

## **Constructionalization of body part constructions in Russian: five constructions with face, eyes, forehead, and back terms**

*Daria Demidova*

### *1. Introduction*

*В глаза любит, а за глаза губит.*  
'Loves you to your face, but ruins you behind your back.'  
Russian saying (Žigulev 1965)

The saying in the epigraph describes a two-faced person (topic “*Двуличный*” in Žigulev (ed.) 1965). *Двуличный* (‘two-faced’) is a description of a person who says one thing to your face but acts differently behind your back.

The opposition of different actions ‘to one’s face’ vs ‘behind one’s back’ is represented by a group of Russian constructions, not only the pair VP *в глаза* and VP *за глаза* instantiated in the saying. To capture this meaning, the article proposes a new constructional category, termed “inclusative and exclusative”<sup>1</sup> (referring to inclusion or exclusion of a relevant participant). In Russian, the category is represented by five constructions that include certain body part terms (face, eyes, forehead, back): VP *в лицо* ‘in face’, VP *в глаза* ‘in eyes’, VP *в лоб* ‘in forehead’, VP *за глаза* ‘behind eyes’, VP *за спиной* ‘behind back’. The constructions denote something said (or done) either openly (‘to one’s face’) or in secret (‘behind one’s back’).

The focus of the article is on the evolution, dynamic interactions and variation of the group of five Russian constructions. This research seeks to (a) figure out the nature of semantic transitions body part nouns undergo during their development as a part of constructions and (b) analyze how paths of constructionalization might affect the behavior of body part constructions in the present-day Russian.

I address the following questions in the article:

- What is the history of the five aforementioned constructions in Russian? When did they first appear, and what is their likely origin?

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Laura A. Janda for coining the terms “inclusative and exclusative” during our discussions on the topic.

- What meanings did the body part constructions under scrutiny acquire during their documented development?
- Are the developmental paths of the constructions similar? Are the constructionalization paths of ‘face’-, ‘eye’-, ‘forehead’-, and ‘back’-constructions in question parallel to the grammaticalization paths of corresponding body part terms?
- What cognitive concepts and metaphors could have motivated the direction in which the five constructions developed?

My study is based on the theories of Construction Grammar, Embodiment, Conceptual Metaphor, Grammaticalization, and Constructionalization. The research was conducted using The Russian National Corpus ([ruscorpora.ru](http://ruscorpora.ru)).

The structure of the article is as follows. In Section 1.1 of the Introduction, I discuss the theoretical background for my argument. Section 1.2 introduces the concepts of “inclusative and exclusative” and the data on which the analysis is based. Section 2 of the article presents an in-depth explanation of inclusative semantics, as well as a discussion of three Russian inclusative constructions (VP *в лицо*, VP *в глаза*, VP *в лоб*) and their constructionalization. Section 3 explores exclusative semantics and the diachronic development of two Russian exclusative constructions (VP *за спиной*, VP *за глаза*). Section 4, Conclusion, discusses the entire construction family: the interactions and parallels within the group, the results of constructional development of the family in present-day Russian.

### *1.1 Theoretical background*

A construction, according to Goldberg (2019, 2), is a recurrent form-function pairing in a language, at any level of complexity (morpheme, lexeme, phrase and even discourse structure). The starting point of my research is the Russian Constructicon<sup>2</sup> (RC, <https://constructicon.github.io/russian/>), whose constructions are more specific: they are entrenched multi-word expressions that contain at least one open (not fixed) slot (Janda et al. 2020). Typically, constructions in the Russian Constructicon have a fixed part (anchor) and one or more slots that are filled with a restricted set of lexemes. A key aspect of the five constructions of the group under discussion is the fact that they all include body part terms as anchors, which puts them in a bigger group of body part constructions.

The body is a crucial tool for our understanding of the world. Motor and perceptual mechanisms provide a basis for the way we conceptualize reality and reflect it in language. According to Embodiment Theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1999), spatial concepts are motivated by our bodies and their orientation, not by abstract mental ideas. For example, the concept of ‘front’ (and opposite ‘back’) is based on the structure of the human body, which is projected onto an object. The front of an object is the side that *faces* the human when they interact with it, or the part that *faces* forward when the object moves. For instance, the front of a screen is its visible, functional part; the front cover of a book is what one would see (and judge) before reading the book.

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<sup>2</sup> The Russian Constructicon is an open-access searchable database of multiword grammatical constructions of Russian, with over 3600 constructions.

The body and its physical capacity, and the way human brains work determine our perception and conceptualization (see the example of color categories in Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 104), which is characterized as neural embodiment. The way the body is projected onto the world also establishes perception and conceptualization of the world.

Abstract thought is impossible without metaphor: abstract ideas are metaphorical projections from structures of the physical world. According to the theory of primary metaphor (Grady 1997), more complex metaphors consist of and are grounded in primary metaphors. Primary metaphor is a strong association between a real-world experience and our perception of it, which forms unconsciously and automatically. Though primary metaphors are based on subjective experiences, these experiences are basic enough for them to be universal. For instance, the primary metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 53–54) is an association between seeing something (sensorimotor domain) and the basic experience of getting information through vision, therefore, knowing (subjective judgment): *I see what you mean; Я не вижу причин для этого* ‘I don’t see any reasons for it’. The KNOWING IS SEEING metaphor has played an important role in the development of the following four constructions under scrutiny: VP *в лицо* ‘in face’, VP *в глаза* ‘in eyes’, VP *за глаза* ‘behind eyes’, and VP *за спиной* ‘behind back’.

As I will argue in the article, for instance, the relevant Russian constructions with *глаза* ‘eyes’ have developed by the path represented in Figure 1. The body part term (‘eyes’) with certain prepositions has likely metonymically expanded to refer to a field of vision (i.e. something is visible or not visible to an observer). Prepositional phrases with ‘eyes’ as a marker of (in)visibility have further developed to denote the idea of physical presence or absence: if someone or something is visible, it is physically present, if someone or something is invisible, they are absent. Furthermore, the meaning of physical presence or absence has likely become a source to the meanings ‘openly’ and ‘in secret’, characteristic of the present-day Russian constructions VP *в глаза* and VP *за глаза* (for an in-depth discussion, see sections 2.2 and 3.2).

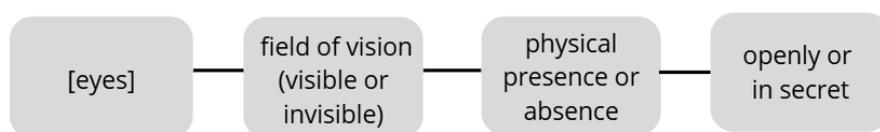


Figure 1: Reconstructed development of Russian ‘eye’-constructions

In the context of the constructions under scrutiny, the primary metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING is connected to the physical traits of human bodies, front-back asymmetry in particular. Actions that are done ‘in front’ of a person, in the zone where most perception occurs, are known and done openly, with the goal to be known. Actions that occur ‘behind’ someone, outside of the zone of most perception (vision in particular), are therefore unknown (i.e. secrets).

According to Lakoff & Johnson (1999, 47), conceptual metaphor is a cognitive mechanism for conceptualizing subjective (mental) experiences in terms of other domains of experience (often sensorimotor). For instance, the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 4–5) structures the concept of an argument (a verbal

confrontation) through the concept of war (a physical battle). The actions performed during the argument are often conceptualized as a physical attack or defence: *I demolished his argument*; *Он отстоял свою точку зрения* ‘He stood his ground on his point of view’, etc. The ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor is a motivating factor in the development of the Russian construction *в лоб* ‘in forehead’ (see section 2.3). Conceptual metaphors are embodied by cognitive primitives and primary metaphors that “ground human metaphor systems and more complex metaphors in embodied experience” (Lakoff 2012, 778).

The importance of the body in human cognition (and language in particular) is underlined by the prevalence of primary body-based metaphors in the languages of the world. Lexical items related to the body are a cross-linguistically productive source of grammaticalization: 41 out of 528 lexical sources of grammaticalization described by Kuteva et al. (2019) are body part terms.

According to the *World Lexicon of Grammaticalization* (Kuteva et al. 2019), all four body part terms relevant to this article (‘face’, ‘eyes’, ‘forehead’, ‘back’) are documented to grammaticalize into spatial markers, and three of them (‘face’, ‘eyes’, and ‘back’) can further develop into temporal markers (pp. 64, 67, 165–166, 168). More specifically, both ‘face’ and ‘eye’ lexemes can get grammaticalized into deictic location markers meaning ‘front’, and possibly further to express temporal deixis ‘before’. For instance, Bambara *nyè/né* ‘eye’, ‘face’ has grammaticalized into a locative adverb or postposition *né, né fê* (‘in front of’, ‘before’), and into a temporal postposition *nyè, nyè fê* (‘before’), following this grammaticalization path: EYE (> FACE) > FRONT > BEFORE. ‘Forehead’ is documented to grammaticalize into a deictic location marker ‘in front of/ahead’ in two African languages, Dually and Bulu. For instance, Dullay *múinaté*, locative genitive of *miinté* ‘forehead’ has developed into a postposition *múinacé* ‘in front of’. The body part term ‘back’ has been grammaticalized to a locative marker ‘behind’: in Modern Chinese *bei* ‘back’ > *beihou* ‘behind’. Moreover, in some languages it can express the temporal concept of the future (‘after’). For instance, Icelandic *bak* ‘back’ has grammaticalized into a locative and temporal marker *bak(i)* ‘behind’, ‘after’. Thus, the grammaticalization path of ‘back’ terms is BACK (body part) > BEHIND > AFTER. Additionally, ‘back’ is documented to become a past temporal marker (‘earlier’) in some languages, such as English ‘back’ (*back in the day*).

Lexicon and grammar are not separate and autonomous, and constructions are symbolic assemblies that connect them (Langacker 1986, 2009). The multiword structure of constructions provides them with the potential to connect semantics and grammar on the lexicon-grammar continuum and develop quasi-grammatical meanings.

Gildea & Barðdal (2023) emphasize that grammaticalization theory is compatible with the framework of Diachronic Construction Grammar. The development of the constructions under scrutiny in this article partly parallels the grammaticalization paths of the corresponding body part terms discussed earlier. Constructions result from constructionalization, which is in some ways parallel to grammaticalization. Traugott and Trousdale (2013) define constructionalization as a creation of form-meaning combinations of signs, which is accompanied by changes in degree of schematicity, productivity, and compositionality. Constructionalization is a result of accumulation of constructional changes, smaller changes limited to specific (micro-) constructions. As a result of

constructionalization, new constructions emerge and develop different functions. Constructionalization is not a finite process, as opposed to grammaticalization, which ends when a lexical item becomes a grammatical marker.

Unlike grammatical markers, the elements of non-compositional constructions obtain additional quasi-grammatical meanings: their constituents often do not undergo full semantic bleaching, and the process of grammaticalization is not finished. Incomplete grammaticalization is called quasi-grammaticalization and is still considered grammaticalization (Traugott 2003). ‘Leftover’ lexical components that did not undergo the bleaching process and were preserved from the original meaning of the phraseme provide the basis for non-trivial oppositions, which usually include numerous constructions of the same family: they fall into one quasi-grammatical class (Rakhilina et al. 2022). Rakhilina and Lee Su Hyon (2010) discuss the degree of grammaticalization and development of quasi-grammatical meanings as a scale and provide examples of ‘minimally grammaticalized’ and ‘maximally grammaticalized’ Russian quantifiers. The Russian quantifier *копна* ‘sheaf’ is an instance of a quasi-grammatical marker that still preserves traces of its source semantics: the lexical source, sheaf, is ‘a large amount of stacked hay or straw bound in the middle’. It is still used in Russian in its literal meaning, but it has also expanded to refer to a large quantity of flowers or other plants (*копна гиацинтов* ‘a bunch of hyacinths’, *копна деревьев* ‘a bunch of trees’, *копна водорослей* ‘a bunch of seaweed’), and in this case, the restriction on the quantified noun is enforced by semantic connection between the quasi-grammatical quantifier and its lexical source. On the opposite end of grammaticalization scale is *куча* ‘pile’, with almost no restrictions. *Куча* is used with animate nouns (*куча людей* ‘a bunch of people’, *куча родственников* ‘a bunch of relatives’), object and substance names (*куча грибов* ‘a bunch of mushrooms’, *куча пшеницы* ‘a bunch of wheat’), as well as with abstract concepts (*куча времени* ‘a lot of time’, *куча ошибок* ‘a lot of errors’). The only restrictions on the use of *куча* as a quantifier are liquids (\**куча воды* ‘a lot of water’), possibly due to incompatibility with the lexical source (a pile).

The way grammaticalization and constructionalization affect the meaning of body part lexemes and their behavior as part of a construction can help us understand the role of the body in human cognition and language in particular even better.

### 1.2 *Inclusative and exclusative*

By “inclusative and exclusative” I will refer to a cross-linguistic constructional category which captures the inclusion or exclusion of a participant who is the topic of a conversation in said conversation.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the “inclusative and exclusative” category is instantiated by five Russian constructions with body parts: (1) VP *в лицо* ‘in face’, (2) VP *в глаза* ‘in eyes’, (3) VP *в лоб* ‘in forehead’, (3) VP *за глаза* ‘behind eyes’, (4) VP *за спиной* ‘behind back’.

- (1) Он *рассмеялся* мне прямо *в лицо* и смылся. [Vera Belousova. (2000)]<sup>3</sup>  
'He *laughed right in my face* and took off.'
- (2) Я прямо *говорю* правду *в глаза*, даже если она неприятна... [Vremja Voroneža, 04.05.2016]  
'I *speak* the truth *to the face*, even if it's unpleasant...'
- (3) Любовь Петровна такая, что не будет *за глаза говорить*, а сразу *в лоб*. [Novaja gazeta, 20.12.2017]  
'Ljubov' Petrovna is the kind of person who won't *talk behind your back*, she'll say it right *to your face*.'
- (4) Чувствую, что все относятся ко мне с неприязнью, уверена, что *за спиной говорят* нелестные вещи. [Vladimir Levi. (1973)]  
'I feel that everyone treats me with hostility, and I'm sure they *say* unflattering things *behind my back*.'

These constructions denote a specific parameter of a communication situation and form a construction family in the sense of Endresen & Janda (2020): a construction family is a small (usually 2–9) group of constructions with shared semantic, syntactic and structural properties. The five constructions under scrutiny have similar semantics as well as syntactic structure: they are Head and Modifier Constructions with a VP slot and an anchor instantiated by a PP with a body part noun in the Accusative or Instrumental. On a more abstract level, the five constructions can be represented as two schematic constructions: inclusative 'VP *в* body\_part.Acc' and exclusative 'VP *за* body\_part.Instr/body\_part.Acc' (I describe the variation within the exclusative construction VP *за глаза* in Section 3.2). However, it is important to underline that the potential body\_part slot fillers are restricted to 'face', 'eyes', and 'forehead' for the inclusative construction, and 'back' and 'eyes' for the exclusative one.

Inclusative constructions include VP *в лицо*, VP *в глаза*, and VP *в лоб*, illustrated in (1), (2), and (3). They denote a situation in which [Participant A] Agent [says something] Action openly and honestly to [participant B] Maleficiary/Addressee. The content of [participant A] Agent's speech is about [participant B] Maleficiary/Addressee and is usually negative.

Exclusative constructions include VP *за глаза* and VP *за спиной*, cf. (3) and (4). They denote a situation in which [Participant A] Agent [does something] Action without [participant B] Maleficiary's presence and knowledge. The Action usually negatively affects participant B (often it's Agent talking negatively about the Maleficiary). The speaker typically disapproves of participant A's behavior. However, exclusative constructions do not solely denote situations of communication (gossip): they can be used in a more general meaning to describe an action done excluding an important involved participant, who is absent, removed from the situation, and unaware of it.

It is important to stress that inclusative and exclusative form a constructional category. No grammatical category denoting purposeful inclusion or exclusion of a witness (who is also a maleficiary, a topic of conversation, and a possible addressee) from a communication situation is documented in the languages of the world (Mel'čuk 1998; Kuteva et al. 2019;

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<sup>3</sup> Hereinafter the examples are taken from The Russian National Corpus (ruscorpora.ru).

Plungian 2011). The closest grammatical meaning found in the languages of the world is evidentiality (Aikhenvald 2004). Non-firsthand evidentiality refers to a speaker not witnessing a situation and receiving the information from another source. For instance, non-firsthand Turkish *gelmiş* ('he/she/it has come') means 'I did not witness them coming but I know it because someone told me / because I see that they are there now', as opposed to firsthand *geldi* ('he/she/it came') which means 'I was there and saw them coming' (Universal Dependencies 2020<sup>4</sup>). However, the meaning of the constructions under scrutiny does not fall within the grammatical category of evidentiality: inclusative and exclusative constructions represent a more specific opposition of 'exclusion of a participant' vs. 'focus on the inclusion of a participant'. For inclusative constructions, the topic of the conversation is a participant who is physically present and included by the agent in the communication as a core addressee (i.e. the topic and the addressee are the same participant). For exclusative constructions, the topic of the conversation is an absent person, excluded by the agent on purpose (i.e. the participant under discussion is neither core addressee nor part of the audience).

The distinction between inclusion or exclusion of a participant in a conversation can also be expressed by "clusivity"<sup>5</sup>, a grammatical category which denotes whether the addressee is included or excluded in the set of referents of the first-person plural pronoun 'we' (Filimonova 2005). For instance, Guajajara differentiates between inclusive first person plural pronoun and morpheme *zane* "We (I + you or I + you + they)" and exclusive *ure* "We (I + they)" (Universal Dependencies 2020<sup>6</sup>). Once again, while this grammatical category is relevant and represents a part of the meaning under scrutiny, it does not cover the entirety of the complex situation expressed by inclusative and exclusative constructions. Therefore, despite referring to *inclusion* or *exclusion* of a participant and sharing similar names, inclusive/exclusive (grammatical distinction of first person plural pronouns) and inclusative/exclusative (constructional category contrasting open communication and gossip) are not the same and should be separated.

The Russian Constructicon also employs the terms "inclusive" and "exclusive". In the RC, "inclusive" and "exclusive" are semantic types of constructions that belong to the subclass Sets and Elements<sup>7</sup>. The constructions of this subclass "contain information on the relationship between an element and a set" ("quantifiers and operators"). Thus, the syntactic types of inclusive and exclusive constructions<sup>8</sup>, as well as their semantics<sup>9</sup> differ significantly from the five constructions under scrutiny in this article.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://universaldependencies.org/u/feat/Evident.html#examples-1>

<sup>5</sup> See also: inclusive/exclusive distinction, Siewierska (2004, 82–88).

<sup>6</sup> <https://universaldependencies.org/gub/feat/Clusivity.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://constructicon.github.io/russian/semantic-types/#1-6-subclass-sets-and-elements>

<sup>8</sup> Syntactic types: inclusives are biclausal, clause and modifier, or NP head and modifier constructions, while all inclusatives discussed in the article are VP head and modifier constructions.

<sup>9</sup> Inclusives explicitly name a set and state that an element belongs to it; in inclusatives, inclusion is implied rather than expressed, and is only a part of the relevant semantics.

Four constructions of the group are represented in the RC: 3006 VP *в лицо*, 767 VP *в лоб*, 1037 VP *за спиной* (у NP-Gen), and 1028 VP *за глаза*. The construction VP *в глаза* will be added to the RC soon. These constructions are not classified as “inclusive” or “exclusive” in the RC: their semantic tags include Manner, Assessment specific to people, Attitude (Dissatisfaction), Core Addressee, and Witnesses.

Common verb fillers for the five inclusive and exclusive constructions include speech (and sound) verbs: *говорить* ‘talk’, *сказать* ‘say’, *называть* ‘call’, *обзывать* ‘call names’, *смеяться* ‘laugh’. For exclusive constructions, typical VP slot fillers also include gossip verbs *обсуждать* ‘discuss’, *сплетничать* ‘gossip’, *шептаться* ‘whisper’. Additionally, deverbal nouns may also function as VP slot fillers (although relatively infrequently). Close inspection of the VP slot fillers, their restrictions, and quantities is outside the scope of this study, but is a potential topic for future research.

Examples from the Russian National Corpus (over 2B words: main, National Media, Middle Russian and Old East Slavic subcorpora) were analyzed in order to investigate the development of the five aforementioned constructions. In order to avoid as many irrelevant entrances as possible, I have only checked the occurrences of the three inclusive constructions with verbs of movement, possession, speech, sound, and human behavior in the main subcorpus. In order to collect the relevant attestations of the exclusive construction VP *за спиной* in the main subcorpus, I have excluded from the search the instances where the context of *за спиной* contained lemmas *крыло* ‘wing’, *корзина* ‘bucket’, *волос* ‘hair’, *коса* ‘braid’, *рука* ‘arm’, *карабин* ‘carbine’, *ружье* ‘shotgun’, *рюкзак* ‘backpack’, *рюкзачок* ‘backpack’, *котомка* ‘knapsack’, *сумка* ‘bag’, *винтовка* ‘rifle’, *парашют* ‘parachute’, *мешок* ‘bag’ (with the distance 1–3 before or after). Thus, I eliminated some of the attestations where *за спиной* refers to an actual location (on or behind someone’s literal back). For the exclusive construction VP *за глаза*, I was able to examine all the occurrences in the main subcorpus of the RNC.

In the Middle Russian subcorpus, I have examined all occurrences of the preposition *в* ‘in’ with lemmas *лицо* ‘face’ and *око* ‘eye’, as well as *за* ‘behind’ with *око* ‘eye’. As for the Old East Slavic subcorpus, I have examined all occurrences of the relevant body part nouns (‘face’ and ‘eye’) in order to find attestations of the five constructions, as well as other similar constructions that no longer exist in present-day Russian. In addition, the National Media subcorpus was used to examine the use of the five constructions in contemporary Russian and to investigate changes in the use of constructions related to the prevalence of online communication.<sup>10</sup>

The appearance and occurrence of inclusive and exclusive constructions, their various forms and semantics in the different subcorpora of the RNC form a timeline of the construction family (see Figure 2).

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<sup>10</sup> For the data, see: <https://doi.org/10.18710/OTA2JF>

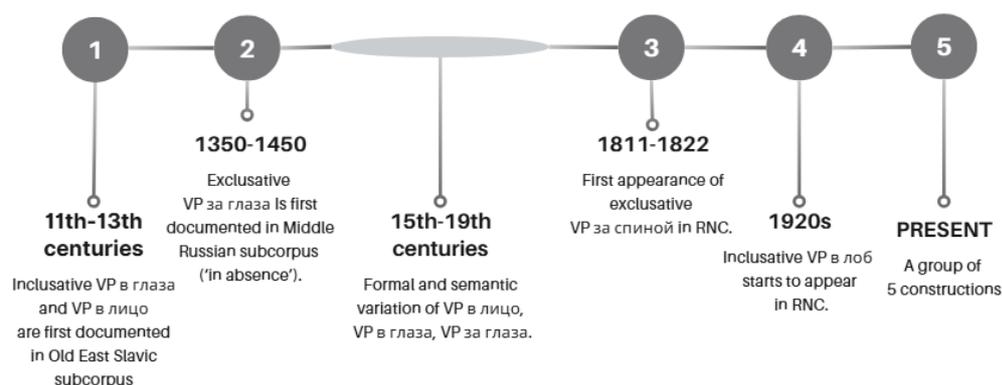


Figure 2: The crucial stages in the development of the inclusive and exclusive construction family in Russian

Stages 1 and 2 depict the appearance of the core of the construction family (two inclusive and one exclusive Russian constructions). The three oldest constructions underwent a long period of instability, formal and semantic variation, which dwindled down by the 19th century. In the beginning of the 19th century (stage 3), the fourth construction appeared. Stage 4 completes the group with the appearance of the last construction in the 1920s. Ultimately, stage 5 represents the current state of the construction family: a group of five constructions.

## 2. Inclusive constructions

Inclusive constructions denote something unpleasant said about someone to them openly in their presence. The two parameters relevant to the situation in question are 'openly' and 'in presence'.

In European languages the category is often instantiated by constructions with face terms: English *to one's face*, Swedish *rakt i ansiktet*, Spanish *en cara*, Portuguese *na cara*, French *en face*, German *ins Gesicht*, Polish *w twarz*, Czech *do obličej*, Bulgarian *в лицето*, Belarusian *у твар* etc. In Russian, the 'face' lexeme is also represented.

### 2.1 VP в лицо

The first construction of the group is VP в лицо. According to Evgen'eva's dictionary (ed. 1999), в лицо means '(berate/laugh) openly, directly to the person being talked about':

- (5) [Они]<sub>Agent</sub> [мне]<sub>Maleficiary</sub> [говорили]<sub>Action</sub> в лицо: «Мы к вам относимся как к шакалам». [Vitrina čitajuščej Rossii, 2002]  
 'They said it to my face: "We treat you like jackals".'

Based on the attestations of the VP в лицо in the historical and main subcorpora of the RNC (as described in 1.2), the likely constructional development of the construction in Russian can be reconstructed as reflected in Figure 3. The boxes represent the meanings expressed by the construction over the course of its development. Black lines indicate semantic links between the meanings. Numbers in brackets refer to (prototypical) example sentences in the text of this article. The dotted box on the left depicts the 'literal' non-constructionalized combination of the preposition and the noun, while the rightmost box represents the resulting inclusive meaning of the construction.

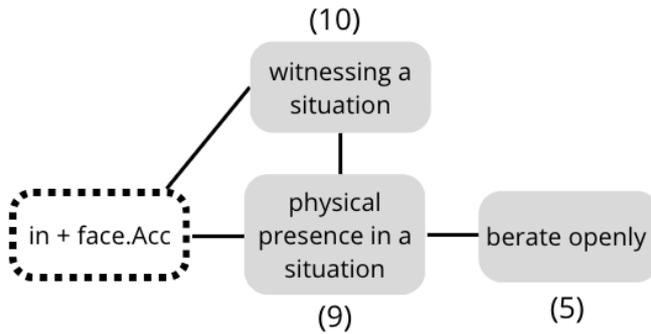


Figure 3: Reconstructed development of the inclusative semantics: construction VP в лицо

An important feature of the Russian body part noun *лицо* is its ability to metonymically denote a person:

- (6) Договор может заключить *лицо*, уполномоченное общим собранием собственников. [Parlamentskaja gazeta, 2021.12.14]  
 ‘The contract may be concluded by a person authorized by the general meeting of owners.’

Face-for-person metonymy is attested by Sreznevskij (1890–1912) in Old East Slavic as well. This metonymy might be a result of Ancient Greek influence: πρόσωπον (‘face’) can refer either literally to a face or metonymically to a person.

It is possible that the inclusative construction VP в лицо was borrowed to Russian from Ancient Greek as well. According to Thayer's Greek Lexicon (1889, 551), πρόσωπον (‘face’) combined with the preposition κατά (‘in, towards’) denotes ‘present in person’. Of course, the ‘in person’ meaning attested in Ancient Greek does not perfectly coincide with the more specific definition of present-day Russian VP в лицо. However, the diachronic semantic variation of the construction in question does include the meaning of ‘presence’ (see (8)–(10)). In modern Russian construction VP в лицо does not vary, but an older variant VP въ лице (also Accusative Singular, cf. Galinskaja 2016; *Slovar' russkogo jazyka 11–17 vv.* [Dictionary of the Russian language of the 11th–17th centuries]) is attested in the Old East Slavic and Middle Russian subcorpora. In Russian, the combination of the preposition в and the noun in the Accusative denotes movement directed towards an object.

One of the earliest instances of the construction is found in the Old East Slavic subcorpus, where it appears in a 12th century hagiographic text:

- (7) грѣшници юсмь. да смѣют ми са дѣмоны в лице. [The life of Andrew the Fool (mid-11th – mid-12th cc.)]  
 ‘We are sinners, and demons *laugh in my face*.’

*The Life of St Andrew the Fool*<sup>11</sup> was likely written in Ancient Greek by a Constantinople priest Nikephoros in the 10th century and later translated to Old East

<sup>11</sup> The construction VP в лице is used in the episode “Epiphanius beset by carnal desire”: Epiphanius overcame temptation and “laughed in the face of a wholly evil devil”. In the 10th century Ancient Greek original, the text is “ἐγέλασεν εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ παρμπονήρου διαβόλου” (Rydén 1995). In the text, εἰς τὸ

Slavic. Moldovan (2013) underlines that the earliest translation (where the construction under scrutiny is attested) has preserved some lexical and syntactic features characteristic of Ancient Greek. The ‘in presence’ meaning of Ancient Greek κατά πρόσωπον is also attested for Russian VP *в лице*: the construction was characterized by not only formal, but also semantic variation. Examples of the ‘in presence’ meaning of the construction can be found in the Middle Russian subcorpus of the RNC:

- (8) *Бяху же съ нимъ въ лице*<sup>12</sup> и она два брата. [Volokolamsk Paterikon. (1500–1550)]  
 ‘And those two brothers *were present* with him.’
- (9) Прочее же во умиленіи глаголы скончаемъ слово яко *въ лице* ту *сущу* посрамляемому. [Timofeev I. (1610–1617)]  
 ‘We will end the rest of the speech with heartfelt contrition, as if the condemned *is here in person*.’

In (10), VP *в лице* denotes a situation where a person was searched in the presence of other people, witnesses:

- (10) [...] и *в лице* пред всѣми людьми *бывшу изысканию*, отецъ же Дионисей вся закрыв собою [...]. [Simon Azar’in. (1648–1654)]  
 ‘And *in the presence* of all the people he *was investigated*, so Father Dionysius took the blame for everyone.’

The possibility of a semantic shift from a spatial to a more abstract ‘in presence’ meaning is apparent with VP *перед лицом* with the preposition *перед* ‘before’ and ‘face’ term in the Instrumental. In (11), the construction denotes a spatial meaning ‘in front of’, while in (12) it refers to an oath done in the presence of witnesses. Note that in both (11) and (12) the body part term is somewhat desemantized: in (11), ‘face’ is used in relation to a castle, not a person, and in (12) the body part noun is in Instrumental Singular, although it refers to a group of people.

- (11) Речка Лелия *течет перед лицом* замка [...]. [I. I. Lažečnikov. (1833)]  
 ‘The river Lelija *flows in front of* the castle.’
- (12) — Готовы ли вы, товарищ Артем, *перед лицом* бойцов нашей бригады, спасших вам жизнь, *поклониться* [...]? [Glukhovskij M. (2005)]  
 “— Are you ready, comrade Artem, to *swear in front of* the soldiers of our brigade who saved your life?”

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πρόσωπον means ‘in face/front/person.AccSg’. According to Thayer’s Greek Lexicon (1889, 183), εἰς is “a preposition governing the Accusative, and denoting entrance into, or direction and limit: into, to, toward, for, among.” Thus, two prepositions, εἰς and previously mentioned κατά, were used in combination with Accusative πρόσωπον to denote adjacent meanings ‘openly, to one’s face’ and ‘in presence’.

<sup>12</sup> In instances such as (8) and (10) it is unclear whether *лице* is in Accusative Singular or Locative Singular form. The use of the Accusative with *быть* ‘to be’ (as in (8)) is atypical, since *в* + Acc denotes movement towards something, a dynamic situation, while *в* + Loc denotes location and is more appropriate with *быть* ‘to be’. *Лице* belongs to the 1st declension (neuter soft stem), which has an *-e* ending in Nominative and Accusative, and *-u* in Locative (Galinskaja 2016). Thus, the form (*в*) *лице* appears to be Accusative Singular. However, I found a less ambiguous use of Locative *лице* in the source document of (8), Volokolamsk Paterikon: *и слезы на лице многи имуща*. Thus, the form in (8) is also likely a variant of the construction under scrutiny with the body part noun in Locative Singular.

The ‘presence’ meaning of the construction VP *перед лицом* likely developed from a spatial construction with the meaning ‘in front of’. Note that when used to describe situations of communication, VP *перед лицом* and VP *в лицо* have different types of addressees (or people present): VP *перед лицом* refers to an audience/witness, while VP *в лицо* refers to a core addressee.

Another meaning of VP *перед лицом* that developed from the spatial (‘in front of’) is ‘against (a future threat)’. In modern Russian, it is often used to refer to inanimate “faceless” threats in the future, with the body part noun somewhat desemantized:

- (13) [...] *перед лицом* кризиса система должна становиться проще и жестче.  
[Vedomosti, 2020]  
‘[...] *in the face of* a crisis, the system *must become simpler and tougher*.’

The constructionalization path of VP *перед лицом* partially parallels the grammaticalization of ‘face’ terms discussed by Kuteva et al. (2019): the body part term acquires the ability to denote an area in front, which can later develop into a ‘future’ meaning. It is likely that the spatial construction is the basis for semantics of ‘presence’, possibly by the metonymic shift ‘area in front of someone’ > ‘field of one’s vision’.

Some remnants of the ‘presence’<sup>13</sup> meaning of ‘face’-constructions can still be detected in modern Russian: for example, *лично* ‘in person’, *с поличным* ‘red-handed’, *наличие* ‘availability’, *налицо* ‘(something is) present’. The ‘presence’ meaning of ‘face’ is connected to (and likely influenced by) the metonymic shift *face* - *person* (*лицо* - *личность*), characteristic for Russian.

To sum up, the construction VP *в лицо* with the meaning ‘(berate) openly and directly’ is first attested in the RNC in the 12th century. It is possibly a borrowing from Ancient Greek, and the first attestation of VP *в лицо* is in a translation of a Greek hagiography. The construction is documented in its older variant VP *въ лице* in the Old East Slavic subcorpus of the RNC from the 12th century, and the modern variant appears in the main subcorpus from the second half of the 18th century.

The construction VP *в лицо* (*въ лице*) during its documented lifespan had two adjacent, but separate meanings: ‘say something openly’ and ‘do something/be in one’s presence’. *Лицо* is also a part of another Russian construction denoting ‘presence’: VP *перед лицом*. The construction has developed to mean ‘before witnesses or an audience’. Over time VP *в лицо* lost its ability to denote general ‘presence’ and now describes a parameter of communication situations only (‘say openly to the person talked about’).

## 2.2 VP в глаза

‘Face’ is the main body part responsible for expressing inclusative semantics under scrutiny in European languages. However, Slavic languages also use ‘eye’-constructions to denote a similar meaning ‘openly, directly’: Czech *do očí*, Polish *w oczy*, Slovak *do očí*,

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<sup>13</sup> The semantics of ‘presence’ were also expressed by *в лицахъ* (‘face’ in Locative Plural) and *лицемъ* (‘face’ in Instrumental Singular). Notably, the construction *в лицахъ* was often used in relation to objects that are ‘present’, i.e. in stock, available (cf. *в наличии* ‘in stock’): *чарка и ныне в лицах* (1500–1528) ‘the cup is still present/available’.

Serbo-Croatian *y oči*, Bulgarian *в очите*, Ukrainian *в очі/у вічі*, Belarusian *y vочы*. In Russian, the construction is VP *в глаза*. Evgen'eva (ed. 1999) defines *в глаза* as '(talk; discuss) addressing directly to the person being talked about, or in their presence':

- (14) Если бы я с ним встретился, [я]<sub>Agent</sub> бы и лично *в глаза* [ему]<sub>Maleficiary</sub> все это [высказал]<sub>Action</sub>... [Forum. (2010–2011)]  
 'If I had met him, I would have *said* all this in person *to his face*...'

The reconstructed constructionalization path of the inclusative Russian construction VP *в глаза* is reflected in Figure 4, structured in the same way as Figure 3.

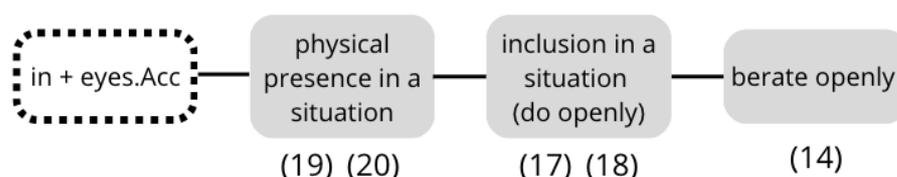


Figure 4: Reconstructed development of the inclusative semantics: construction VP *в глаза*.

The origin of the construction VP *в глаза* is unclear, and its presence in Slavic languages (and absence of equivalent constructions in Germanic and Romance languages) might suggest Slavic origin. However, Ancient Greek is a more likely source: An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon (Liddell & Scott 1889) has documented *κατ' ὀφθαλμούς* 'in eye.AccPI' ('to one's face')<sup>14</sup>.

The construction VP *в глаза* is synonymous to VP *в лицо*, and there are parallels in not only the origin, but also in the structure and the development of these constructions. Similar to VP *в лицо*, the preposition *в* in combination with the 'eye' noun in the Accusative denotes movement directed towards the eyes (and the face as a whole). While it is not possible to identify which of the constructions, VP *в глаза* or VP *в лицо*, have formed the pattern (or if they both developed independently), it is still worth looking into and comparing their constructionalization paths.

The noun *глаз* has an obsolete synonym *око*, reflected in the earliest documented use of the construction in an original Old East Slavic text dated 12th – early 13th centuries (15). The variant VP *в очу* became obsolete by the mid-19th century.

- (15) [...] и *в очу* аще ли кому *смѣются*. то ты хвали и и люби и да ѿ ба́ приимеши мѣзду [Instruction to all peasants (12th – early 13th cc.)]  
 'And if anyone *laughs in one's face*, then you should praise and love him, and you will receive a reward from God.'

The noun *око* was widely used in Russian until the mid-19th century, reflected in its declining use as part of the construction under scrutiny. In addition to the Accusative VP

<sup>14</sup> Moreover, according to the Louw-Nida Lexicon (1989, 893) *κατ' ὀφθαλμούς* is used in the New Testament in the meaning 'in presence of'. The preposition *κατ'* is a variant of *κατά* (cf. *κατὰ πρόσωπον* 'in person'); with a noun in Accusative *κατ'* means 'in, towards'.

в глаза and VP в очи, there used to be Locative variants VP в глазах (obsolete by the end of the 18th century), VP во очесех (obsolete by the mid-18th century):

- (16) Лицемер [...] уверяет в глазах, что он нам друг искренний и слуга вседоброжелательный, но заочно плетет сети к уловлению нашему. [Archbishop Platon (Levšin). (1767)]  
‘The hypocrite [...] assures us *in person* that he is our sincere friend and all-benevolent servant, but *in absentia* he weaves nets to our entrapment.’
- (17) [...] служи ему, яко Богу, без всякия лености и безлукавно, каково во очесех, таково и заочно. [Posoškov I. (1718–1725)]  
‘Serve him, like a God, without any laziness and without cunning, both *in his presence* and *in absentia*.’

As seen in (17), VP в глаза (and its variants) used to have a less specific meaning. Like VP в лицо, VP в глаза used to denote ‘in person, in one’s presence’. Sreznevskij (1890–1912) has documented both в очи and в глаза and explained their semantics as ‘openly’ and ‘in one’s presence’. While these meanings are very similar, they are still distinct in certain contexts. For instance, in (17) and (18) VP в глаза (or во очесех) primarily refers to actions done ‘openly’ (‘not in secret’), while in examples (19) and (20) the construction indicates ‘physical presence’ (‘after/when seeing in person’).

- (18) Пастухи за глаза постоянно ругали скупого хозяина, а в глаза старались выслужиться [...]. [D. N. Mamin-Sibirjak. (1895)]  
‘The shepherds constantly *berated* the stingy master *behind his back*, but *in his face* they *tried to ingratiate themselves*.’
- (19) Мы вас любили за глаза, а в глаза еще более полюбили. [A. A. Fet. (1862–1889)]  
‘We *loved you before we met you*, and we *love you even more now that we met*.’

Occasionally, VP в глаза still denotes ‘presence’ in modern Russian, for instance, ‘in person’, as opposed to ‘online’ in (20).

- (20) – Извинялись-то наверняка не в Сети, а глаза в глаза?<sup>15</sup> [...] – Извинились в глаза, что хорошо. В ином случае эффекта бы не было. [Večernij Čeljabinsk, 30.05.2019]  
‘– They most likely apologized not online, but face to face, right? [...] – They apologized in person, which is good. Otherwise, it would’ve had no effect.’

A few other constructions with eyes as a marker of one’s presence are reflected in the Dictionary of the Russian language of the 11th–17th centuries: *взяти очи* or *видети очи* means ‘to have a meeting’, and *перед очима* (cf. VP *перед лицом*) means ‘in one’s presence’ (21).

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<sup>15</sup> Note that *глаза в глаза*, while partly sharing the structure of the exclusative construction, is different and refers to ‘face-to-face’ interactions (see 2516 VP *глаза в глаза* in the RC).

- (21) Се готовъ есмь, отъче, *предъ очима* твоима повелѣнное тобою *сотворити*, елико ми велить воля сердца твоего. [Book of degrees. 1st degree [Vladimir I Svjatoslavič] (1560–1563)]  
 ‘I am ready, father, *in your presence to do* what you commanded me to do, as much as the will of your heart commands me.’

As opposed to the construction VP *перед лицом* (which still exists in modern Russian), VP *перед глазами* no longer denotes ‘in one’s presence’. A similar modern construction *перед глазами NP-Gen* expresses a location ‘near, in front of’ (Fëdorov ed. 2008):

- (22) *Перед глазами людей*, высыпающих на берег реки, – настоящий огненный апокалипсис. [Vesti.ru, 2020]  
 ‘*Before the eyes of the people* who poured out onto the riverbank, there is a real fiery apocalypse.’

A construction with similar semantics is VP *на глазах (у) NP-Gen*. It means ‘in the presence of’ or ‘while someone is watching’:

- (23) На глазах у посетителей, так и не слезших со столов, ему удалось поймать 28 змей. [Kriminal’naja xronika, 2003]  
 ‘Before the eyes of the visitors, who never got off the tables, he managed to catch 28 snakes.’

Without the NP-Gen, the construction VP *на глазах*<sup>16</sup> has temporal semantics ‘quickly’, a result of a metaphorical extension from ‘while someone is watching’ (people usually do not look at something continuously for a long time; if something happened while someone was watching, it happened quickly):

- (24) Вся конструкция жизни, выстроенная Ириной, *рушилась на глазах*, как взорванный дом. [Novyj mir, 2002]  
 ‘The whole construction of life, built by Irina, *collapsed quickly*, like a blown up house.’

Additionally, the construction VP *на глазах* was sometimes used as an antonym of VP *за глаза*. For instance, in (31) the pair denotes one’s presence or absence in a room:

- (25) [Он] почти не выходил из своей комнаты, — но *за глазами* он казался еще страшнее, чем *на глазах*. [Andreev L. (1900)]  
 ‘He almost never left his room, but *in absence* he seemed even scarier than *in presence*.’

Traces of the ‘presence’ meaning of ‘eye’-constructions found in the modern Russian are adverbs *очно* ‘in person’, *воочию* ‘with one’s own eyes’ (Fasmer 1986).

To summarize, the construction VP *в глаза* had multiple variants during its documented development: Accusative and Locative (obsolete), *глаза* and *очи* (obsolete). Over time, only one variant, with *глаза* in the Accusative, survived. The construction used to denote less specific situations, not only communication, and had two adjacent but separate meanings: ‘openly’ and ‘in one’s physical presence’.

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<sup>16</sup> See 1752 VP *на глазах* in the RC.

VP в *глаза* is possibly a calque from Ancient Greek. The construction's origin, development, and semantics are partially parallel to VP в *лицо*: both are a likely borrowing from Ancient Greek, first documented in Old East Slavic documents around 12th century, had multiple formal variants (Accusative and Locative), existed in the Middle Russian as a parameter of 'in person' situations, and later specialized to mainly describe situations of communication. The parallels in semantics and development are not limited to VP в *глаза* and VP в *лицо*.

The meanings that *глаза* develops in multiple constructions partially echo spatial and temporal meanings that 'eye' terms acquire as a result of grammaticalization (Kuteva et al. 2019). However, the construction VP на *глазах*, which has developed temporal semantics in Russian, does not refer to the future (the way grammaticalized 'eye' terms do): it describes the speed of action (or changing state).

### 2.3 VP в лоб

The construction VP в *лоб* is on the periphery of the family and in most cases has a meaning different from VP в *лицо* and VP в *глаза*. While it does occur with Speech verbs denoting 'openly, honestly', such as (26), its main meaning is 'unexpectedly, straight up, openly' (Fëdorov ed. 2008), often in reference to questions, as in (27).

- (26) [...] это была способность [Стасика]<sub>Agent</sub> [сказать]<sub>Action</sub> [любому человеку]<sub>Maleficiary</sub> в лоб, что он о нем думает [...]. [Andrej Makarevič. (1990)]  
 'It was Stasik's ability to *tell* anyone to their *face* what he thought of them.'
- (27) Просто ты меня несколько неожиданно в лоб спросила [...]. [Forum. (2011)]  
 'You just *asked* me *point-blank* quite unexpectedly.'

Because of the overlap in meanings, the construction VP в *лоб* can be considered near-synonymous (Murphy 2003) to the other inclusive constructions of the family.

The likely constructionalization path of VP в *лоб* is depicted in Figure 5, structured in the same way as Figure 3.

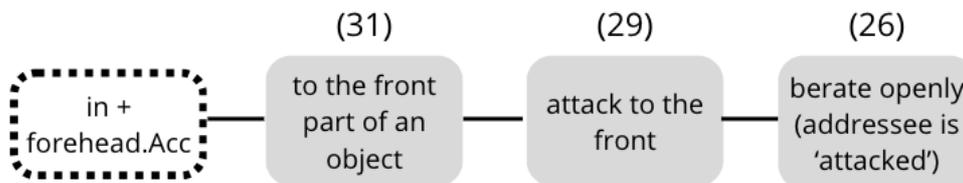


Figure 5: Reconstructed development of the inclusive semantics: construction VP в *лоб*

The construction occurs in the main subcorpus of the RNC since the beginning of the 20th century:

- (28) А ведь дело ясное: просто не хотел *говорить* «низких истин» в лоб [...]. [Gladkov F. (1928)]  
 'But the matter is clear: he just didn't want to *say* "harsh truths" *outright*.'

The construction is a metaphorical extension of *ударить в лоб* 'hit in forehead': the content of the conversation is unexpected and 'hits' the addressee, conversation is

conceptualized as an attack. The construction VP *в лоб* often denotes ‘attack the enemy point-blank’ (a likely source of the metaphorical meaning):

- (29) [...] остальные силы — IX, Гренадерский и X корпуса — *атаковали в лоб*, а XXXV, III Сибирский и III Кавказский корпуса готовились их поддержать. [Kersnovskij A. (1933–1938)]  
 ‘The rest of the forces — 9, Grenadier and 10 Corps — *attacked on the front*, and 35, 3 Siberian and 3 Caucasian Corps prepared to support them.’

Moreover, the construction VP *в чело* with an obsolete noun denoting ‘forehead’ (*чело*) meaning ‘attack point-blank’ is documented in the Middle Russian subcorpus of the RNC:

- (30) *И ступишася в чело, и бысть сеча зла и страшна [...]*. [Holmogory chronicle [852–1559] (1540–1560)]  
 ‘And they *attacked each other on the frontline*, and the battle was evil and terrible.’

While there is evidence that the construction VP *в лоб* (or *в чело*) which describes battles dates back to the Middle Russian, the construction VP *в лоб* with the meaning ‘openly’ is not documented in Russian dictionaries of the 18th and 19th centuries (*Slovar' jazyka Puškina*; *Slovar' Akademii Rossijskoj*, 1789; *Slovar' jazyka A. S. Griboedova*). It is unclear whether the metaphoric shift occurred in Russian, or the construction (with the metaphor) was borrowed from another language. I was not able to find any similar constructions that could have been the source of the borrowing.

The lexical component of the initial meaning ‘attack, hit’ is still present in the modern-day construction VP *в лоб*: the information shared ‘to the forehead’ is usually unexpected and direct. The construction tends to be used in overtly negative contexts, such as abrupt and somewhat impolite questions or tactless comments (i.e. something that is perceived as an attack or a hit ‘to the forehead’).

The development of VP *в лоб* does not mirror the grammaticalization path of ‘forehead’ terms described by Kuteva et al. (2019): the construction (or other similar ‘forehead’-construction) is not documented to denote location ‘in front of’. However, Russian *лоб* can denote the front part of an object, especially as a part of a similar construction VP (*лоб*) *в лоб*<sup>17</sup>:

- (31) По предварительным данным, водитель Kia *столкнулся в лоб* с грузовым автомобилем Volvo [...]. [Izvestija, 31.08.2017]  
 ‘According to preliminary information, the Kia driver *collided head-on* with a Volvo truck.’

It is apparent how different the development of VP *в лоб* is from VP *в лицо* and VP *в глаза*. VP *в лоб* was motivated by the conceptualization of a conversation as a battle, where an unexpected negative comment is understood as an attack (cf. ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor, p. 3). Nevertheless, the concept of visibility crucial to ‘face’- and ‘eye’-constructions is relevant to the development of VP *в лоб* as well: the forehead is conceptualized as the front part of the body, and thus the ‘attack’ is blatant and visible,

<sup>17</sup> See 2628 VP *лоб в лоб* in the RC.

not covert. The construction VP *в лоб* provides a background to the development of other body part constructions of the family: it shows that similar semantics can develop by different paths and be motivated via different semantic shifts.

### 3. *Exclusative constructions*

Exclusative constructions denote something being said or done secretly that negatively affects someone, in absence of the affected person. The two parameters relevant to the situation in question are ‘in secret’ and ‘in absence’.

In European languages the exclusative category is often instantiated by constructions with back terms: English *behind one’s back*, Swedish *bakom ryggen*, German *hinter dem Rücken*, Spanish *a espaldas*, French *derrière le dos*, Czech *za zády*, Bulgarian *зад гърба* etc. In Russian, the ‘back’ lexeme is also represented.

#### 3.1 *VP за спиной*

According to the *Dictionary of the Russian language* (Evgen’eva, ed. 1999), *за спиной* means ‘(to do something) in secret, without one’s knowledge’:

- (32) Даже [Иван]<sub>Agent</sub>, хотя и друг, — неизвестно, что [станет говорить]<sub>Action</sub> про [меня]<sub>Maleficiary</sub> *за спиной*. [Zvezda, 2002]  
 ‘Even Ivan, though a friend, — who knows what he *will say* about me *behind* my back.’

The construction denotes situations in which something (often talking) is done without knowledge of someone whom it affects (usually negatively):

- (33) Так же, *за спиной* и без ведома Людки, Ирина *отнесла* деньги в банк “МММ”. [Novyj mir, 2002]  
 ‘The same way, *behind* her back and without Ljudka’s knowledge, Irina *brought* the money to the bank “МММ”.’

The reconstructed constructionalization path of the exclusative ‘back’-construction is pictured in Figure 6, structured in the same way as Figure 3.

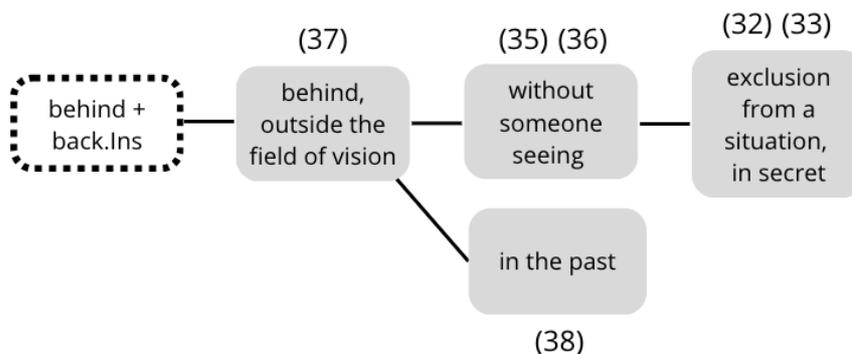


Figure 6: Reconstructed development of exclusative semantics in Russian ‘back’-construction

The meaning ‘in secret’ has most likely developed as a metonymical extension of a spatial construction: ‘behind someone’ > ‘without someone seeing/knowing’. The Instrumental case with the preposition *за* denotes a location behind an object.

The earliest occurrences of the exclusative VP *за спиной* in the RNC belong to the early 19th century:

- (34) Между тем ты можешь себе представить, что о нас все это *говорили за спиной*; я желал бы, чтобы мне это, как-нибудь, сказали в глаза. [Turgenev N. (1820)]  
 ‘Meanwhile, you can imagine that everyone *was saying* this about us *behind* our backs; I wish they would say it to my face sometime.’

The construction was also possible in an older variant VP *за спиною*, which occurred from the late 18th century:

- (35) Некоторые же из наших площадных звонарей неподалеку *за спиною* моею<sup>18</sup> *рассказывали* о моем у регента случае и что я был его любимец. [Šaxovskoj Ja. (1766–1777)]  
 ‘Nearby, *behind* my back, some of our bell-ringers *were talking* about my encounter with the regent and how I was his favorite.’

Notably, example (35) illustrates a case of transition between the initial spatial meaning of the construction and the exclusative: the situation involves people talking about a person while excluding them from a conversation, and the act of gossip physically occurs behind the excluded person.

Gestures are another case of transition from spatial to exclusative meanings: in (36), the gesture is done literally behind the director's back, where he cannot see it. However, the gesture has a certain meaning, and thus information about the director is shared without his knowledge. In such cases, the meaning of the construction is not necessarily ‘in absence’, but ‘out of sight, without someone’s knowledge’.

- (36) Второй охранник *покрутил пальцем у виска за спиной* директора, давая понять первому, что он — полный идиот. [Andrej Žitkov. (2000)]  
 ‘The second security guard *twisted his finger at his temple behind* the director's back, letting the first guard know that he was a complete idiot.’

Note that *за спиной* does not always imply a secret action: the locational construction VP *за спиной* is a common ‘behind’ marker (37).

- (37) Дмитриев *остановился за спиной* рыбакова и стал глядеть на поплавок. [Jurij Trifonov. (1969)]  
 ‘Dmitriev *stopped behind* the fisherman and began to watch the float.’

The locational VP *за спиной* (‘behind’) also motivated the temporal ‘in the past’:

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<sup>18</sup> Note that the construction VP *за спиной* allows for the explicit expression of the possessor of the body part, in contrast to VP *за глаза*, where the potential possessor of the body part is (almost) never expressed and often not transparent altogether. The capacity to include the possessor of the body part as an optional element in its structure makes the construction VP *за спиной* more compositional and less constructionalized than VP *за глаза*. A more detailed analysis of the possessors in the constructions under scrutiny is beyond the scope of this article and will be carried out separately.

- (38) У нее, в ее 25 лет, *за спиной* уже одно короткое и несчастливое *замужество* и второе — по любви. [Ogonëk, 2016]  
 ‘At 25, she already had one short and unhappy *marriage behind* her, and a second one — for love.’

The fact that the exclusative VP *за спиной* first appears in the RNC in the late 18th century suggests that it might be a borrowing from a European language (cf. German *hinter dem Rücken*, English *behind one’s back*, French *derrière le dos*). However, transitional cases such as (35) and (36) show that the path of development depicted in Figure 6 is also possible in Russian. Even if the exclusative construction appeared in Russian as a result of borrowing, the constructionalization path in the source language is likely still similar. The data shows that VP *за спиной* in Russian has developed locational (‘behind’) and temporal (‘past’) meanings similar to those ‘back’ terms obtain as a result of grammaticalization.

It is unclear whether VP *за спиной* will continue its constructionalization by the same path as other constructions of the family and begin to refer only to situations of communication or if it will develop in some other way.

### 3.2 VP *за глаза*

The last construction of the group is the exclusative VP *за глаза*, with the same ‘eye’ noun as its antonym, the inclusative VP *в глаза*. Similar to VP *за спиной*, VP *за глаза* denotes something unpleasant being said about someone without their presence, excluding them from a communication situation:

- (39) [Студенты]<sub>Agent</sub> *за глаза* [дразнили]<sub>Action</sub> [его]<sub>Maleficiary</sub> «ЖИВЧИКОМ». [Irina Murav’ëva. (1994)]  
 ‘The students would *tease* him *behind* his *back* (calling him) “the live one”.’

The exclusative VP *за глаза* has a more specific meaning than VP *за спиной*: according to Evgen’ëva (ed. 1999), *за глаза* is an antonym of *в глаза* and is used with speech verbs (i.e. only denotes secret speech acts).<sup>19</sup>

The reconstructed constructional development of the exclusative ‘eye’-construction in Russian is depicted in Figure 7, structured in the same way as Figure 3.

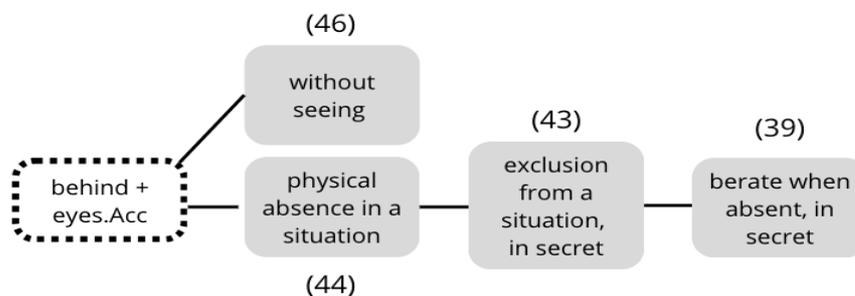


Figure 7. Reconstructed development of the exclusative semantics: construction VP *за глаза*

<sup>19</sup> Additionally, the construction VP *за глаза* generally does not allow an explicitly expressed possessor of the body part, as opposed to VP *за спиной*: \**за мои глаза* ‘behind my eyes’, \**за глаза Васи* ‘behind Vasja’s eyes’.

The construction VP *за глаза* has an unusual form: instead of the Instrumental case expected with the preposition *за* when denoting a location, *глаза* is in the Accusative. The Accusative case with the preposition *за* has a spatial meaning of ‘moving to a location behind something’, referring to a dynamic situation (Rakhilina & Plungian 2013). Use of the Accusative case in the construction may be motivated by the analogy with VP *в глаза*, where the Accusative refers to the movement towards the eyes (and face).

I was not able to find an equivalent construction in Ancient Greek, but similar ‘eye’-constructions exist in some Slavic languages: Ukrainian *Заочі (позаочі, позавіч)*, Polish *(ро)за oczami (za oczy)*, Belarusian *за вочы*. It is likely that VP *за глаза* formed in Slavic languages as an antonym to the earlier construction VP *в глаза*. Melerovič and Mokienko (1997) discuss the possibility that the origin of *за глаза* was influenced by *в глаза* and *за спиной* (with the structure of the first and the meaning of the second). However, diachronic data does not support their statement: VP *за глаза* is attested in corpora much earlier than VP *за спиной* (but later than VP *в глаза*).

Similar to the inclusative VP *в глаза*, the exclusative construction first occurs with the older ‘eye’ term *очи*. The earliest occurrences of VP *за очи* belong to the 15th century and are reflected in the Middle Russian subcorpus of the RNC (40). The variant VP *за очи* became obsolete by the end of the 18th century.

- (40) Слышах, — рече, — другаго человека, иже *за очи* велию ти брань творит и хулы тебѣ глаголет. [The tale of Aristotle (1470–1550)]  
 ‘I heard, — he said, — another man, who *in your absence berates* you greatly and *criticizes* you.’

Moreover, there are other obsolete variants of the construction: VP *за очима* (obsolete by the mid-17th century), VP *за глазами* (obsolete by the mid-20th century). Thus, both *очи* (41) and *глаза* (42) as anchors of the exclusative construction are attested in corpora in the Instrumental case (cf. VP *за спиной*, with ‘back’ in the Instrumental):

- (41) [...] *говорить* о твоей чти *за очима*, и пространенъ мыслию, не досветченъ в недоверья царству достойному и законному. [Secretum Secretorum (1470–1550)]  
 ‘[He] *speaks* about your honor *in your absence*, is ample in thought, and has not been noticed to distrust the worthy and lawful kingdom.’
- (42) Гораздо лучше узнать от друга то, что *могут говорить* о вас насмешники *за глазами* или намекать вам о том лично. [Bestužev A. (1830)]  
 ‘It is much better to learn from a friend what mockers *may say* about you *in your absence* or insinuate in person.’

The variation of four forms of the construction VP *за глаза* is not the only peculiar feature of its historical development. The construction had the potential to denote an action (not just a conversation) that negatively affects someone done secretly, in absence of the affected person (the way VP *за спиной* still does):

- (43) [...] он в глаза Селину уверяет его в дружбе, а *за глаза строит* ему козни. [A. V. Nikitenko. (1850)]  
 ‘He assures Selin of his friendship to his face, but *behind his back*, he *schemes* against him.’

Moreover, VP *за глаза* could also have a neutral ‘in absence’ meaning (opposite to previously discussed ‘in presence’ semantics of VP *в лицо*, VP *в глаза*):

- (44) Точно так же и я любила матушку, когда я жила в Петербурге, а она в Киеве. Опять повторяю, видно я сама виновата, что дети меня *любят* только *за глаза*. [A. N. Dubel't. (1833–1853)]  
 ‘The same way I loved my mother when I lived in St. Petersburg and she lived in Kiev. Again, I repeat, it seems that I am to blame for the fact that my children *love* me only *when I'm not around*.’

The first encounter of the construction (variant VP *за очи* ‘in absence’) is dated 1350–1450 and belongs to a Middle Russian document where it occurs together with VP *в очи* (as an antonym pair):

- (45) Сыну, аще хоцещи великъ быти пред Богомъ и челоувѣкы, то *смѣрися* всѣм *равно*, *добротою* пред всякым челоувѣкомъ, *за очи* и въ очи. [Father's instruction to son (1350–1450)]  
 ‘Son, if you want to be great in the eyes of God and people, then *be humble* and *kind* to every person *equally*, both *in their absence* and in their presence.’

A meaning expressed by VP *за глаза* that is close to ‘absence’, but distinct, is ‘without seeing in person’ (46).

- (46) — В ближний город, — отвечал француз, — оттуда отправляюсь к одному помещику, который *нанял* меня *за глаза* в учителя. [Puškin A. (1833)]  
 ‘—To the nearest city,— answered the Frenchman, —from there I’ll go to a landowner who *hired* me as a teacher *without having seen* me *in person*.’

While the meaning ‘without seeing in person’ is not universally used by Russian speakers nowadays and could be considered obsolete by some, it is still occasionally attested in modern Russian (47), often referring to purchases that are made online, predominantly in colloquial language (48):

- (47) Надя рассказывала о Лиле так, что *за глаза* *можно было влюбиться*. [Emma Gerštejн. (1985–1999)]  
 ‘Nadja spoke about Lilja in such a way that one *could fall in love* with her *without ever having seen* her.’  
 (48) *Купила за глаза*, видела и читала про нее только в Инете. [Review of a sewing machine, Yandex (5.07.2012).]<sup>20</sup>  
 ‘I *bought it without having seen* it *in person*, I’ve only seen it and read about it on the internet.’

A remnant of the constructional meaning ‘without seeing in person’ in modern Russian is the adverb *заочно*<sup>21</sup> ‘without meeting in person’. Additionally, ‘without seeing in person’ is still reflected in some dictionaries as a second meaning of VP *за глаза*: Fëdorov (ed. 2008), Melerovič and Mokienko (1997) include in the entry for *за глаза* a separate meaning ‘(buy, hire) without seeing beforehand’.

<sup>20</sup> Source: <https://reviews.yandex.ru/product/bernina-bernette-e92c--1780157001>

<sup>21</sup> Notably, the colloquial adverb *заглазно* is used as a synonym of VP *за глаза*: ‘actions (often gossip) done in secret’, sometimes also ‘without seeing in person’.

The construction VP *за глаза* has developed by a constructionalization path that mirrors the development of the inclusive VP *в глаза* and VP *в лицо*: VP *за глаза* used to have less specific semantics of ‘absence’, but over time has developed to primarily describe communication situations where the topic of discussion is purposely excluded from the conversation. During its documented history, the construction VP *за глаза* had four adjacent meanings: ‘not physically present’, ‘without seeing in person’, ‘do something that affects someone in their absence’, ‘say something about an absent person’.

Since no equivalent constructions are documented in Ancient Greek, and VP *за глаза* first appears in texts two centuries after VP *в глаза*, it is likely that the exclusative ‘eye’-construction appeared in some Slavic languages as a counterpart to the inclusives VP *в глаза* and VP *в лицо*.

Four formal variants of the construction existed in different periods (sometimes simultaneously): *глаза* and *очи* (obsolete), Accusative and Instrumental (obsolete). Thus, only the Accusative variant VP *за глаза* is still documented in both the main and the National Media subcorpora of the RNC and has won the competition, likely due to the influence of the inclusive VP *в глаза* (with ‘eyes’ in the Accusative as well). Exclusative VP *за спиной* did coexist with the Instrumental VP *за глазами* at one point, but it did not affect the survival of the Accusative variant.

#### 4. Conclusion

The semantic and formal variation characteristic of the constructions centuries ago has changed during their development, resulting in a group of two antonymic pairs of synonymous constructions.

In sections 2 and 3 I discussed the family of inclusive and exclusative constructions. These constructions each have their own constructionalization paths, which are partly similar and have most likely influenced each other. The constructions of the family form a grouping based on shared semantic, syntactic and lexical properties (for more on families, see Endresen & Janda 2020, Zhukova & Janda 2024). The changes that Russian ‘face’-, ‘eye’-, and ‘back’-constructions underwent during their documented history in Russian is partially parallel to the development of grammatical markers with the same body parts in the languages of the world described in the *World Lexicon of Grammaticalization* (Kuteva et al. 2019). While more complex constructional meanings such as ‘inclusion of a participant’ or ‘physical absence from a situation’ are, of course, not relevant for grammaticalization of body part terms, locational and temporal meanings are relevant.

Overall, the main metaphorical extensions likely driving the development of inclusive and exclusative meanings are based on and start from primitive metaphors and conceptualizations of space based on ‘face’, ‘eyes’, and ‘back’. The main motivator is the primary metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING. The Russian ‘forehead’-construction is also rooted in the concept of ‘visibility’; however, the main motivation for the development of inclusive semantics of VP *в лоб* is the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR. This article illustrates how constructions with body part nouns undergo further semantic shifts based on their spatial meanings: constructions can develop meanings such as ‘presence’ or ‘absence’ and further develop to denote a participant’s inclusion in or exclusion from a

conversation. Thus, in certain constructions, some Russian body part nouns have developed to describe the structure of communication. The path by which constructions developed and the semantics they acquired are intrinsically linked to the way the physical world is conceptualized through the capabilities and characteristics of the human body.

In addition to constructions, multiple adverbs meaning ‘in presence’ or ‘in absence’ also originated from ‘face’ and ‘eye’ nouns. The adverbs *лично*, *очно*, and *заочно* now occupy a semantic zone that the constructions in question no longer belong to. Adverbs with neutral semantics of ‘physical presence/absence’ have preserved these meanings, but mostly lack the ability to denote inclusative and exclusative meanings, as in (49). The constructions, in turn, have preserved more specialized inclusative and exclusative meanings, but no longer denote ‘in person’ or ‘in absence’.

- (49) Ее приняли в Москве с восторгом и завистью, превозносили *в глаза* и терзали *заочно*. [V. A. Sollogub. (1845)]  
 ‘In Moscow, she was met with excitement and envy, *praised to her face* and *torn apart behind her back*.’

In (49), the construction VP *в глаза* and the adverb *заочно* are used as a pair of antonyms with inclusative (‘say openly’) and exclusative (‘do in secret’) semantics. While the adverb *заочно* and the construction VP *за глаза* were used interchangeably, they are no longer synonyms: in modern Russian, the adverb is no longer used in ‘secret’ contexts such as (49).

Masini has discussed the competition between morphological words and multiword expressions and concluded that “even when competition occurs between specific items belonging to different patterns, there is often ‘differentiation’ at the more abstract level, as different patterns tend to specialize for different functions” (Masini 2019, 302). The competition between constructions VP *в лицо*, VP *в глаза*, VP *за глаза* and adverbs *лично*, *очно*, *заочно*<sup>22</sup> most likely resulted in differentiation. Presumably, after a period of competition, adverbs and constructions in question divided their “shared” semantics and specialized on one meaning each. However, further careful research of the period of the competition and analysis of shared contexts would be necessary to make any definitive conclusions.

Additionally, it is important to mention the most recent development of constructional meanings of *в глаза* and *за глаза*: in the context of the developing technology and ‘life online’, the idea of what it means to communicate ‘in person’ is changing and has become more nuanced. The constructions *в глаза* and *за глаза* might be “taking a step back” on their path of development: I have encountered a few new occurrences in which the pair of constructions refers to the concept of ‘physical presence/absence’ again. Online and offline communication are not necessarily opposed in terms of “secretive” or “open” conversation; the difference is about being physically present in the “real” world. In (20) and (48), the constructions refer to ‘seeing someone or something in person, in real life’, rather than

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<sup>22</sup> Additionally, a similar colloquial adverb *заглазно* is a present-day synonym of the exclusative *за глаза*. The adverb and the construction are still sometimes used interchangeably.

online. To apologize *в глаза* is to apologize in person, in a “proper” way, and not via a call or a text. To buy *за глаза* is to buy something online, without seeing it in person.

Again, more data and targeted research are needed to make definite conclusions. However, this peculiar case might be an example of the way constructional changes are not restricted to one direction and can ‘go back’: constructionalization is neither finite nor unidirectional, a lot of factors (including non-linguistic, such as the prominence of online communication) can influence the process.

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*Daria Demidova*  
*Åbo Akademi University, Åbo/Turku, Finland*  
*Daria.Demidova@abo.fi*