

Morphological Intensifiers Beyond Adjectives: Evidence from productive patterns of Russian prefixation

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Most studies of intensification focus on lexical intensifiers of propositional semantics, i.e. adverbs like *very* and *absolutely* (Labov 1984) or on the emphatic use of reflexive pronouns like *myself* (König 2001). This paper contributes to the discussion of intensity on a more granular level of derivational morphology. Morphological intensifiers are affixes that amplify the meaning of the base and can be paraphrased as ‘very-X’ or ‘more-X’. Since intensification is an increase of quantity or quality, it necessarily refers to a scale and is most naturally applied to adjectives that are typically gradable as a class (Croft 2001). This paper explores the question of whether morphological intensifiers are found beyond the adjectival domain and what grammatical classes are involved.

We know that adverbs are generally less prototypical bases for morphological intensification than adjectives (Dressler 1994), while nouns can be intensified as long as they have some “adjectival dimension” (van Oss 1989: 77). Intensification of verbs seems very problematic and hardly possible since they profile temporal relations – processes and events (Langacker 2008). Yet modern Russian provides plenty of examples where prefixation of a verb signals intensity of an activity in a number of different ways.

I present the first corpus-based study of the native Russian prefix *pere-* ‘over’ and a historically related prefix *pre-* ‘very’ borrowed from Old Church Slavonic. As opposed to other Slavic languages, Russian preserves both prefixes and employs them in highly productive patterns of derivation, each in its own domain. *Pre-* functions as a productive marker of excess in adjectives (*predobryj* ‘very kind’ < *dobryj* ‘kind’), adverbs (*premnogo* ‘very many’ < *mnogo* ‘many’), some nouns (*preneprijatnost* ‘very unpleasant event’ < *neprijatnost* ‘unpleasant event’) and peculiar words of other classes. The intensifying function of *pere-* is less obvious because it is observed in verbs. I adopt Janda’s 1986 analysis of *pere-* and model its rich polysemy as a network of interrelated submeanings organized around the prototype TRANSFER. I propose that in five submeanings *pere-* is a morphological intensifier of an activity:

- OVERDO: ‘perform an activity more than a norm suggests’
 pere-gruzit ‘overload’ < *gruzit* ‘load’
- REDO: ‘repeat an activity to achieve a better result’
 pere-delat ‘redo’ < *delat* ‘do’
- DISTRIBUTE: ‘apply an activity to a number of objects’
 pere-probovat ‘try many things’ < *probovat* ‘try’
- SUPERIORITY: ‘perform an activity better than someone else’
 pere-kričat ‘shout’ < *kričat* ‘shout’
- THOROUGH: ‘thoroughly affect with an activity the whole object’
 pere-pačkat ‘stain all over’ < *pačkat* ‘stain’

These submeanings are metaphorically motivated by TRANSFER and exemplify various ways of going beyond a metaphorical boundary. I provide examples and numbers of verbs attested (1,729 in total) in the Russian National Corpus (www.ruscorpora.ru) for each submeaning. *Pre-* is found only in 107 verbs. I apply Radial Category Profiling methodology (Nesset et al. 2011) and map the semantics of *pre-* on the network of *pere-*, where the former occupies a smaller subset of meanings. On the basis of their significant semantic overlap in eight submeanings I propose that the two prefixes, usually treated as distinct morphemes, are morphologically conditioned allomorphs of a single morpheme. This account is data-driven, cognitively motivated and suggests theoretical implications for a unified model of morphological intensifiers.