

The quest for the prototype: A case of the Russian prefix *pri-*

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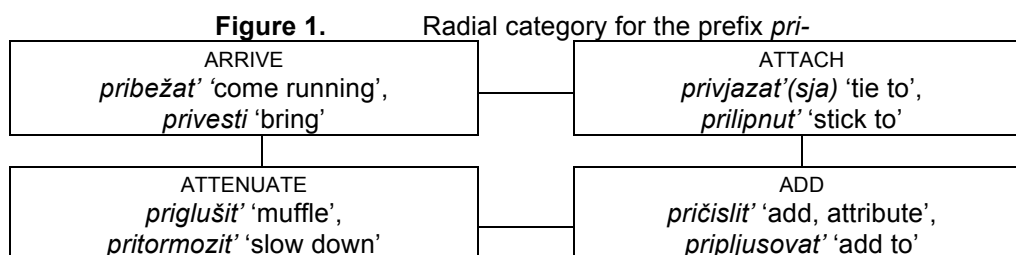
This paper explores the notion of prototypicality and discusses different characteristics that are usually associated with the prototype. Modern cognitive linguistics faces “the necessity to investigate the phenomenon of prototypicality more thoroughly”, since “the notion is far from straightforward” (Gilquin 2006: 180-181). This paper provides a case study of Russian prefix *pri-* and shows that this prefix presents a case of inconsistency among characteristics of the prototype.

The idea of the prototype first appeared in the works of Eleanor Rosch (1973), who found that categories contain an element that is the most typical representative of a group. The seemingly simple notion of a prototype has over the years revealed itself to be very complicated. It has become clear that the notion of the prototype also forms a radial category where a prototypical prototype has several characteristics (Geeraerts 1988, Gilquin 2006): 1) it is the semantic center of gravity of a radial category, 2) it contains the most characteristic features of the category, 3) it is concrete, 4) it is the most entrenched item, 5) it is the most salient item, 6) it is the most frequent item.

This paper studies a database of all verbs with the prefix *pri-* attested in the Russian National Corpus (630 verbs) and shows that the features associated with prototypicality point to different submeanings of the prefix *pri-* as prototypical. Three submeanings, ARRIVE, ATTACH and ATTENUATE, compete for recognition as the prototype (see the Radial Category in Figure 1). There are reasons to believe that each of them has prototypical characteristics. The submeanings ARRIVE and ATTACH are both concrete and show the most characteristic features of the category. The submeaning ARRIVE is used with the motion verbs, which are claimed to serve as prototypical verbs in the Russian aspectual system (Janda 2008: 179). The submeaning ATTENUATE has the highest type frequency which suggests that the submeaning ATTENUATE is the most productive submeaning of the prefix. The submeaning ATTACH is the most salient submeaning of the prefix *pri-*, which can be seen from the fact that pro-verbs (verbs that are able to function as a verbal variable similarly to how pronouns function as nominal variables) are used to signal attachment. See example (1) where the pro-verb *prisobačit'* is used to signal attachment, while its non-prefixed correlate is not possible in the same context.

Thus, it may be concluded that native speakers of Russian employ different strategies for most frequent verbs, least frequent verbs and in a default setting: the most frequent verbs are associated with the meaning ARRIVE, the least frequent verbs are associated with the meaning ATTENUATE, and when the meaning of the verb is not specified, the submeaning ATTACH is used. Our understanding of the term prototype does not include the possibility for all these features to point to different elements, which means that we need to adjust our understanding of the prototype to account for these findings.

- (1) *Neskol'ko lovkix dviženij — i podnosy prisobačeny/*sobačeny k bortikam avtomobilej.* [RNC]
'A few deft movements - and trays are **attached** to the sides of the cars.'



References

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