

## Russian Verbs of Motion in the Russian Language Dictionary

In dieser Arbeit werden russische Bewegungsverben im Rahmen der kognitiven Semantik untersucht. Unter diesem Gesichtspunkt zeichnet sich die russische Sprache durch die Hervorhebung der Bewegungsart aus. Diese Behauptung wird mithilfe des im vierbändigen russischen Sprachwörterbuch (MAS) (Evgen'eva 1981–1984) gesammelten Korpus in Frage gestellt. Die gesammelten Daten zeigen, dass insgesamt ein kleiner Anteil der Bewegungsverben im untersuchten Wörterbuch die Bewegungsart ausdrückt.

In this paper, Russian verbs of motion are studied in the frame of cognitive semantics. From this point of view, the Russian language is characterized by the salience of manner of motion. This claim is challenged with the help of the corpus collected in the four-volume Dictionary of the Russian Language (MAS) (Yevgen'yeva 1981–1984). The collected data show that overall a small proportion of verbs in the examined dictionary expresses manner of motion.

---

In the first part of the paper, theoretical questions concerning motion are presented. More precisely, components of motion, L. Talmy's dichotomy (2007) relating to verb-framed and satellite-framed languages are shown. In the second part, the collected corpus is introduced, showing the different subgroups of verbs of the corpus. The third part summarizes the findings of the investigation, based on which the manner salience of Russian verbs of motion is questioned.

# Theoretical Questions of Motion

In this paper, motion is studied from the perspective of cognitive semantics.

## Motion Components

The motion components can refer to the motion or the location of the participant of the event. The focus is on displacement. It means location-changing motion, in other words the participant is moved from one point to another in space. In contrast, position-changing motion refers to the object maintaining its basic or average location and can be characterized by forms of motion such as swinging, rotation, expansion, or contraction.

Maysak (2005) and Talmy (2007) differentiate between the following components of motion. The *figure* is the moving entity, the primary focus of attention. The *background* (also called *ground* or *landmark*), on the other hand, is a secondary figure and serves as a basis for comparison, as the figure comes into focus relative to it. The *path* (also called *route*) is also an important component of motion, because the latter takes place on it. *Manner* of motion is also a significant component, which can refer, for example, to the medium, speed, and intensity of the motion. Indo-European languages (with the exception of Neo-Latin languages) express manner of motion in various ways. *Cause* expresses that the primary figure of the motion does not perform the action of his own will and that the focus of attention is on the figure performing the passive (caused) motion.

## Typology by Leonard Talmy

L. Talmy (2007) considers the path component essential. Whether it is expressed in the verb or not, he distinguishes between two types of languages. Therefore, in L. Talmy's typology, verb-framed and satellite-framed languages are differentiated.

## Verb-Framed Languages

In the case of the so-called verb-framed languages, the path component is encoded in the verb, while the manner of motion is expressed outside the verb, usually by an adverbial phrase or participle. This is typical of the Neo-Latin languages (e.g. Spanish, French, Italian) among the Indo-European languages as well as Turkish and Hebrew.

## Satellite-Framed Languages

In satellite-framed languages, the verb refers to the manner of motion, while the path component is expressed as a »satellite« outside the verb, for example by means of a verb prefix, a preposition or an adverb, or by combinations of these. This way of expression characterizes Indo-European languages, e.g. English, German, Dutch, Russian (with the exception of Neo-Latin languages) and Mandarin. From the point of view of this research, it is important that the Russian language also belongs to this typological class.

This typology has received a lot of criticism since its release. Several linguists have suggested that languages cannot be clearly classified into one type or another, but rather should be placed along a continuum. According to this, languages are positioned at either end of the spectrum, or perhaps somewhere in between. In this connection, the term »salience« is also used, by which path-salience refers to the predominance of the expression of the path component, and in the case of manner-salience the predominance of the expression of the manner of motion. Terms »low-manner« and »high-manner« are also used, which are understood in the cases described above (Speed 2015).

## Verbs of Motion in Russian

When the term »Russian verbs of motion« is mentioned, it likely brings to mind a narrow lexical-grammatical class, which contains 14 pairs of verbs of the type идти – ходить (*idti* »go (unidir.)« – *khodit'* »walk (multidir.)«

To date, mostly this verb class has generally been studied (Martsa 1986; Rakhilina 2004; Maysak 2005, 2007; Nesset 2010). Russian verbs expressing motion have also been examined according to L. Talmy's typology (Nikitina 2010).

Based on the comparative studies carried out so far, the Russian language is characterized by a high degree of saliency of the manner of motion, both in comparison with English (Hasko 2010) and Polish (Łozińska 2018).

Two important remarks have to be added at this point. On the one hand, Russian verbs of motion are not limited to the above-mentioned 14 pairs and their verb-prefixed forms, although the academic findings mostly have been made based on this range of verbs. The vocabulary of the dictionaries examined so far, gives evidence of the fact that a lot more verbs of motion have to be taken into consideration. On the other hand, the Russian language is distinguished by a rich system of verb prefixes (or preverbs), which

rather reinforces the expression of the path component. Especially the latter point contradicts the theory of characterizing Russian verbs of motion with manner saliency.

## **Collected Material and Its Study**

In this investigation, the four-volume *Dictionary of the Russian Language*, also called *Malyy akademicheskiy slovar'* (Малый академический словарь 1981–1984), edited by A. Yevgen'yeva, henceforth denoted as MAS was examined. A verb corpus has been collected, on the basis of which several comparisons have been made and some conclusions have been drawn.

## **The Verb Composition of the Russian Language Dictionary (MAS)**

MAS is composed of four volumes and contains 83016 words. All the four volumes were examined for their content of the verbs of motion.

## **Comparison of Results with Preliminary Data**

At the first stage of studying the verb composition, the first volume of MAS was examined. As a result, preliminary data on approximately three hundred verbs were obtained. Based on these data, the distribution of different subgroups of the verbs of motion was outlined.

The preliminary data and the final data obtained from the study of the first volume and four volumes are compared below, in the indicated order.

Upon receipt of the results of the first volume, it is assumed that these data are representative and we expect similar proportions of verbs when studying all the four volumes. If similar results are obtained regarding the full composition of the verbs of motion, it can be an important outcome as for the previous statement the salience of the manner of motion in Russian. The results will now be examined to determine whether these expectations were met.

## **The Proportion of Transitive and Intransitive Verbs of Motion**

[Chart 1](#) shows the distribution of the collected verbs of motion from the first volume of MAS, totalling 306 verbs. This set is divided into 115 transitive (38%) and 191 intransitive verbs (62%).

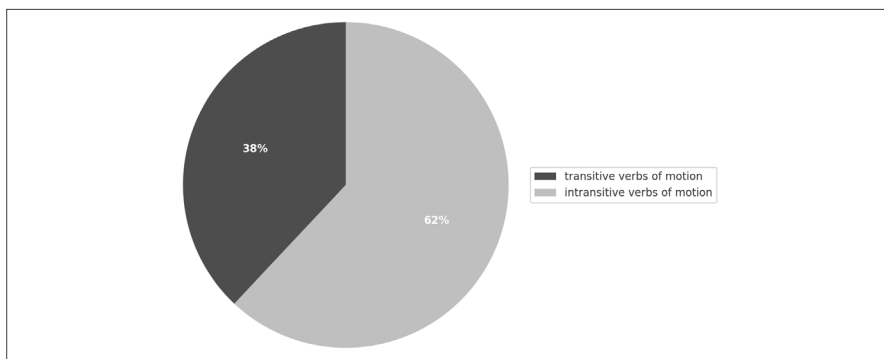


Chart 1

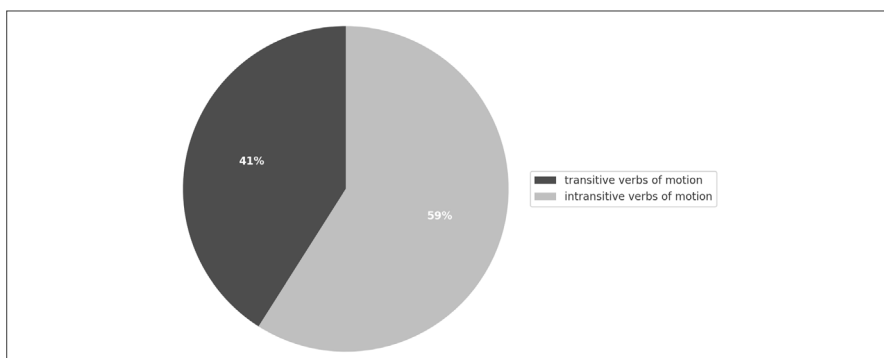


Chart 2

Chart 2 shows the proportional distribution of the full composition of the verbs of motion. The total composition of these verbs is 1376 units, of which there are 567 transitive verbs (41%), and 809 intransitive units (59%). From these data, it can be seen that the proportion of transitive and intransitive verbs has changed only slightly in comparison with the data of the first volume.

### Comparison of Transitive Verbs' Distribution

Chart 3 shows the distribution of transitive verbs of motion based on data from the first volume of MAS. This set makes up the following subgroups of verbs:

- verbs expressing position change: 5 units (4%), e.g. *вильять* [vilyat'] ›wag;

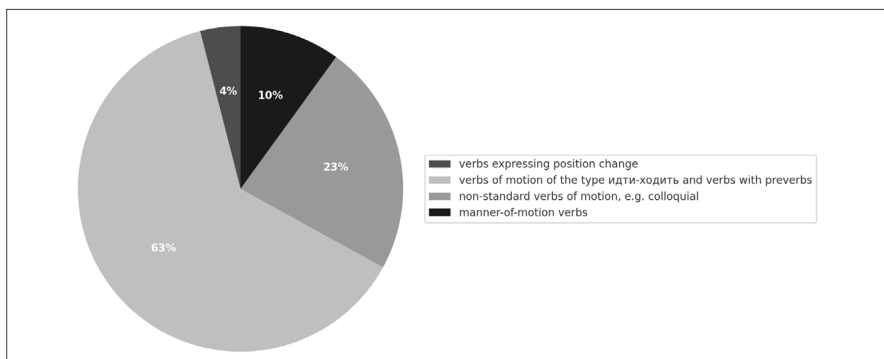


Chart 3

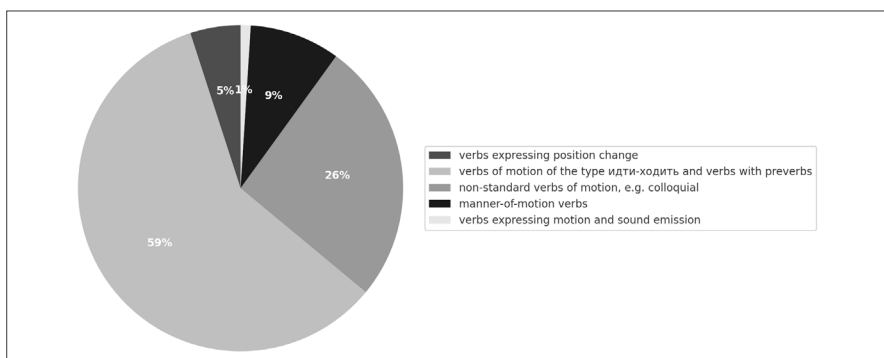


Chart 4

- verbs of motion of the type *идти-ходить* and verbs with preverbs (prefixes)<sup>1</sup>: 73 units (63%), e.g. *водить* [vodit'] ›drive‹;
- non-standard verbs of motion, e.g. colloquial: 26 units (23%), e.g. *вбухать* [vbukhat'] ›pour in big quantities‹.
- manner-of-motion verbs: 11 units (10%), e.g. *волочить* [volochit'] ›drag‹.

In Chart 4, the proportional distribution transitive verbs of the four volumes of MAS can be seen:

- verbs expressing position change: 31 units (5%), e.g. *трясти* [tryasti] ›shake‹;

<sup>1</sup> Preverbs (prefixes) are most often attached to this type of verbs, therefore they constitute one group in my investigation.

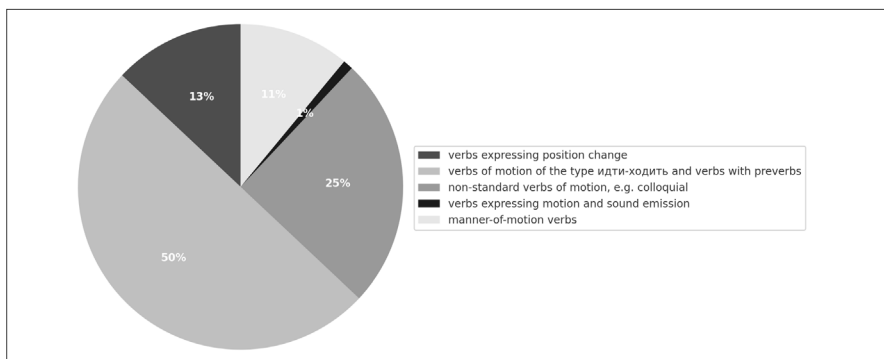


Chart 5

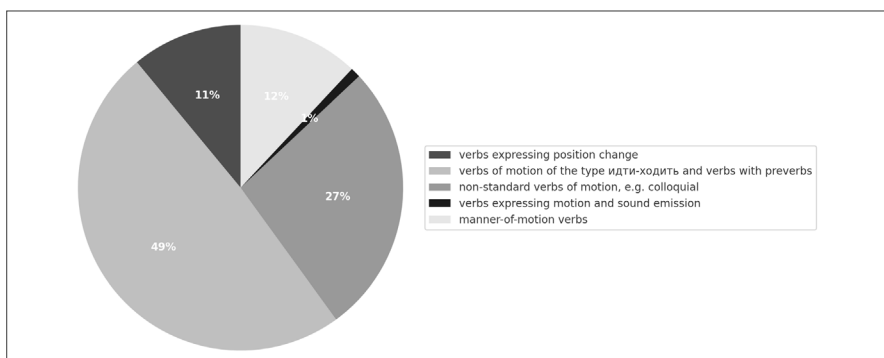


Chart 6

- verbs of the type *идти-ходить* ›go-walk‹ and verbs with preverbs (prefixes): 335 units (59%), e.g. *увезти* [uvezti] ›carry away‹;
- non-standard verbs of motion, e.g. colloquial: 145 units (26%), e.g. *шевырять* [shevyriyat'] ›toss‹;
- manner-of-motion verbs: 52 units (9%), e.g. *шевелить* [shevelit'] ›move‹.

A new subgroup of verbs expressing motion accompanied by sound emission has been found: 4 units (less than 1%), e.g. *хлопнуть* [khopnut'] ›clap‹. It is important to note that sound emission takes place during displacement, so it is concomitant of motion. Charts 3 and 4 show similar data. This means that the representativeness of the proportions of the studied verbs based on the data of the first volume were correctly assumed.

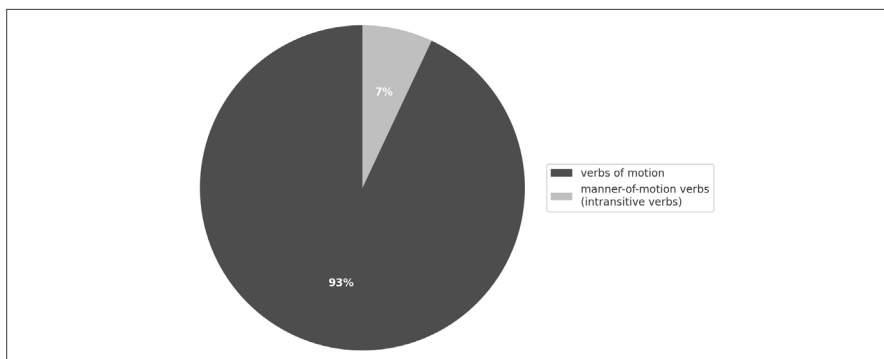


Chart 7

### Comparison of Intransitive Verbs' Distribution

Chart 5 shows the division of intransitive verbs of motion, based on the data of the first volume of the MAS:

- verbs expressing position change : 24 units (13%), e.g. *дрожать* [drozhat'] ›tremble‹;
- verbs of the type *идти-ходить* (›go-walk‹) and verbs with preverbs (prefixes): 95 units (50%), e.g. *бродить* [brodit'] ›wander‹;
- non-standard verbs of motion, e.g. colloquial: 48 units (25%), e.g. *елозить* [yelozit'] ›crawl‹;
- verbs expressing motion and sound emission: 2 units (less than 1%), e.g. *булькать* [bul'kat'] ›guggle‹;
- manner-of-motion verbs: 22 units (11%), e.g. *бросаться* [brosat'sya] ›plunge‹.

Chart 6 shows the division of intransitive verbs of motion, based on data from four volumes of MAS:

- verbs expressing position change: 92 units (11%), e.g. *шататься* [shatat'sya] ›stagger‹;
- verbs of the type *идти-ходить* (›go-walk‹) and verbs with preverbs (prefixes): 398 units (49%), e.g. *уйти* [uyti] ›leave‹;
- non-standard verbs of motion, e.g. colloquial: 214 units (27%), e.g. *таскаться* [taskat'sya] ›drag around‹;
- verbs expressing motion and sound emission: 7 units (1%), e.g. *шмякаться* [shmyakat'sya] ›fall with a flopping sound‹;
- manner-of-motion verbs: 98 units (12%), e.g. *шагать* [shagat'] ›step‹.



Charts 5 and 6 show similar data. This indicates the correctness of the above hypothesis about the proportions of the subgroups of the studied verbs.

## Results

It is important to note regarding the verbs of the manner of motion (22 verbs) that they make up only 7.19% of the first volume of MAS (306 verbs).

As shown in [Chart 7](#), this subgroup of the total composition of 4 volumes of MAS amounts to only 7% (98 verbs out of 1376 units).

Based on the above data presented, it can be concluded that the hypotheses regarding the proportion of the studied verbs were validated. It means that the data of the first volume and those of the 4 volumes were similar with regard to the groups of motion verbs. Moreover, based on the data in the first volume of MAS, the vast majority of verbs of the type идти-ходить (<go-walk>) and the verbs with preverbs (prefixes) were already predictable during the investigation of the first volume of MAS. The proportion of non-standard verbs is also significant in the corpus. It is interesting to note that although not in big quantities, but sound emission verbs are also present. From the perspective of the claim relating to the salience of Russian verbs of motion, it is the most important finding that verbs expressing manner of motion are of low abundance in the corpus. This fact contradicts the above-mentioned statement. Therefore, this claim can be considered disputable based on the study of vocabulary units of a large vocabulary (83,016 words). On that account, the findings of this paper are well-established.

---

## References

- Hasko, V. (2010): »Semantic Compositions Of Motion Verbs In Russian and English: New Approaches To Slavic Verbs Of Motion«. In: Hasko / Perelmutter (eds.): *New Approaches to Slavic Verbs of Motion*. [Studies in Language Companion Series, 115]. Amsterdam, pp. 197–224.
- Łozińska, J. (2018): *Path and Manner Saliency In Polish In Contrast With Russian: A Cognitive Linguistic Study*. [Brill's Studies in Language, Cognition and Culture, 15]. Boston.
- Maysak, T. A. (2005): *Tipologiya grammatikalizatsii konstruktivnykh glagolami dvizheniya i glagolami pozitsii*. Moskva, <http://lingvarium.org/maisak/typgramm.htm> (accessed: 10 September 2022).
- Maysak, T. A. / Rakhilina, Ye. V. (eds.) (2007): *Glagoly dvizheniya v vode: leksicheskaya tipologiya*. Moskva.

- Martsa S. (1986): *Mozgás és irányai. Az orosz mozgást jelentő igék szemantikai-szintaktikai vizsgálata a magyarral összevetésben.* [Motion and its Directions. Semantic-syntactic Examination of Russian Verbs of Motion in Comparison with Hungarian]. Pécs.
- Nesset, T. (2010): »Metaphorical Walking«. In: Hasko / Perelmutter (eds.): *New Approaches to Slavic Verbs of Motion*. [Studies in Language Companion Series, 115]. Amsterdam, pp. 343–359.
- Nikitina, T. (2010): »Variation In The Encoding Of Endpoints Of Motion In Russian«. In: Hasko / Perelmutter (eds.): *New Approaches to Slavic Verbs of Motion*. [Studies in Language Companion Series, 115]. Amsterdam, pp. 267–290.
- Rakhilina, Ye. V. (2004): »There and Back: The Case of Russian ›Go««. *Glossos* (5), [https://slaviccenters.duke.edu/sites/slaviccenters.duke.edu/files/media\\_items\\_files/5rakhilina.original.pdf](https://slaviccenters.duke.edu/sites/slaviccenters.duke.edu/files/media_items_files/5rakhilina.original.pdf), (accessed: 10 September 2022).
- Speed, T. (2015): »Manner / Path Typology of Bulgarian Motion Verbs«. *Journal of Slavic Linguistics* 23 (1), pp. 51–81.
- Talmy, L. (2007): »Lexical Typologies«. In: *Language Typology and Syntactic Description. Volume III: Grammatical Categories and the Lexicon*. Cambridge, pp. 66–168.
- Yevgen'yeva A. P. (ed.) (1981–1984): *Slovar' russkogo yazyka v chetyrëkh tomakh*. Moskva.

## Open Access

This paper is published under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>). Please note that individual, appropriately marked parts of the paper may be excluded from the license mentioned or may be subject to other copyright conditions. If such third party material is not under the Creative Commons license, any copying, editing or public reproduction is only permitted with the prior consent of the respective copyright owner or on the basis of relevant legal authorization regulations.