Irina Iakovleva
Ulyanovsk State University
irinadubrov@gmail.com

Modelling variable government in Russian pseudosynonymous verb-preposition constructions: a Construction Grammar approach.[1]

This study focuses on 3 groups of Russian verb-preposition constructions: 1) constructions with "verbs of speech and thought": *govorit' o Y_{Loc} / govorit' pro Y_{Acc}* meaning 'to speak about Y'; 2) "verbs of sorrow" constructions: *skuchat' o Y_{Loc} / skuchat' po Y_{Dat}* meaning 'to miss Y'; 3)constructions with "verbs of directed contact": *bit' v Y_{Acc} / bit' po Y_{Dat}* meaning 'to bang against Y'. The constructions in every group differ in preposition and case. They used to be considered synonymous from the formal, verb-centered perspectives [Russkaya grammatika 1980], [Zolotova 2001], [Zaliznyak Anna 2006], [Iomdin 1991], [Apresyan Y. D.: 1999]. Besides, as far as constructions with "verbs of speech and thought" are concerned, it is usual to speak of stylistic differences between them. Indeed, the interchangeability of these two constructions in every group is possible in overwhelming majority of examples, but according to Ruscorpora[2] data, there are contexts that make this interchangeability impossible. Having analyzed Ruscorpora data from the CxG perspective as presented in [Fillmore, Kay, O'Connor 1988], [Fried, Östman 2004], [Goldberg 1995], [Leino, Östman. 2005], we come to the following conclusion.

1. Semantic structure of the constructions with "verbs of speech and thought".
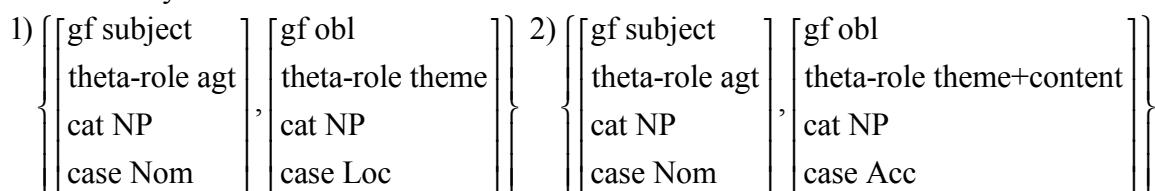
As for the first type of constructions, there are only two of them on the surface syntax level. But the situation differs when these constructions are approached from the C×G point of view. The prepositions *o* and *pro* are linked to different semantic roles. The preposition *o* is connected with the role of theme, while the preposition *pro* is linked to a complex role of theme and content. This additional role of content makes the following examples different: *Rasskazhi o Parizhe*! and *Rasskazhi pro Parizh*! both meaning 'Speak about Paris!' The first example focuses on some predictable information about Paris: its history, architecture, etc., while the additional role of content in the second example makes it possible to focus upon some additional information, f.e. a trip to Paris with friends. This additional role of content requires the agent argument in the position of the subject, while the role of theme doesn't impose such restrictions. That's why different prepositions occur in the following examples:

(1)*Vzglyad na kartu Moskvy XVII veka srazu govorit o raznotodnosti (*pro raznorodnost') zemel', voshedshih v chertu sovremennoy Moskvy.* (D. Zamyatin)

'A glance at the map of 17-th century Moscow immediately points to a variety of lands included into modern Moscow.'

(2)*Govori pro sebya (?o sebe). Ya eyo ne uvazhayu.* (E. Radov)

'Speak about yourself. I don't respect her.'

Thus, we have four constructions which have their own meanings and restrict their elements in a certain way.

1) $\left\{\begin{bmatrix} \text{gf subject} \\ \text{theta-role agt} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Nom} \end{bmatrix}, \begin{bmatrix} \text{gf obl} \\ \text{theta-role theme} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Loc} \end{bmatrix}\right\}$ 2) $\left\{\begin{bmatrix} \text{gf subject} \\ \text{theta-role agt} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Nom} \end{bmatrix}, \begin{bmatrix} \text{gf obl} \\ \text{theta-role theme+content} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Acc} \end{bmatrix}\right\}$

(3)*Masha govorila pro knigu.*   (4)*Masha govorila o knige.*
'Mary spoke about the book.'   'Mary spoke about the book.'

---

[2] http:// www.ruscorpora.ru

3) $\left\{\begin{bmatrix} \text{gf subject} \\ \text{theta-role instr} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Nom} \end{bmatrix}, \begin{bmatrix} \text{gf obl} \\ \text{theta-role theme} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Loc} \end{bmatrix}\right\}$ 4) $\left\{\begin{bmatrix} \text{gf subject} \\ \text{theta-role stim} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Nom} \end{bmatrix}, \begin{bmatrix} \text{gf obl} \\ \text{theta-role theme} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Loc} \end{bmatrix}\right\}$

(5)Pis'mo govorilo o vstreche.   *(6)Otpechatki pal'tsev govorily o ego uchastii v prestuplenii.*
'The letter was about the meeting.'   'The fingerprints testified to his taking part in the crime.'

To sum up, the constructions with "verbs of speech and thought" tend to impose some restrictions on the type of the subject.

2.Semantic structure of "verbs of sorrow" constructions.

As for constructions with "verbs of sorrow", this case is very similar to the previous one. They aren't interchangeable in all contexts because the prepositions *o* and *po* are linked to different semantic roles. The preposition *o* is connected with the role of theme and requires the agent argument in the position of the subject, while the preposition *po* is linked to the role of stimulus and requires the experiencer in the subject position.

1) $\left\{\begin{bmatrix} \text{gf subject} \\ \text{theta-role agt} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Nom} \end{bmatrix}, \begin{bmatrix} \text{gf obl} \\ \text{theta-role theme} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Loc} \end{bmatrix}\right\}$ 2) $\left\{\begin{bmatrix} \text{gf subject} \\ \text{theta-role exp} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Nom} \end{bmatrix}, \begin{bmatrix} \text{gf obl} \\ \text{theta-role stim} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Dat} \end{bmatrix}\right\}$

(7)On tuzhit o brate.   *(8)Ya skuchayu po tebe.*
'He worries about his brother.'   'I miss you.'

Thus, the *o*-construction implies a more controlled action than the *po*-construction, and the ability of a verb to build into this or that construction depends on the degree of control in its semantics. For example, *skuchayu po tebe* ('I miss you') is far more frequently used than *skuchayu o tebe* because this verb means a rather unarbitrary action which is in the domain of feelings rather than speech and thought. On the contrary, the verb *plakat'* ('to cry') is similar in meaning to the verbs *sozhalet'* ('to regret') and *zhalovat'sya* ('to complain') which imply a very high degree of action control. There is an interesting example with the verb *plakat'* in Ruscorpora:

(9)Odna vsyo plachet pro svoi dela. (V. Vysotskiy)
'One girl constantly complains about her life.'

The ability of "verbs of sorrow" to build into this or that construction is shown in the following table.

verb	number of the *po*-construction occurrences in Ruscorpora	number of the *o*-construction occurrences in Ruscorpora
skuchat' ('to miss')	231	14
tomit'sya ('to pine')	26	10
toskovat' ('to miss')	377	134
plakat' ('to cry')	75	101
grustit' ('to long')	34	53
gorevat' ('to grieve')	8	62
pechalit'sya ('to grieve')	1	21
tuzhit' ('to mourn')	2	31
(so)zhalet' ('to regret')	0	166

We can see that while some verbs occur in both constructions with comparatively identical frequency, other verbs have a strong tendency to build into this or that construction. So, the "verbs of sorrow" can be roughly divided into two groups: 1) verbs that have more or less notable tendency to be used in the *po*-construction; 2) verbs that tend to build into the *o*-construction.

The first group contains the verbs *skuchat'* ('to miss'), *toskovat'* ('to miss') and *tomit'sya* ('to pine'). Obviously, these three verbs imply a rather low degree of the action control. Ruscorpora has some rather atypical examples with the verb *tomit'sya* ('to pine') in the *o*-construction.

(10) ... budushiy russkiy intelligent ... nachinaet tomitsya o tsel'nosti i tyanut'sya k ney. (Puti russkogo bogosloviya. 1936)

... the future Russian intellectual starts to long for integrity and seek it. (Ways of Russian theology. 1936.)

(11) On ... vnimatel'no tomilsya – o tom, chto glavnoe organizatsionnoe stroitel'stvo idyot pomimo ego uchastiya. (A. Platonov. Kotlovan. 1930.)

He thoroughly considered the fact that the main organising construction is going on without his taking part in it. (A. Platonov. The foundation pit. 1930.)

Although the verbs *skuchat'* ('to miss') and *toskovat'* ('to miss') are rather similar semantically, the latter expresses a greater degree of action control and is nearer to the verb *dumat'* ('to think'). Consequently, the verb *toskovat'* ('to miss') is capable of incorporating an idea of a future action or a situation, while the verb *skuchat'* ('to miss') is connected with the notion of something familiar:

(12) - Esli by my umeli tak zhe toskovat' o budushem, kak o proshlom, - zametil Ilya. (E. Belkina. Ot lyubvi do nenavisti. 2002.)

- If we were able to miss the future as we miss the past, - mentioned Ilya. (E. Belkina. From love to hate. 2002.)

The second group of "verbs of sorrow" includes such verbs as *(so)zhalet'* ('to regret'), *pechalit'sya* ('to grieve'), *plakat'* ('to cry'), *tuzhit'* ('to mourn'), *grustit'* ('to long'), *gorevat'* ('to grieve'). Obviously, the first three verbs imply a rather high degree of the action control and are semantically similar to the "verbs of speech and thought" discussed above, but the explanation of last three verbs is more problematic. It can be observed that they occur in any of the constructions under discussion with much lower frequency than such verbs as *skuchat'* ('to miss') and *toskovat'* ('to miss'), so they can be subject to the influence of the analogy. The *o*-construction typical for the "verbs of speech and thought" is much more frequent than the *po*-construction incorporating only "verbs of sorrow". As the profile of the verbs *tuzhit'* ('to mourn'), *grustit'* ('to long'), *gorevat'* ('to grieve') partially coincides with the profile of the more frequent *o*-construction, they are likely to exhibit a tendency to build into it. So, this case is very similar to the famous *sneezing the napkin off the table* discussed by A. Goldberg [Goldberg 1995]. This hypothesis can be supported by the acquisition of the "verbs of sorrow" constructions. The evidence here is based on the longitudinal study of the speech of the author's daughter. Our data show that the acquisition of the "verbs of sorrow" constructions correlates with the use of the constructions with "verbs of speech and thought" which appear much earlier in the child's speech. The matter is that the first verb *skuchat'* constitutes a frozen phrase with the preposition *po*, but new "verbs of sorrow" have a strong tendency for some time to be used with the preposition *o*, which is typical for the constructions with "verbs of speech and thought". Thus, in the acquisition of the "verbs of sorrow" constructions it is the idea of a controlled action that is cognitively salient.

To sum up, the "verbs of sorrow" constructions seem to restrict the type of verbs building into them.

3. Semantic structure of the constructions with "verbs of directed contact".

As regards the third group of the constructions, it is the type of object that is restricted by this or that construction. The preposition *po* here is connected with the role of patient and Y_{Dat} refers to a kind of surface, while the preposition *v* is linked to the role of goal and Y_{Acc} refers to a kind of plane covering the cavity that is the place of destination. That's why *stuchat' v dver'* means 'to knock at the door to be admitted', while *stuchat' po dveri* means 'to bang against the door to make a noise'. These two constructions are as follows:

$$
1) \left\{ \begin{bmatrix} \text{gf subject} \\ \text{theta-role agt} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Nom} \end{bmatrix}, \begin{bmatrix} \text{gf obl} \\ \text{theta-role goal} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Acc} \end{bmatrix} \right\} \quad 2) \left\{ \begin{bmatrix} \text{gf subject} \\ \text{theta-role agt} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Nom} \end{bmatrix}, \begin{bmatrix} \text{gf obl} \\ \text{theta-role pat} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Dat} \end{bmatrix} \right\}
$$

(13)On dolgo stuchal v dver', chtoby ego vpustili.   *(14)Rebyonok gromko stuchal igrushkoy po stolu.*

'He was knocking at the door for a long time to be admitted .' 'The child was banging against the table with his toy.'

These two constructions restrict the types of objects which can build into them. The following objects typically occur in the *v*-construction: 1) nouns signifying parts of body, the

conceptualisation of which contains some idea of cavity: *v litso* ('in the face'), *v nos* ('in the nose'), *v zhovot* ('in the stomach'); 2) nouns signifying material objects, the cavity of which is useful and accessible: *v dver'* ('against the door'), *v stenu* ('against the wall'), *v okno* ('against the window'); 3) nouns signifying goal and direction: *bit' v tsel'* ('to hit the target'), *v sut'* ('to the point'), *v tochku* ('to the point'); 4) nouns signifying musical instruments that produce a sound with the help of cavity: *bit' v baraban* ('to beat the drum'), *udarit' v kolokol* ('to strike the bell').

At the same time, the *v*-construction does not normally incorporate nouns referring to: 1)objects without any kind of cavity: *noga* ('leg'), *ruka* (hand'); 2) objects incapable of producing any kind of answer from inside or objects whose cavity is hardly accessible and, consequently, is not functional: *bokal* ('glass'), *krysha* ('roof'). Nevertheless, there are some peripheral contexts:

 (15) Dozhd' bil v kryshu.
The rain was banging against the roof.

The objects capable of building into the *po*-construction are as follows: 1) nouns signifying parts of body which can be conceptualised as surface: *po rukam* ('on the hands'), *po nogam* ('on the legs'); 2) nouns signifying material objects the surface of which is useful and accessible: *po stolu* ('against the table'), *po podokonniku* ('against the window-sill'); 3) nouns signifying those details of musical instruments which are conceptualised as a kind of surface: *po klavisham* ('against the keys'); 4) nouns referring to people and animals: *po naseleniyu*('at the population'), *po pravonarushitelyam* ('at the wrongdoers'); 5) abstract nouns referring to feelings: *bit' po prestizhu* ('to hurt the prestige'), *bit' po samolyubiyu* ('to hurt the self-respect'); 6) nouns referring to abstract notions: *bit' po zdorov'yu* ('to ruin the health').

At the same time, the *po*-construction is normally incapable of incorporating nouns containing a kind of reference to: 1) parts of body that are not conceptualised as a kind of surface in Russian: *rot* ('mouth'), *glaz* ('eye'), *bok* ('side'); 2) musical instruments producing sounds with the help of their cavity (as opposed to parts of musical instruments): *kolokol* ('bell'); 3)some buildings the upper surface of which is normally hardly accessible: *? po ambaru* ('against the barn') as opposed to *po konure* ('against the kennel').

But there are some peripheral examples such as:

 (16) Dozhd' bil po ambaru.
The rain banged against the barn.

Thus, the constructions with "verbs of directed contact" restrict the type of objects capable of incorporating into this or that construction.

4. Conclusion.

To sum up, a C×G approach to the Russian pseudosynonymous verb-preposition constructions makes it possible to explain the semantic differences lying beneath variable government.

<div align="center">References.</div>

1. Apresyan Y. D. (ed.): 1999: Новый объяснительный словарь синонимов русского языка. Под общим рук. акад. Ю. Д. Апресяна. Вып. 1. Москва, 1999.
2. Fillmore, Kay, O'Connor 1988: Fillmore, Charles J., Paul Kay & Catherine O'Connor. Regularity and Idiomaticity in Grammatical Constructions: The case of *Let Alone*. Language 64. 1988.
3. Fried, Östman 2004: Fried, Mirjam, Östman, Jan-Ola. Construction grammar: a thumbnail sketch. / Construction grammar in a cross-language perspective. Amsterdam/Philadelphia, PA: Benjamins. 2004.
4. Goldberg 1995: Goldberg, Adele E. Constructions: A construction grammar approach to argument structure. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1995.
5. Iomdin 1991: Иомдин Л. Л. 1991. Словарная статья предлога ПО. Семиотика и информатика. Вып. 32, 94-120.
6. Leino, Östman. 2005: Leino, Jaakko, Östman, Jan-Ola. Constructions and variability. In M. Fried, J.-O. Östman (Eds.), Grammatical Constructions: back to the roots (pp. 191-213). Amsterdam/Philadelphia, PA: Benjamins. 2005.
7. Russkaya grammatica 1980: Русская Грамматика, т.2, М., 1980.
8. Zaliznyak Anna 2006: Зализняк Анна А. Многозначность в языке и способы ее представления. Москва, 2006.
9. Zolotova 2001: Золотова Г. А. Синтаксический словарь. Москва, 2001.