1. Introduction

In the focus of this paper are the so-called vozvratnye (literally, ‘reflexive’, although this label is a fairly conventional one) verbs in Russian, i.e. verbs with the postverbal –sja affix (or ‘postfix’ in the parlance of the traditional Russian linguistics). These verbs have long been a brainteaser for the students of Russian morphology, especially for those willing to draw a dividing line between inflection and derivation. The position of sja-verbs with respect to this dichotomy is the central question of the present paper; a special emphasis will be put on several subtypes of these verbs that arguably have not been given due attention in the literature. It must not be inferred, however, that my aim is to present a consistent piece of evidence in favour of a certain conclusive (‘solely correct’, so to speak) qualification of those verbs in terms of the opposition between inflection and word formation. Nor is it my goal to adduce arguments in support of a certain approach to these theoretical notions in the light of the empirical facts of the Russian grammar.

Rather, this study is carried out on the assumption that such notions as ‘inflection’ and ‘word formation’ are able to capture recurrent correlations between more atomic properties of morphological patterns (otherwise they would have been superfluous). The study of the ways in which such properties interact thus appears to be crucial and instructive.

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1 I would like to thank Wolfgang Dressler, Jurij Knjazev, Vladimir Nedjalkov, Ekaterina Raxilina, Alexandre Rusakov, Marina Rusakova, Viktor Xrakovskij and the two anonymous referees for their valuable comments and criticism on earlier versions. This by no means implies that these linguists necessarily share the views expressed in the paper. All errors in the analysis are my own responsibility. My gratitude extends to those colleagues of mine who have been providing me with the examples of the phenomena discussed here. To enumerate all those kind people would be too long a list, although I have greatly profited from their help.

The research reported here was partially supported by the president of the Russian Federation’s programme for the support of major academic schools (grant No. NSh-2325.2003.6).

2 Throughout, I use the term ‘sja-verbs’ as a cover term that encompasses all the forms of Russian verbs with sja affix, regardless of whether they have to be treated as inflectional or derivational counterparts of the corresponding non-sja forms. This term is deliberately chosen among traditional labels, for the lack of a better, non-interpretative, solution (sja-forms is no better, since it implies inflectional interpretation of the phenomenon no less than traditional ‘vozvratnye glagoly’, literally ‘reflexive verbs’, implies derivational interpretation).
Which of these properties should be viewed as defining criteria for e.g. inflection as opposed to word formation (the rest would be automatically downgraded to the status of frequent side-effects) is a problem that is largely solved at the discretion of individual scholars based on their theoretical (or aesthetical?) preferences; in view of this I will restrain from any solution of this problem with respect to the phenomena discussed below. My goal is merely to present some unusual patterns of the interaction between those properties that are firmly associated with inflection resp. word formation in the behaviour of (some of) the Russian sja-verbs. It is hoped that such an examination would broaden our understanding of the empirical essence of this dichotomy.

2. Russian sja-verbs: inflection vs. word formation

2.1 Sja-verbs: an overview

A unified analysis of the Russian sja-verbs is seriously impeded by their baffling heterogeneity. Although the use of –sja is quite transparent from a morphotactic point of view (there are only two morphologically patterned allomorphs sja and s’), which somewhat indirectly favours inflectional interpretation, it seems to be much harder to find any consistency in its semantic and syntactic functions. There have been numerous attempts to ascribe an invariant function to all the uses of this affix (for example, overt signalling of intransitivity or valence recession, see also footnote 10 and discussion in Wiemer, forthc.). However, despite all significant insights that these approaches can offer, none of them has been able to account for all the diversity of the attested facts. For the sake of further argument it will suffice to establish that –sja is a polyfunctional recessive/detransitivising marker. With respect to the issues discussed in this paper sja-verbs break up into the following subtypes (tentatively listed in order of increasing semantic regularity).3 (1) Non-correlative sja-verbs, that is, sja-verbs that do not have any non-sja counterpart, e.g. smejat’šja “to laugh” (cf. *smejat’). (2) Idiosyncratic sja-verbs, that is, verbs that are related to their non-sja counterpart in an idiosyncratic way, e.g. rešit’šja “to dare” (cf. rešit’ “to solve, to decide”). (3) Sja-verbs that signal a valency shift if compared to their non-sja counterparts (several further subtypes such as reflexive, reciprocal, decausative etc. could be distinguished). (4) Passive sja-verbs (counted separately from 3 by reasons explicated below).

3 I am not discussing prefixal sja-verbs, that is, verbs that are derived from their bases by the simultaneous prefixation and sja-affixation, e.g. raz-bežat’-sja “to make a running approach” or “to run to different places”, cf. bežat’ “to run”, but *bežat’šja, *razbežat’.

Semantically, such verbs are similar to those in subtypes 2 and 3 in the main text.
In what follows, the verbs belonging to types (1) and (2) will generally not be discussed, since their formation more or less undoubtedly represents a lexical phenomenon (that is, derivation), and the stress will be put on more recurrent uses of *sja*. It must be borne in mind, however, that the contrast between (2) and (3) is not always straightforward, since it is often a matter of degree of semantic opacity of a derivative that goes hand in hand with what can be otherwise treated as a mere change of valency. However, one has to acknowledge the basic contrast between (2) and (3), even if it is not always easy to tease apart the change in the valency of a verb and the changes in (the remaining parts of) its lexical semantics. ⁴ An equally essential contrast between (3) and (4) will be discussed in more detail below.

2.2 The properties of inflection and word formation

With respect to the inflection vs. word formation dichotomy, it might seem tempting to give a unified account of all instances of the *sja*-affixation in Russian. However, it is in the spirit of the approach explicated in the introduction to examine the facts in all their complexity and not to rule out beforehand the possibility that various uses of *sja* may differ in their inflectional resp. derivational status, cf. Stump’s observation that “nothing excludes the possibility that the very same operation might serve a derivational function in some instances and an inflectional function in others” (1998:19).

As this article is concerned with *properties* of inflection and derivation rather than with *defining criteria* thereof, the choice of a particular list of such properties is not crucial for my purposes. I will deliberately use the list proposed by Haspelmath (2002:71); alternative, but generally not incompatible sets could be found in, e.g., Dressler (1989), Plank (1994), Stump (1998). If tested against the twelve properties discussed by Haspelmath, *sja*-verbs will yield the results presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inflection</th>
<th>Derivation</th>
<th><em>sja</em>-verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) relevant to the syntax</td>
<td>not relevant to the syntax</td>
<td>as inflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) obligatory</td>
<td>Optional</td>
<td>??</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) not replaceable by simple word</td>
<td>replaceable by simple word</td>
<td>??</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv) same concept as base</td>
<td>new concept</td>
<td>see below</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁴ This contrast is sometimes disregarded in the relevant literature. For instance, one can often find *drat’sja* “fight (each other)” under the rubric of reciprocal *sja*-verbs, which is not accurate, since *drat’sja* is not a reciprocal derivative of the polysemous verb *drat* “to tear to pieces”, although there is indeed a reciprocal component in the meaning of *drat’sja*. Numerous examples of other quasi-reflexives, quasi-reciprocals, quasi-decausatives etc. can be found in the literature and dictionaries.
Of course, the list of properties in Table 1 must be viewed with a good deal of caution; as is pointed out in the source book, consistent sets of unequivocally defined properties are supposed to be characteristic only of most pure cases of derivation resp. inflection, while much less homogeneous profiles could be observed otherwise. Thus, for instance, if one distinguishes contextual inflection from inherent inflection (following Booij 1996), it would be only the former, “the prototypical case of inflection” (ibid.: 14), that will consistently show properties from the left column of Table 1, while inherent inflection would appear to be rather derivation-like.

However, the following generalisations can be made based on the data in Table 1.

1. *Sja*-verbs do not behave uniformly with respect to five properties (iv-viii); these inconsistencies will be discussed in more detail in the following subsections.

2. It is problematic to test *sja*-verbs against two of the twelve properties at issue, viz. obligatoriness (ii) and replaceability by a simple word (iii). In fact, as typical of two-member oppositions of the ‘zero exponent – non-zero exponent’ type, the problem of obligatoriness of the putative category depends on whether we postulate a zero ‘non-reflexiveness’ morpheme in non-*sja* verbs, which in its turn largely depends on whether or not *sja*-affixation is considered an inflectional process. Thus, the use of criterion (ii) appears to be somewhat circular with respect to *sja*-verbs. As for (iii), replaceability by a simple word, the value of this criterion basically depends on properties of contexts, rather than verbs. For instance, non-*sja* verbs generally cannot be substituted by *sja*-verbs in transitive contexts, since *sja* verbs are intransitive, but the two types of verbs are syntactically interchangeable in many other contexts. Thus, on the one hand, replacement of a verb with its *sja* counterpart often triggers changes in syntactic behaviour (thus, as it were, non-replaceability), but on the other hand, many contexts neither ban, nor trigger the use of *sja* (thus, as it were, replaceability).

3. Out of those five properties (i, ix-xii) that can be unequivocally ascribed to the whole set of *sja*-verbs, there is only one, viz. possibility of cumulative expression (xi), that yields derivational value. The other four properties among these five are congruent with the inflectional nature of a
morphological process. Indeed, sja-affixation is relevant to the syntax (i).\(^5\) Sja always occupies peripheral (word-final) position following all other morphemes including those whose inflectional status is beyond doubt (ix).\(^6\) Base allomorphy under sja-affixation is very limited and morphonologically transparent (x). Finally, sja-affixation is not iterable; it must be stressed that the latter point is explained formally rather than semantically. Indeed, the width of semantic functions of sja (see below) could have made it possible for a single word-form to bear two sja affixes with two different functions, e.g. reflexive / reciprocal and deagentive / impersonal. Such forms are not attested in reality, though.

4. At least two of the ‘unequivocal’ properties, viz. possibility of cumulative expression (xi) and iteratability (xii), seem to involve privative, i.e. non-equivalent, oppositions. Thus, for example, the property of (non-)iteratability is inherently defective, in that iterable processes of affixation are indeed strongly associated with derivation, while non-iteratability of an affixation process hardly gives any indication as to its derivational or inflectional status. In other words, a more exact way to represent profiles of inflection and derivation in Table 1 would be to have ‘non-iteratability’ for inflection and ‘blank’ or ‘either way’ for derivation. Accordingly, inflectional value of this property for sja-affixation must be viewed as a rather conventional one. Equally conventional is the derivational value of (xi), ‘possibility of cumulative expression’, since here we encounter a mirror image of the situation with property (xii). Indeed, while cumulation is cross-linguistically found almost exclusively with inflectional categories, non-cumulation is equally possible for both inflection and derivation. In other words, it would be more accurate to have ‘unknown’ or ‘no clear evidence for inflection’ instead of ‘as derivation’ as sja’s value according to the property of cumulative expression.

2.3. Passive vs. other productive types of valency-changing sja-uses

In the remainder of this section I will concentrate on those verbs that have a semantically transparent correlation with their non-sja counterparts, i.e. belong to the types (3) and (4) according to the classification in section 2.1.

\(^5\) Unfortunately, the assignment of [+/-] values of inflectional and derivational properties inevitably involves a certain degree of simplification. With respect to this first criterion it partially follows from the short discussion of the role of syntax in sja-affixation (see preceding passage in the main text). Besides, there are some further complications. For instance, although sja-affixation is indeed almost always relevant to the syntax, one can find a number of sja-verbs that are almost synonymous to and do not deviate in their syntactic behaviour from their non-sja counterparts, e.g. belet sja “to show white” \(\approx\) belet’ (in one of its meanings).

\(^6\) One could expect sja to appear not in the word periphery in deverbal nouns or adjectives; however, sja is simply never used (left out) in such lexemes even if they are semantically and formally derived from sja-verbs, cf. streml-enie (strive-ACT.NOUN) “aspiration, striving” \(\approx\) streml-it’-sja (aspire-INFIN-SJA) “to aspire, to strive”.

In so doing, I will try to emphasise a contrast between passive uses of *sja* and other productive models of valency-affecting *sja*-derivations in terms of properties (iv) to (viii) above.

The use of the Russian *sja* covers a wide range of valency-changing functions that are cross-linguistically associated with the middle voice phenomenon. These functions include (but are not limited to) the following:

a. ‘proper reflexive’ *sja*-verbs, e.g. *myt’sja* “to wash (oneself)” from *myt’* “to wash (transitive)”;

b. reciprocal *sja*-verbs, e.g. *celovat’sja* “to kiss (each other)” from *celovat’* “to kiss (transitive)”;

c. decausative *sja*-verbs, e.g. *otkryt’sja* “to open (intransitive)” from *otkryt’* “to open (transitive)”.

Further types of valency-affecting *sja*-derivatives include ‘conversive’, ‘impersonal’, ‘potential passive’, ‘absolutive’ and ‘synonymous’ (see footnote 5). For the sake of simplicity, in the remaining part of section 2 I will only discuss reflexive, reciprocal and decausative functions of *sja* and compare those functions to *sja*-passives. There are at least two more important functions of *sja*; these are discussed in great detail in the following sections.

It is crucial that formation of *sja*-verbs of these types is either non-productive (a, b) or only very limitedly productive (c). Thus, in principle it must be possible to count the number of verbs belonging to these three types in the whole of the Russian lexicon. However, the problem is aggravated by at least two factors: 1) it is not always easy to draw a dividing line between the functions of *sja* and in particular to delimitate its grammatical and lexical effects; 2) there are many verbs that dwell on the border between undisputedly standard verbs and neologisms. Discrepant approaches to the two problems mentioned lead to noticeable divergence in the estimate of the size of particular groups of verbs by different scholars. Here, I will adopt the figures arrived at by Korolev (1968), definitely the most detailed, even if not irreproachable methodologically study entirely devoted to the issue of quantitative assessment of *sja*-verbs. Korolev claims that in the Russian lexicon, there are some 200 ‘proper reflexive’ *sja*-verbs, some 40 reciprocal *sja*-verbs and some 1600 decausative *sja*-verbs.

These figures should be compared to the number of those verbs that can be used with *sja*-affix in the passive function. It is a more or less commonly accepted view that this class of verbs is very productive, although there are some restrictions on its productivity, both regular (rule-based) and idiosyncratic. The two most well-known restrictions of the former type are that *sja*-passive can only be formed from verbs that are transitive and imperfective.

Besides, Korolev formulates a number of further subtler constraints so that he finally examines a list of 4500 verbs

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8 It must be borne in mind, that sometimes several (homonymous) *sja*-verbs differing in their functions could be derived from one and the same transitive verb.

9 The latter constraint has been recently called in question by Percov (2003) who examines the phenomenon of occasional *sja*-passivisation and relates it to the general problem of ‘(non)-existence’ in morphology.
that meet all these constraints and could theoretically form sja-passives. It appears that out of these 4500, there no less than 4300 verbs that actually do allow formation of sja-passive (ibid.:17). A comparable statistical result was independently arrived at by Xrakovskij (1991:149), who claims that almost 90% of imperfective transitive verbs are able to form sja-passives. Thus the passive function of sja crucially differs from the other functions in terms of productivity. It must be specifically stressed that in the discussion of ‘proper reflexives’, reciprocals and decausatives it was the overall number of those verbs that have been discussed, while one can only estimate the productivity of sja-passives in terms of relative number, i.e. percentage, and not of absolute figures.

It is, however, even more crucial that the passive function of sja differs from those other functions semantically. Let us take an example of a passive sja-construction (2) and compare it to its active transitive counterpart (1):

(1) Rabočie strojat školu.
workers.NOM build.3PL school.ACC
“Workers build/are building the school.”

(2) Škola stroit-sja rabočimi.
school-NOM build.3SG-SJA workers-INSTR
“The school is being built by workers.”

Although (2) is a hackneyed sentence used as an example of the passive construction in many grammatical studies, sentences of this type are stylistically marked and are rarely encountered in stylistically neutral texts (they are more common in academic and especially bureaucratic discourse). However, it is very important that (2) is perfectly grammatical and does not differ in its so-called ‘cognitive content’ from (1), the difference being in the speaker’s perspective on the situation and not in the number of arguments or their semantic roles10. Thus, the contrast between (1) and (2) is a change of the diathesis marked on the verb, i.e. a voice phenomenon.

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10 This view has been criticised by Gerritsen, whose basic claim is that Russian –sja has an invariant function, namely, the function of “the assignment of an extra role as compared to NR (non-reflexive construction – S.S.)” (1990:276). In particular, with respect to the passive function of sja, Gerritsen observes (not indisputably) that it “cannot be interpreted ‘actually’” and notices that “[m]ost of the time ‘passive’ –sja sentence is iterative; in a number of cases other extra nuances are present – for instance, the sentence depicts a hypothetical event, or the event is the consequence of certain properties of the subject” (ibid.:7). From these observations Gerritsen further concludes that “[t]he presence of this extra nuance points to an extra level, present over and above the concrete action. On this extra level the subject (being a patient on the level of the concrete action) may be said to have an extra role: it is his presence (iterative), his nature or properties which are the cause of the fact that the action is carried out”. I would agree that the very use of the passive voice is usually indeed triggered by something unusual in the discourse status of the patient, which drives the speaker to put it into syntactically prominent position of the
The paradigmatic status of *sja*-passives is corroborated by the fact that perfective verbs, i.e., the verbs that never form *sja*-passives (although see footnote 9), show the same change of diathesis in the analytic passive construction (4) that contrasts with its active transitive counterpart (3) in the same way as (2) contrasts with (1) above:

(3) **Raboče postroili školu.**
    workers.NOM built.perf school.ACC
    “Workers have built the school.”

(4) **Škola byla postroena rabočimi.**
    school.NOM was build.perf.PTCP workers-INSTR
    “The school has been built by workers.”

Let us now proceed to decausatives, proper reflexives and reciprocals. Decausative *sja*-verbs are crucially different from passives in that they do not coincide with their non-*sja* counterparts in denotational semantic properties, cf. transitive *otkryt’* “to open” in (5) and decausative *otkryt’sja* “to open (intransitive)” in (6):

(5) **Mal’čik otkryl okno.**
    boy.NOM opened window.ACC
    “A/the boy opened the window.”

(6) **Okno otkrylo-s’.**
    window.NOM opened-SJA
    “The window opened.”

In (6) the Agent is not only left out, but it is moreover absent on the semantic level. In other words, the hearer of (6) is not licensed to make any inference as to whether the event was or was not (voluntarily) brought about by any Agent (hence, (6) has to be translated as it is, and not as “the window is opened”, as would be the case with the passive construction). Thus, although a decausative *sja*-verb may sometimes be used to describe a real-world situation that could be equally well referred to by a non-*sja* verb, such pairs of verbs always convey discrepant concepts.

As for reflexive and reciprocal *sja*-verbs, the main source of their irregularity lies in the fact that, despite their traditional and somewhat misleading labels, they are almost never used to signal simple coreference between participants bearing distinct semantic roles, e.g. Agent and Patient. For that purpose, Russian normally employs reflexive pronoun *sebja*, as in (7), cf. the ungrammaticality of (8) (for further discussion see Isačenko 2003:383):

subject. However, I don’t see any reasons to consider this pragmatic and syntactic stress on the patient as “the assignment of an extra role”.
‘Proper reflexives’ are mostly derived from those verbs that denote natural reflexive actions, i.e. actions that are typically performed by a human agent on him- or herself; as has been argued by Kemmer (1993:55ff.) these situation types are far from par excellence reflexive contexts. Besides, the so-called ‘proper reflexives’ in Russian often convey a sort of a conventionalised meaning that often goes beyond the compositional sum of the meaning of the base verb and the indication of the coreference of its two arguments. This point could be illustrated by the verb *zastrelit’-sja*, literally “shoot-SJA”. An appropriate translation of this verb would be “to commit suicide by way of shooting oneself”, as can be seen from the ungrammaticality of (9):

(9) *On slučajno zastrelil-sja*  
He.NOM unintentionally shot-SJA.

“He unintentionally shot himself” (e.g. shivered while holding a gun in his hands).

Thus, the meaning of *zastrelit’sja* encompasses the component of intentionality, that is not necessarily present in its transitive counterpart *zastrelit’ “to shoot”*. In general, the former verb denotes a social, rather than merely a physical act.

Such non-compositional unpredictable nuances in meanings are typical of verbs that are traditionally classified as proper reflexives and reciprocals. They are almost impalpable with some verbs, but may cause significant conceptual differentiation in other cases, giving rise to highly idiomatic *sja*-derivatives, such as e.g. *videt’sja*, a quasi-reciprocal derivative of *videt’ “to see”*, whose actual meaning is “to meet (each other), most likely at some event and/or on purpose”, and not merely “to see each other” (see also footnote 4).

In general, Russian demonstrates a picture typical of languages with ‘two-form cognate system’ of reflexive / middle markers (cf. Kemmer 1993:25), namely, “[t]he heavy form (sebja in Russian – S.S.) is (…) quite productive; it can be used in general with transitive roots to produce a reflexive reading”, while the light form (*sja* in Russian) “cannot appear with most roots to indicate reflexive meaning” (ibid.:27).
Table 2. Properties of inflection and derivation: selected classes of sja-verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Passive</th>
<th>Decausative</th>
<th>Reflexive</th>
<th>Reciprocal</th>
<th>Other classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>iv ‘sameness’ of concept</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>i ≈ d</td>
<td>i ≈ d</td>
<td>d &gt; i (mostly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v ‘abstractness’ of meaning</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i &gt; d</td>
<td>i &gt; d</td>
<td>i &gt; d</td>
<td>d &gt; i (mostly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi semantic regularity</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>d &gt; i</td>
<td>d &gt; i</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii relevance to base meaning</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>d &gt; i</td>
<td>i &gt; d</td>
<td>i &gt; d</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viii Applicability</td>
<td>i &gt; d</td>
<td>i &gt; d</td>
<td>d &gt; i</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>——</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* In this table, “i” means that the given class of sja-verbs yields a value typical of inflection if tested against the given property, and “d” that the value is typical of derivation. Since the properties at issue are themselves continuous, I used symbols “>”, “>>” and “≈” iconically when appropriate (cf. e.g. the values for applicability ranging from “i>>d” for almost unrestrictedly productive passive to “d>i” for the closed class of some 40 reciprocal sja-verbs).

We are now in a position to draw a summary of testing some classes of sja uses against the properties (iv)-(vii) from Haspelmath’s list, see Table 2. Unfortunately, due to space limitations the values in most of the cells have not been properly discussed; besides, the data in Table 2 are somewhat simplified and could be further elaborated in many details. However, these data highlight a significant contrast between passive uses of sja and its other functions. It appears that passive sja consistently shows important properties typical of inflection. In particular, they denote the same propositions as their non-sja counterparts, their meanings are different only on a very abstract and essentially pragmatic/discourse level, passive sja-affixation is semantically regular and is not relevant to the base meaning; finally, this sort of derivation is almost unlimitedly applicable to those verbs that meet the fundamental requirements on passive sja-formation (imperfective transitive verbs with probably further restrictions).

Other types of sja-verbs are quite different in that they either show a pronounced gravitation towards derivational values of observed properties (idiosyncratic sja-verbs) or show rather inconsistent patterns (more regular types, such as decausatives, reflexives and reciprocals).

The contrast between the passive function of sja and all its other functions has been repeatedly underscored in the relevant literature (Švedova 1980:616; Wiemer, forthc.). Whether the former should be ultimately treated as an inflectional process and the latter, as a derivational process, is a question that largely depends on definitions; such analysis is only one of a wide range of viewpoints. The arguments presented here are not intended to underpin such an analysis. However, the essential summary of the data presented so far is that the process of sja affixation in Russian covers a motley spectrum of subtypes that are rather inconsistent with respect to the properties that are associated with inflection resp. word formation. In what follows a particularly puzzling sub-pattern of sja uses will be discussed that has not received due attention in the relevant literature.

11 This contrast is also echoed in lexicographic practice, in that passive sja-verbs are never given independent glosses and are explicated by reference to their non-sja counterparts, while other types of sja-verbs usually get their own semantic interpretation.
3. ‘Lexical sja-antipassives’

Among the types of sja-verbs in Russian there is a type that is often referred to as ‘possessive reflexive sja-verbs’ (Gerritsen 1990:80-85), ‘sja-verbs of (semantically) incorporated (inanimate) object’ (Kretov 1978) or ‘partitive object reflexives’ (Geniušienė 1987). This type of sja use is exemplified by (10), if compared to its transitive counterpart (11):

(10)  
Ja zažmuril-sja.
I screwed.up-SJA
“I screwed up my eyes.” = (11)

(11)  
Ja zažmurił glaza.
I screwed.up eyes.ACC

Sja-verbs of this kind are one-argument verbs whose semantic representation incorporates the argument that can be used as the direct object of the corresponding transitive non-sja construction.

This type of use may be classified as an instance of ‘antipassivisation’ if the latter phenomenon is loosely understood as an intransitivising mechanism which either suppresses or demotes the O (transitive object) preserving the A (transitive subject), cf., e.g., Polinskaja (1986).12 It is important that the direct object of the corresponding transitive verb can never be overtly expressed in the construction with what will be henceforth labelled as ‘antipassive sja-verbs’. It is partially illustrated by (12), in which I show ungrammaticality of three deliberately chosen imaginable ways of coding the object, but it must be understood that it cannot be overtly expressed in antipassive sja construction in any other way either:

(12)  
*Ja zažmurił-sja glaza / glazami
I screwed.up-SJA eyes.ACC / eyes.INSTR
/s glazami (etc.)
/ with eyes

The cognitive basis of this type of sja-derivation is a well-known process of metonymic identification of the possessor with its (inalienable) possessee that is further widened by the «metaphoric extension of inalienability to nouns whose referents are normally presumed to be alienable» (Levine 1980:18).13 Kretov (1978) distinguishes the following

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12 There are linguists who understand antipassivisation more narrowly acknowledging this phenomenon only in languages with ergative alignment, where demotion of the object is accompanied by the concomitant ergative-to-absolutive promotion of the Agent.

13 Cf. Zribi-Hertz’s discussion of the French phenomenon parallel to the Russian lexical antipassives (N1 is the semantically incorporated object): “dans tout une série de cas, le N1
types of objects that can get semantically incorporated into sja-verbs of this kind:

a. **Body-parts.** This corresponding group of verbs is by far the largest one; it includes for instance *naxmurit'sja* “to knit one’s brow, to frown” (cf. *naxmurit’* “to knit”), *vysmorkat'sja* “to blow one’s nose” (cf. *vysmorkat’* “to blow”), etc. (see also ex. (10)). In many cases these verbs border reflexives proper: *umyt'sja* “to wash one’s face, to wash (intransitive)”, cf. *umyt’* “to wash (transitive)”.  

b. ‘**Spiritual parts**’ (thoughts, attention etc.), e.g. *sosredotočit'sja* “to concentrate one’s attention”, cf. *sosredotočit’* “to concentrate”.  
c. **Products of one’s creativity,** e.g. *pečatat'sja* “to have one’s works published (in ...)”, cf. *pečatat’* “to publish”.  
d. **Several types of objects of personal use,** such as clothes, money, vehicles, living places, etc.: *zastegnut'sja* “to button one’s clothes up” (cf. *zastegnut’* “to fasten, button up”), *potratit'sja* “to spend one’s money” (cf. *potratit’* “to spend”), *zapavit'sja* “to refuel one’s vehicle” (cf. *zapavit’* “to refuel”).

There are two properties of this type of sja-verbs that have been mentioned in the literature and that are essential for the discussion undertaken here.

First, each verb of this type presupposes a particular type of semantically incorporated object that is idiosyncratic for that sja-verb, cf.:

One may *stroit’* (“build” – S.S.) houses, bridges, clubs, roads etc., *stroit'sja* means “to build a living place, a house, an edifice for living”; (...) one may *tratit’* (“spend” – S.S.) one’s money, salary, stipend, paper as well as (metaphorically) one’s time, forces etc., but *tratit'sja* means “to spend one’s money, (financial) means”; (...) one may *propit’* (“drink away” – S.S.) anything (without any lexical restriction), but *propit'sja* means “to drink away everything one possesses” (Janko-Trinickaja 1962:175).

Second, this type of sja derivation is a lexically restricted process, even for those transitive verbs whose expected objects are subject’s (inalienable) possesses, cf. ungrammaticality of *vsklokočit'sja* (intended meaning “to tousle one’s hair” from *vsklokočit’* “to tousle”) or *zarabotat'sja* (this verb is ungrammatical in the intended meaning “to earn one’s money” from *zarabotat’* “to earn”), although there is no principled way in which these underlying transitive verbs are different from such verbs as *zažmurit’* or *potratit’* that allow lexical sja-antipassivisation (see examples above).

approprié est un nom de partie du corps (...). [N]ous relevons par ailleurs parmi les N (…) des substantifs apparemment assez peu nombreux, tels que *vie, comportement, nature, sentiments (…)* dont l’analyse détaillée révèle qu’il partagent plusieurs propriétés remarquables avec les noms de parties du corps inalienable” (1978:121).
All these facts imply that the process at issue is basically a lexical phenomenon (hence, ‘lexical antipassives’) that shows derivational values if tested against the properties (iv)-(viii) from Haspelmath’s list. It has unpredictably restricted applicability, the verbs in this class are conceptually different from their transitive counterparts, and what is more, this discrepancy is idiosyncratic for each particular pair of verbs.

4. Grammatical sja-antipassives

In this section I will examine a pattern of sja use (henceforth referred to as ‘grammatical sja-antipassive’) that is superficially very similar to lexical antipassivisation as discussed above. However, I will try to demonstrate that the two phenomena are essentially different in a number of important ways. The discussion undertaken here is largely based on data from informal registers, so that for many speakers of Russian some of the utterances below may seem coarse or awkward. Nevertheless, these utterances form a homogeneous and productive class, which has been strangely ignored in the relevant literature. A corpus of utterances with grammatical sja-antipassives that I am gathering is accruing almost every day, and these utterances are not only registered in spontaneous informal conversation, but also in more planned types of discourse, such as, for example, TV news reports or academic presentations, as well as, sporadically, in written texts. Besides, introspective reports obtained from the speakers who have produced utterances of the type discussed here allow one to conclude that they are produced in accordance with the speakers’ intention, i.e. they are not slips of the tongue, but rather represent a regular, even if innovative phenomenon in the grammar of Russian that needs appropriate linguistic examination.

With this in mind, I will leave aside sociolinguistic aspects of the phenomenon (e.g. its standardness, sociolinguistic and stylistic diffusion, its possible and often intended comic effect etc.) and will devote the remainder of this section to the discussion of this model’s grammatical properties.

The phenomenon of the ‘grammatical sja-antipassive’ can be exemplified by utterances (13)-(23). For the sake of simplicity, utterances in this section are provided with more or less word-by-word translations and not with glosses as such. Irrelevant grammatical information is reduced to a minimum, and sja-verbs are boldfaced; the type of contextually understood object and extralinguistic comments are provided in parentheses.

(13)  
Sejčas Ekaterina Ivanova budet perezarjažat-sja.
“Now, Ekaterina Ivanova is about to reload-sja.” (Rifle; registered in a TV-report from a biathlon competition).

(14)  
Kogda ja pered ètim zapuskala-s’, on rabotal.
“When I launched/started-sja just before that, it was working properly.” (Computer programme; a novice user tells a serviceman about a trouble she had encountered).

- Pojdu, pereključu-s’, čto li. – Da ladno, lučše vyključi-s’ prosto.
  “- I’ll probably go and switch.to-sja.” – “Well, you better just switch.off-sja.” (TV-set; in the room next door a TV-set is switched on. Suddenly, the broadcasting stops, and an almost unbearable sound of buzzer appears. The speaker wants to somehow eliminate the sound of the TV).

Vy tam sami zavernēte-s’?
  “Will you wrap-sja yourself?” (Purchase, buying; a saleswoman asks a customer if he could wrap up something that he had bought. The saleswoman points at the package when uttering the sentence).

Vy čto, obmenjat-sja?
  ≈ “Is it to change-sja that you have come?” (Money; a security guard of a currency exchange office is addressing a putative customer).

Xočes’, uberi-s’ ko mne.
  ≈ “You can put.away-sja into my one if you want.” (Bag; a person with a rucksack offers his mate who is carrying an awkward plastic bag to put this bag into the rucksack).

Ja budu stīrat-sja potom.
  “I will launder-sja later.” (Laundry; the members of a family are using the same washing machine and have to discuss the order of its use).

A, stabilizēm-sja!
  “Ah, let’s stabilise-sja!” (Winnings; the transitive verb stabilizētu, literally ‘to stabilise’, is a novel verb introduced in a TV show in which players gain money).

Ty čto, xočes’ vyrovnjat-sja?
  “Are you going to align-sja?” (Car; a passenger asks a driver if he is going to park the car parallel to the edge of the road).

To est’ vsē ravno večerom nužno oščelknut-sja, daže esli ty ostaēš-sja na noč’.
  “That is, you have to oščelknut-sja, even if you stay for the whole night.” (Magnetic card; the speaker explains his interlocutor the way one has to handle an employees’ attendance to office controlling system. In the previous discourse the speaker introduces a novel transitive verb oščelknut’, a derivative of ščelknut’ ‘click’, for a manipulation that one has to perform with the magnetic card when entering or leaving the office).

Ne davī-s’, otkraj novuju.
Don’t squeeze-sja, open a new one. (Parcel; the addressee is trying to squeeze the dregs of sour cream off an almost empty pack).

These constructions are similar to the lexical antipassives in that they can be roughly paraphrased by transitive clauses with the corresponding non-sja verbs. Thus, compare (23) and (24):

(24) *Ne davi ètu pačku, otkroj novuju.
Not squeeze this.ACC parcel.ACC, open new.ACC
“Don’t squeeze this pack, open a new one”.

The similarity extends to the fact that the direct object of the corresponding transitive construction can not be overtly expressed in the construction with grammatical sja-antipassives, cf. (12) above; once again I only show ungrammaticality of three imaginable patterns of coding the object, and once again other patterns are no better:

(25) *Ne davi-s’ ètu pačku /
Not squeeze-sja this.ACC pack.ACC /
ètoj pačkoj /s ètoj pačkoj.
this.INSTR pack.INSTR / with this pack

However, there is an indispensable difference between lexical and grammatical antipassives, namely, contextual nature of the semantic interpretation of the latter. It is thus not coincidental that I am providing utterances and situations and not isolated verbs in this section. Given in isolation, these verbs would not be appropriately interpreted. It can be clearly demonstrated by the fact that one and the same antipassive sja-verb may get discrepant interpretations as to what is its implied argument depending on the context, see examples (26)-(29):

(26) Nu davaj, Lenka, zakryvaj-sja.
“Well, Lenka, close-sja.” (Door; the addressee stands in the doorway of a flat from which the speaker has just come out).

(27) Xorošaja xozjaka zakryvaet-sja rafinirovannym.
“A good housewife close-sja with the help of refined (oil).” (Jar; = “Uses refined oil for impermeabilisation of the jars”; registered in a TV-advertisement of refined oil).

(28) Uže zakryvat’-sja pora.
“It is time to close-sja.” (Computer programme; = “it is time to close/stop the computer programme”).

(29) Nu èto, zakraem-sja.
“Well, let’s close-sja.” (Playing cards; in a card game, in which cards could be either ‘opened’ or ‘closed’, that is, kept unshown to other players).

Thus, unlike lexical antipassives, grammatical antipassives do not seem to show any tight connection between the verbal lexeme and the type of implied object. Correct interpretation of these utterances is made possible by the context (in the broad sense of the word). I will side-step probably the most intriguing side of this phenomenon, that is, those pragmatic stipulations that urge speakers to use these sja-constructions instead of more usual transitive clauses (leaving this topic for the discussion elsewhere). For the purposes of this study it will suffice to say that speakers tend to use grammatical sja-antipassives in those cases when the pairing of the Actor and Undergoer has been established beforehand (contextually, deictically or based on the common knowledge of the extralinguistic reality), and the latter is unimportant for the discourse (has low topicality and persistence in Givón’s terms, see e.g. 1990: 570 and a further reference therein). Given informal character of the speech situation, this pragmatic unimportance enables speakers to iconically suppress the argument, regardless of whether this might-have-been direct object is semantically definite (16), (18), (21), (23), referential indefinite (17), (22) or non-referential (19), (27).  

These pragmatic functions of the grammatical antipassive do impose certain lexical restrictions on the use of this model. These restrictions are not discussed here in much detail, but basically they are of the same order as the restrictions on the formation of sja-passive. For instance, grammatical antipassive constructions are almost never used when the second participant is animate, which nicely fits the general motivation of this construction outlined above, i.e. elimination of unimportant objects. Accordingly, it is very unlikely to encounter sja-antipassives of such transitive verbs that normally take animate objects (e.g. ubit’ ‘to kill’ or kormit’ ‘to feed’). Another example of a severe restriction on the productivity of sja-antipassive is that it is only possible with verbs of action, which is also true for sja-passive. Thus non-action transitive verbs, such as for example stoit’ ‘to cost’, znat’ ‘to know’, prevosxodit’ ‘to surpass, to exceed’ etc. are never used in sja-passive and sja-antipassive constructions.

14 It is curious that the Russian grammatical antipassive (as well as lexical antipassive discussed above) is not associated with the cross-linguistically prevalent function of antipassives, namely, signalling generic or unspecified objects (Heath 1976; Cooreman 1993). However, there is a handful of the so-called ‘absolutive’ sja-verbs in Russian that are used in exactly this function, i.e. no affected entity is coded in the constructions with these sja-verbs, so that the whole construction expresses the meaning of a characteristic property of the subject rather than a particular instance of a real-world event, cf. èta sobaka kusaetsja (literally, this dog bites-SJA) ‘this dog bites’ (is a biter). Absolutive sja-verbs constitute the last (by far the smallest) group of sja-verbs in Russian that meets Polinskaja’s definition of antipassive adopted in this paper (along with ‘lexical antipassives’ and ‘grammatical antipassives’ discussed in the main text).
However, there seem to be no idiosyncratic, arbitrary lexical restrictions on the applicability of the grammatical antipassive *sjä* use, at least I can not trace any on the basis of the corpus of utterances with *sjä* antipassive that I have registered in oral speech. This unrestrictedness is obliquely indicated by the fact that some of the base transitive verbs used in *sjä*-antipassivisation are neologisms themselves (20), (22).

It is absolutely crucial that the number of semantic arguments of the grammatical antipassive *sjä*-verbs coincides with the number of semantic arguments of the base verb, the difference being that in the antipassive clauses the second argument (= Undergoer) is not overtly expressed and remains a semantic variable to be interpreted on the level of the discourse. The function of *sjä* in these cases is precisely to mark on the verb the elimination of direct object. It must be stressed once again that grammatical antipassive *sjä*-verbs are different from lexical antipassives in this respect, since in lexical antipassives there is no semantic variable that has the role of Undergoer and *sjä* signals incorporation of a particular type of the original direct object into the meaning of the verb.

Thus, grammatical antipassive is a diathetic permutation of a transitive construction, that is, a ‘function-changing’ (as opposed to ‘event-changing’, see Haspelmath 2002:218) or ‘morphosyntactic’ (as opposed to ‘morpholexical’, see Sadler & Spencer 1998:208ff.) operation. Verbs under grammatical *sjä*-antipassivisation are conceptually identical with their transitive base verbs, the meaning of the diathetic change is rather regular and abstract (its function is pragmatically-driven), and the process presumably has no arbitrary restrictions on applicability. In other words, the process of grammatical *sjä*-antipassivisation shows important properties that are tightly associated with inflection.

5. Lexicalisation of antipassives

In the two preceding sections the contrast between lexical and grammatical poles of *sjä*-antipassivisation was presented in a rather black-and-white manner, which is important for rhetorical reasons but gives a somewhat simplified view on the overall complexity of *sjä*-antipassives. We are now in a position to briefly tackle some processes that take place on the borderland between the two phenomena.

It has been repeatedly noticed in the literature, that “one of the mechanisms for semantic change in grammaticization is the conventionalization of implicature, by which a frequently-occurring inference that a hearer is licensed to make beyond the explicit meaning of an utterance becomes part of the explicit meaning” (Bybee 1994:240). This type of semantic development is probably even more typical of lexicalisation, a process that generally shares many properties with grammaticalisation. It is no wonder that such a conventionalisation of
implicature is shown by some instances of what originally used to be a grammatical antipassive *sja* construction, that is, a construction whose essence is by definition an implicature. In other words, there are antipassive *sja*-verbs that seem to lexicalise in a certain speech community, in that the interpretation of the implied object gets fixed in that community and does not require specific pragmatic prerequisites typical of grammatical antipassives.

Several examples are necessary. *Sdavat’*, literally “to hand in”, is a verb that is used – among other uses – in such collocations as e.g. *sdavat’ èkzamen, začët* (or the like) “to pass an exam, test etc”. In some (student) communities, the verb *sdavat’ sja* is regularly used in this latter meaning. *Podat’* is a polysemous verb roughly meaning “to give (to)”, the verb *podat’ sja* got to mean “to submit a paper / an abstract” for some young people involved in academic activities; *gasit’* is “to put out, to extinguish”, *gasit’ sja* is regularly interpreted as “to put out the light (most likely before going to bed)” in informal family communication of some speakers. *Zabit’* (literally “to hammer in”) is used in an utterly substandard idiom *zabit’ strelku*, literally, “to hammer in the hand (of a watch)” that means “to make a date”. This latter meaning can be compactly expressed by an even more substandard *zabit’ sja*.

*Sja*-verbs like those quoted in the previous paragraph can easily emerge and receive conventional interpretation for the speakers in a certain speech community and remain ununderstandable or only contextually understandable for other speakers of Russian. In the process of conventionalisation antipassive *sja*-verbs acquire properties that have been described for lexical antipassives above, i.e. they no longer involve a semantic variable that is interpreted contextually as a might-have-been direct object of the corresponding transitive non-*sja* verb. These secondary lexical antipassives are only different from those discussed in section 3 in that they do not necessarily meet the restrictions on types of incorporated objects, i.e., these conventionally understood objects are not necessarily (quasi-)inalienable.

6. Discussion

In this paper, I have examined the ways in which the characteristics that had been claimed to be defining criteria / concomitant properties / epiphenomena of the inflectional vs. derivational status of a morphological process are distributed among the various uses of *sja*-affixation in Russian.

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15 Cf. “Not infrequently a morphosyntactic operation becomes a morpholexical operation in historical change (lexicalization). As a result of this one and the same piece of morphology may realize a morphosyntactic operation in one language / dialect and a morpholexical operation in a closely related language / dialect” (Sadler & Spencer 1998:212).
a process of notorious grammatical complexity. Central for the discussion undertaken here were the two types of *sja*-verbs that are conventionally labelled here as *lexical* and *grammatical antipassives* correspondingly. The essence of the two processes can be somewhat loosely devised by the following formulae: lexical antipassive *sja*-verb *V*-*sja* means “to *V* an object of the type *A*” where *A* is a semantic constant idiosyncratically assigned to the verb *V*, while grammatical antipassive *V*-*sja* means “to *V* an object *X*” where *X* is a semantic variable whose reference is identified in the context.

The two processes are very similar to each other in terms of *coding* the participants of real-world events. Most likely, grammatical *sja*-antipassivisation is diachronically tightly related to lexical antipassivisation being a result of an extension of productivity of the latter process. However, despite all similarity, the two processes show for the most part opposite values of the properties associated with inflection vs. derivation dichotomy. As the very terms proposed here imply, lexical antipassives show many of the properties of derivation and grammatical antipassives show many of the properties of inflection.

However, numerous cases of on-going lexicalisations are an evidence of a dynamic interplay between the two processes. Basically, the distinction between lexical and grammatical antipassives appears to be a distinction between the types of *strategies* that speakers use when producing and interpreting these *sja*-forms. If the implicit object is contextually omitted (e.g. for reasons of economy) and the hearer is forced to make a pragmatic inference *ad hoc*, the construction has to be qualified as an instance of grammatical antipassive. But if the object is viewed by the speaker as inherent / conventional for the given lexeme, we have to postulate a case of lexical antipassive. Thus, ultimately, *one and the same* antipassive *sja* construction may appear to be a lexical antipassive for one speaker, and a grammatical antipassive, for another (or, theoretically, even for the same speaker at another moment of time).

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16 Diachronic links between reflexives proper, possessive reflexives (= lexical antipassives) and object-demoting constructions (= grammatical antipassives) are widely discussed in the literature. An insightful notion that seems to offer a unified semantic account of possible diachronic relations between such constructions is ‘non-distinction of arguments’, cf., e.g., (Langacker 1976).

17 In a certain way, the contrast between lexical resp. grammatical antipassive is reminiscent of that between passive and decausative functions of *sja* (I want to thank Christian Lehmann for that intriguing remark proposed at the conference in Vienna). Whether there is any theoretical relevance of the fact that in both cases it is the function with lower text frequency (passive and grammatical antipassive correspondingly) that shows more properties of inflection needs further exploration.

18 The fact that I do not intend to offer an analytical technique for teasing apart these two possibilities when examining particular utterances and even doubt that such a technique can be offered should not undermine the theoretical relevance of the contrast discussed.
The last statement actually comes as the final theoretical conclusion of this paper. Once again, it has not been my goal to put forward an argument for a certain view on what is inflection and what is derivation in the realm of the Russian sja affixation. Rather, my goal was to demonstrate that absolutely crucial discrepancies in the distribution of properties that are thought of as criteria of inflection and derivation can not only cross-cut a polyfunctional process of affixation, but also a semantically homogeneous fragment of such a process, or even different instances of use of one and the same linguistic form, depending on the type of mental mechanisms that stand behind that use.

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