



**Current issues
of the Russian language teaching
XIV**

**Simona Koryčánková,
Anastasija Sokolova (eds.)**

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Edited by: doc. PhDr. Mgr. Simona Koryčánková, Ph.D.,
Mgr. Anastasija Sokolova, Ph.D.

Reviewed by: Elena Podshivalova (Udmurt State University),
Irina Votyakova (University of Granada)

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CONTENTS

METHODOLOGY ISSUES	5
A Reading-Book in Russian Literature: The Text Preparation and the First Opinion of its Use	6
<i>Josef Dohnal</i>	
Poetic Text Of Vasily Shukshin – The Red Guelder Rose In Russian As A Foreign Language Class.....	13
<i>Marianna Figedyová</i>	
Language Games in Teaching Russian as a Foreign Language	21
<i>Olga Iermachkova Katarína Chválková</i>	
Specificity of Language Material Selection for Introduction of Russian Imperative Mood in “Russian as a Foreign Language” Classes.....	30
<i>Elena Kolosova</i>	
Poetic Texts in Teaching of Russian on B1 Level (On the Example of Working with Vocabulary Denoting Perception in the Poems of O. Březina and V. S. Solovyov).....	39
<i>Simona Koryčánková</i>	
Speaking Accuracy of Russian Language Learners in Czech Lower Secondary Schools.....	46
<i>Janina Krejčí</i>	
Use of Digital Technologies in Russian Language Teaching	54
<i>Miroslav Půža</i>	
Integrating Poetry into the Foreign Language Classroom from the Point of View of Second Language Acquisition	62
<i>Tatiana Savchenko</i>	
Verbal Aspect in Teaching Russian as a Foreign Language.....	67
<i>Liudmila Valova</i>	
ISSUES OF LINGUISTICS	76
Metaphoric Representation of the Concept “Creative Process” in V. Nabokov’s Novel “The Gift”	77
<i>Yuliya Golovnyova Albina Novikova</i>	
Polyprefixal Verbs of Silence in Russian and Polish	86
<i>Tatiana Kopylova Liliia Kilina</i>	
Images of Sound in Original and Translated Poems by Boris Pasternak.....	94
<i>Larisa Kryukova Anna Khiznichenko</i>	

The Structure of Professional Knowledge and Construction of Terminological Dictionaries	104
<i>Anna Glogowska</i>	
<i>Piotr Michalowski</i>	
Features of Word Formation in Contemporary Mass Media Texts (In Russian and Croatian Language)	112
<i>Marina Radčenko</i>	
The Language Component of The Film “Serf” as a Reflection of the Linguistic Features of Modern Russian Colloquial Speech (Russian as a Foreign Language)	120
<i>Evgeniya Rubtsova</i>	
<i>Tatiana Romanova</i>	
Linguacultural Dominants in Modern Russian Media Word Creation.....	128
<i>Nadezhda Samylicheva</i>	
Neuter Gender Diminutive Suffixes in Russian in Comparison to Czech	137
<i>Anastasija Sokolova</i>	
<i>Kateřina Strachotová</i>	
The syntactic functioning of the infinitive in the Russian and Czech languages.....	145
<i>Oxana Truhlarova</i>	
ISSUES OF LITERARY SCIENCE	152
Fact and Allegory: Two Poles in The Representation of War (on the Example of “War’s Unwomanly Face” by S. Alexievich and “The Cursed and The Slain” by V. Astafiev)	153
<i>Olga Gubskaya</i>	
<i>Olga Jilevich</i>	
The Space of Light and Darkness in the Context of the Creative History of M.A. Bulgakov’s Novel the Master and Margarita	163
<i>Elena Kolysheva</i>	
Thoughts on Boundaries in the Russian Linguistic Consciousness: Background and Traditions.....	174
<i>Maria Milovanova</i>	
<i>Alexandra Matrusova</i>	
Comparison of Tongue Twisters in Czech and Russian Languages	182
<i>Lenka Rozboudová</i>	
<i>Evgeniia Korneeva</i>	
Formulations of Wishes in the Traditional Russian Folklore and in the Internet Communication.....	190
<i>Oleh Tyshchenko</i>	

POLYPREFIXAL VERBS OF SILENCE IN RUSSIAN AND POLISH

Tatiana Kopylova
Liliia Kilina

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Abstract

This article describes Russian and Polish polyprefixation on the material of the group of verbs of silence. The analysis of historical and modern dictionaries combined with the functional-analytic approach to the text enable us to identify the hall marks of this language phenomenon in the Russian and Polish languages, to identify the most productive secondary prefixes and the specifics of their functioning.

Key terms

polyprefixation, verbs, silence, the Russian language, the Polish language, functioning

Introduction

The verbal polyfixation is a frequent research subject in modern linguistics since this phenomenon is inherent to many linguocultures, including Slavic ones (Čelakovský, 1853; Venediktov, 1955; Lekov, 1958). The polyfixation development chronologically coincides with the process of formation of the verb aspect as a category in Russian and Polish (Belich, 1962); it is a special way of semantic enrichment of a verb (Vendina, 2002; Fil, 2011). This work studies the functioning of the polyfixal verbs of the silence group. The idea of silence has a well-developed representation in Slavic cultures that has evolved for centuries (Volokhina, 1993; Koroleva, 2003; Royzenson, 1967, 1970). So, as early as in the Old Russian language the linguistic phenomenon of polyfixation creates a variety of derivatives with new or amended meanings based on the primary unit of *молчати* ('to be silent'): *помолчавати* ('to keep silent for a while'), *помолчати* [1] ('to keep silent for a while', 'to keep silent, to keep to oneself, to pass over in silence', 'to become silent, to quiet', 'to calm down, to stop moving', 'to stop talking to smb. '), *помолчати* [2] ('to go silent, to quiet down'), *помолкнути* ('to keep to oneself, to say no more', 'to keep silent, to be silent for a while', 'to calm down, to quieten, to put a stop to smth. '), *промолчати* ('to keep silent'), *замолчати* ('to cease talking, to say no more', 'to control oneself, to remain silent, to keep to oneself'), *смолчати* ('to take no notice of').

This research aims to find out what meanings of the action not to speak, to keep silent can be expressed by means of secondary prefixes in the Russian and Polish languages through the use of the functional-analytic approach to the text.

Polyfixal Verbs in the Russian Language

In modern Russian the derivational paradigm of the verb *молчать* [to be silent] is represented by the following units: *промолчать* [to keep silent], *смолчать* [to remain silent], *помолчать* [to be silent for a while], *умолчать* [to keep to oneself], *замолчать* [to say no more], *намолчатся* [to have been silent long enough], *отмолчатся* [to take refuge in silence]. The verbs *отмолчатся*, *умолчать* and *замолчать* have their aspectual pairs – *отмалчиваться*, *умалчивать*, *замалчивать* correspondingly. All these verbs indicate various nuances in the communicative behavior of a silent person.

The unit *промолчать* can designate silence of both the speaker and the listener. The component of the meaning 'not to answer, to say nothing' characterizes the communicative behavior of the listener while silence replaces the verbal reaction expected from him. It is the mindfulness of the choice of the verb *промолчать* standing for the whole conversational turn that should be noted

in this case: «я, разумеется, промолчал», «(он) что-то почувал во взгляде и в голосе своей собеседницы, что-то понял и промолчал»³.

The communicators (both an addresser and an addressee) consider *промолчать* as an opportunity to escape from an impolite, rude, or uncomfortable behavior of their interlocutor that may violate norms, moral and ethical standards adopted by a particular society.

(1) *Глухой? окончательно выпрямляясь, повторил ассистент. Андрей опять промолчал. Ассистент был не прав по всем понятиям территория здесь была чужая* (Виктор Пелевин. Желтая стрела).

The unit *не промолчать* [not to keep silent] in the Russian communicative culture is assessed by mother-tongue speakers as some demonstrative line of conduct that violates established norms and causes discomfort.

(2) *Стас снова не промолчал, тут же пробормотал: «Ой, сорвалось, я нечаянно» — и втянул голову в плечи, словно ожидал удара* (А. Макеев, Н. Леонов. Эхо дефолта).

As a rule, improper and impolite behavior caused by the fact that the communicant has not kept silent triggers a negative feedback response. The following contexts demonstrate the commonly-accepted nature of the unit *промолчать* as a norm: «*все промолчали, а он один...*», «*другой промолчал бы, а ты...*».

The use of the unit *промолчать* describes a speaker when he wants to hide his true intentions, motives, thoughts. Unlike the silence of an addressee, the silence of an addresser is initiated. In this case a communication simply does not take place or the true intention is hidden, replaced by the false one.

(3) *Чуть не сорвалось с языка, что тоска по Лиде смягчится со временем, но разумно промолчал, а вслух повторил: Нельзя тебе одному быть!* (Д. Рубина. Окна).

The communicative behavior characterized by means of the unit *промолчать* is quite adequately interpreted by the interlocutor. The initiator of silence is a priori sure that he will be understood.

(4) *Саша промолчал – так, чтоб Матвей понял, что он ждал иного ответа* (З. Прилепин. Санька).

The unit *смолчать* has a close meaning to *промолчать*. Their use in contexts may define them as interchangeable synonyms. Basically, we can talk about complete synonymy when these units are used in their common meaning ‘not to answer, to say nothing’. However, as it has been shown by the contextual analysis, the unit *смолчать* has its own specific connotation, namely: to avoid a negative response, not to respond to resentment, insult, or criticism, to refrain from a dispute or a conflict dialogue. Silent behavior interpretation marked as *смолчать* also indicates the restraint, the ability to keep one’s head, to control emotions in the Russian communicative behavior.

(5) *Павел Алексеевич мотал головой, жмурился, старался смолчать: безумец, святой безумец, бритвенного тазика не хватает...* (Людмила Улицкая. Казус Кукоцкого).

Thus, the unit *промолчать* has a more general meaning as against the unit *смолчать*. The frequency of use of the mentioned above verbs proves it. The National Corps of the Russian Language records 2059 contexts with the word forms of *промолчать* and only 354 ones with the word forms of *смолчать*. A stylistic factor matters here as well: *смолчать* is mostly perceived as conversational.

The unit *помолчать* can be considered as an antonym to the verb *промолчать*. Derivatives of the verb *молчать* narrow their meaning influenced by the meaning of their prefixes.

The prefix PO + impf. – ‘a short-term action lasting for a certain period of time’

The prefix PRO + impf. – ‘a long-term action lasting for a certain period of time’

(6) *Мысль, которая открылась мне в это мгновение, так меня поразила, что я весь остаток вечера промолчал...* (Фазиль Искандер. Письмо).

³ All examples are available at: <http://ruscorpora.ru/new/search-main.html>.

(7) *Лизавета секунду помолчала и заметалась по квартире* (Елизавета Козырева. Дамская охота).

The verb **отмолчаться** / **отмалчиваться** has a meaning 'to evade an answer, to get rid of something by remaining silent' which can be specified or expanded contextually. Like the verbs *смолчать* and *промолчать* it indicates the subject's control over his speech activity and records the following communicative actions in the language:

(8) *Эффект, впрочем, не был оглушительным: Коломнин, боясь ее обидеть, отмолчался.* (Семен Данилюк. Бизнес-класс).

However, unlike other verbs, the unit *отмолчаться* does not determine a separate communicative action, but rather several ones which are natural to the communicative behavior of the subject as a whole. So, it defines a characteristic communicative reaction of the subject of communication to a particular stimulus. The context in this case often put emphasis on the duration of the period (an era, time, an age period, a temporary event).

Both the forced silence over a long period of time that leads to a great desire for communication, and the voluntary silence as a targeted state are implemented with help of the verb **намолчаться**. The very moment of transition from speaking to silence is indicated by the unit **замолчать** in the Russian language.

There are units with the same meaning in the Russian language: *смолкнуть* [to grow silent ('to stop ringing or to stop talking')], *замолкнуть* [to cease speaking ('to stop talking, to go quiet')], *умолкнуть* [to become silent ('the same meaning as *замолкнуть*')], which are characterized by the less frequent use in speech. All of them mark both the moment the person stops speaking and the onset of silence. Despite the fact that these units are not labelled as bookish in dictionaries, the statistics of the National Corps of the Russian Language highlights their functioning predominantly in belles-lettres (436 word forms (86.85%) were recorded in belles-lettres texts, 45 word forms (8.96%) in publicist writings).

(9) *Он выждал некоторое время, зная, что никакою силой нельзя заставить умолкнуть толпу, пока она не выдохнет всё, что накопилось у неё внутри, и не смолкнет сама. И когда этот момент наступил, прокуратор выбросил вверх правую руку, и последний шум сдуло с толпы. Тогда Пилат набрал, сколько мог, горячего воздуха в грудь и закричал, и сорванный его голос понесло над тысячами голов: Именем кесаря императора!* (М. А. Булгаков. Мастер и Маргарита).

The subgroup of verbs that realize the idea of a deliberate silence – *промолчать*, *умолчать*, *замолчать* – deserves our special attention. Intentional silence as a special kind of silence is proved by the fact that the verbs *умолчать* and *замолчать* have their aspectual pairs – *умалчивать* and *замалчивать* correspondingly. Intentional silence is named as *умолчание* [passing over in silence] and *замалчивание* [suppression] in the Russian linguistic culture.

Modern dictionaries define *умолчать* as 'not to say about smb./smth., to pass smth. by in silence' || 'not to say about smb./ smth. on purpose wishing to hide, to conceal smth.'. The unit *замолчать* has a similar interpretation: 'to conceal smth. in deliberate silence, not to let know smth.' (Evgenyeva, 1999). The Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language emphasizes the purposefulness of this speech action: *умолчать* – 'to keep to oneself not to say about smb., smth., to pass smth. over in silence (usually wishing to conceal smth. pursuing some goals)' (Kuznetsov, 1998). The Explanatory Dictionary of the Modern Russian Language divides *умолчание* as 'deliberate silence' from *замалчивание* as 'premeditated silence, i.e. aforethought, intentional one (usually about something bad)' (Ozhegov, 1999). Thus, the unit *замолчать* acquires a connotation from the unit of a purposely 'malicious intent'. The lexical item *умолчать* is associated with speech or its absence, 'not to say', whereas the lexical item *замолчать* is attributed to information, knowledge, 'prevent smb. from knowing smth.'.

The studied contexts enable us to speak about the verbs *умолчать* and *замолчать* as different speech actions.

Умолчание is always related to speech, speaking. It unfolds against the background of speaking. Contextual synonyms provide means for specifying the unit's meaning: a hint, an understatement, a failure to tell all.

(10) *Рассказ полон намеков и недоговоренностей. Остается впечатление, что автор стремился не столько сообщить нечто существенное, сколько умолчать о чем-то главном* (Э. Герштейн. Надежда Яковлевна).

The use of the units *умолчать / умалчивать, умолчание* is always associated with incompleteness of the provided (expressed) information. Partial understatement or a failure to tell all also stipulate the use of the further going indefinite object (о чем-то, о кое-чем, о кое-каком) and some lexical units such as *частично, единственно, только*.

(11) *Список, который иному хватит на целый том мемуаров и интервью, Миша скромно умолчал, не сделав друзей отца своими покровителями* (Григорий Горин. Иронические мемуары).

Умолчание does not have only a negative connotation. It might be just preferable to speaking.

(12) *Кстати, сам Вадим Васильевич в своих уникальных воспоминаниях тоже ведь кое о чем умолчал (и правильно сделал!)* (Владлен Давыдов. Театр моей мечты).

We encounter a different situation when analyzing the functioning of the units *замолчать / замалчивать*, which appear as antonyms of speaking in the text. This is also proved by the contextual synonyms that have been recorded during this research: *не говорить, не сообщать, утаивать, игнорировать, скрывать, не замечать, не произносить вслух, не признаваться самому себе*. The contextual analysis expands the meaning of this unit and separates out the following components of it: 'not to speak', 'not to inform', 'not to admit to oneself', 'not to express in sound', 'to conceal, to hold back', 'to ignore, to pass over, to take no notice of', 'to hide', 'to keep in secret', 'to take no notice of'.

Замалчивание can be either intentional or unintentional.

(13) *А роман Достоевского «Бесы» нужно не замалчивать, а изучать, потому что это – предупреждение о китайской культурной революции* (М. Л. Гаспаров. Записи и выписки).

(14) *Западноевропейская историография отчасти по неведению, отчасти умышленно замалчивала Ушакова* (Е. В. Тарле. Адмирал Ушаков на Средиземном море).

It is of interest to note the case governed by this verb.

Замалчивание + what? / whom?

An object is a concrete, less often abstract noun, an adjective or a participle acting as a noun. An object can be either inanimate or animate. The frequency of use of animated objects is 29% of the total recorded number.

(15) *Ведь в Советском Союзе не больно-то распространялись о звездах русской эмиграции, их попросту замалчивали, будто их и не было* (А. Е. Рекемчук. Мамонты).

Intentional silence in Russian linguoculture can be also expressed with help of the unit ***промолчать*** meaning an avoidance of an answer, unwillingness to speak, an attempt to hold back, to conceal information.

(16) *И как вы думаете, стоит вам ходить туда после этого? Я промолчал. Он пожал плечами, повернулся и ушёл. Ничего так и не было названо своими именами, а я между тем твёрдо знал: Ольгина чудесная находка – не кто иной, как мой отец* (Вера Белоусова. Второй выстрел).

As we see, the component expressed as 'to conceal intentionally', 'to hold back information', 'to pass over in silence', which characterizes the key representative lexical item of silence in many languages, becomes an independent language expression in Russian.

Polyprefixal Verbs in the Polish Language

In Polish the key lexeme *milczeć* has a close meaning to the Russian verb ‘to keep off the subject, not to respond to anything, not to protest against anything’ (Polish language dictionary).

(17) *Sekret jest jej naturą, istnieje tylko po to, żeby milczeć, i dlatego, że milczy* (Stanisław Mrożek. *Jak zostałem filmowcem*)⁴.

Despite the fact that a dictionary definition, at first glance, lacks the component ‘to conceal, to hold back’, it can be said that the situation when they keep off some question inherently implies *умалчивание* or *замалчивание*. The confirmation of this said is found in the Polish Dictionary by Witold Doroszewski (50th–60th of the 20th century), which describes one of the meanings of this verb as follows: *milczeć* as ‘to keep off the subject, to hold confidential, to keep secret’ (Doroszewski, 1958-1969). It is this component of meaning that is revealed in the following contexts:

(18) *Zdradziłem tajemnicę jaskiń na Jaszczurze, odebrawszy od nich przysięgę, której siła wzmocniona została przemieszaniem krwi z nakłutych igłą palców, że będą milczeć* (Ewa Białołęcka. *Tkacz iluzji*).

(19) *Bałwan byłem. Regis, wydaje się, domyślał się prawdy. Ale milczał. Milczał do chwili, gdy nie mógł już dłużej milczeć* (Andrzej Sapkowski. *Chrzest ognia*).

If the first example is, indeed, about non-disclosure of secrets, then silence in the second one indicates unwillingness to share information, and both examples more closely correspond to the Russian verbs *умолчать* / *умалчивать* (see above). Besides, the situation of information hiding is well-established in the phrase *historia milczy* (lit.: the history is silent) which corresponds to the Russian phrase *история умалчивает*:

(20) *Moje kontakty z profesorami były znacznie bardziej stresujące i z reguły ograniczały się do wpisywania przez nich do mojego indeksu ocen, o których niech historia milczy* (Andrzej Górny. *Jadowite frukta*. *Słowo Polskie Gazeta Wrocławska* 2005-01-14).

As a rule, it is a certain topic that can be passed over in silence. If such is the case, the following phraseological unit *milczeć na temat* (lit. to keep silent on the subject) and its antonym *powiedzieć na temat* (lit. to speak out on the subject) is often used in the Polish language. Contexts containing the mentioned above Polish phraseological unit usually record the situation that implies absence of any statement or any message in general, for example:

(21) *Lecz są sprawy, których – myśli – nie warto rozgrzebywać. Zresztą taki telefon miała tylko raz. Dlatego woli milczeć na temat tamtej rozmowy* (Paweł Smoleński. *Izrael już nie frunie*).

(22) *IBM milczy na temat środków przeznaczonych na badania, ale dziennikarzom udało się ustalić, że może być to kwota porównywalna z wcześniejszym wsparciem dla producenta systemu operacyjnego Linux* (Tomasz Teluk. *E-biznes*. *Nowa gospodarka*).

The verb component in the phraseological unit can be replaced by the noun *milczenie* (in Russ.: *молчание*). If such is the case in the Russian language, then the noun *замалчивание* is more suitable:

(23) *Natrafiamy tutaj na dwa momenty usprawiedliwiający zajęcie takiej właśnie, a nie innej postawy badawczej: logicznie uporządkowany czyn umierania i niemal zupełne milczenie na temat jego znaczenia czy sensu* (Józef Tischner. *Świat ludzkiej nadziei: wybór szkiców filozoficznych* 1966-1975).

Zmilczeć meaning ‘to leave something unsaid consciously’ is another Polish verb which is typically used to describe intentional silence.

Despite the fact that this verb is conventionally listed in the Russian-Polish translation dictionaries as corresponding to the Russian verb *смолчать*, it should be noted that *zmilczeć*, based upon the further given descriptions of its meanings, corresponds more to the following Russian verbs: *промолчать* (‘not to answer, to say nothing’), *умолчать* / *умалчивать* (‘not say about

⁴ All examples are available at: *Narodowy Korpus Języka Polskiego*. Retrieved from URL: <http://nkjp.pl/poliqarp>.

somebody / something intentionally wishing to conceal, to withhold something’), (‘not to say anything about anyone / anything, to bypass something in silence’) and *замолчать / замалчивать* (‘to hide in deliberate silence, not to let anything be known’). The contextual use of the Polish verb *zmilczeć* also demonstrates its correspondence to the Russian verb *промолчать*:

(24) *Mnie i tyle wiedzy dość, że towar to pewnikiem nie lichszy niżli ten, którym handlowali ostatnio inni. Fabian Pfefferkorn. I Mikołaj Neumarkt. Że o innych zmilczę. – Może i dobrze, że zmilczycie. Za dużo gadamy* (Andrzej Sapkowski. Narrenturm).

If in Russian linguistic culture the partiality – the completeness of the hidden information becomes a relevant criterion for choosing the right unit (*умалчивать / замалчивать*), then in Polish linguoculture these meanings are a component of one unit *zmilczeć*:

(25) *A jeszcze inne rzeczy możnaby powiedzieć, gdzie to już czarno na białym widać, na co to sobie Społeczeństwo pozwala jak myśli, że nikt go nie widzi, ale lepiej to zmilczeć. Milczenie jest złotem.* (Christian Skrzyposzek. Wolna Trybuna).

It should be noted that in the latter case one might use the verb *промолчать* which also denotes a targeted concealment of information in certain contexts.

The idea of intentional silence in Polish can be realized by the unit *przemilczeć* which has a wide range of meanings, including ‘to hide something consciously’, ‘to make no reply to anything’. All of these meanings implement the idea of concealment, information hiding, and some unspoken words. The Russian language redundancy against the Polish one foregrounds the problem of searching for an appropriate unit and increases the role of the context containing this or that representative.

(26) *Po powrocie do domu z trudem panowała nad sobą. Czy przywitać się z Marianem równie serdecznie jak co dzień? Jak on mógł przemilczeć przed nią swoje bywanie w tej obrzydliwej Kolchidzie! Byłoby najlepiej zapytać go ostrożnie, czy dawno tam był. W ten sposób można by go przyłapać na kłamstwie* (Tadeusz Dołęga Mostowicz. Trzecia płeć).

By keeping silence, a person can hide not only some information, but also his feelings and emotions both in Russian and in Polish. In such cases, one uses the verb *przemilczeć* (‘to make no reply to anything’) in Polish, and the verbs *смолчать* and *промолчать* in Russian.

(27) *Z żalem więc przemilczę emocje związane z cesarską wizytą i zajmę państwa uwagę innym wydarzeniem, w którym brałem udział, a mianowicie kolejną imprezą poświęconą integracji europejskiej* (Krzysztof Zanussi. Barbarzyńcy nadchodzą).

Thus, the idea of intentional silence has an autonomous linguistic expression. ‘Completeness / incompleteness’ of the hidden information is more relevant for the Russian language than for the Polish one, which conditions recording of this component of the meaning through separate units in Russian represented as *замалчивание / умалчивание*. The emphasis is on ‘withholding, hiding information’, ‘unwillingness to speak’ in the Polish language. All this leads to a rather complicated picture of correspondence:

<i>Молчать</i>	<i>Milczeć</i>		
<i>Промолчать</i>		<i>Zmilczeć</i>	<i>Przemilczeć</i>
<i>Умолчать</i>	<i>Milczeć</i>	<i>Zmilczeć</i>	<i>Przemilczeć</i>
<i>Замолчать</i>	<i>Milczeć</i>	<i>Zmilczeć</i>	<i>Przemilczeć</i>

Conclusion

Verbal prefixation as a fairly frequent linguistic phenomenon has its own distinctive features in each language. The number of morphemes involved in polyprefixation, functions of secondary prefixes and their semantic diversity are characteristic of both the Russian and the Polish languages. As illustrated by the verbs of the silence group, we see how much various prefixes may elaborate and specify the verb’s central meaning, indicating the moment of speech interruption, the duration of silence,

the subject's control over his communicative activity, avoiding an undesirable answer, withholding information, etc. It has become possible to separate out the most productive secondary prefixes: they are *po-*, *pro-*, *za-*, *y-* in the Russian language; *z-*, *prze-* in the Polish language. If we compare the two Slavic languages with each other, then we can say that there are much more meanings relevant to Russian linguoculture as evidenced by the rich recording of these components through their separate units.

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Contact information

Tatiana Kopylova

Web of Science Researcher ID: N-9286-2014

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5616-8265

Udmurt State University

Institute of Language and Literature

Department of Russian Language, Theoretical and Applied Linguistics

Universitetskaya 1, Izhevsk 462 034

Russia

k_tatiana4@mail.ru

Liliia Kilina

Web of Science Researcher ID: AAT-2419-2020

ORCID ID: D 0000-0001-5001-1822

Udmurt State University

Institute of Language and Literature

Department of Russian Language, Theoretical and Applied Linguistics

Universitetskaya 1, Izhevsk 462 034

Russia

kilin_74@mail.ru