

Who are you, Mr. Russian preposition?

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Abstract

In this article, a portrait of Russian prepositions as a part of speech is presented. The analysis of grammars and dictionaries has shown that there is no certain list of Russian prepositions and that the image of this part of speech is quite blurry. The author reveals the main “prepositional” blank spots for Russian linguistics: the fast growth of preposition-like units, the lack of objective criteria to separate prepositions and non-prepositions, and a disputable academic (traditional) classification of prepositions. Some feasible solutions for overcoming these research difficulties are suggested, such as the use of descriptive terms and a notion of field, revision of syncategorematic parts of speech and prepositional classifications, as well as searching for reliable tests for membership in prepositions.

Key words: preposition, Russian, grammar, grammaticalization, field

1. Introduction

It seems strange and unfair, but the status of the Russian preposition as a part of speech is extremely vague. It is commonly known that prepositions form one of the smallest parts of speech, which is supposed to be easily enumerated. However, the situation in Russian is vastly contrary. For the last few years, we have been asking our postgraduate students (approximately 1500 persons) in the Philology and History departments (Lomonosov Moscow State University) to highlight prepositions in a list of 200 items. The results usually differ, with students choosing between 30 to 70 percent of the list. The trick is that the register consists only of prepositions named by the latest Russian academic grammar (Russian grammar, 1980). Apart from not considering postgraduate students' opinions amateur, we decided to determine what is a preposition in modern Russian grammar and lexicology and to extract (if possible) a closed prepositional list. Thus, the main objective of this article was to make a comparative analysis of Russian prepositions in grammars, dictionaries and scientific issues concerned with prepositions. The second significant purpose of this article is to determine, based on the analysis, the main problems arising in the prepositional description. Finally, we aimed to offer some possible decisions for the correct linguistic description of the part of speech in question.

According to the stated aims, the text is organized as follows. Section 2 defines the preposition based on the latest academic grammar. In Section 3, the grammars, dictionaries and scientific issues containing lists of prepositions, which are to be scrutinized in the research, are named. In Section 4, the history of prepositional description and classification from the end of XVII till the middle of XX centuries is tracked. Section 5 is totally devoted to a comparative analysis of the prepositional lists in Section 3's modern sources. In Section 6, we elicit the main problems emerging within grammatical and lexicological descriptions of prepositions and name feasible solutions. The ways of overcoming these difficulties are amply described in Section 7. Section 8 closes the paper with a conclusion

2. Definition of the preposition in Russian academic grammar

The latest Russian academic grammar is Russian grammar (1980), which describes prepositions as a part of speech, marking the dependence of one word on another in a word phrase or in a sentence. According to traditional classifications of prepositions in academic grammar (Russian Grammar, 1960; Russian Grammar, 1970; Russian Grammar, 1980), they are divided into (1) primary and (2) derivative, consisting of adverbial, denominative and deverbative units. Russian grammar (1980) names the closed lists of each group:

(1) 27 primary prepositions such as:

<i>v</i>	<i>dlya</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>u</i>
‘in’	‘for’	‘on’	‘with’	‘by’

(2) 178 derived prepositions:

a. 67 adverbial prepositions:

<i>vmesto</i>	<i>vnutri</i>	<i>protiv</i>	<i>kasatel'no</i>	<i>szadi</i>
‘instead of’	‘inside’	‘against’	‘regarding’	‘behind’

b. 93 denominative prepositions, which are derived from different noun forms including one, two or no primary prepositions:

<i>v techenie</i>	<i>v svyazi s</i>	<i>v kachestve</i>	<i>putem</i>	<i>v oblasti</i>
in flow _{ACC} ¹	in connection _{PREP} with	in quality _{PREP}	path _{INS}	in area _{PREP}
‘during’	‘in connection with’	‘in the quality of’	‘by means of’	‘in the field of’

c. 18 deverbative prepositions, which are derived from adverbial (unchangeable) participle:

<i>blagodarya</i>	<i>nemotrya na</i>	<i>vkluchaya</i>	<i>sudya po</i>	<i>spustya</i>
thank _{ADVDPART}	not-look _{ADVDPART ON}	include _{ADVDPART}	judge _{ADVDPAT}	pull _{ADVDPART}
‘thanks to’	‘in spite of’	‘including’	‘judging by’	‘after’

Our experiment has shown that the primary prepositions are undoubtedly regarded by all the respondents as prepositions and that the evaluation of derived prepositions varies a lot. Thus, out of 178 derived prepositions, there were none that were mentioned by all respondents. Such highly educated students of humanitarian faculties find it extremely difficult to name Russian (derived) prepositions. Why? We had a hypothesis that the list of Russian grammar (1980) is in a way subjective and that there is no definite understanding of which derived units have already become prepositions and which have not. For example, compared to English, are *in terms of* and *with respect to* prepositions or just forms of nouns functioning as prepositions? Therefore, in the next sections, we scrutinize the most important Russian grammars and dictionaries, along with scientific issues devoted to prepositions, and try to make a portrait of the Russian preposition as a part of speech today.

3. Materials and methods

The research is based on scanning and parsing the following issues.

¹ Abbreviations used in this paper: GEN – genitive, DAT – dative, ACC – accusative, INS – instrumental, PREP – prepositional, PL – plural, ADVDPART – adverbial participle.

I. Grammars:

- a. "Grammatica Russica" by H. Ludolf (Ludolf, 1696)
- b. "Russian Grammar" by M. Lomonosov (Lomonosov, 1755)
- c. "Lengthy Russian Grammar" by N. Gretch (Gretch, 1830)
- d. "Russian Grammar" by A. Vostokov (Vostokov, 1874)
- e. "The Russian language (A grammatic theory of the word)" by V. Vinogradov (Vinogradov, 1947)
- f. "Grammar of Russian language" edited by V. Vinogradov et al. (Russian Grammar, 1960)
- g. "Modern Grammar of Russian literary language" edited by N. Shvedova (Russian Grammar, 1970)
- h. "Russian Grammar" edited by N. Shvedova (Russian Grammar, 1980).

II. Dictionaries:

- a. "A dictionary of Russian structural words" edited by V. Morkovkin (Morkovkin, 1997)
- b. "A defining dictionary of the Russian language" by S. Ozhegov and N. Shvedova (Defining dictionary, 1999)
- c. "Defining dictionary of Russian auxiliary parts of speech" by T. Efremova (Efremova, 2001)
- d. "A defining dictionary of word combinations equivalent to words" by R. Rogozhnikova (Rogozhnikova, 2003)
- e. "A modern defining dictionary of the Russian language" by S. Kuznetsov (Modern defining dictionary, 2008)
- f. "A dictionary of non-derivative prepositions in Modern Russian" by M. Lepnev (Lepnev, 2009)
- g. "Russian derivative prepositions. Problems of semantics. Dictionary materials" by M. Lepnev (Lepnev, 2010)
- h. "A dictionary of Russian adverbs and auxiliary words" by V. Burtseva (Burtseva, 2010)
- i. "Russian prepositions and units of the prepositional kind. Materials for the functional-grammatical description of real usage. Introduction to objective grammar and lexicography of Russian prepositional units. Book 2" by M. Vsevolodova, E. Vinogradova, T. Chaplygina (Vsevolodova et al., 2018).

III. Scientific studies containing lists of prepositions:

- a. "Transformation of autonomous words to prepositions" by E. Cherkasova (Cherkasova, 1967)
- b. "Russian auxiliary words. Synoptic tables" by S. Bordanov and Ju. Ryzhova (Synoptic tables, 1997)
- c. "Relative phraseological units in Russian" by G. Shiganova (Shiganova, 2003)
- d. "Denominative relatives in Modern Russian. Semantic-syntactic essays" by E. Sheremet'eva (Sheremet'eva, 2008)
- e. "Russian prepositions and means of prepositional type. Materials for the functional-grammatical description of real usage. Introduction to objective grammar and lexicography of Russian prepositional units. Book 1" by M. Vsevolodova, O. Kukushkina, A. Polikarpov (Vsevolodova et al., 2014).

4. Flashback on linguistic descriptions of Russian prepositions

The first grammar of proper Russian (not a Church Slavonic) language was written by Henrich Ludolf (1696) and published in Oxford in 1696. He enumerated 24 prepositions, though even today, not all of them are regarded as primary, for example,

protiv
'against'

posle
'after'

okolo
'near'

In the middle of the next century, a famous Russian scientist, M. Lomonosov (1755), created his grammar of Russian, in which he named 19 direct prepositions and a group of prepositions (13 units, but the list is open), which were also adverbs. He missed just one preposition mentioned by H. Ludolf (see Fig. 1) –

bez
'without.'

Therefore, we can state that Lomonosov achieved the following:

- (1) increased the quantity of prepositions (or, putting it more objectively, probably more units had turned to prepositions); see Fig. 1.
- (2) created a tradition of adverbial preposition segregation.

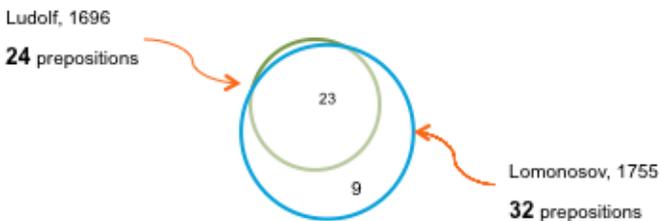


Figure 1: Comparison of prepositional lists in “Grammatica Russica” by H. Ludolf, 1696 and in “Russian Grammar” by M. Lomonosov (1755)

In the XIXth century, Russian linguists continued expanding the theory of prepositions. N. Gretch (1830) in his “Lengthy Russian Grammar”, developed Lomonosov’s ideas and specified 51 prepositions, including 28 prepositions that were also adverbs (see Fig. 2). It is important to highlight that N. Gretch thoroughly recapped Lomonosov’s prepositions and widened the list. He was the first one to notice complicated prepositions:

iz-za
'from behind'

iz-pod
'from under'

Thus, he elaborated Lomonosov's notion of prepositions and presented the following groups of prepositions:

- i. simple
- ii. complicated
- iii. adverbs being used as prepositions.

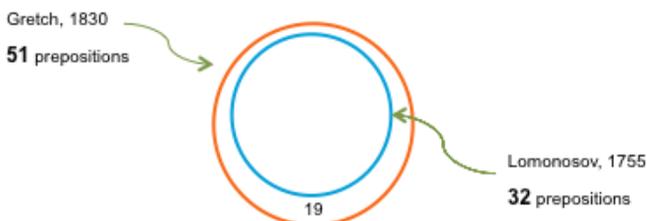


Figure 2: Comparison of prepositional lists in “Russian Grammar” by M. Lomonosov (1755) and in “Lengthy Russian Grammar” by N. Gretch (1830)

A. Vostokov (1874) was, on the one hand, less accurate than N. Gretch; he missed (on purpose or not) 8 prepositions mentioned in the grammars above, including complicated prepositions absolutely correctly emphasized by N. Gretch. Nevertheless, A. Vostokov added 15 new prepositions (see Fig. 3).

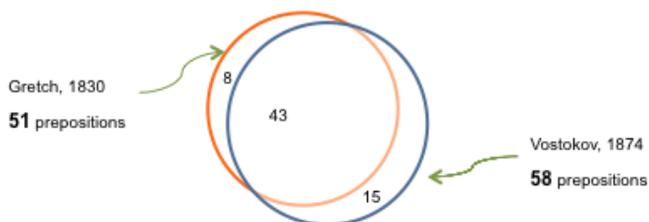


Figure 3: Comparison of prepositional lists in “Lengthy Russian Grammar” by N. Gretch (1830) and in Russian Grammar by A. Vostokov (1874)

Much more substantial is the fact that A. Vostokov expressed 2 very significant concepts. First, he proposed the idea of Russian derivative prepositions, stating that they could be derived from adjectives such as:

<i>kasatel'no</i>	<i>otnositel'no</i>
tangently	relatively
‘concerning’	‘regarding’

His second flashing thought was that there were some verb and noun forms that function as prepositions, e.g.:

<i>iskluchaya</i>	<i>posredstvom</i>
exclude _{ADVPART}	intermedium _{INS}
‘excluding’	‘by means of’

Thus, we can ascertain that A. Vostokov was the one who presented a framework for the modern classification of Russian prepositions. He regarded Russian prepositions as consisting of the following:

- (I.) proper prepositions and
- (II.) words that can be used as prepositions:
 - a. adverbs: the group named in (Lomonosov, 1755) and (Gretch, 1830);
 - b. deadjective adverbs:
 - sootvetstvenno*
 - respectively
 - ‘accordingly’
 - c. adverbial participles:
 - nesmotrya na*
 - not-looking_{ADVPART} at
 - ‘in spite of’
 - d. nouns in different case forms:
 - s pomosh'yu*
 - with help_{INS}
 - ‘with the help of’

We can also notice that A. Vostokov somehow founded a tradition of not including in the list all the prepositions mentioned in previous grammars, thereby making their description more subjective (see the non-overlapping parts in the Fig. 3).

A growth (in 2,5 times) of prepositions named in the XVIII and XIX centuries is also remarkable if we compare the 24 prepositions of Ludolf and the 58 of Vostokov. However, the giant leap happened in the XX-XXI centuries.

The next prominent Russian grammar issue to be detected is V. Vinogradov's "Russian language" (1947) which greatly increased the number of prepositions to 120 units by adding derivative prepositions (even giving an open list of them). Comparative analysis shows that he is at the same time very rigorous towards his predecessors: we revealed just 6 prepositions from the above grammars that he had not mentioned, and all of them seem archaic. Thus, here, we are dealing with language changes and development: some prepositions obviously die, and some (in our case many more) appear (see Fig. 4).

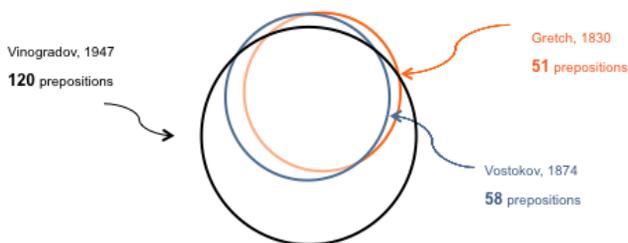


Figure 4: Comparison of prepositional lists V. Vinogradov's "Russian language" (1947) with the lists of XIX century Grammars (Gretsch, 1830) and (Vostokov, 1874)

In addition to being one of the most famous Russian linguists, V. Vinogradov modified A. Vostokov's classifications and elicited 5 groups:

- I. 26 primary prepositions,
- II. adverbial prepositions:
 - a. 28 prepositions, connected with adverbs of circumstance:

<i>krugom</i>	<i>pozadi</i>
‘around’	‘behind’
 - b. 7 prepositions, connected with adverbs of quality:

<i>kasatel'no</i>	<i>otnositel'no</i>
tangently	relatively
‘concerning’	‘regarding’
- III. 36 denominative prepositions:

<i>v otmoshenii</i>	<i>po prichine</i>
in respect _{PREP}	by reason _{DAT}
‘with respect to’	‘by the reason of’
- IV. 8 deverbative prepositions:

<i>iskluchaya</i>	<i>nachinaya</i>
exclude _{ADV_{PART}}	start _{DAD_{V_{PART}}}
‘excluding’	‘starting with’
- V. 13 complicated prepositional collocations (these include simple preposition in postposition):

<i>nezavisimo ot</i>	<i>v svyazi s</i>
irrespectively from	in connection _{PREP} with
‘irrespective of’	‘in connection with’

As can be clearly seen, V. Vinogradov integrated deadjectival prepositions and adverb-prepositions in one class, which was crucial for the modern prepositional classification (Russian Grammar, 1960; Russian Grammar, 1970; Russian Grammar, 1980). Since that time the classification came to include a triad of derived prepositions: “adverbial vs. denominative vs. deverbative.” At first glance, this seems quite logical because of the parts of speech that it reflects. However, the history of depicting prepositions shows that the group of adverbial prepositions is very controversial and brings asymmetry to the traditional classification of prepositions. As it has been shown above in this Section, M. Lomonosov, N. Gretch and A. Vostokov elicited this group of prepositions, stressing that they are at the same time adverbs, intending homonymy (or polyfunctionality) of adverbs and prepositions. Later, A. Vostokov showed that, in Russian, there existed (or they could appear or became perceived as existing at the end of the XIXth century) some prepositions that could be derived from nouns, verbs and adjectives (or de-adjectival adverbs). He still opposed these derived prepositions to prepositions–adverbs.

Thus, an integration in one class of prepositions having adverbs, homonyms and derived prepositions caused de facto classification on 2 different bases: derivative for denominative and deverbative prepositions and functional for homonyms that can function both as adverbs and prepositions. This cannot help but arouse collisions. For example, the preposition

<i>v rode</i>	<	<i>v rode</i>
		in kind _{PREP}
‘like’		‘in kind’

is attributed as denominative in (Vinogradov, 1947) and adverbial in (Russian grammar, 1980); preposition

<i>vmesto</i>	<	<i>v mesto</i>
		to place _{ACC}
‘instead of’		‘to place’

is attributed as denominative in (Morkovkin, 1997) and adverbial in (Russian grammar, 1980).

Thus, it is quite evident that the quantity (see Fig. 5) and structural system of Russian prepositions has changed drastically within the last 3 centuries, and a rather disputable classification of prepositions has become academic.

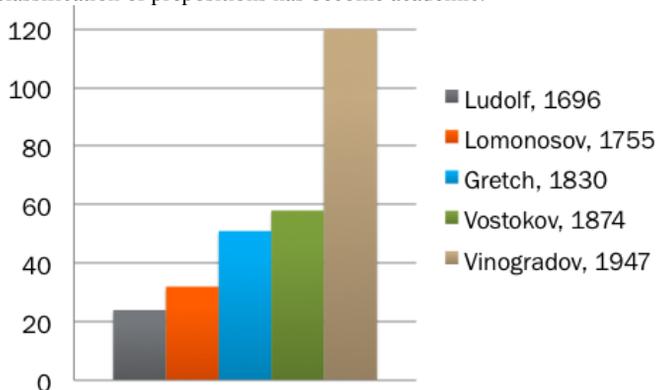


Figure 5: The increase in prepositions named in grammars 1696 – 1947

In the next section, we focus on studying modern Russian grammars and dictionaries in order to determine what is a Russian preposition today.

5. Prepositions in modern Russian grammars and dictionaries

As we have seen, Russian prepositions have been replenished vigorously during last century, mostly by forms of nouns, used in the function of prepositions. Thus, it is not surprising that Russian grammars and books of prepositions keep increasing the number of prepositions; see Fig. 6, where all the origins containing closed lists are taken into consideration. In this section, we compare the modern works devoted to prepositions.

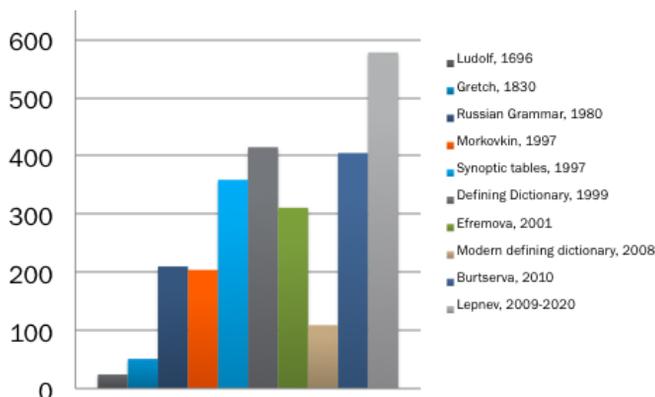


Figure 6: The increase in prepositions named in grammars and dictionaries 1696 – 2010 (closed lists)

In addition to the increasing quantity of prepositions, excluding (Modern defining dictionary, 2008), we determined that linguists included different prepositions in their lists. Thus, the sum of prepositional sets mentioned above is 713, which means that the authors are quite subjective when compiling prepositional catalogs because the largest list (Lepnev, 2009, 2010) contains 578 prepositions. This fact has led us to hypothesize a lack of objectivity in categorizing units as prepositions. To verify this hypothesis, we compared the prepositional lists of the origins in the review. As a first step, we compared (5.1.) different catalogs to the (Russian Grammar 1980) list, and then we collated (5.2.) prepositional lists of some simultaneous editions.

5.1. The modern history of academic grammars consists of 3 manuscripts. In 1960, the Russian Academy of Science published the first Academic Russian grammar (editor V. Vinogradov), and since then, 2 more Academic grammars have been issued – Russian grammars 1970 and 1980 (both edited by N. Shvedova). These are the most acknowledged Russian grammars. The first two grammars enumerate prepositions in open lists; nevertheless, they do not coincide with each other nor with V. Vinogradov’s list (1947) (see Fig. 7).

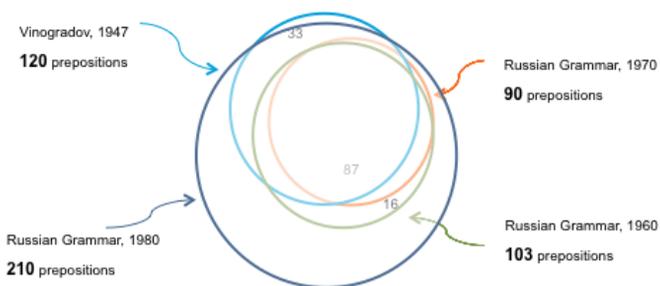


Figure 7: Comparison of prepositional lists in (Russian Grammar, 1960, Russian Grammar, 1970, Russian Grammar, 1980) and V. Vinogradov's list (Vinogradov, 1947)

The Russian grammar (1980) presents a closed list of 210 prepositions. It is supposed to be the standard list of prepositions because Russia has not published any academic grammars since 1980. Thus, the idea was to compare the prepositional list of (Russian Grammar, 1980) to lists of Russian defining dictionaries (5.1.1.) and to lists of more narrowly focused dictionaries (5.1.2.).

5.1.1. A defining dictionary of S. Ozhegov and N. Shvedova (Defining dictionary, 1999) consists of 80.000 words and contains 415 prepositions; only 9 from (Russian Grammar, 1980) are not mentioned (Fig. 8).

Defining dictionary, 1999

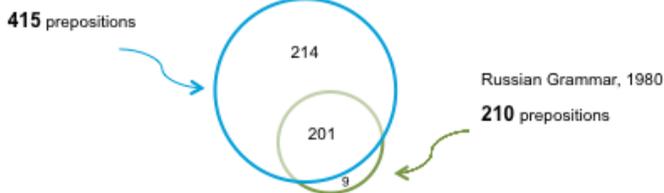


Figure 8: Comparison of prepositional lists in (Russian Grammar, 1980) ed. N. Shvedova and in "A Defining Dictionary", by S. Ozhegov & N. Shvedova (Defining dictionary, 1999)

The second very popular contemporary defining dictionary is a dictionary by S. Kuznetsov (Modern defining dictionary, 2008) including more than 90.000 words and only 109 prepositions (Fig. 9). It reflects a tendency towards minimizing and restricting prepositions as a part of speech.

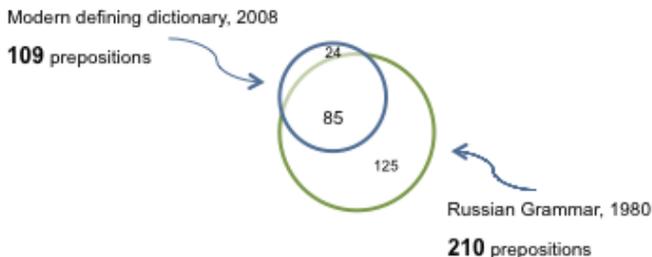


Figure 9: Comparison of prepositional lists in (Russian Grammar, 1980) and in “A Modern Defining Dictionary”, S. Kuznetsov (Modern Defining Dictionary, 2008)

Thus, we can state that modern defining Russian dictionaries include roughly discrepant lists of prepositions (415 and 109 units) and have controversial views on prepositions as a part of speech.

5.1.2. In the dictionary of structural words issued by V. Morkovkin (1997), 204 prepositions are described, but 53 prepositions from (Russian Grammar, 1980) are missing, while at the same time, 47 new prepositions are added (Fig. 10).

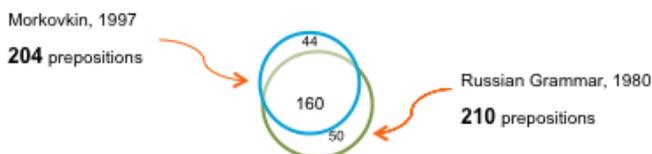


Figure 10: Comparison of prepositional lists in (Russian Grammar, 1980) and in “A Dictionary of structural words”, ed. V. Morkovkin (Morkovkin, 1997)

In 2001, a dictionary of auxiliary parts of speech was published (Efremova, 2001) in which T. Efremova enlarged the list of (Russian Grammar, 1980) with 135 prepositions, but 34 units were not mentioned (Fig. 11).

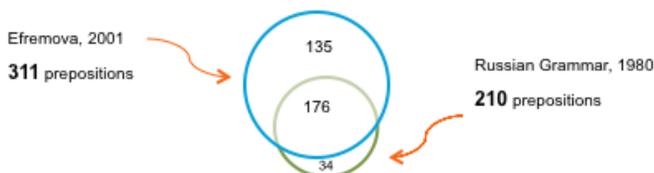


Figure 11: Comparison of prepositional lists in (Russian Grammar, 1980) ed. N. Shvedova and in “A Dictionary of auxiliary parts of speech”, by T. Efremova (2001)

The next remarkable work on prepositions is “A dictionary of Russian adverbs and auxiliary words” by V. Burtseva (2010). It continues the trend of including a prepositional catalogue a wide range of units (Fig. 12), but still does not join 21 prepositions from the (Russian Grammar, 1980) list.

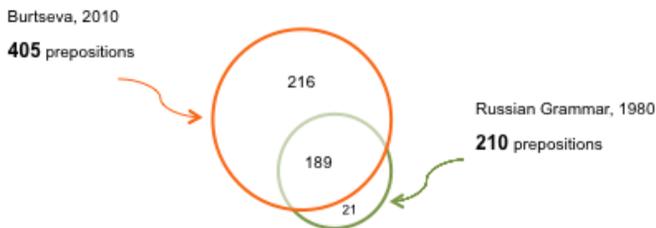


Figure 12: Comparison of prepositional lists in (Russian Grammar, 1980) ed. N. Shvedova and in “A Dictionary of Russian adverbs and auxiliary words”, by V. Burtseva (Burtseva, 2010)

Finally, the two dictionaries (of derivative and non-derivative prepositions) by M. Lepnev (2009; 2010) contain almost all prepositions from the (Russian Grammar, 1980) list, except for

naravne s
‘pari passu with.’

The number of prepositions named by M. Lepnev is 578.

An even broader catalog of prepositional units is presented in “... prepositions ...” (Vsevolodova et al., 2018), which covers the first 3 letters of Russian alphabet, *A*, *B*, and *V* and consists of almost 900 units, each of them being characterized in accordance with an attribution scheme including morphonologic, morphosyntactic, and lexical parameters. The catalog also includes all the prepositions from the (Russian Grammar, 1980) list.

The fact that almost all the lists overlap in some parts and differ in some number of prepositions shows that the researchers lack the objective criteria to determine the “membership in prepositions”. The same trend can be traced while comparing contemporary catalogs (see the next part).

5.2. The second comparison was made with some simultaneous works to show that the Russian language deals not only with the growth of prepositions but with the subjective attitudes of linguists when defining of prepositional borders.

Comparison of two papers issued in 1997 – “Russian auxiliary words. Synoptic tables” (Synoptic tables, 1997) and “Dictionary of structural words” (Morkovkin, 1997) – shows a considerable difference in quantity: 359 and 204 prepositions, respectively (see Fig. 13). Despite the notably lesser quantity of prepositions, V. Morkovkin named 19 “new” prepositions.

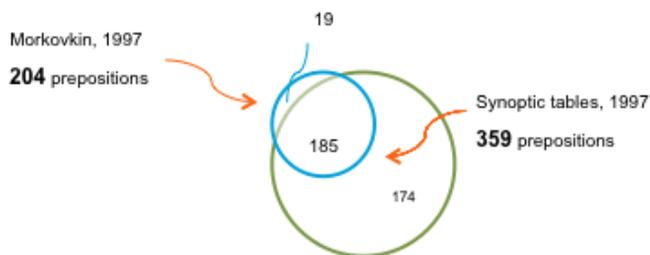


Figure 13: Comparison of prepositional lists in “Russian auxiliary words. Synoptic tables” by S. Bogdanov, Ju. Ryzhova (Synoptic tables, 1997) and “Dictionary of structural words” ed. by V. Morkovkin (Morkovkin, 1997)

The next two catalogs are devoted exclusively to multi-word derivative prepositions and their equivalents. They are “Relative phraseological units in Russian” by G. Shiganova (2003) and “A defining dictionary of word combinations equivalent to words” by R. Rogozhnikova (2003) (see Fig. 14).

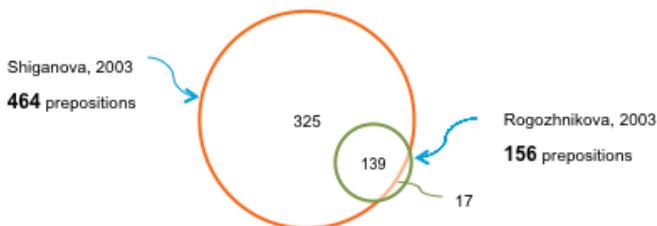


Figure 14: Comparison of prepositional lists in “Relative phraseological units in Russian” by G. Shiganova (2003) and “A defining dictionary of word combinations equivalent to words” by R. Rogozhnikova (2003)

The picture in Fig. 14 closely resembles Fig. 13 – a large difference in the number and still a non-overlapping part.

The last comparison concerns the dictionaries mentioned above – the dictionaries of non-derivative and derivative verbs by M. Lepnev (2009; 2010) and “A dictionary of Russian adverbs and auxiliary words” by V. Burtseva (2010) (see Fig. 15).

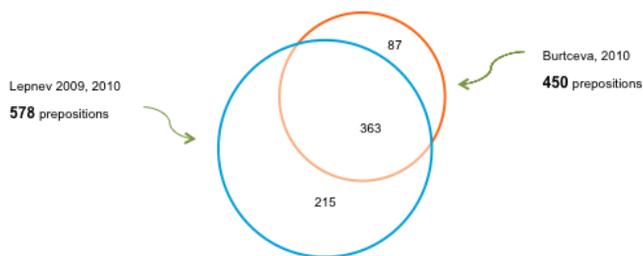


Figure 15: Comparison of prepositional lists in “A dictionary of non-derivative prepositions in Modern Russian” (Lepnev, 2009) united to “Russian derivative prepositions. Problems of semantics. Dictionary materials” (Lepnev, 2010) and “A dictionary of Russian adverbs and auxiliary words” by V. Burtseva (2010)

As becomes obvious from Fig. 15, the non-overlapping part is even greater. In both papers, 665 prepositions are named, and the common part of 2 lists is only 363 units, which makes up only 55 percent of the total amount. That undoubtedly shows the subjective approach to prepositions by linguists.

Thus, during our analysis, we have created a synoptic table, which includes 985 prepositional units (see the list in (Vinogradova, 2017)) named in all materials mentioned in Section 3. Comparative analysis of different catalogs has shown that the quantity and quality of prepositions differ drastically.

The study of depicting prepositions in different lexicography and grammar sources has brought us to a floral metaphor of prepositions. If we may be so poetic, Russian prepositions form a magnificent flower with a core and petals that impose in complicated ways. This fancy blossom keeps on the burgeoning while, at the same time, some parts are withering. The analysis has shown that the core consists of 61 prepositions – they are named in all the works.

6. Main problems and their solutions

The results of comparative analysis have revealed the main difficulties linguists face while studying prepositions. They are as follows:

- A. There is no apparent strict list of Russian prepositions.
- B. The academic classification of Russian prepositions is not absolutely precise.
- C. Most Russian linguists regard prepositions as a rapidly growing part of speech and include an increasing number of prepositions in their catalogs.
- D. Researchers are subjective in making their prepositional catalogs.
- E. There is no reliable test for “being preposition or not.”
- F. The borders of Russian prepositions as a part of speech are quite blurry.

In the next section, we describe some ways of overcoming the mentioned problems. We believe that the blurry and flickering character of the prepositional studies can be conquered in some ways by the following:

1. revision of the prepositional classification
2. usage of descriptive terms
3. application of a notion “field” in regard to prepositions
4. search for objective criteria for membership in prepositions
5. revision of parts of speech classification.

7. Description of feasible solutions for “prepositional” problems

7.1. Re-classification of prepositions

As it has been shown in Section 4, the traditional academic classification of derivative prepositions is quite controversial since it uses different features for grouping. For denominative and deverbative prepositions, the derivative feature is applied, and for adverbial prepositions – the functional one. Thus, according to (Russian Grammar, 1980), denominative and deverbative prepositions are derived from noun and verb forms, and adverbial prepositions can function as adverbs. We could also mention the difference in terms, which does not seem to be accidental: denominative, de-verbative and adverbial prepositions; same term structure in Russian:

<i>ot-ymennye</i>	<i>ot-glagol'nye</i>	<i>narechnye</i>
from nominative	from-verbative	adverbial
‘denominative’	‘deverbative’	‘adverbial.’

The analysis shows that it is much more correct to use one ground feature for preposition classification. If we apply a derivative basis for structural division, the current group of so-called “adverbial prepositions” appears to fall into 3 different subgroups:

- a) de-adjective prepositions, for example:

<i>kasatel'no</i>	<	short neuter gender form of adjective <i>kasatel'nyi</i>
‘concerning’		‘tangent’
<i>otnositel'no</i>	<	short neuter gender form of adjective <i>otnositel'nyi</i>
‘regarding’		‘relative’
<i>sootvetstvenno</i>	<	short neuter gender form of adjective
‘according’		<i>sootvetstvennyi</i>

		‘corresponding’
	(it’s a group elicited by A. Vostokov as adjective adverbs);	
b) denominative prepositions, for example:		
<i>nakanune</i>	<	<i>na kanune</i>
‘on the eve of’		on eve _{PREP}
<i>poseredine</i>	<	<i>po seredine</i>
‘in the middle of’		by middle _{PREP}
<i>szadi</i>	<	<i>s zadi</i>
‘behind’		from behind _{GEN}
		‘from behind’

Here, it is appropriate to remember Vinogradov’s saying that “we have to get rid of common prejudice as if nouns and adjectives necessarily pass by adverbs’ station on their way to denominalisation and turning to bounding words” (Vinogradov, 1947: 327); and

- c) non-derivative prepositions where at a synchronic level, Russians can hardly feel their derivative origin such as:

<i>okolo</i>	<	<i>protiv</i>
‘around’		‘against.’

This point of view was uttered in some works, such as (Cherkasova, 1967), (Vsevolodova et al., 2014) and has to be, to our firm belief, taken into consideration by future academic grammars.

As for polyfunctionality of adverbs and prepositions, it is a burning matter for Russian linguists. It seems that there are 3 theoretically feasible ways to describe it:

- a) as polyfunctionality of different parts of speech: thus, in:

Ej okolo 40.
 She_{DAT} around 40.
 ‘She is around 40.’

okolo ‘around’ is a preposition, but in:

Ej 40 ili chto-to okolo.
 She_{DAT} 40 or something around.
 ‘She is 40 or something around’

okolo ‘around’ is an adverb (that is the way prepositions and adverbs are presented in defining dictionaries, for example (Defining dictionary, 1999) and (Modern defining dictionary, 2008);

- b) as prepositions sometimes having a zero form of actant (Vsevolodova, 2010), in:

Ej 40 ili chto-to okolo.
 She_{DAT} 40 or something around.
 ‘She is 40 or something around’

okolo ‘around’ is a preposition with a zero form of actant, which is named in pre-text (40), compare:

**Ej chto-to okolo.*
 *She_{DAT} something around.
 *‘She is something around’

which is impossible to interpret in temporal meaning.

c) as adverbs always having a semantic actant of “orienting point,” which can be expressed or not on a syntactic level; thus, this group of adverbs is able to subordinate a noun group (Uryson, 2017; Degaltseva, 2019).

7.2. Descriptive terms

As it has been shown above, the image of Russian prepositions changes drastically. Many forms of nouns start functioning as prepositions. The burning issue is whether a new unit is already a preposition or still a noun form. Such ambiguity of “prepositional contenders” urges researchers to use different descriptive terms for them to avoid unequivocal categorization as prepositions.

Defining dictionaries mark these “units in question” as “in the meaning of preposition” (Defining dictionary, 1999) or “in the role of the preposition” (Russian semantic dictionary, 2003). R. Rogozhnikova (2003) defines disputable units as “analogs”, A. Mustajoki & M. Kopotev (2004) advocate the term “equivalent”, O. Inkova (2018) describes a wide class of connectors, and the term “prepositional units” is suggested in (Vsevolodova, 2010). Prepositions and their equivalents can also be regarded within Construction Grammar (Traugott, 2018; Janda et al., 2020; Luraghi et al., 2020).

E. Sheremetjeva (2008), being the opponent of a wide approach to prepositions prefers to use the term “denominative relatives,” corresponding more to nouns than to prepositions. G. Shiganova (2003) regards as synonyms terms “relative phraseological units” and “phraseological prepositions”. A narrow approach to prepositions, which resists “vague and ambiguous outlines of prepositions as a part of speech” (Shmelev, 2002: 342), is also applied in (Modern defining dictionary, 2008), where the number of prepositions compared to (Russian Grammar, 1980) is reduced twice.

Such descriptive terms allow for the studying of all the units that function as prepositions in modern Russian and abandoning the question of the part of speech.

7.3. A field of prepositions

A notion of field is a very efficient linguistic instrument helping to describe language units with regard to core and periphery. Starting from lexical fields uniting lexemes expressing one concept, the term has been moved to functional-semantic fields, which consolidate language units of different levels (lexemes, grammatical forms, syntactic forms, etc.), which function for expressing the same semantics, such as time, location, cause, etc. (Bondarko, 1975). It is quite rational to distinguish functional-grammatical fields by combining all the means of expressing one grammatical meaning, for example, the meaning of a preposition (Vsevolodova et al., 2014). Using the idea of the field, we can study all the units functioning as prepositions, some of them being in the very core of the field and some being close to the periphery (see Fig. 16). Thus, we avoid putting a strict border between prepositions and disputable units behaving like prepositions.

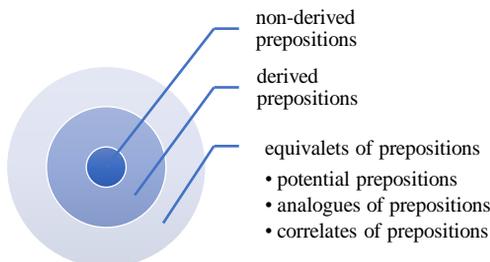


Figure 16: A functional-grammatical field of prepositions (Vsevolodova et al., 2014)

It is quite prominent that forms of nouns are able to become prepositions, and it is a very active process in modern Russian. This process is known as grammaticalization; see the classic definition of grammaticalization by Jerzy Kuryłowicz as “the increase of a range of a morpheme advancing from a lexical to a grammatical or from less grammatical to a more grammatical status” (Kuryłowicz, 1965: 62). It is quite a long process and, as Christian Lehman stated, has no clear-cut end (Lehmann, 1995: 16). If we imagine grammaticalization against the background of a functional-grammatical field of prepositions, it looks like a movement from the periphery to the core. Thus, very often, it is extremely difficult to define if the grammaticalization is complete and a noun group became a preposition or not (Hoffman, 2005; Pinto de Lima, 2019; Staps, 2020).

How can we distinguish between prepositions and prepositions-on-the-way? For example, in (Russian Grammar, 1980), there are some prepositions that are not mentioned in the majority of dictionaries, such as:

<i>bez</i>	<i>soprovozhdenija</i>	<i>vne</i>	<i>ramok</i>
without escort _{GEN}		outside frame _{GEN PL}	
‘without escort of’		‘outside the frame of’.	

In the next subsection, we name some tests for defining prepositions.

7.4. Tests for the “membership” in prepositions

In (Essays, 1964), it is stated that the most quickly progressing group of prepositions are the denominative ones. Many noun forms function as prepositions, and many of them become proper prepositions via grammaticalization. A considerable number of in-between nouns and prepositional units, or units which are on different stages of grammaticalization, have drawn us to the question of objectively defining the degree of grammaticalization or tests for membership in prepositions.

In the theory of grammaticalization, it is well-known that grammaticalization involves 4 mechanisms: semantic bleaching, context generalization, decategorization and phonetic reduction (Bybee et al., 1994; Lehmann, 1995; Hopper & Traugott, 2003; Kuteva et al., 2019). In Russia, T. Tikhomirova (Tikhomirova, 1972) proposed testing the transformation of a word (in a certain form) from one part of speech to another using the following criteria: change of meaning, loss of some morphological forms and loss of syntactic capacity (it is quite prominent that grammaticalization mechanisms and Tikhomirova’s tests correspond). M. Vsevolodova added that regarding prepositions, such criteria as morphosyntactic paradigm, possibility to make a case question and inability to eliminate any component out of the prepositional unit (Vsevolodova et al., 2014). In (Vinogradova, 2016), prepositional tests are also elaborated, and the author examined metaphoric degree, type of syntactic form (syntaxeme), ability to insert adjectives and morphologic specializing compared to similar units. Nevertheless, scanning and developing of objective criteria for defining a degree of grammaticalization in a field of prepositions is still a burning issue.

7.5. Parts of speech classification

Parts of speech, being a fundamental category for Russian language description, are still causing hot debates between scientists. There are several classifications based on different features. In Russian academic grammars, parts of speech are usually divided into categorematic (noun, adjective, verb, pronoun, numeral and adverb) and syncategorematic (preposition, conjunction, particle, and interjection). Categorematic parts of speech are easier to distinguish because, in Russian, most of them do have different systems of flexion (except for adverbs), although there are still some issues of the day here. The situation within syncategorematic parts of speech is rather more complicated because there are no formal bases for distinction; thus, there is no flexion.

The other reasonable division is flexible and inflexible parts of speech. Inflexible parts of speech include prepositions, conjunctions, participles, interjections and adverbs. It seems that inflexible parts of speech can be divided into groups only by their functions. So far, polyfunctionality is wide spread within inflexible parts of speech. For example, Russian *točno* can be an adverb ('strictly, accurately'), a conjunction ('as if, like') and a participle ('exactly').

Returning to prepositions, we should state that their correct definition and position, among other inflexible syncategorematic parts of speech, is greatly needed. Thus, in (Russian Grammar, 1980: 706), the definition is as follows: "preposition is a syncategorematic part of speech which marks subordination of one categorematic word to another in a word phrase or a sentence, expressing in this way the relationship between objects, actions, states, attributes, which are named by those words". This definition can hardly help with clarifying the borders of prepositions as a part of speech because all the above-mentioned units mark subordination and express relations, i.e., function as prepositions.

Therefore, it seems that the problems being discussed in this article are tightly bound with parts of speech classification and the definition of prepositions.

8. Conclusion

In this article, we tried to draw a portrait of Russian prepositions today. Analysis of the prepositions listed in sources scrutinized has shown that they differ drastically both in quantity and in quality. We can state that nobody truly knows what is a Russian preposition today and how many of them are there: the smallest modern list consists of approximately 100 prepositions, and the largest, approximately 1000 prepositions. In addition, prepositions in Russian change their image fast: the grammaticalization of noun forms to prepositions is a very active process today, but there are no reliable tests for defining the status of a preposition as a part of speech, and there is no irrefragable definition of a Russian preposition. Furthermore, the structural classes of Russian prepositions are separated on different bases, which makes classification ambivalent.

In this regard, the aims of Russian linguistics are quite transparent: to catalog all units functioning as prepositions, to set forth a perfect definition of the preposition, to find objective criteria for differentiating between prepositions and non-prepositions and to name an inarguable prepositions list in order to clarify the classification of prepositions.

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