

The Importance of Prefixes in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Damir Boras & Nives Mikelić Preradović

University of Zagreb/ Zagreb, Croatia

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to examine associations between the general meaning of the verb prefix and the meaning of verb it is attached to in order to help foreign language learners to build their vocabulary easier and faster. To achieve this goal, the specific semantics of verb prefixes in Croatian has been extracted and captured. The statistics of derivational characteristics for 20 productive prefixes in Croatian was collected. Also, all meanings of 20 prefixes were thoroughly analyzed, the properties of the base verbs and prefixed verbs were compared and the group model of verbs sharing the same meaning of the prefix was built. The statistics show that the prefix with the largest set of meanings in Croatian is za- (in, at, down) with 20 different meanings, while the average number of meanings per prefix is 11.

We proved that the process of prefixation establishes connection between different base verbs that start to share the same semantic feature due to the prefix attached. This connection became obvious in the valency frames of these verbs, since prefixed verbs tend to share the valency frames, regardless of the valency frame of the base verb. We discovered that derived prefixed verbs can be treated as hyponyms of base verbs if they do not differ significantly with regard to the meaning.

Finally, the syntacto-semantic connections between base verbs and derived prefixed verbs were revealed and modelled as rules which contribute to the foreign language learning and teaching of Croatian language. Rules are modelled to help foreign language learners guess the meaning of new prefixed verbs while reading and to help them use dictionaries better, recognizing common verb prefixes and their meanings. These rules can also enable them to acquire the syntactic complexity of the morphologically rich language, such as Croatian, Bosnian or Serbian.