# Rethinking reference-points:
## Russian Aktionsart as reference-point constructions

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Langacker (2009) has demonstrated that reference-point constructions are ubiquitous in grammar and fundamental for our understanding of metonymy. In this paper I propose extending the list of reference-point constructions to include Russian Aktionsarten, arguing that not only concrete objects, but also events as metaphorical objects can serve as reference points. I analyze data from the Russian National Corpus and show that this broadening of the view on reference points reveals new links between nouns and verbs, places Aktionsarten in context with other phenomena such as possessive constructions, and simplifies the analysis of different Aktionsarten by bringing them together under a general schema.

Russian Aktionsarten represent regular modifications of the verbal semantics, expressed by suffixes and prefixes (Isačenko 1960, Zaliznjak, Šmelev 2000). Aktionsarten are used in order to single out stages of an action (as ingressive for the beginning, e.g. *za-govorit'* 'start talking'), repetition (habitual for repeated actions, e.g. *govar-iva-t'* 'say repeatedly'), intensity (attenuative for low intensity, e.g. *pri-utixnut'* 'slightly fade (about sound)') etc. I argue that the main idea behind Aktionsarten is comparison with a contextually given standard that serves as a metaphorical reference point. For example, for the attenuative *pri-nagnut'* 'bend slightly' a standard of comparison is *nagnut'* 'bend': in order to describe a door as slightly open, we have to know what it would look like if it were open. In prototypical cases for telic events the natural end of the process acts as a reference-point; thus for *glušit'* 'mute, about sound' a completed event would be described by *zaglušit'*, 'mute the sound completely'. An attenuative *priglušit'*, then, indicates that the result was not quite achieved, or was achieved to a lower degree than expected.

Analyzing Aktionsarten as reference-point constructions has general theoretical implications. Aktionsarten differ from the phenomena described in the literature on reference points in two important respects. First, traditional reference-point constructions all deal with entities that are physical objects as reference points. For possessive constructions, there is the possessor, conceptualized as a reference point; for anaphoric constructions, the anaphor uses a concrete entity given in the context as reference-point. However, what verbs use as a reference point is not an object but an action expressed via a verb or predicate. However, if we acknowledge that events can be conceptualized as metaphorical objects (Langacker 1991, Janda 2004), verbal Aktionsarten do not seem to be very different from other reference-point constructions. Second, previous scholarship on reference-points saw targets and reference points as belonging to the explicit context: in possessive constructions, both the possessor and the possessed are expressed; in the case of anaphora, the reference point is available in contexts often larger than an utterance. However, in the case of Aktionsarten, the reference point is not necessarily available in the context.

My analysis adds a new dimension to the typology of reference points insofar as I show that reference points are not limited to concrete objects. Analyzing Aktionsarten as reference point constructions enables us to explicate the relations between different types of Aktionsarten in a new way and opens up exciting perspectives for the study of reference-point constructions in cognitive linguistics.

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