

## The Meaning of Russian Verbal Prefixes: Semantics and Grammar\*

Laura A. Janda

This paper contains a discussion of the semantics of Russian verbal prefixes, using the prefix *za-* to illustrate an approach to this issue which allows the submeanings to be represented as being at one and the same time both distinct and unified. In the concluding remarks, the relevance of prefixal semantics to aspect is examined.

Russian verbal prefixes are notorious for their semantic complexity, which has historically defied satisfactory description. At the root of this problem is the fact that prefixes contain two seemingly opposite characteristics in their semantic make-up: diversity and unity. A prefix appears to be semantically fractured because of the diverse semantic contributions it makes to various verbs, yet at the same time certain submeanings are clearly related to each other, and the intuitions of native speakers suggest that semantic unity underlies all instantiations of a prefix.

Traditional scholars like Boguslawski (1963) and the authors of the *Academy Grammar* (1960) concentrated on diversity and consequently described the meaning of a given prefix as a seemingly random group of submeanings of homonyms. This atomistic approach, however, obscured the real unity of submeanings. Structuralists like van Schooneveld (1958, 1978), Flier (1975, 1984, this volume), and Gallant (1979) recognized the drawbacks of the traditional approach and made the first important step toward correcting them, concentrating on the unity of prefixal meaning. Yet the structuralists had no apparatus to handle both characteristics of prefixal semantics and as a result defined prefixes in terms of semantic features, which could capture the actual diversity of submeanings only with difficulty.

In the 1970s, Eleanor Rosch (see Rosch 1973a, 1973b, 1978; Mervis and Rosch 1981) did a series of experiments on natural human categorization, the results of which are relevant to the present discussion. She discovered that a human cognitive category is centered around a prototype, to which all members bear some family-type relationship, be it distant or close. The structure of Rosch's cognitive category is significant because it incorporates both diversity in its individual members and unity in the family-style relationships which all members bear to the prototype. In the past few years certain linguists (see Fillmore 1975, 1978, 1982; Lakoff 1977, 1983; Lan-

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gacker 1982) have recognized the applicability of Rosch's cognitive model to semantic description. I also have borrowed certain elements from this model in the present description of prefixal semantics.

Before undertaking the analysis of *za-*, I will briefly outline the basic concepts and structure of what will henceforth be referred to as the "modified structuralist" approach. The meanings of prefixes will be captured by configurations drawn in space.<sup>1</sup> This is not necessarily three-dimensional space as it is understood by post-Einsteinian physicists, but rather our mental perception of it. This "cognitive" space may contain one, two, or three dimensions. In addition, cognitive space may, through metaphorical extension, refer to some entirely different domain, such as time, existence, or emotion.

Prototypically a configuration consists of a landmark (LM; also called a domain) and a trajector (TR) which moves in relation to it. The trajectory (TRY) is a profile of this movement, usually with respect to time.

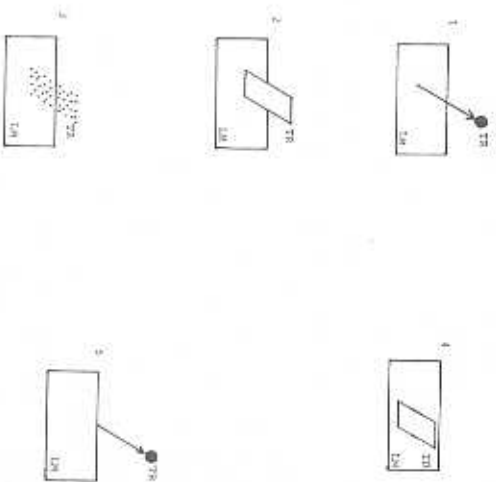
Each prefix has one or more configurations, each of which may in turn signal one or more submeanings. If a configuration is associated with more than one submeaning, usually one submeaning is spatial and the rest are metaphorical extensions of that submeaning, created by varying the referents of the landmark and the trajector.

I will now give a brief demonstration of how the prefix *za-* could be described using the modified structuralist model. Figure 1 contains diagrams of the configurations of *za-* and of the network which they comprise. The specific submeanings associated with each configuration will be discussed in greater detail and with examples below. Configuration 1 is semantically central to *za-*'s network. Varying referents of cognitive space, ranging from real space to freedom and tolerance, allow this configuration to represent six submeanings, whereas each of the remaining configurations has only one submeaning associated with it. In configuration 1, the domain is a band which has properties distinct from those of the extradomain. To generalize, the domain is normal and/or basal, in contrast with the extradomain, which is abnormal and/or forced. The trajector crosses one of the lateral boundaries of the domain and arrives in the extradomain. This configuration serves as the root of *za-*'s semantic family tree: configurations 2 through 5 are related to configuration 1 by a series of minimal transformations. In going from configuration 1 to 2, the trajector is identified with the trajectory forming a (two-dimensional) object which covers the landmark. The transformations linking configurations 2 and 3 involve the nature of the trajector: for 2 it is a single mass, but for 3 it is a group of countable objects. Configurations 5 and 4 differ from 1 and 2, respectively, in that

they are of three, rather than two, dimensions. For configurations 2 and 4, this variation in dimensionality translates into the difference between covering a surface (two dimensions) and filling a container (three dimensions). When configuration 1 is extended to three dimensions, the trajectory is no longer obliged to transgress a boundary of the landmark, but can escape directly to the extradomain by means of the third dimension.

In the network the configurations are both distinct yet unified as a group through their relationships to configuration 1. Thus the present model integrates the two seemingly opposed aspects of prefixal semantics: unity and diversity. In addition, it exposes the internal semantic structure of the prefix.

#### The Configurations:



#### The Network:

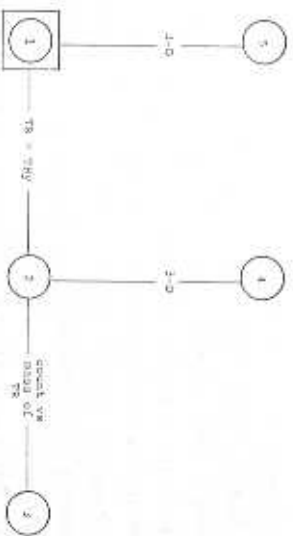


Figure 1

In the limited scope of this paper, the transformations, or "links," which join the configurations may seem arbitrary. At first glance it appears that this analysis is excessively powerful, having no restraints. When more prefixes are analyzed according to this model, however, it becomes apparent that the links form a tightly circumscribed group and can indeed serve to limit the definition of a category. A more extensive survey, including the prefixes *pere-* and *ot-* in addition to *za-*, shows that the thirteen links that structure the networks of these prefixes fall into three patterns in which transformations are performed on the number, identity, and dimensionality of elements of the configuration. The number of types of links is strictly limited. All of the links present in the *za-* network, for example, appear in the *pere-* network as well (see Janda 1984).

The limiting function of the system of links is therefore in some ways parallel to that of distinctive features. Both links and distinctive features comprise relatively small, closed sets. The difference between the present modified structuralist approach and a standard structuralist approach is in the way in which the description is restricted. The system of links imposes internal restrictions on the possible semantic structure of a category, whereas distinctive features focus on establishing external boundaries (that is, by drawing the line between [+feature X] and [-feature X]).

Against this background, the role of the submeanings and their instantiations can be taken up in some detail:

#### CONFIGURATION 1

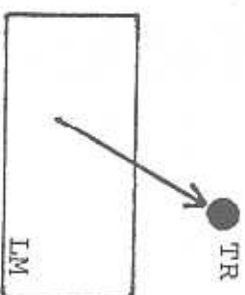


Figure 2

The landmark of *za-* is the normal or canonical environment of the trajectory, a baseline from which the trajectory *za-* deviates. The boundaries of the landmark divide cognitive space into two areas: the area included by the landmark, called the domain, and the area outside the landmark, called the extradomain. The trajectory begins in the domain and then transgresses a boundary of the landmark, passing into the extradomain. The extradomain is in most cases qualitatively different from the domain, and it frequently does not allow the freedom of movement possible in the domain.

*Deflection*: The first submeaning associated with this configuration is <deflection>. The most familiar examples of this submeaning are formed from the verbs of motion and mean 'drop by'.

- (1) "*Zajda* v konfektnyj magazin na Kuzneckom mostu," pisal poet Baťuškov, "ja uvidel bolšuju tolpu moskovskix frantov v lakirovannyx sapogax i v širokix anglijskix frakax."  
 "When I *stopped by* in the candy store on Kuzneckij Bridge," wrote the poet Baťuškov, "I saw a great crowd of Muscovite dandies in polished boots and loose-fitting English tailcoats."

In this example, Baťuškov is the trajector and his straight-line path along the bridge is the landmark. Deflection is foisted upon the trajector (young women) in (2):

- (2) *Togda* devušek v brjūkax ne puskali v kino iť daže *zabirali* v miliciju.  
 'At that time young women wearing pants were not allowed into movie theaters or were even *taken away* to the police station.'

The landmark in (3) refers to canonical position, from which the airplane deviates.

- (3) *Vzryvnoj* volnoj udarilo v niz fuzeljaža, samolet kljunul nosom i čut *zavahisja* na pravoe krylo.  
 'When a shock wave hit the underside of the fuselage, the plane went into a nosedive and *rolled over* a bit onto its right wing.'

The trajector need not be a solid object. In (4) it is vision, which is deflected from its normal straight-ahead path.

- (4) *Začijunuv* v komnatu, gde dolžno bylo proxodit' zasedanie, pisateli s udivleniem uvideli tam Furmanova i sekretarja, kotoryj vel protokol.  
 'Peeking into the room where the meeting was supposed to be taking place, the writers were surprised to see there Furmanov and the secretary, who was handling the agenda.'

As (5) illustrates, the path may refer metaphorically to an activity in which one can get side-tracked.

- (5) *Zakamnyvalis'* li vy kogda-nibud', počemu duraka sčitajut durakom?  
 'Have you ever *stopped to think* why a fool is considered a fool?'

*Fix*: The only significant difference between <deflection> and <fix> is that in the latter the trajector always becomes lodged in the extradomain. Going back to the configuration, we might think of the landmark as a good, solid road, on the shoulder of which is deep, sticky mud. Any devia-

tion from the road will cause the trajector to get stuck!

- (6) *Pri* ruležke šassi samoleta *zaryvalis'* v grunt nastol'ko, što mašiny prixodiloš vytaskivat' na sobstvennyx plečax.  
 'During taxiing the landing gear *would dig its way* into the earth so deeply that we had to drag the planes out again on our shoulders.'

Metaphorically, words as trajector can also become lodged in the extradomain of memory:

- (7) *V* rečenie žizni my stalkivaetsja so mnogimi ljudmi. Počemu že toľko v redkix slučajax my utverždaem sebja pointerosovatsja, kak zovut čeloveka, i *zapomnit'* ego imja?  
 'During our lives we meet many people. Why is it that only in rare cases do we endeavor to take an interest in a person's name and *to commit it to memory*?'

The effect here is that of standing at one point, watching words, ideas, information, and so on float by on the path. When we see an item that we would like to keep, we must pull it out and fix it in the extradomain. Left to its own devices, most information has a way of getting lost, and must, therefore, be secured in some way, as in (8):

- (8) *Spravočku zaregistrovali* i podšli kuda sleduet, zabyv vskore pro starušku i pro ce syna, uvjaznuy v tekuščix delax, kotoryx v miliciji i bez togo bylo mnogo.  
 'They *registered* and filed the certificate accordingly, and soon forgot the old woman and her son, bogged down as they were in routine business, of which there was already plenty at the police station.'

*Change of state*: This is a metaphorical extension of the <fix> submeaning. This submeaning does not include any and all changes of state, but rather makes reference to a specific type of unidirectional change which can be alternately captioned as normal — abnormal, active — inactive, or soft, perishable — hard, permanent. *Za-* prefixed verbs cannot denote state changes that proceed in the opposite direction or that are not semantically subsumed under one of these captions. Cognitive space here represents states. The landmark, or domain, designates the normal, natural state of the trajector, which passes into the extradomain, a semi-permanent state that is abnormal and/or stifles further development.

- (9) *Kak zakaljalas'* stal'.  
 'How the steel was *tempered*.'

The steel (trajector) was made harder, more resistant to change (semi-permanent state of the extradomain).

Concrete objects are not the only potential trajectors for this type of hardening, as we see in (10):

- (10) *Imenno v takix semjax deti polučajut navyki istimo kulturnogo povedenija. Pozdnc eti navyki razovet škola i zakrepiť trudovoj kollektiv.*

'In such families children learn the habits of cultured behavior. Later on, these habits are developed in school and consolidated by the labor collective.'

In some cases the new "hardened" state of the trajector is realized metaphorically as a state of increased difficulty. Note that this severely hinders or halts the otherwise normal development—that is, the trajector is no longer in the domain:

- (11) *Nenastunaja osenňaja pogoda silno zatrudňajala polety.*  
'The foul autumn weather made flying very difficult.'

<Change of state> also accounts for *za-*prefixed verbs meaning 'to pickle, preserve'. Food (trajector), if it is not preserved in some way (brought to the semi-permanent state of the extradomain), will rot (normal development in the domain).

- (12) *Prošijy god voseni meškov odnoj kartoški sobrali da ogurcov kadku zasolili.*  
'Last year they gathered eight bags of potatoes alone and pickled a vat of cucumbers.'

If the trajector is a person, the states involved may be states of consciousness or health. In this case, the person goes from a canonical or active state to an inactive or abnormal state.

- (13) *Romantika, xitrajaja lesnaja veďma s lišim pušistym telom, izvorotil-vaia, kak tat', kak rosomaxa, bacnula Glebu poddyx, otravila sladkim gazom, zagipnoizirovala rassirenymy ližvopečalnymi glazami.*

'Romance, a sly forest witch with a vixen's fluffy body, shrewd as a thief, like a wolverine, on the lookout for our every unsure step, caught Gleb unawares, poisoned him with a sweet gas, and hypnotized him with her wide-open, insincerely sorrowful eyes.'

*Excess:* This submeaning is very similar to <change of state>. Here, again, the landmark is a band of normalcy which the trajector leaves due to excess exposure to, or indulgence in, a given activity. The result of this process is negatively evaluated as torturous or harmful to the patient. Teaching, for example, is not usually in and of itself a torture, but it can

become one if carried to extremes.

- (14) *Byvaet tak: učat, učat čeloveka, emu uže pora svoimi mozgami ševelit', a ego vse učat, smotriš', i xireet čelovek: zarušili.*

'It happens that they will teach and teach a man even though it's already time for him to use his own brains, but they keep on teaching him. Then you see that the man has withered: they have worn him out with their teaching.'

Activities which are normally pleasant and/or beneficial can also be carried to harmful extremes, as in (15) and (16):

- (15) *Ja o xozjajke upominaju edinstvenno potomu, što ona v menja vlyubilas' strastno i čut'-čut' ne zakornila menja na smert'.*

'I mention the landlady only because she fell passionately in love with me and nearly fed me to death.'

- (16) *Družja i prijatelji zavvalili ego ne v meru, tak vot on už teper' dumael o sebe, što on čut'-čut' ne šekspir.*

'His friends and acquaintances praised him too much, and now he thinks that he is almost as good as Shakespeare.'

Daily wear and tear can be too much for one's garments, causing them to get worn out:

- (17) *Akakij Akakievič rešil kak možno reže otdavaj' pračke myt' bele, a čtoby ne zanašivalos', to vsjakij raz, prixodja domoj, skidat' ego.*

'Akakij Akakievič decided to take his underwear to be laundered as infrequently as possible, and, so that it would not get worn out, he always took it off as soon as he got home.'

Predictably enough, many *za-*<excess> prefixed verbs are formed from simplexes that denote torture or torturous activities:

- (18) *Telesnye nakananija vo vsex vidax i formax javjalis' glavnym pedagogičeskim priemom. Dopuskalos' tolko odno ograničenie: kak by ne zasnukat' sovseni!*

'Corporal punishment was an important pedagogical tool. There was only one limitation: don't beat them too much (to death)!'

*Inchoative:* The trajector in this submeaning is an action and the landmark is a person or other agent of the action. Until the action is performed, it remains a hidden potential of the subject of the verb. <Inchoative> identifies the landmark as a basal, or zero, level of activity at which the agent would otherwise continue. A deviation from this base line occurs when an activity is started.

- (19) Vyšla v svet novaja plastinka. Golosom Larisy Gerštein zagovoril drugoj Okudžava.  
'A new record has come out. Another Okudžava has begun to speak in the voice of Larisa Gerštein.'

(20) gives an example of a rather surprising departure from basal behavior.

- (20) Gor'kij govoril kak-to, čto, esli čeloveka vse vremena nazывают свиņej, v konce koncov on zaxryžkaet.  
'Gor'kij once said that if you call a man a pig all the time, he will eventually begin to oink.'

*Exchange:* The trajector trades the domain for the extradomain. In concrete examples, this involves simple substitution.

- (21) Esli čaj *zamenjaet* legkij užin, razmestite na stole maslenki so sivočnym maslom, tarelki s vetčinoj, syrom, xolodnoj reljatinoj i drugimi produktami dlja buterbrodov.  
'If tea is being replaced by a light dinner, set the table with butter-dishes containing butter and plates with ham, cheese, cold veal and other sandwich ingredients.'

Here the afternoon meal (trajector) which is usually tea (domain) is replaced by a more substantial repast (extradomain).

More frequently the exchange involves things such as work, attention, and love, which can be regarded as entities (and therefore landmarks) only metaphorically. A classic example of this submeaning is *zarabotat'* 'to earn', in which work is exchanged for pay or, as in (22), for some other compensation:

- (22) U nix v dome počti vsegda byla xorošaja, sytnaja eda: xleba Kuznina *zarabatyval* vdovov' daže v neurožajnye gody; moloko i mjaso šli so svoego dvora. No dengi . . .  
'At home they almost always had good, satisfying food: Kuznina earned enough grain even in years of poor harvest and they got milk and meat from their own plot. But money . . .'

In many examples, however, attention is focused almost exclusively on the trajector's attainment of the extradomain. The specific sacrifice (LM) which the trajector has to give up is unspecified.

- (23) Tak prišla k Rjabovoj bolšaja, nastojaščaja ljubov'. Katja *zasažila* ee, i ja radovalas' za podругu.  
'Thus a great, true love came to Rjabovaja. Katja had deserved it, and I was happy for my friend.'

## CONFIGURATION 2

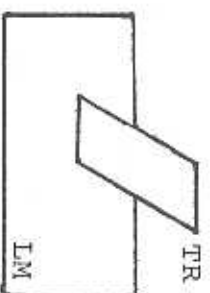


Figure 3.

*Cover:* The trajector in this configuration is a mass which is applied to the landmark, and thereby covers it. The exactness of the fit of the trajector to the landmark is determined by context, and is the shape of the landmark.

- (24) Leto bylo na isxode. Oblaka vse čaške *zavolaktivali* nebo.  
'Summer was on its way out. Clouds covered the sky more and more frequently.'

- (25) 1917 god. Na vesax istorii — sudba Rossii i buduščee proletarskoj revoljucii. Lenin vynužden skryvatsja. Nikem ne zamечennyj, *zagri-mirovannyj*, vyxodit on iz vagona na stancii.  
'It is 1917. The fate of Russia and the future of the proletarian revolution hang in the balances of history. Lenin is forced to hide. Unnoticed by anyone and *made up*, he gets out of the train at the station.'

The covering in (25) is accomplished on two levels: the make-up covers both Lenin's face and his identity.

(26) is an example of a metaphorical use of a cover verb which is also serviceable in concrete contexts.

- (26) Svoim prostupkom vy opozoril svetloe imja gvardejca, *zajpatnali* čest' svoego slavnogo boevogo polka.  
'You have disgraced the splendid title of guardsman with your transgression and *desmirched* the honor of your own glorious fighting regiment.'

The following example illustrates metaphorical extension of the submeaning <cover>. *Zaglutit'* 'drown out' identifies sounds as entities (landmark and trajector), the louder of which covers up the other.

- (27) Zvuki lesa *zaglutilis'* revom dvigatelja i boltovej sotrudnikov.  
'The sounds of the forest were *drowned out* by the roar of the engine and the charter of the workers.'

## CONFIGURATION 3

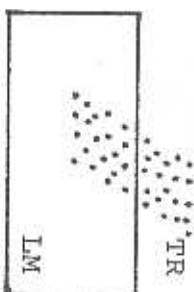


Figure 4.

*Splatter*: This submeaning is identical to <cover> except that the trajector is a group of objects rather than a single mass. The result is a scattering of objects or spots over a surface rather than a solid layer, as in <cover>. Two examples:

(28) *Nel'zia zasor'jal' pljaž ob"vedkami, okurkami, gazetnoj bumagoj i t.p.*  
'One must not litter the beach with scraps of food, cigarette-butts, newspaper, etc.'

(29) *Vo vremja dožd'ivoj pogody možno vstreči' devušek, u kotoryx čulki i niz palto zabryzguny grjazju.*  
'During rainy weather one can meet girls whose stockings and coat hems are splattered with mud.'

## CONFIGURATION 4

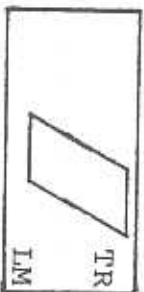


Figure 5.

*Fill*: This submeaning is also very closely related to <cover>. Rather than a two-dimensional surface to be covered, the <fill> submeaning makes reference to a three-dimensional container or hole to be filled. Unlike the boundaries of a two-dimensional surface, the walls of a container cannot be transgressed by the mass which is applied to it. The trajector, therefore, must remain inside the landmark in this configuration.

(30) *Vo!, razglad'ie štany i zastopaj'e dyročku.*  
'Here, iron these pants and darn the hole.'

(31) *Vdrug dver' s zadnego kryč'a, ta v kotoruju on vošel včera, kogda priexal, raspaxnuł'sj, nečto massivnoe vdvinuł'sj i zagorodila proem.*  
'Suddenly the back door, through which he had entered yesterday when he arrived, flew open and some massive object moved in and blocked the passageway.'

## CONFIGURATION 5

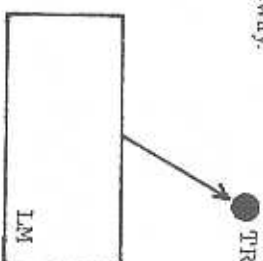


Figure 6.

*Surface*: This is a minor submeaning, associated with a small number of verbs, all of which describe the removal of something (trajector) from the surface of another object (landmark). Configuration 5 is a three-dimensional version of configuration 1. When locked in two dimensions, the trajector of configuration 1, which is located on the landmark, must transgress the landmark's boundary in order to leave it. In configuration 5, the trajector escapes via the third dimension.

(32) *Čto što u vas na xalate opjat' p'atno? Skinite da dajte skoree, ja vyvedu i zamoju. Zavtra ničego ne budet.*  
'Do you have a spot on your dress again? Take it off and give it to me right away. I'll take it out and wash it off. Tomorrow it will be fine.'

(33) *V dremučij les neset svoj klad seljannin. Gluboko v zemlju zarvyvaet i na češučatoj sosne svoj znak s zakučiatem zarubaet.*  
'The villager carries his treasure into the dense forest. Saying a curse, he etches his mark on a scaly pine.'

As stated above, these five configurations are joined in the *za*-network, a diagram of the semantic structure of this prefix. The network illustrates the tight unity of *za*-'s submeanings: each configuration is only one or at most two links removed from the prototype. Both the diversity of the members of this semantic category and the system which holds them together are explicit.

Now that the analysis of *za*- has been completed, I will comment on the relevance of the semantic structure of prefixes to aspect. With the exception

of a few inherently perfective simplex verbs and the suffix *-nu-*, perfectivization is the exclusive domain of the verbal prefixes. Given this fact, it stands to reason that the meanings of the verbal prefixes should contain a clue to the meaning of the term "perfective." As illustrated in the configurations of the modified structuralist model, the prefix acts as a semantic organizer in a verb; it sets the stage and gives a general plot to the verbal activity. The semantics of the verbs merely identify the actors and fill in details of the setting. The configuration depicts the contribution of the prefix: the landmark set in cognitive space is the stage, the trajectory the main character, and the trajectory is the plot. Each verb which can combine with the prefix will designate the referents of the landmark and of cognitive space and assign the role of trajectory to an appropriate person, object, or whatever. Thus the play outlined by a prefix can be endlessly rehearsed, its variations limited only by the available base verbs. By assigning a plot, prefixes take what are for the most part activity and state terms (according to Vendler's 1957/67 nomenclature) and give them the outlines of accomplishment and achievement terms. I suspect that it is this organization of what is largely undifferentiated activity into actual events that is at work in the perfectivizing property of prefixes.

University of California, Los Angeles

#### NOTES

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1. See Flier's use of configurations (1975, 1984, this volume) in describing prefixal semantics. See also the configurations or "profiles" in Brugman 1981, Lindner 1981, and Rudzka-Oslyn 1983a, 1983b.

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