

**Corpus Approaches to Lexicogrammar (LxGr)**  
**Saturday 16 June 2018, Edge Hill University**

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

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In this presentation I am going to:

- 1) analyse the different meanings of the prefix *po-* in the verbs of motion, contained in A. Chekhov's short story *The Duel*;
- 2) classify them according to a multilevel categorisation;
- 3) apply Grammar Valency to explain their usage for an L2 context.

# Aspectuality and semantics

- Aspect is essentially a matter of semantics (Forsyth: xiii).
- If you interrogate the system grammatically you will get grammar-like answers and if you interrogate it lexically you get lexis-like answers (Halliday: 64).

## The case of Russian verbs of motion

- ‘Words of every language create a system’ (Ščerba).
- ‘Meanings of linguistic signs can relate differently to the reality they denote’ (Komissarov: 46).

# What is a verb of motion?

## In Italian:

- the concept of a verb of motion may seem blurred.
- Verbs of motion are characterised by a vast, yet rather neutral, semantic potential (Cardelli: 54).
- Verbs, such as *andare* (to go), indicate a rather general movement.
- Some verbs give information about the manner in which the movement is taking place, such as, for example, *camminare* (to walk), *correre* (to run), *nuotare* (to swim), none of which, however, describe the movement in terms of its direction.

# What is a verb of motion?

## In Russian:

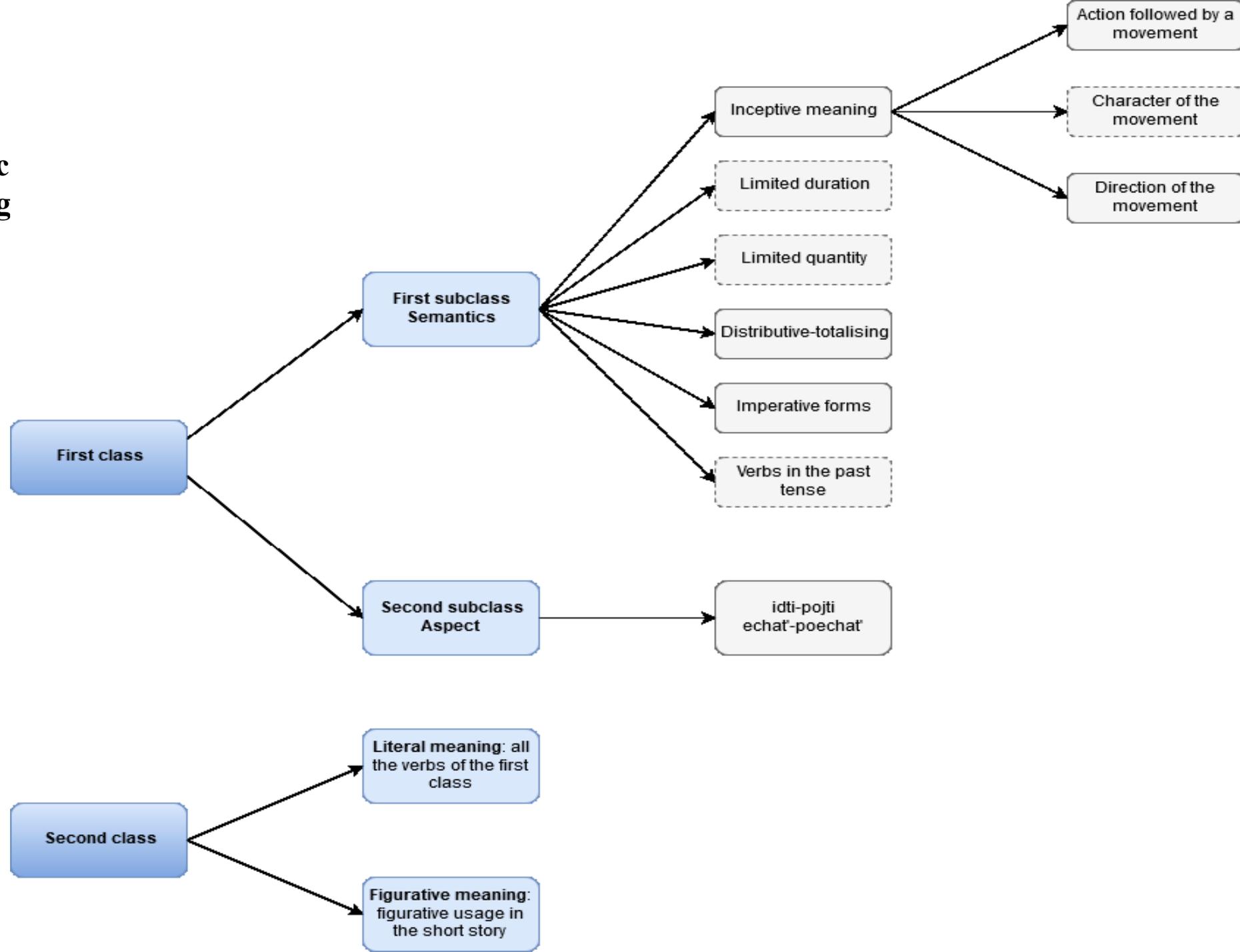
- there are 18 couples of verbs of motion. They consist of pairs of verbs, whose grammatical meaning is different from its partner's, but whose lexical meaning is the same (Bahry: 3).
- They are a structurally stable semantic group of imperfective verbs, where every member of each pair shares the same root (except in the case of *idti-chodit'*, to go, walk).

# What is a verb of motion?

## In Russian:

- ‘The differences between the two types of verbs are usually presented as opposing pairs: determinate/ indeterminate, non-frequentative/ frequentative, unidirectional/ non-unidirectional, unidirectional/ multidirectional’ (Bahry: 5).
- Both members of the pair are linked by their semantic and morphological features: each pair describes a real action in the same way, but it describes different types of movement.
- There are two criteria: the manner of movement, in other words, how the movement takes place (on foot, by transport, by plane, etc.), and the type of movement, in terms of unidirectionality, non-unidirectionality and multidirectionality.

# Classific meaning



**First subclass**  
**First subgroup: inceptive meaning**

A change in the movement. The change may involve:

- 1) an action followed by a movement;
- 2) the character of the movement;
- 3) the direction of the movement.

**First subclass**  
**First subgroup: inceptive meaning**

1) An action followed by a movement:

– Mar’ja Konstantinovna, dobroe utro! – kriknul ej Samojlenko, prijatno ulybajas’. – Kupat’sja chodili? Ha-ha-ha... Počtenie Nikodimy Aleksandryču! I on pošel dal’še, prodolžaja prijatno ulybat’sja.

“Good-morning, Marya Konstantinovna,” Samoylenko shouted to her with a pleasant smile. "Have you been bathing? Ha, ha, ha! . . . My respects to Nikodim Alexandritch!" And he went on, still smiling pleasantly.

## First subclass

### First subgroup: inceptive meaning

2) The character of the movement:

Snačala my šli medlenno, a potom pošli bystree, čtoby ne opozdat' na zanjatija (Skvorcova: 36).

At first, we walked slowly, but then we began to hurry in order not to miss our class.

3) The direction of the movement:

Volna pokatilas' nazad. The wave started to roll back.

**First subclass**  
**Second subgroup**

- Meaning of limited duration:

My poprosili šoferu taksi **po**voziť nas po raznym ulicam Moskvy, čtoby lučše znat' gorod (Skvorcova: 51).

We asked our taxi driver to take us around the different streets of Moscow, so that we could get to know the city better.

- Meaning of limited quantity:

Ja nemnogo **po**plavala

I swam for some time / I had a little swim

**First subclass**  
**Third subgroup**

Distributive-totalising meaning:

Mar'ja Konstantinovna usadila ee, dala kofe, nakormila sдобnymi bulkami, potom pokazala ej fotografii svoich byvšich vospitannic – baryšen' Garatynskich, kotorye uže **po**vychodili замуž.

Marya Konstantinovna sat her down and gave her coffee, regaled her with milk rolls, then showed her photographs of her former pupils, the Garatynskys, who have all by now gotten married.

**First subclass**  
**Fourth subgroup**

Verbs in the imperative mood:

an invitation to take part in a collaborative action, or an inducement of the counterpart to take action.

– **Po**jdemte ko mne. Vy upakujete u menja posylku i koe-čto perepišite. Kstati, potolkuem, čem by vam zanjat'sja. Nado rabotat', d'jakon. Tak nel'zja.

“Let's go to my place. You can pack up a parcel and copy something for me. By the way, we must have a talk about what you are to do. You must work, deacon. You can't go on like this.”

**First subclass**  
**Fourth subgroup**

Verbs in the imperative mood:

an invitation to take part in a collaborative action, or an inducement of the counterpart to take action.

– S tobom ja ne mogu soglasit'sja. Ili **po**ezžaj vmeste s nej ili že otprav' ee vpered, inače... inače ja ne dam tebe deneg. Eto moe poslednee slovo.

“I can't agree with you. Either go with her, or send her first; otherwise... otherwise I won't give you the money. Those are my last words...”

## First subclass Fifth subgroup

### Verbs in the past tense:

instead of the present tense, the past tense is used to attract the counterpart's attention to the movement of the object, or simply to the moment.

– Ty ne schodiš' za molokom? Da, uže **po**šel.

“Could you go and buy some milk? I'm going already”.

## Second subclass

Aspectual meaning of the prefix:

in this case the prefix *po-* does not convey a specific lexical meaning.

It is simply a marker of the aspect.

– Čto ž? **Po**jdeš' ili ne **po**jdeš' ot etogo zemletrjasenija ne budet, polagaju...

“Ah well. There won't be an earthquake whether you go or not, I suppose...”

– Vot tak! – skazal protjažno fon Koren. – Aga... Ponimaem. A ona s nim **po**edet ili kak?

“So that is it!” Von Koren drawled out. “Aha! . . . We understand. And is she going with him, or how is it to be?”

## Second class

It sees the opposition between the literal and figurative usages of the verbs.

- First subclass: all the verbs of the first class used in their literal meaning
- + *po*vychodit' zamuž (to get married, used for a woman)
- + the phraseological expression *po*jtj na kraj sveta (to go to the four corners of the earth for someone).

Čto že kasaetsja ljubvi, to ja dolžen tebe skazat', što žit' s ženščinoj, kotoraja čitala Spensera i *po*šla dlja tebja na kraj sveta, tak že ne interesno, kak s ljuboju Anfisoj ili Akulinoj.

As for love, I ought to tell you that living with a woman who has read Spencer and has followed you to the ends of the earth is no more interesting than living with any Anfissa or Akulina.

## Second class

It sees the opposition between the literal and figurative usages of the verbs.

- Second subclass: all the verb forms that in Russian can be used both literally and figuratively, but that are used here, in Chekhov's short story, in their figurative sense.

**Po**katit'sja:

1. the beginning of a movement (inceptive meaning)
2. ~ to roar with laughter, to howl with laughter.

## Second class

Compare these sentences:

1) Samojlenko chotel čto-to otvetit', no v eto vremja bol'saja volna nakryla ich oboich, potom udarilas' o bereg i s šumom pokatilas' nazad po melkim kamnjam.

Samoylenko was going to answer, but at that moment a big wave covered them both, then broke on the beach and rolled back noisily over the shingle.

2) On žadno vsmatrivalsja v lica, slušal ne migaja, i vidno bylo, kak glaza ego napolnjalis' smechem i kak naprjagalos' lico v ožidanii, kogda možno budet dat' sebe volju i pokatit'sja so smeču.

He watched people's faces greedily, listened without blinking, and it could be seen that his eyes filled with laughter and his face was tense with expectation of the moment when he could let himself go and burst into laughter.

## Grammar Valency

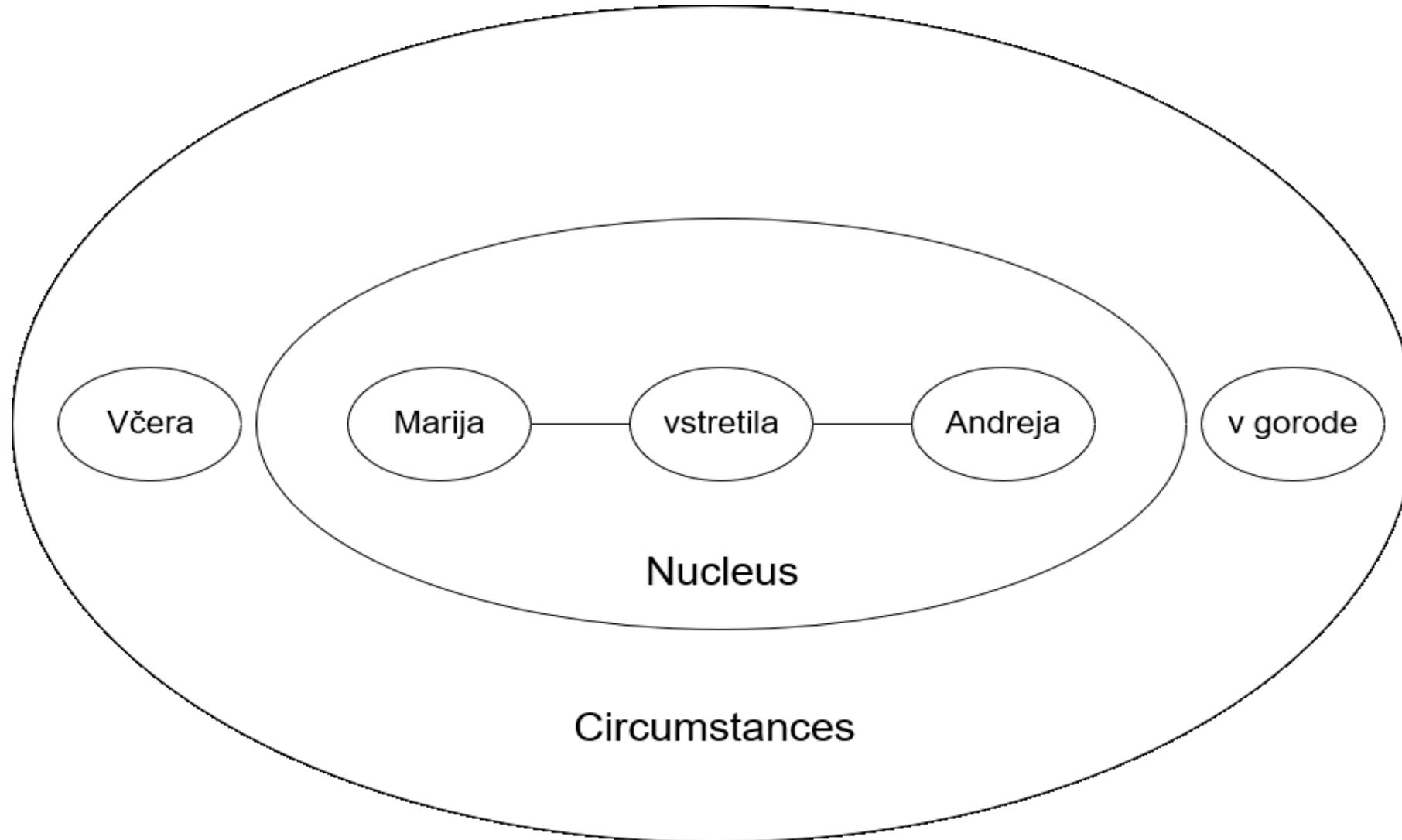
The difference between a full conceptual relation and a void grammatical relation (Prandi, 131):

3) I put the book on the table.

4) I count on you.

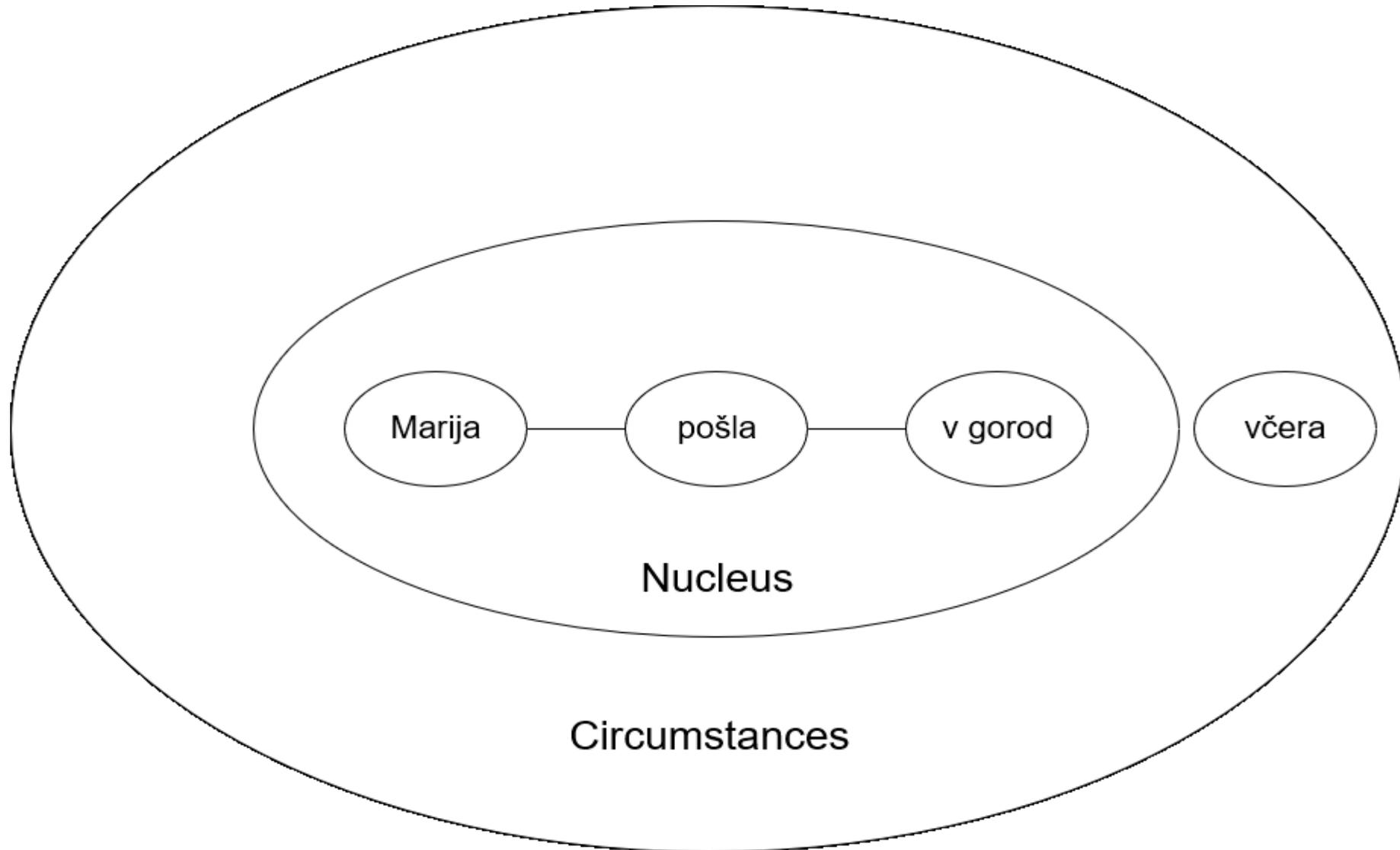
5) Včera Marija vstretila Andreja v gorode/ na more /v gorach.

Yesterday Mary met Andrew in the city/ by the sea/ in the mountains.



6) Včera Marija pošla v gorod/ na more/ v gory.

Yesterday Mary went to the city/ the sea/ the mountains.

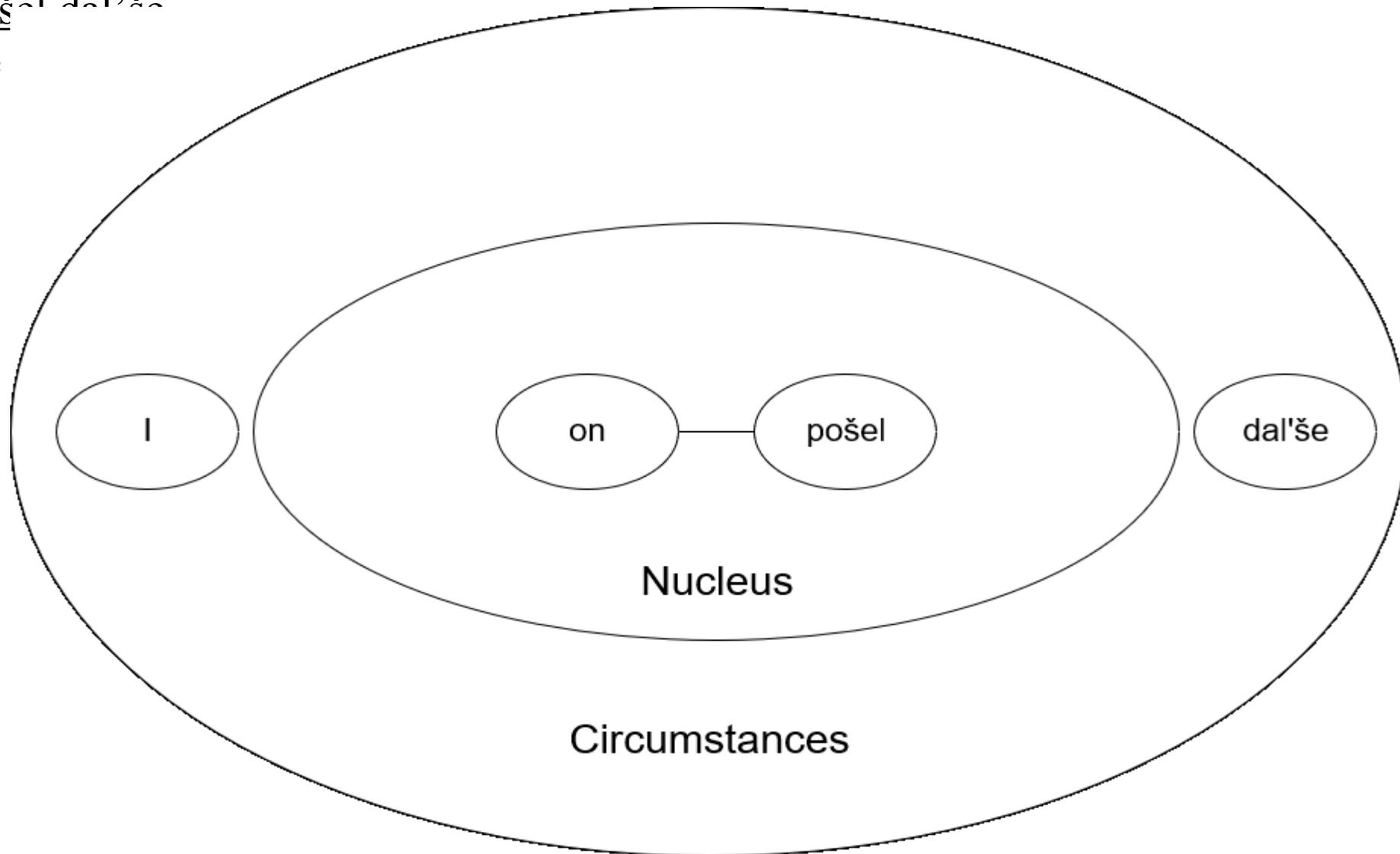


## First class: semantics, inceptive meaning

1. An action followed by a movement.

I on pošel dal'se

And he



## Possible circumstances:

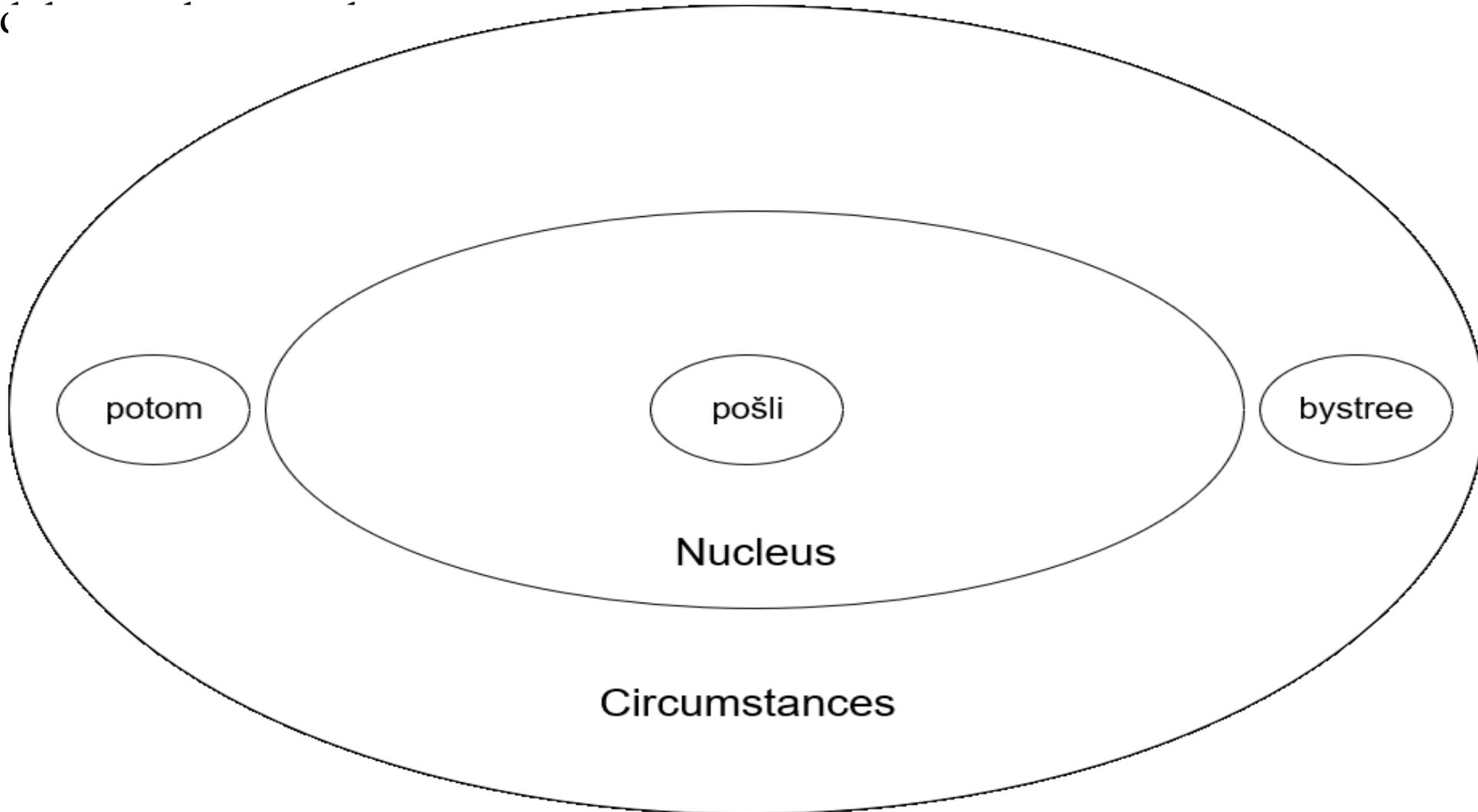
- dal'she, on
- vmeste s, together with
- vpered, ahead, onwards

**First class: semantics, inceptive meaning**

2. A change in the character of the movement.

Potom pošli bystree

And



Possible circumstances:

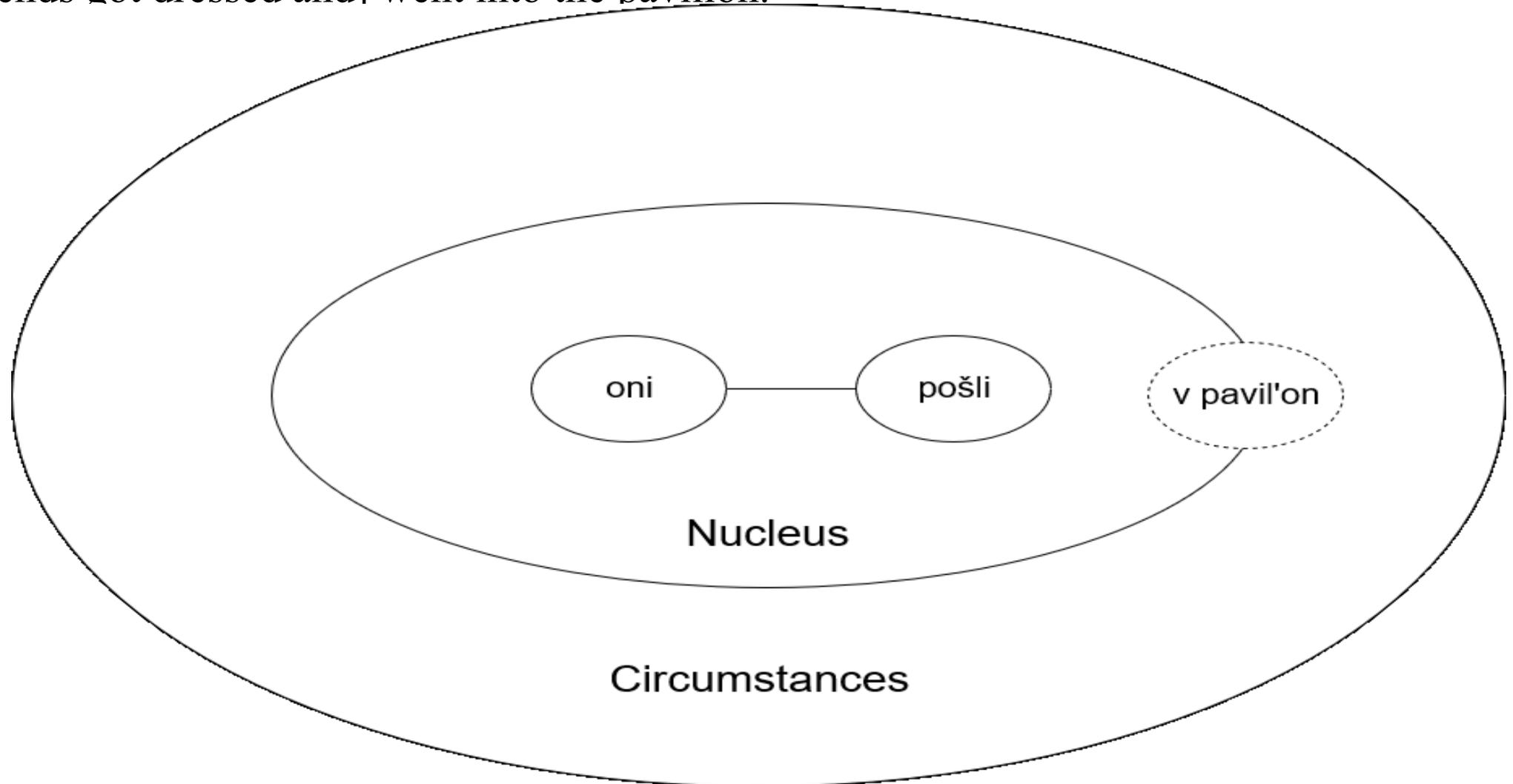
- bystree, faster
- medlennee, slower

## First class: semantics, inceptive meaning

An action followed by a movement, alternative example.

[Prijatelji odelis' i] pošli v pavil'on.

[The friends got dressed and] went into the pavilion.

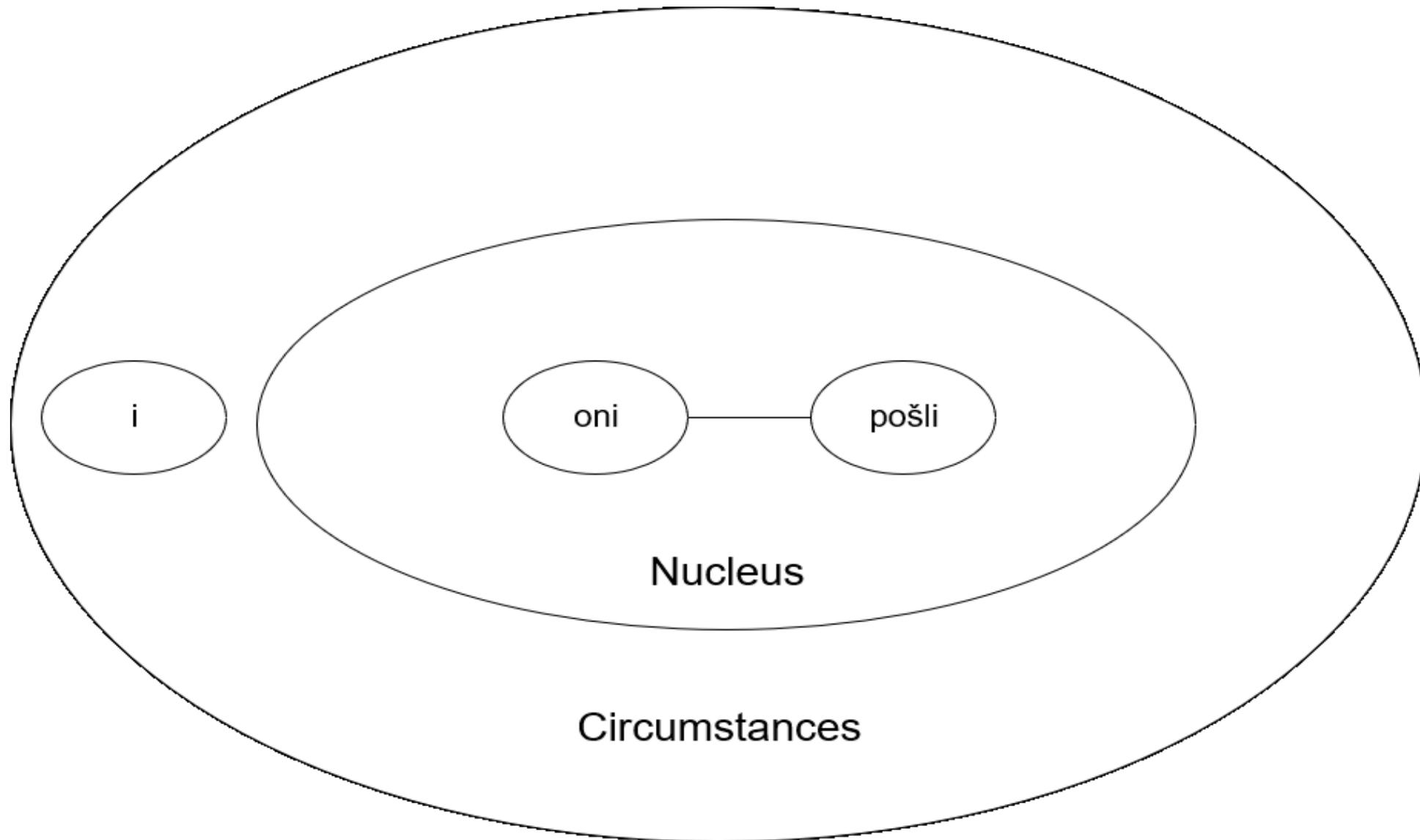


## Possible complements inside the nucleus:

- v cabinet, to the office
- po naberežnoj, along the sea-front
- po bul'varu, along the boulevard
- k sebe v cabinet, into his study
- za neju, after her

Oni prošli s občestvom i pošli.

They said good-bye to the company and went away.



As far as the means of indicating the change in the movement are concerned, some patterns can be outlined in the short story among the possible complements:

- expressions with the structure  $v +$  accusative case (9 examples);
- expressions with  $k +$  dative case (the person's or the object's name) (7 examples);
- expressions with  $po +$  dative case (4 examples);
- expressions with  $za +$  instrumental case (2 examples);
- then adverbial expressions follow.

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Thank you for your attention!