

What's in a Passive?

Russian Passive Participles and the Locative Alternation



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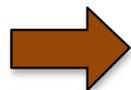
1. The Passive

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).

Is passivization associated with additional reorganizations of the structure?

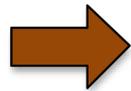
(1) Theme-Object active

gruzit' seno-ACC na telegu-ACC
'load the hay onto the truck'



(2) Goal-Object active

gruzit' telegu-ACC senom-INS
'load the truck with hay'



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 (Goldberg 2006, Boas 2006, Iwata 2008).

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

We show that passive and non-passive forms show slightly different preferences for the constructions and that passive forms set stronger restrictions on metaphorical uses.

3. Data

We propose an empirical study based on all attestations of the main Russian Locative Alternation verbs in the Russian National Corpus (www.ruscorpora.ru). In their passive version, The Theme-Object construction has the Theme as the grammatical subject (3), whereas the Goal-Object construction has the Goal as the grammatical subject (4).

(3) Theme-Object passive

brevna-NOM za-gruženy na baržu-ACC
'the logs are loaded onto the barge'

(4) Goal-Object passive

barža-NOM za-gružena brevnami-INS
'the barge is loaded with (the) logs'

4. Analysis

4.1. Stronger preference for one construction

The first case study is based on the analysis of the Russian central Locative Alternation verb *gruzit'* 'load'. The verb *gruzit'* 'load' is the most prototypical Locative Alternation verb since it is characterized by a smaller degree of specificity, its Themes can be both solid objects and substances (though the preference is for solid objects), and the Goals can be represented as both containers and surfaces.

Tables 1 and 2 show the distribution of the two Locative Alternation constructions with the non-passive and passive forms of verb *gruzit'* 'load' and its three prefixed perfective partner verbs, *na-gruzit'*, *za-gruzit'*, and *po-gruzit'*, all with the meaning 'load'. Figure 1 presents the same distribution graphically in terms of relative frequency.

	Theme-Object constructions		Goal-Object constructions		Total
	raw frequency	relative frequency	raw frequency	relative frequency	
<i>gruzit'</i>	208	72.73%	78	27.27%	286
<i>nagruzit'</i>	34	23.13%	113	76.87%	147
<i>zagruzit'</i>	94	45.19%	114	54.81%	208
<i>pogruzit'</i>	253	99.61%	1	0.39%	254

Table 1. Locative Alternation among non-passive forms of *gruzit'* 'load' and its prefixed perfective partner verbs.

	Theme-Object constructions		Goal-Object constructions		Total
	raw frequency	relative frequency	raw frequency	relative frequency	
<i>gružen</i>	1	0.93%	106	99.07%	107
<i>nagružen</i>	1	0.45%	220	99.55%	221
<i>zagrūžen</i>	11	4.44%	237	95.56%	248
<i>pogružen</i>	447	99.55%	2	0.45%	449

Table 2. Locative Alternation among passive forms of *gruzit'* 'load' and its prefixed perfective partner verbs.

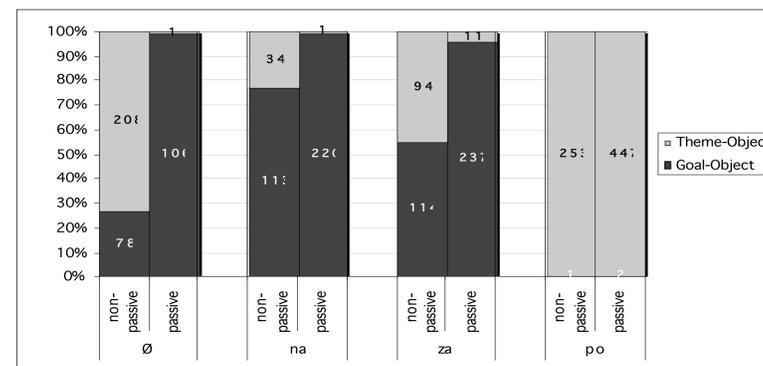


Figure 1: Locative Alternation among non-passive and passive forms of *gruzit'* 'load' and its prefixed perfective partner verbs.

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

- the unprefixed *gruzit'* strongly prefers the Theme-Object construction
- the prefixed verb *nagruzit'* is nearly the mirror image, preferring the Goal-Object construction. This preference of *nagruzit'* for focusing on the Goal may have to do with the SURFACE meaning of *na-*.
- *pogruzit'* is almost exclusively restricted to the Theme-Object construction, suggesting a focus on the Theme that is loaded rather than the place where the load ends up.
- *zagruzit'* is the only verb that shows an almost even distribution across the two constructions. A more elaborate analysis of the examples indicates that this could be due to the number of additional metaphorical uses that this verb has in the Goal-Object construction.

Yet, we see that the passive participles of the prefixed verbs boost the frequency of the construction that is more frequent for the non-passive forms.

Our analysis indicates that passive participles have the effect of increasing the relative frequency of the construction that is associated with a given verb.

4.2. Holistic effect and metaphorical uses

The second case study is based on the analysis of twelve Russian Locative Alternation verbs with the prefix *za-*: *kapat'* 'drip', *pryskat'* 'spray', *bryzgat'* 'splatter', *sypat'* 'strew', *lit'* 'pour', *gruzit'* 'load', *mazat'* 'smear, daub', *pakovat'* 'pack', *pixat'* 'stuff', *vešat'* 'hang', *stavit'* 'stand', *klast'* 'lay'.

Passive participles also reinforce the holistic effect associated with the construction, i.e. when the object is completely affected (Anderson 1971).

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), Croft & Cruse (2004)).

For instance, human beings can serve as the metaphorical CONTAINERS (Goal) for information that represents metaphorical CONTENTS (Theme), as in example (5) below (HUMAN IS A COMPUTER metaphor):

(5) Ax, vam interesny podobnosti iz žizni zvezd? Radi boga, Andrej Maksimov "zagruzit' vas ètoj informaciej.

[Oh, you are interested in the details of the life of pop stars? For Heaven's sake, Andrej Maksimov will load you-ACC this information-INS]

'Oh, you are interested in the details of the life of our pop stars? No problem, Andrej Maksimov will provide you with this information.'

In general human beings are more likely to serve as metaphorical containers than as metaphorical surfaces. While the corpus contains many examples like (6) with active metaphorical uses of the verb *za-sypat'* 'strew', no such cases are attested for the passive forms (7).

(6) Goal-Object active

On-NOM *za-sypal* ego-ACC šutkami-INS
'He showered (lit. strewed) him with jokes'



(7) Goal-Object passive

?On-NOM *za-sypan* šutkami-INS
'He is showered (lit. strewn) with jokes'

The logic is that a human being can become filled up with a metaphorical substance like work (8), but cannot become completely covered with a metaphorical substance like jokes.

(8) Goal-Object passive

čelovek-NOM *za-gružen* rabotoj-INS
'a person is loaded with work'

Passive participles reinforce the holistic effect associated with the construction

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.

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