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The Route Instrumental: A Historical Perspective

On the Use of Bare Instrumental of Space in Eighteenth-Century Russian

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Abstract.

This article deals with the use of the bare Instrumental case as a means of expressing spatial semantics in Russian literary sources from the eighteenth century. In modern Russian, the function of such Instrumental is somewhat limited to expressing a route or, rather, a physical setting through which a trajectory of motion lies. In the meantime, analysis of case usage in works written during the period of transition from Middle Russian to the modern literary language makes it possible to determine those spheres in which the bare Instrumental regularly appeared but has since grown obsolete. Major differences with the present-day situation are revealed, while the numbers demonstrate which uses of the bare Instrumental of space remained a language norm in the 1700s and also which competing case forms provide for syntactic variation.

1. Subject and background

Alongside many other structural elements of the Russian language, the Instrumental case (INS) underwent some defining changes during the eighteenth century, which marked the shift from Middle Russian to the literary language of modern times. This evolution concerns, primarily, the INS’s sphere of use, which during that period both preserved semantic features inherited from the previous period and, simultaneously, was moving towards a newer set of meanings.

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The major tendencies which had shaped the semantics of the INS by the start of what we recognize as the period of Modern Russian were the subject of my doctoral dissertation (Mikhaylov 2012), in which I attempted to identify the most typical uses of that case over a span of one hundred years. The analysis was based on a corpus of approximately 11,400 constructions, with the INS excerpted from eighteenth-century sources of various genres and styles. All major Russian authors of the period are represented here. The oldest text, a play by Theophan Prokopovič, dates back to 1705, while the most recent one was written between 1808 and 1812. In addition to the examples with the INS, nearly 2,500 constructions with other cases were included. These competed with the INS during the eighteenth-century as synonymous means of expressing various semantics.

Describing the sphere of use for a case in literary texts from a certain period is akin to assembling a puzzle, as different pieces (diverse in size and shape), each representing a separate meaning, build up a bigger picture of a semantic network for that case. One such element is the instance of the bare INS, which was regularly utilized by eighteenth-century authors as a means of expressing spatial semantics. This specific application was registered approximately 340 times in the analyzed texts, which stands for almost 3% of the overall corpus. As examples show, at that time, the bare INS of space was a more widespread and less lexically restricted construction as compared to present-day Russian. Below I will discuss these differences with the current language norm and provide a description of the semantic peculiarities of such INS in eighteenth-century sources.

2. Previous research and the definition of terms

Bare INS expressing spatial semantics is known in Slavic languages from the earliest times, as several scholarly sources cite examples from Old Slavonic, Old Russian, Old Serbian, Old Polish and Old Czech (Bulygina 1958:246–247, 256–257; Buslaev 1959:472–473; Mrazek 1964:127–128). Such usage has traditionally been treated as a separate meaning of the INS with the discussion concentrating on its origins. Berthold Delbrück’s (1867:53) view that the INS of space is derived from the comitative meaning were later shared, to a certain extent, by Aleksandr Peškovskij (1914:91–92), who saw comitative INS (alongside INS of means) as one of the prototypes from which all other meanings of that case developed.

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2 Excluding official documents.
3 Namely, Gavrila Deržavin’s memoirs, which he completed a few years before his death in 1816. In many aspects the language of literary works written in the early nineteenth century is much closer to the earlier tradition than the newer practice. Therefore, several texts which chronologically do not belong to the 1700s were included in the corpus.
4 That is, used without a preposition.
5 Also known as “sociative” meaning expressed in modern Russian by a c + INS collocation.
However, Delbrück’s claims were met with scepticism by Aleksandr Potebnja (1888:449–450) and, aside from Peškovskij’s opinion, were hardly supported by later researchers (see, e.g. Ivić 1954:126; Mrazek 1964:127). The dominant views link the INS of space with the meaning of an instrument which is central for this case’s semantic network. Roman Mrazek (ibid.) argues that the space denoted by the bare INS serves “as a means of accomplishing a certain goal [...] убежал оттуда ’окном’ (> через окно, использовав окно)”.

The specific function of such bare INS has remained unchanged throughout history, as it has consistently been used as a means of expressing a ‘dynamic’ characteristic of space, denoting a physical setting in which someone or something is moving. This semantic nature of the INS of space, as it had traditionally been called, gave Galina Zolotova (2001:230–231) sufficient grounds to suggest a different term for such a meaning and to refer to it as “transitive” INS. Another specification is offered by Ekaterina Rakhilina and Elena Tribushinina, who characterise the use of bare INS of space in modern language as follows:

The construction which has been traditionally called locative instrumental is, in fact, much more specific in its meaning. Constructions such as idti polem ‘walk through the field’ and exat’ lesom ‘ride through the forest’ denote a type of route rather than a location. Furthermore, it should be an established, recognized route through a larger space, such as a field or a forest. Together with a motion verb, the instrumental of route denotes a purposeful movement to a specific endpoint (Rakhilina & Tribushinina 2011:148).

Both the suggested term (“Route INS”) and Rakhilina’s interpretation of the functions performed by the INS in contemporary Russian are critical for the characteristics I provide when describing the differences between the current state and the language practice of the eighteenth century. As noted above, the role of bare INS of space is somewhat limited nowadays to expressing a type of route or a physical setting through which a trajectory of motion lies. Another important detail is that the INS is not used in modern Russian to denote a trajectory if the route is not set by the subject but rather “pre-determined by the topological properties of the described entity” (ibid.:149). Finally, one more requirement is the collocation of a noun in the INS with a verb denoting linear, purposeful motion (i.e., it is possible with идти – ‘to go’, but not бродить – ‘to roam’, etc.).

However, the analysis of examples I will present below demonstrates that these restrictions are a relatively recent development, and that about three hundred years ago, the functionality of bare INS in terms of expressing spatial semantics, although similar in its essence, was more diverse.

6 ‘Escaped from there window [INS] (> through the window, by using the window)’. See also Janda 1993:166.
7 A similar definition is given by E. Rakhilina in her earlier book Когнитивный анализ предметных имен: Семантика и сочетаемость (2000), but I have chosen to quote this more recent article which was written in English and, thus, relieved me of the need to translate the citation.
3. Use of the bare INS of space in eighteenth-century sources

When tracing the history of the bare INS of space, or Route INS, we see how various restrictions are imposed on its use while prepositional constructions with other cases prove to be stronger competitors and eventually take the INS’s place in those circumstances where it once flourished. To a certain extent, this is already the case if we compare the usage of the INS in the eighteenth century with earlier periods. However, the material I have collected provides us with examples which are considered archaic from a contemporary viewpoint and which show that bare INS remained a rather frequent means of expressing spatial relations throughout the 1700s.

There are some distinctive features in the use of the INS expressing spatial semantics which distinguish it from the current norm as authors in the eighteenth century apply it:

- To denote an opening (войти дверью) or restricted space (пройти комнатой) through which a person or an object moves.
- To denote a topographically pre-determined space along which a route lies (плыть рекой).
- To denote unrestricted space that does not stipulate a fixed route (добираться океаном).
- In combination with verbs of non-linear, random motion (гулять полем).

Naturally, there are scores of examples where the INS carries out the same function as in modern Russian; i.e., as a means of marking a physical setting across which an established route lies (ехать лесом). The use of bare INS in such contexts has been known throughout the history of Russian. I will therefore concentrate on those applications which are either infrequent in the present-day language or have gone out of use completely.

3.1 INS as a means of denoting an opening or restricted space

The use of bare INS as a means of designating an opening or an aperture through which motion is conducted has been described as “rare” (Janda 1993:167) in today’s Russian, and is limited to so-called “special expressions” (Lomtev 1956:240), by which is meant constructions in which the INS marks a name for a human organ (nostrils, mouth, throat, etc.) serving as an aperture. The following quotes from eighteenth-century sources illustrating such usage also reflect the current practice:

(1) И часто случается, если не довольно отогреется, то кровь носом и ушами пустится, иногда и умирают (Tatiščev 1744‒46)\(^8\).

\(^8\) The citations are provided with the name of the author and the year in which the text originally appeared. The bibliography at the end of the article, however, lists the editions (primarily modern) from which the quote was taken.
(2) Принял бы я один из тех, по его мнению, целительнейших порошков его, но у меня кровь пошла горлом (Lopuchin 1809).

The corpus also contains nine instances in which the INS denotes an opening that has nothing to do with human anatomy. In eight of these instances, the particular case form is attributed to such nouns as doors, gates or windows through which a subject enters or exits:

(3) Для торг в город входить по пятидесяти человек, одними воротами (Lomonosov 1754–58).
(4) Пойдем отсель, пойдем мы медными вратами, | Которы в царство нас подземное сведут (Majkov 1763).

In one example from the late eighteenth century, we see the INS marking an actual lexeme отверстие (‘opening’), as Nikolaj Karamzin uses this particular form to describe a passage in the mountains through which a travelling party moves:

(5) Мы долго ехали отверстием Юрь, которая с обеих сторон дороги возвышалась как гранитная стена (Karamzin 1791–92).

Examples 3–5 clearly demonstrate the connection between INS denoting openings and the meaning of an instrument: doors and ravines are means that allow the subject to pass from one domain to another. Enter [through] the gates can easily be interpreted as ‘enter by using the gates’, which brings such use into close proximity with the core semantics of the case.

Interestingly, it is those constructions with an obvious trace of instrumental semantics that grow obsolete, while lexicalized forms such as кровью, носом, etc. are the only relics of this use of the INS in the modern language.

There is also a singular instance of what can be defined as a variation of the ‘opening’ theme. It is the use of bare INS to mark a restricted, enclosed space which is crossed by the subject in the following instance:

(6) Сюда обещалась быть чрез княгинину спальню потаенными сеньми (Lukin 1765).

Сени (‘the anteroom’) in this context also serves as a conduit through which motion occurs, and, thus, the use of INS to mark the noun is somewhat natural, or at least justifiable, from an eighteenth-century perspective. However, this kind of use is extremely rare already during that period. The rival construction через + Accusative (ACC) which appears in the same sentence (чрез спальню) is unambiguously dominant in our corpus and preserves its status as the main means of denoting restricted intersectable space in modern Russian.
3.2 INS describing a topographically pre-determined route.

As noted above, nowadays bare INS is not a typical means of expressing a route if the latter is topographically pre-determined, i.e., established by the landscape itself and allowing no choice for the subject but to follow that path. The marking of nouns denoting such routes by the INS was not very frequent in the eighteenth-century texts either, and our research produced only singular examples of that type:

(7) Зелобрюшного монаха идущего улицею, спросила некая насмешница: Отче святый, когда вы родите? (Kurganov 1769).

(8) Якутская дорога отходит от Ангары версты за три от города и подымается сперва нечувствительно лощиною чрез горы (Radişčev 1790).

Just as today, the prepositional construction *no + Dative (DAT)* is by far the prevalent form for describing such paths.

There is, however, one notable exception: the form *рекою* (‘[by] river’), as well as the proper names of rivers, which hardly appear in route INS constructions in modern Russian. When discussing this usage, Rakhilina & Tribushinina (2011:149–150) quote data from the Russian National Corpus which contains only five examples of the noun ‘river’ in the INS expressing the trajectory of motion. All of them “are quite old” (ibid.), as the most recent occurrence dates back to 1913.

In the meantime, this restriction is not yet known in the earlier period discussed here. Moreover, Mikhail Lomonosov, arguably the ultimate authority on what was acceptable in mid-eighteenth-century Russian, cites precisely such an example in his *Russian Grammar* (1755:208). As if defying the future changes, the scholar illustrates the use of bare INS in response to the question “каким местом” (‘[by] which place [a motion occurs]’) with the aid of a hydronym, i.e., a proper name for a river:

(9) На вопрос кото́рым местом служит творительный без предлога: плыл Двиною (Lomonosov 1755).

In total, our corpus contains 33 instances of *река* marked by the INS denoting the route. Most of them are extracted from texts written in the 1730-60s (examples 10–11), but a few appear as late as the last quarter of the eighteenth century (12–13):

(10) [Завод] на которой руду возить сухим путем до реки Чырыша со 100 верст, а потом до завода рекою Обью (Tatiščev 1736).

(11) Христианская вера завелась там еще прежде сих князей от варягов-rossов, ходивших к Царю-граду ближайшим путем, Двиною мимо Полоцка (Lomonosov 1754–58).

(12) Безбедный на водах имеющи покой, | Россияне плывут с веселием рекой (Cheraskov 1779).

(13) На Мамырье пообедав, до Кежмы Ангарою 20 вер., с Кежмы Ангарою до Филиппова острова 22 вер., до Братского 22 вер. (Radişčev 1790).

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9 Example 5, in which an ‘opening’ actually stands for a mountain gorge, can also be included in that category.

10 Almost half of them come from one particular text, as will be revealed below.
It is undeniable, however, that even in these circumstances the INS is gradually ousted by the prepositional collocation no + DAT. The ratio of competing constructions can be illustrated by one specific text, namely, Stepan Krašeninnikov’s *Description of Kamčatka* (1755). This learned tract on geography contains many passages in which the author describes various routes that can be taken by travelers in this far-off region, so his need for a means of expressing such semantics is particularly high.

The statistics for case marking of the noun ‘river’ expressing a route show that no + DAT is used almost 4 times more frequently than bare INS, with the correlation of 62:16. On several occasions both forms appear in the same paragraph as synonymous:

(14) Посредством Быстрой реки можно бы было ходить на малых лодках от Пенжинского моря до самого окиана: а именно с устья Большей реки вверх до устья Быстрой, и вверх по Быстрой (DAT) до ее вершины, а от вершины Камчаткою рекою (INS), которая течет из одного с нею болота (Krašeninnikov 1755).

(15) Из Большецерского острова в Верхней Камчатской остrog три дороги, по которым тамошние жители наибольше ездят [...] по реке Жупановой (DAT) до самой ее вершины, от вершины Жупановской через хребет на реку Повычу, а Повычею (INS) вниз до самого ее устья, которое против Верхнего острога находится (ibid.).

The fact that рекою survives longer than any other nouns denoting “topographically pre-determined” routes can be explained by the nature of river travel as opposed to walking along the street or riding through mountain passes. A river with its current, unlike other “paths” in this category, is something that facilitates travel in and of itself and is thus perceived not simply as a route, but as a means of reaching a destination. While I do not have enough examples to establish a definite pattern, it is noteworthy, in the passages quoted above (14 and 15), that the author uses no + DAT when describing a route up the river, but then switches to bare INS when describing travel down the river. This might be purely coincidental but, in my opinion, it serves as collateral evidence of watercourses being treated as a means of transportation; thus, a river is different from other natural paths suitable for travelling and possesses “instrumental” characteristics which are essential for the semantics of the case in question.

Another specific instance of a “topographically pre-determined” route I will discuss here is the noun дорогоа (‘road’) and the alternation between bare INS and no + DAT marking it. The co-existence of both forms is known in the eighteenth-century, as well as in the modern language. E. Rakhilina (2000:79) mentions this particular noun among those that are regularly marked by the INS to denote an allotted strip of land used for traffic. However, our data shows that this conclusion needs refinement. The form дорогоа tends to be preferable under two circumstances. Firstly, it occurs when the ‘road’ stands for a general direction or course of motion, as in:
(16) Одного жаль, что, идучи обратно, следовал той же дорогою и не отошел далее к востоку (Lomonosov 1763).

Secondly, it is recurrent when used in a metaphorical sense denoting abstract means and ways to achieve a goal:

(17) Но если ты так ленив, то ищи хотя другою дорогою своего счастья (Krylov 1789).

But when it comes to contexts in which a ‘road’ appears in its literal meaning, that of a “strip of land allocated for movement” (Ožegov & Švedova 1992:178), bare INS is practically non-existent as early as the eighteenth century. I have discovered only two examples of дорогою carrying the aforementioned meaning:

(18) Из Иркутска мы выехали в половину дня и предприяли ехать болью Якутскою дорогою, которая хотя гораздо дале, но лучше, ибо, по уверению ехавших прямою Илимскою, она была чрезмерно худа, узка и гориста (Radiščev 1790).

(19) Тогда я доложил, что лутче ехать ближе заливов, а не дорогою (Muravjev 1777).

Note the contrast in example 19: дорогою, denoting a route along a specially prepared path, is juxtaposed with roadless terrain – ближе заливов, ‘along the bays’. Normally this opposition between travelling along the pathway and going off-road is expressed by using по + DAT for the former element and bare INS for the latter, as evident from the very same text by Matvej Muravjev, as well as many other instances:

(20) [Граф] поотважился ехать по дороге, ево тот же час схватили ядром, тут его отважность тем и кончилась. А мы ехали берегом по заливу, тогда прикрыты были высотою берега (Muravjev 1777).

In total, I have collected over forty examples of по дороге expressing semantics which lead us to conclude that this is the unquestionably dominant form when the noun is used in its primary meaning, while дорогою occupies the metaphorical domain of a “path as a method” (Janda 1993:166).

3.3 INS denoting unrestricted space

In the eighteenth century, bare INS is frequently used to describe a physical setting through which motion occurs. As opposed to enclosed spaces (see 3.1), these spaces, though possessing formal borders, tend to be larger and stipulate multiple entrance and exit points, as well as several available routes. This is also the semantic sphere in which the INS of space has the widest application in modern Russian.

Just as in the present-day language, sources from the 1700s cannot be characterized by lexical diversity in terms of nouns which are marked by bare INS. The majority of

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11 I therefore find T. Lomtev’s (1956:239–240) term “indefinite space” too ambiguous.
occurrences (over 70%) are such forms as лесом, морем, берегом, местами. The latter usually appears with an attribute, as in example 22:

(21) Потом все прошло благополучно, и мы, ехав лесом почти до самой Варшавы, стекол уже не поднимали (Fonvizin 1777).
(22) От Чажмы дорога лежит через горы нежилыми местами на реку Камчатку (Krašeninnikov 1755).\(^{12}\)

There are, however, certain peculiarities which distinguish the usage of the INS in the eighteenth-century from the current norm. Namely, bare INS was possible with geographical names, while in modern Russian the physical setting marked by the INS is, usually, much less specific:\(^{13}\)

(23) Проходя славенскими и чудскими областями, варяги особливое пристанище и жительство избрали в Киеве (Lomonosov 1754–58).
(24) Россияне тогда не только товары свои восточные, но и естландские на торги привозили, а то и, Балтийским морем приплывши, к иным пристаниам приставали (Tatiščev 1769).
(25) Он смеялся, говоря: «Ну, братец Муравьев, ты прохладно Полшео ехал, и тебя весьма поляки принимали хорошо» (Muravjev 1777).

Again, on many occasions, especially in the context of sea voyages, the INS bears additional semantics of means which facilitate the passage from one point to another. The space marked by the INS is something used by travelers to reach a destination. One such example is the title of Mikhail Lomonosov’s tract on geography, where the bare INS in adnominal position denotes exactly that – a physical setting that serves as a means of a possible passage:

(26) Краткое описание разных путешествий по северным морям и показание возможного проходу Сибирским океаном в Восточную Индию (Lomonosov 1763).

Thus, the stance of the INS denoting unrestricted space is quite strong in the eighteenth-century, and it successfully endures competition from such collocations as no + DAT and, to a certain extent, чрез + ACC. Moreover, some authors adhere to the traditional practice of using the INS, preferring it to prepositional constructions. Sometimes this leads to remarkable contaminations, as in Alexander Radiščev’s travel notes from his trip to Siberia:

(27) Из Ачинска дорога идёт на отлогую возвышенность лесом, потом высоко сверх поверхности Чульма чрез не весьма большими горами, которые к ручьям становятся круче (Radiščev 1790).

Here the author attempts to use a prepositional construction with чрез which requires the ACC in order to mark the setting across which the route lies (‘across the

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\(^{12}\) For other examples, see Mikhaylov 2012:211–212.

\(^{13}\) Cf. “During the eighteenth – first decades of the nineteenth century proper names – names of states, cities, rivers, etc. – tend to appear in such constructions more frequently than in the later period” (Filippova 1964:76).
mountains’). But with the bare INS having already appeared in the sentence, Radiščev succumbs to habit and breaks grammatical rules by using the same case again instead of the ACC.

As we know from the current state of affairs, the parallel usage of the INS and prepositional collocations with the DAT and the ACC in these circumstances does not lead to an extinction of constructions with bare INS and, as already mentioned, they persist in the modern language, although with a much more limited set of nouns.

3.4 Bare INS with verbs of non-linear motion.

The last feature of the INS of space I will consider here has less to do with the type of setting it describes than with the characteristics of motion expressed by an accompanying verb.

For bare INS of space to appear in present-day Russian, the verb must denote a type of motion that has both direction and a goal; one can purposefully run across the field (бежать полем), but strolling through it (гулять полем) is “odd” (Rakhilina & Tribushinina 2011:149). In the meantime, according to R. Mrazek (1964:130), such restriction was unknown in Old Russian, and bare INS could appear with verbs of non-linear, random motion.

It is safe to say that by the end of the Middle Russian period, such usage had grown obsolete, as the search for similar examples in the eighteenth-century sources produces singular results. One such instance is the use of bare INS of space with the verb гулять14 ('to stroll') from a 1740s poem by Alexander Sumarokov:

(28) Тот, кто не гуливал плодов приятных садом, | За вишни клюкву ест, рябину виноградом | И, вкус имея груб, бездельные труды | Пред общество кладет за сладкие плоды (Sumarokov 1747).

The purposelessness of motion deprives such use of the INS of any connection to the core semantics of means, and bare INS in such contexts easily yields to prepositional constructions with no + DAT – or, in some cases, в / на + Locative (LOC) – which appear with verbs describing any sort of movement. In Nikolaj Kurganov’s Pis’movnik, we find yet another instance of the INS alongside a verbal adverb from гулять:

(29) Девицы, гуляя полем встретились на дороге с пастухом, несущим козленка (Kurganov 1769).

However, in the same text, as anywhere else, no + DAT is an unambiguously more frequent means of expressing the setting across which non-linear motion occurs:

14 The verb itself has since been driven out by a more commonly-used variant гулять. It can still appear in the modern language with various prefixes (разгуливать, выгуливать, погуливать, etc.), while the search in RNC produces only several examples of non-prefixed use. However, most of them are characterized with a shift in semantics, with the verb meaning ‘to lead a rackety lifestyle’.
(30) Двое пажей, гуляя по городу встретясь с мужиком биющим крепко своего осла сказали ему (Kurganov 1769).

While R. Mrazek (1964:130) quotes two more instances of bare INS with such verbs from nineteenth-century sources, the most recent example discovered in the RNC is the passage from Tsar Nicholas II’s diaries written in 1894–96: “Гулял и бродил лесом и болотами”.

4. Conclusion

The story of bare INS expressing spatial semantics can thus be interpreted as a slow narrowing of the sphere in which it is used, and the restrictions that we see in our times can be traced back to the period when the national literary language was under formation.

In the eighteenth century, the INS loses ground to rival prepositional constructions with other cases, yet one can still see the lingering remnants of past diversity. When drawing comparisons with the current practice, we can conclude that the tag “route INS” is perhaps more legitimate if we apply it to this usage as it was known three centuries ago. At that time, unlike today, the bare INS was still a possible means of denoting an actual route – that line through space along which one travels – and not just a larger physical setting.

One distinctive feature of those examples found in eighteenth-century language, but which have since become archaic, is that they demonstrate an obvious connection with the semantics of instrument and of a means which have been central for the case throughout the history of Russian. In the end, however, even these ties cannot prevent the prepositional collocations with DAT, ACC and LOC which prevail in the “locative” domain from taking over. Nowadays, the sphere of use for the INS of space is strictly limited, and the remaining applications possess a much weaker bond with the core semantics of the case. Thus, it would not be too bold to predict the further decline of such usage and the continuing substitution of bare INS for prepositional constructions with other cases.

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