Grammaticalization and Coercion:
The Case of Russian *bez konca**

Vladimir Plungian and Ekaterina Rakhilina

Abstract: The paper discusses the emergent grammaticalization of Russian prepositional phrase *bez konca*, lit. 'without end'. Various corpus data (including specialized corpora of Russian) allow us to isolate several stages of this process, which finally results in a kind of iterative marker. The resulting meaning of (habitual) iterativity is not fully compositional but has well established crosslinguistic counterparts.

В статье на корпусном материале (в том числе с использованием специализированных корпусов) обсуждается проблема грамматикализации русского предложного сочетания *без конца*. Прослеживается процесс его превращения в грамматический маркер и выявляются ограничения на этот процесс. Показано, что возникающее в результате особое значение (хабитуальной) итеративности некомпозиционально, но типологически релевантно и ожидаемо.

1. Introduction

Russian (as well as many other languages) has a considerable array of polysemous markers ambiguous between the expression of duration (if applied to an ongoing process) and iterativity (if applied to any multiply-repeated situation). Consequently, they can be seen as operators, roughly, either extending the boundaries of a process or multiplying occurrences of a single situation. Consider a list of such expressions (not at all exhaustive):

(1) *vsë vremja* 'all the time'; *sploš' i rjadom* 'all over' (lit. ≈ 'entirely and near'); *na každom šagu* 'at every step'; *to i delo* 'over and over again' (lit. ≈ 'that and matter'); *snova i snova* 'again and again'; *tol'ko i delaet, čto...* 'nothing but' (lit. ≈ 'only and does that...'); *to i znaj, čto...* 'exclusively' (lit. ≈ 'that and know that...'); *postojanno* 'constantly'; *vremja ot vremeni* 'from time

to time'; *bespreryvno* 'without breaks'; *beskonečno* 'endlessly'; *bez konca* 'without end', etc.

Most of them semantically originate from the concept of continuous (or even endless) duration, but their subsequent development has resulted in a number of output values belonging to (or closely approaching) the quasi-grammatical domain, so that nearly all of these markers can be regarded as grammaticalized (at least to some extent). As such they build up a sort of continuum along the lexico-grammatical scale. At the same time, they form another scale which could be construed as an aspectual one, with two poles: that of duration and that of plurality. The position of each marker depends on the proportion of plurality vs. duration component in its semantics. However, the values related to plurality tend to be much more prominent and largely prevail.

The types of predicates allowed within the scope of these operators are not obvious either. Along with the prototypical processes like *pull*, which could be easily prolonged, and intrinsic iteratives like *chew*, *cough*, or *jump*, which look quite natural in the context of multiplying operators, less straightforward combinations are attested. For example, some states can be multiplied, while others cannot; some processes can only be multiplied and never extended. Usually, however, both possibilities are available, and the choice depends on the operator. Certain semantic and syntactic aspects of linguistic behavior of these constructions have been already addressed in Letuchiy and Rakhilina 2013. The present paper starts a broader discussion of this quasi-grammatical domain and focuses on the properties of the expression *bez konca V* 'keep V-ing; V and V' (lit. 'V without end') and its closest synonym *beskonečno* 'endlessly'.

2. *Bez konca*: Semantics and Combinability

2.1. Starting Point

Bez konca, despite its seemingly transparent morphosyntactic structure of a simple prepositional phrase, is a very peculiar discourse marker in Russian with a rather sophisticated meaning. On a first approximation, it would be safe to assume that *bez konca* expresses a continuous repetition with a more or less distinct negative assessment. Below is a typical example:

(2) Ja soveršenno ubežden, čto možno pokorit' ljubuju ženščinu, **bez konca fotografiruja** ee.   [S. Dovlatov, Filial, 1988]

'I am strongly convinced that you can conquer any woman, if you **keep taking** photos of her **on and on**'.

Accordingly, its frequency is much higher in the oral subcorpus of the Russian National Corpus (RNC, http://www.ruscorpora.ru, 7.1 wpm) than in the newspapers' subcorpus (2.3 wpm). Interestingly, RNC subcorpus of Russian poetry, which usually reflects the older and more conservative norm, attests quite frequent occurrences of *bez konca*, the same as in the oral one (7.1 wpm). As for the main corpus, which presents both old and new texts, *bez konca* is twice more frequent than in the newspapers (5.5 wpm); the last character can be taken as an average point.[1]

In fact, if viewed more broadly, *bez konca* can formally apply both to nouns and verbs, but these types of uses are very different. Nominal uses, such as *doroga bez konca* 'a road without end', semantically more straightforward, seem to be diachronically primary. Alternatively, verbal uses (which will be our main concern here) display a certain degree of grammaticalization and cannot be regarded as strongly compositional, cf.: *on bez konca opazdyval* 'he was always late' (lit. 'he was late without end').

The original nominal uses concern mostly spatial objects: *roads, seas, forests, deserts, fields, planes*, etc. They express the idea of extension without limitations, and therefore can also refer metaphorically to standard periods of time, like *den'* 'day' or *vesna* 'spring', or somewhat less frequently to names of persistent mental or emotional states, like *užas* 'horror', *terpenie* 'patience', or *toska* 'melancholy'. The important point is that the same meaning is readily transferrable into the verbal domain, applying primarily to the verbs with the semantics of continuity, like 'last' or 'stretch', as in *doroga tjanulas' bez konca* 'the road extended for miles and miles' (lit. 'extended without end') or *spor dlilsja bez konca* 'the debates lasted without end/took ages'. However, as we have already seen, most verbs display derived uses where *bez konca* came to express the meaning of (repeated) plurality instead of simple duration. This effect requires more discussion.

2.2. Duration vs. Repetition

For inherent iteratives (like *ževat'* 'chew'), both values—duration and plurality—easily combine in the context of multiplicative situations (in the sense of Khrakovskij 1997), already containing the idea of unlimited repetition (with a frequent negative connotation), such as *taldyčit'* 'to harp on', *kljančit'* 'beg for', *otnekivat'sja* 'make excuses', etc. In these cases, the meaning of duration is reached due to plural-

---

[1] Of course, these numbers also include older, nongrammaticalized uses of *bez konca*, where this expression is attested in its primary meaning. Its relatively high frequency in the corpus of poetry can be accounted for—at least partially—by this fact. For a more detailed discussion, see below.

ization of single punctual events, so that these two components equally contribute to the semantics of the corresponding constructions.[2]

For momentary events (like *opozdat'* 'be late'), the fact that 'be late' and similar momentary predicates, like *vozniknut'* 'emerge', *ostanovit'sja* 'stop', *najti* 'to find', *upast'* 'fall', etc., are readily used in the context of *bez konca* when imperfectivized and with the meaning of (unlimited) repetition (*opazdyvat'/ostanavlivat'sja ... bez konca* 'to be late/stop ... always/again and again') proves that *bez konca* can modify not only various inherent processes (simple or multiplicative), but also imperfectivized punctual events. This broad combinability points towards a nearly grammatical (and already considerably bleached) marker.

The use of imperfective aspect with *bez konca* is also highly significant here. It is well known that in most cases Russian imperfective forms are ambiguous between duration and plurality obtained through metonymy, as a process vs. a multiple sequence of its punctual end-points: cf. *smotri, mašina ostanavlivaetsja* 'look, the car is stopping' [on-going process] vs. *mašina ostanavlivaetsja na každom svetofore* 'the car stops at every traffic light' [continuous repetition]. Another well-known fact of Russian grammar is that Russian lacks a dedicated marker of habituality. The role of *bez konca* can thus be seen as disambiguating the highly polysemous imperfective form by facilitating the habitual interpretation. In a way, *bez konca* operates here as a lexical (or, better, quasi-grammatical) marker of habituality. Unlike fully grammatical markers, which normally occupy a clear-cut space within their specific semantic domain and have no overt competitioners, quasi-grammatical markers represent a whole family of closely related expressions, conveying subtle lexical nuances of their input meanings. *Bez konca* is in no way an exception. It has strong connections with many other members of the same group (enumerated at the beginning of the article), so that *bez konca* is nearly synonymous in this context to *vsë vremja, večno, postojanno, to i delo, znaj sebe*, and others. Each of them supports the idea of habitual repetition somehow deriving from the original meaning of these expressions. What is really puzzling in the case of *bez konca* is that its very straightforward original semantics of (endless) duration has been suppressed in favor of habituality.

This phenomenon is even more obvious if we consider telic processes. For instance, a sentence like *kartoška bez konca gniët* does not mean 'potatoes are (currently) rotting', it means, roughly, 'potatoes rot all the time' (= 'each time a new portion of potatoes becomes rotten'). Accordingly, *ja bez konca čital* does not mean

---

[2] The same effect may hold for predicates with some other types of original meaning, cf. a potentially ambiguous interpretation of the contexts like *bez konca idët dožd'* lit. 'it is raining without end', which can be construed either as 'it keeps raining' or as 'it is always raining': in other words, the situation remains every moment when the observer checks the state of affairs, either uninterruptedly within one very long period of time, or from time to time within a sequence of smaller occurrences.

that I couldn't stop an actual process of reading, but rather that I either was constantly involved in reading different books or kept reading and rereading several times one and the same text.

2.3. Coercion: Verb >> Operator

The interplay between *bez konca* as a verbal operator and the verb may be more sophisticated, however, especially in what concerns the scope of the operator. For example, verbs like *kusat'sja* 'to bite' or *bodat'sja* 'to butt' display polysemy between abilities and actual iterative situations, so that *sobaka kusajetsja* 'the dog bites' or *korova bodajetsja* 'the cow butts' means, first, that these animals are, so to say, characterized by a certain (typical) activity and, second, that they actually do that now (cf. contexts like *ty čto kusaješ'sja?* ≈ 'why are you biting?'). In both cases, the situation can be viewed as multiple, according to the lexical semantics of the predicate. Nevertheless, *bez konca*, though construed as a marker of habituality, does not select the ability meaning and tends to mark the actional interpretation, which is certainly related to its original semantics 'without end' in a less direct way. Thus, *bez konca kusaetsja* is preferably applicable to repeated situations of observed instances of biting and can hardly denote an ability. The choice here is dependent on the verbal slot of the construction: it can be argued that, in the context of these verbs, *bez konca* acquires an additional component of actuality by coercion. It seems that this is not the only case of coercion, and we shall elaborate on this issue below.

2.4. Coercion: Operator >> Verb

Coercion in the opposite direction, when it is the operator that influences the semantics of the verb (for example, providing an iterative reading for punctual events), is hardly expected in the context of perfective forms (as in **bez konca prygnul*), since they cannot express unlimited repetition. As for the imperfective forms, their semantics may be radically reshaped in the context of *bez konca.* Primarily, this concerns stative predicates. They seem to receive new reading coerced by the semantics of *bez konca* particularly often. This new reading deviates from the original stative meaning and is iterative, in keeping with what most modern constructions express. Thus, *bolet'* 'be ill' yields *bez konca bolel* 'got ill all the time'; *zanjat* 'occupied' yields *bez konca byl zanjat* 'was occupied every time', and so on. Here, *bez konca* acts as a true operator: it "cuts" the homogeneous stative situation into fragments and then presents them all as a sequence of small parts belonging to a single repeated process.

Notice that roughly the same happens with verbs of atelic activities like 'play' or 'cry', which represent homogeneous situations as well. Contrary to possible expectations, in the context of *bez konca* atelic processes also have to be split up and

represented as consisting of some repeated portions: thus, *igraet* 'is playing' yields *bez konca igraet* ≈ 'always plays/plays in every situation' (and not something like 'is playing for a long while').

2.5. Resistance: Unidirectional Motion and Atelic Process

However, the main iterative reading is not always (easily) obtained. Some verbs seem to resist this semantic process. Consider verbs of unidirectional motion: without special pragmatic support, the iterative interpretation remains the least natural one, as in ?*bez konca plyl/letel/šel* 'kept sailing/flying/walking', etc.[3] A better combinability is obtained when the motion itself is iterative: this is possible either with a plural subject (cf. oni *bez konca plyli/leteli/šli* 'they sailed/flew/walked again and again') or, slightly less trivially, with a multidirectional imperfectives (cf. *bez konca plaval/letal/xodil* 'was constantly engaged in (repeated) sailing/flying/walking'). Cf. a typical example:

(3) I **bez konca** šli almazy, brillianty, rozy, solitery vsex vidov i razmerov, kamni iz Indii, Južnoj Afriki, Brazilii i Kongo, kamni beloj, zelënoj, sinej vody, kamni žëltye, oranževye, zelënye, krasnye i sinie...
<div align="center">[A. E. Fersman. Vospominanija o kamne (1940)]</div>

'They **kept coming in and coming in**: diamonds, brilliants, roses, solitaires of all shapes and sizes, jewels from India, South Africa, Brazil, and Congo, jewels of white, green and blue water, yellow, orange, green, red, and blue ones...'

Many atelic processes in general (like *gorit* 'is on [light]' or *svetit* 'shines [the sun]'), as well as stance verbs, are similar to the verbs of unidirectional motion: the pragmatically natural construal of something like ?*bez konca visit/ležit...* ≈ 'keeps hanging/lying' would require specific contextual conditions—most typically, some strongly focused adverbials, as in *bez konca ležit ne na svoëm meste* ≈ 'is always out of place'. Examples of this kind are frequent in the newspaper subcorpus, where we can find *prixoditsja bez konca sidet' v kabinetax* 'you have to sit all the time in the offices', *bez konca stoit v očeredjax* 'spends all time standing in queues', and so on. Actually, this type of use can be accounted for by a context-induced distributive component.

---

[3] It should be noted that some examples of *bez konca* modifying verbs of this type are sporadically attested in older texts, mainly with the basic durative reading, cf.: *Potom videl èti vesennie dni, kogda ja, kazalos', **bez konca plyl** po Dnepru...* 'Seeing later these spring days when I seemed to sail and sail along down the Dnieper...' [Ivan Bunin, Žizn' Arsen'eva, 1927-33]. Modern Russian tends to avoid such uses.

However, some instances of basic durative reading can be found among these verbs as well; as a rule, they represent a clearly obsolescent usage, as in:

(4)   Rešila dat' otdyx glazu i celyj den' provalandalas': dnem xodila po vtorostepennym delam, večerom u menja **bez konca sidela** Ivinskaja.

                    [Lidija Čukovskaja. Polgoda v "Novom mire" (1946–47)]

'I decided to rest my eyes and fiddled away the whole day: the afternoon was spent on some minor affairs, and then Ivinskaja **was round** at my house **all** evening' (lit. ≈ 'sat at my place for hours').

As concerns the stative verbs, they include one particular group of "stable" states like *verit'* 'believe' *nadejat'sja* 'hope', *vladet'* 'own', *znat'* 'know', *zelenet'* 'to be seen as green', etc., which cannot be "split up," because they can hardly be represented as having regular temporal breaks. The more stable the property, the more pertinent this effect is. It explains why numerous stative verbs and especially adjectives (as typical names of stable properties) do not combine with *bez konca*: **bez konca umnyj* 'clever'/*lysyj* 'bald'/*vysokij* 'tall'/*staryj* 'old' are impossible, as contrasted with quite acceptable *bez konca p'jan* 'drunk'/*goloden* 'hungry'/*razdražën* 'angry', and others. It seems that a well-known and largely debatable distinction of "individual-level" vs. "stage-level" predicates (cf. Carlson 1977 and Kratzer 1995, among others) is at work here.

2.6. Coercion: Further Amplifications

Along with temporal nonstability (stage-level property) there is another feature which helps statives to become more action-like. It can be called the observability of the situation. Observability is the most salient characteristics of the "verbs of behavior," like *žemanit'sja* 'simper', *žadničat'* 'be greedy/stingy', *bodrit'sja* 'put on a brave face', etc. (Apresyan 2013). According to Apresyan's definition, these verbs express both states or properties and their visual correlates. Thus, *žemanit'sja* 'simper' presupposes grimaces and specific gestures, the frame of *bodrit'sja* 'put on a brave face' typically includes a bright voice and energetic body movements, etc. *Bez konca* privileges statives which have perceptible manifestations most typically represented by verbs of behavior. Otherwise the combination with statives is not allowed.

Indeed, predicates that are prohibited in the context of *bez konca* are mostly mental: *znat'* 'know', *verit'* 'believe', *nadejat'sja* 'hope', *pomnit'* 'remember'; cognitive activity never has visual correlates. On the contrary, most of the emotional predicates listed in Apresjan 2013 can easily combine with *bez konca*, because the corresponding situations display a behavioral component, as in *bez konca zlit'sja* 'be angry'/*panikovat'* 'fearmonger'/*radovat'sja* 'be glad, rejoice'/*razdražat'sja* 'feel an-

noyed, *chafe'/vosxisčat'sja* 'admire'. The pair of close synonyms *opasat'sja ~ bojat'sja* can be considered a showcase example, since *opasat'sja* is treated as expressing the mental state of a frightened person and *bojat'sja*, as describing the emotional state. Thus, ??*bez konca opasat'sja* is strange, though *bez konca bojat'sja* sounds perfect. However, there are a number of long-lasting emotions not manifested visually, like *gordit'sja* 'be proud', *stydit'sja* 'be ashamed', *prezirat'* 'scorn', *skorbet'* 'mourn' (examples are taken from V. Apresyan's list). In this respect, they are closer to mental states, so their combination with *bez konca* is more than doubtful.

Other prototypical stative verbs also seem to follow this line. For example, **bez konca bedstvovat'* 'live in misery/poverty' sounds odd (no occurrences either in the RNC or on the Internet), because *bedstvovat'* is a longstanding state, difficult to overcome, as compared, for example, with *nužat'sja* 'stand in need', which could be incidental and involves a lack of money rather than general circumstances, so *bez konca nužat'sja* should be considered as a rare but possible situation (two occurrences on the Internet; none in the RNC).

Interestingly, there are cases where *bez konca* can modify a prototypically stative predicate, but which implies some actional interpretation. It can be seen as another result of coercion, occurring in specific pragmatic situations, or representing a regular semantic shift. Here are some illustrations.

It is well known that verbs with the meaning 'want' belong to paradigmatic statives. However, the RNC provides an example of the most general Russian equivalent of English *want, xotet'*, in the context of *bez konca*: *bez konca xotim novoj žizni* 'every time we expect (lit. 'want') some new life'. Pragmatically, this phrase looks quite acceptable in the context of a series of social changes (like revolutions) inspired by the attempts and expectations for a new life. In other words, *xotet'* is possible here, because it acquires the meaning of an activity instead of the internal mental state.

Another illustration concerns states denoting basic physiological abilities, like *videt'* 'see' and *slyšat'* 'hear'. Here, again, *videt'* 'see' in *bez konca vižu* 'I always see' does not refer to a visual capacity but is used in an actional meaning 'to meet somebody' (cf. *ja ego sovsem ne vižu* 'I do not meet him at all') with an obvious potential for being pluralized, cf. the following sentence from the newspaper subcorpus of the RNC:

(5)   Narod vsë vremja slyšit krasivye reči ob ulučšenii ego žizni, o reformax,
      no **bez konca vidit** razodetyx členov pravitel'stva […]

      'People hear all the time beautiful words about how their life will get
      better, about reforms, but **keep seeing** members of the government
      dressed up […]'

Another common interpretation for *bez konca videt'* is based on the phrasal unit *videt' vo sne* 'to see in a dream' and describes regularly repeated (short) dreams rather than originally stative situation.

The same holds for hearing ability: the Russian verb *slyšat'* 'to hear' normally does not combine with *bez konca*, because it denotes a long-lasting state without clearly observable manifestations (*bez konca slyšu cannot be interpreted compositionally). *Slyšat'* occurs in this context only metonymically, as a verb describing the perception of human discourse and oral information. Oral speech is processed in small portions and can be perceived repeatedly, so that this frame suites *bez konca* in a perfect way. Syntactically, it is marked in a specific way: the source of information is usually introduced with the help of the preposition *o* or *pro*, and the theme is expressed by direct object. Thus, *bez konca slyšu o nem* (*pro nego*)/*odno i to že* 'I always hear about him/one and the same thing' is roughly equivalent to 'people always talk about him/the same thing', which is quite far from the original meaning of hearing.

The similar actional meaning is acquired in the context of *bez konca* by the predicate *obvinjat'* 'accuse/blame', especially in the impersonal construction of the type (*ego*) **bez konca obvinjajut** *v*o *lži* lit. 'people [= Ø] blame (him) all the time for telling lies' ≈ 'it is often said by different people that they consider him a liar'. Interestingly, the semantically close passive form *obvinjat'sja* (as in, for example, *on* **obvinjaetsja** *v ubijstve bezoružnyx ljudej* 'he **is accused** of killing unarmed people') denotes a social state of a person accused (by the court or some other official institution) and therefore can hardly combine with *bez konca*.

More generally, the shift from some abstract internal state to an adjacent speech act is a frequent type of coercion, which seems specific to stative and stative-like predicates in the context of *bez konca*: speech acts are normally brief and easily repeated actions. Thus, speech-act interpretation is the only possible one for such sentences as *on* **bez konca vospityval** *vnuka* 'he **kept lecturing** his grandson'; here, the verb *vospityvat'* in its basic meaning 'educate, bring up' is very far from what is susceptible to combine with *bez konca*.

All these examples show how "strong" *bez konca* can be as a semantic operator, requiring the primary meaning of states to be totally reorganized and transformed into a series of actions fitting the pattern of the whole construction. Consequently, the resulting meaning amounts to a special type of (habitual) iterativity that privileges predicates describing situations that can be directly observed and have a negative assessment.

3. *Bez konca* and *beskonečno*: Close but Drifted Apart

We would like to conclude this brief sketch with a comparative analysis of *bez konca* and probably the closest morphological and semantic counterpart to it—the

adverb *beskonečno* 'endlessly'. This pair can be a nice example for courses in lexical or general semantics: it demonstrates how two items, originating from the same source, can evolve independently (though involving cognitively related changes) and in different directions.

Unlike *bez konca, beskonečno* itself is not an iterative operator. Both markers have a durative reading (most probably, diachronically original): it is marginal for *bez konca* but still central for *beskonečno*, as in *bez konca/beskonečno tjanut'sja/dlit'sja* 'last endlessly'; cf. also numerous examples like *Armija ne možet beskonečno bezdejstvovat'* 'Army cannot be always inactive', where *beskonečno* not only seems more natural, but definitely excludes any iterative reading.

Another important property of *beskonečno* is that it combines the semantics of duration with intensivity, clearly observable in such contexts as *beskonečno blagodaren* 'endlessly thankful'. This means that *beskonečno* has its own list of compatible predicates, providing intensive meaning, e.g., for unlimited states and even for perfective participles (unavailable for *bez konca*), cf. *beskonečno cenen* 'valuable', *složen* 'complicated', *ljubim* 'loved', *uveren* 'sure', as well as *beskonečno ustavšij* 'infinitely tired'. As a result, *bez konca* and *beskonečno* may be clearly opposed semantically in one and the same contexts: cf. *beskonečno/bez konca sožaleju* meaning either 'I feel infinitely regretful' or 'I always feel/keep feeling sorry', respectively.

Historically, we can observe that *beskonečno*, starting out from duration, comes to express the same two core meanings that we find in *bez konca*, namely, intensity and repetition, but the order is somehow different. Judging from the RNC, the first derived uses are intensive ones (early 19th-century texts abound in *beskonečno ljubit'* 'love' or *žalet'* 'feel sorry'), and contexts with repetition appear relatively late (around the turn of 19th and 20th centuries). Only after the 1920s, examples like *beskonečno otkašlivalsja* 'kept clearing his throat' or *publika beskonečno vyzyvala ego* 'the audience called him on and on' become frequent. Modern texts retain both uses.

It is noteworthy that the analysis of *bez konca* seemed to suggest that intensivity is better understood as the final point of a semantic change to what was originally a durative marker, because it is more complex that the repetition. However, the case of *beskonečno* proves that the development may be different, with repetition appearing diachronically later that intensivity.

4. *Bez konca* in Parallel Corpus: Nabokov as a Bilingual Autotranslator

One final remark is in order. Observing the English-Russian parallel corpus reveals that Russian translators tend to insert *bez konca* even in cases where a direct lexical counterpart is absent in the English text. It means that the degree of grammaticalization of *bez konca* is relatively high in Russian: its use has often become obligatory when the situation itself is presented as excessively long or repeated. For example:

(6) a. The Baudelaire orphans **blinked** in the darkness, straining their eyes to see as much as possible.

[Lemony Snicket. The Ersatz Elevator (2001)]

   b. Naprjagaja zrenie, Bodlery **bez konca migali**, pytajas' xot' čto-nibud' rassmotret' v polut'me.   [trans. by A. Staviskaja, (2005)]

(7) a. It can be compared to the uncontrollable flick of an insomniac's tongue **checking** a jagged tooth in the night of his mouth and bruising itself in doing so but still persevering.

[Vladimir Nabokov. Speak, memory (1954–66)]

   b. Tak, v bessonnuju noč', razdražaeš' nežnyj končik jazyka, **bez konca proverjaja** ostrju gran' slomavšegosja zuba—i ne xočeš', a vse uporstvueš'.   [trans. by S. Il'jin (1999)]

In fact, without *bez konca*, added by Russian translators (Staviskaja and Il'jin, respectively), both sentences would sound much less natural: it can be said that the use of *bez konca* is triggered by the semantics of the iterative situation as such. Of course, there are many instances where English texts include more or less close equivalents of *bez konca*, but they are very heterogeneous. Most frequently, it is a simple lexical repetition, as well as *keep V-ing* or *V again and again* constructions (sometimes combined).

(8) a. Oh, I could **learn and learn and learn and learn**.

[John Fowles. The Collector (1963)]

   b. O, ja mogla by **učit'sja bez konca**.   [trans. by I. Bessmertnaja (1991)]

(9) a. The man falling isn't permitted to feel or hear himself hit bottom. He just **keeps falling and falling**.

[J. D. Salinger. *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951)]

   b. Tot, kto v neë padaet, nikogda ne počuvstvuet dna. On **padaet, padaet bez konca**.   [trans. by R. Rajt-Kovalëva (1965)]

The case of Nabokov is especially interesting in this respect. When we consider translations of Nabokov's early Russian texts by his son Dmitri (1934–2012, born in Berlin, but lived in the US for the most part of his life), partly in collaboration with Vladimir Nabokov himself, we notice that their way of rendering *bez konca* resembles a kind of lexical interference, since Dmitri Nabokov seems to be the only modern author using phrases like *without end* or *endlessly* as direct equivalents of

Russian *bez konca*. Native speakers of English, most probably, would choose other ways to translate this phrase. Cf., for example:

(10) a.   [...] gde do six por budto by živut takie že bednjaki, **bez konca razvešivajuščie** bel'e (bednjaki očen' mnogo stirajut) [...]

                    [Vladimir Nabokov. Istreblenie tiranov (1938)]

      b.   [...] where supposedly to this day live similar paupers, **endlessly hanging out** the wash (paupers do a great deal of washing) [...]

            [Tyrants destroyed, trans. by Dmitri and Vladimir Nabokov (1976)]

(11) a.   Krupnye i mjagkie snežinki šuršali po stëklam okon, **padali, padali bez konca**.   [Vladimir Nabokov. Udar kryla (1923)]

      b.   The plump, soft particles of snow rustled against the window-panes, **falling, falling without end**.

                    [Wingstroke, trans. by Dmitri Nabokov (1995)]

The translation in (10b) seems not very exact: the idea of (10a) is rather of repeated than of "protracted" hanging, primarily suggested by English *endlessly*. Similarly, *without end* in (11b), although quite grammatical, seems to be heavily induced by the original—an English-speaking author, most probably, would use a different construction here (as did, for example, Salinger in 9a).

5. Conclusion

We have followed the semantic development of adverbial *bez konca* (compared with closely related *beskonečno*). Our claim was that *bez konca* first acquired the semantics of duration based on a relatively straightforward spatial metaphor (as in *doroga bez konca* 'road without end'). Later, *bez konca* underwent a more peculiar transformation, becoming a marker of (habitual) repetition. Its combinability increased drastically, with the only exception of stable internal states like *znat'* 'know' or *verit'* 'believe' which remain immune to the possibility of being split into discrete repeating portions. The majority of other situational types in fact allow this operation: in order to combine with *bez konca* almost all predicates must be construed as representing a kind a sequence.

On the other hand, *beskonečno*, which started from the same domain of duration (based on the same spatial metaphor), acquired new iterative uses on the last stage of its development, but retained the original ones as well. The most natural meaning for *beskonečno* is, however, the intensive one, which prevails both in early and modern texts. The exact distribution of the predicates privileging intensive or

iterative interpretation with *beskonečno* is a complicated matter, which is beyond the scope of this article.

Bibliography

Apresyan, Valentina. (2013) "Corpus methods in pragmatics: The case of English and Russian emotions." *Intercultural pragmatics* 10(4): 533–68.

Carlson, Greg N. (1977) *Reference to kinds in English.* New York: Garland.

Khrakovskij, Viktor S., ed. (1997) *Typology of iterative constructions.* Munich: Lincom Europa. [*LINCOM studies in theoretical linguistics*, 4.]

Kratzer, Angelika. (1995) "Stage-level and individual-level predicates." Gregory N. Carlson and Francis J. Pelletier, eds. *The generic book.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 125–75.

Letuchiy, Alexander and Ekaterina Rakhilina. (2013) "Načal'naja stadija grammatikalizacii značenij glagol'noj množestvennosti v kvazigrammatičeskix konstrukcijax." *Slavjanskoe jazykoznanie: XV Meždunarodnyj s"ezd slavistov. Doklady rossijskoj delegacii.* Moscow: Indrik, 432–51.

Vinogradov Institute for Russian language, RAS
plungian@iling-ran.ru

Higher School of Economics, Moscow
rakhilina@gmail.com