

Polysemy of verbal prefixes in Russian: conceptual structure versus syntax.

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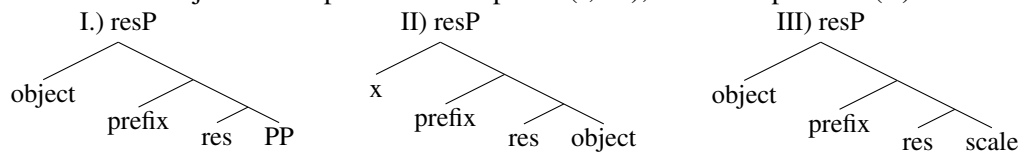
I address the problem of widespread polysemy of Russian verbal prefixes and argue that different uses of a single prefix share a core meaning, specified in the lexicon. Syntax may combine the prefix with the verb in a variety of syntactic configurations. Then the conceptual meaning combines with the structural meaning component, which is a function of the syntactic position of the prefix and its structural relation with the verbal arguments.

I adopt a neo-constructivist viewpoint where the meaning rests partly on what is brought from the lexicon and partly on the syntactic structure (cf. Borer (2005) and Ramchand (2008)). Ramchand's first phase syntax approach is used, where a verb may contain initiation, process and result projections, which host the corresponding thematic arguments. The lexical/superlexical distinction (Svenonius (2004), Babko-Malaya (1999)) is crucial, where the lexical prefixes are located in the *res* (result) projection, while the superlexical prefixes are above aspect. The intermediate prefixes (Tatevosov (2008)) are in *proc*. I suggest that the prexes are neither heads nor specifiers, but rather range assigners in terms of Borer(2005), attaching between the specifier and the head.

The table below illustrates how the conceptual prefix meaning combines with the structure. The conceptual meaning introduced by *pere-* is 'exceed', and the structure tells us what exceeds what. *Pro-* is similar to 'through' in meaning, and the syntax decides what interval (temporal, spatial or degree) is covered. *Do-* refers to reaching a certain point, and this point (temporal, spatial, or degree) is specified by syntax. *Za-* refers to entering a certain location, state, or activity; while *ot-* is the reverse transition, out of it.

	pere-	pro-	do-	ot-	za-
	'exceeding'	'through'	'up to'	'off' (+ -)	'into' (- +)
I. R(e; ground)	pere-bežatj run across	pro-bežatj run through	do-bežatj run up to	ot-bežatj run away	za-bežatj run into
II. R(e, theme)	pere-goroditj block	pro-bitj break through			
III. R(e, norm)	pere-varitj over-cook	pro-varitj cook through	do-varitj complete cooking	ot-varitj cook completely	za-varitj brew (tea)
IV. R(e, time)	pere-plavatj over-swim	pro-plavatj swim for a time	do-plavatj complete swimming	ot-plavatj stop swimming	za-plavatj start swimming

There are two logical possibilities for a transitive verb to unify its argument structure with that of the prefix: either the direct object is the specifier of the prefix (I, III), or its complement (II).



I. When the direct object is the specifier, a complement is required: the path PP for directional verbs:

- (1) pro-rubitj tunnel (skvozj skalu) In the result state of the cutting process, of which the
 THROUGH-hew tunnel through rock rock is the undergoer, the tunnel is through the rock
 'to cut a tunnel through rock'

II. Spatial reading emerges when the direct object is the complement of the prefix (a), thus no other complement is allowed (b). The figure is a contextually bound variable.

- (2) a. pro-bitj stenu (molotkom). b. *pro-rubitj stenu na ulicu.
 THROUGH-hit wall hammer-INSTR THROUGH-hew wall on street
 'to breach a wall (with a hammer)' 'to breach the wall into the street'
result = something through the wall.

III. Scalar verbs provide an inherent scale (Rappaport Hovav, 2008), which is the *res* complement:

- (3) pro-varitj griby
through-cook mushrooms
'to cook the mushrooms thoroughly'.

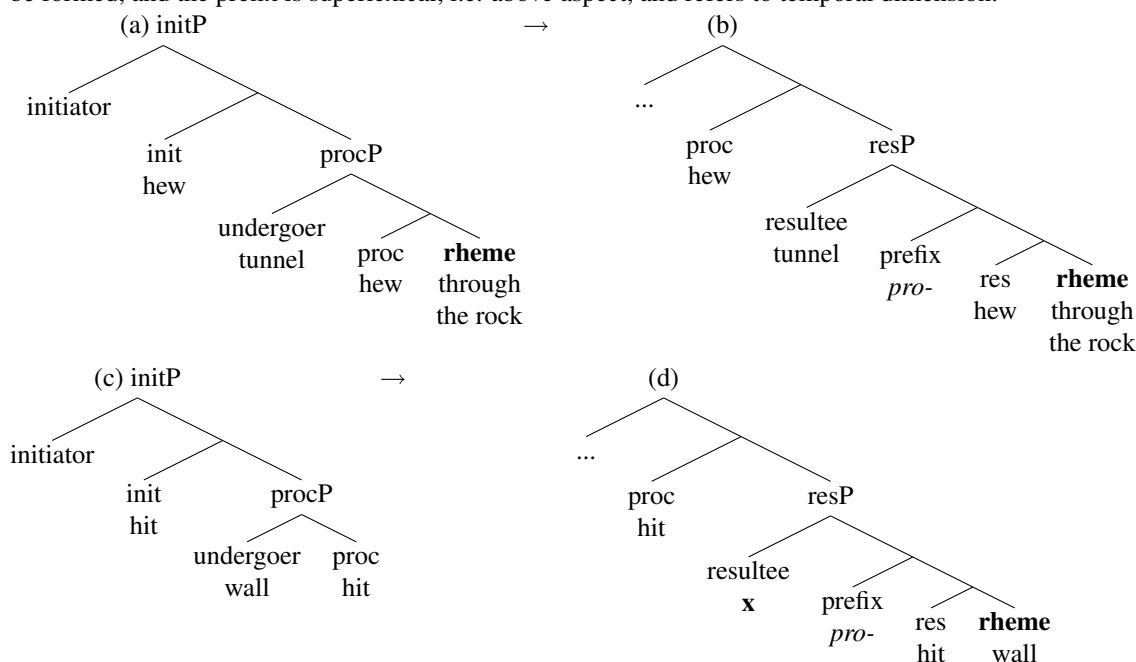
In the result state the mushrooms went through every subpart of the scale (of cookedness) and reached the culmination point (of being properly cooked).

IV. With unergative verbs prefixes are above aspect and the prefix assigns range to a temporal variable:

- (4) pro-plavatj dva časa
swim^{NON-DIR} two hours
'to swim (back and forth) for two hours'

The swimming event happens through the interval of two hours.

An unprefixated, atelic, verb contains initiation and process projections, but no result (a). The process complement ('rheme') may be path, object dependent scale, or conflated material (e.g. non-directional Z-path in Romanova (2007)). When PP is the complement, a result phrase may be formed, where the figure is the external argument and travels along the path specified by the PP (internal argument). In the absence of rheme (c), the undergoer may be the rheme (ground) (d). When the rheme contains conflated material, no result projection may be formed, and the prefix is superlexical, i.e. above aspect, and refers to temporal dimension.



Thus, the analysis allows us to preserve a single lexical entry for cognate prefixes. The meaning variation is determined by the syntactic position of prefixes, and the argument structure is predictable based on the inner structure of the verb. A lexical entry specifies a mapping relationship between external and internal arguments, but remains unspecified for the domain and scope of it. This information is provided by syntax, which results in a clear correlation of the semantic distinctions with the syntactic properties.

References

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