

METAPHOR: UNIDIRECTIONAL VS. NON-DIRECTIONAL CARRYING IN RUSSIAN
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Verbs of motion represent a major challenge for L2 learners of Russian, and metaphorical uses of the verbs are particularly difficult to master. In this article, we consider the verbs *носить* and *нести* ‘carry’, which occur frequently in metaphorical uses. On the basis of data from the Russian National Corpus (www.ruscorpora.ru), we show that *носить* is metaphorically focused, while *нести* is versatile. We discuss a number of generalizations and suggest that the versatility of *нести* may be due to the fact that life consists of many purposeful activities, for which a unidirectional motion verb like *нести* represents a suitable source domain.

In Nesset and Janda to appear we distinguish between “specific”, “generalized” and “metaphorical” motion. Specific motion is when the verb is used in its literal sense (*нести посылку домой* ‘carry a package home’). Generalized motion involves physical movement, but not of the kind specified by the verb:

- (1) *Да и вода любой реки несет с собой столько ила, песка, гальки [...].*
‘And the water of any river carries with it so much mud, sand and pebbles [...].’ («Знание - сила», 2008)

Metaphorical motion is present when no physical motion takes place, as in expressions like *носить имя* ‘(lit.) carry a name’ and *нести ответственность* ‘carry responsibility’. In order to study the distribution of these three kinds of motion (specific, generalized and metaphorical), we constructed a database with 100 random examples for each of the following verbs: *ходить/идти* ‘walk’, *ездить/ехать* ‘ride in a vehicle’, *летать/лететь* ‘fly’, *носить/нести* ‘carry’, *водить/вести* ‘lead’, *возить/везти* ‘transport’, and *плавать/плыть* ‘swim/sail’. Figure 1 shows that both unidirectional and non-directional verbs are used metaphorically, but that the former category is much more prone to metaphorical use. The question is why. In order to investigate this, we consider *носить* and *нести*, which are both used frequently in metaphors.

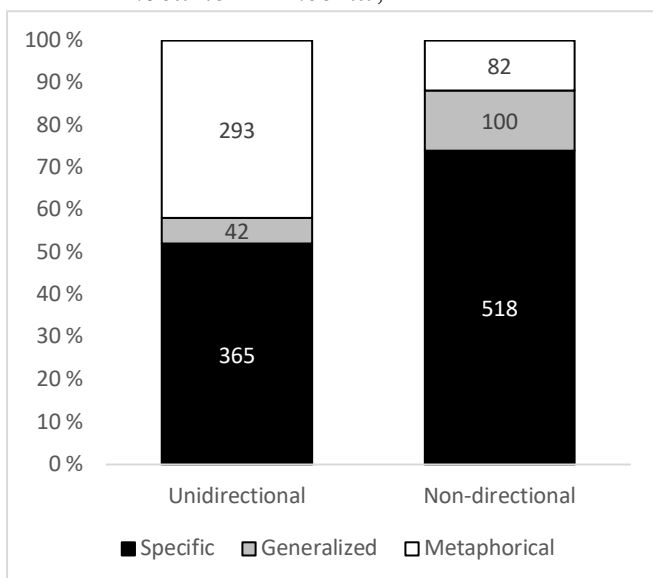


Figure 1: Distribution of specific, generalized, and metaphorical motion for 14 simplex verbs of motion. Numbers are raw numbers from our database, which consists of 700 examples with unidirectional verbs and 700 with non-directional verbs.

Characteristic of *носить* is the use with a garment as the object (*носить пиджак* ‘wear a jacket’), which occurs in 49 out of 100 examples in our database. We classify this as generalized motion, since

the garments move around with their owners, although they are not carried in a literal sense. Among the metaphorical uses, two types stand out:

- (2) *Во всем мире первоначально терроризм носил характер индивидуальной агрессивной активности.*
'All over the world, in the beginning terrorist activity was of an individual aggressive nature.' (Коллективный, 2008)
- (3) *В этом отеле каждый номер носит имя композитора.*
'In this hotel, each room bears the name of a composer.' (Спивакова, 2002)

In our database, the “character construction” in (2) is attested in 23 examples, while we have 12 examples with the “name construction” in (3). Thus, taken together the two constructions occur in 35 out of 100 examples. Apart from these two constructions, our database contains only 6 more metaphorical examples with *носить*. In this sense, the metaphorical use of *носить* is “focused”; while the verb is often used metaphorically, two metaphorical constructions dominate.

The picture is quite different for *нести*. As shown in (1) above, this verb also occurs in generalized uses, but we found only 7 examples in this category. Metaphorical uses, on the other hand, are attested in as much as 59 out of 100 examples in our database. The metaphorical uses are quite heterogeneous and therefore difficult to classify. However, one broad class involves situations that have consequences, often negative:

- (4) *Федеральные силы продолжают нести потери в столкновениях с боевиками.*
'The federal forces keep experiencing losses in confrontations with warriors.'
(«Еженедельный журнал», 2003)

To this category belong frequent collocations such as *нести потери/убытки* ‘carry losses’ and *нести риск* ‘carry risk’, and we may also include *нести ответственность* in this class, since responsibility comes with consequences. Less closely related are constructions involving carrying (metaphorical) weight:

- (5) *Станут ли религии несущими конструкциями нового миропорядка?*
'Will religions become support structures in a new world order?' («Эксперт» 2013)

If something is not able to carry weight, the result is collapse – clearly a negative consequence.

Another broad class involves abstract nouns with negative or positive connotations:

- (6) *Многие знания обо всем творящемся на просторах России несут с собой многие печали.*
'Many insights about everything happening in Russia bring a lot of sadness.' (Дежнев, 2009)
- (7) *Здесь какая-то ущербная [...], «слободская» урбанизация, которая, в отличие от средневековых городов, не несет с собой воздух свободы.*
'Here we are dealing with detrimental urbanization, which, unlike medieval towns, do not carry with themselves the air of freedom.' («Знание - сила», 2008)

Characteristic of examples like these is the fact that *нести* denotes bringing about something, creating a new situation.

Four more constructions deserve mention; although we have few examples in our database, they are well attested in the Russian National Corpus. The first one involves laying eggs:

- (8) *Куры несли яйца чаще и крупнее.*

‘The hens laid eggs more often and bigger.’ («Зеркало мира», 2012)

The second construction is about growing leaves:

- (9) А вот клёны [...] несут довольно крупные листья и являются довольно крупными деревьями, распространёнными в горах.
‘And the maples [...] grow quite large leaves and are fairly large trees that are widespread in the mountains.’ (Карпун, 1997)

Both laying eggs and growing leaves are “transformations” that are part of cyclic processes. Eggs become chickens that lay eggs, and trees grow leaves in the spring and lose them in the fall before growing new leaves next spring.

The third class that deserves mention is what we may call the “speech construction”, since *нести* corresponds to a speech verb in English:

- (10) *Это же очевидно. — Что ты несешь? — сказал Дамилола сердито.*
“‘That’s obvious, what are you saying?’”, said Damilola angrily.’ (Пелевин, 2011)
- (11) А когда человек несет реальную чушь, не предлагая ничего взамен - что это по-вашему?
‘And when a person is talking nonsense without offering anything back, what is that in your opinion?’ (Коллективный, 2010-11)

Examples where *нести* is used about smell represent the fourth construction that is not widespread in our database, but nevertheless well attested in the corpus at large:

- (12) — *Опять от тебя несут, Павел, — жена шепчет.*
“‘Once again you smell bad, Pavel’”, his wife whispers.’ (Маканин, 1977)

Examples (4) through (12) testify to a heterogeneous situation, where *нести* occurs in a number of different metaphorical constructions. While *носить* is metaphorically “focused”, we may conclude that *нести* is “versatile” when it comes to metaphorical use.

What should we tell L2 learners, when they ask how to use *носить* and *нести* in metaphors? For a native speaker of Russian, it may appear obvious that you use the former verb in the “name construction” (*носить имя*), but the latter about responsibility (*нести ответственность*). For L2 learners, on the other hand, this is anything but obvious. On the basis of our finding that *носить* is metaphorically “focused”, while *нести* is “versatile”, we propose the following rule of thumb:

- (13) The *носить/нести* metaphor rule:
In metaphorical expressions, use *нести*, except in the “name construction” (*носить имя*) and the “character construction” (*носить характер*).

Since this rule is simple and at the same time refers to verbs that are frequently used metaphorically, it stands to reason that this rule is valuable in second language pedagogy. At the same time, the rule raises a question of interest for theoretical linguistics. What is the motivation for the skewed distribution summarized in the rule? Is it possible to explain why the unidirectional verb *нести* is more prone to metaphorical use than its non-directional partner *носить*?

Although it seems unfeasible to provide a definite answer, we suggest that the answer should be sought in the difference between unidirectional and non-directional motion in space. We observe that the unidirectional *нести* is used in metaphors involving change of state. This applies to the examples with situations leading to (negative) consequences (e.g., *нести потери*) and situations where *нести* denotes bringing about some sort of result (e.g., *нести с собой печаль*). The examples with eggs

(*нести яйца*) and leaves (*нести листья*) also involve change of state. The “speech construction” (*что ты несешь?*), is also relevant, insofar as speech verbs are about conveying information, i.e. bringing about a change from less information to more information (although in examples like *нести чушь* the relevant information is not particularly valuable.) Even the examples involving smell (*от тебя несет*), can be analyzed as conveying information.

While the metaphors with *нести* tend to involve change of state, the two metaphorical constructions with *носить* are stative. In the “name construction”, *носить* denotes inalienable possession, since a name is something one has, which under normal circumstances cannot be changed easily. It is therefore expected that *носить имя* ‘carry a name’ competes with the nearly synonymous *иметь имя* ‘have a name’. The “character construction” (*носить характер*) also relates to (inalienable) possession insofar as the possessive verbs *иметь* ‘have’ and *обладать* ‘possess’ also combine with *характер*.

The upshot of this discussion is that metaphorical *нести* tends to involve a change of state, while *носить* is stative and does not imply a change of state. This is in harmony with the spatial meanings of the two verbs. While the former indicates movement in one direction along a path towards a goal, the latter describes non-directed motion. The question why *нести* is more versatile in metaphor thus boils down to the question of why metaphors tend to involve change of state, i.e. metaphorical motion in one direction towards a goal, rather than stative situations involving possession. To this question, we have no definitive answer, but we note that already Lakoff and Johnson (1980) pointed out that LIFE IS A JOURNEY, i.e. unidirectional movement along a path. This journey has taken Vladimir Plungian to his sixtieth birthday, at which we would like to bring him (*принести*) our congratulations and best wishes for the future.

References

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