

# TEACHING RUSSIAN REFLEXIVE VERBS TO SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

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Petia D. Alexieva

Ph.D. Slavic Linguistics  
University of Chicago

ESL/EFL Instructor and Curriculum Developer  
DLIELC, Lackland AFB

# Table 1: Most frequent RVs in Russian

Ranking among all Russ verbs	RV	English meaning	RV type	Overall word freq. in Russ
24	okazat'sja <i>pf</i>	'appear/turn out'	Reflexive Only	172
27	javljat'sja <i>ipf</i>	'be, appear'	Reflexive Only	177
30	ostat'sja <i>pf</i>	'be, remain'	Reflexive Only	194
35	kazat'sja <i>ipf</i>	'seem'	Reflexive Only	211
46	naxodit'sja <i>ipf</i>	'be located'	Semantically Irreversible	287
48	ostavat'sja <i>ipf</i>	'be, remain'	Reflexive Only	304
54	vernut'sja <i>pf</i>	'return'	Autocausative	325
60	pojavit'sja <i>pf</i>	'appear'	Reflexive Only	345
62	prijtis' <i>ipf</i>	'have to'	Complex Morpheme	358
63	xotet'sja <i>pf</i>	'want to, feel like'	Impersonal Modal	359
67	bojat'sja <i>ipf</i>	'be afraid'	Reflexive Only	392
70	stanovit'sja <i>ipf</i>	'become'	Reflexive Only	404
75	pytat'sja <i>ipf</i>	'try, attempt'	Semantically Irreversible	423
79	zanimat'sja <i>ipf</i>	'do, occupy o.s. with'	Autocausative	440
112	načat'sja <i>pf</i>	'start'	Decausative	567

Table 1: The 15 most frequently used RVs in Russian according to the *New Frequency Dictionary of Russian* Ljaševska & Šarov 2009  
<http://dict.ruslan.g.ru/freq.php>

# Classification of Reflexive verbs (RVs)

- Geniušiene's 1987 typological classification of RVs applied to Russian by Kalašnikova 2008
- Geniušiene's classification views RVs in all languages as a **system and not as a list of random items, taking into account their morphological, syntactic and semantic properties.**
- Major RV types
  - I. Primary morphological types – derived
    - Subject-Oriented
    - Object-Oriented
    - Impersonal
  - II. Secondary morphological types –no base verb or difference in meaning from base verb that cannot be explained with -ся

## Table 2: Subject-Oriented RVs

Semantic type of RV in Russian	Equivalent in English
True Reflexive: мыться	✓ wash (oneself)
Partitive object: причесаться пудриться	✓ comb (oneself/one's hair) transitive+N: powder o's nose
Autocausative: броситься	✓ throw oneself
Reciprocal: целоваться	kiss (each other)
Absolute: он не целуется	he doesn't kiss
De-accusative: бросаться камнями	throw stones

## Table 3: Object-Oriented RVs

Semantic type of RV in Russian	Equivalent in English
Decausative: проявляться сломаться	✓ show/declare itself intransitive: break (as if by itself)
Emotional decausative: интересоваться беспокоиться	be interested worry
Quasi-passive: посуда бьется	dishes break
Passive: школа строится рабочими	the school is being built by workers
Converse: крыша держится на колоннах	the roof holds on columns
Causative-Reflexive: стричься	get a haircut

## Table 4: Impersonal Modals

Semantic type of RV in Russian	Equivalent in English
Modal Impersonal: мне не спится	<b>I cannot sleep</b>

## Table 5: Secondary morphological types of RVs

Semantic type of RV in Russian	Equivalent in English
Complex morpheme (prefix+RM) истомиться за-/укутаться	✓ reflexive + preposition wear oneself out muffle oneself up
Denominal: толпиться	crowd
Reflexiva tantum: гордиться	✓ pride oneself
Semantically irreversible: пытаться	try, endeavor

## Table 6: Morphological Classes of RVs in NRC and Advanced L2 Learner Data

Morphological Class	Number of Tokens		Percentage of usages	
	NRC	Advanced	NRC	Advanced
Non-reversible	5219	148	52%	48%
Reversible	4412	163	44%	52%
Partially Reversible	369	0	4%	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,000</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>



## Table 7: Non-reversible RVs in the NRC and Advanced Speaker Data

Type of non-reversible RV	Percentage within non-reversible	
	NRC	Advanced
Reflexive only	49%	66%
Semantically irreversible	32%	26%
Complex Morpheme	19%	8%
Total	100%	100%

## Table 8: Reversible RVs in the NRC and Advanced Speaker Data

Type of reversible RV in order of frequency in the NRC	Percentage within reversible	
	NRC	Advanced
Autocausative	30.9 %	40.5%
Decausative	30.1%	14.7%
Emotional Decausative	8.6%	6.1%
Passive	7.5%	13.5%
Metonymical	6.5%	-
Modal Impersonal	4.5%	5.5%
Proper Reflexive	3.4%	3%
Quasi-Passive	2.0	-
Reciprocal	1.2%	9.2%
Absolute	0.4%	3.6%
Minor types	below 2%	below 2%

# TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

RVs classes presented in order of token frequency in the NRC

## - СЯ always verbs (reflexive only)

Бояться 'be afraid' + Род

Гордиться 'be proud' + Тв.

Относиться 'treat' к кому/чему?

Надеяться 'hope' на кого/что?

Смеяться 'laugh' над кем/чем?

Согласиться 'agree' с кем/чем?

Сомневаться 'doubt' в ком/чём?

Заботиться 'look after' о ком/чём?

# СЯ verb ≠ base verb (semantically irreversible RVs)

- Полагаться 'rely on, pin one's hopes on'    полагать 'think, suppose'
- Купаться 'swim for fun'    купать 'bathe'
- Пытаться 'try, endeavor'    пытать 'torture'
- Приняться 'begin to do something'    принять 'accept, take'
- Прощаться 'say goodbye'    прощать 'forgive'
- Собираться 'be about to, decide to do'    собирать 'gather'

# СЯ = Self-movement (autocausative RVs)

Вернуться 'return'

Бросаться 'rush'

Подниматься 'ascend'

Двигаться 'move'

Остановиться 'stop'

Вертеться 'twist, turn'

Качаться 'rock'

Прятаться 'hide'

Кувыркаться 'tumble, do somersaults'

# СЯ = as if by itself; **inanimate subject** (decausative RVs)

The action happens as if by itself. The actual subject/doer of the action is not expressed and often cannot be expressed with the -ся verb

- *Велосипед сломалСЯ. Машина сломалАСЬ*
- *Лекция кончилАСЬ?*
- *Репетиция продолжаетСЯ.*
- *Как пишется это слово?*
- *Как произносится эта фраза?*

## Prefix + Verb + СЯ (complex morpheme RVs)

Приходиться 'have to'

Разходиться 'diverge, go in different directions'

Зачитаться 'become engrossed in reading'

Наестся 'to become full'

Набегаться 'have one's fill of running'

Достучаться 'knock until one is heard'



## СЯ verbs expressing emotion (emotional decausative RVs)

удивляться <i>кому/чему?</i>	Be amazed
интересоваться <i>кем/чем?</i>	Be interested
беспокоиться <i>о ком/чем?</i>	Worry
радоваться <i>чему?</i>	Be glad
злиться <i>на кого?</i>	Be angry
увлекаться <i>кем/чем?</i>	Fancy
успокаиваться	Calm down

**СЯ = Passive (imperfective verbs only)**

Дом строится рабочими.

'The house is being built by the workers.'

# СЯ = part of you (metonymical RVs)

-СЯ incorporates in the verb an object that is perceived as an inalienable possession for the grammatical subject of the sentence

- *Высморкаться* 'blow one's nose'
- *Прищуриться* 'squint one's eyes'
- *Сосредоточиться* 'focus one's attention',
- *Публиковаться* 'get published',
- *Защищаться* 'defend one's thesis'
- *Заправиться* 'refuel one's vehicle'
- *Стираться* 'do one's laundry'
- *Убираться* 'clean, pick up one's things'

## СЯ with a Dative subject (Impersonal Modal RVs)

Богатым живется лучше.

'The rich live better'

Ему не спалось.

'He couldn't sleep'

Мне не гуляется / поется / пляшется.

'I don't feel like walking/singing/dancing'

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