

american
contributions
to the eleventh
international
congress of slavists

Bratislava, August–September 1993

Literature. Linguistics. Poetics.

edited by
Robert A. Maguire
& Alan Timberlake

Slavica

Cognitive Linguistics as a Continuation of the Jakobsonian Tradition

The Semantics of Russian and Czech Reflexives

Laura A. Janda

In the course of the past decade a new linguistic movement has been gathering steam in both the U.S.A and Europe. This approach to the science of language has come to be known as cognitive linguistics, and is particularly relevant to us as the inheritors of the Jakobsonian tradition. In fact, Slavists will find that the fundamental assumptions of this movement are quite familiar, and that the framework it presents is thoroughly compatible with our tradition. I will give a brief introduction to cognitive linguistics and illustrate its application in an analysis of certain reflexive morphemes of Czech and Russian.¹

Briefly, cognitive linguistics has two identifying characteristics:

(a) Cognitive linguistics postulates the same characteristics for linguistic categories that have been discovered for other cognitive categories. Here cognitive linguistics draws on the work done by the psychologist Eleanor Rosch (1973a, 1973b, Mervis and Rosch 1981), who found that cognitive categories typically have an internal structure comprised of family relationships borne by members to a central prototype. This type of category is termed a 'radial category' because of its characteristic shape.² The analysis below will provide illustrations of the radial category and its structure.

(b) Cognitive linguistics recognizes semantics as playing a primary role in the organization of all linguistic phenomena. Meaning is recognized as the driving force of language and is found even in linguistic phenomena which are often considered to be merely grammatical or syntactic. Langacker (1987:17) asserts that "grammar and lexicon form a continuum." Talmy (1986:1) has expanded on Langacker's assertion, and provided insightful and useful comments on the nature of grammatical meaning. He views lexical and grammatical information as "two subsystems which have distinct functions, ones that are indispensable and complementary." Grammatical, as opposed to lexical, elements are characteristically relativistic; that is, they refer to relative rather than absolute values of magnitude, shape, rate, and other properties. Thereby "the grammatical specification in a sentence . . . provides a conceptual framework or, imagistically, a skeletal structure or scaffolding, for the conceptual material that is lexically specified." Like units of lexical meaning, "grammatically specified notions can be seen to pattern in categories, and the categories, in turn, in integrated systems." Thus the grammar and lexicon are subtly distinguished, yet both are seen to contribute to the semantic content of language. The data presented on reflexive morphemes below aptly illustrate the grammar/lexicon continuum.

Already we see that in its holistic approach cognitive linguistics continues previous traditions of linguistics. Geeraerts (1987:674) characterizes the cognitive approach as "a partial return to the methodological position of the prestructuralist, historical-philological tradition of semantic research . . . [which] takes some fundamental steps forward in comparison with the older tradition." Parallels to the Jakobsonian tradition are even more apparent. Jakobson (1936/1971) described a hierarchy of specific meanings, or variants, which by means of "relative invariance" bear a relationship to a general meaning, or invariant, specified in terms of semantic features. At first glance the concept of relative invariance appears illogical, for how can an absolute phenomenon such as invariance be relative? Yet Sangster (1982:78) identifies the concept of relative invariance as "probably the most powerful construct in Jakobson's linguistic arsenal," for it is this concept that allows Jakobson both to conceive of a category as a unified whole and to describe the minute details of widely varying members of that category. In Jakobson's work, however, the relationship between the invariant and its variants is postulated, but not fully elaborated. Cognitive linguistics takes his line of inquiry one step further by examining the nature of the semantic infrastructure that is implicit in Jakobson's hierarchy. Jakobson's invariant, the concept that unifies a category, is equivalent to what Langacker (1986) calls a schema. In its canonical instantiation the schema is realized as the prototype of the category, which bears relationships to more peripheral members. Jakobson's relative invariance is the abstract relationship of the schema to the category members, but it presumes the existence of the more direct relationships between the members and the prototype. Cognitive linguistics provides a framework in which these relationships between a prototype and less central members can be investigated in detail, as will be demonstrated in the following analysis of reflexive morphemes.

In many of the world's languages expressions of voice, reflexivization, intransitivity, reciprocity (as well as some expressions typically identified as 'lexical') share a single set of morphemes, and here the Slavic languages are no exception.³ I will examine in brief the semantics of two such morphemes, the Russian verbal postfix *-ся/-сь* and the Czech dative enclitic *si*, to demonstrate how cognitive linguistics renders the old structuralist slogan 'one form, one meaning' practicable. If we recognize 'meaning' as representing a cognitive category (i.e., a system of related uses), then we do indeed find that we can relate each morphological form to a single semantic category, however complex its structure may be. Thus the use of a single morpheme in a group of seemingly disparate yet related constructions can be motivated on semantic grounds.

Schematically, the Russian verbal postfix *-ся/-сь* combines the reflexive notion Self with the accusative case, thus denoting (an action) 'On-the-Self'; i.e., indicating that the patient of the action is cross-referenced with the subject of the clause. This reflexive postfix appears in a wide variety of constructions expressing a range of meanings, distinguished and inventoried in the Academy Grammar (RG 617-8).⁴ Prose captions of the various members of this category are presented in a metalinguistic formalism inspired by the example of Wierzbicka. The meanings of the reflexive *-ся/-сь* have been arranged so that neighboring senses

exhibit minimal differences between each other, thus exposing a network of family relationships which the various members of this category bear to the central concept 'On-the-Self'. An outline of the semantic network of *-ся/-сь* appears in figure 1.

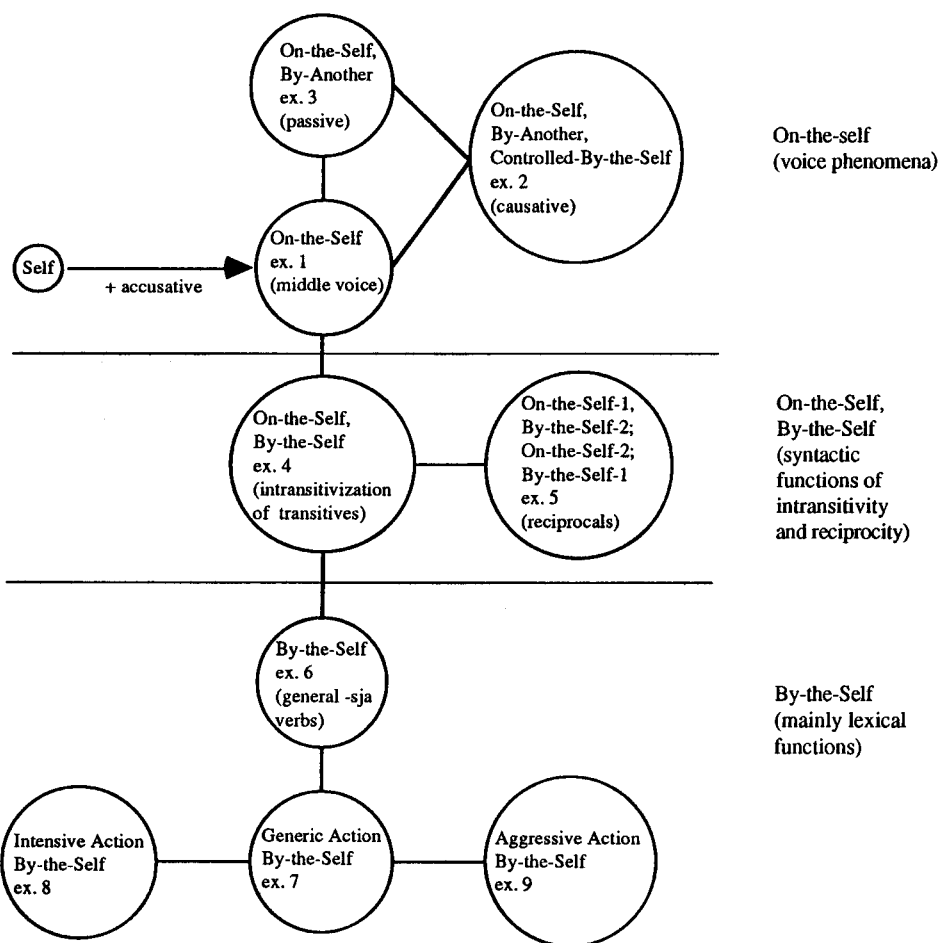


Figure 1: Semantic Network of Russian *-ся/-сь*

The agent and patient of the action may or may not be the Self, and it is this distinction that divides the semantic network of *-ся/-сь* into three subnetworks. The upper portion of the network specifies only that the Self is the patient of the action and represents voice phenomena. In the middle portion are verbs for which the Self is identified as both the patient and the agent of the action, and both of the verbs in this portion have clearly defined syntactic functions (intransitivization and reciprocity). The lower portion of the network specifies only that the Self is the agent of the action, and most of its members have clearly lexical functions. The overall structure of the network is consistent with Babby's (1983:72) claim "that the only syntactic function of *-ся/-сь* is to mark reduced valency," for the reflexive postfix is used in each portion of the network to specify one, the other, or both of the arguments of the verb.

The base-line (or prototypical) member of the semantic network of Russian *-ся/-сь* is the most underdetermined, for it specifies only that the action is performed 'On-the-Self', and makes no claim about the agent of the action, identifying it neither as Self nor as Other. This member of the category is traditionally labeled middle voice;⁵ an example appears in (1a). (1b) represents a closely related type of impersonal expression in which the dative arguably functions as a subject.⁶

- (1) a. Двери закрываются!
'The doors are closing!'
- b. Этой птице не летится. (Bachman 1980)
'That bird is having trouble flying.'

Causative reflexives denote actions performed 'On-the-Self, By-Another, Controlled-By-the-Self'; i.e., the subject is the patient of an action executed by a separate entity (the agent), and the subject controls the agent's execution of the action. Examples are given in (2). Passives differ from causatives in that the element 'Controlled-By-the-Self' is missing; thus they describe situations in which the subject is the patient and another entity acts as the agent, as in (3).

- (2) a. Она оперировалась в новой клинике. (Paillard 1979)
'She had an operation at the new clinic.'
- b. Я фотографируюсь у хорошего фотографа. (Babby 1983)
'I have myself photographed at a good photographer's.'
- (3) a. Такие книги читаются широкими массами.
'Such books are read by the broad masses.'
- b. Любые скандалы тут обычно смакуются прессой.
'Here all sorts of scandals are usually gobbled up by the press.'

The unmarkedness of middle voice verbs facilitates their role in linking passives and causatives and also in linking the upper portion of the network to the remaining uses of *-ся/-сь*. Because the Self may be in control (although this is not expressed), middle voice verbs are linked to causatives (indeed, Toops [1987: 606] states that causativity in Russian "may be viewed as one of several semantic properties of a middle voice"), and because the Self might also be the unnamed

In all of these examples the reflexive postfix semantically distinguishes the verbs from their nonreflexive counterparts. Without the postfix *-ся* the verbs in (7) are typical transitives which require a direct object: *растворять* 'dissolve', *заводить* 'start'. Both (8) and (9) would be grammatical without *-ся*, but they would be neutral statements, lacking connotations of intensity or aggression.

The network proposed for Russian *-ся/-сь* contains members that have no semantic elements in common, yet are united by the fact that all ultimately bear some relationship to the prototype. Thus, for example, the semantic contribution of the reflexive postfix to the verbs in (9), characterized as 'Aggressive Action By-the-Self', shows no overlap with the passives in (3), which describe action performed 'On-the-Self, By-Another'. Yet the fact that these verbs (and all others represented in the network) have the same morphological marker is well-motivated in this framework, for they all bear a relationship, be it direct or indirect, to the central concept 'On-the-Self'.

The Czech dative reflexive clitic pronoun *si* likewise shows systematic semantic diversity. Prototypically it unites the concept of Self with the benefactive meaning of the dative case, producing 'For-the-Self', illustrated by (10).

- (10) Já jsem si koupila motorku.
'I bought myself a motorcycle.'

This prototypical meaning, 'For-the-Self', can be further specified as entailing 'Comfort/Convenience' ((11)), 'Enjoyment' ((12)), or 'Exclusivity' ((13)). In all of these cases the verbs also intransitivize, and thus *si* cannot be said to mark an indirect object. Czech has grammaticized the implementation of the first of these variants ('Comfort/Convenience'), and uses it to distinguish between verbs of position that describe positions assumed for the comfort of the agent and those which do not add to the agent's comfort.⁸ Thus the verbs for 'sit down', 'lie down', and 'squat' all have obligatory *si*. The neutral verb for 'stand up' is not accompanied by *si*, and another verb with *si* is used to describe the assumption of a standing position when it is convenient for the agent (i.e., standing up in order to reach something, in order to get in line for something, in order to get dressed, etc.). The second meaning, 'For-the-Self's Enjoyment', has also been grammaticized, and is used exclusively with verbs denoting play, physical exercise (with the prefix *za-*), and talking (with the prefix *po-*). Most verbs of this type can exist without *si* but their meaning is different. *Hrát*, for example is a neutral word denoting any type of play, whereas *hrát si* specifies the type of play that children engage in; without *si*, *zatančit* is merely a perfective partner of *tančit* 'dance'. The third variant, 'For-the-Self Exclusively', is used to express actions performed for the Self as if in the Self's own private universe, with no regard for anything or anyone else. The example given in (13) was uttered by a man whose wife had asked him how he had managed once again to burn the dinner she had left for him to heat up. If he had merely said *četl jsem* 'I was reading', he would have made a neutral statement, but the insertion of *si* adds the assertion that he was utterly and exclusively consumed by reading and therefore unable to register other perceptions.

- (11) sednout si, lehnout si, dřepnout si
 'sit down, lie down, squat'
but:
 vstát
 'stand up' (neutral verb)
and:
 stoupnout si
 'stand up' (for convenience)
- (12) hrát si, házet si
 'play (as children do), play ball (throwing)'
 zatančit si, popovídat si
 'do some dancing (for fun), have a nice chat'
- (13) Četl jsem si!
 'I was reading (not noticing anything else)!'

The last two types are further combined to produce 'For-the-Self's Enjoyment Exclusively' in affective expressions of selfish indulgence, as in (14).

- (14) a. Žili si tam jako bohové.
 'They lived it up there like gods.'
- b. My se tu dřeme a on si sedí v hospodě!
 'We are toiling away here and he is sitting in a pub [enjoying himself, he does not care about us]!'

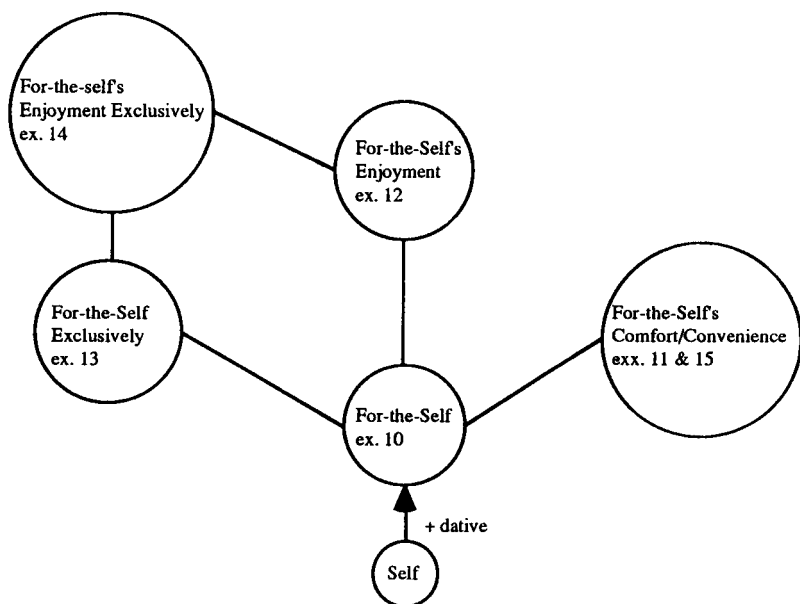


Figure 2: Semantic Network of Czech *si*

The meaning exemplified in (11), 'For-the-Self's Comfort/Convenience', can be, by semantic extension,⁹ applied to the speech-act domain. Thus the speaker uses the dative reflexive pronoun to define what is right for the hearer. This (grammatically unmotivated) insertion of *si* is not a part of standard Czech, but it was frequently encountered under the old regime in the speech of officials who considered it their duty to indicate correct behavior for citizens. The examples in (15) are subway announcements.

- (15) a. Vystupte si z bezpečnostního pásu!
 'Step out of the danger zone [it's for your own good]!'

 b. Urychlete si nástup do soupravy!
 'Board the train faster [it's for your own good]!'

Thus pragmatics joins the grammar/lexicon continuum.

Jakobson clearly recognized that a grammatical category presents a dichotomy of overall unity on the one hand and specific variants on the other, and that some hierarchical system of relationships must link these two aspects of the category. He received much criticism for his failure to fully elaborate this "missing link," perhaps best summed up by Wierzbicka (1980a:xv-xvi), who stated that his semantic feature formulas "have limited predictive power [and are] too vague, too general to be empirically adequate." Through its discovery and elaboration of the radial category, cognitive linguistics provides the internal structure that links the two ends of the unity/variety dichotomy and gives flesh to Jakobson's hierarchy of specific meanings.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

NOTES

¹ For a more detailed demonstration of the compatibility of cognitive linguistics with Jakobsonian structuralism, see Janda 1993, in which the semantic features assigned by Jakobson (1936/1971) are shown to motivate the semantic networks of the dative and instrumental cases in Czech and Russian. Note, however, that the use of the term 'schema' in that volume differs from the definition offered by Langacker (1986) and used in the present article.

² This is not to suggest that other category structures do not exist; radial categories, do, however, appear to be the most common type. For more on radial categories, see Lakoff 1987:91-114.

³ Shibatani (1985:826-7) gives examples from several Indo-European and American Indian languages in which the same morpheme is used in passive, reflexive and reciprocal constructions. Barber (1975) also gives an account of the similarities between middle, passive, reflexive and reciprocal expressions in Indo-European languages. Nedjalkov (1980) gives a typology of languages which use the same morpheme for various combinations of these constructions.

⁴ The semantic categorization of this group of examples follows that in RG 617-8, but has been modified somewhat. I omit the "secondarily-reflexive verbs" [*побочно-возвратные глаголы*], for which the action is stimulated by the presence of another object (*держаться, цепляться* 'hold (onto), catch (on)'), and the "obliquely reflexive verbs" [*косвенно-возвратные глаголы*] on the grounds that these are special subgroups of

intransitivized verbs, and that they have been singled out by the authors because of characteristics of the contexts these verbs are used in, not because of any special semantic contribution of the reflexive postfix. This classification also does not single out the reflexiva tantum; cf. Schenker (1986). All of these verbs are subsumed under headings in figure 1.

⁵ Although according to Barber's (1975:22–23) classification, constructions usually identified as middle voice in Russian are not true full middles, but rather 'catalytic passives', transitional forms in the development of an Active/Middle system from an Active/Passive system.

⁶ Bachman 1980 argues for the subjecthood of such datives. It is this type of impersonal construction which Shibatani refers to as "the potential." He makes the following remarks about the intimate relationship between the middle voice (which he terms "the spontaneous") and the construction represented by (1b): "It is only one small step from the spontaneous [i.e., middle voice] to the potential [i.e., the impersonal construction of (1b)]. An event that occurs spontaneously has a strong propensity to happen. If this automatic happening is negated, then a reading of impotentiality is implied" (Shibatani 1985:839).

⁷ The concept 'On-the-Self' can be emphatically expressed in Russian by the reflexive pronoun, as in *Он мыл себя* 'He washed himself (not someone else)', but discussion of the differences between these two expressions goes beyond the scope of this article.

⁸ The grammaticized use of *si* is best exemplified by but not limited to verb denoting the assumption of a position. For other examples, see Janda 1993:106.

⁹ For more on semantic extension, see Janda 1993:111–113.

REFERENCES

- Babby, Leonard H.
1983 "The Relation between Causative and Voice: Russian vs. Turkish," *Wiener slawistischer Almanach* 11:61–88.
- Bachman, Ronald David
1980 *The Subject Potential of the Dative Case in Modern Russian*, Ph.D. Dissertation, The Ohio State University.
- Barber, E. J. W.
1975 "Voice—Beyond the Passive," *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, Berkeley, pp. 16–24.
- Geeraerts, Dirk
1987 "Cognitive Grammar and the History of Lexical Semantics," B. Rudzka-Ostyn (ed.), *Topics in Cognitive Linguistics*, Amsterdam, pp. 647–677.
- Jakobson, Roman O.
1936/1971 "Beitrag zur allgemeinen Kasuslehre: Gesamtbedeutungen der russischen Kasus," *Travaux du Cercle linguistique de Prague* 6:240–280 [= *Selected Writings*, 2: *Word and Language*, The Hague, pp. 23–71].
- Janda, Laura A.
1993 *A Semantic Geography of Case: The Czech Dative and the Russian Instrumental*, Berlin.
- Lakoff, George
1987 *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, Chicago.
- Langacker, Ronald W.
1986 *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*, 1, Stanford.
- Mervis, Carolyn and Eleanor Rosch
1981 "Categorization of Natural Objects," *Annual Review of Psychology* 32:89–115.

Nedjalkov, Vladimir P.

- 1980 "Reflexive Constructions: A Functional Typology," G. Brettschneider and C. Lehmann (eds.), *Wege zur Universalienforschung: Sprachwissenschaftliche Beiträge zum 60 Geburtstag von Hansjakob Seiler*, Tübingen, pp. 222–228.

Paillard, Denis

- 1979 *Voix et aspect en russe contemporain* [= Bibliothèque russe de l'Institut d'Études slaves, 51], Paris.

Rosch, Eleanor

- 1973a "Natural Categories," *Cognitive Psychology* 4:328–350.

Rosch, Eleanor

- 1973b "On the Internal Structure of Perceptual and Semantic Categories," T. E. Moore (ed.), *Cognitive Development and the Acquisition of Language*, New York, pp. 111–144.

RG = N. Ju. Švedova (ed.): *Russkaja grammatika*, 1, Moscow, 1982.

Sangster, Rodney B.

- 1982 *Roman Jakobson and Beyond: Language as a System of Signs*, Berlin.

Schenker, Alexander M.

- 1986 "On the Reflexive Verbs in Russian," *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics* 33:27–41.

Shibatani, Masayoshi

- 1985 "Passives and Related Constructions: A Prototype Analysis," *Language* 61:821–848.

Talmy, Leonard

- 1986 *The Relation of Grammar to Cognition*, Berkeley Cognitive Science Report, No. 45.

Toops, Gary H.

- 1987 "Russian Contextual Causatives," *Slavic and East European Journal* 31:595–611.

Townsend, Charles E.

- 1967 "Voice and Verbs in *-sja*," *Slavic and East European Journal* 11:196–203.

Wierzbicka, Anna

- 1980a *The Case for Surface Case* [= *Linguistica Extranæa Studia*, 9], Ann Arbor.

Wierzbicka, Anna

- 1980b *Lingua Mentalis*, Sydney.