

Valency Ambiguity Interpretation: What Can and What Cannot be Done

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Abstract

Russian constructions that involve the ambiguity of valencies are considered regarding the extent in which it can be successfully resolved by man or machine. The material includes two types of phenomena: 1) Russian counterparts of noun phrases like (a) *the phases of sleep* vs. (b) *the phase of active sleep* – in (a), *sleep* instantiates the subject valency of *phase* whereas in (b) *sleep* is the content of the *phase*; 2) subject and object infinitives with the verbs *prosit* ‘ask’ and *predlagat* ‘suggest/offer’: *Rebënok prosit est* ‘lit. ‘The child asks to eat’ vs. *Rebënok prosit podojti* lit. ‘The child asks (for someone) to come up’, *On predložil vstretit menja* ‘he offered to meet me’ vs. *On predložil prijti k nemu* ‘he suggested that (I) should come round to him’.

Keywords

Valency structure, automatic disambiguation, human interpretation of texts, surface syntax, deep syntax, semantics, lexicography

1 Introductory Remarks

Any language has certain constructions that are ambiguous with regard to how actants of situations represented are expressed. A classical case is subject/object ambiguity like *support of the government* (‘someone supports the government’ vs. ‘the government supports someone’) or *the betrayal of her husband* (who betrayed whom?). This phenomenon is much less common in English (because composite constructions like *government support* clear up some of the ambiguities) than in Russian, where it is fairly widespread, or in Latin, which

provided the famous example *amor patriae* ‘love of one’s fatherland’ for Alan Gardiner (1932). Gardiner considered this ambiguity in detail, postulating two genitive cases: in one of the interpretations the word-form *patriae* is in *genetivus objectivus* and points to the fatherland as object of love whilst the other interpretation uses *genetivus subjectivus* and refers to the fatherland as the loving entity. Despite the fact that it is not always possible to resolve this ambiguity, especially in automatic text processing tasks, it is quite lucid, both logically and semantically, and presents no theoretical difficulties.

A quite different case of actant ambiguity is seen in Russian constructions like

(1) *na vysote Monblana* ‘at the height of Mont Blanc’,

which may refer to the mountain itself and its height, or to a different place whose height is equal to the height of this particular Mont Blanc (imagine e.g. a plane flying at such height). Juri Apresjan (1974) believes that such examples provide another instance of actant ambiguity where oscillation occurs between the parameter argument (whose height is assessed) and its value (how high it is): he sees a parallelism between the second interpretation of (1) and expressions like *na vysote 4810 metrov* ‘at the height of 4810 meters’. The semantic opposition in this type of ambiguity is quite clear, too (even though its theoretical character appears to be different, which will be discussed later).

This paper is focused on two other cases of actant ambiguity, where the actants to be interpreted are related in a less trivial way. The first case (Section 2) refers to surface syntax as understood in Igor Mel’čuk’s Meaning $\Leftrightarrow$ Text Theory; the second (Section 3) refers to DSyntR or even SemR representation.

2 Ambiguities of Self-Derivatives and Words of Close Lexical Classes

2.1 Material

Actant ambiguity regularly emerges in phrases that contain nouns with a valency of content instantiated by the genitive. Most such nouns are self-derivatives (Russian «avtoderivaty», see Boguslavsky & Iomdin, 2010a,b): a typical example is *ideja* ‘idea’, which has two indisputable valencies,¹ the subject (i.e. the originator of the idea) and the content (i.e. what the idea is about): cf. resp. (2) *ideja Ejnštejna* ‘Einstein’s idea’ and (3) *ideja odnositel’nosti vremeni i prostranstva* ‘the idea of space and time relativity’. Obviously, many phrases with *ideja*, including (2) and (3), are unambiguous with regard to its valencies of subject and content as the words filling them are categorially different: prototypical instantiations of the subject are names of humans whilst prototypical actants of content are propositions or facts. The real difficulties start when these two valencies are instantiated in a less prototypical way.

¹ The noun *ideja* may have another semantic valency expressible by genitive, that of theme, as in *osnovnye idei jadernoj fiziki* ‘the basic ideas of nuclear physics’, which should probably be distinguished from both the valency of content and the valency of subject. This was suggested e.g. by Elena Uryson (2004: 254) in her dictionary entry for *ideja*. For simplicity’s sake, we will abstract away from this valency.

For instance, the content of an idea may be expressed by a word denoting an organization, as in

(4) *ideja naučno-issledovatel'skogo universiteta* 'the idea of a research university'

or even a human, as in

(5) *My videli, kak trudno bylo moskovskim umam osvoit'sja s ideej vybornogo carja* (V. Ključevskij) 'We saw how difficult it was for the Moscow minds to accept the idea of an elected tsar'.

Cases like (4) or (5) offer a metonymical, condensed description of a situation: (4) roughly means that somebody had an idea to set up a research university while (5) introduces the idea that the Tsar should be elected.

Conversely, the subject valency may often be filled by a noun naming a collective author: a science, theory, literary work etc, as in *idei jadernoj fiziki* 'the ideas of nuclear physics'. In such cases, which immediately become ambiguous, no categorial distinction of the actants is possible. They will be our main focus of interest.²

The phenomenon we are discussing appears to involve broad linguistic material. Russian has hundreds, if not thousands,³ of nouns that have at least two valencies fillable by the genitive. The examples below are given to demonstrate the vast range of semantic classes of nouns which have this feature and may trigger potential syntactic ambiguities.

(a) *Tema* 'theme, topic', *gipoteza* 'hypothesis', *aksioma* 'axiom', *lozung/slogan* 'slogan', *deviz* 'motto', *zamysel* 'plot' etc. *Tema X-a* 'theme of X' may refer to a theme offered by X or consisting in X, cf. *fantazija na temy Čajkovskogo* 'a fantasia on the themes of Tchaikovsky' vs. *tema vojny* 'the theme of war', *gipoteza Sepira-Uorfa* 'the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis' vs. *gipoteza Boga* 'the hypothesis of God', *lozung partii* 'the party's slogan' vs. *lozung spravedlivosti* 'the slogan of justice'; (b) *čuvstvo* 'feeling', *blaženstvo* 'bliss', *radost* 'joy', *bojazn'/strax* 'fear' and many other emotions (though not all of them, e.g. not *revnost* 'jealousy' and not *gnev* 'wrath, anger'): *čuvstvo materi* 'the feeling of a mother' vs. *čuvstvo opasnosti* 'the feeling of danger', *strax <bojazn> rebënka* 'the fear of a child' vs. *bojazn' vysoty* 'the fear of heights'; (c) *variant* 'variant', *versija* 'version', *svojstvo* 'property', *ottenok* 'shade (of colour)', *rol'* 'role', *funkcija* 'function': *versija sledovatelja* 'the version of the

² We confine ourselves to considering the cases where ambiguous valencies are instantiated by nouns, thus disregarding interesting constructions in which ambiguous or syncretic realizations of nominal valencies by adjectives take place: *evropejskie cennosti* 'European values' (Europe is the subject), *russskaja ideja* 'The Russian idea' (Russia or the Russians may be the subject and/or content of the idea), *hlebnje zagotovki* (grain procurements (grain is the object), *nemeckij plen* 'German captivity' (captivity by the Germans, who are the subject) vs. *nemeckij voennoplennyj* 'German prisoners of war' (Germans who are in captivity, i.e. they are the object).

³ The combinatorial dictionary of Russian, which has ca. 100,000 entries and is part of the ETAP-3 linguistic processor (Apresjan *et al.* 2003), features almost 1200 nouns whose first and second syntactic valencies can be instantiated by the genitive. Of course, not all of them are of the class with which we are dealing (in particular, the nouns that produce subject/object ambiguity are there, too), but on the other hand this dictionary cannot be considered complete, either with respect to the list of words included or with respect to government patterns of individual nouns.

investigator' vs. *versija man'jaka-odinočki <ubijstva iz revnosti>* 'the version of a lone maniac <of murder out of jealousy>'; *svojstvo sistemy* 'the property of the system' vs. *svojstvo reflektivnosti* 'the property of reflexivity'; *ottenok cveta* 'the shade of colour' vs. *ottenok sinego* 'the shade of blue', *kommunikativnaja funkcija teksta* 'the communicative function of a text' vs. *tekst vypolnjaet funkciju soobščeniya* 'the text implements the function of communication'; **(d)** *reputacija/renome* 'reputation', *slava* 'fame': *Reputacija eksperta byla bezuprečnoj* 'The expert's reputation was impeccable' vs. *On pol'zuetsja reputaciej eksperta* 'He has the reputation of an expert'; **(e)** *etap/stadija* 'stage', *faza* 'phase', *period* 'period', *stupen'/šag* 'step' etc.: *etapy stroitel'stva doma* 'the stages of house construction' vs. *etap zakladki fundamenta* 'the stage of foundation laying'; *na raznyx periodax razvitija* 'during different periods of development' vs. *period upadka* 'the period of decline'; *faza Luny* 'the phase of the Moon' vs. *faza rastuščej <ubyvajuščej> Luny* 'the phase of the growing <waning> Moon'; **(f)** *sostojanie* 'state', *zvanie* 'rank', *status* 'status', *professija* 'profession', *prizvanie* 'vocation', *amplua* '(an actor's) line of business': *sostojanie bol'nogo* 'the state of the patient' vs. *sostojanie affekta* 'the state of affect', *zvanie Ivanova* 'the rank of Ivanov' vs. *zvanie admirala* 'the rank of an admiral'; **(g)** *akt* 'act', *akcija* 'action', *demonstracija* 'demonstration': *akt otčajavšegosja človeka* 'an act of a desperate man' vs. *akt samopožertvovanija* 'an act of self-sacrifice'; *demonstracija nedovol'nyx* 'a demonstration of discontented people' vs. *demonstracija nedovol'stva* 'a demonstration of discontent'.

2.2 Criteria for Disambiguation

We know of three general criteria that can be used to resolve actant ambiguity of the type discussed here: 1) context involving lexical functions, 2) adverbial derivatives and 3) instantiation of the respective valencies by pronouns. None of these criteria is absolute but their consideration will allow us to substantially reduce the level of uncertainty when interpreting potentially ambiguous utterances.

2.2.1 Lexical Functions

Information on types of lexical function (LF) whose values are expressed with the argument nouns that have equally realizable valencies has long been successfully used to resolve ambiguity in automatic text analysis of Russian and English. Papers by linguists belonging to the Moscow semantic school describe this in detail (see e.g. Apresjan *et al.* 2007, 2010). Let us see how this information can help the interpretation of actants of words of the *ideja* class.

Considering the LFs listed in the dictionary entry for *ideja*, ones which can be used for disambiguation purposes are the LFs oriented at the valency structure of the key word, such as Oper and Func. On the one hand, these are the LFs of the Oper₁ and Func₁ classes, which are oriented at the first valency of the word: cf. Oper₁(*ideja*) = *imet'* 'to have an idea', S₀Oper₁(*ideja*) = *naličie* 'existence of an idea', IncepOper₁(*ideja*) = *vydvigat' / vyskazyvat'* 'suggest / put forward an idea', S₀IncepOper₁(*ideja*) = *vydvizenie* 'suggestion of an idea', CausOper₁(*ideja*) = *natalkivat' na* 'lead to the idea', Func₁(*ideja*) = *prinadležat' / isxodit' ot / imet'sja u* 'the idea belongs to / comes from smb.', IncepFunc₁(*ideja*) = *pojavljat'sja u / voznikat' u / roždat'sja u / prixodit' k / osenjat' / ozarjat'* 'the idea arises from someone'; on the other hand, these are the LFs of the Oper₂ and Func₂ classes, oriented at the second

valency; cf. $\text{Oper}_2(\text{ideja}) = \text{javljať'sja}$ ‘the idea is’, $\text{Func}(\text{ideja}) = \text{kasat'sja} / \text{zatragivat}$ ‘the idea concerns smth.’.

The LF criterion functions in “crisscross” manner. If, in a sentence with *ideja X-a* ‘idea of X’, the word *ideja* is bound to another word within a lexical function of the first class, the subject valency is instantiated with the subject governed by the LF verb, so X must be interpreted as the valency of the **content of the idea**, e.g. its second valency: *Vo sne Dante ozarila ideja «Božestvennoj comedii»* [X] ‘In sleep, the **idea** of “La Divina Commedia” **dawned upon** Dante’. If, however, the word *ideja* is bound to a word within a lexical function of the second class, the content valency is instantiated with an NP governed by the LF verb, so X must be interpreted as the valency of the **subject of the idea**, e.g. its first valency: *Vážnoj ideej fil'ma* [X] *javljaetsja predatel'stvo* ‘An important idea of the film is treachery’.

2.2.2 Adverbials

Many nouns of the class in question can be part of prepositional collocations modifying a verb which instantiates one of the semantic valencies of these nouns: *po idee* ‘according to the idea’, *po príčine* ‘because of’, *s cel'ju / v cel'jax* ‘with the purpose of’, *na šírote* ‘at the latitude of’, *s vysoty* ‘from the height of’, etc.⁴. The valency structure of adverbial derivatives is quite complicated, and we are not discussing it here⁵. For our purposes, it suffices to say that the noun within such prepositional collocations governs one of its valencies. This fact can be used as a disambiguation criterion: in many of such adverbials, only one of the two types of valencies can be instantiated with a NP in the genitive case governed by the noun.

Let us consider the adverbial *po idee* ‘according to the idea’. The word *ideja* here can only govern its subject valency, as in *Po idee avtora figura pojavljajuščej'sja iz morja prekrasnoj damy simboliziruet roždenie goroda* ‘According to the author’s idea, the figure of a lady appearing from under the sea symbolizes the birth of the city’, where the word form *avtora* instantiates the subject valency of the word *ideja*, and its content valency is instantiated by the rest of the sentence. Outside the adverbial the word *ideja*, as we have seen, can govern both its actants in the genitive case. Similarly, in *lingvisty priexali v Barselonu s cel'ju učastija v konferencii* ‘The linguists have come to Barcelona with the objective of participating in the conference’ the word *cel'* governs the word *učastija* (its second actant), while without the adverbial the word *cel'* can also govern its first actant, as in *Cel' lingvistov – učastie v konferencii* ‘The linguists’ objective is the participation in the conference’.

For some nouns, it may even be the case that within the adverbial only one of its two valencies can be instantiated, while without the adverbial it can only govern the other valency.

Consider the situation described by the sentence *Podžog privel k požaru* ‘Arson brought about the fire’. Discussing it, we can use the expressions like *príčina požara* ‘cause of the fire’ (but not [#]*príčina podžoga* ‘cause of the arson’) or *po príčine podžoga* ‘due to the arson’ (but not

⁴ The degree of idiomaticity of these adverbials is different. In some of the cases, the adverbial is far in its meaning from the noun which belongs to it and should be considered an independent lexical unit, cf. *sila* ‘force, power’ – *v silu* ‘by virtue of’, *storona* ‘side’ – *so storony* ‘on the part of; protivoves ‘counterbalance’ – *v protivoves* ‘as the counter to; versus’: we do not consider such adverbials now.

⁵ This structure is considered in detail by Igor Boguslavsky (2008).

[#] *po pričine požara* ‘due to the fire’); see Boguslavsky & Iomdin 2010a. The same goes for *arest prestupnika* ‘arrest of a criminal’ vs. *pod arestom policii* ‘under police arrest’.

Several more examples of diagnostically significant adverbials and nouns forming them are given below with no detailed comments: *na puti stroitel'stva* ‘in the way of construction’ – *put' prob i ošibok* ‘the way of trial and error’, *pod bremenem obstojatel'stv* ‘under the burden of circumstances’ vs. *bremja belogo človeka* ‘the white man’s burden’, *po zakazu klienta* ‘by request of the customer’ vs. *zakaz novyx komp'juterov* ‘order of new computers’; *po zaprosu prokurora* ‘at the request of the prosecutor’ – *zapros dopolnitel'nyx svedenij* ‘request of additional data’, *v zaščitu obvinjaemyx* (‘in defence of the accused’ = object) – *pod zaščitoj gosudarstva* (‘under the protection of the state’ = subject) – *zaščita advokata* ‘defence offered by a lawyer’, *v popytke samozaščity* ‘in an attempt to protect oneself’ – *popytka človeka zaščitit' sebja* ‘the man’s attempt to protect himself’, *vo slavu pobeditelja* ‘to the glory of the conqueror’ – *mirovaja slava etogo skripača* ‘the world-wide fame of this violinist’, etc.

There are two complicating factors. First, some of the adverbial derivatives can yet accept different valencies. Consider the noun *pravilo* ‘rule’ that has as many as three valencies instantiated by the genitive: a) subject (≈ the rule’s author), cf. *pravilo Mirandy* ‘the rule of Miranda’; b) object (to which the rule is applied), cf. *pravila dorožnogo dviženija* ‘traffic rules’; and c) content (what the rule consists of), cf. *pravilo levoj ruki* ‘the left hand rule’, *pravilo buravčika* ‘the corkscrew rule’ etc.; cf. also the English *rule of thumb*.⁶ This noun has an adverbial derivative *po pravilu* ‘by the rule’, which differs from the adverbials listed above in that it accepts any of the three valencies in genitive: *po pravilu Mirandy* ‘by the rule of Miranda’, *po pravilam dorožnogo dviženija* ‘according to traffic rules’, *po pravilu buravčika* ‘by the corkscrew rule’.

Second, it is not always possible, especially in NLP tasks, to differentiate between an adverbial derivative and a free prepositional phrase, in which the restriction on actant attachment is lifted. Cf.: *Priexali s cel'ju učastija* ‘came with the aim of participating’, where *s celju* is an adverbial, and *Ja soglasen s celju učastnikov* ‘I agree with the objective of the participants’, where *s celju* is a free prepositional phrase.

2.2.3 Pronouns

If valencies of our nouns are filled with pronouns, this can be diagnostically significant for valency disambiguation. We will look at the noun *ideja* again to see what pronouns can fill its subject and content valency slots. It appears that the subject valency is readily instantiated by third person personal pronouns in the genitive *ego*, *eë*, *ix* (semantically equivalent to *his/her/its/their*) or possessive adjectives like *moj* ‘my’, *vaš* ‘your’, *čej* ‘whose’, *čej-to* ‘somebody’s’ etc. We will refer to them as Group A pronouns. As for the content slot, it is not normally filled by Group A pronouns (even though this ban is not absolute, especially for third person pronouns). Instead, it is filled by pronominal nouns in the genitive like *ètogo/sego* ‘of this/thereof’, *čego* ‘of what’, *čego-to* ‘of something’ etc. or pronominal

⁶ Interestingly, this valency of “brief content” often presupposes a metaphor impossible to understand without background knowledge.

adjectives *ètot* ‘this’, *kakoj* ‘what, of what kind’, *takoj* ‘such’ and a few others: these will be referred to as Group B pronouns.

Cf.: *ideja Petra* ‘Peter’s idea’, *ego ideja* ‘his idea’, *moja ideja* ‘my idea’, *č’ja-to ideja* ‘somebody’s idea’ vs. *ideja večnogo dvigatelja ne nova* ‘the idea of perpetual motion is not new’, *ideja ètogo ne nova* ‘the idea of this is not new’, *èta ideja ne nova* ‘this idea is not new’, *Kakaja ideja ne nova?* ‘What idea is not new?’, etc. Remarkably, the relative pronoun *kotoryj* ‘which’ is ambivalent in this respect: cf. *učenyj, ideja kotorogo...* ‘the scientist whose idea...’ and *večnyj dvigatel’, ideja kotorogo...* ‘the perpetual motion the idea of which...’ are equally acceptable.

Pronominal instantiation of valencies considered here are of a systemic character. We studied this phenomenon on a large class of nouns and found that in the overwhelming majority of cases our observation holds true. To give an example, out of 45 cases of contact placement of the 3rd person pronoun with the word *avtorstvo* ‘authorship’ found in the National Corpus of Russian, 33 pronouns could be definitely identified as the subject fillers for *avtorstvo*, while the remaining 12 could either be identified as objects or were ambivalent. As was noted, the ban on the second valency is less strict in this case.

On the other hand, pronominal realizations of valencies often display individual peculiarities and largely depend on the semantic class of the noun. For the nouns belonging to the semantic field of images, pronominal filling of slots loses its discriminative power: *moj portret* ‘my portrait’ may readily mean both the portrait made by me and the portrait depicting me.

For words whose slots obey the above regularities, the pronominal criterion could be conveniently used in human disambiguation of valencies: in order to understand which valency is expressed by a noun in an utterance, one may try to re-phrase it with a pronoun and see which of them fits.

To illustrate this claim we will look again at constructions like (1) *na vysote Monblana*. We remember that the parametric word *vysota* ‘height’ has two valencies: the parameter’s argument (carrier) and its value. The first of these valencies is pronominalized naturally by Group A pronouns: *vysota gory* ‘the height of the mountain’ – *eë vysota* ‘its height’, *č’ja vysota* ‘whose height’ etc. Conversely, the second valency is expressible by Group B pronouns: *vysota 8 metrov* ‘the height of 8 meters’; *èta vysota* ‘this height’, *kakaja vysota* ‘which height’, etc., but not *#eë vysota* or *#č’ja vysota*. If we agree with Juri Apresjan’s opinion that in the adverbials like (1) the word *Monblana* fills the value slot of the parametric noun, we will have difficulty explaining why these adverbials can be pronominalized with Group A pronouns: *na ego vysote* ‘at its height’, *s č’ej vysoty* ‘from whose height’, etc. These constructions are quite common in language use. (6) presents a characteristic literary example:

(6) *Džomolungma govorit: “Ja vyše, ibo s moej vysoty ves’ mir viden!” A Golgofa v otvet: “Net, ja vyše, ibo s moej vysoty čelovek kak na ladoni”* (A.Korjakovtsev) ‘Jomolungma says: I am higher since one can see the whole world from my height. But Golgotha replies: No, I am higher, since from my height man is seen as plain as the nose on one’s face’.

These facts convince us that in the expressions like (1) the first valency of the parameter is saturated. As for the fact that expressions like *s vysoty X-a* ‘from the height of X’ or *na vysote X-a* ‘at the height of X’ X may characterize the height of a different object Y (which is

positioned at the height equal to the height of X), it should be interpreted along the same lines as expressions like *ulybka rebënka* ‘the smile of a child’, where the genitive conveys the sense of similarity.

3 Ambiguities of Subject/Object Infinitive

3.1 Material

We will now briefly discuss another remarkable ambiguity case, this time of the deep, rather than the surface, syntactic nature: the “verb – infinitive complement” construction. Most verbs which allow this construction fall into two classes. For verbs of the first class, the subject of the infinitive is coreferent with the subject of the head verb, as in *Ja xoču spat'* lit. ‘I want to sleep’ or *Ona ljubit tancevat'* lit. ‘She likes to dance’. For verbs of the second class, the infinitive refers to the head verb’s object, as in *General velit vystupat'* ‘The general orders [the soldiers] to attack’ or *Učitel' razrešaet otvetit'* ‘The teacher permits [the students] to answer’. For some head verbs, both interpretations are possible.

3.1.1 *Predlagat'* ‘to offer’ vs. ‘to suggest’

First, consider the verb *predlagat'* ‘to offer, to suggest’. It can govern subject infinitives, cf. *Xodil na vokzal, predlagal passažiram pomoč' snesti vešči* (A. Panteleev) [lit. ‘(He) used to come to the railway station and offer the passengers to carry their luggage’]; *Eščë bol'she on obradovalsja, kogda Ženja predložila vymyt' posudu* (O. Novikova) [lit. ‘He was even more glad when Zhenya offered to wash the dishes’]. But it can govern object infinitives as well, cf. *Predlagaem čitateljam razrabotat', izgotovit' i ispytat' takoe prisposoblenie* (B. Sinelnikov) [‘We suggest that the readers work out, manufacture and test such a device’]; *V radiostudii mne predlagajut, poka ja ždu, poslušat' zapisyvaemuju peredaču* (M. Gamburd) [‘In the radio studio they suggest to me that, while waiting, I listen to the show being recorded’].

The most important thing here is that in many cases it is quite hard (or impossible) to determine whether the infinitive refers to the subject or to the object. Cf. *Ol'ga predlagaet otvezti tēte Mane samovar* (G. Shcherbakova) [‘Olga offers to take the samovar to aunt Manya’ OR ‘Olga suggests that someone takes the samovar to aunt Manya’]; *On predložil Mižuevu dat' deneg na eto delo, i Mižuev radostno soglasilsja* (M. Artsybashev) [‘He offered to Mizhueva to give money for the cause, and Mizhueva gladly agreed’ OR ‘He suggested to Mizhueva that Mizhueva give money for the cause, and Mizhueva gladly agreed’].

These two situations may well represent two different senses of the verb *predlagat'*, which could roughly be translated as ‘to offer (to do something)’ and ‘to suggest (that someone else does something)’ (this is the way this verb is described in some Russian dictionaries, e.g. in *Malyj Akademicheskij Slovar*). Note that the second sense includes semantic components conveying the authority of the subject over the object of the situation and even those of mild compulsion exerted upon the object. Such an interpretation is also supported by the fact that the subject and the object infinitives cannot be coordinated. Indeed, sentence (7), though originating from a novel by Vasily Grossman, a very good author, seems highly infelicitous:

(7) *On daže predložil mne davat' Jure uroki francuzskogo jazyka i platit' za urok tarelkoj supa* 'He even suggested to me to give French lessons to Yura and to pay with a plate of soup for each lesson',

where the author clearly meant that 'me' is to give lessons and 'he' is to pay. But even with this lexical interpretation, one is often faced with the challenge to disambiguate between the two senses of *predlagat'*.

The case where the infinitive governed by *predlagat'* refers to both the subject and the object of the verb simultaneously (which occurs very frequently, cf. e.g. (8) and (9)) deserves special consideration:

(8) *Predlagaju pojti v kakoj-nibud' restoran* 'I suggest that we go to a restaurant';

(9) *Kto-to predložil posmotret' novyj fil'm* 'Someone offered that [everyone] watched a new movie'

On the one hand, such sentences are fully correct and do not constitute any pun, which is generally the case if a word is used in two senses simultaneously (cf. Apresjan 1974: 180-187), so only one sense of *predlagat'* is present. On the other hand, we believe that such uses of *predlagat'* do not represent any additional lexical meaning of the verb and should be considered on a par with the sentences where *predlagat'* accepts a **subject** infinitive. Indeed, sentences like (8) or (9) do not presuppose any authority or coercion of the subject; besides, in many cases, sentences with *predlagat'* and a non-object infinitive defy unequivocal interpretation: in (10), it is not clear whether the subject offers to sing alone or in chorus:

(10) *On predložil spet' novyju pesnju* 'He offered to sing a new a song'.

Such behavior of *predlagat'* is similar to the behavior of the pronoun *we*: despite the fact that it can be used inclusively or exclusively of the hearer, its lexical meaning remains the same.

3.1.2 *Prosit'* 'to ask'

Second, consider the verb *prosit'* 'ask'. Quite unlike *predlagat'* – and, remarkably, in sharp contrast to the English verb *to ask* – in most cases it governs an object infinitive, cf. *Babuška prosit' prinesti očki* 'The grandmother asks to bring her spectacles', *Provožajuščix prosjat' vyjti iz vagonov* 'People who see passengers off are requested to leave the coaches'. But in a number of cases it can also govern a subject infinitive; cf. *Rebënok prosit' pit'* 'The child asks for something to drink'. Here, too, both interpretations of the infinitive may be possible in many cases. E.g. phrases like *prosit' zavtrakat'* <*obedat'*, *užinat'*> lit. 'to ask to have a breakfast <lunch, dinner>' are used in both senses, cf. *I barina prosit' obedat'!* (A. S. Pushkin) 'Invite the master to lunch!' vs. *Ne žnët i ne kosit, a obedat' prosit* lit. 'He does not reap or mow but he asks for lunch' (a Russian riddle about the idler).

Interestingly, the second construction is only possible with a very limited number of verbs denoting the consumption of food (in a broader sense, including eating, drinking, or smoking): *prosit' est'* <*kušat'*, *žrat'*> 'to ask for food', *prosit' pit'* <*popit'*> 'to ask for water', *prosit'*

vypit' 'to ask for alcohol'⁷, *prosit' kurit' <zakurit'>* 'to ask for cigarettes'. Even synonyms of the above verbs (as the matter of fact, their Aktionsarten) may be unacceptable, cf. ^{??}*Mal'čik prosit' napit'sja* 'The boy is asking for enough water to quench his thirst', ^{??}*Mal'čik prosit' zapit' lekarstvo* 'The boy is asking for water to take with his medicine', ^{??}*Mal'čik prosit' otpit'* 'The boy is asking to take a sip' etc. Verbs denoting other physiological needs are hardly possible here, cf. ^{??}*Rebēnok prosit' písat'* lit. 'The child asks for a piss', ^{*}*Devočka ustala i prosit' spat'* 'The girl is tired and is asking for sleep'.⁸

Outside this semantic field, the construction is very rare. Compare the following examples with very close synonyms *poprobovat'* and *isprobovat'* 'to taste, to try out': (11) is about food and thus almost normal, whereas (12) is not and appears infelicitous:

(11) *Jabloček mal'čiku mama prinosit. Každyj poprobovat' jabločko prosit* [lit. 'Mom brings some apples to her boy. Everyone asks [to give him] to taste an apple']

(12) *Potom on poprosil menja isprobovat' mylo na dele i pošel na rečku myt' golovu* (F. Iskander) 'Then he asked me to try out the soap and went to the river to wash his hair'.

In the construction with the subject infinitive, the head verb *prosit'*, too, may hardly even be replaced by its close synonyms, cf. ^{??}*On kljančil <vymalival> pit'* lit. 'He begged to drink'.

On the other hand, a few other Russian verbs reveal a similar behavior, in particular, the verb *potrebovat'* 'require', *sprosit'* (in the obsolete sense 'demand or order, like in a restaurant'): *On sprosil užinat' i stal rasskazyvat' ej podrobnosti begov* (L. N. Tolstoy) 'He asked to have supper and started to relate to her the details of the race'.

In this context, the verb *davat'* 'give' deserves special attention. This verb has two major and contrasting senses; one denoting a simple physical transfer of objects (*davat'* 1, cf. *on dal mne xleba* 'he gave me some bread') and the other conveying a permission (*davat'* 2, as in *on dal mne otdoxnut'*) 'he allowed me to take a rest'. Normally, only *davat'* 2 may govern an (object) infinitive whilst *davat'* 1 admits neither the object nor the subject infinitive. However, in the context of consumption of food, *davat'* 1 accepts the infinitive, too, as in *On dal mne poest'* 'He gave me to eat', invoking a case of mimicry: syntactically, it looks exactly like *davat'* 2, which it is not⁹; see a more detailed description of *davat'* in (Iomdin B., in progress).

These facts make us hypothesize that the infinitives of consumption in this context may in fact be equalled to nouns close in meaning to 'food', 'drink', 'tobacco', or 'alcohol'¹⁰ (cf. Footnote 7), thus creating self-derivatives out of the respective verbs in the strong sense of

⁷ This expression is especially interesting, because beyond the construction considered the verb *vypit'* (an Aktionsart for *pit'* 'drink') does not necessarily imply an alcoholic beverage.

⁸ Maybe this restriction explains why the infinitive is not listed as a possible means of instantiating the content valency in the very detailed description of two meanings of *prosit'* by Marina Glovinskaya, who explicitly writes that the lexeme of *prosit'* with the meaning 'X asks that Y should give P to X' does not govern an infinitive (Glovinskaya 2004: 885).

⁹ This claim is easy to prove: you can well say something like *Levoj rukoj on dal mne popit'* 'with his left hand he gave me to drink', which unequivocally points to the physical nature of the action.

¹⁰ Verbs like these are ever more often used in colloquial constructions like *Voz'mi s soboj poest' <popit'>* lit. 'Take with you [something] to eat <to drink>'; cf. the observation that verbs are becoming more popular as hypernym descriptions of everyday items in Russian in (Iomdin B. 2010).

(Boguslavsky & Iomdin, 2010 a,b): *pit'* may be used as the name for what instantiates the second, object, valency of *pit'*. In any case, the meaning of consumption becomes grammatical. This is another instance of grammaticalization of this semantic field, supplementing the case of the verb *byt'* 'to be' in constructions like *Ja budu čaj* 'I will have tea' in contrast to **Ja budu knigu* 'I will [read?] the book' (reported elsewhere by L. Iomdin).

3.2 Criteria for disambiguation

3.2.1 Statistics

For *prosit'*, if the infinitive conveys the idea of consumption of food, in the vast majority of cases it is the subject infinitive. Out of 59 examples of *prosit' pit'* in the National Corpus of Russian, only one has an object infinitive: *Gospoda! u menja prošu pit' i est'* (N. S. Leskov) 'Gentlemen! I am asking you to eat and drink in my house'; out of 43 examples of *prosit' est'*, only 3 are subject infinitives.

3.2.2 Syntactic dependents of the head verb

Both *predlagat'* and *prosit'* have three semantic valencies: subject, object, and content. In the case of *predlagat'*, the object is expressed with a NP in dative, whereas for *prosit'* it can either be expressed by an NP in accusative (*prošu vas*) or by a NP in genitive with the preposition *u* (*prošu u vas*). For *prosit'*, this is a criterion for disambiguation: in *prosit' kogo-l. pit'* 'to ask someone to drink' *pit'* can only be interpreted as the object infinitive, while in *prosit' u kogo-l. pit'* 'to ask someone for a drink' *pit'* is definitely the subject infinitive.

The content in both verbs can be expressed either with an NP in accusative (*predlagat' <prosit'> jabloko* 'to offer <to ask for> an apple') or with an infinitive.

3.2.3 Syntactic dependents of the infinitive

For *prosit'*, the subject infinitive cannot govern any other words. Sentences like *Babuška prosit pit' čaj*, *Kto-to prosit sročno pit'*, *Mama prosit est' pomedlennee* can only be viewed as containing object infinitives, meaning 'Grandmother is asking [everyone] to drink tea', 'Someone is asking [us] to drink immediately', 'Mom is asking [someone] to eat more slowly', respectively.

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