Recent typological work on ditransitives emphasizes that valence alternations are verb-sensitive. The locative alternation with Russian contact verbs (gruzit' barzhu drovami / drova na barzhu; nasypat' meshok krupoj / krupy v meshok) is not only verb-sensitive but also prefix-sensitive. This paper proposes an account of their interactions.

I surveyed six root verbs and the four valence-relevant prefixes na-, za-, po-, ob- in the Russian National Corpus, counting frequencies of theme object (TO, e.g. gruzit' drova na barzhu) and goal object (GO, gruzit' barzhu drovami). Proneness of verbs to GO is: polnit' (100%) > mazat’ > gruzit’, sypat’ > bit’, lit’; prefixes: ob- > po- > za- > na- > no prefix; subsense: figurative > literal. Prefix behavior depends on semantics (e.g. za- quantizes telicity, therefore favors as direct object the argument that undergoes a state change) and syntax (ob- is an applicative). Where the choice is fairly free, an animate or topical participant is most likely to be the accusative object. Participial passives in texts are exclusively GO (zagruzhennaja drovami barzha) though elicited TO is fully grammatical (zagruzhennye v barzhu drova). There is a T > A unmarked diathesis (voda zalila travu) but no unmarked G > A (only travu zalilo vodoj). Related unsuffixed nouns pertain to T: maz’, gruz, syp’. Minimally suffixed adjectives pertain to either T (gruznyj) or G (polnyj). Verbs classify only for properties of T (shape, texture, etc.): gruzit’ (T is heavy or bulky), sypat’ (T is particles), lit’ (T is liquid or granular), mazat’ (T is semisolid).

Thus ditransitives have a GO bias in their syntactic behavior but are TO in their deeper lexical properties. The prefixes are polyfunctional but all four can derive ditransitives (ob- usually does). These things emerge clearly from corpora but are poorly covered in grammars and dictionaries.