Alexander Letuchiy

**Historical development of labile verbs in modern Russian**

**Abstract:** The article deals with the phenomenon of lability (ambitransitivity), in other words, the ability of a verb to be either transitive or intransitive. I analyze the historical development of verbs which are currently labile in modern Russian. The main group of Russian labile verbs includes verbs of motion. On the basis of corpus and dictionary data, I conclude that the behavior of the lexemes under analysis is far from being uniform. However, interestingly, for most of them, e.g., *lit* ‘flow/pour’, *gonjat* ‘run, drive/chase, pursue’, and *kružit* ‘go round, turn, roll’, the proportion of the intransitive use grows throughout the period under analysis, though for the verb *kapat’/kapnut* ‘drop, pour in drips’, in contrast, the transitive use becomes more and more frequent.

In the cases when the intransitive use becomes more frequent, the semantic change matches the statistical one. In the beginning, verbs of this subtype were only used intransitively in a restricted type of contexts (e.g., for *gonjat* ‘run, drive/chase, pursue’, hunting contexts represent this restricted class), where the intransitive use might be a result of object omission. Later on, the semantic range of the intransitive use became wider and the lability was no longer semantically related to object omission. I conclude that the emergence of an intransitive use of a strictly transitive verb or the increase of the number of intransitive uses is often accompanied by semantic changes: first, a verb is used intransitively in a very restricted range of contexts (for the verb *gonjat* these include hunting contexts). Then, the range of contexts and the semantics of the intransitive use becomes wider, the number of intransitive uses grows and the verb becomes canonically labile with both uses being equally or almost equally frequent. Importantly, the borderline between A- and P-lability is not as strict as it is put sometimes: P-lability (the causative/non-causative alternation) can in some cases be traced back to A-lability (object omission).

**Keywords:** transitivity, labile verbs, the Russian language, motion verbs, argument, causation

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1 Introduction

In this paper, I trace the history of labile verbs in modern Russian, from the beginning of the 18th century until the end of the 20th century. My aim is to determine what relation exists between the transitive and the intransitive uses of each verb in various parts of the period under analysis. While for some labile verbs the Russian National Corpus and the materials of the Dictionary of 18th century show only transitive or only intransitive uses, others already manifest lability in the 18th century. However, the relationship between the two uses undergoes significant changes in the period under analysis: some of the verbs that used to be primarily transitive later become primarily intransitive, and so forth. This paper is concerned with the problem of shifts from the strictly transitive/intransitive to the labile type of verbs. Additionally, the question is raised as to whether the rise or decay of a particular use is a purely syntactic process or whether the semantic motivation of transitivisation/detransitivisation/labilization also plays a role. For instance, Hale and Keyser (2002) regard lability as a kind of unmarked derivation – that is, a syntactic rather than semantic process. I will show that, historically, the emergence of lability is strongly regulated by semantic restrictions imposed on the semantic properties of arguments and context of use.

Lability has been noted by linguists as early as in 1940s (see, for instance, Yakovlev and Ašhamaf 1941). However, the phenomenon is primarily described for languages with large classes of labile lexemes, while languages like Russian with small labile groups are by and large ignored.

I use the Russian National Corpus (www.ruscorpora.ru, henceforth RNC) to search for transitive and intransitive uses of each verb and to count these occurrences (the figures are of 2013). For each verb in each period, the option of “random ordering” available in the RNC was chosen. The proportion was counted for the first 100 uses of this random ordering. To make the figures represent as many texts as possible, I counted not more than two examples in any individual text. Note that, for several verbs in some periods, when their rate of occurrence was just over 100 times, i.e., less than 120 contexts, I counted all of them.

The RNC, however, is not comprehensive enough in its representation of the 18th century: texts of this time are only sporadically included in the corpus. A complementary search for the verbs under analysis in the card file (citations collection) compiled for the dictionary of Russian in the 18th century (Sorokin et al. 1984–2014) helped to fill this gap and to find out which uses the verbs had in this period as well as to determine the proportion of intransitive vs. transitive usage. Below, the source text was marked for each example found in the citations collection as well as for examples from the RNC. Note that, for the other periods, the dictionary materials have not been used both due to the fact that no figures show-
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The frequency of lexemes are available for the dictionary entries, and also because, in order to provide the most consistent analysis where possible, only one source of examples was used, namely, the RNC (as it contains a rather wide sample of examples from the 19th and the 20th centuries). In Modern Russian, both P- and A-lability in the terms of Dixon (1994: 6) are observed. P-labile verbs have a patientive argument in both uses. The transitive use also has an agent while the intransitive use lacks it (e.g., John broke a cup vs. The cup broke). A-lability is a type of lability where both uses have an agent but the patient is eliminated in the intransitive use (e.g., John ate a pizza vs. John ate). Modern Russian belongs to the group of languages where P-lability is restricted to a small group of verbs. As Apresjan (1969), Nedjalkov and Knjazev (1985: 25–30) show, we only find a few P-labile lexemes in Russian (see also Letuchiy 2006a: 183–185, 2006b for details). The group includes, among others, kružit’ ‘go round/turn, roll smth.’, mčat’ ‘run, rush/move quickly, rush smth.’, katit’ ‘drive, go, roll/roll smth.’, dvinut’ ‘go/move smth.’, lit’ ‘flow/pour smth.’, kapnut’ ‘drop/pour smth. in drips’, spustit’ ‘be blow off/drain’, gonjat’ ‘run, drive/chase, pursue’ (intransitive uses are cited before transitive ones). In contrast, A-labile verbs are numerous in Russian: cf. jest’ ‘eat/eat smth.’, pít’ ‘drink (alcohol)/drink smth.’, videt’ ‘see, be capable of seeing/see smth.’, etc’. They are beyond the scope of our paper, though I will show that what appears to be P-lability now is historically closely related to A-lability. In terms of Ljutikova (2002) and Letuchiy (2006a: 97–179), who classify labile verbs into several semantic subtypes, only the anticausative type (as break in English) is found in Russian. All the other types, viz. the reciprocal (John kissed Mary – Mary and John kissed), reflexive (John shaved Bill – John shaved), converse (cf. Bulgarian xaresvam ‘love; please’), and passive (present in some families in Africa, e.g., in Berber (see Chaker 1983), Bamana and other Mande languages (see Vydrine 1994), Songhay (Nilo-Saharan, see Galiama 2006) are entirely absent in modern Russian. Note that the relations between this classification and the traditional A vs. P lability distinction are far from trivial. For instance, the reflexive type of lability had to be regarded as a subcase of A-lability. However, the intralinguistic and crosslinguistic distribution of reflexive lability shows that the reflexive type is closer to P-lability than to A-lability in many respects:

- In reflexive lability, the two uses of labile verbs are semantically distinct, while what distinguishes the uses in A-lability is rather the pragmatic relevance of participants;

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1 In what follows, I will not always list all translations of verbs under analysis due to the lack of space.
- Reflexive lability, as well as P-lability, rarely characterizes large verb classes, contrary to A-lability, which often characterizes large subclasses (see Aikhenvald 2000 on Tariana where all transitive verbs seem to be A-labile).
- Reflexive lability shows no preference to accusative languages, while A-lability is more widespread in accusative than in ergative languages.

In Section 2, I will show that Russian labile verbs mainly belong to one semantic class (verbs of motion), which means that lability is not an accidental characteristic of individual lexemes. Based on the data of the dictionary of Russian of the 11th–17th centuries (Barkhudarov et al. 1975–2014), it is possible to conclude that Old Russian already had some labile verbs, but this lability is not always inherited in Modern Russian. Section 3 comprises the data on the diachronic development of Russian labile verbs. Each verb is analyzed in a separate section beginning with a table showing the distribution of transitive vs. intransitive uses in the Russian National Corpus in each subperiod of the period under analysis. Finally, in Section 4 (Conclusions) I formulate some general tendencies concerning Russian labile verbs and try to explain why Russian data is relevant for the general typology of lability (see Ljutikova (2002), Letuchiy (2009), Letuchiy (2013) for an outline of this typology).

It is necessary to say that, according to the most widespread point of view, the history of Modern Russian begins in the 15th century. However, in this paper I only analyze the period from the 18th century until the 20th century as it is represented in the Russian National Corpus. A remark concerning older periods of the Russian language history seems to be necessary here. When dealing with Modern Russian lability, it is interesting to determine whether Old Russian, the ancestor of Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian (see Borkovskij and Kuznetsov (2006) for the periodization of the Russian Language), had labile verbs. The abovementioned source, (Barxudarov et al. 1975–2014), as well as the card file compiled for this dictionary, prove that Old Russian possessed some labile verbs, though they showed no systematic and productive lability of any verb class. Moreover, some of these labile lexemes belonging to the motion class, which tends to be labile now, were also labile at this time:

(1) Jedin-Ø čelovek-Ø s ščit-om gde xošć- et tudy teč- et i na kon-e mč-it.
one-M.SG.NOM person-SG.NOM with shield-SG.INS where want-PRES.3SG there run-PRES.3SG and on horse-SG.LOC ride-PRES.3SG
‘One person with a shield runs and rides on a horse where he wants.’
(Ivan Peresvetov, 163. 16th century)
Another interesting feature of Old Russian is that it had a special type of diathesis variation where the same (transitive) verb could be used causatively with one or two accusative objects and non-causatively with one accusative object (see Section 3.1 on this type of variation). This type of variation, according to Krys’ko (2006), characterized verbs of motion (Krys’ko 2006: 289–298) and teaching (Krys’ko 2006: 298–325). Note that, here and below, Old Russian data are not analysed in detail, though it is important to note that, according to the dictionary materials, Old Russian also had some labile verbs, including labile verbs of motion. However, I here consider only the data of dictionaries for 18th century. The use of this data source allows me to see whether the verb was transitive, intransitive or labile in the beginning of the period under analysis.

2 Semantics of Russian labile verbs

In many languages where lability characterizes large verb groups, it is difficult (if not impossible) to make a precise formulation of the common semantic property which brings all or most labile verbs together. For instance, Levin (1993) and McMillion (2006) show that a wide range of English verb classes include labile lexemes, e.g. verbs of breaking (break, scatter), verbs of opening and closing (open, close), phasal verbs (begin, end, finish), and others. However, a large number of languages exist where lability is restricted to one or several semantic classes. For example, according to Haspelmath (1993: 117), labile verbs in Lezgian (Nakh-Daghestanian) mainly denote the destruction of the patient: cf. rugun ‘boil (transitive/intransitive)’ xun ‘break, split (transitive/intransitive)’, kun ‘burn (transitive/intransitive)’ and q’in ‘die/kill’. The same is true for Cora (Uto-Aztecan, Vasquez-Soto 2002), where the labile class is mainly represented by destruction verbs such as tapwa ‘break (transitive/intransitive)’, wa-síuh ça ‘tear (transitive/intransitive)’, and hantána{akaka‘akaka ‘divide/be divided, split (transitive/intransitive)’. Letuchiy (2010) shows that the semantic-class parameter is often even more relevant for the distribution of labile verbs than the spontaneity feature proposed by Haspelmath (1993). In Russian, the distribution of
lability is also strongly driven by the semantic classification of verbs. Lability in Russian is primarily characteristic of verbs whose meanings are associated with motion. This semantic category of motion can be further divided into two subtypes:

A. Verbs mainly denoting motion of humans and/or vehicles in their intransitive uses and a wider class of situations in their transitive uses: kružit’ ‘go round, turn, roll’, mčat’ ‘move quickly, rush, ride’, katit’ ‘drive, go, roll; roll smth.’, dvinut’ ‘go, move’, gonjat’ ‘run, drive (intransitive)/chase, pursue (transitive)’, povernut’ ‘turn’

In their intransitive uses these verbs characterize the motion of agentive participants and modes of transport (3). In transitive uses, this is not always the case: the object can be a canonical patient, as in (4), where the ball is rolled by the boy:

(3) Mašin-а kati-l-a po dorog-e.
    car-sg.nom roll-pst-sg.f along road-sg.dat
    ‘The car moved along the road.’

(4) Mal’čik-Ø kat-it m’ačik-Ø po dorog-e.
    boy-sg.nom roll-prs.3sg ball-sg.acc along road-sg.dat
    ‘The boy is rolling the ball along the road.’

In what concerns the object argument, verbs of agentive motion show variable behavior. Some of them, such as gonjat’ ‘run, drive/chase, pursue’, have one agentive argument in the intransitive use and two agentive arguments in the transitive use. For instance, in the sentence Mal’čik-Ø gonja-et golub-ej ‘The boy chases/pursues pigeons’ [boy-SG.NOM chase-PRS.3SG pigeon-PL.ACC], the verb is used transitively with both the subject and the object being animate. The subject (the boy) is an agent, and the object argument (pigeons) has some agentive features, too: for instance, it controls its own motion. In the sentence Mal’čik-Ø gonja-et po gorod-u ‘The boy runs/drives across the city’ [boy-SG.NOM drive-PRS.3SG across city-SG.DAT], the verb is used intransitively and the subject is agentive. Other verbs, such as dvinut’ ‘go, move’, usually have a non-agentive object in the transitive use, but the subject of the intransitive use is nevertheless agentive. The sentence Grossmejster-Ø dvinu-l-Ø pešk-u ‘The grand master moved the pawn’ [grand.master-SG.NOM move-PST-SG.M pawn-SG.ACC] illustrates the transitive use where the subject is agentive, and the object has the semantic role of the Theme. In the intransitive use, as in My dvinu-l-и k Volod’k-e
‘We went to Volod’ka’ [we.NOM go-PST-PL to Volod’ka-SG.DAT], the subject is agentive.


The verbs of motion of liquid do not behave uniformly either. One of them (kapnut’) is primarily intransitive, whereas lit’ and sypat’ are primarily transitive.

Note that the verbs of the first subclass (agentive motion verbs) are difficult to include in the A-labile vs. P-labile class. For instance, in their intransitive uses, the subject is mostly agentive, which reminds us of A-lability. However, what draws them together with P-labile verbs is that their transitive uses (e.g., dvinut’ ‘move smth.’) are semantically causatives of the intransitive uses (dvinut’ ‘begin to move (by itself)’). This is why I consider them to be P-labile even though, in what follows, I will show that, historically, they are undoubtedly related to A-lability (object omission).

Outside the motion class, lability occurs only sporadically: sometimes it characterizes individual lexemes, such as igrat’ ‘play’; in some other cases it is morphologically motivated, as with several verbs with the suffix combination -ir-ova- (e.g., var’jirovat’ ‘vary, change / be variable’).

Finally, I do not consider here processes of ‘occasional labilization’, such as the use of the verb ujti in the sense ‘make go out, fire a worker’ and so on.

3 Diachronic development of Russian labile verbs

In this section, I trace the diachronic development of labile verbs in modern Russian. Note that my analysis will not include any examples of delabilization: when initially labile verbs become either strictly transitive or strictly intransitive. I will concentrate on labilization.

3.1 Labile verbs in Old Russian

Some introductory remarks concerning lability in Old Russian need to be made in addition to what has been said in the introductory section. This section is based on the card file compiled for the Dictionary of the Russian language of the 11th–18th centuries and, partially, on Krys’ko’s (2006) assumptions. A full description of lability in Old Russian is beyond the scope of the present paper. As I have
already shown, Old Russian, just as Modern Russian, had some canonically labile verbs with one transitive and one intransitive use. Motion verbs such as mčat’ ‘move quickly, rush’ in Examples (1) and (2) are among these verbs. As detailed above, however, not all motion verbs showed a labile pattern in Old Russian. At the same time, Krys’ko (2006: 289–325, 350–352) shows that Old Russian had another rather peculiar type of lability. This phenomenon described by Krys’ko differs from what is traditionally meant by the term “lability”. The canonical notion of lability presupposes that one of the uses of the verb is transitive, and the other one intransitive. Both uses of noncanonically labile verbs in Old Russian (including some motion verbs as well) were transitive. For instance, the verb gŭnati ‘drive, chase, move, run’ and teči ‘drive, run’ are among lexemes manifesting this noncanonical lability: they have a noncausative transitive use (‘make smth./smb. move’) in (5a), (6a) and a causative transitive one in (5b), (6b):

(5) a. Put’-Ø gŭn-aše.
   way-SG.ACC drive-IPF.3SG
   ‘He went/ran his way.’ (lit. ‘He drove his way’).
   (Uspenskij sbornik. 226g; cited by Krys’ko [2006: 291])

b. Žen-et’ vētr-ŭ prax-ŭ.
   drive-PRS.3SG wind-SG.NOM dust-SG.ACC
   ‘The wind drives dust.’
   (Uspenskij sbornik. 298g; cited by Krys’ko [2006: 291])

(6) a. Bez trud-a put’-Ø gorn-ii tek-oša.
   without labour-GEN way-SG.ACC celestial-ACC.SG.M run-AOR.3PL
   ‘They ran easily (on) their celestial way.’
   (Paterik Kievo-Pečerskij. 100b; cited by Krys’ko [2006: 291])

b. Aš’e na poxot’-Ø ok-o teč-ėt’ ny.
   if on lust-SG.ACC eye-SG.NOM run-PRS.3SG we.ACC
   ‘If our eye(s) incite(s) us to lust.’ (lit. ‘runs us to lust’).
   (Troickij sbornik. 193; cited by Krys’ko [2006: 291]).

There are two main semantic verb classes in Old Russian that show this type of lability or, more strictly speaking, syntactic variation. The first of these are verbs of motion (see Examples (5) and (6)), some of which also manifest canonical lability in modern Russian). Yet, there is another class of labile verbs which behave non-canonically in modern Russian, namely, verbs of teaching. In (7a), the verb učiti ‘teach, learn’ is used in the sense of ‘learn’, whereas in (7b) it means ‘teach’. The same is true for the Russian verb učit’ ‘learn, teach’ in examples (8a) and (8b), respectively:
Labor verbs in modern Russian

(7) a. Ručn-aja remestv-a dobr-ii on-i izuči-ša.
   manual-ACC.PL craft-PL.ACC good-NOM.PL that-NOM.PL learn-AOR.3PL
   ‘These good people learned handicrafts.’
   (Vygoleksinskij sbornik. 267; cited by Krys’ko [2006: 300])

   b. Izuči-ša pop-ove ljud-ii ne na dobr-o.
   teach-AOR.3PL priest-PL.NOM people-PL.ACC not on good-SG.ACC
   ‘The priests did not teach the people good things.’
   (Sbornik Sofijskij. 109v. cited by Krys’ko [2006: 301]).

(8) a. Pet'a uč-it' arabsk-ij jazyk-Ø.
   Petja-sg.nom learn-PRS.3SG Arabic-m.sg.acc language-sg.acc
   ‘Petja learns Arabic.’

   b. Pet'a uč-it' det-ej arabsk-omu.
   Petja-sg.nom teach-PRS.3SG child-PL.ACC arabic-m.sg.dat
   ‘Petja teaches children Arabic.’

Subsequently, the Old Russian type of lability, where some verbs had an accusative argument both in the non-causative and in the causative use, almost disappeared, excepting the verb učit’ and, perhaps, a few more lexemes. It should be noted that some of the verbs we will deal with in this paper are found in Old Russian card files only with transitive or as intransitive uses. For instance, the verb katiti ‘drive, go, roll; roll smth.’ only shows transitive uses, as in (9); in contrast, kružiti/kružati ‘go around’ seems to only have intransitive uses (cf. (10)):

(9) I povel-ě Vorotynsk-omu svo-im polk-om
   and order-AOR.3SG Vorotynski-sg.dat own-m.sg.ins regiment-sg.ins
   soit-i s kon-ej i tur-y katit-i.
   go.down-INF from horse-pl.gen and tower-pl.acc roll-inf
   ‘And he ordered Vorotynski and his regiment to get off their horses and to
   roll their towers.’

(10) Jeretik-i okolo kupel-i protiv solnc-a
   heretic-pl.nom around fond-sg.gen against Sun-sg.gen
   kružaj-ut.
   go.round-PRS.3pl
   ‘Heretics go around the fond against the Sun (i.e., counterclockwise).’
   (Avvakum. Kniga besed, 413, 1675 г.)

In other words, it is possible to say that the Modern Russian lability is not always inherited from the Old Russian one. Note also that even verbs that were already
labile prior to the 18th century do not always remain labile in the 18th century. For instance, *mčat’* ‘move quickly, rush’ had both transitive and intransitive uses before the 18th century (see Examples (1) and (2)) but is only found as transitive in the 18th century corpus texts and dictionary materials. Thus the task of tracing the statistical distribution of transitive vs. intransitive uses in the period under analysis makes considerable sense. In the following subsections, I will describe the development of syntactic patterns for each verb of motion under analysis in the 18th through 20th centuries.

### 3.2 Lability in modern Russian in the 18th–20th centuries

In this section, I will trace the proportion transitive and intransitive uses of the verbs under analysis during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. The following verbs were analyzed:

- *katit’* ‘drive, go, roll/roll smth.’;
- *kružit’* ‘go round, turn (intransitive)/move around, roll (transitive)’
- *spuskat’/spustit’* ‘be blown off; drain’
- *mčat’* ‘run, rush (intransitive)/move quickly, rush (transitive)’
- *kapat’/kapnut’* ‘drop, pour in drips’
- *lit’* ‘flow/pour’
- *gonjat’* ‘run, drive/chase, pursue’
- *dvinut’* ‘go/move smth.’

The period under analysis is divided into five subperiods: the 18th century, the first half of the 19th century, the second half of the 19th century, the first half of the 20th century, and the second half of the 20th century (the 18th century is analyzed as a whole because the number of texts from this period in the Russian National Corpus is rather small, and examples from the *Dictionary of the Russian language of the 18th century* are added). For each verb, I counted transitive and intransitive uses. Table 9 contains the figures for all lexemes under analysis. For individual verbs, the percentages of each use are shown in Tables 1 through 8. It is necessary to add that metaphoric uses and other meanings that are not directly related to the meaning of motion were not taken into account. For instance, the verb *dvinut’* ‘go/move smth.’ can also be used in the sense ‘hit, kick’, but these contexts are not included in my figures (though historically they seem to be related to the meaning ‘move (tr/intr)’).
3.2.1 Katit’ ‘drive, go, roll/roll smth.’

Let us begin with the verb katit’ ‘drive, go, roll; roll smth.’. Above I have mentioned the statistics procedure I use. Note that for the first and the second halves of the 20th century, all the uses have been included even though the total number may slightly exceed 100. The same has been done for other cases when the general number of the examples in a subperiod is between 100 and 110. In the 18th century texts included in the Russian national corpus, the verb occurs only once and this use is transitive:

(11) Veličestvenn-yj Gvadalkvivir-Ø kat-it medlenno
majestic-NOM.SG.M Guadalquivir-SG.NOM roll-PRES.3SG slowly
svoj-i vod-y
OWN-PL.ACC water-PL.ACC
‘The majestic Guadalquivir flows slowly’ (lit. ‘rolls its waters slowly’).
(N.M. Karamzin. Sierra-Morena. 1793)

However, the data of the Dictionary of the Russian language of the 18th century shows that the verb was already labile in the 18th century. Cf. the following intransitive (12) and transitive (13) uses of katit’ from the same text by Trediakovsky:

(12) Ravno kak v tak-om kotor-yj kat-it
in.the.same.way.as in such-M.LOC which-M.LOC roll-PRES.3SG
v kolesnic-e.
in chariot-SG.LOC
‘... As well as (in) the person who rides in a chariot.’
(Vasily Trediakovsky. Tilemakh. 1766, volume II, book 24.)

Some data concerning statistical significance of differences between the periods under analysis can be found in Section 4 (Conclusions).
As a fast river rolls its waves.
(Vasily Trediakovsky. Tilemak. 1766, volume II, book 17.)

In the dictionary data, 10 of 19 uses of \textit{katit}' of the 18th century are intransitive.

In the 19th century, both transitive and intransitive uses of \textit{katit}' are found in the corpus. Moreover, the verb has more intransitive than transitive uses (13 and 9, respectively). All intransitive uses denote motion in some mode of transport:

(14) \textit{Na drug-oj den'-Ø kat'-at ko mne prjamo na dvor-Ø.}

‘The next day, (they) drive directly to my yard.’

Transitive uses express caused motion of an inanimate patient, for instance, a snowball. Many transitive uses have an inanimate subject (causer):

(15) \textit{Dnepr-Ø kati-l-Ø v bereg-ax vod-y svoj-i.}

‘Dnieper [the river] flowed in its bed.’ (lit. ‘rolled its waters in the coasts’).
(V.T. Narezhnyj. Slavenskie večera. 1809).

In the second half of the 19th century, this verb is much more often used intransitively (59 instances) than transitively (30 uses). The range of contexts compatible with the intransitive use of the verb also increases. Besides the situation of agentive motion (mainly having to do with transport), it can also denote motion of liquids: in three examples it designates motion of sweat, as in (16), and in one example it is used for the motion of water.

(16) \textit{Pot-Ø kati-l-Ø s menja grad-om.}

‘I sweated (lit. ‘Sweat flowed from me as hail’).’
(D.V. Grigorovich. Korabl’ “Rtvizan”. 1863.)
At the beginning of the 20th century the verb remains primarily intransitive, but the prevalence of intransitive uses is less obvious, at least in the texts of the Russian National Corpus (46 transitive uses against 59 intransitive ones). Finally, in the second half of the 20th century, the proportion of intransitive uses grows again; now their number 61, whereas the number of transitive uses is 41. Thus, in the case of *katit’*, we can speak of no uniform direction of change in the proportion of the uses. At the same time, the semantic class of intransitive uses becomes wider: from the 19th century on, it includes nonagentive contexts. The verb *katit’* does not seem to have a regular perfective pair (*pokatit’* ‘begin to roll, drive’ bears an inchoative meaning, not being a precise aspectual pair for *katit’* – this lexeme is also labile).

### 3.2.2  *Kružit’*  ‘go round, turn (intransitive)/move around, roll (transitive)’

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>transitive</th>
<th>intransitive</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18th century</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>19th century (1st half)</td>
<td>26 (87%)</td>
<td>4 (13%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>19th century (2nd half)</td>
<td>42 (68%)</td>
<td>20 (32%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>20th century (1st half)</td>
<td>49 (45%)</td>
<td>59 (55%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>20th century (2nd half)</td>
<td>30 (30%)</td>
<td>70 (70%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The verb is already labile in the 18th century: see an intransitive use in (17) and a transitive use in (18).

(17) *Ja strašny-m obraz-om kruži-l po gorod-u.*

I awful-ins image-ins circle-pst.m along city

‘I lost my way awfully in this city’.

(N.M. Karamzin. Pis’ma russkogo puteshestvennika. 1793.)

(18) *Zarazi-vš-ij jegž dux-Ø ljubonačalij-a*

infect-PART.PRS-NOM.SG.M he.ACC spirit-SG.NOM lust.for.power-GEN

kruž-it vs-e golov-y.

turn-PRS.3SG all-PL.ACC head-PL.ACC

‘The lust for power that fills him turns everyone’s head.’

(D.I. Fonvizin. Rassuždenije o nepremennyx gosudarstvennyx zakonax. 1778–1783.)

In the 19th century this verb remains labile. Its transitive use is much more frequent than the intransitive one (26 and 4 instances, respectively). However,
almost all transitive uses exemplify the phraseological unit *kružit’ golovu* ‘turn smb.’s head.’ In contrast, the intransitive use occurs in the prototypical sense of motion. In the second half of the 19th century, the frequency of the intransitive use increases: it occurs in 20 examples – 32% of all uses.

At the beginning of the 20th century, we observe a dramatic change towards the intransitive pattern for this verb. Only 49 out of the 108 first examples are transitive, while 59 are intransitive:

(19) *Bol’šij-e belyj-e ptic-y kruž-at nad vod-oj.*

‘Big white birds circle above the water.’

(N.S. Gumilev. Afrikanskij dnevnik. 1913.)

In the 20th century, the range of contexts where *kružit’* can be used intransitively changes (as was also the case for *katit’* ‘drive, go, roll; roll smth.’ in the 19th century). In its intransitive use, the verb now primarily denotes the motion of birds or planes. In the second half of the same century, the proportion of transitive uses decreases to 30 examples for the first 100 contexts – therefore, the verb remains primarily intransitive.

The verb *kružit’* does not have a regular perfective counterpart (*zakružit’* ‘begin to roll’ is not a precise aspectual pair for *kružit’*).

### 3.2.3 *Spuskat’*/*spustit* ‘be blown off/drain’

The case of this lexeme is problematic because by the 18th century it already had a broad range of meanings and many of them were secondary uses not related to real motion: *spustit’* ‘waste (money)’, *spustit’*/*spuskat’* glaza ‘turn one’s eyes’, *spustit’* postupok ‘forgive an action (to smb.)’, etc. This is why I have not built a table of transitive vs. intransitive uses for this verb. The primary use, as well as almost all the secondary metaphorical uses, is transitive. The materials of the dictionary contain neither intransitive noncausative uses in the meaning of motion nor any “physical” meaning.4 This tendency

---

4 In the sole metaphoric use where the verb shows an intransitive pattern it means ‘forgive, let act’. In this reading, the verb always has a dative-marked indirect object denoting the person who is forgiven, but the direct object (the action for which this person is forgiven) can be either expressed or omitted. However, this use is not related to motion in any way.
is maintained in the 19th century. At the beginning of the period, the verb is only attested in transitive constructions. Importantly, we observe a new use, ‘drain’, which will constitute an intermediate stage on the way to “labilization”:

(20) On veli-t spust-t glavn-yj
    he.nom order-prs.3sg drain-inf principal-acc.sg.m
    vnešn-ij prud-∅.
    external-acc.sg.m pond-sg.acc
    ‘He will order the main external pond be drained.’
    (N.M. Karamzin. Istorija gosudarstva Rossijskogo. 1824–1826)

The situation is the same in the second half of the 19th century, the only difference being that there are three uses of spustit’ vodu ‘drain water’. In the 20th century, we see only a very small number of intransitive uses; the subject is usually koleso ‘wheel’ or šina ‘tire.’, and the verb means ‘blow off’. Along with the canonical intransitive use illustrated in (21), there is an impersonal pattern where the wheel is accusative-marked (22), and there is no canonical nominative-marked subject:

(21) Osta-l-i-s’ posledn-ie dom-a, i tut
    remain-pst-pl-refl last-pl.nom house-pl.nom and here
    spusti-l-a šina-
    blow.off-pst-sg.f tyre-sg.nom
    ‘Several houses remained [to the final point]. And at this moment, a tire blew off/was blown off.’

(22) Šin-u spusti-l-o.
    tyre-sg.acc blow.off-pst-sg.n
    ‘The tire blew off/was blown off.’

The fact that in (21) ‘the tire’ is really a subject, is manifested in its nominative marking and the feminine agreement of the verb spustit’ ‘blow off.’ Even in the 20th and 21st centuries, the intransitive pattern is much rarer than the intransitive one, at least in literary language. However, in colloquial speech, usage of this type is not rare. The imperfective correlate for spustit’ – spuskat’ – is also labile with the same types of usage as the perfective verb spustit’.
3.2.4 *Mčat* ‘run, rush (intransitive)/move quickly, rush (transitive)’

Table 3: Transitive and intransitive uses of the verb *mčat*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>transitive</th>
<th>intransitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18th century</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th century (1st half)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th century (2nd half)</td>
<td>22 (85%)</td>
<td>4 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th century (1st half)</td>
<td>64 (71%)</td>
<td>26 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th century (2nd half)</td>
<td>59 (67%)</td>
<td>27 (33%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The case of *mčat* is particularly interesting because it occurred as labile as early as in the 17th century (see Examples (1) and (2) above). Later on, however, the verb seems to have lost its lability. All four uses of this verb in the 18th century found in the corpus are transitive causative. In the intransitive meaning, ‘move fast’, the reflexive derivative is used.

(23) *Lošad-i menja mčat.*
    horse-pl.nom I.acc move.quickly-prs.3pl
    ‘The horses rush me.’
    (A.N. Radiščev. Putešestvije iz Peterburga v Moskvu. 1779–1790.)

(24) *Pust’ vixr’-Ø vremen-i mč-it nas kuda xoč-et.*
    let whirlwind-sg.nom time-gen move.quickly-prs.3sg we.acc where want-prs.3sg
    ‘Let the wind of time move us where it wants.’
    (N.M. Karamzin. Pis’ma russkogo putešestvennika. 1793.)

The dictionary material does not contain examples of the noncausative use either, though there is an example where the verb is used without an explicit object (*mčat* could be used in this period without an object meaning ‘chase an animal (of a bird dog’) ). However, in any case, this meaning seems to be causative (‘make run’), though it admits object omission. Equally, there is one example from a text by Trediakovsky, which I was not able to mark unequivocally as transitive or intransitive. The verb remains strictly transitive in the first half of the 19th century as well: it occurs in 12 transitive uses. Two uses could, in principle, be interpreted as intransitive, including (25):
(25) Mč-it  li  kon’-Ø  v  propast’-Ø  
move.quickly-PRS.3SG  whether  horse-SG.NOM  in  abyss-SG.ACC  
vleč-et  li  voln-a  na  skal-u.  
urge-PRS.3SG  whether  wave-SG.NOM  on  rock-SG.ACC  
‘... Whether the horse moves (me) in the abyss, whether the wave urges (me) to the rock.’  
(I.A. Gončarov. Obyknovennaja istorija. 1847.)

However, the fact that mčat’ and strictly transitive vleč ‘urge’ are used in syntactically parallel constructions in (25) makes us think that mčat’, as well as vleč, are used transitively, and that the direct object is omitted. Intransitive uses of mčat’ begin to be found in the corpus in the second half of the 19th century. First of all, in this period we find many uses that may be interpreted either as transitive with an omitted object or as intransitive, cf. (26) and (27):

(26) Jamščik-i  mč-at  čto  jest’  moč-i.  
coachman-PL.NOM  move.quickly-3PL  what  be.PRS.3SG  strength-GEN  
i.  ‘The coachmen drive me as fast as possible.’  
ii.  ‘The coachmen ride as fast as possible.’  
(I.A. Gončarov. Fregat “Pallada”. 1853.)

(27) Lošad-i  mča-l-i  pod  gor-u.  
horse-PL.NOM  move.quickly-PST-PL  under  mountain-SG.ACC  
i.  ‘The horses drove (him) downhill.’  
ii.  ‘The horses ran downhill.’  
(A.I. Gercen. Byloje i dumy. 1854–1858.)

In (26) and (27), the verb mčat’ could either be intransitive with the meaning ‘to run fast’ or transitive with an omitted object – in this case the meaning is ‘to drive smb. fast’ (cf. the strictly transitive verb vezti ‘drive’, which can also occur with an omitted object, as in (28)):

(28) Lošad-i  ot  stanci-i  do  stanci-i  vez-l-i  
horse-PL.NOM  from  station-SG.GEN  to  station-SG.GEN  drive-PST-PL  velikolepno.  
perfectly  
‘The horses drove (me) very well from one station to another.’  
(V.P. Meščerskij. Moi vospominanija. 1897.)

An anonymous reviewer considers (26) to be an example of the intransitive use. This could, in fact, be the case, but I found no evidence to exclude the reading of
‘The coachmen drives (me) as fast as possible’. The omission of the direct object if it is either the speaker or the addressee is found with verbs of different semantic classes. However, in two examples of the same period, the verb mčat’ definitely shows an intransitive pattern:

(29) Capn-et čto jemu nado i mč-it.
    grab-PRS.3SG what he.DAT necessary and run-PRS.3SG
    ‘He grabs what he needs and runs away.’
    (N.S. Leskov. Nekuda. 1864.)

(30) Ty kuda jed-eš? V gorod-Ø mč-u.
    you.nom where go-PRS.2SG in city-SG.ACC move.quickly-PRS.1SG
    and there seen be-FUT.3SG
    ‘Where are you going? I rush to the city, we’ll see later what happens.’
    (D.N. Mamin-Sibirjak. Zoloto. 1864.)

In (29) and (30), the subject does not move a passenger or anything else, and, therefore, we can only analyze these structures as intransitive. At the same time, the vast majority of examples from the second half of the 19th century presuppose the existence of an object that was omitted (a ‘passenger’). These examples were not included in our figures because of their dubious nature. The history of mčat’ proves that its lability goes back to A-lability with the patient omission (recall that even in the first half of the 19th century, we found examples where the verb is used causatively, the object being omitted), which was later on re-analyzed as P-lability (the intransitive use begins to mean ‘X moves (by itself)’). At the beginning of the 20th century, the proportion of the intransitive use grows: now 29% of all uses are clearly intransitive. In most of them, as in (31), no causative interpretation including an omitted object seems to be plausible:

(31) Mč-at k bereg-u vagončik-i vozdušn-oj
    move.quickly-PRS.3PL to coast-SG.DAT coach-PL.NOM air-GEN.SG.F
    železn-oj dorog-i.
    railway-SG.GEN
    ‘The coaches of the funicular go to the coast.’
    (B.A. Piln’ak. Zavoločje. 1923.)

In (31), the author does not know whether there are any passengers in the coaches. Thus the verb is used intransitively and noncausatively; it denotes the motion of the coaches itself, and not the fact that the coaches move any people inside them.
Finally, in the second half of the 20th century, the proportion of intransitive uses continues to increase; they now constitute about 33% of all uses. Thus, for мчать’, the semantic change (emergence of new uses that are definitely noncausative and not causative with an object omission) and the statistical change (the growth of the proportion of intransitive uses) match very well. It is only at the beginning 20th century that the verb starts to occur in many clearly noncausative examples, and in the same period, the intransitive use occurs in about 29% of the examples (see Table 3 for details). The inchoative perfective verb помчать’ also seems to be labile, though this lexeme is not very frequent in the corpora in general.

### 3.2.5 Капать/капнуть ‘drop/pour in drips’

#### Table 4: Transitive and intransitive uses of the verb кать (imperfective).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>кать (imperfective)</th>
<th>transitive</th>
<th>intransitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18th century</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th century (1st half)</td>
<td>2 (5%)</td>
<td>39 (95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th century (2nd half)</td>
<td>8 (6%)</td>
<td>116 (94%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th century (1st half)</td>
<td>5 (5%)</td>
<td>95 (95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th century (2nd half)</td>
<td>7 (7%)</td>
<td>93 (93%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 5: Transitive and intransitive uses of the verb капнуть (perfective).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>капнуть (perfective)</th>
<th>transitive</th>
<th>intransitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18th century</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th century (1st half)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>6 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th century (2nd half)</td>
<td>6 (23%)</td>
<td>20 (77%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th century (1st half)</td>
<td>6 (19%)</td>
<td>26 (81%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th century (2nd half)</td>
<td>11 (32%)</td>
<td>23 (68%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the verb капать (imperfective)/капнуть (perfective), both transitive and intransitive uses are found in the dictionary material, though the RNC contains no example of the transitive use of капать’. Note also that the examples of the transitive use of капать and капнуть are all from texts from the third part of the 18th century, beginning in 1788. In other words, the examples that are available to us show that the intransitive use is historically precedes the transitive one. For the perfective variant капнуть, there is one transitive use in the RNC and 11 intransitive ones in the 18th century. A complication is that in Russian the direct object of the transitive use is often not expressed. As Kazenin (1993) shows, the object of some
transitive verbs in different languages can be omitted, and this is the case with *kapnut’*, as in (32). Intransitive uses also occur (33).

(32) [I saw many phials on a small table].
\[Krasavica-g, vza-v odi-Ø, kapnu-l-a mne na beauty-sg.nom take-conv one-m.sg.acc drop-pst-sg.f I.dat on golov-u. head-sg.acc
\]‘The beauty took one [of them] and dripped a drop on my head.’
(M.D. Čulkov. Peresmešnik, ili Slavenskije skazki. 1766–1768.)

(33) [Suddenly a tear shone in her right eye, then in the left one, both of them rolled out,]
\[odn-a kapnu-l-a na grud’-Ø one-sg.nom drop-pst-sg.f on breast-sg.acc
\]‘one of them dropped on her breast.’
(N.M. Karamzin. Natal’ja, bojarskaja doč’. 1792.)

Fortunately, there is one example in the corpus (and many analogous examples in the Google search system) where we can see a passive participle of this verb proving that *kapnut’* was labile at the time.

(34) \[kapl’-a vod-Ø kapnu-taja v mor-e ...
\]drop-sg.nom water-sg.gen drop-pass.part-nom.sg.f in sea-sg.acc
‘A drop of water which was dripped into the sea’
(V.N. Tatiščev, Istorija Rossijskaja. 1739–1750.)

Although examples like (34) do not show an accusative-marked object, the existence of the passive participle shows that the verb already had a transitive use in the 18th century (in Russian, the formation of passive participles is restricted by transitive verbs). At the beginning of the 19th century, the imperfective variant *kapat’* remains labile but the proportion of the transitive use is small. I found only 2 transitive uses whereas intransitive uses are much more numerous (39 instances). The situation with the perfective variant in the same period is even simpler: no clearly transitive examples are found; only one example can be interpreted as instrumental or as transitive because the object is omitted and its case remains unclear. A slight change is observed in the second half of the 19th century. The imperfective variant is almost exclusively found in intransitive constructions. The transitive use only occurs in the corpus in specialized chemical literature (recommendations concerning chemical experiments):
Labile verbs in modern Russian

(35) Jesli v rasplavlenn-yj gidrat-Ø kali kapa-t’
   if in melted-ACC.SG.M hydrate-SG.ACC potash.SG.ACC drop-INF
   masl-o ...
   oil-SG.ACC
   ‘If we drop some oil into melted potash hydrate ...’
   (A.M. Butlerov. Teoretičeskije i eksperimental’nyje raboty po ximii. 1851–1886).

The story of the perfective variant is more complicated. Among the 26 uses of kapnut’, there are at least 6 transitive examples. However, at this time this use is an attribute of individual style; most transitive uses occur in Leskov’s works:

(36) Ja tak-oj recept-Ø znaj-u odn-u
   I such-SG.ACC recipe-SG.ACC know-PRT.1SG one-SG.F.ACC
   kapl’-u kapn-u i projd-et.
   drop-SG.ACC drop-PRT.1SG and pass-PRT.3SG
   ‘I know an excellent remedy: I will drip one drop and it [pain, sickness] will pass.’
   (N. S. Leskov. Božedomy. 1868).

In the first half of the 20th century, the imperfective variant kapat’ remains primarily intransitive: there are only 5 transitive uses among the first 100 examples. The percentage of transitive uses of kapnut’ remains stable and is synchronically 7 of 34 examples. The behavior of the imperfective variant kapat’ remains basically the same in the second half of the 20th century. The verb remains mainly intransitive and is used transitively in only 7 examples out of 100. In contrast, the proportion of transitive uses of the perfective variant increases with 11 of 34 examples being transitive (note that these uses are no longer restricted by special medical and chemical texts). However, one property distinguishes these uses from prototypically transitive ones: in most contexts, the object argument is encoded with the genitive or instrumental and not the accusative case:

(37) Razve chto dl’a raznoobrazij-a med-u kapn-et.
   if.only for variance-SG.GEN honey-SG.GEN2 drop-FUT.3SG
   ‘He can drop some honey – only for variance.’

The accusative pattern is used when the object is a noun such as kapel’ka ‘drop’ or a quantifier phrase with markers nemnogo ‘a little’. However, it is impossible with objects like vino ‘wine’, voda ‘water’: they must be genitive-marked (mainly
because the semantics of the verb kapnut’ requires an object with the partitive meaning or the meaning of “portion” (a drop), and genitive tends to mark partitive-like meanings both in Slavic languages and typologically). This ability to alternate between the patterns with the accusative and with genitive case marking of the object is a common property of many Russian verbs, such as glotnut’ ‘take a sip’, otpit’ ‘drink a small portion’ and so on. Uncountable objects (mass nouns) of these verbs are marked with the genitive while names of portions and other types of quantifiers get the accusative marking. Thus the accusative pattern, which is the default variant for many transitive verbs in Russian, is problematic for this verb.

3.2.6 Lit’ ‘flow/pour’

Table 6: Transitive and intransitive uses of the verb lit’ ‘flow/pour’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>lit’</th>
<th>transitive</th>
<th>intransitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18th century</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th century (1st half)</td>
<td>83 (65.4%)</td>
<td>44 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th century (2nd half)</td>
<td>50 (50%)</td>
<td>51 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th century (1st half)</td>
<td>79 (71%)</td>
<td>32 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th century (2nd half)</td>
<td>63 (60%)</td>
<td>42 (40%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the 18th century, there are 22 transitive and 5 intransitive uses demonstrated in the RNC. All intransitive uses refer to rain:

(38) Neb-o razverz-l-o oblak-o i dožd’-Ø
    sky-sg.nom open.wide-pst-sg.n cloud-sg.acc and rain-sg.nom
    li-l-Ø vedr-om.
    flow-pst-sg.m bucket-sg.ins

‘A cloud opened in the sky and the rain was coming down in torrents.’

(A.N. Radischev. Putešestvije iz Peterburga v Moskvu. 1779–1790.)

However, in the dictionary material, there are examples of intransitive uses with subjects other than rain (e.g., reka ‘river’, voda ‘water’, and pot ‘sweat’) – cf., for instance, Pot li-l-Ø s menja ručj-ami [sweat-nom.sg flow-pst-sg.m from IGEN stream-pl.ins] ‘The sweat flowed from him intensively (lit. ‘in streams’).’ Note, though, that the percentage of the intransitive use is even smaller than in the Russian National Corpus: about 10% of examples for the verb lit’ in the dictionary materials illustrate the intransitive noncausative use while, for the RNC, the pro-
portion of the intransitive use is 18.5% in the same period. In the following periods, the relative number of the intransitive, noncausative use becomes greater. In the 19th century, the percentage of the intransitive use in the Russian corpus increases (it constitutes 35% of the total number of uses in the first half of the century, and a bit more than 50% in the second half). In the 20th century, we observe a slight decrease of its proportion (40% of all uses in the second half of the century). In general, we cannot find any general tendency throughout the period under analysis. More informative, however, is the change in the class of subjects that the verbs, in the intransitive use, are compatible with. In the 18th century, the subject in all intransitive uses found in the RNC is *dožd’* ‘rain’. In the 19th century, we observe some contexts where the subject is *pot* ‘sweat’ and *krov*’ ‘blood’:

(39) *Pot-Ø li-l-Ø s jego lic-a ručj-ami.*

*sweat-SG.NOM flow-PST-SG.M from he GEN face-GEN stream-PL.INS*

The sweat flowed from his face intensively (lit. ‘in streams’).

(I.I. Panaev. Razdel imenija. 1850–1860.)

Note, though, that subjects like ‘sweat’ are found with this verb in the dictionary materials of the 18th century. This means that the statistical change throughout the period under analysis is more significant for the verb *lit’* than the semantic change. Finally, in the 20th century, the noun *voda* ‘water’ can also be used in the subject position. Note that this extension of the subject class to other nouns cannot only be a result of the general increase of frequency of the intransitive use. I have already mentioned that the proportion of this use does not increase from the 19th to the 20th century. In other words, the extension of the class of possible subjects in the case of *lit’* does not always correlate with the increase in frequency of the corresponding use. The perfective correlates of *lit’* – *vylit’, nalit’* and so on – do not show intransitive use in any part of the period under analysis.

### 3.2.7 *Gonjat’* ‘run, drive/chase, pursue’

**Table 7:** Transitive and intransitive uses of the verb *gonjat’*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>gonjat’</em></th>
<th>transitive</th>
<th>intransitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18th century</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th century (1st half)</td>
<td>31 (97%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th century (2nd half)</td>
<td>111 (97%)</td>
<td>3 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th century (1st half)</td>
<td>91 (90%)</td>
<td>10 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th century (2nd half)</td>
<td>94 (90%)</td>
<td>11 (10%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The verb *gonjat’* was already labile in the 18th century. While the transitive use does not seem to be restricted by a narrow group of contexts (see, e.g., Example (40)), its intransitive use is only attested in a very specific context, namely, descriptions of hunting, as in (41) and (42):

(40) … laz-ıt po golubjatn’am gonjaj-et golub’-ej.  
climb-PST.3SG along dovecot-PL.DAT chase-PST.3SG pigeon-PL.ACC  
‘He gets into dovecots and knocks pigeons around.’  
(N.I. Novikov. Živopisec. 1775).

(41) Veš-iva-l-Ø sobak-Ø svoj-ix na sučj-ax  
hang-ITER-PST-SG.M dog-PL.ACC own-PL.ACC on branch-PL.LOC  
kotor-yje xudo gonja-l-i za zajc-ami.  
which-PL.NOM badly run-PST-PL for hare-PL.INS  
‘He used to hang his dogs which hunted hares badly onto the branches;’  
(N.I. Novikov. Živopisec. 1775).

(42) Pol’an-Ø svoj-ix s kotor-ymi gonja-l-i za  
peasant-PL.GEN own-PL.GEN with which-PL.INS run-PST-PL for  
hare-PL.INS  
‘… his peasants, with whom he went to hunt hares.’  
(Pugachev’s decrees. 1773–1774).

It is difficult to say whether *gonjat’* in this use should be translated as ‘run’ or ‘chase, pursue’. Of course, the most natural way is to regard the verb in (41) and (42) as being used intransitively and meaning something like ‘run (after)’. However, one could also suppose that this intransitive verb has an incorporated argument and means something like ‘chase (animals)’. In any case, the hunting examples do not represent a canonical, intransitive, non-causative use. They always carry a sociative component of meaning (‘the agent runs, making the undergoer (an animal) run as well’).

In the dictionary materials, other uses are found:

(43) A proči-e šved-y za pobeg-š-imi  
and other-PL.NOM Swede-PL.NOM beyond run-PART.PST.ACT-PL.INS  
konfederat-y gonja-l-i.  
confederate-PL.INS chase/run-PST-PL  
‘And the other Swedes urged the confederates who had run out.’  
(Moskovskie vedomosti I, 1705.)
Labile verbs in modern Russian

(44) I za nim de Fedor-om on Petr-Ø s and beyond he.ins cit Fedor-sg.ins he.nom Petr-sg.nom with nož-em gonja-l-Ø tože knife-sg.ins chase/run-pst-sg.m also

And, reportedly, he was also running after (urging) Fedor with this knife.’

(B.I. Kurakin’s letter to V.L. Dolgorukov, part III, 1712.)

These uses and the “hunting” examples found in the corpus share an important feature: they are not prototypically anti-causative (in other words, they do not mean simply ‘run’, related to the causative use ‘chase’). Both the hunting use and the uses represented in the dictionary denote sociative causation in terms of Shibatani and Pardeshi (2002): in other words, not only does the subject move, but it also makes the object move. In the first half of the 19th century, the situation is the same: we find only one intransitive use, which belongs in the domain of hunting, as in (45).

(45) Gonč-ije otmennno udačno gonja-l-i i trackhound-pl.nom superbly successfully chase-pst-pl and dovollno travi-l-i. well hunt-pst-pl

‘The bloodhounds chased [the animal] very successfully and hunted well.’


Even in this example, the intransitivity of gonjet’ is doubtful. The second verb used in (45), namely, travit ‘hunt (to an animal)’, is transitive, its object being omitted. It is probable that gonjet’ is transitive as well, both verbs being used without an explicit direct object. The first intransitive uses that can be regarded as non-causative at all occur in the second half of the century:

(46) I gonja-l-Ø on na tex lošadušk-ax. and drive-pst-m.sg he.nom on that.pl.loc little.horse-pl.loc

‘He rode (on) those horses.’

(P.I. Mel’nikov-Pečerskij. V lesax. 1871–1874).

(47) Gonjaj-ut po gorod-u svodj-at družb-u drive-prs.3pl across city-sg.dat lead-prs.3pl friendship-sg.acc so vsjak-im vstrečn-ym. with every-ins comer-sg.ins

‘They run across the city, make friends with everyone.’

In the 20th century, the transitive use remains much more frequent than the intransitive one. However, the percentage of the intransitive use is now about 10% of all uses whereas, in the 19th century, it was about 3%. For instance, Example (48) illustrates the intransitive use.

(48) On gonja-l-Ø iz odn-ogo konc-a he.nom drive-PST-SG.M from one-GEN.SG.M end-SG.GEN
gorod-a v drug-oj na sobstvenn-om avtomobil-e. city-GEN.SG in other-ACC.SG.M on own-LOC.SG.M car-SG.LOC
‘He rode from one end of the city to the other in his own car.’
(A.N. Tolstoj. Černaja pjatnica. 1924.)

This rise of the percentage of intransitive uses can be traced back to the invention of cars. Note, however, that there are equally as many examples at this time where the verb gonjat’ is used with the meaning ‘run’, rather than ‘drive’:

(49) Ja kotor-yj v Bežeck-e gonja-l-Ø po I.nom which-M.SG.NOM in Bezhetsk-SG.LOC run-PST-SG.M along
ogorod-am teper’ siž-u u izvestn-ogo vegetable.garden-PL.DAT now sit-PRS.1SG at famous-M.SG.GEN
poet-a.
poet-SG.GEN
‘I, who was running in the vegetable gardens in Bezhetsk, am now sitting in a famous poet’s house.’
(Emma Gershteyn. Lishniaja liubov’.)

In general, the proportion of the intransitive use of gonjat’ rises from the 19th to the 20th century. Other verbs derived from the same stem as gonjat’ are not uniform in the statistical relation between the uses, though many of them are labile. For instance, the perfective verb pognat’ ‘begin to chase’ is very often used both as transitive and intransitive. On the other hand, the imperfective verb gnat’ most often shows a transitive pattern, though intransitive uses are also possible. Derivatives with locative prefixes, such as otognat’ ‘chase out’, peregnať’ ‘chase across something’, are strictly transitive.

3.2.8 Dvinut’ ‘go/move smth.’
This verb is attested only in transitive constructions during the 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries (for instance, in the first half of the 19th century there are 25 transitive and no intransitive uses).
Labile verbs in modern Russian

Table 8: Transitive and intransitive uses of the verb *dvīnut*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>transitive</th>
<th>intransitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18th century</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th century (1st half)</td>
<td>25 (100%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th century (2nd half)</td>
<td>63 (95%)</td>
<td>3 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th century (1st half)</td>
<td>86 (82%)</td>
<td>19 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th century (2nd half)</td>
<td>71 (69%)</td>
<td>32 (31%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(50) *On* dvinu-l-Ø vpered vs-e vojsk-o.

he.nom move-pst-sg.m forward all-acq.sg.n army-sg.acq

‘He moved the whole army forward.’

(M.N. Zagoskin. Jurij Miloslavskij, ili Russkie v 1612 godu. 1829.)

The dictionary of 18th century contains no intransitive, noncausative uses either. Note, however, that the verb had intransitive causative uses with an instrumental-marked object as early as in the 18th century.

(51) *On* dvinu-l-Ø tuš-eju i v kresl-a

he.nom move-pst-sg.m body-sg.ins and in armchair-pl.acq povaļi-l-Ø-sja.

fall-pst-sg.m-refl

‘He moved his body and fell to the armchair.’

(Beljaev. Prelesta.1794.)

This pattern is also found with the verb *dvigat* ‘move’, the imperfective correlate of *dvīnut*. In the second half of the same century, the first three intransitive uses occur in the corpus.

(52) Vot sbi-t’ by s pozici-i et-o

part knock-inf subj from position-sg.gen this-acq.sg.n kare da pod ix prikrytiem i dvinu-t’

square.sg.acq and under they.gen escort-sg.ins and move-inf vpered.

forward

‘It would be nice to knock this square from its position and move forward under their lee’.

(N.G. Garin-Mixajlovskij. Detstvo Temy. 1892.)
At the beginning of the 20th century, the frequency of the intransitive use increases, even though it remains much rarer than the transitive one. This may be due to the fact that the corpus includes more examples from diaries and newspapers where norms of literary language are not always observed. Finally, at the end of the 20th century, the percentage of the intransitive and the transitive use does not change significantly, though a slight increase of intransitive uses is observed. There seems to be a sort of functional distribution between the uses: the verb is used intransitively mainly in newspapers, magazines or fiction imitating colloquial speech.

(53) *Ja večer-om segodn'a k Volod'k-e nameren dvinu-t'*.  
*I evening-ins today to Volod'ka-sg.dat is.going go-inf*  
‘I am going to visit Volod’ka this evening.’  
(V. Rybakov. Trudno stat’ Bogom. 1996.)

The semantics of the situation denoted by the intransitive use of *dvinut’* also changes. In (52), a weak causation component may be present in the situation (the speaker wants to move some troops forward), while in (53) and similar examples of 20th century, the meaning is anticausative in a strict sense: the speaker wants to go to Volod’ka himself. Along with the canonical transitive and the canonical intransitive pattern, this verb (just as *kapat’/kapnut’* ‘drop, pour in drips’, *kružit’* ‘go round, turn, roll’ as well as many non-labile verbs, has a pattern where it is used causatively (‘make sth. move’) but is syntactically intransitive, as in (54)). When the subject moves his or her body part, this body part is marked by instrumental case:

(54) *Odn-oj nog-oj kasaj-a-s’ pol-a*  
*one-F.SG.INS leg-SG.INS touch-CONV.PRS-REFL floor-SG.GEN*  
*drug-oju medlenno kruž-it.*  
*other-F.SG.INS slowly roll-PRS.3SG*  
‘Touching the floor with one leg, she is rolling (with) the other.’  
(Alexander Pushkin. Evgeni Onegin. 1823–1831.)

(55) *Ja ne mog dvinu-t’ palc-em.*  
*I.nom not can.PST.SG.M move-INF finger-INS*  
‘I couldn't move my finger.’

This kind of object marking can also be found outside of the labile class. See Krys’ko (2006: 135–148) and Letuchij (2007) for the analysis of instrumental marking of body-part object with verbs like *vertet’* ‘roll’, *povodit’* ‘move’ and so
on. Generally speaking for *dvinut’*, the continuous rise of the intransitive use is shown by the corpora data. The verb *dvigat’*, the imperfective correlate of *dvinut’*, also has intransitive, non-causative uses. However, their proportion is very low: in the 18th century, the verb is not used intransitively either in the materials of the dictionary or in the corpus. The same is true for the first half of the 19th century. In contrast, in the second half of the same century, some intransitive uses occur, but only in Leskov’s texts:

(56) *A my včetverom <...> dviž-em k smotritel’-u.*

and we.NOM four move-PRS.1PL to inspector-SG.DAT

‘And the four of us are going to the inspector.’

(Nikolai Leskov. Temnjak. 1880–1890.)

(57) čtoby zavtra kak rann’-u konč-it ko mne
to tomorrow as matins-SG.ACC finish-FUT.3SG to I.DAT

*dviga-l-Ø.*

move-PST-SG.M

‘... For him to go to me right as soon as he will finish the matins.’

(Nikolai Leskov. Železnaja volja volja. 1876.)

Interestingly, for the verb *dvigat’*, the behavior of imperative forms differ from all other forms of *dvigat’*. In the imperative, the verb is often used intransitively in the meaning ‘go’, mainly in texts imitating the colloquial stile:

(58) *Dvigaj-Ø k nam priglasi-l-Ø Jurok-Ø.*

move-IMV.SG TO we.DAT invite-PST-SG.M Jurok-SG.NOM

‘Go/come to us, – Jurok invited.’

(Maksim Milovanov. Rynok tscheslavija. 2000.)

### 3.3 Labile verbs with symmetrical uses

The preceding sections have shown that many labile verbs in Russian used to be either strictly transitive/intransitive or at least that one use significantly prevailed over the other. The following features distinguish the “main” use from the “secondary” one:

- the main use occurs in texts much more frequently than the secondary use;
- the class of arguments that are compatible with the given verb in its main use is much broader than that with which the verb is compatible in the secondary use.
However, symmetrical labile verbs that had two uses already existed, both of them rather frequent, in the 18th and 19th centuries. The verb *vysypat’* ‘spill out; run out’ is the best example. In the 18th century, only one out of the four uses for this verb found in the corpus was intransitive, which is too few to draw any conclusions. Beginning with the 19th century, both uses are frequent and neither of them is significantly higher than the other. A slight tendency towards a rise in transitive uses is observed, but, in general, we can regard *vysypat’* as an (almost) symmetrical labile verb.

### 3.4 Statistics

The proportions of transitive and intransitive uses of each verb are listed in Table 9. The first number denotes the number of transitive uses in each period, the second of all uses. For each period, except for the 18th century, where the figures based on the Russian National Corpus are not very reliable, the number of intransitive uses and its percentage are counted and compared to the number of all uses. For instance, for the verb *katit’* the cell describing the 1st half of the 19th century contains “13 (59%) of 22” which means “the verb *katit’* was used 22 times in the 1st half of the 19th century, of which 13 uses were intransitive”.

**Table 9**: Percentage of intransitive uses of Russian labile verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>18th</th>
<th>19th (1st half)</th>
<th>19th (2nd half)</th>
<th>20th (1st half)</th>
<th>20th (2nd half)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Katit’</em></td>
<td>0 of 1</td>
<td>13 (59%) of 22</td>
<td>59 (66%) of 89</td>
<td>59 (56%) of 105</td>
<td>61 (60%) of 102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kružit’</em></td>
<td>1 of 2</td>
<td>4 (13%) of 30</td>
<td>20 (32%) of 62</td>
<td>59 (55%) of 108</td>
<td>70 (70%) of 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mčat’</em></td>
<td>0 of 4</td>
<td>0 (0%) of 12</td>
<td>4 (15%) of 26</td>
<td>26 (29%) of 90</td>
<td>27 (33%) of 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dvinut’</em></td>
<td>0 of 2</td>
<td>0 (0%) of 25</td>
<td>3 (5%) of 66</td>
<td>19 (18%) of 105</td>
<td>32 (31%) of 103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lit’</em></td>
<td>5 of 27</td>
<td>44 (35%) of 127</td>
<td>51 (50%) of 101</td>
<td>32 (29%) of 111</td>
<td>42 (40%) of 105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kapat’</em> ipf.</td>
<td>9 of 9</td>
<td>39 (95%) of 41</td>
<td>116 (94%) of 124</td>
<td>95 (95%) of 100</td>
<td>93 (93%) of 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kapnut’</em> pf.</td>
<td>2 of 3</td>
<td>6 (100%) of 6</td>
<td>20 (77%) of 26</td>
<td>26 (81%) of 32</td>
<td>23 (68%) of 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gonjat’</em></td>
<td>2 of 11</td>
<td>1 (3%) of 32</td>
<td>3 (3%) of 114</td>
<td>10 (10%) of 101</td>
<td>11 (10%) of 105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Vysypat’</em></td>
<td>1 of 4</td>
<td>37 (56%) of 61</td>
<td>64 (60%) of 107</td>
<td>51 (50%) of 103</td>
<td>42 (42%) of 101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 For *kapat’* and *kapnut’*, as well as for the other verbs, causative uses with an object in the instrumental case are not included in the figures. We don’t count causative uses where the object is unexpressed, either: the reason is that we cannot classify them as canonically transitive or instrumental.
4 Conclusions: The diachrony of Russian labile verbs and the general typology of lability

As we have seen, Russian does not have a large class of labile verbs in any period. But even the behavior of the small labile class allows us to observe some tendencies that can be relevant not only for labile verbs, but also for general historical issues in Russian syntax. First of all, some of the motion verbs I considered in this paper become labile in the period under analysis (18th–20th centuries). Given that the verb mčat’ ‘move quickly, rush’, for instance, used to be labile in Old Russian, we must suppose that a lexeme could move from one type to another one (first from noncanonically labile to strictly transitive, and then to the canonically labile) throughout its history. For almost all of the current labile verbs that had already been labile prior to the period under analysis, the proportion of their uses became more symmetrical in some subperiods analyzed here (though for kružit’ ‘go round, turn, roll’, after a symmetrical period in the second half of the 20th century, an asymmetry is observed again). Of course, to complete the picture, I would have to analyze all verbs that used to be labile in previous periods and trace their development. I leave this to further research.

Three of our verbs (kružit ‘go round, turn, roll’, mčat’ ‘move quickly, rush’ and dvinut’ ‘go/move smth.’) definitely followed the same direction of syntactic change in the period under consideration (from the 18th to the 20th century): they were strictly or primarily transitive at the beginning of this period and over the two centuries their intransitive uses became more and more frequent. The same direction of change is observed for gonjat ‘run, drive/chase, pursue’, the difference being that gonjat’ is mostly transitive in all periods. However, the percentage of the intransitive use grows from the 18th to the 20th century. For katit’ ‘drive, go, roll; roll smth.’ and lit’ ‘flow/pour’, the picture is controversial: the period under analysis includes both subperiods of increase and of decrease of the intransitive use. It is important, however, that for lit’, the semantic range of the intransitive use has definitely become wider from the 18th to the 20th century. I have only found one case – kapat’/kapnut ‘drop, pour in drips’ – where the development obviously went in the opposite direction; the proportion of transitive uses growing in the period under analysis. The crucial thing is that it is not obvious that modern Russian labile verbs, which are analyzed in Section 3, inherit their lability from the Old Russian period.

It is theoretically possible as well that some modern Russian labile verbs became labile in the 19th century after a period during which they were strictly transitive or intransitive. This seems to be really the case for some verbs. For instance, the verb mčat’ ‘move quickly, rush’ used to be labile in Old Russian. Later on, it is
only found in transitive constructions in the 18th century (we should suppose
that it became strictly transitive in early periods of the history of Modern Russian)
but becomes labile again in the 19th century.

A note on the statistical significance of the historical changes is in order here.
It turns out that only for some verbs the difference between distributions in two
periods following each other is statistically significant.

For instance, this is the case for kružit’ ‘go round, turn, roll’. The difference is
the most significant if we compare between the second half of the 19th century
and the first half of the 20th century (in Fisher’s two-tailed exact test, p-value =
0,0065). The difference between the first and the second half of the 20th century
for the same verb kružit’ is also significant (p-value = 0,0317⁶).

The same is true for the verb dvinut’ ‘go/move smth.’ The changes which are
statistically significant take place between the second half of the 19th and the first
half of the 20th century (p-value = 0,0098) and between the first and the second
half of the 20th century (p-value = 0,0362).

For the verb gonjat’ ‘run, drive/chase, pursue’, a statistical difference is only
observed between the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th
century, though the p-value is very close to the borderline between significant
and non-significant values (p-value = 0,0414).

The verb lit’ ‘flow/pour’ is not illustrative, since the proportion of intransitive
uses of this lexeme does not show a uniform change throughout the history: in
3.2.6, I show that there are both periods of increase and periods of decrease of the
percentage of intransitive uses. The rest of the lexemes do not show any statisti-
cally significant changes.

However, what makes it possible to speak of “detransitivization” is the fact
that many verbs (mčat’ ‘move quickly, rush’, kružit’ ‘go round, turn, roll’, dvinut’
‘go/move smth.’, and perhaps gonjat’ ‘run, drive/chase, pursue’) follow the same
direction: the proportion of their intransitive uses grows from one period to an-
other. Although these changes are often not statistically significant, the crucial
thing is that for almost all verbs, the intransitive use becomes more and more
frequent or at least its frequency does not decline. Only for kapnut’, does the in-
transitive use, in contrast, becomes less and less frequent in the period under
analysis. An important question raised by an anonymous reviewer concerns the
relationship between lability and other linguistic phenomena. It could well be the
case that the rise of intransitive uses reflects some changes in the use of the reflexive
marker -sja. However, this issue is beyond the scope of the present article.

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⁶ Here I consider the difference significant if p-value is less than 0,05.
Russian data allows us to note some semantic restrictions that are crucial for the usage of many verbs at some stages of their history. For instance, the verb *gonjat’* used to denote a special type of situation (hunting); *katit’* ‘drive, go, roll; roll smth.’ and *mčat’* ‘move quickly, rush’ used to designate the motion of modes of transport. Very often these semantic restrictions have to do with syntactic particulars of the precise constructions the verbs are used in. For example, when the verb *mčat’* denotes the motion of modes of transport, the object (‘passenger’) can remain unexpressed. This fact proves the functional similarity between A-lability and P-lability, which are often considered to be two different and independent phenomena. In the period under analysis, Russian P-lability often emerges from A-lability, as has been shown with verbs such as *gonjat’,* and *mčat’,* which were primarily transitive and then acquired their first intransitive uses by means of object omission. In other words, they were A-labile in the beginning: their intransitive use differed from the transitive one only by the absence of the patient, while the agent was expressed in both uses. In the first intransitive uses, the patient was omitted because it was indefinite or less salient for the speaker than in transitive uses. For instance, *gonjat’* was used in the sense ‘hunt’ where the name of an animal seems to be omitted. *Mčat’* denoted the situation where the subject (vehicle) moves a person/some people, which are also not expressed. In fact, the systemic similarity between the two types of lability is not surprising, taking into account semantic properties of Russian labile verbs. It is obvious that many labile verbs that I have analyzed share two features: (i) the subject of their intransitive use is not a prototypical patient; (ii) the subject of the transitive use often participates in the situation in the same way as the object (for instance, consider the verb *gonjat’* ‘run, drive/chase, pursue’: if someone urges another person and makes him run, it also means that the agent runs himself). Below, I list the classes of participants that can be the subject of the intransitive use.

- *katit’:* modes of transport, human
- *kružit’:* human, also prototypical patients
- *lit’:* liquids (with semantic restrictions: in the case of *lit’* the subject of the intransitive use is more autonomous than in the case of *lit’-sja*)
- *vysypat’:* human
- *gonjat’:* modes of transport, human
- *dvinut’:* human
- *mčat’:* mainly modes of transport

An exception is *kapat’*/*kapnut’* ‘drop, pour in drips’. The subject of the intransitive use of *kapat’*/*kapnut’* is a patient.

In other words, in the semantic group of motion verbs, the frequency of intransitive uses grew during the period under analysis. At the same time, the
semantic range of intransitive uses also increased during the same time span. This allows the claim that Russian labile motion verbs showed a uniform scenario of development in the 19th and the 20th centuries.

I propose that the agentivity of the subject of the intransitive uses is the crucial property of Russian verbs of motion, which makes their labilization possible. As I have pointed out, though these verbs are very close to the P-labile type (the object of the transitive use corresponds to the subject of the intransitive use), the subjects of their intransitive uses are not patientive. These agentive, intransitive uses are semantically closer to transitive uses than patientive intransitive uses: the former two have an agentive subject in common, which is not true for the latter. Thus the P-lability of Russian verbs of motion results from the fact that their transitive and intransitive uses are semantically closer than the members of classical P-labile pairs, such as break (transitive) vs. break (intransitive). The scenario of the emergence of lability that we observe in Russian is important for the general typology of valency change and lability in that it proves that A-lability and P-lability are closely related phenomena. At least, one must accept a semantic class (in this case, of motion verbs, which are often labile in Russian) which can be A-labile or P-labile, and this distinction is not always unambiguous. Kazenin (1993: 150–154) proposes that lexemes belonging to the P-labile class have different semantic properties, and he does not show that these classes intersect. His approach, however, simplifies the real situation. For motion verbs, such as mčat’, the intransitive non-causative use and the P-lability in general can well be traced to the object omission (A-lability). It is equally worth noting that all Russian labile verbs of motion, at least in the beginning of their history, have one common property: one of their uses (usually the intransitive one) is restricted by a more or less narrow class of contexts (or, in other words, class of object and subject arguments) whereas the other use is productive and not contextually restricted.

This situation seems to appear in other languages as well (see, for instance, Daniel et al. [2012] for Agul (Nakh-Daghestanian)). This is why for languages like Russian it is insufficient to mark each verb as labile or non-labile. It is, instead, more reasonable to regard verbs whose uses have equal (or close) frequency as “more labile” than verbs that have one “main” and one “peripheral” use. In the history of Russian lability, we find labilization for some verbs, such as mčat’ ‘move quickly, rush’, and dvinut’ ‘go/move smth.’, which are only found as transitive in the 18th century and then became labile. Other lexemes, such as gonjat’ ‘run, drive/chase, pursue’, were already labile in the 18th century, and they can be considered to have become “more labile” because the restrictions on one of the uses became less rigid. At the beginning, the verb was mainly used in hunting contexts. Subsequently, in the context of the motion of
a person on a car, and then examples of use in the meaning ‘run’ begin to emerge.

Interestingly enough, in some cases, we find new intransitive uses of transitive or primarily transitive verbs to be an attribute of an individual style. For instance, Boris Pil’njak used mčat’ intransitively more than other writers. All 20 uses of this verb in his texts are intransitive, which is rather surprising given that the overall proportion of intransitive uses of this verb constitute less than 33% of all uses of the verb even in the second half of the 20th century. Another interesting case is represented by Nikolai Leskov, an author who often imitates colloquial style. Leskov used kapnut’ transitively and dvigat’ intransitively more frequently than other authors. Leskov’s case makes us think that “new”, intransitive and transitive uses often come into literary use from colloquial style.

Finally, an interesting conclusion is that even in languages without a huge class of labile verbs, lability is not entirely accidental. It can characterize a fixed semantic class and its development reveals to us some interesting tendencies in the behavior of labile verbs in general.

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**Appendix**

**Abbreviations**