

Analysis of the –sja passive of Russian ‘governing’ verbs as a conceptual integration

This paper presents an inquiry into the construction types in Russian that have a verb with an object in the instrumental case, but still allow passivization of the oblique object NP. The primary question motivating this research is why near-synonymous instrumental governing verbs behave in a different way in terms of the formation of –sja passives, and whether their ambivalent and unpredictable variability can be accounted for satisfactorily within cognitive linguistics. A tremendous amount of research on voice in the Slavic languages has been carried out over a long time in search of the definition of voice. However, passivization with oblique objects in Russian is either completely ignored or often listed as an exceptional transformation and has not been fully studied.

More specifically, this paper focuses on the prototypical structures of five semantically close ‘governing’ verbs in Russian – *zavedovat*, *komandovat*, *pravit*, *rukovadit*, and *upravljat*. Not all of them use a reflexive form for the expression of passive (Fowler, 1996):

- (1) a. *Moj brat zaveduet v bol'nice xirurgicheskim otdeleniem.*
‘My brother manages in the hospital the department of surgery.’
b. * *Xirurgicheskoe otdelenie v bol'nice zaveduetsja moim bratom.*
‘The department of surgery in the hospital is managed by my brother.’
- (2) a. *Maksim komandoval polkom pod Moskvvoj.*
‘Maksim commanded the regiment in the environs of Moscow.’
b. * *Polk pod Moskvvoj komandovalsja Maksimom.*
‘The regiment in the environs of Moscow was commanded by Maksim.’
- (3) a. *55-letnij korol' pravit etoj stranoj.*
‘A 55-year-old king rules this country.’
b. ?? *Eta strana pravitsja 55-letnim korolëm.*
‘This country is ruled by a 55-year-old king.’
- (4) a. *Viktor rukovodit etoj laboratoriej.*
‘Viktor leads/directs this laboratory.’
b. ?? *Eta laboratorija rukovoditsja Viktorom.*
‘This laboratory is led/directed by Viktor.’
- (5) a. *Andrej upravljaet stroitel'stvom v novom rajone.*
‘Andrej administers the construction in the new area.’

- b. *Stroitel'stvo v novom rajone upravljaetsja Andreem.*
'The construction in the new area is administered by Andrej.'

As these examples show, the verbs *zavedovat'* and *komandovat'* do not permit oblique passivization at all; the verbs *pravit'* and *rukovodit'* are at best marginally acceptable; and oblique passivization with *uprvaljat'* is fully acceptable and well-formed.

I argue that even though the five 'governing' verbs share certain attributes among themselves, they display dissimilar prototypical semantic centers with various ranges of applications and extensions, placing each verb in different proximity to the canonical transitive event (Geeraerts, 1988 and Langacker, 2002). In other words, they have a similar conceptual and collocational range, yet differ with regard to the core and the periphery of their categorical structures, which represent a different degree of transitivity in a continuum (Chvany, 1990).

The proposed analysis evaluates the dimensions of lexical meaning of the verbs under investigation, and adds to our understanding of the cognitive interrelationships between lexical meaning and syntactic structure, i.e. "the continuum of lexicon, morphology, and syntax" (Langacker, 2000:31). It presents a fresh look at a passive construction from a semantic perspective and attributes the passivizability to discourse prominence rather than a strictly structural or morphological explanation, developing a prototypical hypothesis of verbs.

References:

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