

The Continuous Expanse of the World and Language¹

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Abstract

The paper deals with one type of metonymic transfers namely «BORDER → (adjacent) SPACE» which is illustrated with Russian nouns indicating the outermost part of an object: *kraj* ‘edge’, *storona* ‘side’, *zad* ‘back’ and *ploskost* ‘plane’.

Keywords

Semantics, polysemy, metonymy.

1 The spatial aspect of the world and its reflection in word meanings

The spatial aspect of the arrangement of the world is extremely important for man and finds a variety of means of expression in language. For example, in Russian one could mention at the very least the spatial prepositions *pered* ‘in front of’, *za* ‘behind’, *okolo* ‘near’ and the adverbs *daleko* ‘far’, *szadi* ‘behind’, *vverx* ‘upward’ as well as verbs, in the meaning of which the spatial component occupies a central or a more peripheral position (*primykat* ‘to abut’: *Stena primykajet k domu* ‘The wall abuts the house’ vs. *vojti* ‘to go into’, *vytaščit* ‘to drag out’, *perenesti* ‘to transfer’). Of course, there are also nouns with indicate a notion of space: *prostranstvo* ‘expanse’, *mesto* ‘place’, (*gorodskaja*) *ploščad* ‘(city) square’, *komnata* ‘room’.

The linguistic reflection of the spatial arrangement of the world in Russian has been very actively studied and from various points of view (see, for example (Arutjunova & Levontina, 2002; Raxilina, 2000; Vsevolodova & Vladimirkij, 2009)). One aspect of the study is the description of various types of transfers on the basis of which derivative meanings of spatial words are formed. These derivatives can have spatial or other meanings.

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A rather large group of Russian nouns related to the notion of space consists of words which name – in their principal or only meaning – parts of physical or territorial objects and indicate the position of this part relative to the surrounding area: *niz* ‘bottom’, *bok* ‘side’, *veršina* ‘summit’, *konec* ‘end’, *kromka* ‘edge’, *opuška* ‘verge’, etc.

According to the position which the named part occupies, nouns may be divided into two groups: the first consists of words which indicate the outermost part of an object, which delimit it and beyond which the object no longer exists: *podnožije* (*gory*) ‘the foot (of a mountain)’, *verx* (*kolonny*) ‘the summit (of a column)’, *poverxnost’* (*steny*) ‘the surface (of a wall)’, *granica* (*osveščennogo prostranstva*) ‘the border (of a lit space)’. The words just mentioned belong to this group. The second, much smaller group includes words which, on the contrary, name the central part of the object, which doesn’t come into contact with the surrounding space: *seredina* (*komnaty*) ‘the middle (of a room)’, *centr* (*kruga*) ‘the center (of a circle)’, *serdcevina* (*jabloka*) ‘the core (of an apple)’. The following will deal with a few words of the first group.

2 Two types of nouns: discreteness vs. continuity

Many of the nouns which refer to the outermost part of an object embody the naive notion of native speakers that the surrounding world is, to a great extent, discrete: indeed, the word combinations *konec verjovki* ‘the end of a rope’ or *bok arbuza* ‘the side of a watermelon’ do not imply any existence beyond the end or the side of any other objects, even if the rope is tied to something or the side of the watermelon is laying on the ground. Describing the difference between spatial limits and temporal beginning and end points, N. D. Arutjunova comments that «the end or limit of spatial objects does not necessarily imply the direct passage to another object», as opposed to the temporal limit, which, being the end of one time segment, simultaneously indicates the beginning of the next (Arutjunova, 2002: 5 and passim).

It can even be said that most spatial lexemes of such words not only do not imply the passage to another object but, on the contrary, point to the empty space which limits an object that has *verx* ‘top’, *niz* ‘bottom’, *bok* ‘side’, *poverxnost’* ‘surface’, etc.

However, among the names of the outermost parts of an object there are those which, on the contrary, imply the presence of two objects which are in contact. Thus, for example, the word *granica* ‘border’ has two spatial meanings, each of which focuses on the limit of two spatial entities, located one next to the other, which appears in the government patterns: *granica 1.1 između morem i sušej* ‘border 1.1 between the sea and dry land’, *granica 1.2 SŠA i Meksiki* ‘border 1.2 between the USA and Mexico’ (lexemes are numbered, hereinafter, as they appear in (Apresjan et al., 2010)). It’s not by chance that objects, which we think of as bordering on empty space, have no borders, e.g. *kraj odejala* <*kovra, rukava*> ‘the edge of a blanket <rug, sleeve>’, but not **granica odejala* <*kovra, rukava*> ‘the border of a blanket <rug, sleeve>’. Such meanings may be considered as the linguistic manifestation of the continuity of space, the replacement of one spatial object by another.

It is interesting, however, that words which don’t imply a passage to another object can be used in certain contexts and even have separate derivative meanings which point to the

continuity of the material world. Such usages and meanings arise as a result of metonymic transfers.

3 Metonymy as a way of reflecting continuity of the world

Metonymy of this type, as well as other types of metonymic transfers were studied in (Padučeva, 2000; Padučeva, 2004). E. V. Padučeva calls this type of transfer: «BORDER [line] → SPACE [which is adjacent]» and cites, as an example, the word *krug* ‘circle’ «which means both border – i.e. circumference and all the internal space delimited by it» (Padučeva, 2004: 166); cf. also *v čerte goroda* ‘within the confines of the city’, *v prežnix granicax* ‘within the previous borders’. Moreover, “not only borders can encroach on neighbouring territory but also other discrete spatial objects, cf. *na reke* ‘on the river’, *na dače* ‘at the country home’, *vstretilis’ na lyžne* ‘(they) met at the ski track’, *pojexal na mel’nicu* ‘(he) drove to the mill’, *pošjol na more* ‘(he) went to the sea’ (in the meaning ‘to the sea shore’), etc.” (Ibid., 167). The author comments that this transfer is not completely productive and is limited by specific syntactic parameters, namely, judging by the examples, it occurs in certain positional and directional contexts.

As is known, if, among the meanings of a word there is a relationship of metonymy, especially a productive one, the word usually is not felt to be polysemic (Padučeva, 2000: 250). However, in the dictionary definition, polysemy of such an origin should be indicated.

Let us look at a few of the words that name the outermost parts of an object from the point of view of the presence of this type of transfer in the system of their meanings.

3.1 The main example: KRAJ ‘edge’

Let us begin with the vocable KRAJ ‘edge’. The principal meaning of *kraj* 1.1 is defined as being ‘that extremely small part of a physical or territorial object A1 beyond which there are none of its other parts’, which fully reflects the idea of discreteness. The following contexts provide examples of the use of this lexeme: *kraj odejala* <prostyni> ‘the edge of a blanket <sheet>’, *kraj rukava* <jubki> ‘the edge of a sleeve <skirt>’, *kraj lista* <gazety> ‘the edge of a page <newspaper>’, *kraj taburetki* <sidenja> ‘the edge of a stool <a seat>’, *kraj zonta* <šljapy> ‘the edge of an umbrella <hat>’, *kraj stupen’ki* ‘the edge of a step’, *kraj sceny* <pomosta, pričala> ‘the edge of the stage <platform, pier berth>’, *kraj ogoroda* <zaroslej> ‘the edge of a vegetable garden <thicket>’.

As is evident from the definition, one of the taxonomic types of objects that can have a *kraj* are territorial objects of the type *sad* ‘garden’, *zarosli* ‘thicket’, *pole* ‘field’, *les* ‘forest’, *gorod* ‘city’, *ozero* ‘lake’, *luž*a ‘pool’, etc. It is obvious that *kraj polja* ‘the edge of the field’, is that part where the field ends: on one side the field exists, on the other side it does not. Language considers this fragment of space as a part of the very field and establishes the relationship between the words *kraj* and *pole* with a genitive (case) construction, one of the basic functions of which is the expression of the relationship part vs. whole. In the context *zasejat’* <vspaxat’> *kraj polja* ‘to sow <to plow> the edge of a field’ we are speaking precisely about the edge in this sense. Cf. also *Po vspaxannomu kraju polja [...] exal gusenečnyj traktor, voloča kakuju-to složnuju sistemu iz koljos i ryčagov* (V. Dudincev) ‘Along the plowed edge

of the field [...] went a caterpillar tractor, dragging some sort of complex system made up of wheels and levers', *Menja perekidyvajut, kak futbol'nyj mjač s kraja na kraj igrovogo polja* (V. Skvorcov) 'They are tossing me about like a soccer ball from one edge of the playing field to the other'.

However, the same construction *kraj polja* is found in contexts of a different type, which refer to the territory directly contiguous with the edge of the field on its exterior side and which is not a part of the field; cf. *[Jegor] uvidel na kraju polja berjozovyj kolok I pošjol k nemu* (V. Šukšin) 'On the edge of the field [Jegor] saw a birch grove and (he) walked toward it'; *Timonin ne stal vyxodit' na otkrytoje mesto, a pošjol opuškoj lesa po kraju polja* (A. Troickij) 'Timonin didn't bother to walk out into the open space, but set out along the verge of the forest, along the edge of the field'; *Ja otpravilsja domoj čerez perelesok, krajem ovsjanogo polja* (P. Aleškovskij) 'I set out for home across the grove of trees, along the edge of the oat field'.

Out of context, word combinations containing *kraj* and names of territorial entities, especially in directional and positional constructions, are ambiguous: indeed, the word combinations *idti krajem lesa* 'to walk along the edge of the forest' can mean the movement of the subject among trees, i.e. through the forest itself and along the forest (possibly along the road which encircles the forest). Thus, *kraj lesa* is a part of the forest itself and a part of the surrounding space which is directly contiguous with it. In the second instance *kraj lesa* is not a part of the forest.

It is understandable why such ambiguity arises specifically in word combinations with names of territorial entities: such an object, by its very nature has a fixed position and is contiguous with other objects of the same type, as opposed to physical objects such as blankets, hats, etc. which do not have permanent «neighbours». Furthermore, not every word combination of *kraj* plus the name of a territorial entity displays a similar ambiguity, for example: *na kraju ostrova* 'on the edge of the island' means only 'on that part of the island which is its edge'. Compare: *žyt' na kraju ostrova* 'to live on the edge of the island', but not **brosit' jakor' na kraju ostrova* 'to cast anchor on the edge of the island'.

It seems inadvisable to present such uses of word combinations of the type *kraj lesa* 'edge of the forest', which do not refer to a part of the very object, as separate meanings. One of the reasons that this should not be done is linked to systemic considerations: it would be strange to attribute to the words *reka* 'river', *ručej* 'creek', *rodnik* 'spring', *more* 'sea', *mel'nica* 'mill', etc. meanings such as territory contiguous with a given object.

However, as it happens, the word *kraj* has a separate meaning formed as a result of metonymic transfer «BORDER (line) → SPACE (which is adjacent)» and which is not indicated in the well-known dictionaries. This is lexeme *kraj* 1.2 'the edge of a cavity or opening A1 in an object and also the part of this object, contiguous with A1': *kraj otverstija* <*dyrki, treščiny*> 'the edge of an opening <hole, crack>', *kraja ovraga* <*kanavy, tranšėji, kotlovana*> 'the edge of a ravine <ditch, trench, excavation>', *kraj vodojoma* <*lužy*> 'the edge of a reservoir <puddle>', *kraj doliny* <*kotloviny*> 'the edge of a valley <basin>', *dopolzti do kraja polynji* <*voronki*> 'to crawl up to the edge of the unfrozen patch of water <crater>'.

From their definition of this lexeme it follows that, for example, *kraj otversyija* ‘the edge of an opening’, being that part of very opening beyond which there are no other of its parts, means, in addition, the part of the object contiguous with it, into which the opening was made. Thus, *kraj otversyija* turns out to be not only a part of the opening but also of another object, which is not expressed in the genitive case. Cf. *Pulja prošla pod samym donyškom cylindra, probiv jeho naskvoz*. *Kraja oboix otverstij, prožžjonnyx raskaljonnyx svincom, byli buro-žjolnymi* (L. Juzefovič) ‘The bullet passed right under the bottom of the cylinder, breaking right through it. The edges of both holes, burned through with hot lead, were brownish yellow’ (**Kraja cylindra byli buro-žjolnymi* ‘The edges of the cylinder were brownish yellow’ does not have the same meaning); *Sergej podprygnul, ucepilsja rukami za kraj otverstija, podtjanulsja i vybralsja na čerdak* (A. Mel’nik) ‘Sergej jumped up, caught hold of the edge of the opening with his hands, pulled himself up and climbed into the attic’.

In most cases these two meanings are well contrasted: a ravine, abyss, precipice, pit, hole, etc. recesses or openings, by the nature of their «anatomy» may only have *kraj 1.2*. However, there are objects which are capable of having *kraj 1.1* as well as *kraj 1.2*. These are cavities filled with water, e.g. a puddle, pond, lake, cf. *Na protivopoložnom kraju ozera nad vodoj jedva vozvyšalas’ [...] central’naja čast’ zemljanki* (V. Obručev) ‘At the opposite edge of the lake, above the water, the central part of the adobe cottage barely appeared’ (reference is made to ‘the part of a lake contiguous with the shore’, i.e. *kraj 1.1*) and *stojat’ na kraju ozera* ‘to stand on the edge of the lake’ (that is ‘to stand on the shore of the lake’ – *kraj 1.2*); at the same time, the sentence *Kraja ozera zarosli kamyšom <osokoj, travoj>* ‘The edges of the lake were overgrown with reeds <sedge, grass>’ requires, for its interpretation, extra-linguistic meanings about where precisely the reeds, the sedge or any other grass, grew – in the water or near it.

In this way, the meaning expressed by the word combination *kraj X-a* ‘the edge of X’ is determined to a great extent by the taxonomic class of X, that is, ultimately how necessary the other object «on the other side» of *kraj X-a* is and also, if that object is the focus of attention.

The Russian word *kraj*, in the relationship under consideration, can be compared to the English *verge*, which is used in the contexts *the verge of the sea <of the sky>*, *on the very verge of the roof* ($\approx$ *kraj 1.1*) and in contexts such as *the verge of the precipice* ($\approx$ *kraj 1.2*). Moreover, *kraj 1.2* has an English equivalent, *brink* which «refers to a thin strip, part of the surface, which includes the break-off line just in front of the precipice, the steep slope: *the brink of a precipice*» (Apresjan et al., 1979:74)².

² Only the two meanings of the word *kraj* which are connected with the metonymic relationship that interest us are being considered here. Of course, these are not all of the meanings connected with the indication of a part of a physical object. Accordingly, not all English equivalents are presented here. For more details, see (Apresjan et al., 2010; Apresjan et al., 1979).

3.2 Some other examples: STORONA ‘side’, ZAD ‘back’, PLOSKOST’ ‘plane’

I would like to present a few more examples of the type of metonymic transfer discussed here.

The vocable STORONA ‘side’ contains two lexemes which combine principally with names of elongated objects. *Storona* 3.2 is defined as follows: ‘each of the two parts of object A1, located on the right and left of a hypothetical line or surface which divides this object into symmetrical parts, (and) which differs from the second part by feature A2’. This is illustrated by the word combinations *tenevaja* <*čjotnaja, protivopoložnaja*> *storona ulicy* ‘the shady <even (numbered), opposite> side of the street’, *pravaja storona lestnicy* <*eskalatora, koridora, perrona, proseki*> ‘the right side of the staircase <escalator, corridor, platform, glade>’, *levaja storona tela* <*grudi, lica*> ‘the left side of the body <breast, face>’. *Storona* 3.3, metonymically associated with 3.2 means ‘each of the two parcels of territory, which are divided by object A1, usually elongated which differs from the second parcel by feature A2’: *s toj* <*drugoi, protivopoložnoj*> *storony reki* <*ozera, proliva, uščelja*> ‘at that <other, opposite> side of the river <lake, strait, gorge>’, *perepravitsja na druguju storonu Dnepra* ‘cross to the other side of the Dnieper’, *Na nemeckoj storone granicy* <*fronta*> *stojala tišina* ‘On the German side of the border <front> there was silence’. *Storona* 3.3 X-a ‘the side of X’, as opposed to *storona* 3.2, is not a part of X itself, but marks the territory which is contiguous with X.

Besides lexemes designating a part of the very object, the vocable ZAD ‘back’ also contains the colloquial lexeme *zady* 3, which is used only in the plural and which has the meaning ‘a part of the territorial object A1 or the territory which is contiguous with A1, often not very well maintained, located on the other side of A1, which is opposite the main facade and, for that reason, not usually visible by an observer’. From the definition it follows that *zad* 3 X-a ‘the back of X’ may be not only a part of X itself, as, for example in the word combination: *na zadax kladbišča* <*ogorodov, bol’ničnoj territoriji, učastka*> ‘in the back of the cemetery <the vegetable gardens, the hospital grounds, the plot>’ but also a parcel of territory contiguous with X, as in the contexts: *na zadax nekazistyx stroenij* <*zdanij*> ‘at the back of the unsightly edifices <buildings>’; *Svalka vyxodila na zady kanceljariji byvšego ministerstva oxrany korony* (A. & B. Strugeckije) ‘The dump faced the back of the office of the former Royal Ministry of the Guard’. In some instances it is difficult to say if a part of X itself is being referred to, or an area contiguous with it. Thus, the word combination *zady vokzala* <*rynka*> ‘the rear of the station <market>’ may denote the area behind the building where the station or market is located, as well as the «less elegant» part of the area occupied by the station or the market.

The vocable PLOSKOST’ ‘plane’ contains the lexeme *ploskost’* 1.2 ‘a hypothetical flat surface, which is considered to be an extension of object A1’ and which is found in contexts such as *ploskost’ orbity* <*ekliptiki, meridiana*> ‘plane of sphere <ecliptic, a meridian>’, *ploskost’ osnovanija (piramidy)* ‘the plane of the base (of a pyramid)’, *ploskost’ vraščeniya (kolesa)* ‘the plane of rotation (of a wheel)’. In other words, *ploskost’* 1.2 is not part of any object, rather, on the contrary, the object is a part of it. Moreover, the main lexeme *ploskost’* 1.1 denotes the flat surface of an object (*ploskost’ bumažnogo lista* <*xolsta, steny*> ‘the flat surface of a piece of paper <canvas, wall>’).

4 Continuity and discreteness: the language and the world described by it

It is well known that the semantic expanse of language is being structured continuously³, a dictionary description is traditionally based on the notion of the relative discreteness of meanings, although it should have the means necessary to establish the links among various meanings and various types of non prototypic usages which appear within the framework of one or another meaning (this is discussed in the lexicographical concepts of Ju. D. Apresjan, for example in (Apresjan, 2009)). Not only is language itself a continuum, but – in a certain respect – it is the linguistic explanation of the space around us.

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³ However, «together with continuity in certain areas of the semantic expanse substantial «holes» in other of its areas can be seen» (Apresjan, 2009: 422).

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