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

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I. constructions with "verbs of speech and thought": *govorit' o YLoc / govorit' pro YAcc* meaning 'to speak about Y'

II. "verbs of sorrow" constructions: *skuchat' o YLoc / skuchat' po YDat* meaning 'to miss Y'

III. constructions with "verbs of directed contact": *bit' v YAcc / bit' po YDat* meaning 'to bang against Y'

I.

In the constructions of the first group 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.

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(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.'

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

(3) Masha govorila o knige.
'Mary spoke about the book.'

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

(4) Masha govorila pro knigu.
'Mary spoke about the book.'

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

(5) Pis'mo govorilo o vstreche.
'The letter was about the meeting.'

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

(6) Otpechatki pal'tsev govorily o ego uchastii v prestuplenii.
'The fingerprints testified to his taking part in the crime.'

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II.5)
$$\left\{ \begin{bmatrix} \text{gf subject} \\ \text{theta-role agt} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Nom} \end{bmatrix}, \begin{bmatrix} \text{gf obl} \\ \text{theta-role theme} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Loc} \end{bmatrix} \right\}$$

(7) On tuzhit o brate.
'He worries about his brother.'

6)
$$\left\{ \begin{bmatrix} \text{gf subject} \\ \text{theta-role exp} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Nom} \end{bmatrix}, \begin{bmatrix} \text{gf obl} \\ \text{theta-role stim} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Dat} \end{bmatrix} \right\}$$

(8) Ya skuchayu po tebe.
'I miss you.'

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verb	Po (number of occurrence in the Ruscorpora)	O (number of occurrences in the 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

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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 may be considered to depend on the degree of arbitrariness in its semantics, although it is interesting to discuss some atypical examples:

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

(10) *... budushiy russkiy intellegent ... 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.)

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(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.)
(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.)

III.7) $\left\{ \begin{bmatrix} \text{gf subject} \\ \text{theta-role agt} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Nom} \end{bmatrix}, \begin{bmatrix} \text{gf obl} \\ \text{theta-role goal} \\ \text{cat NP} \\ \text{case Acc} \end{bmatrix} \right\}$

(13) On dolgo stuchal v dver', nakonets ego vpustili.
'He was knocking at the door for a long time, and he was admitted at last.'

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

(14) Rebyonok gromko stuchal igrushkoy po stolu.
'The child was banging against the table with his toy.'

The constructions of the third group restrict the type of object. The preposition *po* here is connected with the role of patient and YDat refers to a kind of surface, while the preposition *v* is linked to the role of goal and YAcc refers to a kind of plane covering the cavity that is the place of destination. **The *v*-construction incorporates**: 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.'

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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').

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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.

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To sum up, the Russian pseudosynonymous verb-preposition constructions are not interchangeable in every context and do have semantic differences caused by the restrictions imposed by this or that construction on the semantics of its components.

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