What`s in a Passive? Russian Passive Participles and the Locative Alternation

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1. The Passive

It is widely acknowledged that the use of passive voice allows the speaker to place figures other than the agent in the subject position in order to foreground the patient or to avoid specifying the agent of an action (Saedd 1997, O`Grady et al. 2001, Kroeger 2005).

2. Goal-Object active

gruzit` telegu-ACC senom-INS
‘load the hay onto the truck’

3. Data

This leaves such factors as the grammatical form of the verb and metaphor out of the picture.

In the literature on the Locative Alternation, scholars have mostly been placing focus on the interaction between two factors:

- the semantics of the alternating constructions;
- the semantics of the verbs involved in the alternation (Ilgolden 2006, Boas 2006, leeds 2008).

In the passive uses these three perfective verbs can be partly disambiguated according to the syntactic construction they prefer.

4. 4.3 Stronger preference for one construction


Passive participles also reinforce the holistic effect associated with the construction, i.e. when the object is completely affected (Kroeger 1979).

Both the Theme-Object and the Goal-Object construction can have metaphorical extensions, i.e. they can be instantiated as metaphorical contexts where the semantic class of the participants is modified from more concrete to more abstract (the term “extension” is used as in Goldberg (1995), Craft & Cruse (2004)).

For instance, human beings can serve as the metaphorical CONTAINERS (Theme) as in “human is a computer metaphor”.


5. Conclusions

The fact that the use of passive participles further profiles one of the participants has at least two additional effects on the choice of the construction:

- passive participles are more strongly associated with a particular participant (The Theme or the Goal) than what is attested for the non-passive forms.
- passive participles reinforce the holistic effect and thus block some metaphorical patterns.

The interaction of metaphor with aspect and syntax has not been previously explored.

References


References


