are unlike each other, so that the total paradigm does not demonstrate features that are typical for the majority of verbs, i.e. transparency of a stable, constant reference stem and variable personal exponents; more or less transparent and plausible morphemic structure, with clear and well identifiable “morphemic borders”. The *be*-verbs exhibit paradigms with extremely fluid or fuzzy morphemic structures, as in forms like engl. *a(-)m, a(-)re*, germ. *bi(-)n, bi(-)st, i(-)st*; lat. *su(-m)/s(-um), es(-), es(-)t, su(-mus)/s(-um-us)*; pol. *jest-em, jest-eś, jest-, jest-eś-my, są(-q)/są*, etc. However, as **Rosemarie Lühr** has shown with examples from Hittite, Sanskrit, Greek and Latin in comparison to Germanic languages, original paradigms of the verbs, which the Indo-

¹ The editor is thankful to Prof. Werner Abraham for this particular advice, as well as for very useful recommendations of its further application potential by the evaluation of the *to be*-research.

European *to be*-stems are derived from, consistently demonstrate regular conjugation patterns. Thus, suppletivity generally has to be regarded as a relatively much younger development. On the other hand, nearly all *be*-verbs in Indo-European and in other language families are built from suppletive stems. The suppletive strategies of the verb *to be* are based on frequency, communicative situation, and lexical meaning. Moreover, these stems are mostly short, and many of them have a monolith-like form that disallows the usual separation in root and suffixes or endings. For this reason, one can assume that a prototypical *to be*-verb, i.e. the *be*-verb that has already developed copular and auxiliary function, basically occurs in the suppletive paradigm. What may be the reason of this very special feature? My claim (cf. **Michail L. Kotin**, in this volume) is that suppletivity generally indicates, among other things, a specific function of the entity in question, i.e. its unique role in comparison with other verbs. Namely, irregular morphology is a natural trigger challenging additional efforts by language acquisition, so if a given entity consequently shows suppletive forms in its paradigm, it requires special attention and a strengthening of the cognitive potential in the copying of their totality. Suppletivity by many forms in a conjugation paradigm is impossible, for it would disable their successful “imprinting” by a speaker, whereas suppletivity by seldom-used or conceptually “unimportant” verbs would lead either to their disappearance from the language or to their equation on the basis of analogy. Only entities with especially important conceptual capabilities and simultaneously with special features which basically distinguish them from other verbs are able to afford an entirely suppletive paradigm. Hence, conceptual features and functional specifics of the *to be*-verbs can in this very case be regarded as justification for their morphological complexity. Similarly, **Piotr Krycki** states that *być/sein/to be* are in many languages the most frequently used verbs and thus have a distinct variety of shapes of the corresponding paradigm inventory and a suppletivism like no other verbal stem. This formal-morphological characteristic of the *be*-verbs seems to be a linguistic universal, and the functional load requirements should therefore be examined from a typological perspective. The *be*-verbs can therefore be used as copula, auxiliary, modal and full verbs. They denote existence, condition, possession, character (in conjunction with an adjective), source, location, etc.

2. The semantics of the *be*-verbs is extremely complex and ambiguous as well, as are their syntactic properties. From the synchronic perspective they combine “existentiality” with copulative and auxiliary functions, and diachronically these three basic functions are also often connected, though there are languages in which prototypical copulas neither emerge from nor coincide with existential verbs in synchrony. The existential meaning is, for its part, not as plausible as it would seem. The traditional derivation of the copular semantics of *to be* in Indo-European from the “pure” existence denoted by a one-argument verb in existential clauses like *God is* through the addition of a second argument-like entity in the form of a predicative or an adverbial in clauses like *Pete is a teacher*, *Pete is clever* or *Pete is here* is doubtful for various reasons. In this volume an alternative interpretation is suggested, namely that so-called “small sentences” with *be*-verbs encode various types of existence, including possession, independently of whether they contain one or two argument-like entities. Moreover, it is claimed that sentences with two argument-like positions of *to be* are to be treated as prototypical ones, as they indicate the existence in their “normal” form, i.e. either in space or as a characteristic or property of somebody or something. The one-argument *be* is rather a result of *dropping* of the “right-argument” place than the two-argument *be* is a result of the *addition* of it, cf. **Michail L. Kotin**, in this volume. Interestingly, copula uses also can fall apart in sentence types that are distinguished against the base ground of ‘essentiality’ and ‘stage’. **Werner Abraham** demonstrates that, against the common empirical background being the base of the traditional copula treatment, two copula verbs have to be distinguished once Karl Bühler’s *Origo theory* is applied in his paper by taking the example of the German so-called *absentive construction* (like *Peter ist einkaufen*): one copula *be/esse(re)/byt’/etre/estar* on the basis of the events characterized by place and time coordinates, as opposed to the other without such coordinates playing a role in the semantic and syntactic compositionality. It is argued that such an *Origo* basis not only explains the phenomena in an exhaustive way, but also declassifies the respective verbs: the change is not one of a lexical distinction, but of the distinction of events from properties. A syntactic distinction which is based on the features [+nunc] as opposed to [–nunc] is proposed. From this, two pathways for further investigations emerge: (i) a typological one, namely which languages lexicalize this difference (as Spanish

does, but not French)? (ii) are there *Origo* distinctions to be made only on the feature [+/-hic]? A candidate would be the infinitival absentive readings with dialogic copula sentences such as *He is jogging* (with the respective absentive meaning in a telephone dialogue, for example). In the paper by **Elisabeth Leiss**, the German absentive construction is investigated in comparison to the German progressive form like *Er ist am Arbeiten*. The theory behind this contribution is the Universal Grammar of the 13th and 14th century Modistae where the copula ‘be’ in its finite forms is attributed central status. What we find in older texts is in effect, according to Leiss, not a reduction of the present participle but rather a genuine form of the German language at least since Old High German. Hence, the construction of the absentive has been part of the German language system from the earliest documented times. An important finding is that the old present participle progressive was for some time part of the grammatical system of German (and not only some translation calque from Latin). It was used to encode the difference between stage-level and individual-level predicates.

3. The function of the auxiliary *be* is, according to traditional treatments, the result of the grammaticalization of the originally lexical item with the basic meaning of existence. It is a further step of its de-lexicalization after the copular function. Meanwhile, contemporary research tends to differentiate utterances with *to be* and its typical complements as participles and infinitives depending on their types and above all, on the semantics of the latter ones. The formal complexity of a verbal periphrase mirrors in this way its semantic complexity which can, however, be more or less distinct. The main hypothesis here is that the degree of grammaticalization of the periphrasis and, hence, of the auxiliarization of *to be*, coincides with the aspectual semantics of the participial complement. Thus, e.g. durative and atelic verbs trigger the highest grammaticalization degree, while resultative and telic verbs establish phrases with a partly preserved existential semantics of *to be*, as in the German Past Perfect: *Sie ist lange gefahren/gerest/gewandert* vs. *Sie ist schon gekommen/erwacht* (cf. Chapter II of this volume). With an emphasis on the remarkable role of *be*-verbs in various languages of the world, the paper by **Sonja Zeman** addresses the auxiliation of German *sein* in perfect constructions. In particular, the focus is on the recently observed deictic use of *war gewesen* (‘had been’) in Modern High German such as *Ich war*

vorhin beim Bäcker gewesen, i.e. a past perfect form which seems to indicate simple past tense and is documented mainly in the spoken register. Zeman's claim is that the comparison with "non-conventional uses" of the pluperfect reveals that the German form *war gewesen* behaves differently as it seems to preserve its perfect semantics. Her analysis suggests that the participle *gewesen* functions as an extension mechanism, as is described analogously for double perfect forms denoting the existence of a state. Against this background, *war gewesen* does not only demonstrate the remarkable role of *be*-verbs once again, but, what is more, it constitutes an excellent case study for examining the grammaticalization of *sein* and the interrelationship with its basic existential concept. A comparison of copular and auxiliary usage of *to be* and its pendants in other languages is the subject of the article by **Susumu Kuroda**, who investigates their interaction on the empirical basis of Old High German texts. Though the usage of OHG *uuesan* 'be' in its typical existential meaning is observable in this period of the language's development, most empirically proven cases of its function are to be assessed rather as copulative and even auxiliary ones. However, the relations between copular and auxiliary usages is somewhat controversial. Since the passive construction shows a parallel formal behavior with the copulative construction, the passive construction and the copulative construction with *uuesan* might have the same structure. The same could be true for the Perfect construction with *uuesan*. If these three constructions are considered identical structures, then the three categories that take completely different places in the verbal system of OHG belong together. However, *uuesan* in the passive construction should not be equated with *uuesan* in the copulative construction.

4. Synchronic and diachronic case studies on the status and functions of *to be*-verbs in various syntactic constructions and verbal periphrases are expanded by investigations of diatopic subjects. The basic claim is that local dialects and language variants provide the most credible evidence for language development and language change, especially in cases of intensive language contact which convincingly show which types and forms of borrowed entities have the chance to remain in a new language system as its inalienable part and which will be rejected by it. The basic hypothesis is that only entities and constructions that coincide with genuine mechanisms, regularities and tendencies in the development of the given dialect or language are borrowed for the

long term. An analysis of various copulative and auxiliary functions of the verbum substantivum *běc* /,sein’/‘to be’ in the modern Kashubian verbal system from a diachronic and synchronic perspective is provided by **Piotr Bartelik**, who concludes that – due to its geographical location and historical conditions – genuine Slavic elements and developmental tendencies co-occur with units formed by language contacts. A unique composition of the Kashubian verb system, especially with regard to the functions of *běc* is indicated by numerous triggers. Most important of them are the following ones: (i) Slavic regularities in the copulative *běc*-periphrasis, (ii) the preservation of the Slavic analytic perfect (*běc* with past participle) and its synthesis, (iii) the structure of the passive voice system, (iv) the *běc* copulative constructions, which have been conditioned by language contact, (v) *běc* with passive participles and some functional features in the passive voice system. Diachronic and synchronic analyses as presented in this article not only reveal the diverse functions of *běc* in constructions of varied provenience, but may also constitute an innovative approach of categorial, semantic and functional description of *běc* functions in the Kashubian verb system. Moreover, the investigation enables us to draw conclusions concerning selected typologically relevant features of the *be*-verbs and constructions resp. periphrases with them in Slavonic-Germanic contrast.

5. Beside existence and its varieties and reanalyzed (grammaticalized) concepts, the *be*-verbs verbalize – in nearly every language containing them – further concepts which mainly appear in specific syntactic constructions with a *be*-verb and can be generally either traced back directly to its conceptual origins or at least considered conceptually related in function. Two of these functions are considered in the present volume, namely possession and modality. Both seem to be universal with *to be*, though their place in particular language systems is different. Thus, possession is a special feature of *to be*-constructions in Slavonic languages or in Japanese, whereas modality of *to be*-forms is especially developed in Germanic. According to the thesis of **Piotr Krycki**, who draws his conclusions on the basis of a comparative corpus study of the original German belletristic text and its translations into Polish and English, the functions of the *be*-verbs (existence, condition, possession, character, origin, position) can be expressed in the languages studied. The investigation and analysis of corpus data make possible a description of how the individual functions are

implemented in each other's languages using different linguistic concepts. The paper by **Liisa Buelens** concerns a cartographical account of Flemish Event Possessives (FEvPs) which alternate between a variety with *have* and one with *be*. The FEvP matrix subjects are interpreted as possessing and being affected by the event expressed in the embedded clause. She argues that the matrix subject occupies a similar (applicative) relation to the clausal domain as that observed in the possessor of the Flemish External Possessor pattern. Instead of residing in a DP-internal position, the FEP possessor occupies a higher position in the clause. The matrix subject of event possessives is an affected possessor. The author claims furthermore that affectedness forces the subject into a higher clausal applicative position where it receives default nominative case. She treats the FEvPs as small clauses with full clause propositional subjects. The availability of such a higher applicative position in Flemish is independently motivated on the basis of the FEP-pattern in which the possessor does not occupy a DP-internal position adjacent to the possessee but is separated from it by an adjunct which (crucially) carries an affectedness reading as well. The verb *be* then alternates freely with *have* and can be said to be a dummy verb expressing affected possession. **Jac Conradie** provides a discussion of possible language change processes and mechanisms in Afrikaans, the result of which is the loss of *to be* as a mutative marker and its replacement by *have*. Modern Afrikaans is characterised by a clear-cut opposition between past participle + 'have' in the active and past participle + 'be' in the passive voice, both as perfects, e.g. *gedoen het* 'have done' vs *gedoen is* 'was done'. Otherwise *het* is a present tense main verb and *is* a present tense copula. While mutative *is* acted as a redundant category marker for a type of verb which was already semantically transparent, its replacement by *het* (*gegaan is* > *gegaan het* 'have gone') relieved its functional load to a considerable extent, and brought it into line with the present tense opposition of *doen* vs *gedoen word*. In view of the contact history of Afrikaans, the possibility should always be kept in mind that early learners of Cape Dutch, along with their neglect of verbal inflection, might never have acquired a grammatical category such as the mutative, and that the loss of this distinction filtered through to Cape Dutch usage in the course of the 19th century. Though this scenario is largely acceptable, it provides no insight either into the way in which mutative BE was lost initially or in the later Cape Dutch

acrolect. The correlation can however be found between mutative ‘be’ loss and preterite loss – from a 1797 personal diary with consistent use of the preterite (including examples of *wierd* passives) and full retention of mutative ‘be’, to texts of the early 20th century with only traces of the preterite and mutative ‘be’. It is concluded that functional and structural changes occurred in complementary fashion. Functionally the perfect loses its aspectual anteriority and becomes a simple past tense to (partly) fill the gap left by preterite loss. Structurally the loss of the preterite *wierd/* *werd* auxiliary along with other preterites simplifies the formal opposition to *het* + past participle in the active and *is* + past participle in the passive, causing mutative ‘be’ to become anomalous, both in the tense and the voice opposition. The syntactic role of ‘be’ in the German “*be*-modal-passive” is investigated by **Igor Trost** by means of a corpus analyses. In New High German, *sein* ‘to be’ has been considered partly as a copular verb, partly as a modal verb and partly as an auxiliary verb, though in the literature there is also the acknowledgement of *sein* in combination with the grammatical construction *zu* + infinitive as a passive modality verb. In a diachronic analysis of the “*be*-modal-passive”, based on a wide-range of diverse texts from the Old High German to the New High German period, some linguists consider *sein* as a copular verb, whereas others categorize it in combination with *zu* + infinitive as an auxiliary verb. The author examines the assumption of a reanalysis of the copular verb that has been reinterpreted as an auxiliary verb during language change. In his paper he contrasts these disparate positions by taking into account the diachrony of this construction since Old High German. The research outcome provides an appropriate solution for the discussion regarding the analyses of to be in the “*be*-modal-passive”. **Ana-Maria Barbu** analyses the modal meanings of the verb *a fi* ‘be’ in Romanian. Her diachronic analysis approaches constructions with two verbs in Romanian, in which the matrix verb *a fi* ‘be’ precedes a verb in a non-finite mood (infinitive or supine) or in the subjunctive. In these constructions, *a fi* has mainly modal meanings (*must*, *can*, *want*, etc.). She firstly gives an inventory of the constructions since the 16th century until the present using the Romanian Language Thesaurus (DLR 2010) as the main source. For each syntactic pattern, she specifies the personal/impersonal use of the verb *a fi*, one or several possible modal meanings, depending on the context, and other relevant

features. The study of constructions under consideration shows that the distinction between the predicative value of *a fi* and the non-predicative one (i.e. copula or semi-auxiliary) is not clear, although linguists used to emphasize this distinction. Relying on Romanian syntactic patterns with the modal *a fi* – much more numerous than in other Romance languages – she demonstrates that the modal *a fi* is not only a raising verb but also a control verb. That is, it is a verb sharing with its verbal complement a semantic argument that receives different roles from each verb. Further, she argues that, diachronically, Romanian strengthened its structures with modal *a fi* as a control verb (having its own dative complement).

6. A special feature of *to be* is its omission in various types of clauses, especially in languages like the Slavonic languages, Japanese and many others. The loss of *be*-verbs is often considered an indicator of their prototypically non-verbal character, cf. Verhaar (ed.) 1967-1973, Clancy 2010 etc. Against this claim, it can be argued for the very opposite interpretation, namely that omission of the copula generally stresses its verbal properties, especially in the most neutral sentences with a “designed” present tense. The reason for this interpretation is that the lack of the verb in copular function can be considered a specific signal not for its unimportance, but rather reversely for its exceptional importance for the sentence structure by a maximally neutral usage under certain circumstances. This may sound paradoxical, but nevertheless it seems to be true that neutralizations are often used in cases when the total structure as such can mark some categorial properties and features without a special signal. For this reason, omission can also be considered a specific means of indication of verbal expression of existence, location, property, etc., as well as, for instance, copular or even auxiliary function. Conspicuously, this is only true for sentences in the neutral present tense, whereas past or future constructions nearly unexceptionally demand the *be*-predicate, which is evidence for the obligatory appearance of *to be* in cases when non-neutral tenses have to be denoted. **Monika Schönherr** analyses some relevant aspects of the “*be*-drop” in copula-predicative constructions and existential clauses (e.g. Polish *Piotr to naukowiec* ‘Peter-NOM Ø this scientists-NOM’ ‘Peter is a scientist’, *on tam, ja tu* ‘he-NOM Ø there-ADV, I-NOM Ø here-ADV’ ‘he is there, I am here’). She explores cases in which the *to be*-verbs are formally not marked and the so-called covert predication is established. The study has three main aims. Firstly, she tries to group individual

types of the covert *to be* structures (“two copula-qualities”, cf. Leiss 2014) into two typologically distinct languages areas: in (Old-High-) German and Gothic as Germanic languages, on the one hand, and Polish as a Slavonic language, on the other hand. Secondly, she investigates the syntactic properties and the semantic components of the non-finite/covert *to be*-structures, using the approaches of Geist/Błaszczak 1999 and Kotin 2014. Thirdly, she outlines the main reasons for and consequences of the omission of ‘be’ in the constructions studied, in particular with respect to the question of the syntactic status of non-verbal constructions. Another important aim of her paper is to illustrate differences between the overt and the covert *to be*-structures with respect to their distribution in an historical perspective. Also in languages that do not belong to the Indo-European family, copulaless clauses are quite common phenomena. This fact shows that omission of the *be*-copula and its equivalents belongs to typologically salient syntactic features which characterize the functioning mechanisms of so-called “small clauses” in various language types. **Akio Ogawa** examines this hypothesis with Japanese, in which the topic-prominence correlates with the dominance of copulaless sentences. Japanese sentences have only a set of *topi* which allows various relations and interpretations. From this notion of topic some distinctive characteristics such as “multiple subject”, “adversative passive” etc. can be clarified. Historically, Japanese existential verbs *iru/aru* (“to be”), which differ from each other in terms of “animacy”/“non-animacy”, served as base to connect a set of *topi*. They typically developed into complex forms, together with the locative marker *de*, e.g. *de-aru*. The contracted morpheme *de* became more independent and is now used to connect “*topi*”. On the contrary, it was no longer used as copula together with *iru/aru*. His paper shows this scenario of “copulaless *topi*” and, closely related to this, that sentences based on “*topi*” have more affinity to express “static” events than “dynamic” ones. The latter are generally preferred by European languages.

The six basic issues mentioned above concern the characteristics of the *to be*-verbs and include all relevant points of the total language structure, e.g. morphology, semantics and syntax. Moreover, they involve interactions and convergence phenomena between these levels of the language system both from a synchronic and a diachronic perspective. Another point is the correlation between universal and idioethnic properties of the *be*-predicates. Hence, verbs of the *be*-groups appear as a specific *secundum*

comparationis in the universal field of language typology which is possible only in the case of a very limited group of lexical resp. grammatical items of a given language. The *be*-verbs undoubtedly belong to this small and very specific group. The hierarchy of these reasons is important as well. Generally, one can agree that ‘existence’, which is the central concept both in one’s life and in the natural languages, must be treated as a feature that is situated at the very top of this hierarchy. However, this claim sounds trivial and not transparent enough unless it is precisely realised in language. This means, above all, that the semantic characteristics of the *be*-verbs cannot be considered sufficient until they are defined by means of the syntactic potential of the *be*-predicates, i.e., the *be*-perspective can be successfully described only on the level of the total sentence structure, with a special regard to the syntagmatic features of the verb *to be* and its equivalents in other languages. On the other hand, as has been discussed above, universal morphological properties of the *to be*-group do mirror its outstanding role and place in the language systems, especially in the domain of suppletion.

The analysis of the *be*-verbs requires for these reasons a number of conditions to be met in order to achieve the objectives set by this volume. Firstly, morphological, semantic and syntactic properties of the *be*-verbs have to be compared in their total complexity in many languages with reference to their universal characteristics. Secondly, synchronic approaches have to be strictly combined with diachronic ones, in order to avoid methodological imbalances by the interpretation of the status and, simultaneously, of the development of *be*-phrases and *be*-periphrases. Thirdly, the analysis of the *to be*-verbs has to include the totality of their verbal and non-verbal complements, for the specifics of the *to be*-verbs exclude their treatment as autonomous entities and require their involvement in the complex predication in question. Fourthly, the analysis of the correlation between *be* and its complements includes the measuring of the semantic autonomy of *to be* and implies the comprehension of its incremental semantic attenuation in the periphrases in question. Fifthly, the investigations of *to be*-verbs and predicates have to take cognizance of their total semantic potential, including aspectual, modal and other categorial signals which can be denoted on the sentence level. Sixthly, the omission of *be* in certain types of clauses in some languages, especially in the present tense, has to be interpreted against the background of basic properties in the languages in question, but simultaneously, against the background of other languages, in which such omission is generally impossible.

As follows from the above deliberations, the contribution of *to be*-verbs to the morphology, semantics and syntax of the majority of the languages of the world is substantial from a number of perspectives, and these verbs belong to the most complex and simultaneously central entities of human language. For this reason their analysis must continually be synchronized with the newest results of the general linguistic research. Hence this volume is an attempt to describe and interpret the *to be*-verbs and constructions in the broad context of contemporary linguistic research, including synchrony, diachrony, diatopy, language contrast and typology.

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PART I

BASICS

DAS VERBUM SUBSTANTIVUM AUS SYNCHRONER, DIACHRONER UND TYPOLOGISCHER SICHT

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Abstract: The unique role of the ‘be’-verbs in various languages of the world can be observed at almost every level of the language systems. Morphologically, it mostly shows a wide-spread suppletivism and occurs, as a rule, as a highly irregular verb as regards its inflectional paradigm. Furthermore, internal morphemic “boarders” are often extremely fluent or fuzzy. Syntactically, it can encode the function of a full predicate as well as that of a copula or an auxiliary. Semantically, it combines the meaning of existence (or, in addition, in some languages, the meaning of possession, transformation, development, etc.) with the properties of a “semi-empty” or “empty” entity. In many languages it can or even must be omitted in numerous types of sentences. The main purpose of this paper is to compare various approaches to the verbs of the ‘be’-group and of the ‘be’-constructions from a synchronic, diachronic, diatopic, and typological perspective. The following issues are considered: the genetic origins of the ‘be’-roots in various languages; their etymology and the problems associated with their reconstruction; the origins of the ‘be’-suppletivism, especially the question whether ‘be’ was originally an existential verb or rather a genuine copula; the historical development of the semantics and the functions of the ‘be’-verbs, with a special regard to the problem of their grammaticalization through their acquiring auxiliary functions in the verbal periphrases of tense, aspect, and diatheses; the analysis of the syntactic properties of the ‘be’-verbs, i.e. of their place in the sentence structure; the features of their argument structure features, etc.; the comparison of languages on the basis of different properties involving the occurrence, semantic variation, functional specifics, paths of grammaticalization, etc. of the ‘be’-verbs, with special regard to the question of whether and how languages can be typologically classified from this point of view.

Keywords: verbum substantivum, suppletivity, existential clauses, copula verb, auxiliary verb, grammaticalization.