Experiential verbs in Russian: the structure of a lexical class

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1. Background

Experiential verbs:
- emotions: *nravit'sja* 'like', *udivit'* 'surprise'
- cognition: *dumat'* 'think', *nadejat'sja* 'hope'
- perception: *videt'* 'see', *kazat'sja* 'seem'

Participants:

Peter looks at the girl.
Mne nravitsja etot film.
Experiencer Stimulus

Typological studies show that experiential verbs:
- semantically deviate from the Transitivity Prototype,
- are syntactically heterogeneous.
  [Bossong 1998; Haspelmath 2001; Næss 2007].

Hierarchy of experiential verbs, cf. [Tsunoda 1981; 1985]:

Emotions   Cognition   Perception
→
         Agentivity
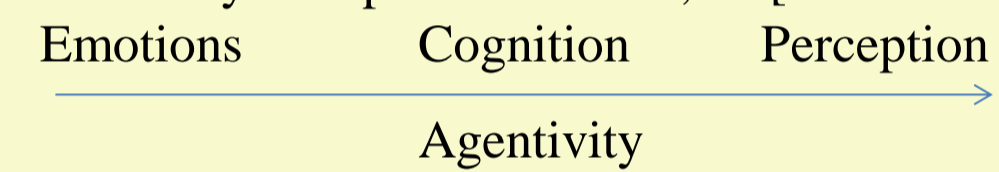
2. Goals

- How is experiential verbal lexicon of Russian structured in terms of syntactic types?
- What is specific of classes of Russian emotion, cognition, and perception verbs in terms of their typical syntactic characteristics?

3. Data

- Russian National Corpus: texts created >1950
- We extracted all the verbs tagged "emotions", "cognition", "perception" in the basic meaning.
- We added verbs related to those already found and some verbs mentioned in linguistic descriptions.

Lists of verbs for the three groups annotated for:
- participant in the subject position
- transitivity
- reflexivity
- token frequency, etc.

4. Problems

- polysemy: *pochitat'* 'read for a while', 'respect', 'consider'
  → excluded for token frequency generalizations
- passives: can be viewed as inflectional forms
 → passive reflexives are included in the lists

5. Results: basic parameters

5.1. Participant in the subject position

Which of the participants occupies the subject position?
- Experiencer-subject verbs: *bojat'sja* 'fear', *glazet'* 'stare', *ugadat'* 'guess'.
- Stimulus-subject verbs: *pugat'* 'frighten', *planirovat'sja* 'be.planned', *vygljadet'* 'look(intr)'.
- Expectation: Less agentive Experiencers tend to be expressed in a non-subject position.

- Emotions < Cognition ≈ Perception

Figure 1. The proportion of Experiencer-subject and Stimulus-subject verbs for the three classes
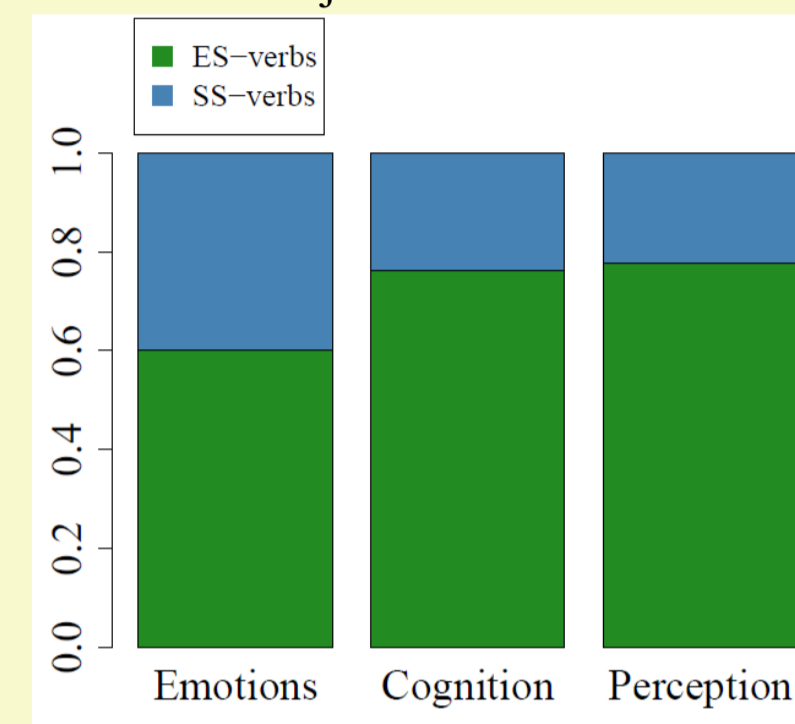
5.2. Transitivity and reflexivity of Experiencer-subject verbs

- Reflexives: both derived, e.g., *radovat'sja* 'rejoice(intr)' and underived, e.g., *naslaždat'sja* 'enjoy'.
- Expectation: Higher proportion of intransitives and reflexives corresponds to lower agentivity.

Figure 2. The proportion of transitives and intransitives among Experiencer-subject verbs
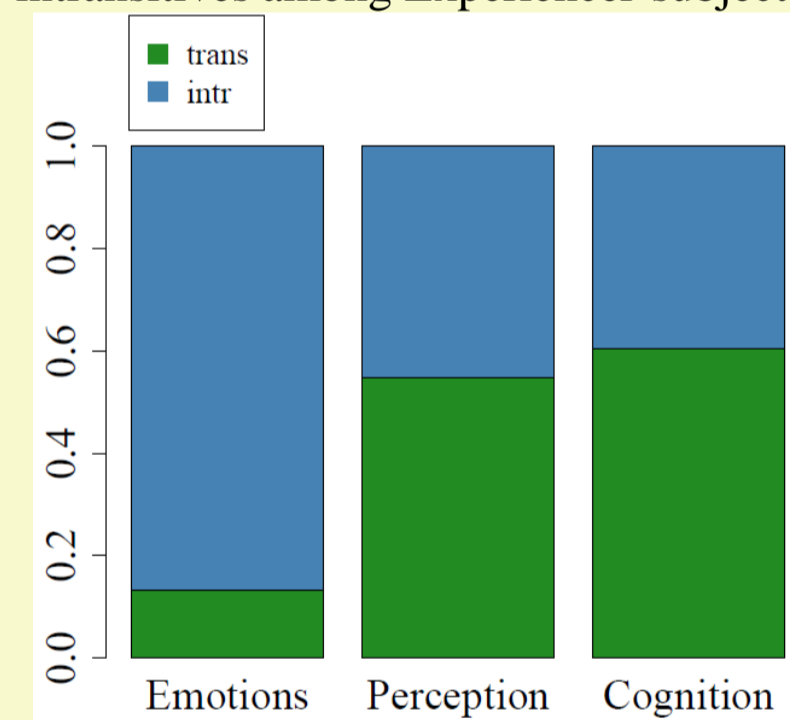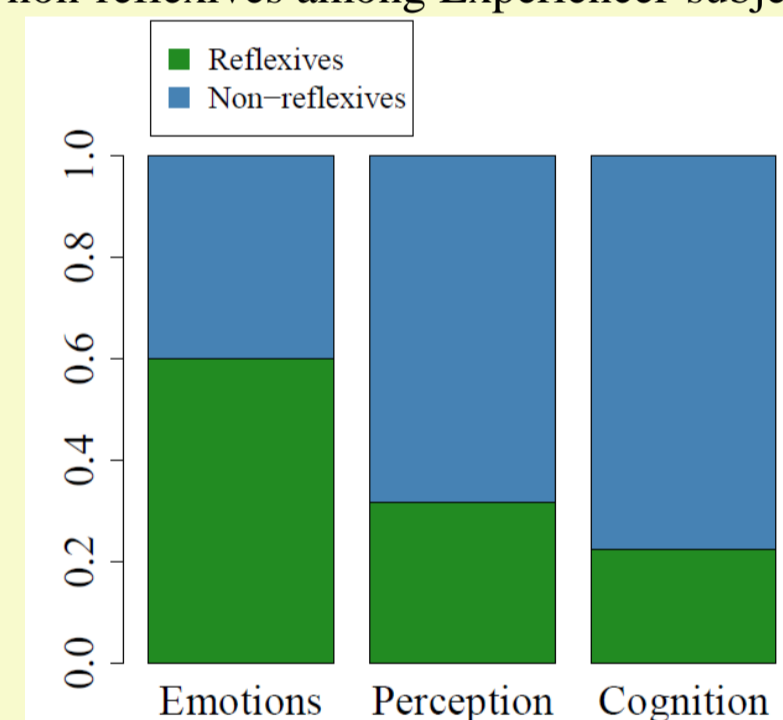

Figure 3. The proportion of reflexives and non-reflexives among Experiencer-subject verbs

- Emotions << Perception < Cognition
- NB! The order of perception and cognition is reversed, cf. Fig.1!

- Emotions > Perception > Cognition

5.3. Transitivity and reflexivity of Stimulus-subject verbs

Table 1. Transitive and reflexive Stimulus-subject verbs

	Transitives		Non-reflexive intransitives		Reflexives		Sum
Emotions	119	0,82	14	0,10	11	0,08	144
Perception	3	0,05	2	0,03	59	0,92	64
Cognition	2	0,03	0		78	0,97	80

- Expectation: High proportion of transitive Stimulus-subject verbs among emotion verbs can be interpreted as an indication that the Experiencer is more affected than in the other two classes.

- Emotions << Perception ≈ Cognition

6. Passive

- The broad definition of "passive":
1) regular correspondence in form: *-sja* is added;
2) the DO of the transitive verb has the same role as the S of the passive;
3) the meaning of the derived verb may be idiomatic.
E.g.: *smotret'* 'look' vs *smotret'sja* 'look(intr)'

- Type frequency of Stimulus-subject passive verbs: the proportion of Experiencer-subject transitive verbs that derive passive reflexives.
- NB! There are perfective passive reflexives, e.g., *osmyslit'sja* 'to become interpreted'.
- Token frequency of Stimulus-subject passive verbs:

Table 2. The ratio of passive verb tokens to the overall number of tokens of passives and corresponding transitives

	% of passive tokens
Emotions	2%
Perception	10%
Cognition	13%

- Emotions < Perception < Cognition

Figure 4. Experiencer-subject transitives and derivation of passive: imperfectives
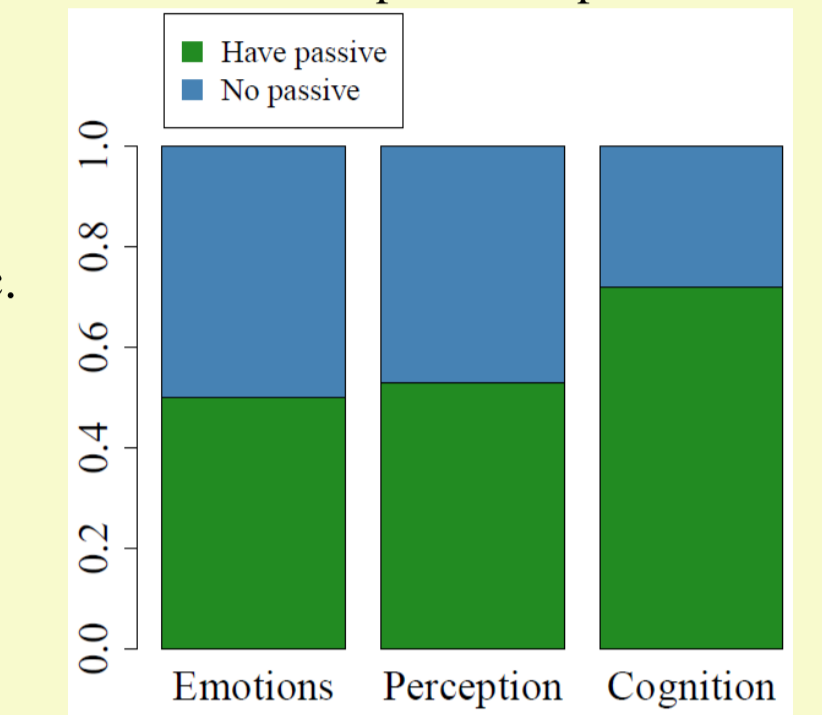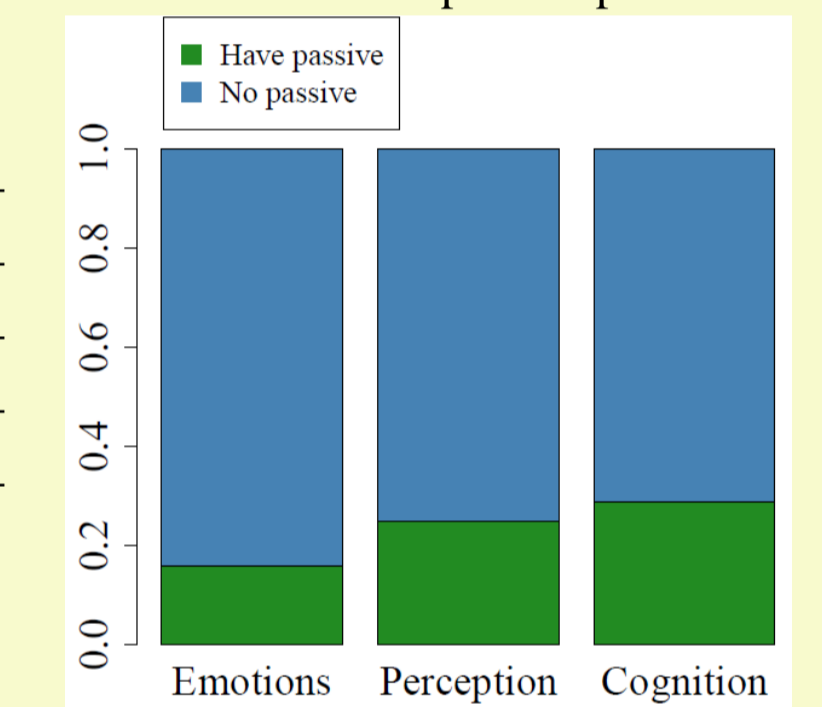

Figure 5. Experiencer-subject transitives and the derivation of passive: perfectives

7. Non-subject Experiencers

Table 3. The encoding of non-subject Experiencers

	Accusative	Dative	Null or Instr	N of verbs
Emotion	0,83	0,12	0,06	144
Perception	0,05	0,32	0,63	63
Cognition	0,02	0,25	0,73	88

Table 4. Derived and underived verbs with dative Experiencers

	Underived		Derived	
Emotion	16	0,94	1	0,06
Perception	11	0,55	9	0,45
Cognition	0	0,00	22	1,00

- Non-subject Experiencers of emotion verbs: accusative.
- Cognition verbs and perception verbs are again more similar to each other.
- Perception verbs: the largest proportion of dative Experiencers.
- The proportion of dative Experiencers of underived verbs decreases: Emotion > Perception > Cognition.
- Possible interpretation: the necessity to mark the contrast in control.

8. Conclusions

- The type frequency distribution of Russian experiential verbs by transitivity, reflexivity, ability to derive reflexive passives, etc., yields the following hierarchy of verb classes:
  Emotions < Perception < Cognition
- Perception and cognition verb classes are more similar to each other than to emotion verbs.
- The basic structuring principle of emotion verbs class is the relation between the basic Stimulus-subject transitive verb and reflexive Experiencer-subject verb (*zlit'* - *zlit'sja*).
- The basic relation for cognition verbs is that of transitive Experiencer-subject verb to passive Stimulus-subject verb (*zabyt'* – *zabyt'sja*). Perception verbs are similar to cognition verbs and also show some predilection for dative Experiencers (*kazat'sja*, *slyšit'sja*).