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Verbs of opening: a cross-linguistic study

Egor Kashkin (RLI RAS) egorka1988@gmail.com

Maria Sidorova (MSU / IL RAS) b.originative@gmail.com

Daria Zhornik (MSU / IL RAS) daria.zhornik@yandex.ru

Research topic

- Verbs of opening = creating access to some space or to some object by removing a barrier ('open', 'unlock', 'uncover' etc.).
- Literal uses.
- Metaphors.
- Some theoretical implications.

Previous studies

- [Bowerman, Choi 2001; Bowerman 2005]: some data on English and Korean; focus on how English-speaking children use the verb *open*.
- [Vinogradova et al. 2017; Kashkin et al. 2018]: a typological study; focus on verbs of closing.

Language sample

- 12 languages:
 - ✓ Germanic (English, German, Swedish)
 - ✓ Romance (French)
 - ✓ Slavic (Polish, Russian)
 - ✓ Uralic (Hill Mari, Komi, Moksha, Udmurt, Western Khanty)
 - ✓ Altaic (Yakut)
- Convenience sample [Bakker 2010: 4; Song 2018: 87–88].
- Reliable first-hand data.
- Lack of data for lexical typology in secondary sources => problems with very large samples.
- Anyway, a list of typological parameters that can be checked in other languages.

Methodology

- Frame-based approach to lexical typology [Rakhilina, Reznikova 2013, 2016; Koptjevskaja-Tamm (ed.) 2015].
- Analysis of collocations as the key procedure of highlighting semantic oppositions.
- Elicitation: fieldwork with Uralic and Altaic, speakers available for other languages.
- Dictionaries, corpora (and Google) where available.

Literal uses: frames

Object types:

- parts of a building (door, window);
- containers (bottle, pan / pot, suitcase);
- body parts (eyes, mouth, ears);
- mechanisms (tap);
- folding objects (newspaper, umbrella, camp-chair);
- flowers.

Additional parameters:

- +/- locking device (door, gate, suitcase);
- living entities & intact objects ('dissect');
- opening for visual perception;
- width.

Literal uses: containers

- A container tightly closed with a cork etc.

Polish

Odkorkował butelkę najlepszego wina, jakim akurat dzisiejszego wieczoru dysponował.

‘He has opened a bottle of the best wine, that he had this evening’.

[Google]

- Cf. also Russian *otkuporit’*.

Literal uses: mechanisms

- Russian: only a dominant lexeme possible for mechanisms like a tap. ***otkryt'*** *kran* 'to open a tap' (**raskryt'*, **otvorit'*, ...), cf. ***otkryt'*** *dver'* 'to open a door'.

Literal uses: body parts

- A special verb for opening one's mouth:

Yakut

*min sohujan ajaxpin **attim** / **astim**.*

'I opened my mouth, being surprised'.

*min uhuktan turammın xaraxpin **astim** / ***attim**.*

'I woke up and opened my eyes'

*min āni **astim** / ***attim**.*

'I opened the door'.

- Often special verbs for closing one's eyes, but no such pattern in the domain of opening so far.

Literal uses: visual perception

- Sometimes a special verb which describes removing an obstacle for visual perception (*a dominant verb).

Polish

*Mogę cię zobaczyć bez maski? — wyciągnęła rękę, by **odsłonić** / ***odemknać** mu twarz...*

“‘May I see you without the mask?’ — She reached out to reveal his face’.

Moksha

*son juksəz'ə ruc'an'ənc i **štaftəz'n'ə** / ***panžəz'n'ə** šer'ənzən.*

‘She loosened her shawl and made her hair visible’.

Literal uses: width of sth. being opened

- Yakut: low width – *sägät=*
*ānī **sägättim**.*

‘I **slightly** opened the door’.

*min ānī **kiratik** astim / **sägättim**.*

‘I **slightly** opened the door’.

*min ānī **täläčči** astim / ***sägättim**.*

‘I opened the door **wide**’.

- Russian: high width – *raspaxnut’* and other verbs with the prefix *raz-* / *ras-*
on ***nastež*** / ****slegka raspaxnul*** *dver’* i zašol v komnatu.

‘He **opened** the door **wide** / ***slightly** and entered the room’.

Literal uses: living entities & intact objects

Russian *vskryt'*:

- dead body, chest, abscess, frog;
- ampule, tin, envelope + a lock (only if it jammed or during a theft);
- grave, burial, coal formations.

Literal uses: flowers

- Sometimes a verb of opening can refer to flowers which blossom.
- Cf. Moksha (+ the same root in the noun *pančf* ‘flower’)

Moksha

s'ε šud'ər'kskət' vasts l'is's't' pančfkat, karmas't' pan'žəmə.

‘Instead of this small spring there appeared flowers and began **to blossom**’.

[Moksha field corpus]

Metaphors

- In general, verbs of opening are rich in metaphoric extensions.
- However, the degree to which each single verb is likely to acquire metaphoric meanings differs.
- For example, the Russian verb *raskryt'* ('open up') is often used metaphorically: in a random sample of 1000 examples from the Russian National Corpus 381 examples demonstrate metaphoric uses.
- On the other hand, the Russian verb *otperet'* ('unlock') only has 8 metaphoric uses in a sample of the same size.

Metaphors

- Creating physical access to an entity

Polish

*Trzeba znaleźć sposób, aby **odkorkować** zatkane autostrady.* [Google]

‘It is necessary to find a way to free overloaded highways’.

Russian

***Otkryto** dviženije pojezdov na etom učastke Serpuxovsko-Timir’azevskoj linii.*

[Google]

‘Trains have been launched on this segment of the Serpukhov-Timiryazev line’.

Metaphors

- Creating access to a non-physical entity.

Russian

*On uže sobirals'a prervat' Prokurora, **otkryt'** obman.*

'He was about to interrupt the prosecutor and reveal the deception'.

Polish

*Pambo modlił się do Boga, aby **odkrył** mu prawdę. [Google]*

'Pambo prayed to God that He reveal to him the truth'.

Metaphors

- Discovery.

Russian

*Kolumb **otkryl** Ameriku. [Google]
'Columbus discovered America'.*

- Revealing deviations.

Russian

*Komissii suščestvujut dl'a togo, čtoby **vskryt'** nedostatki v rabote. [Google]
'Committees exist to reveal work fallacies'.*

Metaphors

- Starting an event.

English

*The Captain **opened** the meeting by welcoming and thanking everyone for attending.* [Google]

- Opening an organization.

Swedish

*Internationella Engelska Skolan ska **öppna** två nya skolor.* [Google]
'The International English School will open two new schools'.

Metaphors

- Switching on a mechanism.

French

*...**j'ouvre** la radio et entends le récit d'un communiste français.* [Google]
'I switch on the radio and listen to a story by a French communist'

*Et si les amis de Papa Mburashi <...> l'appelaient pour lui dire **d'ouvrir** la télé pour voir sa fille?* [Google]
'And if the friends of Papa Mburashi <...> called him to tell him to turn on the TV to see his daughter?'

Metaphors

- In some languages, verbs of opening can describe the situation when one's ears return to their normal condition after having been popped.

Moksha

pi'l'ə-nzə

ear-3SG.POSS.PL

panč-s'-t'

open-PST-3PL

'My ears got unblocked (lit.: opened).'

- The same for Polish **odetkać** 'open, unblock'.

Discussion: derivational patterns

- In general: understudied in lexical typology (see [Koch 2014; Marzo, Umbreit 2016] for some discussion + some observations in [Sidorova 2017, 2019] on the domains of TRANSPARENT and DIRTY).
- Often no transparent traces of derivation, cf. English *open*, Hill Mari *pač-aš* (< PU **panče* ~ **pače* 'open' [Starling]).
- Still some variation in morphological structure.

Derivational patterns

- Verbs of closure → verbs of opening.

English

lock – un-lock; cover – un-cover; bar – un-bar etc.

- Verbs of closure ↔ verbs of opening.

Russian

za-kry-t', *pri-kryt'*, *na-kryt'* (closure) – *ot-kry-t'*, *ras-kry-t'*, *vs-kry-t'* (opening).

< *kry-t'*, cognates across Slavic: 'cover', 'hide', 'keep' [ESSJa XIII: 71–72].

- Denominal derivation.

Western Khanty

xūltəmtti 'to open slightly' < *xūl* 'a chink, a slit'.

Derivational patterns

- Semantic oppositions conveyed by prefixes (cf. also [Lopatin, Ulukhanov 2016]; Empty Prefixes database by Janda et al.).

Russian

ras-kryt', *ras-paxnut'*, *ras-tvorit'* – ‘open wide’ about different objects;

ot-kryt', *ot.vorit'*, (**ot-paxnut'*) – ‘open’ (either wide or not).

Cf. distributive uses of *ras-/raz-* : *raz-dvinut'* ‘move sth. apart’, *ras-kidat'* ‘scatter sth.’, *ras-polzt'is'* ‘crawl into different places; spread’.

- A question for typology: verb-framed vs. satellite-framed systems (following [Talmy 1991, 2000]).

Discussion: constructions

- Different verbs of opening highlight different slots of the frame.
- A case study of Russian so far.
- Two verbs as examples: *raspaxnut* 'open wide' and *otperet* 'open, unlock'.

Constructions [FrameNet]

Closure

Definition:

An **Agent** manipulates a **Fastener** to open or close a **Containing object** (e.g. coat, jar). Sometimes an **Enclosed region** or a **Container portal** may be expressed. Since the **Manipulator** is syntactically frame incorporate the **Fastener**.

Mary **CLOSED** her coat with a belt.

Mary **CLOSED** her coat with one hand.

Mary **BUTTONED** her coat .

FEs:

Core:

Agent [Agt]
Semantic Type: Sentient

The Agent opens/closes the Containing-object.
Harry **UNCORKED** the champagne.

Container portal [C_portal]

This FE identifies the active zone of the container that may be expressed as the direct object of the target verb.
We **ZIPPED** the tent flap.

The sentence refers to the closure of the tent, hence is different from sentences where the action involves the manipulation of a fastener, e.g. We unscrewed the lid.

Containing object [Cont_obj]

This FE identifies the item that is closed by the agent with the fastener. Lee **BUTTONED** his coat.

Fastener [Fastener]

This FE identifies the fastener that the agent manipulates.
Marcus **TIED** his shoe with the neon-green shoelaces.

Non-Core:

Beneficiary []

The person for whom the Closure event occurs.

Circumstances []

This FE describes the state of the world (at a particular time and place) which is specifically independent of the Closure event and any of its participants.

Degree [Degr]
Semantic Type: Degree

The degree to which the **Container portal/Containing object** ends up closed.
Why did you only **LACE** it up **partway**?

Depictive []

This FE describes a participant of the state of affairs introduced by the target as being in some state during the action.

Enclosed region [E_region]

This FE identifies the region enclosed by the container-object that is closed.
Harry **BUCKLED** his belt around his ample waist.

Jeremy **BUTTONED** the shirt around her hypothermic body.

Constructions: *raspaxnut* ‘open wide’

- 1000 contexts from RNC
- 119 examples with adverbials denoting wideness (*široko*, *nastež*’ etc.)

My sdvinuli party <...> i široko raspaxnuli okno.

we move.PST.PL desk.PL.ACC and wide open.PST.PL window.ACC

‘We moved the desks together <...> and opened the window wide’. [RNC]

- 4 examples with Instrument (incl. body parts)

Lebedev <...> nogoj raspaxnul dver’ i skryls’a.

Lebedev foot.INS open.PST.SG.M door.ACC and escape.PST.SG.M

‘Lebedev <...> opened the door wide with his foot and escaped’. [RNC]

- Impossible with locking devices (**raspaxnut zamok* – int. ‘to open a lock’).

Constructions: *otperet* ‘open, unlock’

- 1966 contexts from RNC.
- 100 examples with Instrument (incl. body parts).

Ona otperla dver' svoim kl'učom.

she unlock.PST.SG.F door REFL.POSS.INS.SG.M key.INS

‘She unlocked the door with her key’. [RNC]

- 70 examples with locking devices (*zamok* ‘a lock’, *zadvižka* ‘bolt’ etc.).

On otper zamok i vyšel na kryl'co.

he unlock.PST.SG.M lock.ACC and come_out.PST.SG.M to stoop.ACC

‘He opened the lock and came out to the stoop’. [RNC]

- 7 examples with adverbials denoting wideness (fiction up to the beginning of the XX century; rejected by most native speakers).

Tam dveri uže otperty nastež'.

there door.PL already unlock.PTCP.PASS.PL wide

‘The doors are already opened wide there’. [RNC; year: 1826]

Constructions: comparison

- Different slots can be typically expressed:

	<i>raspaxnut</i> 'open wide'	<i>otperet</i> 'unlock'
Expression of instrument	Rare	Often
Object: locking device	Impossible	Often
Expression of wideness	Often	Very rare / impossible

- *otperet*: focus on physical contact with a Patient (which can be a locking device).
- *raspaxnut*: focus on creating some wide free space.

Constructions

- A broader theoretical notion: constructional profile [Kuznetsova 2015; Janda 2016].
- “the set of constructions available to a lexeme” [Kuznetsova 2015: 108].
- Differences and distances between synonyms.
- A possible task for the typology of opening verbs and for lexical typology in general.

Conclusions

- A set of typologically relevant oppositions in literal meanings.
- A set of metaphoric patterns.
- Derivational patterns: variation inside the domain, verb-framed vs. satellite-framed systems.
- Constructions: different constructional profiles possible for different verbs; variation in the slots of a frame highlighted by a particular verb.

Thank you for your attention!