



## Teaching the Semantics of Russian Verbal Prefixes to Non-Native Learners: A Study of za-, iz-, pere-, and vy-

Sadagat Rasulova<sup>1</sup>, Lyudmila Mehti Guliyeva<sup>2</sup>, Namik Tarverdi Abbasov<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1 2 3</sup> Nakhchivan State University, Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan

<sup>1</sup> Senior Lecturer — [sedaqetresulova@ndu.edu.az](mailto:sedaqetresulova@ndu.edu.az) ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6105-1629>

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer — [guliyevalyudmila68@gmail.com](mailto:guliyevalyudmila68@gmail.com) ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2396-5400>

<sup>3</sup> Senior Lecturer — [Namiqabbasov@ndu.edu.az](mailto:Namiqabbasov@ndu.edu.az) ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-2533-9257>

Received: 21 April 2026 | Accepted: 25 June 2026 | Published: 2 July 2026

<https://doi.org/10.69760/egjille.2603017>

**Abstract.** Russian prefixed verbs, in which the prefix functions as a word-forming morpheme, constitute one of the most difficult areas of the language for foreign learners. The difficulty arises from the abundance of verbal prefixes in Russian, the multiplicity of their meanings, and the intricate regularities of syntactic and lexical combinability that govern prefixed verbs and their dependent words. This article presents a systematic analysis of the semantics of four highly productive Russian verbal prefixes — za-, iz-, pere-, and vy- — with the aim of clarifying the range of aspectual, spatial, and lexical meanings each contributes to the base verb, and of proposing a methodological framework for teaching these meanings to non-native learners, particularly Azerbaijani-speaking students. Drawing on the tradition of Russian aspectology and word-formation theory, the study distinguishes the principal meaning types generated by each prefix, illustrates them with contextualized sentence examples, and examines the patterns of case government associated with prefixed verbs. The analysis demonstrates that prefixation is not a mechanical operation but a rule-governed, semantically layered process whose mastery is essential for accurate lexical comprehension, vocabulary expansion, and communicative competence in Russian. The article argues that verbal prefixes should be taught systematically, in unity with the development of learners' speaking and writing skills, rather than as isolated grammatical items, and it offers concrete pedagogical recommendations for the sequenced presentation of prefix semantics in the Russian-as-a-foreign-language classroom.

**Keywords:** Russian verbal prefixes, word formation, verbal aspect, aktionsart, Russian as a foreign language, case government, language pedagogy

### 1. Introduction

Among the many challenges that confront learners of Russian as a foreign language, few are as persistent or as pedagogically demanding as the system of verbal prefixation. Russian possesses some twenty verbal prefixes, and the attachment of a prefix to a base verb performs two simultaneous and interlocking functions: it typically perfectivizes the verb, contributing to the grammatical category of aspect, and it modifies or specifies the verb's lexical meaning, producing a new lexeme with its own

semantic profile and combinatorial requirements. This dual grammatical-lexical character, together with the sheer number of prefixes and the polysemy of each, makes prefixation one of the most difficult areas of Russian for non-native learners to master (Janda, 1986; Cubberley, 2002).

The difficulty is compounded by the fact that a single prefix may generate a wide range of distinct meanings depending on the semantics of the base verb to which it attaches. The prefix *za-*, for example, can indicate motion behind an object, the beginning of an action, the covering of a surface, or an excessive absorbing activity carried out to the subject's detriment — meanings that appear, to the learner, to have little in common. Mastery of the system therefore requires not the memorization of individual prefixed verbs in isolation but an understanding of the meaning types that each prefix systematically contributes, and of the way these types interact with the lexical semantics of base verbs (Švedova, 1980; Townsend, 1975).

Questions of word formation occupy an important place in the teaching of Russian as a foreign language. The correct use of Russian verbal prefixes is essential for the assimilation of vocabulary and the expansion of learners' lexical range; it underpins the development of speaking and writing skills and largely guarantees the normativity of oral and written speech in communication. The present study addresses this pedagogical challenge by undertaking a systematic analysis of four highly productive Russian verbal prefixes — *za-*, *iz-*, *pere-*, and *vy-* — with the twin aims of clarifying the principal meanings each prefix contributes to the base verb and of proposing a methodological framework for teaching these meanings to non-native learners, with particular attention to Azerbaijani-speaking students, for whom the Russian prefixal system has no direct structural equivalent.

In developing a methodology for the study of these prefixes, we have sought to identify their principal meanings in the sentence through concrete examples, and to establish which meanings it is most appropriate to teach under specific instructional conditions and in the context of corresponding exercises designed to illustrate and consolidate the grammatical material. It should be borne in mind that in performing the proposed speech exercises, a range of variants is possible — involving greater or lesser expansion of sentences, the use of the target verbs in different forms of the perfective and imperfective aspects, in different tenses and moods, and the employment of participial and gerundial forms.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

The analysis is grounded in the tradition of Russian aspectology and word-formation theory, which has established that verbal prefixation stands at the intersection of grammar and lexicon. The Academy Grammar of Russian (Švedova, 1980) provides the foundational systematic description of the prefixal system, cataloguing the meanings associated with each prefix and their interaction with base-verb semantics. Within this tradition, prefixes are understood to contribute not only perfective aspect but also a range of aktionsart or "manner-of-action" meanings — ingressive, resultative, distributive, excessive, and others — that specify the temporal and quantitative contours of the situation the verb denotes (Townsend, 1975; Forsyth, 1970).

Cognitive and structural approaches have further illuminated the internal coherence of prefix semantics. Janda (1986), in a foundational cognitive-linguistic study of a set of Russian prefixes, demonstrated that the apparently disparate meanings of a single prefix are not arbitrary but form radial categories organized around spatial prototypes, with more abstract meanings derived from concrete spatial ones through systematic metaphorical extension. On this view, the spatial meaning of *za-*

(motion behind) and its temporal-aspectual meaning (inception) are connected by a coherent conceptual pathway, and this connection can be exploited pedagogically to render the polysemy of prefixes learnable rather than arbitrary (Krongauz, 1998; Endresen et al., 2012).

For the specific context of teaching Russian to Azerbaijani speakers, the contrastive dimension is significant. Azerbaijani, as a Turkic language, expresses many of the spatial and aktionsart meanings encoded by Russian prefixes through entirely different morphosyntactic means — postpositions, auxiliary verbs, and case marking — so that the Russian prefixal system has no direct structural counterpart in the learner's first language (Mammadova, 2002; Gasimova, 1988). This typological distance is the source of much of the difficulty Azerbaijani learners experience, and it makes explicit, contrastively informed instruction especially valuable. The comparative study of Russian and Azerbaijani verbal word formation has a substantial scholarly tradition on which such instruction can draw (Mirzoyev, 1986; Mammadova, 2002).

### 3. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical and pedagogically oriented methodology. For each of the four prefixes under examination, the principal meaning types were identified on the basis of the standard descriptive literature and illustrated with representative prefixed verbs and contextualized sentence examples. Particular attention was given to the patterns of case government associated with prefixed verbs, since the correct use of a prefixed verb requires command not only of its meaning but of the case and prepositional constructions it governs. The examples are drawn from and modeled on the established descriptive and pedagogical literature on Russian verbal prefixation, and are presented in a form suitable for direct classroom use. The analysis proceeds prefix by prefix, and concludes with a synthesis of pedagogical recommendations for the sequenced teaching of prefix semantics.

### 4. The Prefix *za-*

Our observations indicate that the attachment of the prefix *za-* to a base verb yields at least nine distinguishable shades of meaning. First, certain verbs of motion acquire the meaning of movement behind an object or into its depth:

*Автобус с туристами заехал за угол.* — The bus with the tourists drove around the corner.

*Ребята зашли вглубь леса.* — The boys went deep into the forest.

Second, verbs of motion with *za-* may denote an incidental action performed along the way:

*По дороге домой студенты зашли в книжный магазин.* — On the way home the students dropped into the bookshop.

Third, a large group of verbs with *za-* expresses the occupation of a position in space or the extension of an action over the entire surface of an object; in this meaning *za-* verbs are more widely used than in the preceding meanings:

*Город застроен новыми домами.* — The city is built up with new houses.

*Машина забрызгала пешеходов грязью.* — The car splattered the pedestrians with mud.

Fourth, verbs of abstract action — of perception, thought, speech, or feeling — combined with *za-* and the particle *-sya* acquire the meaning of an excessive, absorbing action, often carried out to the subject's own detriment:

*Пассажир зачитался и проехал свою остановку.* — The passenger became so absorbed in reading that he missed his stop.

*Вчера гости засиделись у нас допоздна.* — Yesterday the guests stayed with us until late.

Fifth, a number of *za-* verbs carry the meaning of obtaining or seizing:

*Труд лауреата заслуживает всенародного уважения.* — The laureate's work deserves nationwide respect.

Sixth, verbs of planning and certain verbs of thought and purchase with *za-* convey the sense of performing an action in advance:

*Группа запланировала досрочно сдать экзамены.* — The group planned to take the exams ahead of schedule.

Seventh, a small group of verbs with *za-* acquires the meaning of carrying an action through to its conclusion or result (*zamorozit'*, *zakonspektirovat'*, *zakonservirovat'*). Eighth, certain verbs of attitude toward a person (to praise, to caress, to torment) and the verbs to feed and to give gifts, combined with *za-*, express an excessive action directed at an object:

*Ребёнок замучил мать своими вопросами.* — The child wore out his mother with his questions.

Ninth, a series of *za-* verbs denotes the enclosing or closing of a space:

*Продавец аккуратно завернул покупку.* — The salesperson neatly wrapped the purchase.

The meanings of these verbs can also be clarified by forming word combinations based on government relations. Many *za-* verbs require the accusative case, with or without a preposition, after them: *зайти за дерево* (to go behind a tree), *засыпать землю снегом* (to cover the ground with snow), *закрыть лицо руками* (to cover the face with one's hands).

## 5. The Prefix *iz-*

The prefix *iz-* must be distinguished among the other prefixes that denote direction of action. In most cases, verbs with *iz-* carry the meaning of movement from within or of removal:

*Сын извлёк урок из случившегося.* — The son drew a lesson from what had happened.

A second meaning is that of multidirectional action or the extension of movement in all directions, formed with base verbs such as to ride, to walk, to run, and to climb:

*Летом наша группа изъездила всю страну.* — In the summer our group travelled all over the country.

*Альпинисты излазили все скалы.* — The climbers clambered over all the cliffs.

The largest group comprises verbs denoting marking on a surface (from to write, to draw, to trace), contact with an object and its division into parts (from to beat, to pound, to tear, to cut), and verbs of destruction (from to spend, to expend); with *iz-* these acquire the meaning of the extension of action over the entire surface of an object, or the completeness of an action — to wear out, to cut up, to tear to pieces, to use up:

*Мальчик изорвал рубашку.* — The boy tore his shirt to pieces.

*Костюм совсем износился.* — The suit has worn out completely.

When these verbs are used in case constructions, characteristic government patterns emerge: verb + accusative + genitive with the preposition *из* (*извлечь пулю из раны*, to extract a bullet from a wound); verb + accusative + accusative with the preposition *на* (*израсходовать средства на оборудование*, to spend funds on equipment); and verb + accusative alone (*издать приказ*, to issue an order).

## 6. The Prefix *pere-*

The prefix *pere-* possesses an especially broad range of meanings. First, verbs of motion and verbs denoting displacement in space (to jump, to step, to throw) acquire with *pere-* the meaning of direction of action across an object:

*Переходите улицу осторожно.* — Cross the street carefully.

*Птицы перелетают в тёплые края.* — The birds fly across to warmer regions.

Second, verbs of motion and displacement, together with verbs such as to place, to sit, to lie, and to pour, acquire with *pere-* the shade of meaning of relocation from one place to another:

*Наш сосед переехал в столицу.* — Our neighbour moved to the capital.

*Хозяйка дома переставила вещи в комнате.* — The lady of the house rearranged the things in the room.

Third, a lexically open group of verbs with *pere-* expresses the meaning of a repeated action or of performing an action anew, in a different way:

*Студент хочет перечитать доклад.* — The student wants to re-read the report.

At this point it is useful to translate such words into the learner's native language for illustration, since among these verbs there are some that, besides the indicated meaning, are used in Azerbaijani with a different sense — for instance, *переписать*, which also conveys the meaning *köçürmək* (to copy out).

Fourth — and this presents the greatest difficulty for nationally educated students — verbs denoting the division of an object or the separation of a part from the whole (to cut, to tear, to break, to gnaw, to saw, to chop) acquire with *pere-* the meaning of dividing something into two parts or simply into parts:

*Бревно очень толстое, его трудно перепилить.* — The log is very thick; it is hard to saw through.

Fifth, another lexically open group of verbs with *pere-* carries the meaning of excess, of exceeding the norm in some action:

*Хозяйка пересолила борщ.* — The hostess over-salted the borscht.

*Студенческий отряд перевыполнил план.* — The student brigade overfulfilled the plan.

Sixth, some verbs with *pere-* denote the sequential extension of an action to a series of objects, or indicate the exhaustiveness of an action:

*Студент перечитал много книг.* — The student has read through many books.

*Сестра перемыла всю посуду.* — My sister washed up all the dishes.

Seventh, certain verbs with *pere-* and the particle *-sya* acquire the meaning of reciprocal action:

*Друзья-писатели переписываются вот уже долгие годы.* — The writer-friends have been corresponding for many years now.

Eighth, a further group of verbs with *pere-* can be used with the meaning of surpassing another performer of the action or having an advantage in some action:

*Молодой учёный смог переспорить своего оппонента.* — The young scholar managed to out-argue his opponent.

*Шахматист перехитрил соперника своим ходом.* — The chess player outwitted his opponent with his move.

## 7. The Prefix *vy-*

Finally, we turn to the principal meanings of verbs with the prefix *vy-*. The first and most characteristic meaning is that of movement from within — removal, extraction, or drawing out of something. In this meaning the stress falls on the prefix (*vy-*):

*Путешественники вышли из леса и направились в город.* — The travellers came out of the forest and headed for the town.

*Весной я выпущу эту птицу из клетки на свободу.* — In spring I will release this bird from the cage to freedom.

*Мой друг выздоровел и выписался из больницы.* — My friend recovered and was discharged from the hospital.

The second characteristic meaning of *vy-* is the obtaining of a desired result over an extended period, thanks to the action named in the verbal base. This is a fairly regular and productive model, especially in colloquial speech, and here too the stress falls on the prefix:

*После долгих усилий спортсмен выиграл соревнование.* — After long efforts the athlete won the competition.

*Всё, что он имеет, он выстрадал.* — Everything he has, he won through suffering.

Verbs of this type — *vyplakat'*, *vymolit'*, *vyprosit'*, *vyigrat'*, *vysluzhit'*, *vyzhit'*, *vystradat'*, *vyterpet'*, *vyderzhat'*, *vystoyat'* — share the semantic feature of a result achieved through prolonged, effortful, or patient action, and they are best taught as a coherent group unified by this common meaning.

## 8. Discussion and Pedagogical Recommendations

The foregoing analysis, summarized in Table 1, demonstrates that each of the four prefixes examined generates a structured range of meanings rather than a single fixed value, and that these meanings, though numerous, are neither arbitrary nor unlearnable. They cluster around identifiable spatial and aktionsart prototypes, and they interact in regular ways with the lexical semantics of base verbs.

In teaching the prefixal method of verb formation, it falls to the instructor to select those prefixes and those of their meanings that it is appropriate to study under the specific conditions of the course. In selecting the material and establishing the sequence of its study, the instructor — taking into account the learners' level of preparation, above all their lexical stock and the development of their reading and speech skills — may return repeatedly to the use of verbs with particular prefixes, deepening and consolidating knowledge at each pass. This cyclical, spiral organization is more effective than a single exhaustive presentation, because the polysemy of each prefix is too rich to be assimilated at once.

Table 1. Principal Meanings of the Prefixes *za-*, *iz-*, *pere-*, and *vy-*

Prefix	Principal Meanings	Representative Examples
<b>за-</b>	Motion behind/into; incidental action; covering a surface; excessive absorbing action; acquisition; doing in advance; enclosure/closure	<i>зайти, захватить, засыпать, зачитаться, заработать, запланировать, застегнуть</i>
<b>из-</b>	Motion outward/removal; multidirectional exhaustive motion; action over an entire surface; completeness/wearing out	<i>извлечь, изгнать, изъездить, изрезать, износить, израсходовать</i>
<b>пере-</b>	Motion across; relocation; repetition/redoing; division into parts; excess beyond norm; sequential/exhaustive action; reciprocal action; surpassing another	<i>перейти, переставить, переписать, перерезать, пересолить, перечитать, переписываться, переспорить</i>
<b>вы-</b>	Motion outward/removal/extraction; obtaining a result through sustained action	<i>выйти, вынести, выбросить, вытисаться, выиграть, выстрадать</i>

For learners to grasp fully the meanings of verbal prefixes, they need to command the grammatical structure of Russian at a level that allows them to form word combinations using different parts of speech and to employ such combinations within various communicative units in oral and written form. The systematic linking of prefix meaning to case government is particularly important: because a prefixed verb's meaning is often realized only in combination with a specific case construction, the two should be taught together rather than separately. To develop learners' skills in the correct use of verbs with the prefixes examined, practical lessons should include written and oral exercises on the topic, and comparable tasks should figure in learners' independent work.

For Azerbaijani-speaking learners specifically, the contrastive dimension deserves explicit attention. Because Azerbaijani encodes the relevant spatial and aktionsart meanings through means other than prefixation, learners cannot rely on transfer from their first language and benefit from instruction that makes the structural contrast explicit. Translating selected prefixed verbs and word combinations into Azerbaijani, as illustrated above with *perepisat' / köçürmək*, both clarifies meaning and alerts learners to cases where a single Russian form corresponds to several distinct native-language equivalents.

## 9. Conclusion

This article has presented a systematic analysis of the semantics of four productive Russian verbal prefixes — *za-*, *iz-*, *pere-*, and *vy-* — and has proposed a methodological framework for teaching their meanings to non-native, and specifically Azerbaijani-speaking, learners. The analysis has shown that verbal prefixation in Russian is a rule-governed and semantically layered process: each prefix generates a structured range of spatial, aspectual, and aktionsart meanings that interact systematically with the lexical semantics of base verbs and with patterns of case government. The prefix *za-* was shown to yield at least nine meaning types, *iz-* to cluster around outward motion and exhaustive action, *pere-* to span the widest range from crossing and relocation to repetition, division, excess, reciprocity, and surpassing, and *vy-* to combine outward extraction with the meaning of a result achieved through sustained effort.

The central pedagogical conclusion is that verbal prefixes should be taught not as isolated grammatical items to be memorized one verb at a time, but systematically, in a definite order, and in unity with the development of learners' speaking and writing skills. The presentation of prefix semantics should be organized around coherent meaning types, linked explicitly to case government, sequenced according to learners' preparation, revisited cyclically, and — for Azerbaijani learners —

informed by contrastive comparison with the learner's first language. Approached in this way, the prefixal system, so often experienced as an insurmountable obstacle, becomes a learnable and even orderly domain, mastery of which substantially advances learners' lexical range, grammatical accuracy, and communicative competence in Russian. Further research should extend this analysis to the remaining productive prefixes and should test empirically the effectiveness of the contrastive, meaning-type-based approach advocated here in the Azerbaijani Russian-as-a-foreign-language classroom.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization: S.R.; Methodology: S.R., L.G.; Investigation: S.R., L.G., N.A.; Writing – original draft: S.R.; Writing – review & editing: S.R., L.G., N.A.

## References

- Barykina, A. N., Dobrovolskaya, V. V., & Merzon, S. N. (1989). *Izuchenie glagolnykh pristavok* [The study of verbal prefixes]. *Russkij Yazyk*.
- Cubberley, P. (2002). *Russian: A linguistic introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Endresen, A., Janda, L. A., Kuznetsova, J., Lyashevskaya, O., Makarova, A., Nessel, T., & Sokolova, S. (2012). Russian "purely aspectual" prefixes: Not so "empty" after all? *Scando-Slavica*, 58(2), 231–291.
- Forsyth, J. (1970). *A grammar of aspect: Usage and meaning in the Russian verb*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gasimova, R. G. (1988). O semanticheskoy sootnositelnosti prefiksialnykh glagolov russkogo yazyka v sopostavlenii s azerbajdzhanskimi glagolami [On the semantic correlation of prefixed verbs in Russian compared with Azerbaijani verbs]. In *Problemy sistemnoj organizatsii yazyka* (pp. 71–78). Mutardzhim.
- Janda, L. A. (1986). A semantic analysis of the Russian verbal prefixes *za-*, *pere-*, *do-*, and *ot-*. *Otto Sagner*.
- Janda, L. A., & Clancy, S. J. (2002). *The case book for Russian*. Slavica.
- Krongauz, M. A. (1998). *Pristavki i glagoly v russkom yazyke: Semanticheskaya grammatika* [Prefixes and verbs in Russian: A semantic grammar]. *Yazyki Russkoj Kultury*.
- Mammadova, E. S. (2002). Slovoobrazovatel'naya sistema glagola v russkom i azerbajdzhanskom yazykakh [The word-formation system of the verb in Russian and Azerbaijani]. *Adiloglu*.
- Mirzoyev, R. S. (1986). *Russkoe slovoobrazovanie* [Russian word formation]. *Maarif*.
- Nessel, T. (2013). *How Russian came to be the way it is: A student's guide to the history of the Russian language*. Slavica.
- Švedova, N. Yu. (Ed.). (1980). *Russkaya grammatika* [Russian grammar] (Vol. 1). *Nauka*.

- Sokolova, S., Lyashevskaya, O., & Janda, L. A. (2012). The locative alternation and the Russian "empty" prefixes: A case study of the verb *gruzit'* "load." In D. Divjak & S. Th. Gries (Eds.), *Frequency effects in language representation* (pp. 51–86). De Gruyter Mouton.
- Townsend, C. E. (1975). *Russian word-formation*. Slavica.
- Vinogradov, V. V. (1972). *Russkij yazyk: Grammaticheskoe uchenie o slove* [The Russian language: A grammatical study of the word] (2nd ed.). Vysshaya Shkola.

Received: 21 April 2026 | Accepted: 25 June 2026 | Published: 2 July 2026