



**WAYS OF ATTENUATING AGENCY IN RUSSIAN**

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Review

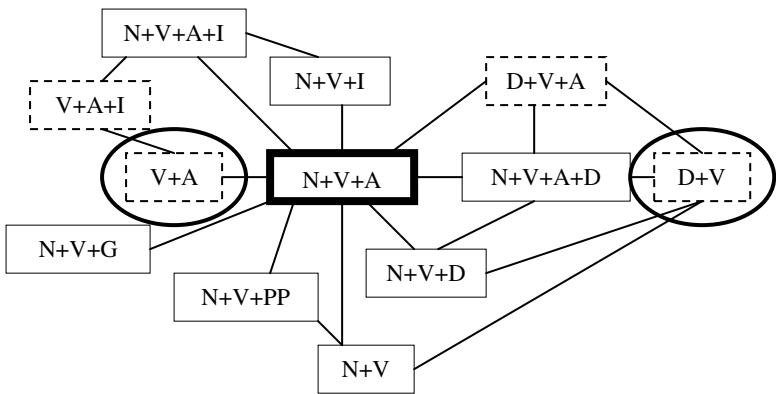


Diagram 1: Network of personal and impersonal constructions in Russian

## WAYS OF ATTENUATING AGENCY IN RUSSIAN

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### 1. Introduction

This article focuses on one set of patterns which are highly conventionalized in Russian, but are typically seen as being less prominent in other Slavic languages, namely grammatical constructions that attenuate or eliminate the expression of agency. Russian has a particularly rich assortment of such constructions, which we explore in detail. Emphasis is on the organization of these constructions in larger networks of related personal and impersonal constructions, with impersonal constructions as peripheral members of the system.

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In the case of impersonal constructions, we look at the way a verb’s argument structure is construed and at the use of grammatical case in the argument structure construction. More specifically, we compare the role of dative case in impersonal constructions containing a finite verb and an infinitive and demonstrate that there are two such constructions, which has implications for the concepts of main verb-hood and agentivity.

The exposition in this article uses the frameworks of Radical Construction Grammar and Cognitive Grammar. Radical Construction Grammar postulates the grammatical construction as the basic unit of language and linguistic analysis: constructions are not derived from their parts, instead, the parts are derived from the constructions and, hence, are construction specific. Cognitive Grammar focuses on differences in construal, i.e. different ways of arranging the elements that make up a complex construction, which signal differences in the relationship between those elements. Cognitive Grammar treats all linguistic units and categories as meaning-bearing, in all contexts. For this reason, all case use is considered semantically motivated and no distinction is made between ‘grammatical’ and ‘semantic’ case.

2. Personal versus impersonal constructions

Russian has a wealth of both personal and impersonal constructions. There is no clear distinction between these two types of construction, however, for the dividing line between them is gradual and complex: most impersonal constructions are closely related to personal constructions, differing mainly in that one or more constituents seem to be ‘missing’. The purpose of the exposition presented below is to show that, although syntactic differences

might appear to constitute discrete changes in the number and identity of constituents, i.e. presence versus absence and various case markings of noun phrases, in fact these transitions are not so discrete: there is often similarity in meaning across constructions that seem to be opposed by discrete units of change. In other words, we show that the recognition of networks with a centre-periphery structure can be as insightful for the investigation of syntax as it is for the analysis of semantics. Within the framework of Cognitive Grammar it is customary to consider linguistic phenomena in terms of prototypes and networks of uses associated with the prototype and variants thereof. This approach is applied to both constructions and thematic roles (agent, patient) in this article and in the latter instance is thus compatible with the prototype approach promoted by Dowty (1991).

## 2.1 Personal constructions

Personal constructions are constructions in which the finite verb agrees with an overt nominative subject, not necessarily a human being. Russian has a number of personal constructions that meet this requirement, but the prototypical personal construction in Russian is the personal transitive construction, containing a nominative subject, a finite verb and an accusative direct object (Janda forthcoming). This construction (which we call N+V+A, for 'nominative + verb + accusative'), illustrated in example (1), instantiates Langacker's (1991: 285-6) 'canonical event model'. It is also closely related to impersonal constructions that lack the nominative noun phrase, as in sections 2.2 and 2.3.

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- (1)    Девушка       сшила       юбку.<sup>2</sup>
- Devuška       sšila       jubku.
- Girl-N       sewed       skirt-A.*
- ‘The girl sewed a skirt.’

The N+V+A construction is identified as prototypical according to the principles of Cognitive Grammar: it is the simplest and most salient construction that directly instantiates the ‘canonical event model’. The prototype is the construction that is centrally located in the semantic network (see Diagram 1 below) and is most connected to other related constructions. The prototype is also the construction that provides the highest transitivity associations in Russian, according to the ten parameters outlined by Hopper and Thompson (1980: 252).

Langacker (1991: 321), Croft (2001: 136) and Goldberg (1995: 101-119) view the personal transitive construction as a unitary structure and do not discuss syntactic variants on this construction or transitions to other constructions. Taylor (2002: 415-426) is more flexible: he admits that it is often hard to distinguish between participants and

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<sup>2</sup> Section 2 uses sentences that are shortened and edited versions of well-attested constructions. For the purpose of comparing a large number of similar constructions, it is advisable to keep the lexical items relatively similar. On the other hand, the sections on the finite + infinitive verb use corpus data as those constructions are less frequently encountered and need proof of attestation.

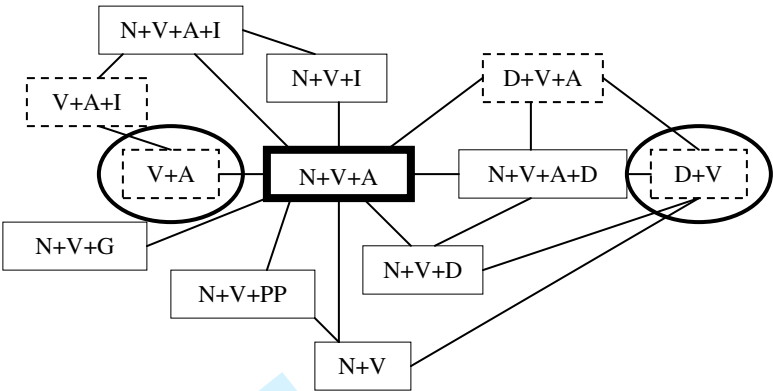
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3 circumstances, that construal plays a role and that participants can sometimes be omitted<sup>3</sup>  
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5 from the construction. Talmy (2000: 92-3) foregrounds the role of construal in the personal  
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7 transitive construction, by recognizing that transitivity is dependent upon construal and that  
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9 similar semantic structures may be encoded differently. Russian offers numerous variations  
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11 on the personal transitive construction by adding, replacing and deleting items (including  
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13 the subject participant).  
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17 In light of Russian data it is necessary to extend Langacker's model and to invoke  
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19 Talmy's model of construal to see how similar constructions are related. We trace the  
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21 relationships among a representative sample of constructions, which together form the  
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23 following network:  
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29 Diagram 1: Network of personal and impersonal constructions in Russian  
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37  
38 <sup>3</sup> One of the anonymous reviewers rightly remarked that 'in a paper where the omissibility  
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40 of particular arguments is crucial to the argument, it becomes important to ask just where  
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42 measurements of how easy it is to omit something, or how often something is omitted, fit in  
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44 the architecture of the theory'. Although we agree that taking such measurements would be  
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46 very revealing, we want to stress that we have not collected such data for this paper: our  
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48 study simplifies the situation by presenting alternatives as either/or options. Yet, given that  
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50 Cognitive Linguistics treats language as a cognitive ability and cognitive abilities are  
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52 typically described in probabilistic terms, a probabilistic approach to grammar does not  
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54 pose a theoretical problem.  
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In the diagram, N = nominative, V = verb, A = accusative, D = dative, I = instrumental, L = locative, PP = prepositional phrase. The prototypical construction is enclosed by a bold line, personal constructions are enclosed by solid lines and impersonal constructions are enclosed by dotted lines. The two constructions that we focus on most, due to their ability to include an infinitive, are enclosed by ovals: V+A and D+V.

Diagram 1 shows the role of the N+V+A construction as the prototypical transitive construction. It occupies a central role in the semantic network of constructions, bearing direct relationships to more related constructions than any other. The most peripheral members in the network, namely V+A+I and D+V bear only indirect relations to the prototype. ‘Distance’ in the network metaphorically expresses the degree of deviation from the prototype. Transitions between constructions may include examples where the energy structure is altered although the syntax is not (cf. discussion of examples (1) and (2)), or where the syntax is altered but the energy structure is not (cf. discussion of examples (6) and (7)). Distance is not directly quantifiable, but an indirect relationship in Diagram 1 represents greater distance than a direct one (one with only one ‘link’). Diagram 1 makes it possible to identify two important groupings within the network: one dominated by the use



of the dative case (on the right) and one involving use of the instrumental (on upper left).

As is typical in radial networks based on a prototype, the relationships mutually support the semantics of each construction and of the whole by providing comparisons and contrasts.

Diagram 1 and the approach in this article reflect the observations that there is a prototypical transitive event and that the case marking of arguments is ‘motivated by the transitivity of the clause as a whole’ (Hopper & Thompson 1980: 292). We furthermore concur with Hopper and Thompson’s (1980: 294) claim ‘that transitivity is a global property of clauses [and] that it is a continuum’. This claim validates our representation of transitivity in Russian as a radial category with a prototypical construction and other constructions at various relative distances from it. The present article extends the model set forth by Hopper and Thompson by a) exploring an entire network of constructions and b) giving equal emphasis to the case marking of the agent (whereas Hopper and Thompson focused primarily on the case marking of the object).

The two components of this analysis are a) distance from the prototype as in Diagram 1 and b) energy structure, which looks at how the energy of the verb interacts with the other constituents in the construction (cf. ‘force dynamics’ Talmy 2000).

Example (1) above instantiates Langacker’s (1991: 285) ‘role archetypes’ for agent (the girl) and patient (the skirt), where the transitive verb focuses on the transfer of energy from the agent to the patient. However, not all Russian sentences with the N+V+A structure express the prototypical personal transitive meaning, as we see in example (2):

(2) Девушка      шила      всю ночь.

Devuška      šila      vsju noč’.

*Girl-N      sewed      all night-A.*

‘The girl sewed all night.’

The relationship between the verb and the accusative noun phrase is different in (2), for it does not entail a transfer of energy to an object. In (2), the accusative marks the duration of the action. The use of a time expression in the accusative slot is part of a transition between the personal transitive construction and the personal intransitive construction, which is completed when we look at the next three examples, (3), (4) and (5):

- (3) Девушка спала всю ночь.  
Devuška spala vsju noč’.  
Girl-N slept all night-A.

‘The girl slept all night.’

- (4) Девушка спала.  
Devuška spala.  
Girl-N slept.

‘The girl slept/was sleeping.’

- (5) Девушка шила.  
Devuška šila.  
Girl-N sewed.

‘The girl sewed/was sewing.’

Sentences (1), (2) and (3) all display the same case pattern, but have a different ‘energy structure’, since (1) is the only one that describes a transfer of energy. Examples (2), (3), (4) and (5) all have the same energy structure, although (2) and (3) have a different syntactic structure to (4) and (5). The transition between transitive and intransitive personal constructions is relatively simple and straightforward. As we shall see, there is a more complex transition to a variety of impersonal constructions. Furthermore, there are constructions that compromise the force of a personal construction even though they meet the syntactic requirements stated above. We turn to the latter first (section 2.1.1). Throughout this survey we express the syntactic relationships in terms of ‘distance’ from the prototypical personal transitive constructions, created by adding and replacing constituents.

### 2.1.1 Adding constituents

The addition of constituents to the prototypical personal transitive construction does not compromise the personal nature of the construction; it can affect transitivity, though, in a way similar to the one we saw above in examples (1) through (5). For example, the addition of a preposition to the finite verb yields an energy structure that is basically the same as in the prototypical transitive construction exemplified in (1), although the transitivity relation is affected, as comparing (6) and (7) reveal:

- (6) Любой спортсмен надеется на победу.  
 Ljuboj sportsmen nadeetsja na pobedu.  
*Every athlete-N hopes for victory-A.*  
 ‘Every athlete hopes for victory.’

- (7)    Каждый клуб            хочет            победу.  
       Každý klub            hočet            pobedu.  
       *Every club-N            wants            victory-A.*  
       ‘Every club wants victory.’

In other words, (6) does not have the prototypical transitive construction (due to the addition of the preposition and use of a reflexive verb; cf. Hopper & Thompson 1980: 262, 278), but it does share approximately the same energy structure as the transitive construction in (7). However, syntactic construction alone does not fully determine transitivity and thus cannot be used as a simple test. If a motion verb is used, we do have reduced transitivity, although the prepositional phrase with an accusative is retained, as (8) shows:

- (8)    Девушка            пошла            в школу.  
       Devuška            pošla            v školu.  
       *Girl-N            went            to school-A.*  
       ‘The girl went to school.’

Example (8) has no more transitivity than (9), which contains a prepositional phrase with the locative instead of the accusative:

- (9)    Девушка            работает            в кабинете.  
       Devuška            rabotaet            v kabinete.

*Girl-N*            *works*            *in office-L*.

‘The girl is working in her office.’

Yet, transitivity is not entirely ruled out in sentences containing a prepositional phrase with the locative either, as we see by comparing (10) and (11). Example (10) is grammatically intransitive, yet similar in meaning to (11), which is transitive:

(10) Девушка            призналась            в убийстве.

*Devuška*            *priznalas’*            *v ubijstve*.

*Girl-N*            *confessed*            *in murder-L*.

‘The girl confessed to murder.’

(11) Девушка            признала            свою вину.

*Devuška*            *priznala*            *svoju vinu*.

*Girl-N*            *admitted*            *own guilt-A*.

‘The girl admitted her guilt.’

The comparison between (10) and (11) is closely parallel to that between (6) and (7).

Adding a dative or an instrumental noun phrase likewise does not reduce transitivity in and of itself, but these additions do create constructions that serve as transitions to impersonal constructions. First, let us consider the addition of a dative, as in (12):

(12) Девушка            сшила            сестре            юбку.

*Devuška*            *sšila*            *sestre*            *jubku*.

*Girl-N                sewed                sister-D                skirt-A.*

‘The girl sewed a skirt for her sister.’

This construction, containing N+V+A+D (word order is relatively free in Russian), is closely related (via deletion of constituents) to two important types of impersonal constructions, as in sections 2.2 and 2.3.

Example (13) shows the construction that results when an instrumental participant is added:

(13) *Девушка                резала рыбу                ножом.*

*Devuška                rezala rybu                nožom.*

*Girl-N                cut                fish-A                knife-I.*

‘The girl cut the fish with a knife.’

This construction, containing N+V+A+I is also a close relative of some important impersonal constructions in Russian that lack the nominative and/or the accusative components.

2.1.2 Replacing constituents

Throughout this section comparisons are made among similar constructions that differ primarily in their use of case marking. For a more detailed discussion of case meaning in Russian and its influence on constructions, we refer to Janda & Clancy (2002).

Changing the accusative object to a genitive object does not compromise the personal transitive construction, as we see in (14).

(14) Девушка избегала всяких интервью.

Devuška izbegala vsjakix interv'ju.

*Girl-N avoided all interviews-G.*

'The girl avoided all interviews.'

There is a group of Russian verbs that can use either the genitive or the accusative in this construction, such as *bojat'sja* ('be afraid of') and *iskat'* ('look for') (Janda & Clancy 2002:118, 123-4). Russian grammar is undergoing change at present and the distribution of accusative versus genitive case appears to depend on many factors, such as age of speaker, register, individuation and the lexical items filling the verb and noun slots (cf. Timberlake 1975; Comrie et al. 1996: 145). These verbs clearly demonstrate the close relationship between the N+V+G and N+V+A constructions, as we see in (15a) and (15b):

(15a.) Девушка боялась смерти.

Devuška bojalas' smerti.

*Girl-N feared death-G.*

'The girl was afraid of death.'

(15b.) Девушка боялась смерть.

Devuška bojalas' smert'.

*Girl-N feared death-A.*

'The girl was afraid of death.'

The accusative object can be replaced by a dative object, as we see in (16). The N+V+D construction is arguably transitive, as we see in (16), though it emphasizes the ability of the dative object to react, rather than treating it just as a patient, which is typical for the accusative. The N+V+D construction, along with the N+V+A+D construction in (12), is a near relative of certain impersonal constructions.

- (16)   Девушка       заплатила       адвокату.  
          Devuška       zaplatila       advokatu.  
          *Girl-N       paid       lawyer-D*  
          ‘The girl paid the lawyer.’

There are a number of semantically similar verbs that differ in whether their objects are dative or accusative (Janda & Clancy 2002:101-4). Thus, both *soputstvovat’* and *sopровождат’* mean ‘accompany’, but the first has a dative object and the second has an accusative object, as in (17a) and (17b). These two semantically similar verbs differ in their case government, motivated by their etymologies. The stem *-putstvovat’* refers to ‘travel’ and is intransitive, whereas *-voždat’* refers to ‘lead’ and is inherently intransitive. This comparison makes it possible to assert a strong connection between the N+V+A and N+V+D constructions.

- (17a.)   Успех       сопутствовал       девушке       всюду.  
          Uspex       soputstvoval       devuške       vsjudu.  
          *Success-N       accompanied       girl-D       everywhere.*  
          ‘Success accompanied the girl everywhere.’



- (17b.) Успех сопровождал девушку всюду.  
 Uspex soprovoždal devušku vsjudu.  
*Success-N accompanied girl-A everywhere.*  
 ‘Success accompanied the girl everywhere.’

Finally, it is also possible to replace the accusative object with an instrumental object. The transitivity of the resulting N+V+I construction varies, from very intransitive, as in (18), through mildly transitive, as in (19), which can be construed as ‘made a waving motion with her hand, to strongly transitive, as in (20) where the verb assigns the instrumental case to the object:

- (18) Девушка улетит следующим рейсом.  
 Devuška uletit sledujuščim rejsom.  
*Girl-N flies away next flight-I.*  
 ‘The girl leaves on the next flight.’

- (19) Девушка махала рукой.  
 Devuška maxala rukoj.  
*Girl-N waved hand-I.*  
 ‘The girl waved her hand.’

- (20) Девушка командовала солдатами.  
 Devuška komandovala soldatami

*Girl-N                      commanded                      soldiers-I.*

‘The girl commanded the soldiers.’

As we have seen in comparing N+V+A (1) with N+V+G (14) and N+V+D (16) constructions, there are numerous examples of verbs in the N+V+I construction that are near equivalents to verbs in the N+V+A construction, creating a smooth transition (Janda & Clancy 2002: 30-33). The verb *komandovat* ‘command’, for example, is semantically related to the verb *vesti* ‘lead’, which can use the N+V+A construction, as in (21). The difference is that the N+V+I construction de-emphasizes the impact of the N+V on the object. When the object appears in the instrumental case, serves merely as a conduit for the action. In other words, (20) tell us that the girl was exercising her command through the soldiers. *Vesti* ‘lead’ is a verb of physical motion (leading by the hand) used metaphorically to express a commanding role. The metaphor brings *vesti* ‘lead’ close to the meaning of *komandovat* ‘command’, but the syntax of the transitive action from the source domain persists in the N+V+A construction in (21).

(21) *Девушка            вела    солдат            (в бой).*  
*Devuška            vela    soldat            (v boj).*  
*Girl-N                      led            soldiers-A            (into battle-A).*

‘The girl led the soldiers (into battle).’

The discussion thus far has centered on the canonical N+V+A transitive construction and constructions related to it via the addition or replacement of constituents, yet staying within the realm of personal constructions. The next section examines the ways

in which these personal constructions are related to impersonal constructions where there is no nominative subject that could be assigned agency.

## 2.2 Impersonal constructions

The term ‘impersonal construction’ typically refers to any construction in which the nominative slot is not filled up by a noun or pronoun. According to Švedova and Lopatina (1990: 283-284, §285) ‘every verb without an acting person or thing [canonically in the nominative – DD and LAJ] can be considered impersonal’ and all ‘3rd (neuter) singular verb forms and infinitives are impersonal forms’.

The typical interpretation for impersonal constructions capitalizes on the absence of a grammatical subject encoding the obvious human instigator and posits ‘the unknown’ (Wierzbicka 1988: 233) that imposes things upon the subject from outside (Israeli 1997: 21). Some things just are beyond our control: every now and then, we find ourselves governed by uncontrollable passions and confronted with the limits of knowledge and reason we are forced to acknowledge the existence of fate or destiny. In what follows we describe how Russian grammar deals with this insight.

Despite the fact that most of the transitions between the personal and impersonal constructions consist of discrete differences, it is the web of relationships between those constructions that supports the meaning of the individual constructions: discrete variety in the composition of constructions is part of an overall syntactic continuum that encompasses both personal and impersonal constructions. Impersonal constructions themselves show a range of expression: from very mild, where a personal subject is assumed but not specified; through constructions where a subject-like, agentive entity (one capable of being the

subject of a further action) is present, but is assigned reduced agency; to constructions where no subject or agent can be present.

Starting from the N+V+A construction, the simplest transition to an impersonal construction uses a 3pl verb without specifying a subject, as in (22), which could be described as (N)+V+A. Thus, the verb is personal and agrees with a plural subject that is missing, but could be reconstructed as something with general reference, such as *oni* ('they') or *ljudi* ('people'):

- (22)    На юге            Москвы        искали        бомбу.  
          Na juge        Moskvvy       iskali        bombu.  
          *On south-L    Moscow-G    searched    bomb-A.*  
          'In south Moscow they were searching for a bomb.'

This impersonal construction can also be intransitive, as in (23), which has a (N)+V structure:

- (23)    Вчера            танцевали    на столе.  
          Včera        tancevali    na stole.  
          *Yesterday    danced       on table-L.*  
          'Yesterday people were dancing on the table.'

Examples (22) and (23) are ‘mildly’ impersonal since they assume the existence of a subject, which is merely left unspecified.<sup>4</sup>

Next in our survey comes a series of impersonal constructions that lack a nominative subject but do have a dative constituent. The dative case emphasizes the idea that the event is something that the dative entity cannot fully control. The dative entity experiences the event as something imposed from the outside, rather than as something that the entity is doing or chooses to do (cf. Dąbrowska 1994 for a similar interpretation of the factors motivating the nominative versus dative choice in Polish). The meaning of such impersonal constructions without a nominative but with a dative entity is closely related to the meaning of corresponding personal constructions where an entity, similar to the entity encoded by the dative in the impersonal construction, appears in the nominative case. The verb forms present in these dative impersonal constructions include bare infinitives, 3SG neuter forms and reflexive forms (also 3SG neuter). Section 2.3 discusses the use of the infinitive in such constructions in detail. The dative impersonal constructions have the structure D+V+A (24) or D+V (26) or (28) and are thus related via substitution to N+V+A (25) and N+A (27) or (29) and due to the relatively free word order of Russian, also to N+V+D+A (12) and N+V+D (16). A classic example of D+V+A is given in (24):

- (24)   Что           нам    делать?  
           Čto           nam    delat’?  
           *What-A       us-D   do?*  
           ‘What are we to do?’

<sup>4</sup> Note that mild impersonals can also be formed with the 2sg, 3sg and 1pl.

Here, the dative entity, which is the recipient of the situation in (24), is presumed to be the subject of a further action and thus serves as a potential subject. The overall syntactic system suggests a comparison between this and the nearest N+V+A personal equivalent, with an overt rather than merely potential subject:

- (25)   Что               мы       делаем?  
          Čto            my       delaem?  
          *What-A        we-N   do*  
          ‘What are we doing?’

D+V constructions are commonly used to express how people experience external forces, including passage of time (age) and temperature (Janda & Clancy 2002:91-101), as illustrated in:

- (26)   Девушке       было трудно       16 лет       холодно.  
          Devuške       bylotrudno       16 let       xolodno.  
          *Girl-D        was difficult/       16 years-G   cold.*  
          ‘The girl was having a hard time/16 years old/cold.’

Although these impersonals are not directly comparable to personal expressions, there are near-equivalents, such as:

- (27)   Девушка       жила трудно       прожила 16 лет       мерзла.

Devuška      žila trudno      prožila 16 let      merzla.  
*Girl-N      lived difficult      lived 16 years-G      was freezing.*  
 ‘The girl lived a hard life/lived 16 years/was cold.’

More obvious transitions are possible with the use of the dative reflexive impersonal construction, as we see when comparing the impersonal in (28) with the personal in (29):

(28) Девушке      не      спится.  
 Devuške      ne      spitsja.  
*Girl-D      not      sleeps-REFL.*  
 ‘The girl can’t sleep.’

(29) Девушка      не      спит.  
 Devuška      ne      spit.  
*Girl-N      not      sleep.*  
 ‘The girl is not sleeping.’

Again, the syntactic system suggests this comparison, in which the dative entity in (28) serves as a nominative subject in (29). The difference between the two constructions relates to the amount of control or agency attributed to the girl and that control is reduced in the dative impersonal construction.

A variant of the dative impersonal construction contains both a 3SG finite verb and an infinitive in the predicate. There is a noun phrase in the dative that serves as the

experiencer of the finite verb, but as the subject of the infinitive verb, as is illustrated in (30):

- (30) Девушке        надоело        шить.  
Devuške        nadoelo        šit'.  
*Girl-D        bored        sew.*  
'The girl got sick of sewing.'

Here the girl is both the experiencer of getting bored, expressed with a 3SG neuter finite verb and the subject of sewing, expressed with an infinitive. This construction is the focus of Section 2.3.

The strongest type of impersonal construction contains a verb and either an accusative entity or an instrumental entity, or both: V+A, V+A+I, V+I. These three constructions are related to corresponding constructions beginning with N+. They differ from constructions with the dative in that there is no presumed subject or subject-equivalent. Impersonal constructions with the accusative and/or instrumental are typically used to describe forces of nature beyond human control, often resulting in difficulties and tragedies, as the V+A in (31) does:

- (31) Человека        убило.  
Čeloveka        ubilo.  
*Person-A        killed.*  
'A person was killed.'



This V+A construction can be enlarged by adding a means as an instrumental entity, as in:

- (32) Человека убило током.  
 Čeloveka ubilo tokom.  
*Person-A killed electrical shock-I.*  
 ‘A person was killed by an electrical shock.’

Despite the fact that the instrumental case can be used to mark the agent of a passive event, an agent interpretation is not available in this V+A+I construction. It is not possible to insert an agent into the instrumental slot here, so example (33) is ungrammatical (cf. also Smith 1994):

- (33) \*Чловека убило солдатом.  
 Čeloveka ubilo soldatom.  
*Person-A killed soldier-I.*  
 ‘A person was killed by a soldier.’

In the V+I impersonal construction also the instrumental entity is a means for the action of the verb, not the agent, as in (34):

- (34) В комнате пахнет горячим шоколадом.  
 V komnate paxnet gorjačim šokoladom.  
*In room-L smells hot chocolate-I.*  
 ‘There is a smell of hot chocolate in the room.’

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To summarize, impersonal constructions are related to personal constructions via both discrete transitions (involving adjustments in constituents) and smooth transitions (involving semantically similar constructions). Together, the two types of construction support each other’s meanings in a web of related construction types, by encouraging comparisons and contrasts.

There are three groups of impersonal constructions, which vary in how strongly they express impersonality. The first type has a 3PL verb that refers to a generalized subject that remains unexpressed yet could be supplied; this type can thus be considered mildly impersonal. The second type comes with a 3SG verb form and lacks a nominative subject; instead, it contains a dative entity. This type of construction expresses medium-level impersonality. The third type also has the 3SG verb form in the absence of a nominative subject, but instead of a dative has an accusative patient, an instrumental means or both. Neither the accusative nor the instrumental can be interpreted as agent, nor can a true agent be inserted into those slots. This type of construction gives the strongest expression of impersonality. The remainder of this article focuses on medium-level and strong impersonals, where the expression of agency is attenuated by the use of the dative.

2.3 Impersonal constructions with Infinitive

In this section we first present a brief overview of medium level impersonals that are impersonal according to morphological, syntactic and semantic criteria (cf. Siewierska ms.). Then, we go on to explain the importance of the relations between the elements that make up the construction in construing meaning and rendering meaning differences.

### 2.3.1 Some examples

The constructions that are in focus in the remainder of this article contain a finite verb that lacks a full morphological paradigm and occurs only in the 3SG (neuter) form, yet combines with an infinitive. In addition, these defective finite verbs do not open up a nominative slot and as a consequence, the constructions in which they occur lack a grammatical subject position. Yet, the defective finite verbs allow or even require a dative (or, less frequently, an accusative) to be present. Here are some examples: (35) illustrates an impersonal construction with an accusative-taking defective finite verb and an infinitive to which no nominative slot can be added, whereas (36) contains examples of impersonal constructions with an accusative-taking defective finite verb and an infinitive in which the nominative is not expressed (36a), or refers to something evil that should not be named, yet could be expressed by means of ‘what’ (see (36) b. and c.). Example (37) is an impersonal construction with dative-taking defective finite verb and infinitive; (38) likewise presents an impersonal construction with dative-taking defective finite verb, yet the infinitive takes on a different role and this has implications for the function the dative entity fulfills, as we argue further on.

- (35) Если вы мечтаете о постоянной и интересной работе, если вы любите общаться с людьми, если **вас привлекает работать** с нежными ароматами, если вы хотите раскрыть свой внутренний потенциал, то мы рады вам предложить [...] [[www.rochalure.idknet.com/inform.html](http://www.rochalure.idknet.com/inform.html), last accessed on 09.02.2007]

Esli vy mečtaete o postojannoj i interesnoj rabote, esli vy ljubite obščat'sja s  
ljud'mi, esli **vas privlekaet rabotat'** s nežnymi aromatami, esli vy xotite raskryt'  
svoj vnutrennyj potencial, to my rady vam predložit' [...]

*If you dream about permanent and interesting job, if you like interact with people, if  
attracts-IND PRES 3SG you-A work-INF with delicate fragrances , if (...)*<sup>5</sup>

'If you are dreaming about a permanent and interesting job, if you like to interact  
with people, if you are attracted to working with delicate fragrances, if you want to  
develop your inner potential, then would like to offer you [...]

(36) а. Вид там красивый, — подавленно ответил друг Марата Павел на мой вопрос,

**какого черта их дернуло пройтись** по пешеходной тропинке под  
кремлевской стеной. [Рустам Вафин. Просто не стало человека // «Вечерняя  
Казань», 2003.01.09]

Vid tam krasivyj, -- podavlenno otvetil drug Marata Pavel na moj vopros, **kakogo  
čerta ix dernulo projtis'** po pešexodnoj tropinke pod kremlevskoj stenoj. [Rustam  
Vafin. Prosto ne stalo čeloveka // 'Večernjaja Kazan']

*View there beautiful, - answered friend Marat's Pavel to my question which devil-G  
possessed-IND PAST 3NSG them-A to take a stroll-INF along the footpath by the Kreml  
wall.*

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<sup>5</sup> In the interest of readability and space, we have decided not to tag longer examples nor to  
provide grammatical information for all words in these examples; instead, only those words  
that are important for the argument are tagged.

‘The view is beautiful there, -- Marat’s friend Pavel responded in a depressed tone to my question about why the heck they took a footpath along the Kremlin wall.’

(36)b. **Что ее дернуло ему рассказать**, сразу не сообразишь. [Галина Щербакова.

Митина любовь (1996)]

**Čto ee dernulo emu rasskazat’**, srazu ne soobraziš’. [Galina ŠČerbakova. Mitina ljubov’ (1996)]

*What possessed- IND PAST 3NSG her-A to tell-INF him-D, immediately not imagine.*

‘It’s hard to imagine what possessed her to tell him.’

(36) c. **И что меня дернуло ввязаться** в эту идиотскую беседу?! [Борис Левин.

Иностранное тело (1965–1994)]

**I čto menja dernulo vvzjat’sja** v ètu idiotskuju besedu?! [Boris Levin. Inorodnoe telo (1965-1994)]

*And what me-A possessed- IND PAST 3NSG to get involved-INF in that idiotic conversation?!*

‘And what possessed me to get involved in that idiotic conversation?!’

(37) Зачем российской телекомпании, а также американскому и туркменскому **президентам понадобилось** так экзотично **тратить** сотни тысяч долларов, неизвестно. [Борис Устюгов. Карусель в прошлое. Центральный парк культуры и отдыха никогда не станет Диснейлендом // «Известия», 2002.05.26]

Začem rossijskoj telekompanii, a takže amerikanskomu i turkmenskomu  
**prezidentam ponadobilos'** tak èkzotično **tratit'** sotni tysjač dollarov, neizvestno.  
 [Boris Ustjugov. Karusel' v prošloe. Central'nyj park kul'tury i otdyxa nikogda ne  
 stanet Disnejlendom // 'Izvestija', 2002.05.26]

*Why Russian broadcasting company-D, and also American and Turkmen presidents-  
 D became necessary- IND PAST 3NSG so exotically to waste-INF hundreds thousands  
 dollars.*

'It is unclear why the Russian broadcasting company and the American and  
 Turkmen presidents had to waste hundreds of thousands of dollars in such an exotic  
 fashion.'

- (38) Кроме того, **России надлежит** быстро **наращивать** объем пенсионных  
 накоплений, инвестируемых в приносящие доход активы. [Константин  
 Фрумкин. ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОЕ ЧУДО ОТМЕНЯЕТСЯ // «Независимая  
 газета», 2003.04.01]
- Krome toho, **Rossii nadležit** bystro **naraščivat'** ob''em pensionnyx nakoplenij,  
 investiruemyx v prinosjaščie doxod aktivy. [Konstantin Frumkin. Èkonomičeskoe  
 čudo otmenjaetsja // 'Nezavisimaja gazeta', 2003.04.01]
- Beside that, Russia-D is required-IND fast PRES 3SG to increase-INF amount  
 retirement savings invested in income bringing stocks*
- 'In addition, Russia needs to quickly increase the amount of pension savings  
 invested in income-bearing stocks.'

In the literature, there is sharp disagreement about the structure of the type of construction exemplified in (35) through (38) and in particular on the distinction between (37) and (38) and the function of the components. The disparity of views concerns the structure of the construction as a whole (is it monopartite or bipartite?), the status of the infinitive (does it function as a grammatical subject or not?) and the function of the (accusative or) dative (are they the semantic subject or not?). We take each of those issues up in turn.

### 2.3.2 Disparity of views

The disparity of views concerns the status of the construction as a whole and stems from the fact that, within the Russian tradition, sentence structure is typically described in terms of subject-predicate relations. The grammatical or syntactic subject of a sentence, *podležaščee*, has traditionally been described as the main member of a *dvusostavnoe predloženie* ('two-component sentence') that dominates the predicate. It is marked nominative and controls the subject-verb agreement in the predicate. It can appear in any position, since word order in Russian is 'free' with respect to the grammatical relations, which are determined by case marking.

Although there is consensus on the 'impersonality' of sentences like those presented in 2.3.1, some researchers consider these constructions to be *odnosostavnye predloženiia* ('one-component sentences') while others analyze them as *dvusostavnye predloženiia* ('two-component sentences') (for a brief overview see Bricyn 1990: 73-76). Adherents of the first view (Bogorodickij 1935: 219, RG 1960 §1004, Butler 1967 42, Kubik 1968: 100, Valgina 1978: 173-180, Lekant 1969a: 215, 1969b: 36 and Greenberg 1985: 227) exclude the infinitive from the grammatical subject function since the infinitive lacks a relation with

the finite verb; in their view, the infinitive does not initiate morphological subject-verb agreement, hence it cannot dominate the predicate. Apart from the infinitive, there is no element that could qualify as grammatical subject, thus the construction is considered monopartite. Other researchers claim a two-component structure for impersonal constructions, yet this does not imply that they agree on assigning the infinitive the function of grammatical subject. Some researchers (Šachmatov 1941: 145-147, RG 1970: 563-564, Zolotova 1974: 46, Belošapkova 1978: 58, Šmeleva 1978: 358-360, RG 1980: 269-273) classify the constructions as *glagol'nye nepodležaščno-skazuemostnye predloženiya* ('verbal non-grammatical subject-predicate sentences')<sup>6</sup>; they claim that the infinitive cannot be the subject of a sentence, a function they reserve for nouns and pronouns. This viewpoint was endorsed by the RG 1980 (2301-2310) and the KG 1990 (§457-458). Other scholars (Greč 1840, Protogenova 1955, Metlina 1960: 130, RG 1960 §447, §670, RG 1970: 558, Ermakova 1974: 231-234, Kokorina 1979: 40, Barsov [1981]: 198-200, Guiraud-Weber 1984: 23-31) contend that infinitives can actually be the syntactic subjects of (certain) finite verbs<sup>7</sup>: an infinitive can be a substitute for a typical noun or pronoun, yet it can never

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<sup>6</sup> For an exhaustive treatment of the classification schemes, used in the RG, see RG 1980, pp. 92-98.

<sup>7</sup> The word order school orientation of RG 1960 and 1970 accepted infinitives as grammatical subjects if they occupied the first sentence position. Ermakova (1974) intuitively extracts about thirty verbs that can have infinitives as grammatical subjects, without this affecting the meaning of the finite verb. Butler (1967) points out that it is sometimes the infinitive that carries the main semantic load, which goes together with a weakening of the meaning of the finite verb.



express exactly the same meaning because its form differs. Therefore, some researchers (Šachmatov 1941: 134, Peškovskij 1956: 203, Bricyn 1990: 79) suggest a position between grammatical subject and non-grammatical subject: they think the infinitive should be seen as a *zamestitel' podležaščego* ('substitute for the grammatical subject') or it should be assigned a *psevdopodležaščnaja funkcija* ('the function of a pseudo-grammatical subject').

Inextricably linked to the problem of the role of the infinitive is the question of the function of the accusative and dative in the constructions studied. Especially the dative has often been the object of discussion, in which the ever-present problem of terminology *podležaščee* vs. *sub''ekt* added to the disparity of views. The dative has a long history in Russian linguistics and has been labeled non-nominative subject (Preslar 1994), or oblique subject (Istrina 1946), subject of the action/state (Timofeev, 1950), logical subject (Lekant, 1969b), potential subject (Bachman 1980) or 'functionally equivalent to a nominative on a different (i.e. semantic) level of representation' (Šachmatov 1941 section 6). These stances touch directly upon the core of the problem: the concept 'semantic subject' has been overused to cover insufficiently differentiated contents (cf. Zaiceva 1990). A syntactic treatment of datives as (syntactic) subjects seems to have been ruled out by the absence of the main characteristic of grammatical subjects, i.e. initiation of subject-verb agreement<sup>8</sup>.

A Radical Construction and Cognitive Grammar approach to these mildly impersonal constructions highlights the importance of the relations between the elements that make up the construction in construing meaning and rendering differences in meaning.

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<sup>8</sup> Bachman (1980) and Komar (1999) demonstrate the subject potential of datives in a formal approach to reflexive and infinitive constructions respectively. Guiraud-Weber (1984) covers the whole range of non-nominative subjects.

Studying the relations between the elements that make up the constructions in which the dative and infinitive are used yields a more precise understanding of the function and meaning of the dative and infinitive. We argue that looking at impersonal constructions from the point of view of the finite verb and its argument structure makes it possible to present an analysis that reconciles the many different insights that have been put forward in the literature (for an overview see Guiraud-Weber (1984) or Bricyn (1990)). Our construction-based proposal starts from a bipartite sentence structure in which the infinitive can - under certain circumstances - be the subject of the construction and the dative can - under certain circumstances - take on a subject-like, agentive, function. Before proceeding to the analysis, let us briefly outline how case relates to the expression of agentivity in Russian.

3. Cases in constructions

Russian and its relatives within the Slavic language family have a system of six grammatical cases used to indicate the role of a noun phrase in a clause: nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, locative and instrumental.<sup>9</sup> All six cases can be used to express an entity that arguably plays an agentive role and can otherwise be expressed as a

<sup>9</sup> Macedonian and Bulgarian differ from the remaining Slavic languages because they do not express case on nouns and adjectives, but even they do express case in pronouns. Polish, Czech, Sorbian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, and Serbo-Croatian all have a seventh case, the vocative, but this case serves a pragmatic rather than a grammatical purpose and does not participate in the expression of agentivity.

grammatical subject, typically coded nominative, either in Russian or in another Slavic language. Of course the semantic value of each case is different, so the way in which an agentive role is expressed by each case is also different. The use of case plays an essential role in portraying the agentivity of a noun phrase and is far more nuanced than a distinction between nominative and all other cases. The semantics of case (Janda & Clancy 2002) suggests the following scale of agentivity:

Nominative > Dative > Instrumental > Accusative > Genitive > Locative

The designations in this hierarchy correspond to Langacker's (1991: 236-241) 'role archetypes' and their agentivity. Nominative is the case Russian uses to express the 'agent' role archetype. In Russian, dative can express an 'experiencer' of a mental process. Instrumental can mark agents, but only in passive constructions. Accusative marks the equivalent of Langacker's 'patient' (or 'absolute patient'), most often the direct object. Langacker excludes the genitive and locative cases from the discussion of role archetypes since they are not directly related to the syntax of verbs in many languages, though in Russian they can be triggered by verbs (cf. Janda & Clancy 2002).

The nominative is the prototypical means for expressing an agent, as in the N+V+A construction:

- (39) Девушка сшила юбку.  
 Devuška sšila jubku.  
*Girl-N sewed skirt-A.*  
 'The girl sewed a skirt.'

With the nominative, agentivity is expressed most fully and unequivocally. As argued above, the dative case is often defined as the case of the ‘potential subject’ (Bachman 1980, Smith 1993) or of the subject of an infinitive (Comrie 1974). The dative typically presumes that the entity it marks is capable of experiencing the event and/or serving as the subject of a further event (cf. Dąbrowska 1994 for Polish). Note that (40) is grammatical, but (41) is problematical:

- (40)

Девушка

сшила

сестре

юбку.

Devuška

sšila

sestre

jubku.

*Girl-N*

*sewed*

*sister-D*

*skirt-A.*

‘The girl sewed her sister a skirt.’
- (41)

\*Девушка

сшила

комнате

занавеску.

Devuška

sšila

komnate

znavesku.

*Girl-N*

*sewed*

*room-D*

*curtain-A.*

‘The girl sewed the room a curtain.’

The difference between the two examples is that the dative entity in (40) is a human being who can appreciate and use the gift (cf. Janda & Clancy 2002: 83-91). The dative entity in (41) gets a similar benefit from the gift, but cannot actively appreciate or use it, so the use of the dative is infelicitous. In impersonal constructions, the dative marks an entity that can serve as the subject in closely related constructions. The potential subjecthood of the dative case brings that case closest to the actual subjecthood of the nominative.

Next on our scale is the instrumental, which cannot express an agent or potential subject in impersonal constructions, but can express an agent in passive constructions, such as (42). Thus, the agency of the instrumental is lower than that of the dative, but still fairly strong.

(42) Юбка была сшита девушкой.

Jubka byla sšita devuškoj.

*Skirt-N was sewn girl-I.*

‘The skirt was sewn by a girl.’

The accusative ranks below the instrumental, since it cannot express either a potential or a passive agent, but it is used in Russian in constructions that involve entities that are interpreted as logical subjects in other languages, as in:

(43) Меня тошнит.

Menja tošnit.

*Me-A nauseates.*

‘I feel sick.’

The expression of agency with the genitive case is facilitated by the use of that case to mark possessors as in (44). Because Russian is a BE language, possessors appear in the genitive case in this construction, which is equivalent to the use of a verb meaning ‘have’ with a nominative possessor in a HAVE language.

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- (44) У девушки есть юбка.  
U devuški est' jubka.  
By girl-G is skirt-N.  
'The girl has a skirt.'

The locative is at the bottom of the scale, lacking uses that express agentivity, even in a sentence like (45), where the locative merely gives us the location, although there is no agentive subject:

- (45) В квартире было холодно.  
V kvartire bylo xolodno.  
In apartment-L was cold.  
'It was cold in the apartment.'

On the basis of these findings, we propose a scale of deactivization or de-agentivization that leads from the typically nominative agent, through a dative experiencer to passive agents or means (conduits), patients and other less agentive expressions. In the prototypical personal construction with a true agent there is a finite verb that is the argument structure core and an animate nominative subject that is the agent. In what follows we argue that, in some constructions with finite verbs and infinitives, the agent of the event expressed by the infinitive appears in the dative case because the finite verb is morphologically defective and does not open up a nominative slot. As a consequence, the the agent of the event expressed by the infinitive combines nominative and dative semantics and functions as an 'agentive experiencer'.

#### 4. Ways to attenuate agentivity

In this section we look into two non-prototypical types of agents. On the one hand, there are constructions in which the prototypical agent slot, i.e. the nominative case-slot, is occupied by entities that are not prototypically thought of as agents, e.g. infinitives. On the other hand, there are constructions that lack a nominative slot, yet contain elements that qualify as agents; these agents cannot occupy the absent prototypical agent slot, however, and we argue that they are consequently assigned to the dative slot.

##### 4.1 Non-nominal entities occupying the nominative slot

In assigning subject status to an entity we follow Brown (1987: 166). Subjects are:

‘those noun phrases with which the verb agrees in person and number (in gender too, for some verb forms). Then we observe that an infinitive construction or a subordinate clause can play the same role as a noun phrase and is mutually exclusive with it; therefore we extend the term ‘subject’ to these infinitive constructions or clauses and mention in our description the special verb-agreement which they are associated with (3SG neuter)’.

Take, for example, the verbs *privlekat* ‘attract’ and *nadoest* ‘bore’. In Russian, *nadoest* ‘bore’ can take as subject a noun (46a), sometimes also a *that*-clause (46b) and even an

infinitive (46c). The noun, *that*-clause and infinitive are mutually exclusive as subjects, i.e. they cannot simultaneously occupy the same nominative slot.

(46)a. Вы мотивировали свой уход тем, что **госслужба надоела**. [Светлана Офитова.

ГЛАВНАЯ ЗАДАЧА — ОСЛАБЛЕНИЕ ГОСУДАРСТВА // «Независимая газета», 2003.04.09]

Vy motivovali svoj uxor tem, čto **gosslužba nadoela**. [Svetlana Ofitova.

GLAVNAJA ZADAČA – OSLABLENIE GOSUDARTSVA // ‘Nezavisimaja gazeta’, 2003. 04.09]

*You motivated your leaving that, that civil service-N had become boring- IND PAST 3FSG.] ‘You motivated your leaving by (saying) that civil service had become boring.’*

(46)b. Генералу надоело, что газеты пишут про него всякие домыслы. [Петр

Акопов. Аушев дал клятву не быть президентом // «Известия», 2002.01.24]

Generalu **nadoelo**, čto **gazety pišut** pro nego vsjakie domysly. [Petr Akopov.

Aušev dal kljatvu ne byt’ prezidentom// ‘Izvestija’, 2002.01.24]

*General-D unnerve- IND PAST 3NSG that the papers wrote about him all kinds of conjectures.*

‘It annoyed the general that the papers were writing all kinds of conjectures about him.’

(46)c. **Надоело тратить** время и силы, чтобы доказывать очевидные, как

представляется, вещи. [Второй съезд // «Спецназ России», 2003.05.15]



Nadoelo tratit' vremja i sily, čtoby dokazyvat' očevidnye, kak predstavljajetsja, veščī. [Vtoroj s''jezd // 'Specnaz Rossii', 2003.05.15]

*Unnerves-IND PRES 3SG waste-INF time and energy to prove evident.*

'Wasting time and energy to prove obvious things has gotten annoying.'

We find a similar pattern with *privlekat'* ('attract') that takes a pronoun in (47a) and an infinitive in (47b). Here too, the noun, *that*-clause and infinitive or the noun and infinitive are mutually exclusive as subjects.

(47)a. Журналисты могут и должны писать **обо всем, что их** интересуєт, **привлекаєт**, заботит. [Владимир Шахиджанян. 1001 вопрос про ЭТО (1999)]

Žurnalisty moguť i dolžny pisat' obo vsem, čto ix interesuet, privlekaet, zabotit.

[Vladimir Šaxidžanjan. 1001 vopros pro ÈTO (1999)]

*Journalists may and must write about everything that-N them-A interests, attracts or worries- IND PRES 3SG them-A.*

'Journalists may and must write about everything that interests, attracts or worries them.'

(47)b. Их привлекаєт работать под началом талантливоег маэстро Эдуарда

Амбарцумяна, ученика В.Гергиева. [www.aki-

ros.ru/default.asp?Edit=1&P=585&AOR=1&Part=4&Region=1&NID=10439&View=1]

Ix privlekaet rabotat' pod načalom talantlivogo maèstro Èduarda Ambarcumjana, učenika V. Gergieva.

*Them-A attracts IND PRES 3SG work-INF under mentorship-I talented maestro Eduard Ambarcumjan-G.*

‘Working under the mentorship of the talented maestro Eduard Ambarcumjan is attractive to them.’

The roles of an infinitive versus noun phrase can be compared by looking at what kinds of questions may be asked using pro-forms such as *čto* ‘what’<sup>10</sup>. Consider the following sentences:

- (48) Он планирует поехать в Москву.
- On planiruet poexat' v Moskvu.
- He plans- IND PRES 3SG travel-INF to Moscow-A

<sup>10</sup> Working with proforms instead of with fully lexicalized elements ensures that the mutual effect of lexical items in a construction is minimized as much as possible (cf. Smessaert et al. 2005): nouns can be replaced by the pronoun *čto/ěto* (‘what/that’), whereas verbs are replaced by the pro-verb *čto/ěto (s)delat’* (‘do what/that’). As a result, the acceptability or unacceptability of a particular construction is very unlikely to be influenced by a particular compatibility or incompatibility of words that are not focused on. In order to check whether the impersonal verbs included in this survey (see Appendix) combine with both an infinitive and a pronoun and to determine how infinitive and pronoun relate to each other, grammaticality judgments were collected from fifteen native speakers of Russian. For a more detailed discussion of the data collection and native speaker survey we refer to Divjak (2004: 19-33).

‘He is planning to travel to Moscow.’

- (49) Он планирует поездку в Москву.  
 On planiruet poezdku v Moskvu.  
*He plans- IND PRES 3SG trip-A to Moscow-A*

‘He is planning a trip to Moscow.’

Support for considering both the infinitive in (48) and the noun in (49) as direct objects of *planirovat* (‘plan’) can be found at a more abstract level. Example (50) reveals that, in Russian, both a thing and an atemporal relation (in the sense of Langacker 1987: 249) are possible answers to the question ‘What is he planning?’.

- (50) Что он планирует?  
 Čto on planiruet?  
*What-A he-N plans-IND PRES 3SG ?*  
 Поездку в Москву.  
 Poezdku v Moskvu.  
*Trip-A to Moscow-A.*  
 ‘A trip to Moscow.’  
 Поехать в Москву.  
 Poexat’ v Moskvu.  
*Travel-INF to Moscow-A.*  
 ‘To travel to Moscow.’

Applying this procedure to the infinitives *tratit* ‘waste’ in (46c) and *rabotat* ‘work’ in (47b) reveals that they fit in the nominative slot occupied by *čto* (‘what’), which initiates neuter singular agreement. At the level of event structure this relation between the infinitive event and the placeholder for things in general, *čto* ‘what’) can be interpreted in terms of reification: the infinitive event is reduced to, treated like any other ‘thing’ that can be the subject of the finite verb event. An interpretation in terms of reification also respects the meaning of the neuter singular form and does not treat it as a default value.

In other words, a finite verb may function as a normal main verb and open up a subject slot into which the infinitive fits. This subject, being inanimate and non-nominal, is not a prototypical subject, yet it still initiates the finite verb event. The accusative slot in (47b) is occupied by noun phrase referring to a human being, the direct object that is affected by the finite verb event. Interestingly, all constructions that contain accusative slots follow this main-verb pattern. The situation is different with dative-taking finite verbs. The dative slot in (46c) is occupied by a person that fulfils its typical role of experiencer, but we see in the next section that this need not be the case; when a nominative slot is absent, the dative may be highlighted or profiled in cognitive grammar terms (cf. Fortuin 2003: 64). So far, however, there are no syntactic and semantic aberrations, i.e. all argument structure slots that are typically opened up by the finite verb are present. Yet, the construction as a whole is not typical because the available argument structure slot is not filled in the prototypical way, i.e. with a human agent.

4.2. Absence of a nominative slot

In example (51) with *ponadobit'sja* 'be necessary', the components of the construction are linked together in a different way.

- (51) Если Вы хотите ощутить себя полноправным партнером врача, Вам необходимо предпринять определенные шаги для установления отношений, основанных на взаимном уважении. Хорошо бы задуматься об этом до того, как **Вам** действительно **понадобится показаться врачу**.
- [www.edem.ru/paper\_new/ paper.asp?ClassID=0&PaperID=157]
- Esli Vy xotite oščutit' sebja polnopravnym partnerom vrača, Vam neobxodimo predprinjat' opredelennye šagi dlja ustanovlenija otnošenij, osnovannyx na vzaimnom uvaženii. Xorošo by zadumat'sja ob ètom do togo, kak Vam dejstvitel'no ponadobitsja pokazat'sja vraču.
- Good would think about this before that, how you-D really need- IND PRES 3SG show yourself-INF doctor-D.*
- 'It would be good to think about this before you really need to go to the doctor.'

In example (51), the infinitive is not an argument of the finite verb: *be necessary* does not tolerate the infinitive event *go and see a doctor* in its subject slot, as *go and see a doctor* is not an acceptable answer to the question *what do you need?* Only the question *what do you need to do?* elicits the answer *go and see a doctor*. In other words, the subject position is reserved for nouns or pronouns, as the possibility of having *medicine* as nominative subject in (52) shows:

- (52) Сегодня искали по всему городу и с трудом нашли редкое **лекарство** для Нины, но потом сказали, что оно не **понадобится**. [Василий Катанян. Лоскутное одеяло (1943–1999)]
- Segodnja iskali po vsemu gorodu i s trdom našli redkoe lekarstvo dlja Niny, no potom skazali, čto ono ne ponadobitsja. [Vasilij Katanjan. Loskutnoe odejalo (1943-1999)]
- Todaysearched throughout whole town and with difficulty found rare medicine for Nina, but then said that it-N not needed- IND FUT 3SG.*
- ‘Today they searched throughout the whole town and with difficulty found that rare medicine for Nina, but then they said that it wouldn’t be needed.’

These constructional differences between (51) with an infinitive and (52) with a noun point in the direction of polysemy: they instantiate two different senses of one polysemous verb and many dictionaries provide two entries for the verb *ponadobit’sja*, i.e. ‘be necessary’ or ‘need’ versus ‘need to’ or ‘have to’. The latter sense is morphologically defective in that it only exists in 3SG.

A similar situation is found with verbs like *nadležit* ‘be required’ that do not open up a nominative argument slot at all and are morphologically truly defective finite verbs.

- (53) **Вам надлежит встретить** эту нужду, накормить этих голодных людей! [Антоний (Блум), митрополит Сурожский. Чудо пяти хлебов и двух рыбок (1980)]
- Vam nadležit vstretit’ ètu nuždu, nakormit’ ètix golodnyx ljudej! [Antonij (Blum), mitropolit Surožskij. Čudo pjati xlebov i dvux rybok. (1980)]

*You-D required- IND PRES 3SG meet-INF that need, to feed these hungry people!*

‘You have to meet that need, feed these hungry people!’

Just like in (51), the infinitive *vstretit’* ‘meet’ in (53) does not fit in the nominative slot occupied by *čto* ‘what’ (neuter singular) or in a prepositional slot. At the level of event structure this fact can be interpreted in terms of absence of reification: the infinitive event cannot be reduced to, treated like any other ‘thing’ that can be the subject of a finite verb event. Instead, the finite verb needs the infinitive in order to specify what action is required.

The question then arises: how does the infinitive relate to the other elements in the construction? A finite verb with a defective paradigm does not function as a normal argument structure core: the finite verb cannot pull the infinitive into its argument structure. The infinitive is thus stronger than usual in that it resists conceptual subordination and the finite verb is weaker because it needs the infinitive to carry the semantic load of the construction. It is very rare for a verb to need another verb. There are thirty-seven impersonal verbs in Russian that display this behavior. Although thirty-seven may seem to be a reasonable number, in the overall perspective this type of verbs still forms a minority: of all Russian verbs (and there are at least 20,000 (Daum & Schenk 1992)) only 2% combine with an infinitive and about one third of those or maximum 0.625% display this divergent, auxiliary-like behaviour (Divjak 2004). Taking a quantitative approach to the center-periphery debate, we can state that these thirty-seven impersonal verbs are at the periphery of the verbal system. The finite verbs in (51) and (53) are weaker than average: the finite verb event modifies the infinitive event and together finite verb and infinitive form a complex event.

How does this proposal fit in with the traditional grammar, where a distinction is made between main verbs and auxiliary verbs? The defective finite verbs treated here show distributional similarity to modal verbs, in the literature often defined as non-full verbs that merely modify the infinite verb or the proposition as a whole. And this distributional behaviour is backed up by semantic coherence: within the group of all finite verbs that fit into this complex pattern, two major subgroups can be distinguished, i.e. a group of non-implicative verbs that expresses modal-like concepts and a group of implicative verbs that stresses the result obtained. An overview of all these verbs is provided in the Appendix.

#### 1. Modality verbs

- Volition: e.g. xočetsja ‘feel like’, ne terpitsja ‘not tolerate’, xvatit ‘be at one’s limit’ etc.
- Suitability: e.g. (ne) goditsja ‘(not) be convenient’, nadležit ‘be necessary’, polagaetsja ‘be required’, etc.
- Necessity: e.g. trebuetsja ‘be necessary’, predstoit ‘have to’, ostalos’ ‘have to’, etc.

#### 2. Result verbs

- Success only e.g. udalos’ ‘managed to’
- Success + associated (mis)fortune, e.g. (+) povezlo ‘was lucky to’, posčastlivilos’ ‘was lucky to’, (-) podfartilo ‘was lucky to’, etc.
- Success + reason for acting (circumstances, chance, higher forces), e.g. dovelos’ ‘managed to’, slučilos’ ‘happened to’, dostalos’ ‘managed to’, etc.



Certain semantically similar groups of Middle English quasi-impersonal verbs have been analyzed in a similar way. Impersonal constructions were prominent in older stages of languages like English. It has been argued (for an overview see Allen 1997: 3) that '[t]he disappearance of the impersonal constructions with a preposed non-nominative Experiencer ... was largely due to the decline of the case-marking system of English, which often made the preposed Experiencer ambiguous as to case marking and liable to reanalysis as the subject'. Allen (1997) provides evidence, however, that some verbs, such as *bihoven*, began to be used impersonally in Early Middle English, i.e. by the time cases had disappeared. According to Allen, 'this increase in the use of a non-nominative Experiencer was semantically motivated. It seems plausible that the reason why the verbs of emotions so frequently had non-nominative Experiencers was that this was a useful way of showing that the Experiencer was not in control of the situation, i.e. not agentive. The increase in non-nominative Experiencers in Early Middle English can be explained if we assume that at this time there was a tendency to extend non-nominative case to subjects which were not agents. Thus we get non-nominative subjects with modal verbs ... which talk about necessity over which the human argument had no control.'

If the finite verb and infinitive form a complex event, what does this imply for selection restrictions on elements from argument structure? A weak version of the complex event hypothesis would predict that both verbs impose selection restrictions on the agentive experiencer; a strong version would imply that the infinitive alone imposes restrictions on the agentive experiencer. The events expressed by the infinitive following *nadležit* and *ponadobitsja* do select a nominative subject, as is illustrated in examples (54)b. and (55)b.

- (54)a. Хорошо бы задуматься об этом до того, как **вам** действительно **понадобится**  
**показаться врачу.**

Xorošo by zadumat'sja ob ètom do togo, kak vam dejstvitel'no ponadobitsja  
pokazat'sja vraču.

*Good would think about this before that, how you-D really need- IND PRES 3SG show  
yourself-INF doctor-D.*

'It would be good to think about this before you really need to go and see a doctor.'

- (54)b. Вы показались врачу.

Vy pokazalis' vraču.

*You-N showed self-IND PAST 2PL doctor-D.*

'You went to see a doctor.'

- (55)a. Вам **надлежит встретить** эту **нужду**, накормить этих голодных людей!

Vam nadležit vstretit' ètu nuždu, nakormit' ètix golodnyx ljudej!

[[http://dl.biblion.realin.ru/text/9\\_Biblioteka\\_Blagoveschenie/Knigi/antons9/H138-T.htm](http://dl.biblion.realin.ru/text/9_Biblioteka_Blagoveschenie/Knigi/antons9/H138-T.htm)]

*You-D required- IND PRES 3SG meet-INF that need, to feed these hungry people!*

'You are required to meet that need, to feed these hungry people!'

- (55)b. Вы встретили эту нужду и накормили этих голодных людей.

Vy vstretili ètu nuždu, nakormili ètix golodnyx ljudej.

*You-N met-IND PAST 2PL that need and fed-IND PAST 2PL those hungry people.*

'You met that need and fed those hungry people.'

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6 It thus seems to be the case that the morphologically defective finite verb that is modifying  
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8 the infinitive blocks the agentive nominative subject that belongs to the infinitive event;  
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10 that entity then re-appears as a dative. We argue that the dative in constructions like these  
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12 function as the potential subject of the infinitive event. However, it has to be borne in mind  
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14 that the nominative case typically encodes the initiator of the finite verb event whereas the  
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16 dative case prototypically conveys the meaning of ‘experiencer’ of that event. Thus, if we  
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18 dress the initiator of the event up as an experiencer we get something like an ‘agentive  
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20 experiencer’ (cf. Pocheptsov 1997: 476 for this type of construction in Middle English and  
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22 Fortuin 2003: 64 for dative-infinitive constructions in Russian). This view on the finite verb  
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24 as modifier and the dative as agentive experiencer also bridges the gap between this type of  
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26 impersonal constructions and impersonal constructions with dative and infinitive but  
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28 without a finite verb, at least in the present tense, recall example (24). The dative in such  
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30 constructions has typically been analyzed as a syntactic subject precisely because the  
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32 infinitive action needs a subject to initiate it.  
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## 43 5. Conclusion

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48 An investigation of the relations between the elements in two constructions that appear  
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50 identical in structure, containing a noun phrase marked in the dative case and a finite verb  
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52 followed by an infinitive thus illustrates the radical construction grammar tenet that ‘while  
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54 difference of form entails difference in categorization, identity of form does *not* entail  
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56 identity of categorization’ (Croft 2001: 76). In other words: not all ‘impersonal’ verbs are  
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equal: there are finite verbs that function as the argument structure core and finite verbs that merely modify the infinitive. Likewise, not all infinitives are equal: some fulfil the syntactic subject or [prepositional] object requirements, others act as (part of the) argument structure core. And finally, not all datives are equal: some are classified as potential subject, others as indirect object.

Acknowledging the fact that different constructional patterns reveal different semantic structures, we submit that both the one-component approach and the two-component approach to impersonal constructions are justified. If the finite verb's argument structure does open up a nominative slot, the infinitive can be used to fill up that slot and the dative functions as a typical experiencer. However, if the finite verb's argument structure does not provide a nominative slot, the infinitive cannot possibly occupy that slot and, if the infinitive does not fulfil the subject or (prepositional) object function either, the infinitive must function as the argument structure core, together with the finite verb, which is reduced to a modifier (cf. Pocheptsov 1997: 476). It is under these circumstances that the dative fulfils a function similar to that of agent, i.e. an agentive experiencer, an agent who carries out the infinitive action and experiences the finite verb action. In other words, our approach reconciles the different views presented in the literature and states precisely to which category of finite verbs each of these views applies.

This analysis has made it possible to tease apart the differences between two impersonal constructions that appear identical in structure and to determine their position as peripheral members of the network of related constructions Russian has at its disposal. A nuanced analysis can be achieved when factors such as case semantics and relationships among constructions are taken into account in assessing how agency is assigned or avoided in Russian impersonal constructions.

## APPENDIX

**I. The infinitive fits in the nominative slot opened up by the following verbs:**

Obligatory accusative:

Влечёт Vlečet (it attracts), забавляет zabavljaet (it amuses), интересуется interesuet (it interests), манит manit (it attracts), (не) привлекает (ne) privlekaet (it (does not) attract(s)), пугает pugaet (it frightens, scares), смущает smuščait (it confuses, disturbs), соблазняет soblaznjaet (it tempts, seduces), тянет tjanet (it draws, attracts), увлекает uvlekaet (it distracts, fascinates), (не) устраивает (ne) ustraivaet (it (does not) suit(s), is (not) convenient)

Optional dative:

Не (по)мешает ne (po)mešait (it does not disturb, hinder; it would not be a bad thing to), надоело nadoelo (be tired of, bored with), наскучило naskučilo (bore), опротивело oprotivelo (it became repulsive), опостылело opostylelo (grow hateful, wearisome), осточертелo ostočertelo (be tired of, bored with)

Obligatory dative:

Грозит Grozit (be threatened with), идёт idet (it suits, fits), льстит l'stit (flatter), (не) нравится (ne) nravitsja (it pleases/does not please), подходит/подойдёт podxodit/podojdet (it suits, fits), полюбится poljubitsja (become attractive), претит pretit (it sickens s.o.), пригодится prigoditsja (prove useful), причитается (be due from), (не) светит ((not) to please), (не) улыбается/улыбнется (ne) ulybaetsja/ulybnetsja (it pleases)

Also in this category are passives such as

Запрещается Zapreščaitsja (it is forbidden/prohibited), предполагается predpolagaetsja (it is intended/proposed), предписывается predpisyvaetsja (it is ordered/prescribed), разрешается razrešaetsja (it is allowed) etc.

**II. The infinitive fits in the Prepositional slot opened up by the following verbs:**

Obligatory accusative:

Дёргает/дёрнуло (на то, чтобы) Dergaet/dernulo (на то, чтобы) (be possessed/urged to), зудит (на то, чтобы/к тому, чтобы) zudit (на то, чтобы/к тому, чтобы) (it itches s.o. to, I'm itching to),

подмывает (на то, чтобы/к тому, чтобы) podmyvaet (na to, čtoby/k tomu, čtoby) (it drives, urges  
s.o. to), толкает (на то, чтобы) tolkaet (na to, čtoby) (it instigates, incites, puts up s.o. to),  
угораздит/угораздило (на то, чтобы) ugorazdit/ugorazdilo (na to, čtoby) (it possesses s.o. to)

**III. The infinitive does not fit in any argument structure slot opened up by the following verbs:**

1. The finite verb is used in a morphologically defective sense

Optional dative:

(He) годится (ne) goditsja (it does not do, one should not), остаётся/останется ostaetsja/ostanetsja  
(it remains, is left over), (не) повелось (ne) povelos' (it is (not) the custom/done), (не) подобает  
(ne) podobaet (it (does not) become(s), befit(s), is (not) appropriate), (не) полагается (ne)  
polagaetsja ((not) be supposed), приходится/придётся/пришлось (prixoditsja/pridetsja/prišlos'  
(happen to s.o., fall to the lot of), хватит хватit (be sufficient, enough)

Obligatory dative:

Вздумалось Vzдумalos' (take it into one's head), досталось dostalos' (it came into, fall to one's  
lot), желается (разг) želaetsja (coll) (desire), надумалось nadumalos' (think up), понадобится  
ponadobitsja (it is necessary), предстоит predstoit (have, to be in for), приключается priklučaetsja  
(it happened, occurred to s.o.), случается/случится/случилось slučaetsja/slučitsja/slučilos' (happen  
to s.o.), (не) требуется (ne) trebuetsja (is (not) needed, required), (не) (за-), (пере-) (раз-)  
хочется/хотелось (ne) (za-), (pere-) (raz-) хоčetsja/xotelos' ((not) want), удаётся/удастся/удалось  
udaetsja/udastsja/udalos' (succeed)

2. The finite verb only exists as a morphologically defective verb

Optional dative:

Надлежит Nadležit (it is necessary, required), (не) пристало (ne) pristalo (it does (not) suit, befit  
s.o.), следует sleduet (ought, should), стоит stoit (it is worthwhile)

Obligatory dative:

Вспадёт/вспало vspadet/vspalo (it occurs to s.o.), выпадет/выпало vupadet/vupalo (it occurs to s.o.,  
turns out, befall), (не) выходит/выйдёт/вышло (ne) vuxodit/vyjdet/vyšlo (it (does not) turn(s) out),

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3 доводится/доведётся/довелось dovoditsja/dovedetsja/dovelos' (it happens, to have the occasion,  
4 manage), долженствует (устар) dolženstvuet (arch) (be obliged to), загорелось zagorelos' (have a  
5 violent urge to), (не) по(д)везло/по(д)везёт (ne) po(d)vezlo/po(d)vezet ((not) be lucky, have the  
6 luck), подфартило podfartilo (have the luck to) посчастливилось posčastlivilos' (have the luck to),  
7 привелось privelos' (it happened), припеет/припело prispeet/prispelo (it came, drew nigh,  
8 became ripe), припичит prispičit (be impatient to, to feel an urge to), не терпится ne terpitsja (be  
9 impatient to)  
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