

Mode of Action Nouns and Their Diatheses

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Abstract

Conceptual apparatus of “Meaning – Text” theory suggests a thoroughly elaborated classification of predicative nouns. This classification distinguishes nouns of action, nouns of subject, object and second object, nouns of instrument, place, and other circumstances, see Mel’čuk 1974: 87, Apresjan 1974: 48, 199. This paper deals with Russian mode of action nouns (such as *počerk* ‘handwriting’, *poxodka* ‘step’). It is demonstrated that when a mode of action noun is motivated by a transitive verb it has a special diathesis in which the subject can be expressed not by instrumental case, as usual, but by a possessive.

1 Introduction

Possessives in Russian can be divided into two groups.

1) Possessive pronouns – personal, such as *moj* ‘my’ *tvoj*, ‘your’, *vaš* ‘your’, *naš* ‘our’ and, with some reservations also 3d person pronouns *ego* ‘his’, *ee* ‘her’, *ix* ‘their’; reflexive pronoun *svoj*; relative pronoun *čej* ‘whose’; indefinite pronouns *čej-to*, *čej-nibud*’, *čej-libo*, *koe-čej*; and negative *ničej*.

2) Possessive adjectives in *-ov*, *-in*, *-ovskij*. Adjectives ending in *-ij*: *lisa-lisij* ‘fox-fox’s’, are drastically different and should be studied separately.

Both groups of possessives are described at length in (Shmelev 2008) devoted to possessives in the context of concrete nouns (*predmetnye imena*). I am interested in possessives in the context of predicative nouns, in particular, in the context of deverbal nouns (such as *interpretacija* ‘interpretation’ from *interpretirovat* ‘interpret’) and verbal nouns, such as *koncepcija* ‘conception’ from a hypothetical verb meaning ‘create a conception’.

2 Possessive pronouns

In its basic meaning a possessive pronoun expresses the idea of belonging to a person. In other words, it denotes a person as a possessor. As is known, the idea of possession appears only in the prototypical context – in the context of a name of an object (*moja kružka* ‘my cup’, *ee rasčeska* ‘her comb’). In the context of a predicate noun the possessive pronoun does not express possession and does not necessarily refer to a person. In the first place this concerns the 3d person pronouns: *ee otsutstvie* can contextually mean ‘lack of *water*’, ‘lack of *freedom*’, etc.

As regards referential status of possessive personal pronouns, they are all alike in allowing only referential use. In fact, a non-possessive personal pronoun may refer to a generic NP, while possessive pronouns cannot be used this way:

- (1) Surovyj Dant ne preziral *soneta*. V *nem* [sonete] žar ljubvi Petrarka izlival. ‘Severe Dante didn’t disdain a *sonnet*. Petrarch expressed the flame of his love in *it*’

3 Possessive adjectives

Now about possessive adjectives ending in *-ov* (*-ev*), *-in* (*nin*) and *-ovskij*. They also refer to a concrete person; we have all rights to say that possessive adjective is a POSSESSIVE FORM of a referential noun – very often it is a proper name.

There is a large and ever growing class of possessive adjectives formed with the help of the suffix *-ovskij*: *vendlerovskaja klassifikacija* ‘Vendler’s classification’ *rixterovskoe ispolnenie* ‘Richter’s presentation’ etc. While the pattern with *-ov* is non-productive – E. A. Zemskaja (1992: 76) gives only one example *Gulliverov* ‘Gulliver’s’ – adjectives ending in *-ovskij* with possessive meaning are easily formed, practically without limitations, from foreign names recognizable as belonging to the 2d declension. The same can be said about adjectives that can be formed with the help of the suffix *-in* from names of the first declension (*Vanin* ‘Vanja’s’, *Šarlottin* ‘Sharlotta’s’).

Adjectives ending in *-ovskij*, as well as possessive pronouns, may have both possessive function and the function of the subject. Thus, we have full right to speak about common possessive semantics of pronouns and adjectives.

In so far as a noun motivating a possessive is referential it is possible to transfer a possessive construction to a genitive one (the example below, as well as most of the examples that follow are taken from National corpus of Russian, site in the Internet www.ruscorpora.ru):

- (2) *Inogda sviridovskie vzgljady na grjaduščee* prosto donel’zja černy i mračny = *vzgljady Sviridova na grjaduščee* [Sviridov’s views on the future = views of Sviridov on the future]

4 Mode of action nouns and their possessive-genitive diathesis

Now let us return to predicative mode of action nouns motivated by a transitive verb. Remarkably, they constitute a context in which possessive pronouns and adjectives effectively oust the genitive in its subject expressing function. See an example (on the basis of Padučeva 1984, 1974: 203):

- (3) a. *tvoe ispolnenie Šopena* ‘your rendition of Shopen’
b. *Rixterovskoe ispolnenie Šopena* ‘Richter’s rendition of Shopen’
c. **ispolnenie Rixtera* [gen] *Šopena* [gen]

As follows from (3c), in the context of the genitive object, the subject cannot be expressed by the genitive (though two genitives are not excluded in principle, cf., e.g., acceptable *lišenie brata nasledstva* ‘brother’s deprivation of heritage’); but it can be expressed by a possessive pronoun, as in (3a), and a possessive adjective, as in (3b).

The problem is, how to delimitate the class of predicative nouns allowing for the possessive construction illustrated by examples (3a) and (3b).

As is known, the participant subject of a predicative noun is usually expressed by Instrumental, the genitive being reserved for the object:

- (4) *razrušenie Novgoroda moskovskim knjazem* ‘destruction of Novgorod by the Moscow prince’

Still there are contexts in which only genitive can be used to express the subject. For example, the subject is expressed by the genitive if the substantive is motivated by an intransitive verb:

- (5) *priezd brata* ‘arrival of the brother’

- (6) *vozvraščenie Ivana na rodinu* ‘return of Ivan to motherland’

If the substantive is motivated by a transitive verb its subject can be expressed by a genitive only in some special contexts.

1. The genitive subject is possible in the context of nouns derived from verbs *ljubit'*, *uvažat'*, which, being transitive, do not license genitive object in the corresponding derived nouns (*ljubit'* *apel'siny* 'love oranges' gives *ljubov' k apel'sinam* 'love to oranges' and not **ljubov' apel'sinov* 'love of oranges [gen]').

2. If the predicate noun belongs to the class of nouns of object (i.e. such nouns as *sovet* 'council', *predloženie* 'suggestion', *namerenie* 'intention', *vospominanie* 'recollection'), the subordinate genitive of such a noun is interpreted, non-ambiguously, as referring to the subject:

(7) *predloženie Kasparova* 'suggestion of Kasparov'

This is but natural – in fact, disappearance of the participant object is inherent in the essence of their derivation pattern: Object valence of the noun is filled, so to say, by the noun itself.

3. If the name has a REDUCED DIATHESIS (in the sense of Padučeva 1977), namely, objectless, the dependent genitive is unambiguously interpreted as the genitive of subject, the implied object being expressed somewhere in the context (in example below the implied object is underlined):

(8) *Mašina* ne prošla proverki *ekspertov* 'the machine didn't undergo the check of *experts*'
On poddalsja na obman *zlopyxatelej* 'he yielded to deception of *scoundrels*'
Èto obespečilo *emu* podderžku *kolleg* 'it ensured to him support of *the colleagues*'

On the other hand, if the noun has a genitive expressing the object then the genitive subject is excluded in principle (see Padučeva 1984) – the only case possible for the subject is the instrumental, as in (4).

As for possessives, they can express subject in the context of a predicative noun with the genitive object, see impossible (3c) and flawless (3a) Example elucidating this distinction between genitive and the possessive pronoun was given in (Iordanskaja 1967: 23).

It is remarkable that all possessives behave in the same way – not only possessive pronoun is acceptable in the context of a genitive subject but also the possessive adjective:

(9) *gedelevo dokazatel'stvo* teoremy o polnote 'Goedel's *proof* of this theorem'
papino istolkovanie moej pros'by 'father's *interpretation* of my request'
šaljapinskoe ispolnenie ètoj arii 'Shaljapin's *performance* of this aria'

Thus, examples (3) and (9) exemplify what may be called a POSSESSIVE-GENITIVE DIATHESIS of a deverbal noun: possessive-subject, genitive-object. The problem is that this diathesis isn't possible for all predicate names. For example, (10a), (11a) are not correct – instead one should say (10b), (11b):

(10) a. **moe* sobljudenie tajny 'my keeping of the secret'
b. sobljudenie *mnoju* tajny 'keeping of the secret *by me*'

(11) a. *Vse zavisit ot *ego* sobljudenija tajny 'everything depends on *his* keeping of the secret'
b. Vse zavisit ot sobljudenija *im* tajny 'everything depends on the keeping of the secret *by him*'

The class of nouns compatible with the possessive-genitive diathesis is to be explored. In fact, in the context of this class the construction in question is not only possible – in fact, possessive is here the only possibility to express the subject.

In (Padučeva 1984) names affording the diathesis with the possessive subject and genitive object were attested as MODE OF ACTION nouns. Such nouns are foreseen in the classification of predicative nouns in "Meaning – Text" model. But examples are given, both by Mel'chuk and by Apresjan, only of nouns either derived from intransitive verbs (*poxodka* 'step', *povedenie* 'behavior') or having a generic object denoting a habitual action or even a property ensuing from habitual actions (*počerk* 'handwriting', *proiznošenie* 'pronunciation'). For such nouns possessive-genitive diathesis is, naturally, impossible.

At the same time, in (Apresjan 1974: 199), where regular ambiguity is discussed of nouns of action and nouns of manner of action, such nouns as *perevod* ‘translation’, *redakcija* ‘edition’ are mentioned as mode of action nouns. It is also noted that syncretism is possible of mode of action nouns and nouns of result. If so then I don’t bother if some of the nouns disposing of possessive-genitive diathesis, can be called both manner of action nouns and nouns of result: a strict border is here absent.

A class of mode of action nouns outlined in this way is sufficiently broad. Mode of action nouns motivated by transitive verbs are of special interest (such as *traktovka*, *ispolnenie*, *ponimanie*, *osmyslenie*, *izobrazenie*, *upotreblenie*, *postanovka*, *tolkovanje*). In fact, these are nouns having subject and object in their argument structure (Grimshaw 1990) (i.e. “glubinno-syntaksičeskaja” structure), though they are not situation names, which, according to the theory, preserve the main valences of a transitive verb.

Mode of action nouns are formed from verbs with the valences “Who?”, “Whom/What?” and “How?”; it is this last valence that differentiates mode of action nouns from situation nouns.

The verb-noun derivation pattern looks like this:

$X \text{ traktuet } Y \text{ Z-ovo} \Rightarrow X\text{-ova traktovka } Y\text{-a Z-ova.}$

‘X treats Y in a Z way $\Rightarrow$ X’s treatment of Y is Z-like’.

As is known, the general rule says that the deverbal noun denoting the *i*-th argument of the verb V fills its *i*-th valence by itself, so that this valence is cancelled in the argument structure of the name. Are mode of action nouns an exception to this rule? In fact, they seem not to lose any valences.

The explanation is to be looked for in the paradoxical status of the argument Result. In fact, in many verb classes the position of direct object is occupied by the participant Patient (for example: *prokolol podošvu* ‘pierced the sole’) or some other participant, such as Goal, as in *rešil zadaču* ‘solved the problem’ or Source, as in *otrecenziroval stat’ju* ‘reviewed an article’. While the participant Result does not enter the argument structure of the verb. When the name of result is formed the participant Result can be said to be excluded from the argument structure of the noun, but it has no effect on the syntactic potential of the word.

Hence this remarkable fact that mode of action nouns (being at the same time nouns of Result, preserve the main valences of the motivating verb, both subject and object one).

So, mode of action nouns inherit from the transitive verb both subject and object valences because they are formed along the derivation pattern that doesn’t absorb either subject or object. Still they differ from situation nouns, for their subject valence cannot be saturated by an NP in the instrumental but only by a possessive pronoun or a possessive adjective (such as *mamin* ‘mother’s’, *Andrejev* ‘Andrej’s’) – including the adjective in *-ovskij* (*otcovskij* ‘father’s’, *Rasselovskij* ‘Russel’s’). Some examples (from Padučeva 1984).

- (12) *Ego vybor sekundanta byl neudačen* ‘his choice of a second was unsuccessful’
Č’e ispolnenie Šopena Vam ponravilos’ bol’še? ‘whose rendition of Chopin you liked most’
A kakoe Vaše ob’jasnenie pričin ètoj ssory ‘and what is your explanation of the reasons of this quarrel?’
- (13) *rasselovskaja traktovka sobstvennyx imen* ‘Russel’s treatment of proper names’
Vot kak obstoit delo v maminom ponimanii ‘this is how the matter stands in mother’s opinion’

If the subject valence is filled by instrumental the noun cannot be interpreted as a mode of action noun:

- (14) a. *Ego ponimanie ètoj problemy ne sovpadaet s moim* ‘his understanding of the problem doesn’t coincide with mine’ [*понимание* ‘understanding’ – mode of action name]
- б. *Ponimanie im ètoj problemy svidetel’stvuet o ego iskušennosti v takix delax* ‘the fact that he understands the problem testifies his experience in the matters like this one’ [*ponimanie* – name of a fact]

- (15) a. *Ego ispolnenie Šopena bylo velikolepno* ‘his *performance* of Shopen was magnificent’
[*ispolnenie* – mode of action name]
b. *Ispolnenie im Šopena bylo neumestno* ‘*performance* of Shopen *by him* was out of place’
[*ispolnenie* – name of action]

A mode of action noun can be a noun of argument and a noun of circumstance. Such words as *počerk*, *poxodka* have the idea ‘How’ in their semantics, and the corresponding participant is inherited from the circumstance of the motivating verb. The noun *udar* ‘stroke’ in the context *U nego sil’nyj udar* ‘he has a strong stroke’ (example from Mel’čuk 1974: 87) is also the name of a circumstance. NB also such nouns as *povedenie* ‘behavior’, *proiznošenie* ‘pronunciation’.

It is very often the case that the participant subject is not inherited by a circumstantial noun, cf. such deverbal nouns as *vyxod*, *vyezd*. Nevertheless it is not a general rule inevitable in the course of semantic derivation.

The importance of making the difference between situation and mode of action nouns can be demonstrated on the following example:

- (16) **Opisanie Tomsonom uslovij, opredeljajuščix vybor padeža, ostaetsja odnim iz lučšix*
‘description *by Thomson* of conditions determining the choice of case is up till now one of the best’

The NP *opisanie Tomsonom uslovij, opredeljajuščix vybor padeža* is well formed and causes no doubts. But it is out of place in this context – in fact, the noun *opisanie* is assigned a diathesis appropriate for nouns of event or fact, though in the context *ostaetsja odnim iz lučšix* it should be interpreted as a mode of action noun, so that the subject is to be a possessive and not instrumental:

- (17) *Tomsonovskoe opisanie uslovij, opredeljajuščix vybor padeža, ostaetsja odnim iz lučšix*
‘*Thomson’s* description of conditions determining the choice of case is up till now one of the best’

The opposite is also true – if a noun cannot be understood as a mode of action noun a possessive cannot be used as its subject marker. In (18) for example, a possessive pronoun cannot be substituted for the instrumental because the name *ponimanie*, in this context, is not a mode of action noun:

- (18) *Neobxodimoe uslovie perevoda – ponimanie eju <mašinoj> teksta v polnom ob’eme* ‘a necessary condition of adequate translation is a complete understanding *by it* <the machine> of the text’

No wonder that mode of action nouns are readily used in the context of characterizing predicate, see (17) above and (19) below:

- (19) *ego izobraženie Napoleona sliškom čelovečnoe* ‘his depiction of Napoleon is too human’

Mode of action nouns have one additional specific diathesis with the genitive object raising – this diathesis can be called attributive:

- (20) a. *ego izobraženie Napoleona* ‘his depiction of *Napoleon*’
b. *Napoleon v ego izobraženii* ‘*Napoleon* in his depiction’

Note that the meaning of possessive adjectives in *-ovskij* and *-in* is not identical: the NP *papina fotografija* ‘father’s photo’ has two interpretations (*papa* ‘father’ the subject and *fotografija* ‘photograph’ a mode of action noun, and *papa* the object), while *velaskesovskij portret* ‘Velasquez’s portrait’ has only one meaning (Velasquez – the subject).

5 Examples

Examples below are given in order to demonstrate two diatheses of a mode of action noun – possessive-genitive and attributive. Examples are given for words *analiz* ‘analysis’, *videnie* ‘perception’, *vybor* ‘choice’, *izobraženie* ‘depiction’, *izloženie* ‘account’, *konceptija* ‘conception’, *ocenka* ‘evaluation’, *perevod* ‘translation’, *plan* ‘plan’, *podbor* ‘selection’, *ponimanie* ‘understanding’, *postanovka* ‘staging’, *pročtenie* ‘reading’, *rešenie* ‘solution’, *spособ* ‘mode’, *traktovka* ‘treatment’, *tolkovanie* ‘explication’, *formulirovka* ‘formulation’.

ANALIZ

On otmečaeť, čto *saxarovskij analiz opasnosti* mirovogo jadernogo samoubijstva v točnosti sovпадаet s dokumentami, opublikovannymi amerikanskimi učenyimi.

VIDENIE

... perenos v sovremennost’ dejstvija romana Oruëlla liš’ banaliziruet tragediju *oruëllovskogo videnija totalitarizma XX veka*...

VOSPRIJATIE

Èti otnošeniya pomagajut vyjavit’ nekotorye črezvyčajno suščestvennye aspekty *šoloxovskogo vosprijatija žizni*.

VYBOR

- (1) Vidimo, kontakt s aviapromyšlennost’ju i poval’naja uvlečennost’ aviaciej 30 godov skazalis’ na *otcovskom vybore* buduščej *professii* syna.
- (2) rabotaet uže 23 goda, i ni razu ne požalela o *svoem vybore professii*!
- (3) Esli čelovek lišen vozmožnosti vybora zla, to *ego vybor dobra* polnost’ju deval’viruetsja.

IZOBRAŽENIE

Naprimen, k *ego izobraženiju revnivca*, v lice Otello, nel’zja pribavit’ ni odnoj čerty: tak ono polno.

IZLOŽENIE

Russkomu že čitatel’ju, odolevšemu *rollanovskoe izloženie* ètogo cirkovogo *vran’ja*, napomnju èto.

INTERPRETACIJA

I zdes’ snova prixodit na pamjat’ “Andželo” i *ego lotmanovskaja interpretacija*.

Besy, ved’m y i privoroty – èto uže sugubo *otcovskaja interpretacija*. [Anna Tkačeva. Privorot (1996)]

ISPOLNENIE

proslušivalas’ magnitofonnaja zapis’ “Petuškov” v *Veničkinom ispolnenii*

No, požaluj, imenno *Runino ispolnenie* do six por predstavljaetsja mne naibolee točnym.

ISTOLKOVANIE

čuvstvo jumora ej nevedomo – čto ona dokazala *svoim istolkovaniem slova* “trubadur”

KONCEPTIJA

To, čto s nim tam proisxodit, vpolne ukladyvaetsja v *bessonovskuju koncepciju* francuzskogo kino. približalsja k *tolstovskoj koncepcii iskusstva*

No vernemsja k *nemcovskoj koncepcii pravitel’sтва-uborščicy*.

platonovskaja koncepcija ljubvi kak vosxoždenija po lestnice prekrasnogo

V *Darvinovskoj koncepcii* èvoljucija sostoit v tom, čto imeet mesto mexanizm prisposobljenija.

OCENKA

A nas vse v klaske porazila *ego ocenka* moix skromnyx uspehov.

PEREVOD

V *pasternakovskom perevode Šekspira*, kak i v tekste Griboedova, postojanno proisxodit peremol vtorgajuščixsja v nego kuskov prozy.

Ljuterovskij perevod "Novogo Zaveta" (1522) markiruet načalo principial'no novogo otnošenija k Pisaniju.

PLAN

čubajsovskij plan restrukturizacii RAO "EÈS Rossii" prokremlevskie frakcii poručili provodit' ne "komande" samogo Čubajsa, a pravitel'stvu M. Kas'janova

V Pariže car' zakazal konduktoru Djumenju kopiju *leblonovskogo plana Peterburga*, zaplativ za nee 100 livrov.

Ustinovskie plany ukreplenija peredovoj fenomenal'ny po masštabam, po raznoobraziju primenjaemyx sredstv i detal'nosti prorabotki vsego ètogo raznoobrazija.

PODBOR

Ja lovlju sebja sejšas na tom, čto *moj podbor svidetel'stv* i argumentov sliškom tendencioznyj, odnostoronnij, umyšlennyj.

PONIMANIE

Nravstvennye osnovy byli v menja založeny v sem'e, tak čto *moe ponimanie grexa* – ne cerkovnoe, a žitejskoe.

ja ... starajus' dat' sebe otčet, čto novogo vnesla èta fraza v *moe ponimanie teksta* i kak perestroila staroe

Esli èto *moe širokoe ponimanie slova* revoljucija pokazalos' g. Astaf'evu nepravil'nym, to on mog by prjamo na èto vozrazit'...

... oppozicionnuju kul'turu, po svoemu smyslu blizkuju k kul'ture kritičeskogo *diskursa* v *gouldnerovskom ponimanii*

jungovskoe ponimanie duševnoj žizni čeloveka "kak vnutrennej dramy so množestvom personažej"

POSTANOVKA

Mandel'stam, očevidno, ulovil karnaval'nuju storonu revoljucionnogo "dejstva", načavšegosja s *mejerxol'dovskoj postanovki "Maskarada"*.

Čisto *mandel'stamovskaja postanovka problemy* povedenija.

PROČTENIE

Stol' že somnitel'no *ego pročtenie* privatizacii.

S "*nabokovskim*" *pročteniem Gogolja* možno ne soglašat'sja.

REŠENIE

Svoe rešenje problemy predlagajut neskol'ko amerikanskix kompanij, kotorye vypuskajut kamufljažnye kontejnery dlja bazovyx stancij.

najti edinstvennyj ključ k ponimaniju rasskaza ili daže najti *čexovskoe rešenje voprosov*, postavlennyx v nem

SPOSOB

èto – liš' *lužkovskij sposob ogradit'* rossijan ot raspredelenija obščšenacional'nogo doxoda

TRAKTOVKA

Kommunističeskie bjurokraty vozmuščalis' *mejerxol'dovskoj traktovkoj* "Revizora" – nezamaskirovannoj satiroj na nix samix.

TOLKOVANIE

Interesno, ... čto oni dumajut o *moem tolkovanii Apokalipsisa*?

FORMULIROVKA

Ibo ètoj "svobody duxa" nikogda i ne moglo byt' u nas imenno iz-za pervyx dvux položenij *aksakovskoj formulirovki "russkogo puti"*.

6 Conclusion

Thus, a class of predicative nouns is presented (namely, mode of action nouns) that have definite common character and a specific diathesis with subject-possessive. The derivation model that generates possessive adjectives in *-ovskij* is highly productive and neologisms of this kind are widely used in modern Russian.

I am not sure that the term mode of action nouns is appropriate for the class of nouns in question but the class described definitely deserves attention.

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