

**A Network Approach to the Verbal Prefix *po-* in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian:
Taking a Non-Russian Prefix on its Own Terms**

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Linguistic descriptions of verbal prefixes have a sparse during and after the Serbo-Croatian era. As far as I am aware, no study focusing on the verbal prefix *po-* in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (BCS) exists beyond brief treatments in reference works, e.g., Babić 1986, which exhibit woeful gaps. For example, Babić (1986: 485) fails to include in his list of meanings of the Croatian *po-* the surface-contact meaning, which does not even escape Anić's brief entry for the meanings of *po-* in his dictionaries (cf., e.g., Anić 2000: 774).

As Slavic linguists outside the former Yugoslavia lean toward the tacit assumption that verbal prefixes in BCS exhibit some trivial variation of the set of meanings attestation for verbal prefixes in Russian, there is a real need for a systematic study of BCS verbal prefixes. This applies in particular to BCS *po-*, given that its Russian counterpart is generally recognized as an important perfectivizing prefix that nevertheless resists quick attempts to ascribe to it a basic spatial meaning.

This paper is a preliminary report of an ongoing study attempting a semantic analysis of BCS *po-* in terms of Langacker's (e.g., 1987) theory of Cognitive Grammar. In particular it attempts to answer the following questions: (1) What meanings does *po-* systematically express, and which of them are the most salient? (2) Assuming a CG network structure, what is/are the central, prototypical meaning(s) of the prefix? (3) What kinds of schemas can be plausibly assumed for (some subsets of) its meanings, if any?

The first step of the project has been to examine the 487 verbs prefixed in *po-* in Anić (2000)¹ and categorize them according to the (sometimes clear, sometimes not so clear) function of the prefix consulting Panzer (1991) where possible. Given the paucity of descriptions, this has not been an easy task, and pushes the limits of informant introspection. Nevertheless, some overall patterns are evident from the following breakdown:

¹ A note about differences between Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian with regard to *po-*: minor, though potentially significant differences do exist, e.g., the use of *poslikati* in Croatian as opposed to Bosnian and Serbian, which can be explained in terms of theory being developed.

FACTITIVE	93	19.1%	
TRANSITIVE	15	3.1%	
SURFACE-CONTACT	56	11.5%	
DISTRIBUTIVE:	87	17.9%	51.6%
LEXICAL/OPAQUE	42	8.6	
PERFECTIVE	30	6.2%	
ATTENUATIVE	30	6.2%	
ABLATIVE	17	3.5%	
ABLATIVE-DEVIATION	14	2.8%	6.3%
INCHOATIVE	26	5.3%	
ALLATIVE	23	4.7%	
INGRESSIVE	16	3.3%	
INGRESSIVE-RECIPROCAL	07	1.4%	4.7%
INTERMITTENT-ATTENUATIVE	15	3.1%	
DELIMITATIVE	14	2.9%	
SEMELFACTIVE	<u>02</u>	<u>0.4%</u>	
	487	100.0%	

The primary result of this initial data is that BCS *po-* is a highly transitive prefix. The first four categories, FACTITIVE (e.g., *pokatoličiti* ‘convert to Catholicism’), TRANSITIVE (*pohađati/pohoditi* ‘attend/visit’), SURFACE-CONTACT (e.g., *popločavati/popločati* ‘cover with cobbles, pave’) and DISTRIBUTIVE (e.g., *potrovati* ‘poison all of’) consist almost exclusively of transitive verbs (apart from a very few intransitive DISTRIBUTIVE verbs such as *posjedati* ‘sit down [of all]’) and account for slightly over 50% of the sample. These verbs are not necessarily perfective only (see the above examples), so that the transitive function of BCS *po-* cannot be identified with a perfectivizing function (the high cross-linguistic correspondence between transitivity and perfective aspect notwithstanding).

Although transitivity is characteristic of a slight majority of verbs in *po-*, this feature cannot be viewed as the prototypical function of the prefix. If one keeps in mind the fact that the SURFACE-CONTACT verbs all involve the complete distribution of the predicate (e.g., placing cobbles) over a surface, the link between the DISTRIBUTIVE verbs and the SURFACE-CONTACT verbs is apparent (indeed, the spatial meaning of [complete] SURFACE-CONTACT is the diachronic source of the DISTRIBUTIVE meaning): full affectation of some object or set of objects. Thus, taking not only statistics into account—the SURFACE-CONTACT and DISTRIBUTIVE verbs together account for 29.4% of the sample—but also the high salience of many SURFACE-CONTACT verbs (e.g., *pokositi* ‘mow’) and DISTRIBUTIVE verbs (e.g., *pojesti* ‘eat all of’) in day-to-day life, as well as the enduring productivity of both, I would make the preliminary suggestion that the semantic prototype of BCS *po-* is COMPLETE AFFECTEDNESS OF THE OBJECT, or very likely a spatial category COMPLETE AFFECTEDNESS OF A GOAL SURFACE, whereby the surface may be metaphorically extended to a set of objects. Transitivity would therefore be a schema extracted from the prototype and other meanings.

This paper will discuss these and other issues in more detail.

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