

A Unifying Account of the Conceptual Categories That Underlie Actions.

With Evidence from Russian

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This paper reports on research of the Russian [Vfinite Vinfinite] pattern, as illustrated by the following examples: (i) *он хочет закончить эту работу* ('he wants_{IMPF PRES 3 SG} to finish_{PF INF} this work') (ii) *он старается закончить эту работу* ('he is trying_{SIMPF PRES 3 SG} to finish_{PF INF} this work') (iii) *он успел закончить эту работу* ('he found the time_{PF PAST 3 M SG} to finish_{PF INF} this work'). Our focus is on the finite verbs themselves, and particularly those that have become so much integrated with the infinitive that they are reduced to a mere modification of the infinitive. Characteristic for these 'modifiers' or 'modifiers' are (a) a shift in meaning (cf. Soldatjenkova & van den Eynde 1998), (b) a lack of subordination possibilities (see also Givon 1990 and Achard 1998) and (c) a non-ability to provide a localisation in time, independent of the one given by the predicator (cf. Givon 1990).

Central to our research is the claim that formal differences reveal semantic peculiarities. Semantics, in turn, provides additional clues to arrive at a consistent conceptual motivation (Janda 2000). Starting from a syntactic categorisation that mirrors the semantics of 'modifiers' I will proceed towards a unifying account of both the syntactic and semantic properties of the constructions

The fairly limited number of 'modifiers' (app. 100) are classified by studying their distribution, i.e. the combinatorial possibilities of two (or more) finite 'modifiers' followed by one infinitive-predicator. This procedure, applied to declarative sentences with main clause word order, yields five conceptual categories, conveniently labelled 'modal' and 'intentional', 'tentative', 'resultative' and 'phasal' (cf. Givon's modal categories 1990). Moreover, if more than two verbs are used in one construction, they tend to appear in this order. This is illustrated in (iv) and (v): (iv) *он хочет постараться закончить эту работу к вечеру* ('he wants_{IMPF PRES 3 SG} to try_{PF INF} to finish_{PF INF} this work by tonight') (v) **он старается хотеть закончить эту работу к вечеру* (*'he is trying_{SIMPF PRES 3 SG} to want_{IMPF INF} to finish_{PF INF} this work by tonight') (for similar results see Chrakovskij 1983). Formal evidence for the semantic cohesion of the categories is provided by the composition of the verbal inflectional paradigm, i.e. the aspect, tense and mode the finite verbs occur in. Additional proof is furnished by the observation that each category of verbs exercises a specific influence on the aspect of the accompanying infinitive. These morpho-syntactic findings can be related to the logical-semantic relations (e.g. (non-) implicativeness, (non-) activity) that hold between the finite 'modifiers' and their infinitival complements. Although members of one syntactico-semantic category tend to display a highly similar morpho-syntactic and logical-semantic behaviour, collocation patterns extracted from a corpus of 56 million words, show that not all members of the category share the same lexical-semantic properties. Usage restrictions within a category reveal conceptual subcategories (near-synonyms).

To arrive at a unifying interpretation of the syntactic and semantic data, I rely on two basic concepts from cognitive linguistics: iconicity and prototypicality. First, I will go into the functional principles of the linguistic organisation of complex verb constructions and explain the word order, imposed on sequences of modifiers, in terms of iconicity. The cognitive interpretation of the concept iconicity sees the complex verbal structures treated here as an iconic diagram: their linear order ('modal' or 'intentional', followed by 'tentative' and 'resultative') reflects the 'temporal' sequence that – in our conception of the world – is assigned to the semantic categories involved in expressing an action (Givon 1990, Ungerer & Schmid 1999). Secondly, I will show how the various groups of near-synonyms are organised around a central concept from which conceptually slightly different lexical clusters radiate. Moreover, it uncovers

differences in the complexity of the internal organisation of the conceptual categories that are distinguished for modifiers (Geeraerts 1994, Taylor 1995).

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