



UiT The Arctic University of Norway

# What goes around, comes around: Cases that keep me going

*Laura A. Janda*

# CLEAR

Cognitive Linguistics: Empirical Approaches to Russian



Threat-Defuser  
(Norwegian Research Council)

# Overview

- Case Semantics

Linguistic theory and description

- Two Tools

- The Russian Constructicon

<https://constructicon.github.io/russian/>

Pedagogical applications

- The Strategic Mastery of Russian Tool (SMARTool)

<https://smartool.github.io/smartool-rus-eng/>

- Putin Makes His (Grammatical) Case

Analysis of political discourse



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# Case Semantics



Textbooks cite seemingly random long lists of prepositions and verbs to memorize for each case – but that can't be the whole story!



# Philosophical questions

- Are grammar and lexicon really distinct?
- Does grammar have meaning?
- If grammar has meaning, how does it work?

Answers from the perspective of  
**Cognitive Linguistics**

# Are grammar and lexicon really distinct?

- Grammar and lexicon form a continuum
- Many functions are expressed grammatically in some languages, but lexically in others
  - case affixes vs. adpositions
  - aspect/tense/mood affixes vs. adverbs
  - in/definiteness affixes vs. articles
  - comparative/superlative affixes vs. adverbs

No clear boundary separating functions expressed  
**synthetically vs. analytically**

# Does grammar have meaning?

- PURPOSE of all language phenomena is to convey meaning
- THEREFORE: all morphemes, including grammatical ones, convey meaning
- BUT: grammatical meaning does tend to be more abstract, schematic, polysemous

# If grammar has meaning, how does it work?

- Homonymy vs. structured polysemy
  - meanings are not random lists of disconnected items
  - meanings are related to each other
- Aristotelian categories vs. radial categories
  - meaning is not “+” vs. “-”
  - meaning is not about sets and boundaries
  - meaning is about prototypes and extensions from/relations to prototypes

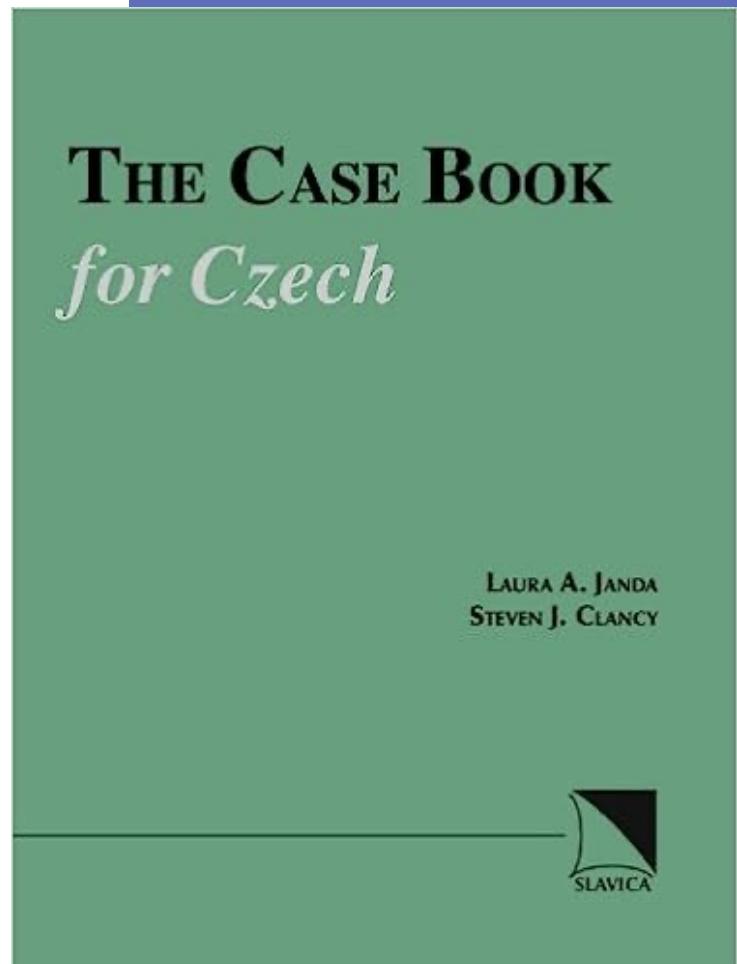
Eleanor Rosch on  
Human Natural Categories



# Case Meanings in Russian (and Czech)

- Janda, Laura A. 1993. *A Geography of Case Semantics: The Czech Dative and the Russian Instrumental* (=Cognitive Linguistics Research, v. 4). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
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- Janda, Laura A. & Steven J. Clancy. 2002. *The Case Book for Russian*. Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers.
- Janda, Laura A. & Steven J. Clancy. 2006. *The Case Book for Czech*. Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers.

THE CASE BOOK  
*for Russian*



JANDA  
CLANCY

AVICA

# Overview of the case meanings (Russian)

For each case:

- Schematic meaning
  - Abstract overall idea
- Network of 1 to 4 meaning nodes
  - Structured polysemy: meanings are related to each other
  - Metaphorical and metonymic extensions, usually from space to other domains: time, purpose, etc.

# Nominative: Identification

NOMINATIVE: A NAME

- Used to point out an item or call someone
- The grammatical subject, the active agent in a situation.

NOMINATIVE: AN IDENTITY

- With verbs meaning ‘be’ as in ‘X is Y’ (*Ivan xorošij student* ‘Ivan is a good student’), where “X” (Ivan) is NOMINATIVE: A NAME as the grammatical subject, while “Y” (good student) is NOMINATIVE: AN IDENTITY.

# Genitive: Backgrounded with respect to something in proximity

## GENITIVE: A SOURCE

- Point of departure specified by prepositions meaning ‘from’ (*iz, s, ot...*), verbs expressing withdrawal (*izbegat* ‘avoid’, *bojat’sja* ‘be afraid of’...); extended metaphorically to time, cause, human relationships.

## GENITIVE: A GOAL

- Point of attainment specified by prepositions (*do* ‘up to, until’, *dlja* and *radi* ‘for’, *protiv* ‘against’...), verbs and adjectives expressing (mostly metaphorical) approach (*ždat* ‘wait for’, *želat* ‘wish’...); extended metaphorically to time, purpose, states of being.

## GENITIVE: A WHOLE

- Part of a larger unit; ‘of’; participant in a nominalized event (*poterja žizni* ‘loss of life’); complex prepositional phrases; quantification (*sto studentov* ‘one hundred students’); partitive expressions (*vypit’ čaju* ‘drink **some** tea’).

## GENITIVE: A REFERENCE

- Proximal landmark (*u* ‘by, at’ and other prepositions); temporal setting; lack, as in the Genitive of negation, and verbs, nouns, and adjectives expressing lack, as well as the preposition *bez* ‘without’; standard of comparison (*Ivan starše menja* ‘Ivan is older **than** I am’).

# Dative: Capacity to interact with surroundings

## DATIVE: A RECEIVER

- indirect object (*Ivan podaril mame knigu* ‘Ivan gave **his mother** a book’), includes many verbs without an overt direct object, such as verbs of communication and payment.

## DATIVE: AN EXPERIENCER

- With words denoting harm, benefit, belonging to, and needing; age; experience of environment, emotions, limitations on capacity (modals).

## DATIVE: A COMPETITOR

- With words expressing matched competition or submission to a greater force; *k* ‘toward’ and *po* ‘along’ which identify a person or entity that exerts influence.

# Accusative: Path toward a destination

## ACCUSATIVE: A DESTINATION

- Direct object; path specified by prepositions (*v* ‘into’, *na* ‘onto’, *za* ‘beyond’, *pod* ‘under’...); metaphorical extensions to domains such as time, purpose, change of state, mathematics, human relationships (joining of groups).

## ACCUSATIVE: A DIMENSION

- Distance or size (*rasstojanie v dva kilometra* ‘a distance of **two** kilometers’), duration (*interval v dve nedeli* ‘an interval of **two** weeks’); prepositions specify path contours (*skvoz'* ‘through’, *čerez* ‘across’).

## ACCUSATIVE: AN ENDPOINT

- Final point of a path (*v* and *za*, both indicating the end of a distance or duration) and postpositions (*nazad* ‘ago’).

# Instrumental: Peripheral conduit or attachment

## INSTRUMENTAL: A MEANS

- Conduit for an action (*idti lesom* ‘go **through/by means of the forest**’); instrument that makes an action possible (*rezat’ xleb nožom* ‘slice bread **with a knife**’); with verbs signifying control and evaluation (*vladet’ anglijskim jazykom* ‘have mastery **of the English language**’); passive agent (*Mašina kuplena Ivanom* ‘The car was bought **by Ivan**’); facilitator in a sentence lacking a grammatical subject (*Ivana zabilo molniej* ‘Ivan was killed **by lightning**’).

## INSTRUMENTAL: A LABEL

- With verbs denoting being, becoming, and seeming to identify a category that something belongs to (*koška javljaetsja mlekopitajuščim* ‘a cat is a **mammal**’).

## INSTRUMENTAL: AN ADJUNCT

- Preposition *s* ‘with’ (*Marija přišla s Ivanom* ‘Marija came **with Ivan**’).

## INSTRUMENTAL: A LANDMARK

- Prepositions *nad* ‘above’, *pod* ‘under’, *pered* ‘in front of’, *za* ‘behind’, *meždu* ‘between’.

# Locative: Location

## LOCATIVE: A PLACE

- Locations in space or other domains specified by prepositions *v* ‘in’, *na* ‘on’, *pri* ‘at’, *o* ‘about’, *po* ‘after’ (*v Moskve* ‘in Moscow’, *v mae* ‘in May’).



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# Two Tools



**RUSSIAN**  
CONSTRUCTICON

<https://constructicon.github.io/russian/>



# RUSSIAN CONSTRUCTICON

## Team



Anna  
Endresen



Daria  
Mordashova



Ekaterina  
Rakhilina



Valentina  
Zhukova

Plus: over 40 students

Financing and  
collaboration



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**CLEAR**

Cognitive Linguistics: Empirical Approaches to Russian



Direktoratet for  
høyere utdanning  
og kompetanse



HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS  
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МИНИСТЕРСТВО НАУКИ  
И ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ  
РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ



한국연구재단  
National Research Foundation of Korea

# What is a construction?

- A construction is:
  - any **conventionalized form-meaning pairing** in a language, at any level of complexity, from morpheme through lexeme through phrase to discourse structure (Goldberg 2006, 5)
  - **the basic** (though not elementary) **unit** that structures language

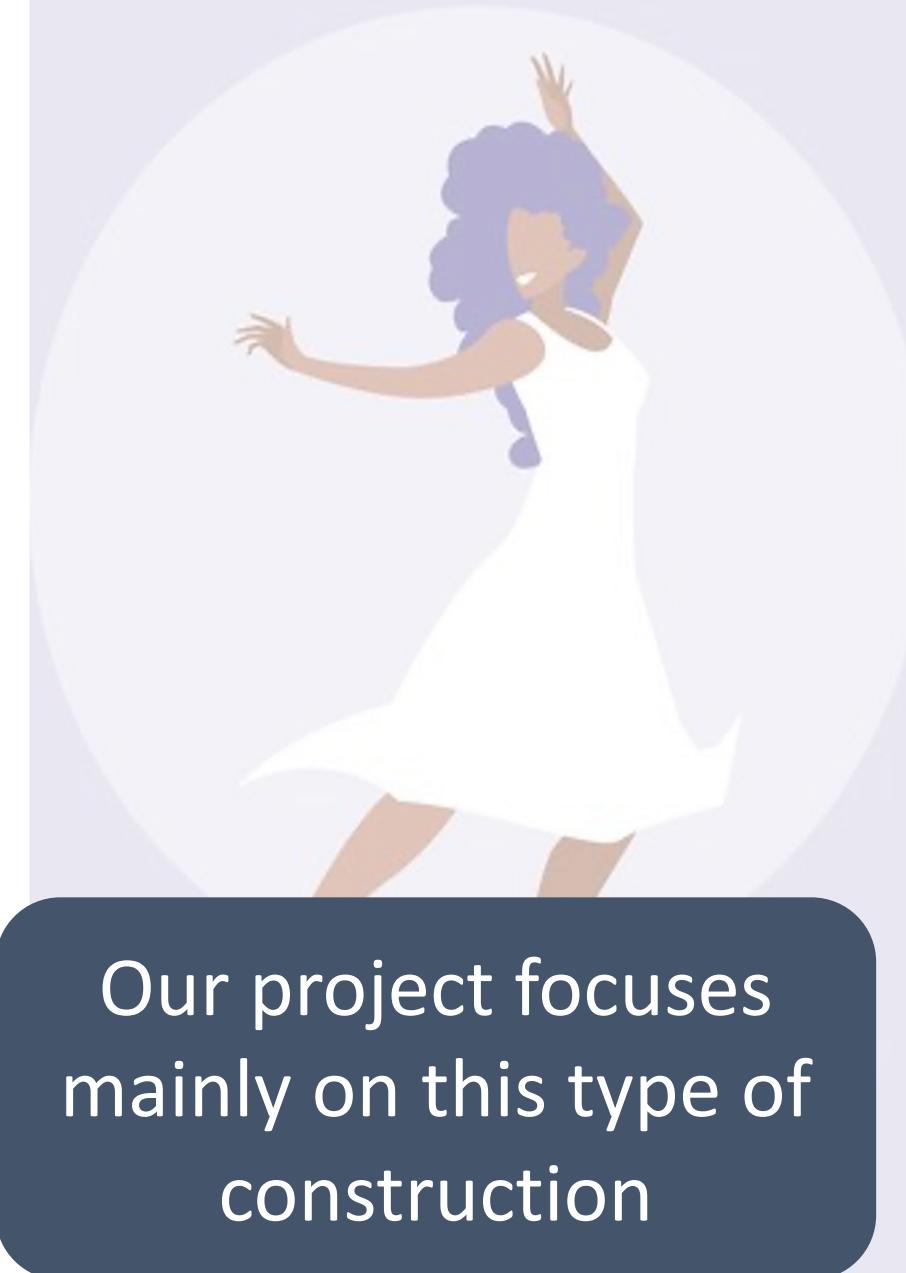
A construction may be **compositional or non-compositional**

All meaningful units of a language are constructions

An entire language can be described in terms of constructions

# Examples of Russian constructions

- morphemes  
-*t'* = INF
- lexemes  
*tancevat'* 'dance'
- multi-word idioms where all slots are fixed  
*tancevat' ot Adama* 'start from the very beginning'
- **multi-word expressions with open slots**  
VP pod NP-Acc  
*Ona tancevala pod muzyku* 'She danced to the music'
- larger discourse units

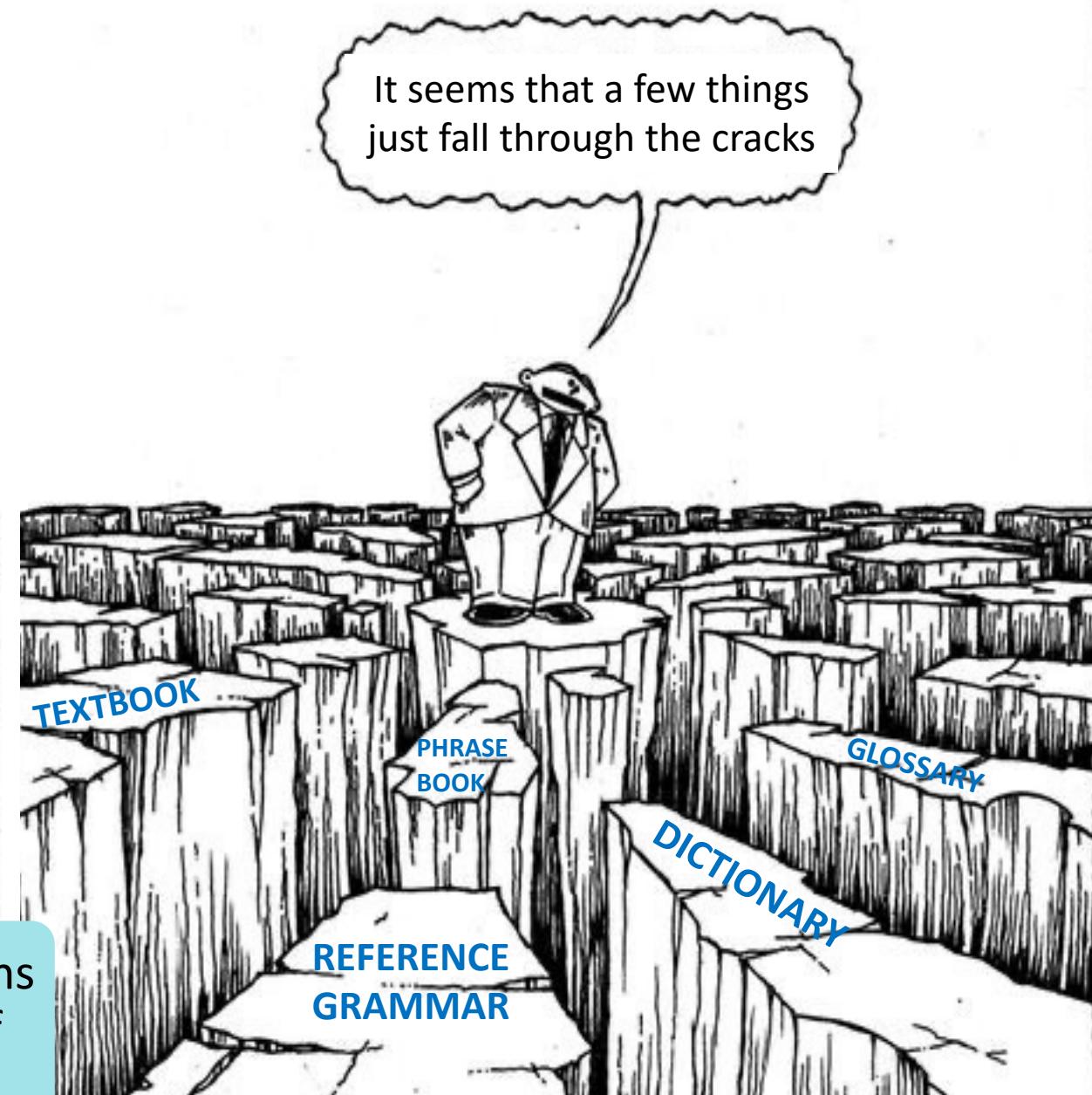


Our project focuses mainly on this type of construction

# Filling in the gaps

- Dictionaries, grammars, and textbooks focus primarily on lexemes, lexicalized idioms, inflectional paradigms, and grammatical patterns
- **Multi-word expressions with open slots** are less reliably represented in standard resources

We need a relatively large inventory of constructions of a single language, and a detailed description of this inventory, a constructicon.



# What is a constructicon?

- A constructicon is:
  - a structured inventory of constructions in a given language
- Constructicons exist for:
  - English
  - German
  - Swedish
  - Japanese
  - Brazilian Portuguese

The Russian Constructicon  
is by far the largest,  
with over 2200  
constuctions

[Browse](#) [Daily dose](#) [Advanced search](#) [Instructions \(English\)](#) [Instructions \(Russian\)](#) [Statistics](#) [About](#)

Search in names and illustrations

Results

- 3 - (а) как же NP-Nom? - А как же мама?
- 4 - (а) при чём здесь/тут Сор NP-Nom? - При чём здесь наши отноше...
- 5 - (а) Noun-Nom/кто (же) (PronPers-3.Acc) знает, Cl - Кто его знает, г...
- 6 - (а/так) что насчёт XP? - Что насчёт пятницы? Какие у тебя планы...
- 7 - NP-Nom Сор похожий-Short на NP-Acc (NP-Ins/по NP-Dat) - Вася п...
- 8 - (вот) тó-то и онó, что Cl/XP - То-то и оно, что от меня ничего не за...
- 9 - (всё) никак не VP-Ipfv - Задача всё никак не решалась.
- 10 - (единственное) (Prep) что (не) VP, так это (не) XP/Cl - Чего дочь...
- 11 - (как) по мне, (так) Cl - Как по мне, это ещё не беда.
- 12 - (не/самое) время Сор VP-Inf - Самое время вршить большие д...
- 13 - NP-Nom Сор NP-Acc (NP-Ins/по NP-Dat) - Вася п...

**RUSSIAN  
CONSTRUCTICON**[Browse](#) [Daily dose](#) [Advanced search](#) [Instructions \(English\)](#) [Instructions \(Russian\)](#) [About](#)

Search in names and illustrations

**Browse a list of over 2200 constructions****Select any construction, click on it and  
the description will appear at the  
bottom of the same page****Results**

- 3 - (а) как же NP-Nom? - А как же мама?
- 4 - (а) при чём здесь/тут Cop NP-Nom? - При чём здесь наши о
- 5 - (а) Noun-Nom/кто (же) (PronPers-3.Acc) знает, Cl - Кто его зн
- 6 - (а/так) что насчёт XP? - Что насчёт пятницы? Какие у тебя г
- 7 - NP-Nom Cop похожий-Short на NP-Acc (NP-Ins/по NP-Dat) - В
- 8 - (вот) тó-то и онó, что Cl/XP - То-то и оно, что от меня ничего
- 9 - (всё) никак не VP-1pvf - Задача всё никак не решалась.
- 10 - (единственное) (Prep) что (не) VP, так это (не) XP/Cl - Чего
- 11 - (как) по мне, (так) Cl - Как по мне, это ещё не беда.
- 12 - (не/самое) время Cop VP-Inf - Самое время вершить больш

**Diku**

Constructicon

constructicon.github.io/russian/

Apps Other Bookmarks



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ID-number

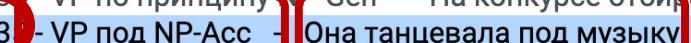
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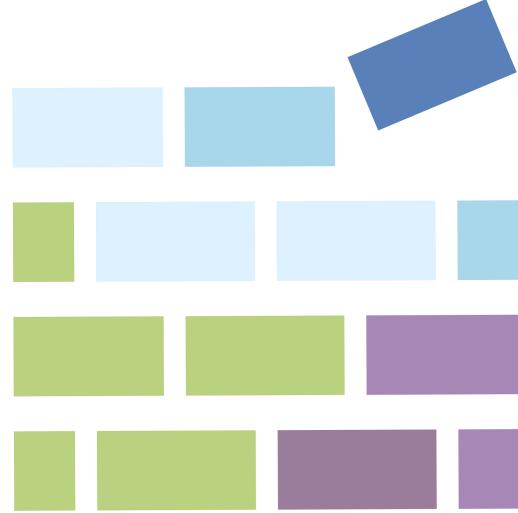
Illustration

Search in names and illustrations

For each construction we have an ID number, a name  
(a general morphosyntactic formula) and a short  
recognizable illustration.

- 631 - VP как следует - Он работал как следует.  
632 - VP лучше/не хуже PronPoss-Gen - Я знаю лучше вашего.  
633 - VP на раз(-два)(-три) - Настоящий мастер может изготовить об...  
634 - VP по принципу NP-Gen - На конкурс отбирают победите...  
**635 - VP под NP-Acc - Она танцевала под музыку**  
636 - VP под NP-ACC - Она вернулась под утро.  
637 - VP себе - А он идёт себе.  
638 - VP себе (и) VP/~Verb - Я стою себе думаю.  
639 - VP так себе - На пианино я играю так себе.





# Construxercise!

Hands-on learning of Russian constructions

<https://constructicon.github.io/construxercise-rus/>



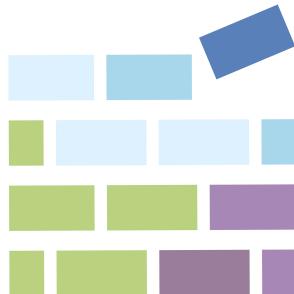
# RUSSIAN CONSTRUCTICON

database with over 2200 Russian  
grammatical constructions

<https://constructicon.github.io/russian/>

built in 2016-2021 / 2022,  
launched in September 2021

- The exercises are aimed at the strategic groups of 57 Russian constructions
- All constructions included in the exercises are carefully described and illustrated in the Russian construction



# Construxercise!

Hands-on learning of Russian constructions

practical exercises for students  
learning Russian

[https://constructicon.github.io/construxer  
cise-rus/](https://constructicon.github.io/construxercise-rus/)

built in January - June 2022,  
launched in June 2022

# Our choice: discourse constructions

ID	Construction	Illustration	
1087	иными/другими словами, ХР/СІ	Наш корреспондент выехал в аэропорт, чтобы взять интервью. <b>Другими словами</b> , задать несколько вопросов.	Clarify your point
1840	к примеру, СІ/ХР	Вот, <b>к примеру</b> , мне нравится Мерилин Монро.	Give an example
1872	(и) кстати (говоря), СІ	<b>И кстати</b> , он пришёл без подарка.	Add information
6	(а/так) что насчёт ХР?	<b>Что насчёт пятницы?</b> Какие у тебя планы?	Introduce a topic
2273	в-NumOrd-ых, ХР/СІ	<b>Во-первых</b> , я бы хотел поблагодарить своего тренера.	Structure your argument
1839	таким образом, СІ	<b>Таким образом</b> , наша команда за год добилась важных результатов.	Draw a conclusion
11	(как) по мне, (так) СІ	<b>Как по мне</b> , это ещё не беда.	Express your opinion
2281	СІ, не правда ли?	Интересный художник, <b>не правда ли?</b>	Ask someone for their opinion
1133	мягко говоря, СІ	Он, <b>мягко говоря</b> , не подарок.	Hedge

 **Construxercise!** предлагает студентам и преподавателям русского языка как иностранного более 150 упражнений, которые значительно улучшают навыки говорения и письма. В упражнениях отрабатываются стратегические группы русских конструкций (частотных моделей построения предложений и фраз), которые организуют текст и помогают достичь складности речи на уровне носителей языка.

 **Construxercise!** er et verk for lærere i russisk. Det tilbyr 150 øvelser som hjelper til med å utvikle skriveferdigheter mot de strategiske konstruksjonene i russisk. Øvelsene er laget for å hjelpe med å få god teknologi og bidra til en god morsmålsnivå.

- 1. Знакомство.** Introducing yourself
- 2. Поездка за границу.** Traveling abroad
- 3. Устройство на работу.** Getting a job
- 4. Поход к врачу.** Going to the doctor
- 5. Закрепление уроков 1-4.** Review lessons 1-4
- 6. Транспорт.** Getting around
- 7. Праздники.** Holiday celebrations
- 8. Еда.** Cooking and eating
- 9. Внешность.** Personal Appearance
- 10. Характер.** Describing personality
- 11. Одежда.** Getting dressed
- 12. Закрепление уроков 6-11.** Review lessons 6-11

**xercise!** offers learners and Russian over 150 exercises that strengthen text production exercises target strategic sets of constructions (prominent patterns and phrase structures) that flow of speech and help to e-like fluency in speaking and



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CONSTRUCTION



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# Spin-offs from the Russian Constructicon

[BROWSE](#)[ADVANCED SEARCH](#)[DAILY DOSE](#)[STATISTICS](#)[INSTRUCTIONS](#)[ABOUT](#)

Search in names and illustrations

Level

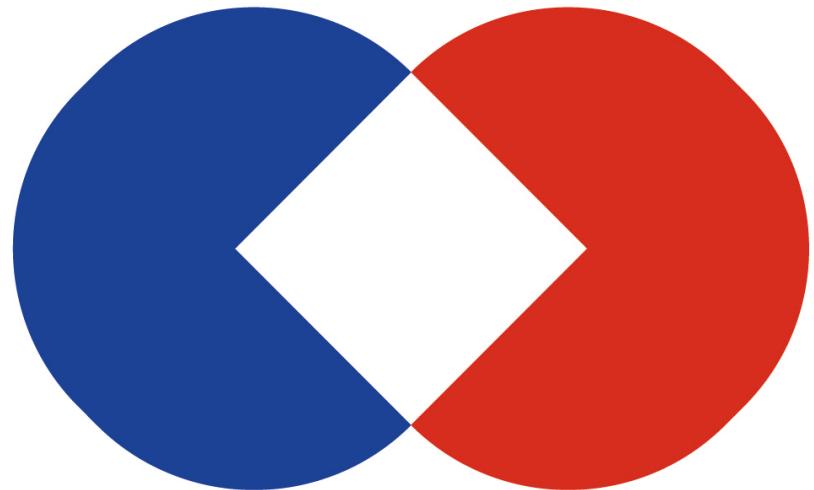
Select level ▾

Results

1. чого доброго VP-Pfv.Fut | А то вони, чого доброго, подумають, що ти забув про них.
2. як та/те/той/то NP | Життя, як той цвіт, що землю красить.
3. невже (не) VP? | Невже люди говорять правду?
4. NP-Nom набиратися (набратися) NP-Gen | Хлопчик ріс і набирає сил.
5. з огляду на NP-Acc, Cl | Він не став цього робити, з огляду на банальність ситуації.
6. начебто/неначе XP/Cl | Про мене начебто забули.

Also under construction: Hill Mari, Persian

# The Strategic Mastery of Russian Tool



language  
**SMARTool**

<https://smartool.github.io/smartool-rus-eng/>

# Team



Radovan Bast



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Svetlana  
Sokolova



Evgeniia  
Sudarikova



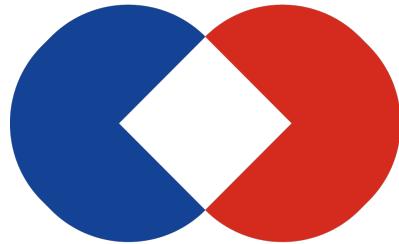
Ekaterina Rakhilina



Olga  
Lyashevskaya



James  
McDonald



language  
**SMARTool**

Financing and  
collaboration

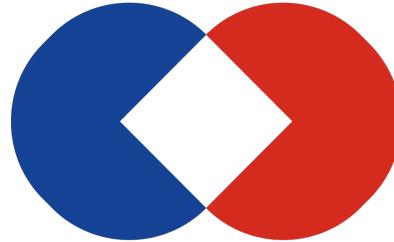
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Cognitive Linguistics: Empirical Approaches to Russian

**Diku**



# SMARTool: Empirical Basis



language  
**SMARTool**

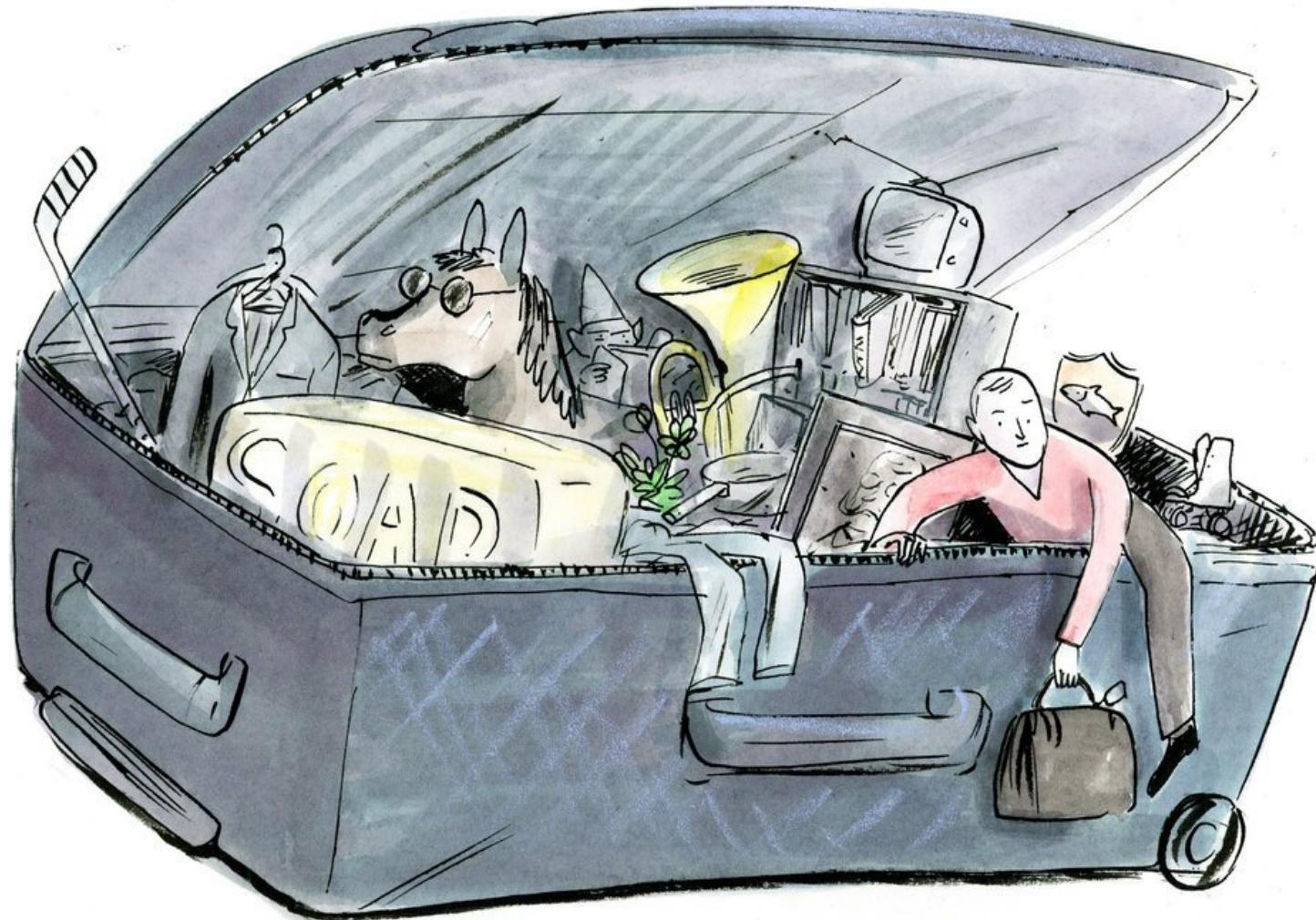
- Russian has rich inflectional morphology
  - Nouns, adjectives, and verbs have many forms
  - Even a small vocabulary of a few thousand words has >100,000 potential forms
  - But 90% of these forms are rarely used
  - Machine learning indicates that focus on the most frequent word forms is the best path to full mastery
  - Language technology resources make it possible to identify the most frequent word forms and the grammatical constructions and collocations that motivate their use
  - The SMARTool presents over 3000 words at the A1 through B2 levels
  - Freely available: <http://uit-no.github.io/smartool/>

# Computational Learning Experiment

- Learning is potentially enhanced by focus **only on the most typical wordforms** attested for each lexeme: **accuracy increases and severity of errors decreases**
- This finding is **consistent with a usage-based cognitively plausible model**

# How Can We Escape From Overstuffed Paradigms?

- Textbooks have always focused on certain forms and constructions
- Now we can do this in a scientific, consistent way



# Introducing the SMARTool



## Strategic Mastery of Russian Tool

- The user can browse 3000 Russian words according to proficiency level, topic, and grammatical categories.
- For each word, the SMARTool provides the three most common forms, plus example sentences that show typical collocations and grammatical constructions.

# Find the SMARTool here:

<https://smartool.github.io/smartool-rus-eng/>

SMARTool for English-speaking learners of Russian



Search by topic

Search by analysis

Search by dictionary

List of abbreviations

About

Level

Topic



Show translation  male voice  female voice



# First, choose a Level

SMARTool for English-speaking learners of Russian

[Search by topic](#)[Search by analysis](#)[Search by dictionary](#)[List of abbreviations](#)[About](#)

Level

Topic

- A1
- A2
- B1
- B2
- all levels

Show translation

male voice  female voice



NATIONAL RESEARCH  
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# Next, you can search by topic, analysis, or dictionary

SMARTool for English-speaking learners of Russian



[Search by topic](#) [Search by analysis](#) [Search by dictionary](#) [List of abbreviations](#) [About](#)

Level

B1

Topic

Show translation  male voice  female voice



[Search by topic](#)[Search by analysis](#)[Search by dictionary](#)[List of abbreviations](#)[About](#)

Level

Topic

B1

 Show translation n**Diku**

- ✓ внутренний мир (mental experience)
- время (time)
- еда (food)
- животные/растения (animals/plants)
- жильё (home)
- здоровье (health)
- люди (people)
- магазин (shopping)
- мера (measurement)
- общение (communication)
- одежда (clothing)
- описание (description)
- погода (weather)
- политика (politics)
- путешествие (travel)
- свободное время (leisure)
- транспорт (transportation)
- учёба/работа (study/work)

Level

Topic

[B1](#)

еда (food)

 **резать** Show translation  male voice  female voice

Для салата Катя **режет** лук, а Петя — помидоры. (Imperf.Sing.3 



Она не любит **резать** лук, потому что плачет от этого. (Imperf.Inf 



Он так громко кричал, как будто его **режут**. (Imperf.Plur.3 



Level

Topic

[B1](#)

еда (food)

 **резать** Show translation  male voice  female voice

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Он так громко кричал, как будто его **режут**. (Imperf.Plur.3 



Level

B1

Analysis

- ✓ Acc.Fem.Sing
- Acc.Masc.Sing
- Acc.Plur
- Acc.Sing
- Adverb
- Anim.Acc.Plur
- Comparative
- Dat.Fem.Sing
- Dat.Masc.Sing
- Dat.Neut.Sing
- Dat.Plur
- Dat.Sing
- Fem.Sing
- Gen.Fem.Sing
- Gen.Masc.Sing
- Gen.Neut.Sing
- Gen.Plur
- Gen.Sing
- Imperf.Fem.Sing.Past
- Imperf.Gerund
- Imperf Imper Plur?



рецепт

 Show translation  r

Это очень лёгкий рецепт

It's a very easy recipe! It is

Я попробовал больше д

I tried more than twenty

Ане нравились рецепты

Anya liked the baking rec

Level

Analysis

B1

Imperf.Gerund

 Show translation  male voice  female voice

Прощаясь, не забудьте улыбнуться. (Imperf.Gerund  

*When saying goodbye, don't forget to smile.*

Любую трудность она преодолевала, сохраняя улыбку. (Imperf.Gerund  

*She managed to overcome any difficulty with a smile on her face.*

Костя не спеша пошёл к дому. (Imperf.Gerund  

*Kostya slowly walked toward his house.*

Сравнивая три надписи, он понял значение иероглифов. (Imperf.Gerund  

*By comparing the three inscriptions, he figured out the meaning of the hieroglyphs.*

Он нёс тяжёлую сумку, то и дело ударяя ей себе по коленке. (Imperf.Gerund  

*He was carrying a heavy bag, which was hitting his knee every now and then.*

<https://smartool.github.io/exercises/>



**SMARTool exercises**

Home    Treasure Hunt    Story Time    Visit SMARTool    About

## Treasure Hunt

The Treasure Hunt design launches users on explorations into various corners of the Russian language. Treasure Hunt activities are stratified for proficiency level, and even A1 users (with a vocabulary of only a few hundred words) have ample opportunities to go on Treasure Hunts. They can be undertaken in groups or individually, in the classroom or self-study.

Each Treasure Hunt begins with a simple Prompt, an instruction on how to use a SMARTool search function to extract a target set of sentences, and a question to consider. After deducing an answer

## Story Time

The goal of Story Time is to build up skills and confidence in productive communication in Russian. Story Time helps learners to become confident writers, and, when used in the classroom – speakers.

Story Time activities take advantage of the fact that all lexemes in the SMARTool are searchable according to Topic, and many lexemes belong to more than one Topic. Filtering lexemes by Topic facilitates the targeting of word forms that learners can use to construct coherent narratives.



# SMARTool exercises

[Home](#)[Treasure  
Hunt](#)[Story  
Time](#)[Visit  
SMARTool](#)[About](#)

- 1. Choose your level.*
- 2. Choose the topic you would like to focus on.*

... [Show more](#)

Sounds and Letters

Meanings of words

Morphology

Case and Prepositions

Singular vs. Plural

Topic:  All topics

Level:

[Choose](#)



## 8. Sounds and Letters A1

**Choose:** Search by dictionary (all levels)

Find all the words that begin with ә-

What do these words have in common?

[Answer key](#)

*All of the words that begin with ә- in the SMARTool dictionary are borrowed words in Russian.*

*Native Russian words do not begin with ә-. the only exceptions are: этот 'this/that' and other forms of this word (эта, эти, etc.)*

*In general, most Russian words begin with a consonant. This includes words that begin with е-, ю-, я-, which begin with the consonant j- (sounds like y- in English). If a Russian word begins with a vowel, it is one of these: и-, о-, or у-.*

[Take-away idea](#)

*If you encounter a long new word that begins with a vowel, it is probably a borrowed word. If you sound it out, you will probably recognize it. For example, экономический means 'economic', and you don't need a dictionary to figure that out.*



UiT The Arctic University of Norway

# Putin Makes His (Grammatical) Case

# Why is Putin so popular? Why do Russians find him convincing?

- Russians are usually skeptical of their government
- Public opinion polls not entirely reliable, but a lot of people support Putin, at least passively
- Sociologists say people are “hypnotized”
- Independent media shut down, replaced by 24-hour TV propaganda

**Putin is not a brilliant orator, but  
his speech consistently deviates  
from norms**



Data from:  
Фонд Общественное Мнение  
(Public Opinion Foundation)



# Philosophical issues: norms, meaning, and grammar

- A corpus as a proxy for experience and expectations of native speakers
- Speakers may be sensitive to deviations from norms
- Words can be consciously chosen, grammar less under conscious control and more systematic
- Grammar and meaning: the semantic continuum lexicon – grammar

# Overview

- Keymorph Analysis as an extension of Keyword Analysis
- Meanings of Russian grammatical cases
- 2022 “The case for case in Putin’s speeches”  
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11185-022-09269-2>
  - Macro-level quantitative comparison: Putin’s use of case vs. reference corpus
  - Micro-level qualitative interpretation of Putin’s use of case
- 2023 Comparison with Putin’s speech Feb 21, 2023
  - Media have reported that this speech was more of the same
  - But we found some stark differences

# 2022

Russian Linguistics

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11185-022-09269-2>

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## The case for case in Putin's speeches

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### Abstract

Vladimir V. Putin has banned the use of the word ‘war’ to refer to the conflict in Ukraine. While one’s choice of words is deliberate and conscious, grammatical categories are obligatory and pivotal to signaling the roles notions have in a discourse. Over- and underrepresentation of grammatical cases can be identified by Keymorph Analysis, which measures deviations from corpus norms analogously to Keyword Analysis. This first application of Keymorph Analysis to Russian data compares the use of grammatical case for the nouns meaning ‘Russia’, ‘Ukraine’, and ‘NATO’ in Putin’s speeches in the period leading up to and immediately after the invasion of Ukraine. Our analysis reveals a narrative in which Putin depicts Russia as a dynamic, agentive, foregrounded actor, a reliable partner for collaboration, but also the victim of unfair geopolitical maneuvers. Ukraine, by contrast, is dehumanized

# Keymorph Analysis as an extension of Keyword Analysis

- Keyword Analysis (cf. Egbert & Biber 2023):
  - widely used in corpus-assisted discourse analysis
  - focus on the distribution of words, identifying as “keywords” those that are unusually frequent in a target text vs. reference corpus
  - Keywords reveal the “Aboutness” of a text
  - mostly used with English, which has little morphology
  - it is customary to remove English function words, also known as “stopwords”
- Keymorph Analysis:
  - takes advantage of the morphological expression of grammatical categories
  - developed by Fidler & Cvrček (2017, 2018, and Cvrček & Fidler 2019) on the material of Czech
  - this is the first pilot study/proof-of-concept using Russian data

# Meanings of Russian grammatical cases

- Based on previous publications (Janda 1993, 1999, 2000, Janda & Clancy 2002 )
- Meanings most relevant for analysis of Putin's speeches in 2022
  - Nominative (NOM): agent (subject); label
  - Genitive (GEN): agent or patient; possession
  - Dative (DAT): potential agent (usually human)
  - Accusative (ACC): patient (direct object); destination
  - Instrumental (s + INS): collaborator
  - Locative (LOC): a place

# Macro-level quantitative comparison: Putin's use of case vs. reference corpus

- Data: scope and source
- Raw data
- Difference Index keyed to frequency (DIN\*)
- Visualizations

# Data: Putin's speeches 10.02.-03.03.2022

- 10.02.2022: Russia launched its “largest military exercise since the Cold War, holding joint maneuvers with Belarus, close to the Belarus/Ukrainian border” (Walker 2022: 27).
- 02.03.2022: height of the first phase of invasion when Russian forces in Ukraine moved “to tighten their siege of key cities, including the capital, Kyiv, and the southern port of Mariupol” (Walker 2022: 39)
- Size of target corpus: 34,720 tokens
- Focus on three words:
  - Россия ‘Russia’
  - Украина ‘Ukraine’
  - НАТО ‘NATO’
- Reference corpus:
  - Russian InterCorp (Czech National Corpus [www.korpus.cz](http://www.korpus.cz)) 20.1 M tokens

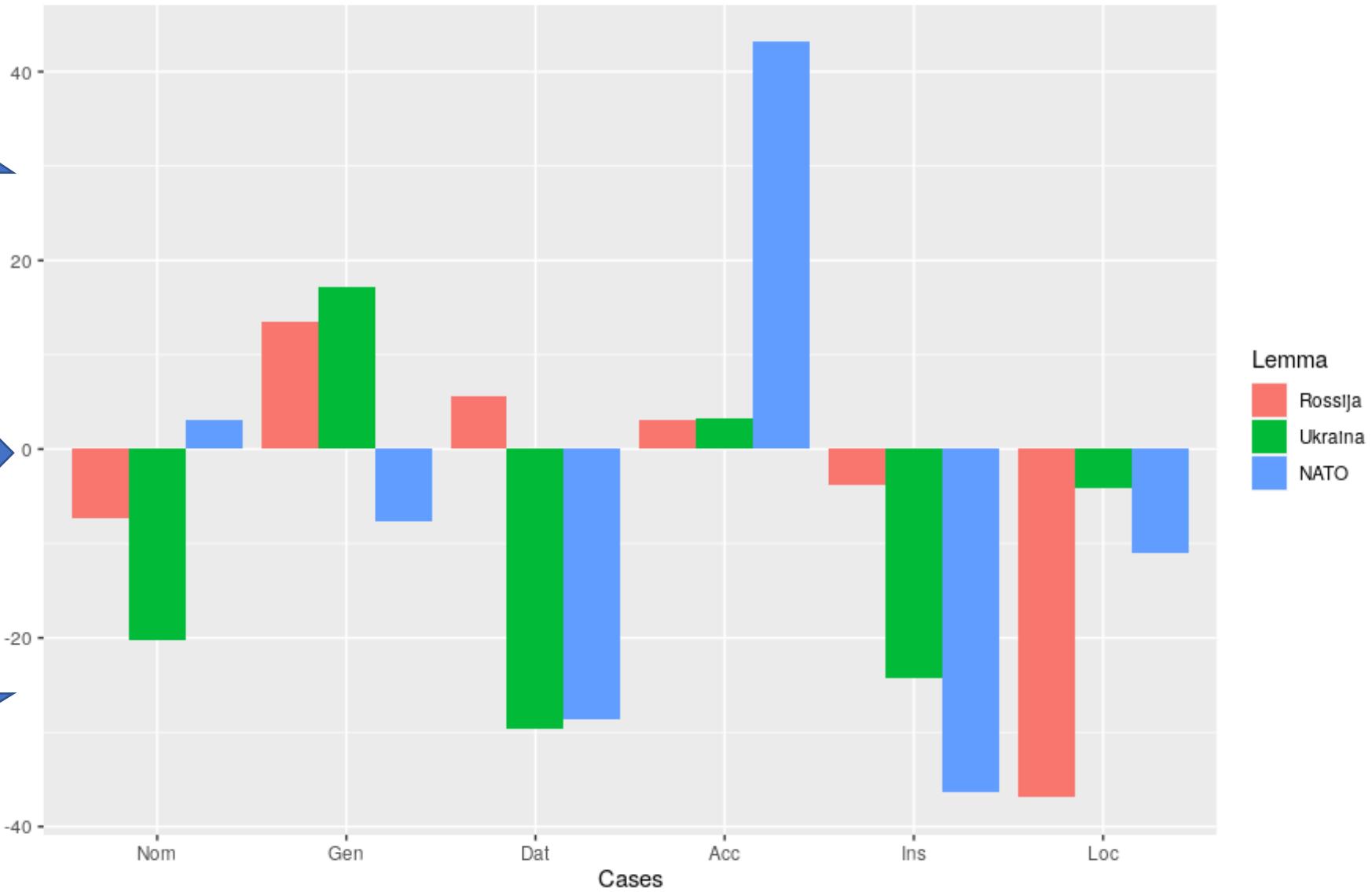
# Comparison with reference corpus

MORE than in corpus

SAME as in corpus

LESS than in corpus

Case prominence In Putin's speeches 2022



# Micro-level qualitative interpretation of Putin's use of case

## Representation of

- NATO
- Ukraine
- Russia

Every example manually tagged for case  
submeaning

# NATO in 2022



- NATO represented as
  - just a label, not an agent (NOM)
  - a threat (GEN)
  - a destination or container (ACC, LOC)
  - not a collaborator, dehumanized (little INS and DAT)

# Ukraine in 2022

- Ukraine represented as
  - passive (NOM with stative verbs)
  - manipulated (ACC)
  - dehumanized (little DAT)
  - not a collaborator (little *s* + INS)
  - just a location, a region (*na* + LOC, GEN)

# Russia in 2022

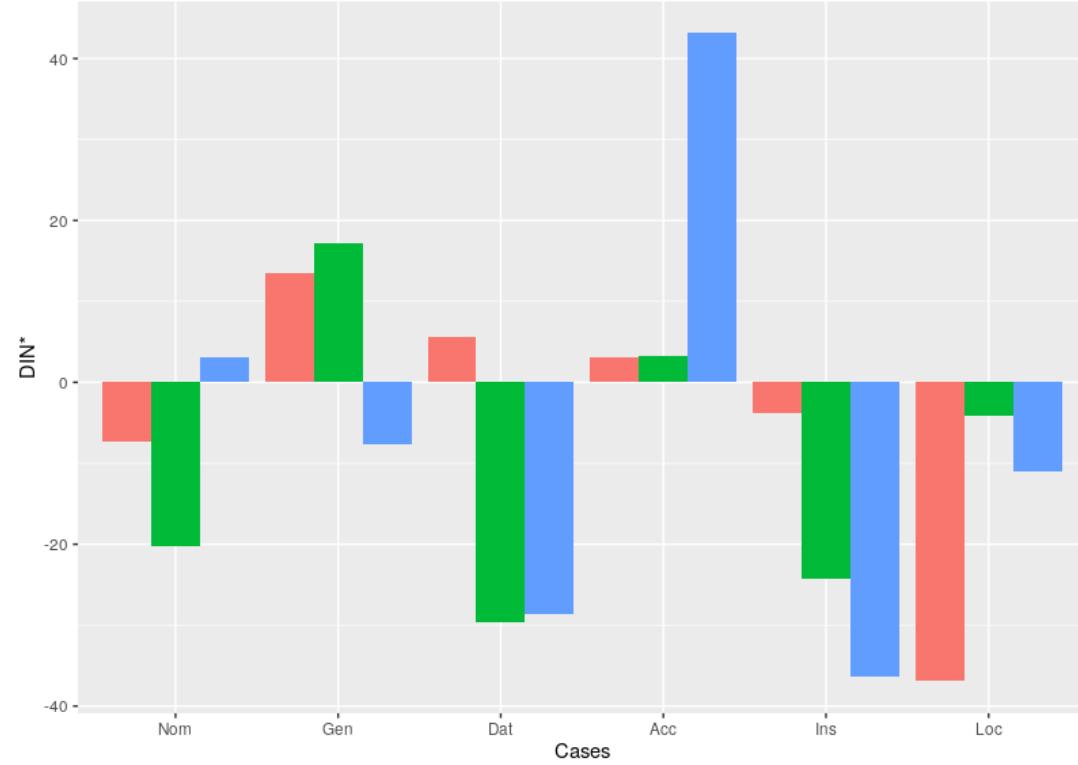
- Russia represented as
  - a dynamic agent (NOM)
  - a collaborator (INS)
  - treated unfairly (ACC) and therefore in need of a strong leader
  - humanized, inspires empathy (DAT)

# Putin's speech to the Federal Assembly

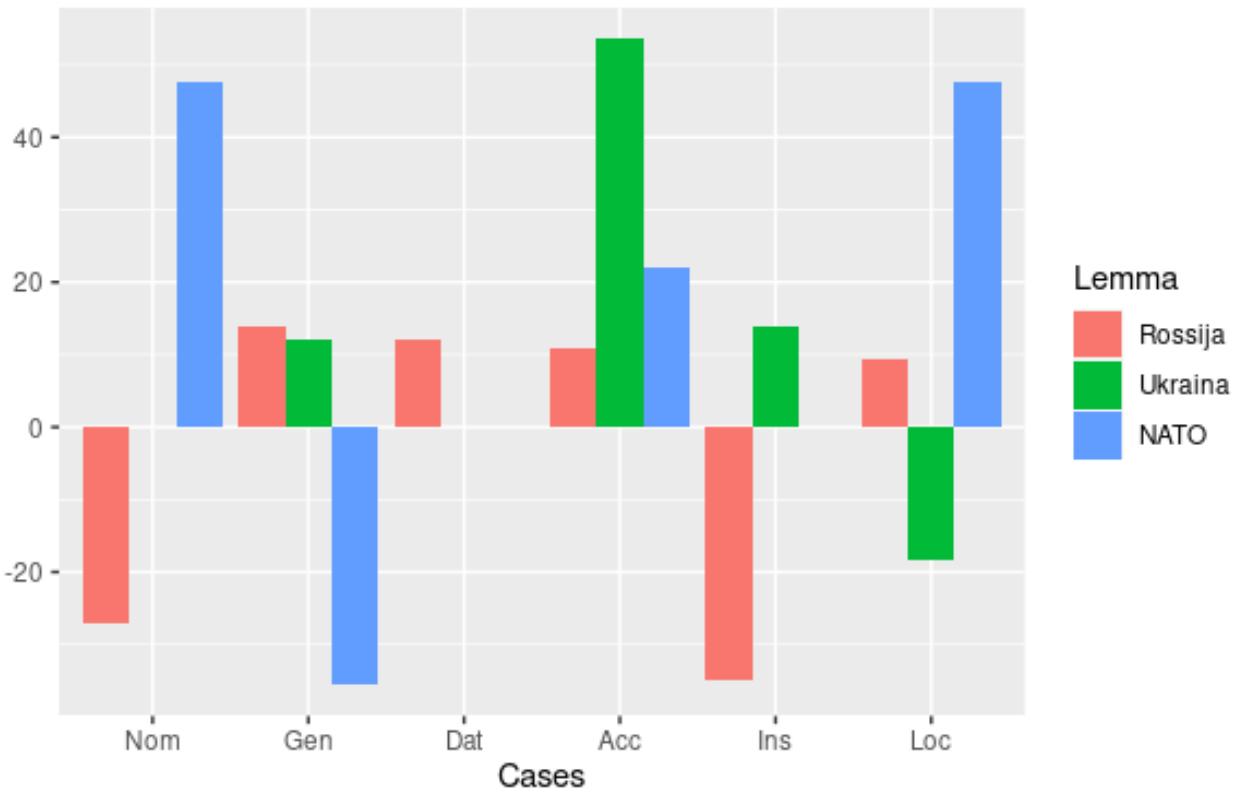
## Feb 21, 2023: 10,538 tokens



Case prominence in Putin's speeches 2022



Case prominence in Putin's speech (Feb 21, 2023)



Caveat: some distortion due to much smaller dataset

No data for

- ‘Ukraine’ Nominative, Dative
- ‘NATO’ Dative, Instrumental

# NATO in 2023



- NATO represented as
  - an aggressor, placing weapons on Russia's borders, directly stating that it wishes to defeat Russia, equated with USA and the West (NOM)
  - having expanded to Russia's borders and having representatives who are liars and deceivers (GEN, ACC)
  - the location of multiple nuclear arsenals (LOC)
  - strongly dehumanized (no s + INS, no DAT)

# Ukraine in 2023

- Ukraine represented as
  - non-existent as an actor (no NOM)
  - entirely manipulated, the destination of NATO's weapons (ACC, *na*)
  - dehumanized (no DAT)
  - not a collaborator (no *s* + INS), a name rendered "just for now" (subject to change) (INS)
  - the location of a conflict and a neonazi regime (*na* + LOC)

‘Ukraine’ appears only 12 times in 2023 speech:

*Мы не воюем с народом Украины...*

‘We are not fighting with the people of **Ukraine (GEN)**...’

*А в наше время из Украины они стали делать <<анти-Россию>>.*

‘At present they have started to make **Ukraine (GEN)** into an “Anti-Russia”

*этот проект ... с одной целью - оторвать эти исторические территории, которые сегодня называются Украиной, от нашей страны.*

‘this project ... [has] one goal – to tear away from our country the historical territories that are now called **Ukraine (INS)**’

*Запад использует Украину и как таран против России, и как полигон.*

‘The West is using **Ukraine (ACC)** both as a battering ram against Russia, and as an artillery range.’

# Russia in 2023

- Russia represented as
  - an agent that helps others, remembers, depends on its citizens, an open country (NOM)
  - a land of great potential and people, unfairly targeted (GEN)
  - united (*s* + INS)
  - being exploited but cannot be defeated, the place to invest (ACC)
  - humanized and victimized, in no need of cooperation with western economies (DAT)
  - a place with a strong economy and values (LOC)

# Putin 2022 vs. Putin 2023: What has changed?

- NATO
  - no longer the destination of Ukraine
  - foregrounded as the aggressor
- Ukraine
  - sinks further into background
  - Russia's "historical territories", the West's "Anti-Russia"
- Russia
  - self-sufficient economy with great potential
  - unfairly targeted by the West

# What does this buy us?

- Proof-of-concept for Keymorph Analysis applied to Russian data
- Keymorph Analysis is unique, can complement Keyword Analysis and other traditional methods of discourse analysis
- Analysis of grammatical case reveals roles of social actors in discourse
- Consistent deviation from norms likely has an impact on hearers
- Useful not only for linguistics, but for history, political science, and other disciplines in the social sciences
- Invites further comparisons (Putin vs. other politicians, etc.)
- Method could be used to analyze other types of manipulative texts

# Thank you!

- Threat-Defuser: <https://threat-defuser.org/>

Funded by the Norwegian Research Council

- CLEAR: Cognitive Linguistics: Empirical Approaches to Russian:  
<https://site.uit.no/clear/>

