THE COGNITIVE APPROACH TO THE SEMANTICS OF THE RUSSIAN VERBAL PREFIX *PERE-*: A USEFUL CONTRIBUTION TO CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING?

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Abstract: The cognitive approach to the semantics of Russian verbal prefixes (RVPs) defines each of their meanings by virtue of a visual cognitive configuration. Since the process of note-taking in consecutive interpreting (CI) calls for the use of symbols that must be clear, evocative, and unambiguous, the aim of this work is to test whether configurations for RVPs can be effectively repurposed as CI symbols, as a way to help interpreters provide more precise translations of Russian prefixed verbs into a target language. In particular, we will focus on the meaning <TRANSFER> of the RVP *pere-* in the context of Russian→Italian CI. We will analyze examples of Russian texts that will be translated into CI symbols, using RVP configurations for *pere*-verbs; on the basis of that, these symbols will in turn be translated into Italian. This way, we hope to provide some useful guidelines for the visual language of CI symbols, so as not to alter the meaning of Russian prefixed verbs when interpreting into Italian.

Keywords: Russian verbal prefixes, consecutive interpreting, note-taking

1. Introduction

From a semantic perspective, Russian prefixed verbs are extremely specific. More often than not, this is due to the high level of polysemy of Russian verbal prefixes (RVPs),[1] which makes Russian verbs semantically very "dense." For this reason, it is (almost) always impossible to find a one-to-one, fully corresponding equivalent for each of those verbs when translating from Russian into Italian – "two languages [that are] 'far' from each other, especially from a lexical point of view" (Bezkrovna *et al.*

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[1] For practical purposes, we provide a list of the acronyms used in this article: RVP – Russian verbal prefix; VB – verb base; SL – source language; TL – target language; CI – consecutive interpreting; *p*-TR – the meaning <TRANSFER> of the Russian verbal prefix *pere*-; SVO – subject-verb-object; BT – back translation.

2021: 268).[2] Consequently, since "prefixed verbs make up almost 90% of all Russian verbal lexicon" (Tichonov 1971: 52), a good command of RVPs and their semantics clearly plays a pivotal role in translation: translators and interpreters alike must be able to recognize and (fully?) convey the meanings of both the RVP and the verb base (VB) from the source language (SL) into the target language (TL). Consecutive interpreting (CI), with its distinctive system of note-taking that functions as a stand-alone mediating language between SL and TL, is no exception to this. Since CI calls for great cognitive effort that goes far beyond sheer translation of words and concepts, it is crucial for the interpreter to use a system of notes that is as quick, effective, and effortless as possible. This is why in this work we will investigate whether/how using RVP cognitive configurations as CI notes affects/improves the translation of Russian prefixed verbs in the context of Russian→Italian CI. To achieve that, after a few introductory words about RVP semantics and the basics of CI, we will take the RVP *pere-* with the meaning <TRANSFER> (*p*-TR) as our case study, for which examples of verbs and their translations will be analyzed.

2. Fundamentals of Cognitive RVP Semantics

Several approaches to RVP semantics have been proposed over the decades. In this study, we will consider Janda's cognitive approach, conceived in the mid-80s, as it is the only one that defines each meaning of an RVP by means of a visual configuration. Such configurations consist of polygons and arrows, which conceptualize actions through a "trajector" that moves along a "trajectory" in relation to a "landmark."

The meaning of the RVP *pere-* <TRANSFER> is interesting because not all sources agree on its status. Janda first conceived it as two separate meanings, <TRANSFER> and <OVER> (see Figure 1), before she defined it as one meaning "expressing movement from one point to another, often with an intervening barrier, such that the movement is often conceived of as an arc" (Janda *et al.* 2013: 66-68). More recently, Endresen proposed four related configurations that collectively make up the meaning <TRANSFER OVER/ACROSS> (see Figure 2) to highlight the "blurred semantic borders" that separate (or unite?) Janda's 1986 two meanings. In order to be able to "read" cognitive configurations, we consider three of those proposed by Endresen (2014: 164), which conceptualize actions "where the Trajector (T) moves from one place to another place proceeding over [...], through [...], or across [...] a physical Landmark (LM)," as exemplified by some verbs of motion: "a) *perelezt' čerez zabor* [...]; b) *perenesti čerez porog* [...]; c) *perejti ulicu*." Depending on the context and the syntactical construction of the verb phrase, one *p*-TR-verb may refer to all these variations. In this work, while using and comparing Janda's 1986 and Endresen's 2014 configurations, we will refer to <TRANSFER> *sensu lato* as per Janda *et al.* (2013) by calling it "*p*-TR."

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[2] Translations of quotations into English are ours. Also, we use scientific transliteration for Russian texts. Since this work is mainly aimed at Russian- and Italian-speaking readers, words in those languages will not be translated into English.
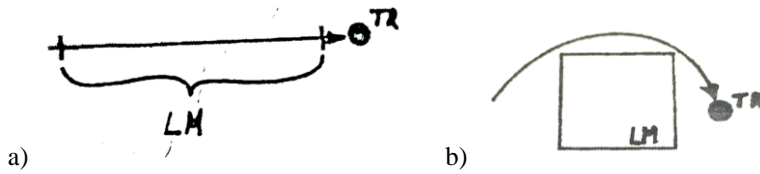
Fig. 1. Janda's configurations for <TRANSFER> and <OVER> (1986: 134; 165)
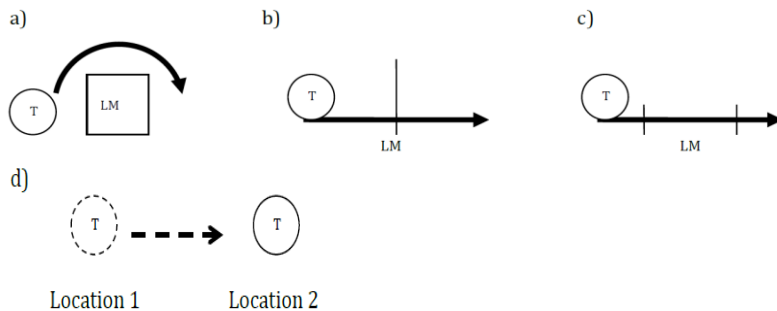
Fig. 2. Endresen's configurations for <TRANSFER OVER/ACROSS> (2014: 164-165).

3. Fundamentals of Note-Taking in CI

Unlike simultaneous interpreting, where SL→TL oral translation occurs at the same time, CI "takes place after the speaker has finished giving a portion of their speech" (Amato 2021: 3). This calls for the CI interpreter to use an effective, specific system of note-taking, which is a "fully fledged third language" that works as "some kind of *baby talk*" with "its own morphological and syntactical rules" (Amato 2021: 15; Straniero Sergio 1999: 307; Russo 1999: 252). Therefore, CI consists of two phases, a first translation from SL into notes (phase 1) and a second translation from notes into TL (phase 2). Such notes are made up of so-called "symbols," which are interpreter-specific and do not correspond to one word, as they carry broad general meaning: they might range from stylized drawings to short English words and are used as a support to "evoke" what the speaker said. For instance, by using the English verb "get" as a symbol, one conveys the general meaning entailed by the act of "getting something," which stands for such verbs as 'receive,' 'obtain' or even 'buy,' 'take,' etc., depending on the context. Phrase syntax is usually conveyed by placing symbols diagonally on paper (see Figure 3).
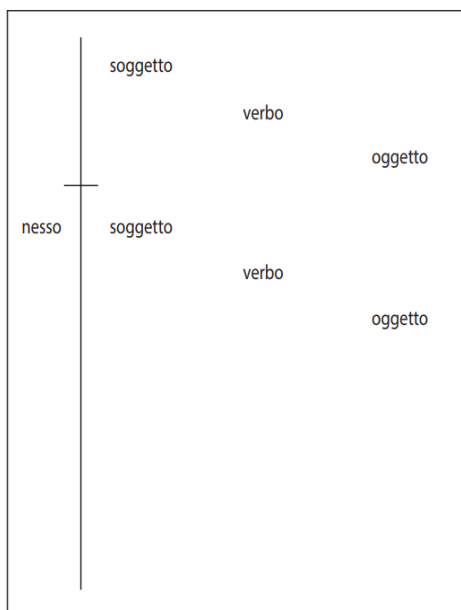
Fig. 3. The subject-verb-object (SVO) diagonal placing of CI symbols on paper, with syntax linkers on the left side (Amato 2021: 8).

## 4. *p*-TR in the Context of CI

In this study, we focus on symbol semantics, although a few words will also be spent on phrase syntax when relevant. Our idea is to use RVP configurations and test whether/how their mediation between SL and TL affects (improves?) the specific case of Russian→Italian CI. To achieve this, we will take *p*-TR as our case study and analyze 4 examples with *p*-TR-verbs from Janda's works, which we will first translate into the visual language of CI note-taking using Janda and Endresen's configurations as symbols. We will then translate these symbols into Italian, thereby testing how effectively "evocative" they are, and try to figure out how many configurations are needed for precise renditions of *p*-TR-verbs into the TL. For practical reasons, mainly quickness in phase 1 note-taking, some configurations will be simplified. Also, since symbols are the visual translation of the RVP and the specific VBs are omitted, we will test whether the RVP symbol is enough for the interpreter to "retrieve" a viable VB in phase 2. Moreover, we will resort to back translation (BT) to verify how precise phase 2 renditions are. Each example will consist of: a) the original Russian text; b) the visual translation of the sentence into notes, using Janda's 1986 a) configuration for the verb; c) another alternative configuration/symbol for that same verb that contributes to its more precise translation into the TL; d) a list of renditions into Italian. One further example will be provided at the end for cases of multiple *p*-TR-verbs with different VBs.
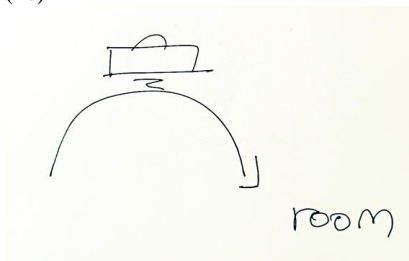
4.1 Moving an Item of Luggage

(1a)
[...] passažir [...] sam __perenes__ v komnatu svoj tjaželyj čemodan
(Janda 1986: 139-140)

(1b)
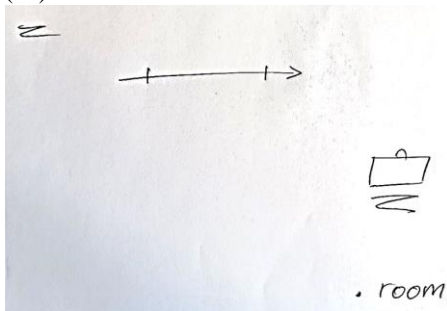
(1c)

(1d)
[...] il passeggero [...] __portò / spostò / ?trasferì__ (a mano / con le proprie forze) la valigia pesante nella stanza

We first use Janda's 1986 <TRANSFER> configuration, which conveys the idea of movement from one place to another. However, its two short, vertical lines might mislead the interpreter into conceiving it as <THROUGH>, a meaning of the RVP *pro-*, which yields the wrong rendition 'portò la valigia attraverso la stanza.' Even by correctly translating 'portò [...] nella stanza,' we mainly focus on the VB, as it partially overlaps with the RVP: however, BT yields *ponesti*, *vnesti*, or even *unesti*, depending on how we picture the scene in our minds. Therefore, 'portò' is vaguer than *perenes*, yet still acceptable, as the action described in (1a) is not contradicted. To avoid symbol ambiguity, we might use a stylized version of Endresen's a) configuration. Despite there being no explicit obstacles, the idea is that the item of luggage was first located in one place and subsequently lifted and placed in another specified location by the passenger. Also, the SVO diagonal order might be overcome by placing the symbol for luggage directly onto the bent arrow, with the room as the destination in the object position. This new set of symbols has fewer pen strokes and is therefore quicker to write. Also, it is more "evocative," thereby helping the interpreter find a more precise

rendition: 'spostò' or 'trasferì' could be a viable solution (although the second one is likely to sound less natural), to which 'a mano' or 'con le proprie forze' might also be added for the VB.
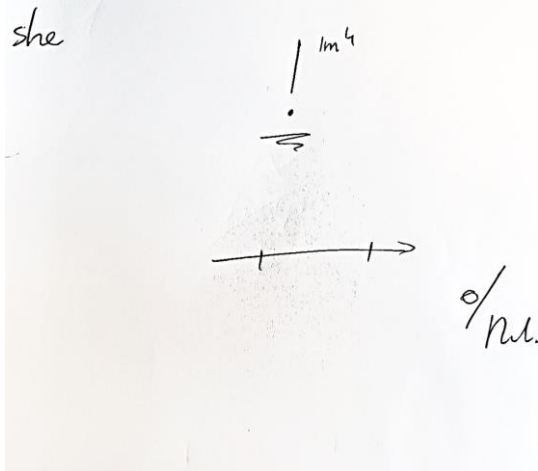
4.2 Flying to Another Platform

(2a)
*Ona prikazala nemedlenno **pereletet'** na druguju ploščadku [...]*
(Janda 1986: 140)

(2b)

(2c)

(2d)
*Mi ordinò immediatamente di **andare / recarmi / spostarmi / trasferirmi (in volo)** / **?volare** su un'altra pista d'atterraggio [...]*

In this case, Janda's linear configuration might affect the way the interpreter visualizes the action in phase 2: *pereletet'* is thus likely to be translated 'andare,' 'recarsi,' or 'giungere,' which, albeit not wrong, are vaguer and get stripped of the VB semantic component 'to fly.' This is confirmed by BT, which yields *pojti*, *poechat'*, *prijti*, *priechat'* or even *dojti*, *doechat'*. The action described in (2a) is similar to *perenesti* in (1a), since *p*-TR involves a trajector in a static position at the beginning of the action that subsequently lifts and moves to a new final position. For this reason, Janda's <OVER> or Endresen's a) configurations better suit the purposes of (2a), as

they help the interpreter recall the situation they memorized in phase 1 and translate it more precisely in phase 2. The bent arrows "evoke" the act of transfer, which can be better rendered as 'spostarsi,' 'trasferirsi,' 'riposizionarsi.' BT confirms it: these Italian verbs translate as *perejti*, *pereechat'*, *peredvinut'sja*, or *peremestit'sja*. Despite them all being *p*-TR-verbs, it is crucial that *perejti* be excluded, as the action does not take place "on foot," while all the other verbs (also) imply that the action occurs by means of a vehicle. Therefore, the expression 'in volo' can be added to fully convey all the semantic components of both the RVP and the VB of *pereletet'*. This example confirms the primary role of the RVP over that of the VB in note-taking: by using a symbol for 'to fly' and thereby rendering *pereletet'* as 'volare (verso/sulla pista),' BT yields *poletet'*, *uletet'*, *?priletet'* (which, albeit vaguer, are correct), but also *letat' [nad ploščadkoj]*, which is wrong.

4.3 Moving to Another Country

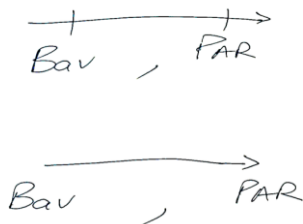(3a)
Ego predki __pereselilis'__ v Paragvaj iz Bavarii
(Janda *et al.* 2013: 69)

(3b)
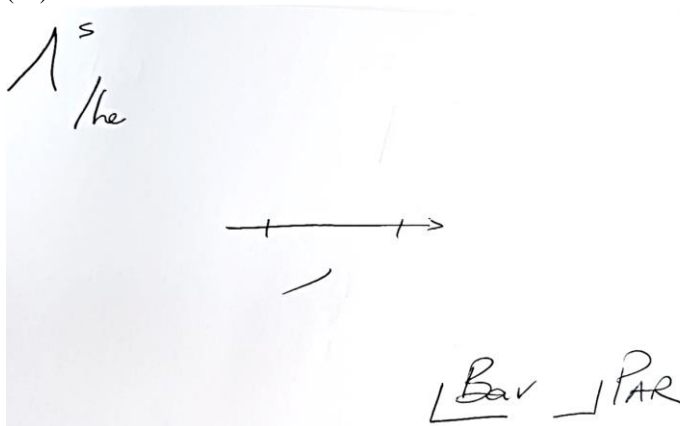
(3c)

(3d)
I suoi antenati __giunsero / andarono / si spostarono / si trasferirono / traslocarono__ in Paraguay dalla Baviera

The action described in (3a) is interesting because the syntactic structure required by *pereselit'sja* focuses on the departure and destination points. Despite beginning and ending with static positions of the subject as in the two former examples, the movement that takes place between those two positions can be cognitively conceptualized by means of a horizontal line, as we picture the ancestors moving on the surface of the Earth from Bavaria to Paraguay. Therefore, Janda's configuration is likely to be enough, although, as was the case with (1a) and (2a), such horizontal movement can be interpreted as a simple act of "going," thus affecting phase 2: once more, 'sono andati,' 'si sono recati,' 'sono giunti (dalla Baviera al Paraguay)' are not (completely) wrong, but they are less precise. However, the SVO diagonal order proves again to be redundant, as the whole action can be more quickly and efficiently "depicted" in one complex symbol in the central verb position. Abbreviations for "Paraguay" and "Bavaria" are placed directly under the two short vertical lines of Janda's configuration. These latter can also be avoided altogether, since the movement is already clearly described by the arrow that connects Bavaria with Paraguay. This way, we are using Endresen's d) configuration as a symbol, which is simpler than the first one and benefits phase 2 for its clarity. The interpreter is now likely to translate 'si sono spostati,' despite this verb yielding the already-mentioned *perejti*, *pereechat'*, *peredvinut'sja*, or *peremestit'sja* in BT. However, using their memory, the interpreter should be able to recall that the ancestors moved to Paraguay *for a living*, thus coming up with the more specific 'si sono trasferiti' or 'hanno traslocato.' We might also add a stylized house next to or above the symbol for "Paraguay" to make sure that the meaning of the VB is fully conveyed. The Italian verbs *trasferirsi* and *traslocare* represent a rare instance of a one-to-one corresponding equivalent of a Russian prefixed verb, as the Italian prefixes *tra-* and *tras-*, both deriving from the Latin *trans-*, have several meanings, one of which is "[moving] from one place to another," as in *p-TR* (Iacobini 2004: 135). In this case, we argue against the use of Janda's <OVER> or Endresen's a) configurations, as the bent arrow might wrongfully have the interpreter conceive a movement similar to the ones described in former examples. Since moving from Bavaria to Paraguay requires crossing the Atlantic Ocean, it might be tempting to "visualize" a flight and translate 'volarono' or 'presero un volo': without further context, this might well be the case, since *pereselit'sja* does not provide information as to what vehicle (if any) was used. However, what if the ancestors *pereplili* 'voyaged across' the Atlantic or used several means of transport? This example is thus a good reminder for the interpreter, who must not add extra (potentially wrong) information.
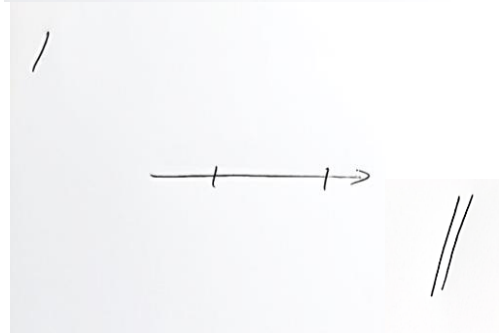
4.4 Crossing the Street

(4a)
*[...] ja **perebežal** čerez dorogu [...]*
(Janda et al. 2013: 69)

(4b)

(4c)

(4d)
*[...] **attraversai** la strada (**di corsa / correndo**) / **corsi** dall'altra parte della strada [...]*

In (4b) we propose two phase 1 translations for *dorogu*, which we render alternatively as a short English word or a stylized road. For the same reasons as in § 4.3, we regard the bent arrow configuration as misleading, since the interpreter might render it as 'saltare (dall'altra parte della strada)' or '?saltare (attraverso la strada):' BT yields *pereprygnut'*, *pereskočit'* or *perešagnut'*, clearly not conveying the meaning of *perebežat'*. Yet again, we can overcome the SVO diagonal order. Even though the action in (4a) takes place horizontally, it differs from (3a) in that the former focuses on

a movement *across* an object. For this reason, we can place the symbol for "road" onto the straight arrow and get rid of the two short, vertical lines, thereby creating a new symbol that is very similar to Endresen's b) and c) configurations. This new symbol basically turns into a visual stylization of the action, which is very helpful in phase 2: 'attraversare la strada' is probably the first solution the interpreter comes up with, with the addition of 'di corsa' or 'correndo' if they remember that the subject was running. However, this new configuration does not exclude 'sono corso (dall'altra parte della strada),' for which BT yields *pobežat'* or *ubežat'*: as stated before, despite being slightly different from the SL text and a bit longer in terms of words, it does not contradict what was said in the SL.
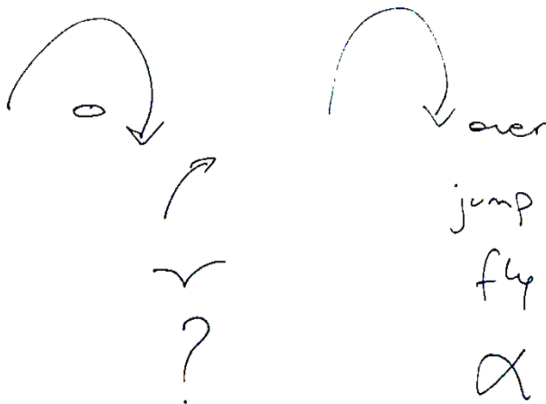
4.5 Same RVP, Different VBs

While the former examples focused on single verbs, we will now turn to contexts where more than one *p*-TR-verb is used in the same sentence, using Russian poet Vladislav Chodasevič's 1922 verses as an example.

(5a)
**<u>Pereš</u>agni*, *pere<u>skoč</u>i,*
**<u>Pere</u>leti*, *<u>pere-</u> čto chočeš'* -
No vyrvis': [...]

(5b)

(5c)
Trapassa, trasalta,
Trasvola, Tra-fai quello che vuoi
Ma liberati: [...]
(5d)
Oltrepassa, oltresalta*,
Oltrevola*, oltre-fai quello che vuoi
[...]

(5e)
Passa oltre / al di là, salta oltre / al di là,
Vola oltre / al di là, fai-quello-che-vuoi oltre / al di là
[...]

Despite the unlikelihood that the CI interpreter is asked to translate poetry, we will take (5a) as an example of a speaker's possible wordplay during their speech. If such words are said unexpectedly, and/or if the speaker has not provided the interpreter with any information or material in advance, the interpreter might deliver a generalized translation, sacrificing the wordplay. However, if the interpreter has enough time to write down notes, RVP configurations are not enough and memory is likely to be unreliable, given the number of specific VBs that call for precise translation. Therefore, we first choose the bent arrow as the symbol for *p*-TR, since the verbs clearly express movement *over* a landmark. Then, we write four different symbols for the VBs – be they stylized drawings or short English words, as shown in (5b). Once more, as in § 4.3, we might be lucky enough that *p*-TR sometimes has semantically corresponding Italian Latinate prefixes – the aforementioned *tra(s)-*, but also *oltre-* (from *ultra-*) meaning "beyond, to the other side" (Iacobini 2004: 135). Therefore, to recreate the same rhythm as in the SL text, we must bear in mind that the *p*-TR-verbs in (5a) are regularly attested in Russian, while Italian correspondents might be uncommon or understandable, yet not attested. There are, however, a few problems with *tra(s)-*. First, only at a first glance does *trapassare* resemble *perešagnut'*, as it does not semantically correspond to the latter, nor can it be cognitively represented by Endresen and Janda's configurations: BT yields *projti (naskvoz')* or *pronzit'*. Also, *trasaltare* is uncommon and sounds too similar to *trasalire*. To stick more closely to the movement embodied by the the bent arrow, we may use *oltre-*. However, since this prefix is mostly productive with nouns and adjectives, the *oltre*-verbs proposed in (5c), except for *oltrepassare*, do not actually exist (which is why they are marked with a *) and give a different flavour to the TL text. To sound more natural, we might get rid of Latinate prefixes altogether and translate the *p*-TR symbol with an adverb or an adverbial construction, such as 'oltre' or 'al di là,' as in (5e).

5. Conclusion

This study is, of course, a theoretical suggestion for a possibly new practical approach to CI note-taking. However, unlike real-life CI, where interpreters translate whole chunks of speech lasting several minutes, sentences provided here were isolated and not "surrounded" by any context, which would affect or help both phase 1 and phase 2. Despite this, we can draw some conclusions that are useful for Russian→Italian CI. From a purely linguistic point of view, this analysis confirms that *p*-TR needs to be conceptualized by means of several configurations, as suggested by Endresen (2014). Taking the needs of CI into account, we propose three stylized configurations that are also quick-to-write-down, evocative, unambiguous CI symbols (see Figure 4):

a) a straight line for actions that involve moving *from* one place *to* another (for which symbols are written under the beginning and the end of the arrow), although a bent arrow is also possible when such actions involve moving up and then down, too;
b) a straight line intersected by two vertical lines for actions that involve *crossing* an object perpendicularly;
c) a bent arrow for actions that involve moving *over* an object, represented by another symbol written under the arrow.

The use of such configurations can be useful for both learners of Russian and Russian→Italian CI interpreters, especially if they make lists of *p*-TR-verbs for each configuration. By memorizing these lists in association with their configurations, the interpreter will have a ready-to-use, practical tool in their mind that will make the choice of a particular verb (more) effortless and precise in CI: this will spare them cognitive effort that can be diverted to other CI-related processes.
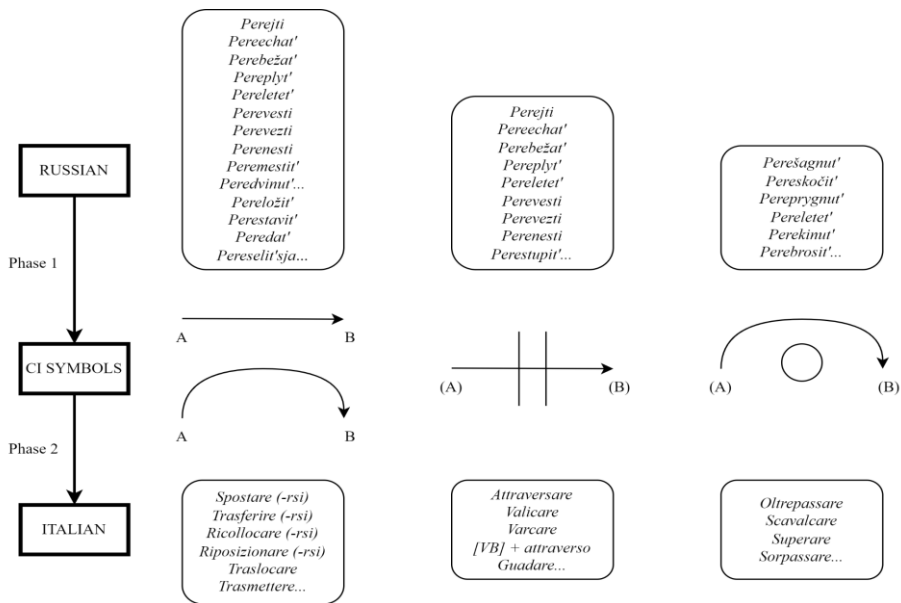

Fig. 4. A proposal for CI *p*-TR symbols and their lists of verbs.

In conclusion, from a practical point of view, it would be interesting to test these non-binding guidelines in real CI contexts, such as courses for aspiring interpreters. Also, from a theoretical perspective, it would be tempting to expand this approach to other meanings of *pere-* or other RVPs altogether. For now, however, we hope this work on *p*-TR configurations as symbols will make its little contribution to CI note-taking as a visually mediating tool between two natural languages – Russian and Italian – that are so different from each other.

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Conflicts of Interest
The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards
The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.