

Time Out of Time: Russian and Slavic Aspect in Non-Temporal Contexts

Stephen M. Dickey
University of Kansas

This paper discusses the Russian PF : IMPF opposition in “non-temporal” domains: (1) performatives, (2) imperatives, and (3) modal “bare infinitive” constructions. It follows on the overall approach to Slavic aspect outlined in Dickey (2000 and developed in subsequent work) as well as the constructional classifier approach to Slavic prefixes developed in Dickey and Janda (2015).

The argument proceeds from the view that Slavic pf verbs are morphological constructions; prefixes type-classify verbal predicates according to their outcome. As an ostensibly derivational opposition, the Slavic and especially the East-Slavic PF : IMPF opposition resembles lexical aspect in SAE languages (Germanic). However, Slavic pf verbs lexically encode not only lexical aspect (and that to different extents in different Slavic languages), but also viewpoint aspect and temporal sequencing in the verb itself, as an *isolated lexical unit*.

Paradigm examples of the contrast between the temporal sequencing of pf verbs (temporal definiteness) and the lifting of such sequencing (temporal indefiniteness) are to be found in narratives, which have been the subject of numerous analyses. However, the distribution of pf and impf verbs in East Slavic in performatives, imperatives, and modal infinitives evidences the same contrast. This paper demonstrates this point on the basis of examples taken from the RNC, e.g., the following:

- (1) a. *Pomogi mne. Prošu_{IMPF} tebja. Pomogi mne.*
'Help me. I'm asking you. Help me.'
- b. *Po-prošu_{PF} vnut'.*
'I ask [you] to take out [your maps]. [Said by military commander to subordinates]
- (2) a. *Beri_{IMPF} čto xočeš'!*
'Take what you want!'
- b. *Žrat' xoču. Serž, sxodi v stolovku, voz'mi_{PF} kefira.*
'I want to eat. Sergej, go down to the cafeteria and get/take some kefir.'
- (3) a. *Utrom, opjat' s koptilkami pojavilas' vospitatel'nica i zyčno skomandovala:*
«Vstavat'_{IMPF!}!»
'In the morning a governess appeared again with two oil lamps and sharply commanded: “Get up [inf]!”'
- b. *Vstat'_{PF}, učitel' idët!*
'Get up [INF], the teacher is coming!'

In (1a), the impf performative simply performs a locutionary act, whereas the pf in (1b) can only be felicitously uttered by someone in a position of authority who can perform a perlocutionary act (i.e., asserting that the result will entail). In (2a) the impf imperative simply refers to the situation, when the interlocutor has already made the decision carry it out; in (2b) a pf imperative always commands the interlocutor to first make the decision and then perform the action (Šatunovskij 2009). In modal bare infinitives, the impf (3a) activates a script situation (repeatability), whereas a pf (3b) is an interim command and the interlocutor must be able to access a reason to carry out an unpredictable action. The chaining of decision, situation and result/consequence in these utterances is an instantiation of the temporal definiteness template in non-temporal contexts.

References

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