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Are prefixes always or never "empty"?

The centre of discussion of the present article is the problem of the so-called "empty" verbal prefixes in the Russian language and the prefix вы- 'out-' in particular. "Empty" prefixes are those prefixes that seem not to contribute any lexical meaning to the verb, but only change imperfective aspect into perfective. According to some scholars, such prefixes have purely grammatical but no lexical meaning. In this article I investigate the verbal aspectual prefix вы- in natural perfective verbs. In the terminology of Janda (2007), natural perfective verbs are aspectual correlates of imperfective verbs. In traditional terms, natural perfectives describe the logical completion of the corresponding imperfective activity. The activity described by the perfective verb is denotationally equivalent to the activity described by the imperfective verb and they differ only in terms of aspect. Natural perfectives differ from specialized perfectives whose denotation differs from their imperfective counterpart (Janda 2007: 609). I investigate the natural perfectives with вы- from the database created at University of Tromsø's "Exploring Emptiness" project. The database contains all aspectual pairs from *Malyj Akademičeskij slovar'* (Evgen'eva 1999), *Tolkovyj slovar' russkogo jazyka* (Ožegov & Švedova 2005) and a list compiled by Cubberley (1982).

In a previous article (Pozolotina 2009) I analyzed the meaning of the prefix вы- as a radial category. The present article explores the constructions into which the prefix вы- enters. I will argue that it is possible to demonstrate the existence of a lexical meaning in the so-called "empty" prefix вы- by looking at the constructions, in which they participate. Scholars who argue that "empty" prefixes do not have a lexical meaning, substantiate their claim by referring to the fact that such prefixes do not add any new lexical meaning to the verb. However, I suggest considering constructions that are broader than prefix + verb, where we will see that the meaning of the prefix is always repeated somewhere in the construction: if not by the verb itself, then by a preposition. This suggests that the meaning of the prefix that is repeated by the verb is not different from the

meaning repeated by a preposition. And if the meaning is always repeated, then there are only two possible positions to choose between: either prefixes always have lexical meaning or they never have lexical meaning. Within the frameworks of cognitive linguistics and Goldberg's construction grammar constructions are regarded as independent units, whose meanings are not the bare sum of the meanings of their components. This approach allows for the existence of recurring meaning, so we can claim that prefixes always have a meaning. In the article, I also show that differences among the submeanings of the prefix вы- influence the choice of constructions it is used in.

Goldberg's construction grammar

As I have mentioned before, the Construction Grammar framework developed by Goldberg (1995 and 2006) is of major importance for my research; it is helpful to regard constructions as independent units where the meaning of the whole is not necessarily the sum of the meanings of its parts.

According to Goldberg, the main difference between Construction Grammar and generative approaches is that generative linguists study formal constructions independently of their semantics and discourse functions, while cognitive linguists insist that constructions cannot be studied independently of their meanings (Goldberg 2006: 4). As Goldberg points out, generative linguists claim that there exist basic constructions (universal grammar), and that other constructions are derived from the basic constructions by means of movement. Thus the construction *Chris gave Pat a ball* is no different from the construction *Chris gave a ball to Pat* as they derive from the same underlying structure. Cognitivists, on the other hand, deny the existence of underlying representations, so each construction is independent, i.e. not derived from another one, and each construction has its own meaning. The fact that such a construction as, for example, *Chris gave Pat a ball* is not derived from the construction *Chris gave a ball to Pat* is supported by data from language acquisition: children learn both constructions at the same time, while if one construction was more basic than the other, we would expect children to acquire the basic construction first (Goldberg 2007: 589ff.).

In her work, Goldberg has shown that constructions have meaning on the basis of verb argument-structure constructions. There exist constructions like *Chris gave Pat a ball* where the verb's semantics presupposes 3 participants which are all present in the construction. However, there also exist constructions like *he sneezed his tooth right across town* where we cannot claim that the semantics of the verb *sneezed* involves three participants. Thus one cannot claim that general interpretations of basic sentence patterns are fully determined by the semantics of the main verb (Goldberg 2007: 591ff). In view of this, cognitive linguistics regards constructions as conventionalized pairings of form and meaning that merit analysis in their own right (Goldberg 2006: 3).

Constructions with the prefix вы-

In my research I claim that the constructions with the verbal prefix вы- have recurring meaning. To be more precise, such constructions have a tendency to repeat the meaning of the prefix in other parts of the construction. I also state that prefix meaning can be duplicated either by the preposition or by the semantics of the base verb. (I call such verbs "verbs with built-in semantics"). To make things clearer, I will provide some examples:

Вытравить зайца **из** норы 'to **out**-smoke the hare **out of** the burrow' – in this construction the meaning of the prefix **вы- (out-)** is repeated by the meaning of the preposition **из (out of)**: both introduce a scenario with two actants: the trajector and the container. Both the prefix and the preposition describe the relationships between the two actants in the initial (the trajector is inside the container) and final situations (the trajector is outside of the container). Moreover, both presuppose the direction of movement that changes the initial situation into the final situation (the movement of the trajector from the initial position inside the container into the final position outside the container).

Выпотрошить рыбу – the base verb потрошить 'disembowel' has the built-in semantics достать потроха из 'to take the entrails **out of**'. We can see that the built-in semantics of the base verb has the same meaning as the prefix (and the same meaning the preposition would have): it introduces two actants (the trajector and the container) and determines the relationships between them. Moreover, the semantics of the

verb not only provides the place, but also incorporates the trajector. For instance, in the verb потрошить 'disembowel', the trajector потроха 'entrails' is incorporated in the base verb.

In my work I entertain the hypothesis that the meaning of the prefix always has to be repeated by other constituent parts of the construction. In other words, in the aspectual constructions (the constructions formed by adding the prefix and thus changing the aspect from imperfective into perfective) the meaning of the prefix should be repeated either by the semantics of the base verb or by the preposition, determining relations in the verb's argument structure construction.

I argue that in cases where the base verb does not have the built-in semantics, the preposition should be always present in the construction. Admittedly, there can exist such cases as вытравить зайца 'to out-smoke the hare', but I consider them elliptical because in such cases the full construction with all the actants must be recoverable either from the context or from the general knowledge of the interlocutors.

I argue that in the light of my hypothesis the problem of "empty" prefixes disappears, as the meaning of the prefix is always repeated by other components of the construction. Those who stated that in some cases the prefix adds the meaning to the verb and sometimes does not, looked at the construction вы +V, but not at larger syntactic constructions. Otherwise they would see that in cases where the verb does not repeat the meaning of the prefix, this meaning is repeated by the preposition. The proponents of the view that the meaning of a construction is the bare sum of the meanings of its components then must state that the addition of the prefix to the construction never changes its lexical meaning (as it is already present in other parts of the construction) and thus that the prefix is always "empty". However the statement that the prefix is always "empty" would be untenable and could be easily disproved by the fact that "occasionalisms" are often created.[1] By way of example, consider the following sentence from Krongauz:
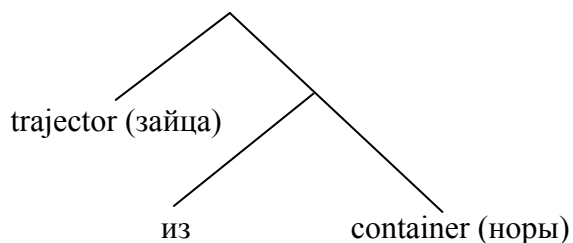
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[1] For the purposes of this study I will use "occasionalism" as the English equivalent of the Russian "окказионализм", i.e. the words that are not conventionalized in the language, but are created occasionally by individual authors according to the rules of the language and are understandable for the speakers.

(1)   Ага, - сказал бурно Семен, - чтобы он нас выженил отсюда
       годов через пять. (Krongauz 1998: 243).

The transitive verb женить 'to marry' is not normally used with the prefix вы-. In other words, the verb выженить 'to out-marry' is created by the author as an occasionalism. However, as the prefix вы- has a meaning, the native speaker can understand the verb выженить 'to out-marry' as 'to force parents out of the house by marrying'. Thus the native speaker is able to mentally restore the actants from the context and place them in the situation implied by the prefix.

Based on examples like выженить 'out-marry' I claim that the prefix вы- has a meaning that comprises a scenario consisting of situations that locate the actants and determine the interrelations between them. This meaning of the prefix is reflected in the construction. When a native speaker comes across an occasionalism like выженить родителей отсюда 'to out-marry parents from here', the meaning of the prefix enables him/her to mentally restore the construction implied: вы + V + родителей + из + дома + путем женитьбы 'to out-V parents from the house by marrying'. Notice that the verb stem has a very general meaning, so in principle there are numerous stems that can be placed there: гнать 'drive out', селить 'evict', etc. The existence of occasionalisms shows that prefixes have a meaning, since the use of the prefix helps the listener to reconstruct the whole scenario.

I consider two types of constructions: first with a simple base verb and second with a base verb with built-in semantics. According to my hypothesis, these two constructions have different meanings that can influence the meaning of the base verb itself. The fact that constructions can influence the meaning of the components, or to put it differently, that the meaning of the construction can override the meaning of its components, was demonstrated by Goldberg (2007: 591ff) on the basis of argument-structure constructions of the verb. She stated that there are cases where the meaning of the construction and the verb coincided as in the case *Chris gave the ball to Mat*: the semantics of the verb involves three actants and the argument-structure construction also gives place for three arguments. However, in the case of *he sneezed his tooth right across town* the verb's semantics provides the place for only one actant, but the meaning of the argument-structure construction overrides the original

meaning of the verb by imposing the three-participant semantics onto the verb.

Let us now look at the constructions with the prefix вы-. I will start with the construction involving verbs without built-in semantics: вы + V + trajector (Acc) + из + container (Gen), where V stands for the base verb. I suggest representing this construction as follows:

The way of presenting a construction as a tree-structure is borrowed from generative linguistics as I consider it very fruitful. However, for my purposes it is sufficient to use simplified tree-structures; the tree-structures used by generativists are more complex.

To show how to understand the construction I will use the example **вы**травить зайца **из** норы 'to **out-**smoke the hare **out of** the burrow'. The preposition из 'out of' combines with the noun standing for the container нора 'burrow', thus making a phrase из норы 'out of the burrow', which I represent as follows:

Then the phrase из норы 'out of the burrow' combines with the noun standing for the trajector and thus we get a phrase зайца из норы 'the hare out of the burrow':

trajector (зайца)

из   container (норы)

etc.

This construction can be either explicit (вытравить зайца из норы 'to out-smoke the hare out of the burrow' or elliptical (вытравить зайца 'to out-smoke the hare', but in the case of ellipsis it should be possible to restore all the actants from the context, so that the construction equals the explicit version with all participants intact.

Let us take a closer look at the verbs with the prefix вы- under analysis. In my previous article (Pozolotina 2009) I analyzed different submeanings of the prefix вы-, in this chapter I look at the constructions to see whether there is correspondence between a meaning and its use in this or that type of construction. As stated in the previous article, the prototypical or near-prototypical sub-meanings and metaphorical extensions from the prototypical meaning of the prefix have two variations in construals depending on the position of the observer. If the observer is inside the container, the focus is on the container that becomes free from the trajector. If the observer is outside the container the natural focus is on the appearance of the trajector, i.e. on the trajector itself.

First we will look at the prototypical and near-prototypical meanings to see whether there are some peculiarities of the constructions used to express these meanings. The meaning of the prefix is the scenario, which provides semantic slots for the verb and its actants and also describes the relationships between them. The slots should be obligatorily filled.

We have two sub-types of constructions here:

1)   the first type of the construction is вы + V + trajector + из + container, here both construals of prototypical meaning are presented:

   a. construal with the observer inside and focus on the container:

вымазать жир из банки 'to out-smear the fat from the jar', вымарать строки из текста 'to out-cross the lines out of the text', вытравить мышей из дому 'to out-poison mice out of the house'.

b. construal with the observer outside with focus on the trajector: вытравить зайца из норы 'to out-smoke the hare out of the burrow'.
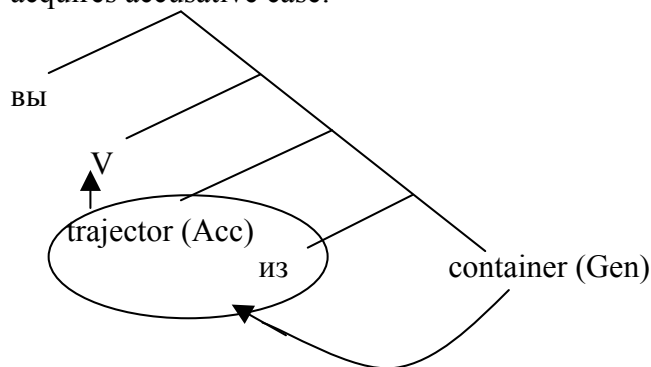
As mentioned, this construction can be either explicit or elliptical, but in the latter case it should be possible to recover the missing elements from the context. For example, it is possible to say "наконец-то мы вытравили зайца", but in this situation it is obvious from the context that the hare was in the burrow. Thus it is possible to restore the construction вытравить зайца из норы 'to out-smoke the hare out of the burrow'.

Notice that ellipsis is not equally natural in all constructions. For example, in the construal with the observer outside, when the focus is on the trajector, the use of the elliptical construction вы + V + trajector (Acc) (e.g., вытравить зайца 'to out-smoke the hare', выкопать куст 'to out-dig the bush', and вырыть клад 'to out-dig the treasure' is more natural. In the construal with the observer inside, on the other hand, it is more natural to use the construction вы + V + всех + trajector (Acc) + из + container (Gen) (e.g. вымазать весь жир из банки 'to out-smear all the fat from the jar'. This is because in the situation with the observer inside the focus is on the fact that all the entities left the container. It is also possible to use the elliptical construction вы + V + всех + trajector (Acc), but the container should be recoverable from the context (e.g. вытравить всех мышей 'to out-poison all mice'.
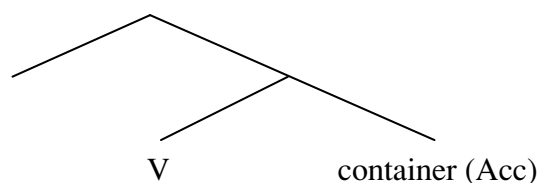
2) The second type of construction is вы + V + container (Acc) in cases like выпотрошить рыбу 'to (out-)disembowel the fish', выполоскать белье 'to (out-)wash the clothes'. This type of construction is used only for construals with the observer inside, when the focus is on the container. What is significant here is the meaning of the base verb: for the verb to be used in this type of construction it should obligatorily have built-in semantics, like, for instance, the verb потрошить 'disembowel'.

We can conclude that when the focus is on the container, the semantics of the trajector can be incorporated into the verb's semantics. It

is possible not to explicate the trajector in the construction, and therefore the container takes the place of direct object in the construction and acquires accusative case:

вы

V

trajector (Acc)

из

container (Gen)

Thus we get the following construction:

V   container (Acc)

I should mention here that I do not claim that the construction вы + V + container (Acc) is *derived* from the construction вы + V + trajector (Acc) + из + container (Gen), as it would be done in generative linguistics. When I use arrows, I do not mean the actual movement and transformation of a construction from a more basic one, but rather use the arrows to compare the two constructions and thus clarify similarities and differences.
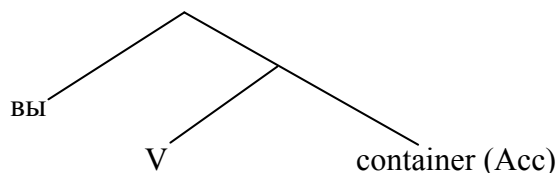
As we could see from the examples above, the construction вы + V + trajector (Acc) + из + container (Gen) is preferably used when the situation is construed with the observer outside and thus with the focus on the appearance of the trajector on the observer's eyes. But this construction can also be used for construals with the observer inside. The construction вы + V + всех + trajector (Acc) + из + container (Gen) (with the additional qualifier) is used for the construal with the observer inside and the focus on the container being free from the trajector completely. The construction вы + V + container (Acc) is used to describe the situation construed with the observer inside and the focus on the container

being free from the trajector. Thus we can see that when a speaker wants to construe the situation with the observer outside, s/he uses the following construction: вы + V + trajector (Acc) + из + container (Gen) where the base verb is without the built-in semantics.

When a speaker wants to construe the situation with the observer inside s/he uses this construction: вы + V + container (Acc) where the base verb has the built-in semantics. Therefore the speaker is obliged to use the verb *without* the built-in semantics to construe the situation with the observer outside and to use the verb *with* the built-in semantics to construe the situation with the observer inside.

However, as I have already mentioned, the semantics of the construction can override the semantics of its components. That is why if the observer wants to use a certain verb, for instance a verb with built-in semantics to construe the situation with the observer outside, s/he can deprive the verb of its built-in semantics by using it in the construction вы + V + trajector (Acc) + из + container (Gen) as in the example выпотрошить перья из подушки 'to (out-)disembowel feathers from the pillow'. In this case, one cannot use the ellipsis выпотрошить перья 'to (out-)disembowel the feathers' because the construction will be interpreted as вы + V + container (Acc) and the feathers would be seen as the container and not the trajector. In other words, the verb will be interpreted as having the built-in semantics thus yielding the interpretation 'to take the entrails out of the feathers'.

Now I will turn to the constructions with the non-prototypical meaning of the prefix вы-. For the meaning "to disappear", which is an extension from the prototypical meaning construed with the observer inside the construction вы + V + container (Acc) is used. By way of example, consider выстирать бельё:
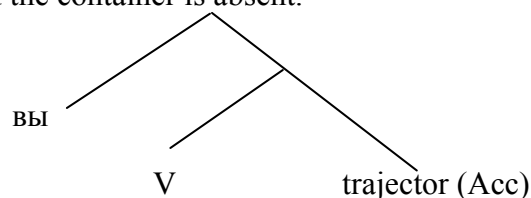

The verb выстирать 'to (out-)wash' has the built-in semantics 'to remove the dirt' and unlike the verbs in the prototypical meaning it cannot be

deprived of its built-in semantics and cannot be used in the situation with the observer outside and thus in the construction вы + V + trajector (Acc) + из + container (Gen) as in *выстирать грязь из белья '*to (out-)wash the dirt out of the clothes'.

Now let us consider meanings that are extensions from the prototypical meaning construed with the observer outside such as 'to appear on the surface', 'the appearance of an image', 'the appearance due to the removal of the container', etc. To reveal such meanings we use the construction вы + V + trajector (Acc). However, in contrast to the prototypical meaning, this construction does not involve ellipsis. Thus it cannot be restored to the construction вы + V + trajector (Acc) + из + container (Gen): *выкопать яму из земли '*to (out-)dig a pit out of the earth' *вытатуировать паука из кожи 'to (out-)tattoo a spider out of the skin', *вытравить надпись из металла '*to (out)etch the inscription out of the metal'. In each of those cases the verb has the built-in semantics that repeats the semantics of the prefix. For example, in case of выстрогать игрушку 'to (out-)cut a toy' the meaning of the prefix would be "the appearance of the image or shape" and the verb строгать 'cut' has this built-in semantics.
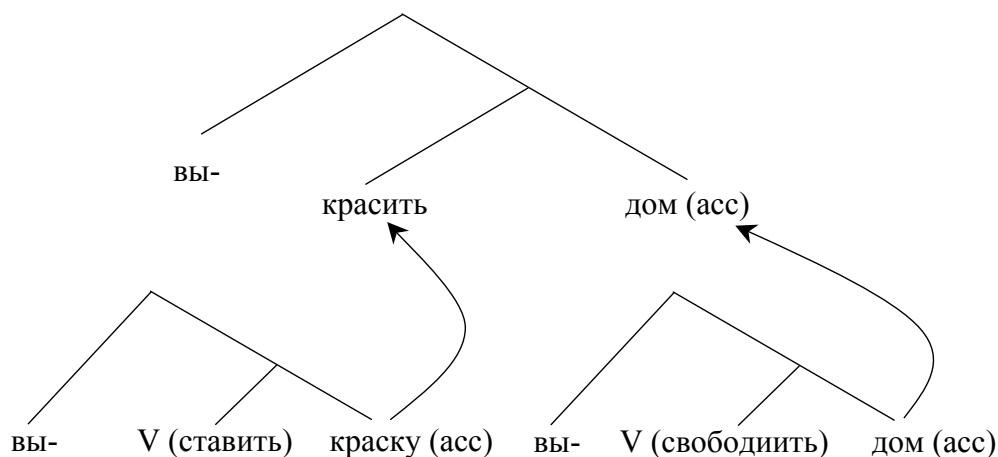
In the diagram below the trajector occupies the place of the direct object and the container is absent.

Now we will look at a construction whose meaning is the result of blending of the extensions from both prototypical construals. Here I include such cases as выкрасить дом 'to (out-)pain the house', вымостить улицу 'to (out-)pave the street', выпороть ребенка 'to (out)whip the child'. Such cases are the blending of the extensions from two construals. The first one is an extension from the construal with the observer outside – "the appearance on the surface", where the construction is вы + V + trajector (Acc). The second one is an extension from the construal with the observer inside, where the construction is вы + V + container (Acc). In the construction standing for the blended meaning the trajector of the first construal becomes incorporated into the semantics of the verb, while

the container of the second construal occupies the position of the direct object. Thus we end up with the construction вы + V + container (Acc), where the semantics of the verb incorporates the trajector.

The example выкрасить дом 'to (out-)paint the house' illustrates the blend:

This schema helps us to better understand what places are taken by which actants in the construction. As mentioned, the meaning of the prefix is the result of blending of extensions from both construals (with the observer inside and the observer outside). The construal with the observer outside is to put the paint (the trajector) on the surface and for that construal the construction would be: вы + V + trajector (Acc). The construal with the observer inside is to make the house free from an undesirable quality (i.e. being unpainted). The construction for this case would be: вы + V + container (Acc). However, the construction revealing the blended meaning looks different: the trajector from the construal with the observer inside gets incorporated into the meaning of the base verb, while the container from the construal with the observer inside takes the place of the direct object and acquires accusative case. Thus the construction is вы + V + container (Acc).

To conclude, I have suggested that the meaning of the prefix is always repeated in the construction either in the built-in semantics of the verb or in the preposition. Such an approach helps to solve the problem of "empty prefixes". Proponents of the theory of "empty prefixes" would claim that a prefix is empty whenever prefixation does not produce a

change in the meaning of the verb. By taking syntactic constructions into account, however, I have shown that the meaning of the prefix is *always* repeated somewhere else in the construction. Therefore, a proponent of the theory of "empty prefixes" would be forced to adopt the absurd position, whereby all prefixes are always empty. In my view, this shows that the theory of "empty prefixes" is problematic and cannot be maintained.

I have also discovered that different constructions help to reveal different submeanings of the prefix. For the prototypical situations, the construction вы + V + trajector (Acc) + из + container (Gen), where V is the base verb without the built-in semantics, can be used for both situations: with the observer inside and outside. However, this construction is more natural for the construals with the observer outside. The construction вы + V + всех + trajector (Acc) + из + container (Gen) is used for the construals with the observer inside. The construction вы + V + container (Acc), where the base verb has built-in semantics, is used for the situations with the observer inside. However, for the prototypical cases, it is possible to use the verb with built-in semantics for construals with the observer outside. In this case, the meaning of the construction вы + V + trajector (Acc) + из + container (Gen) overrides the semantics of the verb; it deprives it of its built-in semantics. That is possible if we adopt the theory of Goldberg (1995 and 2006) according to which the meaning of the construction can be different from the sum of meanings of its components.

The constructions used for all the non-prototypical meanings in my analysis involve base verbs with built-in semantics, so the construction for the extensions from the prototypical meaning construed with the observer inside is: вы + V + container (Acc). For the extensions from the prototypical meaning with the observer outside the following construction is used: вы + V + trajector (Acc). For the submeaning that is an extension from both construals the construction is вы + V + container. However, in this case the verb incorporates the trajector in its semantics.

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Summary

This article investigates the prefix *vy-* in so-called natural perfectives. On the basis of syntactic constructions where *vy*-verbs occur, it is argued that that even in natural perfectives *vy-* is not semantically empty.

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