

RUSSIAN PREPOSITION GRAMMAR: ON THE VARIABILITY OF POSITION IN THE SYNTAXEME

Грамматика русского предлога:
о вариативности позиции в синтаксеме

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate positional patterns of the preposition in the syntaxeme with “paired” pronouns, in particular, to consider possibilities and reasons for pattern usage of Russian prepositions with the pronoun *друг друга*. The study is based on extensive factual material obtained by continuous sampling from the Russian National Corpus. The frequency of antepositional, interpositional, and postpositional patterns of prepositions in syntaxemes at different time periods has been estimated.

Along with the expected interpositional usage of non-derivative prepositions, instances of their antepositional usage and the reasons for their usage have been defined. An increase in such usage has been seen for the past 20 years.

It has been found that the functioning of derived prepositions with the pronoun *друг друга* is determined, first of all, by the degree of their “assimilation” in the language. The interposition of derivative prepositions is similar to non-derivative ones and shows the weakening of bonds with the notional derivative word. The pronoun *друг друга*, as well as the forms of third-person personal pronouns, serve as a kind of marker while adapting new forms of prepositions in the language. Multi-component prepositions have the ability to be used interpositionally, but this is rarely the case.

Keywords: Russian prepositions, Russian pronouns, variability, antepositional pattern, interpositional pattern, postpositional pattern

РЕЗЮМЕ

В центре внимания настоящего исследования оказывается позиция предлога в составе синтаксемы с «парными» местоимениями, в частности рассматриваются возможности и основания вариативного использования русских предлогов по отношению к компонентам местоимения *друг друга*. Исследование проведено на обширном фактическом материале, полученном методом сплошной выборки из Национального

корпуса русского языка, оценена частотность препозиционных, интерпозиционных и постпозиционных вариантов функционирования предлогов в синтаксеме на разных временных этапах.

Наряду с ожидаемым интерпозиционным использованием непроизводных предлогов выявлены случаи их препозиционного употребления, указаны способствующие тому факторы. Отмечаем рост подобных употреблений за последние 20 лет, прежде всего в текстах СМИ.

Установлено, что функционирование производных предлогов с местоимением *друг друга* определяется, прежде всего, степенью их «освоенности» системой языка. Интерпозиция производных предлогов сближает их с непроизводными и свидетельствует об ослаблении связей с производящим полнозначным словом. Местоимение *друг друга*, а также формы личных местоимений третьего лица служат своеобразным маркером процесса адаптации предложных новообразований системой языка. Выявлено, что потенциальная возможность интерпозиционного употребления присуща и многокомпонентным предлогам, однако в большинстве случаев она остаётся нереализованной.

Исследование осмысляет тенденции функционирования предлогов и местоимения *друг друга* в русском языке новейшего периода и расширяет существующие представления о грамматике русского предлога.

Ключевые слова: русские предлоги, русские местоимения, вариативность, препозиция, интерпозиция, постпозиция

INTRODUCTION

The description of the semantics and functioning of prepositions in various languages has been of particular interest in linguistic research in recent decades, both within the framework of computer linguistics (Jensen, Nilsson 2006: 229–244; Lassen 2006: 45–50) and for linguistic and pedagogical purposes (Song et al. 2015: 109–128). In the field of Slavic studies, the focus on prepositional structures is confirmed by the successful development of the international research project *Slavic Prepositions in Synchrony and Diachrony: Morphology and Syntax* (Vsevolodova 2022: 4–17). During the project implementation, indexes of prepositions and their equivalents for the Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Polish languages were compiled. The index of Russian prepositions and their equivalents has provided the material for a new extensive study (Vinogradova, Klobukova 2022: 84–100) aimed at identifying the systemic paradigmatic relations that form the functional-grammatical field of the preposition.

The objectives of the large-scale project *Quantitative Grammar of Russian Prepositional Structures* are to describe the corpus of Russian prepositions as a special prepositional ontology and to compile the database (Azarova et al., 2019: 245–257). The problems of automatic text analysis necessitate the goals of studying homonymy of Russian prepositional structures (Boyarsky et al., 2021: 98–110). The impressive corpora of Russian prepositions and constant evolution of new prepositional units highlight the relevance of research that enhances the understanding of the grammar of prepositions.

While describing various aspects of the functioning of prepositions, M. V. Vsevolodova (2022: 11) highlights the position of a preposition in the syntaxeme as one of the critical issues. The linguist notes the possible variability in the usage of prepositions with paired pronouns and points to the lack of research revealing the regularities of such usages in modern grammar. This study devoted to the features of the functioning of prepositions with the pronoun *друг друга* is intended to partially solve that problem.

The pronoun *друг друга* is attributed to the paired pronouns due to its two-part structure. It should also be noted that it is characterized by strong bonding of its parts,

i.e. their position stability, the invariability of the first part and the stability of the whole collocation stress. *Дрызь дрызза* is actively used both with non-derivative and derivative prepositions in various functional styles in the Russian language, with prepositions being used both antepositionally and interpositionally in relation to the parts of the pronoun.

The semantics of the pronoun can be characterized as a combination of the meanings of reflexivity and reciprocity: it refers to the part of the statement denoting a certain entity, while denoting the relation between the parts of this entity. Consequently, the use of the term “reciprocal-reflexive pronoun” in this paper, which was originally offered by M. A. Shelyakin (2001: 63), seems to be reasonable.

It should be noted that the evolution of pronoun terminology in the Russian language grammars remains in the focus of researchers (Vlasov, Moskovkin 2021: 35–51). The semantics and pragmatics of different categories of Russian pronouns are currently being actively studied in a comparative aspect (Rahimova, Yusupova 2015: 113–116), for instance, to deal with the problems of the ethno-oriented approach in teaching Russian as a foreign language (Lu et al. 2017: 273–278). The practical need for a functional description of linguistic units often arises when we teach a foreign language.

The objectives of this study are to identify the possibilities and reasons for pattern usage of prepositions in relation to parts of the pronoun *дрызь дрызза* and to outline the main trends in this area.

The problems of pattern usage of linguistic units in Russian today are successfully solved within the framework of corpus research (Galeev et al. 2020: 145–154), which makes this study relevant to be done on the basis of the Russian National Corpus – RNC (www.ruscorpora.ru).

METHODOLOGY

The research has been conducted within a semasiological framework using a functional approach. It is based on the study of grammar according to the principle “from form to function” and ensures the integration of system structure and functional aspects of the language system.

Corpus analysis was applied to compile the empirical database: the material was obtained through total sampling from the main corpus (375 million usages), newspaper corpus (765 million usages), and oral corpus (13.9 million usages) of the Russian National Corpus. The instances of the usage of the pronoun *дрызь дрызза* with all non-derivative and derivative prepositions listed in the Russian Grammar in Brief (1989) were analyzed. The instances of interpositional, antepositional, and postpositional usage of prepositions in relation to reciprocal-reflexive pronouns were evaluated using quantitative methods of data processing, and the frequency of pattern usage at different time periods was noted.

To interpret the cases of “non-standard” usage of prepositions with the pronoun *дрызь дрызза* and to understand the basis of variability in the syntaxeme, methods of structural, contextual, and transformational analysis were employed. Determining the main tendencies in the usage of the reciprocal-reflexive pronoun with prepositions was carried out using methods of objectivization of individual cases and prediction.

RESULTS

The data of the Russian National Corpus clearly demonstrate the consistent use of most non-derivative prepositions in interposition, namely: *без, в, для, до, за, из, из-за, из-под, к, между, на, над, о, об, от, по, под, перед, при, про, с, у, через*.

However, we can also see individual uses in antepositions (the number of antepositional/interpositional usages in the main subcorpus is given below) of the prepositions *к* 27/7302, *в* (with the accusative case) 7/1260, *с* 6/8115, *на* 4 /7734, *перед* 3/802, *в* (with the prepositional case) 2/420, *о* 1/651, *от* 1/6450, *по* 1/64. The majority of antepositional uses of the main subcorpus (34 out of 52) was seen in the 2000s. Antepositional forms are active in oral corpus (only 25 cases) and in newspaper corpus (137 cases in total), in the latter we see the cases of antepositional use of the prepositions *для, до, у*, which are absent in the main corpus.

It is necessary to point out to a random, non-systemic nature of such uses: they all belong to different authors. The sources are often texts from Internet publications, entries on Internet forums and many antepositional uses in the newspaper subcorpus are associated with the oral spontaneous speech of the interviewees: *Мы должны еще теснее работать с друг другом. Izvestiya, 2016 (RNC)*.

In such contexts *друг друга* is governed by a verb or noun with a preposition while the placement of the preposition between the components of the pronoun disturbs the probabilistic flow of speech, the anteposition, on the contrary, supports it. We find such contexts with the verbs *привыкнуть, прислушиваться, относиться, обращаться, прижаться, притереться* which are used with the preposition *к*: *51-летняя артистка призналась, что в распадае брака виноваты они оба, поскольку из-за собственного эгоизма не хотели прислушиваться к друг другу. Moscovskiy comсомоlets, 2019 (RNC)*. We observe also some contexts with the words *связь, связывать, общаться, разговаривать, спорить, делиться, соперничать, конкурировать, соревноваться* which are used with the preposition *с*: *Мы должны еще теснее работать с друг другом. Lenta.ru, 2019 (RNC)*.

The antepositional use of a preposition can also be affected by the insertion of the pronoun in a series of homogeneous members preceding it, each of which has a preposition before it, which tends to be used before the pronoun *друг друга*: *... ребята соскучились по полю, по мячу, по друг другу. Vesti.ru, 2020 (RNC)*.

A number of contexts can be explained by interference with a foreign language when translating and when non-native speakers of Russian use the language: *И ни одно из государств не испытывает враждебности, которая когда-то вынуждала обе наши страны держать тысячи единиц ядерного оружия в состоянии боевой готовности, нацеленными на друг друга. RIA Novosti, 2006 (RNC)*.

Finally, phonetic peculiarities such as the resulting confluence of consonants in the interpositional use of the preposition *к* may also have an impact.

If we consider the usage of derivative prepositions, we can conclude that their use with the pronoun *друг друга* is determined primarily by the degree assimilation by the language system (*друг друга* becomes a peculiar marker of this process). The use of a derivative preposition in interposition brings it closer to non-derivatives and indicates a weakening of the bonding with a derivative notional word, which cannot be used in interposition. Thus, a word form acquires a more abstract meaning and the functional

possibilities of a preposition. On the contrary, the impossibility of interposition of a preposition indicates the incompleteness of its formation as an independent unit.

For example, the preposition *благодаря* undoubtedly tends to correlate with the corresponding verbal form. The connection with a notional word and the insufficient abstractness of its meaning as compared to non-derivative prepositions leads to its anteposition usage with the reciprocal-reflexive pronoun.

The majority of prepositional-case constructions with the pronoun *друг друга* are adverbial prepositions denoting location in space. The close bonding of adverbial prepositions with adverbs was pointed out by L. V. Shcherba (1957: 66) and V. V. Vinogradov (1984: 534) who considered them to be forms of the same word. At present D. G. Figurovskaya (2007: 51–60), F. I. Pankov (2009: 12–19) are studying this issue.

It is the poor distinction between the functions of the preposition and the adverb that prevents the use of the forms *навстречу*, *наперерез* and *наперекор* in interposition to the pronoun *друг друга*. At the same time, we can see that the possibility of their antepositional and even postpositional usage contradicts the essence of the term “preposition”. *На зимнике «Надым – Салехард», соединяющем окружной центр Ямала с большой землей, дорожники идут друг другу навстречу. Vesti.ru, 2014 (RNC).* In the main corpus of the Russian National Corpus we find 406 antepositional uses of the form *навстречу* with the pronoun *друг друга* (*навстречу друг другу*) and 85 postpositional uses (*друг другу навстречу*) for 3 interpositional uses (*друг навстречу другу*). This gap is even further accentuated in the newspaper corpus: only 8 interpositional uses, 723 antepositional and 43 postpositional uses.

The incomplete formation of *навстречу*, *наперерез* and *наперекор* as prepositions is evident from their interaction with third person personal pronouns. It is known that the pronouns *он*, *оно*, *она*, *они* in the oblique cases in combination with prepositions have forms with initial *н*. As I. A. Baudouin de Courtenay showed (Bogoroditsky 1907: 118), these forms evolved due to the rearrangement process of the archaic prepositions *кън*, *вън* and *сън*, and started to be used with other prepositions thanks to analogy. However, there is no single case of the use of “н”-forms after *навстречу*, *наперерез* and *наперекор* in the Russian National Corpus, in all cases “j”-forms are preserved: *навстречу ему*, *наперекор ей*, *наперерез им*, etc. (RNC).

The complex interweaving of the properties of adverb and preposition is also demonstrated by the lexeme *мимо*. In the Russian National Corpus we find both combinations *друг мимо друга* and *мимо друг друга*, and the latter prevails: 27 antepositional uses and 16 interpositional ones respectively in the main corpus and 24 antepositional contexts in the newspaper corpus with 6 interpositional ones. At the same time, both patterns are not seen within a certain time period, on the contrary, they are spread through the time. The analysis of the contexts presented in the Russian National Corpus allows us to conclude that *мимо* as a derivative preposition with the meaning “near, in close proximity to something” is freely used in interposition to the pronoun *друг друга*: *Люди стараются, проходя друг мимо друга, выдерживать дистанцию, меньше контактировать и вообще не выходить на улицу. Izvestiya, 2020 (RNC).*

At the same time, *мимо* as a synthetic form combining the functions of a preposition and an adverb with the meaning “without stopping, without delaying, without going through” or “without paying attention, without noticing, inconsistently” is used

exclusively in the anteposition, and might be used in the postposition as well: *Такие передачи происходили, как правило, довольно избитым шпионским методом – из рук в руки, проходя мимо друг друга и не останавливаясь.* NEWSru.com, 2010 (RNC).

The active and successful assimilation of the lexeme *напротив* as a preposition leads to the transition from the anteposition of this form to its predominantly interpositional use at the end of the 20th century: ... *посетителям не позволяется садиться за столиками в ресторанах друг напротив друга.* *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 2020 (RNC). The three earliest cases of the use of the lexeme *напротив* with a reciprocal pronoun in the Russian National Corpus date back to the 19th century and they are antepositional. The first interpositional patterns in the Russian National Corpus appeared almost a century later. Today, interpositional and antepositional uses in the main corpus are 109 and 80 respectively, with the gap widening considerably in texts belonging to contemporary times (since 2010): 34 and 14 respectively. The ratio of these uses (191 to 87) in the newspaper corpus is also indicative. The evidence of adopting the function of a preposition for the lexeme *напротив* is also apparent in its usage with personal pronouns of the third person, namely the consistent replacement of the “j-” forms, which were very widespread in the late 19th century, by “н-” forms.

We can say that the process of preposition adaptation is complete in the case of adverbial prepositions *против, возле, подле, около*. All of them are consistently used in interposition with the reciprocal pronoun, thus demonstrating a disconnection from their derivatives which can be shown by statistical data. The main corpus of the Russian National Corpus has 86 cases of the use of the combination *друг возле друга*, 87 – *друг подле друга* and 40 – *друг около друга*. At the same time, the use of the type *возле друг друга* is not given, and antepositional uses of the prepositions *подле* and *около* are not common (1 and 3 respectively), and are observed only in the texts of the late 19th – early 20th century. The bookish nature and, as a consequence, low representation in modern colloquial speech, as well as the influence of literary tradition, determine the “conservativeness” of such combinations. The preposition *против* is most often used with the pronoun *друг друга*. In the main corpus for every 1332 interpositional uses, there are 9 antepositional uses, in the newspaper corpus there are 51 cases for 920. It should be noted that in many cases the combinations *против друг друга* depend on nouns with obligatory governance (*лозунги, искли, действия*), automatically “attracting” the use of the preposition. In the newspaper corpus for the year of 2019 the ratio of interpositional uses to antepositional uses is 59 to 5, and for 2020 and 2021 there are no instances of antepositional placement of the preposition *против*, while 28 instances of the combination *друг против друга* have been recorded for the same period.

In this context, the occurrence of lexemes in the anteposition that have long been part of the prepositional system seems strange (including their interaction with “н-” forms of personal pronouns of the third person). In particular, it concerns the variable use of the preposition *относительно* with predominantly antepositional use (104 to 71 in the main subcorpus), despite the apparent functional equality of the variants. Let us compare completely similar contexts when the pronoun and preposition usage contexts are the identical: *По расчётам учёных, две части Арракота сформировались неподалёку друг от друга и двигались друг относительно друга с небольшой скоростью.* *Vesti.ru*, 2020 (RNC); *Чтобы сделать такие снимки, нам нужно было точно знать*

положение аппарата и астероида с точностью до секунды, ведь они двигались относительно друг друга со скоростью 32 тыс. миль в секунду. Gazeta.ru, 2019 (RNC).

The texts of the 2000s saw the increasing number of combinations *относительно друг друга*: 47 cases of uses in relation to 28 combinations of *друг относительно друга*. The newspaper subcorpus shows an even greater gap: 109 antepositional uses to 35 interpositional ones.

It seems that we are dealing with the formation of a tendency to the antepositional use of the preposition with the pronoun *друг друга*. Due to this tendency, we see the antepositional use of the combination *напротив друг друга*, the gradual development of variability in the use of the prepositions *вокруг* and *сквозь*, the emergence of isolated and indicative cases of the use of the prepositions *подле*, *возле*, *около*, as well as non-derivative prepositions in anteposition: *Когда они проходили около друг друга, один парень лопнул шарик. Moscovskiy comсомоlets, 2019 (RNC).*

The limited use of *друг друга* along with the tendency to antepositional use determines the use of prepositions *вблизи*, *вместо*, *помимо* and *вопреки* exclusively before the pronoun.

Today the reciprocal-reflexive pronoun is in active use with compound prepositions *рядом с*, *недалеко от*, *далеко от*, *вдали от*, *независимо от*, *по отношению к*, *в отношении*, *за счет*, *в адрес*. The compound prepositions as *вблизи от*, *вдалеке от*, *по направлению к*, *навстречу к*, *вслед за*, *совместно с*, *вместе с*, *в согласии с*, *в направлении* are potentially capable of forming the syntaxeme with the reciprocal-reflexive pronoun.

The structure of such combinations is determined by the sequence of elements of the prepositional units: a non-derivative final component “wedges” between the parts of the pronoun (*рядом друг с другом*, *недалеко друг от друга*): *Посетителей не должны сажать рядом друг с другом, при входе им должны измерять температуру. Parlamentskaya gazeta, 2020 (RNC).* If the final component is the old form of a notional word, this determines the antepositional use (*в отношении друг друга*, *за счет друг друга*): *В его рамках стороны договорились не вводить новые пошлины в отношении друг друга, которые должны были вступить в силу 15 декабря. RIA Novosti, 2020 (RNC).*

The use of compound prepositions as a unit in interposition with the pronoun *друг друга* is indicative: *Сети также намерены увеличивать прибыль, расширяя друг за счет друга сбыт собственных торговых марок. RBK Daily, 2007 (RNC).* *При этом в ряде других районов полицейские и демонстранты спокойно стоят друг рядом с другом. RIA Novosti, 2017 (RNC).*

DISCUSSION

The study identified the regularities in the functioning of the pronoun *друг друга* with both non-derivative and derivative prepositions, including compound prepositions. The potential for variable usage of prepositions in anteposition, interposition, and postposition was considered, and the major tendencies in this area were outlined.

In addition to the expected interpositional forms of non-derivative prepositions, instances of their antepositional use were also identified, and the factors contributing to this usage were described. The growth of such usage can be observed primarily in media texts over the past 20 years.

It has been found that the functioning of derivative prepositions with the pronoun *друг друга* is determined by the degree of their assimilation into the language system. The interposition of derivative prepositions connects them with non-derivative prepositions and indicates a weakening of the bond with a derivative notional word. Consequently, the word form acquires greater abstractness of meaning, expanding the functional possibilities of a preposition. Conversely, the inability to position the preposition interpositionally indicates the incompleteness of its formation as an independent linguistic unit. The pronoun *друг друга*, along with the forms of third-person personal pronouns, serves as a marker of the assimilation process of new antepositional forms by the language system.

Simultaneously, the increase in antepositional uses of both derivative and non-derivative prepositions in the last two decades can be explained by a specific process: the realization of the unity of the components of the pronoun *друг друга*, the perception of the pronoun as a single word, and the desire to preserve its integrity. Furthermore, the use of the preposition in anteposition aligns with the characteristics of oral speech, characterized by predictable speech structures and the use of set phrases.

It is shown that the potential for interpositional use is also inherent in compound prepositions, but in most cases, it remains unrealized.

CONCLUSIONS

Now we witness two competing trends in the sphere of reciprocal-reflexive pronouns with prepositions. The first trend is the interpositional use of derivative prepositions, which is determined by the process of their assimilation into the language system and their affinity to non-derivative prepositions. The second trend is the antepositional use of derivative prepositions, which is caused by an awareness of the integrity of the pronoun “друг друга” and is maintained by features of oral speech.

The first trend has determined the functioning of prepositions with reciprocal reflexive pronouns throughout the 20th century. It is still active now but less intensive, as indicated by isolated instances of interpositional usage of compound prepositions. The second trend has been actively developing in the last two decades and contributes to the variability of unsettled antepositional-case structures. Further growth of antepositional patterns of structures with the pronoun *друг друга* can be predicted, especially in colloquial speech.

Thus, the interaction of reciprocal-reflexive pronouns with prepositions can be seen as an active, complex, and rather contradictory process. By supervising this process, we can describe large-scale trends in modern Russian language and enhance the present understanding of the grammar of the Russian preposition.

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