

What's in a Passive? Russian Passive Participles and the Locative Alternation

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It is widely acknowledged that the use of passive voice allows the speaker to place figures other than the agent in the subject position in order to foreground the patient or to avoid specifying the agent of an action (Saedd, O'Grady, Kroeger). However, it would be interesting to check whether passivization is associated with additional reorganizations of the structure. We test this assumption by looking at the effects which the use of the passive has on the distribution of the two Locative Alternation (LA) constructions, Theme-Object and Goal-Object, illustrated by examples (1) and (2) below. In the literature on the LA, scholars have mostly been placing focus on the interaction between two factors: the semantics of the alternating constructions and the semantics of the verbs involved in the alternation (Goldberg, Boas, Iwata). This leaves such factors as the grammatical form of the verb and metaphor out of the picture. We show that passive and non-passive forms show slightly different preferences for the constructions and that passive forms set stronger restrictions on metaphorical uses.

We propose an empirical study based on all attestations of the main Russian LA verbs in the Russian National Corpus. In their passive version, the Theme-Object construction has the Theme as the grammatical subject (3), whereas the Goal-Object construction has the Goal as the grammatical subject (4). Our analysis indicates that passive participles have the effect of increasing the relative frequency of the construction that is associated with a given verb. Figure 1 shows the overall distribution of the two LA constructions with the verb *gruzit'* 'load' and its three prefixed perfective partner verbs, *na-gruzit'*, *za-gruzit'*, and *po-gruzit'*, all with the meaning 'load'. In the non-passive uses these three perfective verbs can be partly disambiguated according to the syntactic construction they prefer. Yet, we see that the passive participles of the prefixed verbs boost the frequency of the construction that is more frequent for the non-passive forms.

Passive participles also reinforce the holistic effect associated with the construction, i.e. when the object is completely affected (Anderson). In general it appears that human beings are more likely to serve as metaphorical containers than as metaphorical surfaces. While the corpus contains many examples like (5) with active metaphorical uses of the verb *za-sypat'* 'strew', no such cases are attested for the passive forms (6). The logic is that a human being can become filled up with a metaphorical substance like work (7), but cannot become completely covered with a metaphorical substance like jokes.

Thus, the fact that the use of passive participles further profiles one of the participants has at least two additional effects on the choice of the construction: passive participles are stronger associated with a particular participant (the Theme or the Goal) than what is attested for the non-passive forms; passive participles reinforce the holistic effect and thus block some metaphorical patterns. This interaction of metaphor with aspect and syntax has not been previously explored.

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|--|---|---|
| (1) Theme-Object active
<i>za-gruzit'</i> <i>brevna</i> -ACC <i>na</i>
<i>baržu</i> -ACC
'load the logs onto the barge' | (3) Theme-Object passive
<i>brevna</i> -NOM <i>za-gruženy</i> <i>na</i>
<i>baržu</i> -ACC
'the logs are loaded onto the barge' | (5) Goal-Object active
On-NOM <i>za-sypal</i> ego-ACC <i>šutkami</i> -INS
'He showered (lit. strewed) him with jokes' |
| (2) Goal-Object active
<i>za-gruzit'</i> <i>baržu</i> -ACC
<i>brevnami</i> -INS
'load the barge with the logs' | (4) Goal-Object passive
<i>barža</i> -NOM <i>za-gružena</i>
<i>brevnami</i> -INS
'the barge is loaded with (the) logs' | (6) Goal-Object passive
?On-NOM <i>za-sypan</i> <i>šutkami</i> -INS
'He is showered (lit. strewn) with jokes' |
| | | (7) Goal-Object passive
<i>čelovek</i> -NOM <i>za-gružen</i> <i>rabotoj</i> -INS
'a person is loaded with work' |

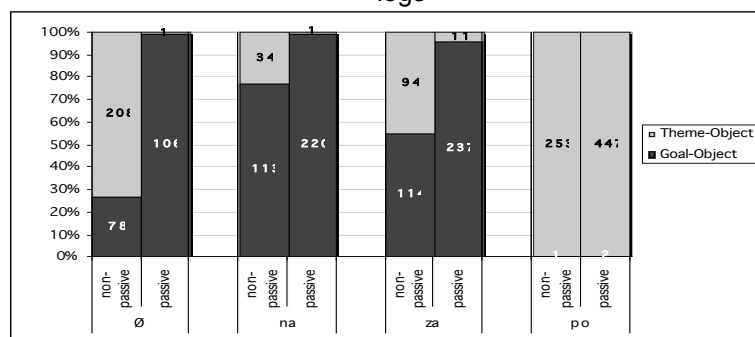


Figure 1. Locative Alternation among non-passive and passive forms of *gruzit'* 'load' and its prefixed perfective partner verbs *na-gruzit'*, *za-gruzit'*, and *po-gruzit'*.