

Moving towards new meaning: meaning differentiation in rival forms and the Russian verb *dvigat'(sja)* 'move'

Rival forms, the situation whereby a “language has two or more forms that express similar meanings in similar environments” (Baayen et al. 2013:254), has received considerable interest in linguistics (e.g. Divjak & Gries 2006, Nessel et al. 2011, Sokolova et al. 2012, Makarova 2014). Already Saussure (1916/1983:167) noticed that rival forms tend to develop distinct meanings, an observation that has been repeated by a number of linguists in our time (Clark 1987:2, Carstairs-McCarthy 1994, Goldberg 1995:67). However, the question of how such meaning differentiation takes place has not received due consideration. What are the mechanisms and factors involved? How do they interact? The present paper addresses these questions on the basis of a case study of the Russian verb *dvigat'(sja)* ‘move’. We suggest that the emergence of syntactic constructions is the driving force in meaning differentiation, and that morphological and syntactic factors interact.

Dvigat'(sja) undergoes the diachronic change “suffix shift”, which creates rival forms with the suffixes *-a* and *-aj*. While suffix shift has been studied intensively (Nessel & Kuznetsova 2011 and references therein), meaning differentiation has received little attention. The present paper aims at filling this empirical gap. Although suffix shift applies to more than 30 verbs, we focus on *dvigat'(sja)*, which is the only relevant verb with enough attestations in the Russian National Corpus (RNC, www.ruscorpora.ru) to permit statistical analysis.

We observe that one suffix becomes associated with certain syntactic constructions. For instance, *-aj* dominates in transitive constructions, which makes it possible for speakers to reanalyze *-aj* as a marker of transitivity. However, this is not an “all or nothing affair”, but rather a gradient tendency that can be modeled statistically. Furthermore, the emerging meaning of the suffix is restricted to very specific syntactic patterns; *-aj* is not developing into a general transitivity marker in Russian, since it is not associated with transitivity in other verbs, and since *-aj* also occurs in certain non-transitive constructions, such as *dvigaj otsjuda!* ‘get out of here!’. In addition, morphological constraints apply, insofar as *-aj* is most widely attested in the imperative and the gerund.

Meaning differentiation involves gradient tendencies and highly specific constructional patterns where both syntactic and morphological information interact. Since all relevant properties can be straightforwardly represented in Construction Grammar, our study not only fills an empirical gap in Russian grammar, but also lends support to the idea of Goldbergian constructions as the fundamental unit for linguistic analysis.

References

- Baayen, R. Harald, Anna Endresen, Laura A. Janda, Anastasia Makarova and Tore Nessel, (2013): Making choices in Russian: pros and cons of statistical methods for rival forms. *Russian Linguistics* 37.3: 253–291.

- Carstairs-McCarthy, Andrew. 1994. Inflection classes, gender, and the principle of contrast. *Language* 70: 737-787.
- Clark, Eve (1987): *The lexicon in acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Divjak, Dagmar and Stefan Th. Gries (2006): Ways of trying in Russian: clustering behavioral profiles. *Corpus Linguistics and Linguistic Theory* 2.1: 23–60.
- Makarova, Anastasia (2014): *Rethinking diminutives: a case study of Russian verbs*. PhD dissertation: UiT The Arctic University of Norway.
- Nesset, Tore, Anna Endresen and Laura A. Janda (2011): Two ways to get out: Radial Category Profiling and the Russian prefixes *vy-* and *iz-*. *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 56.4: 377 - 402.
- Nesset, Tore and Julia Kuznetsova (2011): Stability and complexity : Russian suffix shift over time. *Scando-Slavica* 57.2: 268–289.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de (1916/1983): *Course in general linguistics*. Translated and annotated by Roy Harris. London: Duckworth
- Sokolova, Svetlana, Laura A Janda, and Olga Lyashevskaya (2012): The Locative Alternation and the Russian ‘empty’ prefixes: A case study of the verb *gruzit’* ‘load’. In Dagmar Divjak and Stefan Th. Gries (eds.): *Frequency Effects in Language Representation*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 51–86

- Author information:
 - Authors: Olga Lyashevskaya (Higher School of Economics, Moscow) and Tore Nesset (UiT – The Arctic University of Norway)
 - Contact email address: tore.nesset@uit.no
- Presentation title:
 - Moving towards new meaning: meaning differentiation in rival forms and the Russian verb *dvigat’(sja)* ‘move’
- Preferred mode of presentation:
 - Oral presentation
- Session preference:
 - General session