

**Russian verbs of motion:
Valency Grammar as an instrument to explain and teach the meaning of prefixes**

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In Russian verbs of motion represent a case of paramount interest both from a theoretical and a practical point of view, especially when teaching Russian as a foreign language. As a matter of fact, they are often believed to be a case of inexplicable mystery. Instead of clarifying the matter, the descriptive approach sometimes complicates it, thus some sort of gap between theory and usage has been created.

This work aims at demonstrating how Valency Grammar can result to be a resourceful instrument when explaining the meaning and the usage of prefixes in an L2 context. The notion that it is the combination 'prefix + verb' to attract different arguments gains even further importance when the language of the target audience typologically differs from Russian, such as in the case of Italian. In Italian and Russian the simple notion lying at the basis of the concept 'verb of motion' significantly differs and consequently the existence of a different mental representation of this concept strengthens the need to tackle the problem of teaching differently how to use these verbs.

Besides the usual considerations at the basis of the difference between imperfective and perfective verbs, in Russian there are 17 couples of imperfective verbs which, while describing the same type of action, illustrate a different speaker's point of view (the so called determinate and indeterminate verbs). In general terms, determinate (or unidirectional) imperfective verbs describe the action as limited to a specific moment of time: the subject (inanimate or animate) is moving now, thus the movement takes place in one direction (Forsyth: 319). Indeterminate verbs, on the contrary, present a more generalised type of motion without referring to any specific time, and are also called multidirectional verbs (Forsyth: 321). The interaction among aspect, tense and meaning of the prefix complicate matters: aspect and meaning of the verb change when a prefix is attached to a verb. The prefix can convey new, different lexical meanings or it can simply be a marker of the aspect.

This work focuses on the analysis of the criteria which can be applied to form a multilevel categorisation of all the verbs containing the prefix *po-* in A. Checkov's short story *The Duel*. This categorisation allows to explain the meanings of the prefix within the framework of Valency Grammar. By putting the verb at the centre of the sentence, Valency Grammar is an intuitive, flexible and powerful tool (De Santis) which can help to illustrate how the same prefix may attract different arguments modifying in each case, graphically in each schema, the meaning of the prefix *po-*. Consequently, a list of possible arguments triggered by the prefix *po-* can be provided and effectively used by students.

References

- Forsyth, J. (1970) *A Grammar of Aspect. Usage and Meaning in the Russian Verb*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
De Santis, C. (2017) *Che cos'è la grammatica valenziale*. Roma: Carocci.