

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

I. The Question: Are There Non-Temporal Uses of Aspect in Russian?

- Most of the literature does focus on past-tense usage.
- As many languages encode viewpoint aspect oppositions primarily in the past tense, it can be hard to tell what the contribution of the verb is, and what the contribution of the context is.
- Slavic languages are much different, all verb forms are coded either perfective or imperfective.
- I will argue that Russian (East Slavic) perfective verbs create time on the lexical level in a way completely unknown to SAE languages. By “time” here I mean an abstract sequencing template.
- This sequencing template is present any time perfective verbs are used, e.g., in imperatives, infinitives, and performatives. That is to say, the perfective in Russian brings sequencing/time into discourse—it organizes Russian discourse into temporal packets.

Russian Pf, 1st Pass: Completion

- (1) *Ivan *napisal pis'mo v dva časa.*
 ‘Ivan wrote.PF letter at two o’clock.’ (*dopisal* ‘finished writing.PF’ OK)

Russian Pf, 2nd Pass: Totality

- (2a) *Vy kogda-nibud' *napisali dissertaciju?*
 ‘Have you ever written.PF a dissertation?’
- (2b) *To est' praktičeski každyj den' ona *s'est po odnomu jajcu.*
 ‘That is, practically every day she eats.PF one egg.’

Russian Pf, 3rd Pass: Sequential Connection/Temporal Definiteness

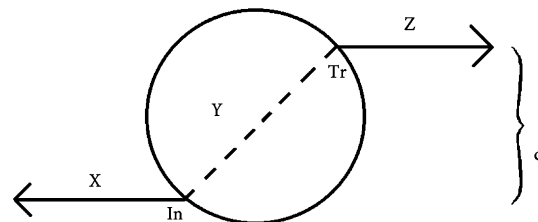


Figure 1: One Version of Sequencing—Barentsen 1995, cf. Šatunovskij 2009

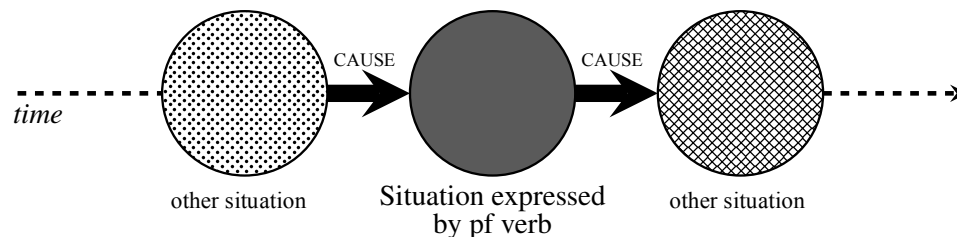


Figure 2: Basic Schema of Temporal Definiteness, According to Dickey 2000

This template represents the meaning of perfective verbs common to all of them in the overwhelming majority of their occurrences.

(3) The Russian Perfective according to Zel'dovič 2002: 29

“[1] the speaker conceives of one or more sets M of situations, and in every M there is a situation expressed as ‘ P ’ or ‘ $P + A$ ’ (A is some [adverbial] comment about P) such that

“[2] within M (every individual M) the situation expressed by ‘ P ’ or ‘ $P + A$ ’ occupies a single temporal interval;

“[3] P [i.e., the lexical content of the verb].

“With regard to purely ‘material’ content, components [1] and [2] are entirely nonessential: there is rarely if ever a case in which the Speaker cannot conceptually include them in the “script” of a given predicate P ; accordingly, these semantic elements are nothing other than a kind of **appeal to the Listener to complete them in such a way that the result is an informative utterance**. In addition, [1] and [2] contain a **direct instruction** that is in fact what the Speaker intends to be carried out: if he communicates that he has conceived of (and thus that he is interested in) a set (or sets) of situations M , in which the situation in question (for the sake of simplicity we will assume it simply to be ‘ P ’) takes place on a single interval t , then the question of why that has been communicated is most naturally reinterpreted as the question what *the other situations* (P) are. **It is precisely the appeal to reconstruct P' that determines the most important features of the behavior of the perfective aspect.**’ [Translation and emphasis mine—SMD.]

	Imperfective	Perfective
‘write’	<i>pisat'</i>	<i>na-pisat'</i>
‘do’	<i>delat'</i>	<i>s-delat'</i>
‘read’	<i>čitat'</i>	<i>pro-čitat'</i>
‘drink’	<i>pit'</i>	<i>vy-pit'</i>
‘wash up’	<i>myt'sja</i>	<i>u-myt'sja</i>

Table 1: Sample of Completive Perfective Verbs

Russian has developed myriad patterns of perfectivizing prefixation, which categorize a base action by all manner of conceivable results. Natural perfectives are a small minority of pf verbs.

<i>vy-pit'</i>	‘drink up’	<i>na-pit-sja'</i>	‘drink sth. to satiety’
<i>po-vypivat'</i>	‘drink up all of a certain set of drinks’	<i>do-pit-sja'</i>	‘drink to the point of an adverse consequence’
<i>po-pit'</i>	‘drink for a while’	<i>za-pit'-sja</i>	‘binge drink to the point extreme intoxication’
<i>za-pit'</i>	‘start habitual drinking’	<i>ot-pit'-sja</i>	‘return to a normal state by drinking’
<i>do-pit'</i>	‘drink to the end/all of’	<i>pro-pit'-sja</i>	‘drink to the point of physical/financial ruin’
<i>pro-pit'</i>	‘drink for a [specified] long period of time’	<i>is-pit'-sja</i>	‘drink to the point where one becomes a drunkard’
<i>pro-pit'</i>	‘squander/spend on drinking’	<i>pri-pit'-sja</i>	‘get used to the taste of sth. by drinking it’
<i>pere-pit'</i>	‘drink too much of sth.’	<i>u-pit'-sja</i>	‘get wasted’
<i>ras-pit'</i>	‘drink up with others’	<i>s-pit'-sja</i>	‘reach concord/mutual understanding by drinking’

Table 6: Perfective Possibilities for a Single Verb: Drink

<i>na-pisat'</i>	‘write [to completion]’	<i>do-pisat'-sja</i>	‘write to the point of an adverse consequence’
<i>po-pisat'</i>	‘write for a while’	<i>za-pisat'-sja</i>	‘write to the point where one loses track of time’
<i>za-pisat'</i>	‘start/take up being a writer’	<i>ot-pisat'-sja</i>	‘get out of something unpleasant by writing’
<i>do-pisat'</i>	‘finish writing’	<i>o-pisat'-sja</i>	‘make a slip of the pen’
<i>pro-pisat'</i>	‘write for a [specified] long period of time’	<i>is-pisat'sja</i>	‘write to the point where one loses his creativity’
<i>pere-pisat'</i>	‘record, write down all of’	<i>s-pisat'-sja</i>	‘reach concord/mutual understanding by writing’

Table 6: Perfective Possibilities for a Single Verb: Write

The overall meaning of perfective verbs is the assertion of change from one situation to another: they basically “create” time and force it on a listener, whether in a sentence or not, and regardless of their particular form (e.g., present tense, past tense, future tense, infinitives, imperatives, etc., etc.). The schema for change is given in Figure 2; this is called the “Temporal Definiteness” template.

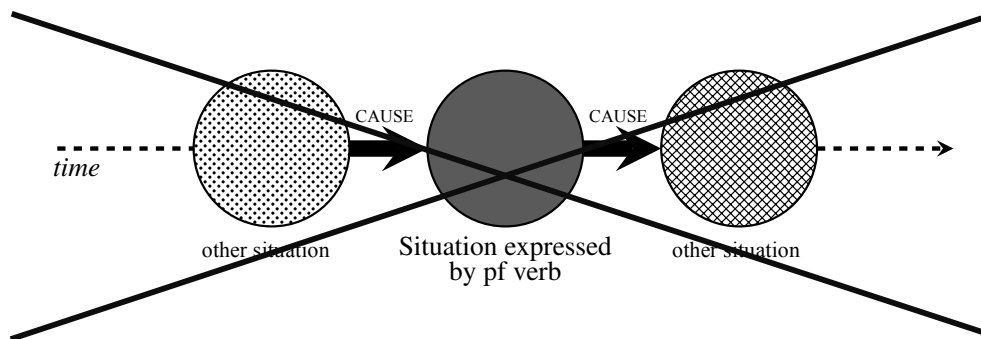


Figure 3: The Meaning of the Russian Imperfective

II. Non-Temporal Case #1: Imperatives

Perfective Imperative: Contains a covert command/request for the hearer to (a) *decide* to carry out an action, (b) carry it out with (c) the appropriate outcome.

- (4) *Ljampin, prošu vas, **sjad'te** za fortep'jano:*
 ‘Ljampin, please, sit down.PF at the piano:’

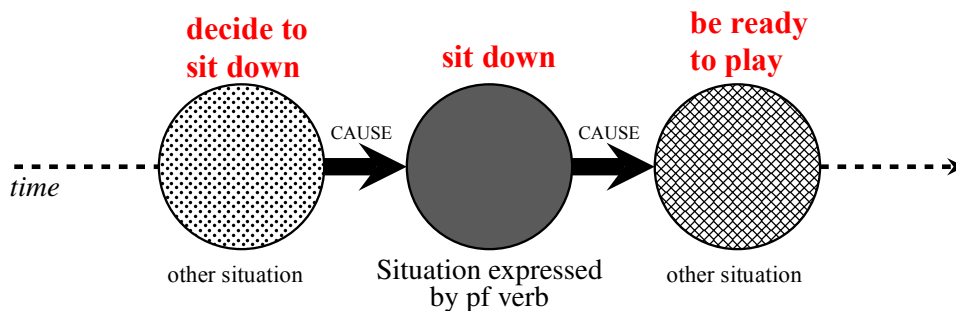


Figure 4: The Perfective Imperative in (4)

- (5) **Porabotajte** god, i polučite otičnyj rezul'tat!
 'Work.PF for a year, and you will achieve an excellent result!'

NB: imperfective imperatives with durations of time referring to single actions are not attested in the corpus.

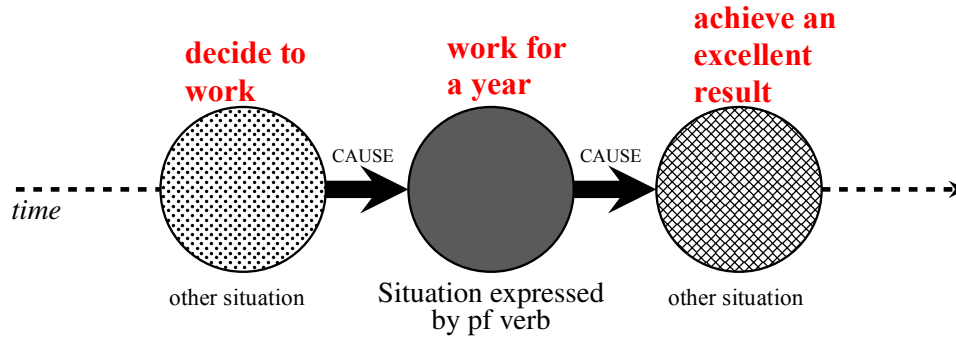


Figure 5: The Delimitative Perfective Imperative in (5)

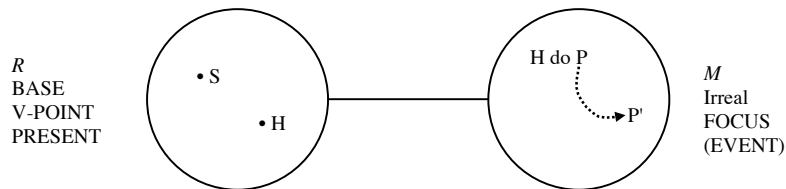


Figure 6: A Mental-Space-Theory Account of a Russian Perfective Imperative

Imperfective Imperative: Occurs whenever the command is for anything other than making a decision to carry out a particular action with a specific outcome:

1. Telling someone to engage in a process indefinitely;
2. Telling someone to do something habitually;
3. Telling/Inviting someone to do something they have already decided to do;
4. Suspending someone's decision-making power.

These variants are exemplified in (6–9):

- (6) **Čitajte**, požalujsta, dal'se.
 'Read.IMPF further, please.' [Such examples almost always occur in a context where the person is supposed to have already made the decision to do something.]
- (7) **Piši** počašče.
 'Write.IMPF more often.'
- (8) **Vxodi**, ne robej.
 'Come in.IMPF, don't be shy.'
- (9) **Beregis**!
 'Protect yourself.IMPF! = Watch out!' [Said to a construction worker about to be hit by a crane.]

In all of these cases, there is no sequence of decision > unique action > unique result, and thus the perfective sequencing schema does not apply. Rather, we are already upon the action and it should be done immediately.

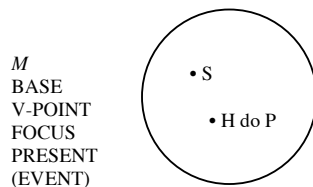


Figure 7: A MST Model of a Russian Impf Imperative

Further Examples of Types 3 () and 4 ().

In Type 3, the hearer has already made the decision to carry out the action. This may involve an invitation situation (8, 10a) or express the resignation/indifference of the speaker (10b–c).

- (10) a. — **Proxodite**, — *priglasila Anna*.
 “‘Come on in.IMPF,’ Anna invited.’
- b. — *S obozami kak rešil?*
Širjaev ulybaetsja.
 — *Da nu ix k čertu, èti obozy! Zabirajte! Tri povozki tol'ko ostavljaju dlja boepripasov. I to mnogo...*
 “‘What did you decide about the wagons?’”
 ‘Shiryaev smiles.
 “‘Oh, to hell with them, those wagons. [Go ahead and] take.IMPF them! I will only leave three for weapons and ammunition. And that’s plenty...’”
- c. *V zemljanku zagljadyvaet štabnoj pisar' — ryxlyj, kruglolicyj seržant. Sprašivaet, kak s zelenym jaščikom byt' — vezti ili sžigat'. Kapitan govoril kak-to, čto sžeč' by ne mešalo, — tam net ničego nužnogo.*
 — **Sžigaj** k allaxu! *Polgoda vozim za soboj `to baraxlo. Sžigaj! Pisar' uxodit.*
 ‘The staff clerk looks into the dugout—he’s a placid, broad-faced sergeant. He asks what is supposed to happen to the green strongbox—should they take it along or burn it? The captain said it wouldn’t hurt to burn it,—there wasn’t anything we need in it.
 “[Go ahead and] burn.IMPF it, by Allah! We’ve been lugging that crap around with us for half a year. [Go ahead,] burn.IMPF it!” The clerk leaves.

In Type 4, the speaker suspends the hearer’s decision making power. This can occur for any number of reasons. One is the case of an emergency (9). Another case is a hostile situation where the hearer has no rights (11a). Lastly, any kind of established power relationship means that the superior/authority makes decisions for the hearer, so that orders (e.g., in the military) are regularly imperfective (11b–c). Orders can obviously involve urgency as well.

- (11) a. **Davaj** časy!
 ‘Give.IMPF the watch!’ [Said by Soviet soldiers in WWII when they captured Germans; everyone knew captives had no rights.]

- (11) b. — *Karty u vsech est'? Poprošu vnut'.*
My vynimaem. Maksimov razvoračivaet svoju mjaškiju, zamusolennuju pal'cami pjativerstku.
Žirnaja krasnaja linija polzet čerez vsju kartu sleva napravo, s zapada na vostok.
 — **Zapisyvajte** maršrut.
 “Does everyone have their maps?” His voice is sharp, unpleasant. His pipe has gone out. But he continues to suck on it mechanically. “Take them out.”
 ‘We take them out. Maksimov takes out his topographic map, soiled from handling. A thick, red line crosses the entire map from left to right, from west to east.
 “Mark down.IMPF the route of march.”
- c. **Zanimaj** oboronu, inžener... *Fricy.*
 ‘Take.IMPF your defensive position, engineer... Krauts.’

Such imperatives uttered outside of a command hierarchy are perfective, cf. (12–13)

- (12) *Kstati, u menja est' očen' xorovsij vrač, **zapiši** telefon.*
 ‘By the way, I have a very good doctor, write down.PF his telephone number.’
- (13) *Da **zajmi** že, nakonec, prednaznačennie tebe mesto!*
 ‘Do finally take.PF your assigned seat!’

Occasionally can “think” for the hearer in a friendly/concerned way, which is almost a combination of an order and an invitation, as in (14), in which the hearer is drunk and not necessarily thinking in his own best interest:

- (14) — *Vo kak! — skazal Potapov nasmešlivo. — Už sovsem vpilsja. I tut Daša zakrasnelas' ešče bol'se, podnesla emu buterbrod s kil'koj i skazala: — **Zakusyvajte!***
 “Oho!” said Potapov mockingly. “He’s already completely trashed.” And then Saša blushed heavily even more, brought him a sprat sandwich and said: Eat a bite.IMPF

Perfective and imperfective imperatives can alternate in one and the same set of commands, with the corresponding differences in communicative function:

- (15) *«Molodoj čelovek, vy nam ponravilis', no u vas malo opyta raboty v teatre, vystuplenij s orkestrom. **Porabotajte** na periferii, a čerez godik snova **priežžajte**».*
 ‘Young man, we like you, but you don’t have enough work experience in the theater, in performances with orchestras. Work.PF in the provinces, and in a year come.IMPF [back to us].’
- (16) — *Dolgo ne zasiživajtes', — govorit Širjaev Igorju. — Čas — ne bol'se. I za nami topajte. Strogo na vostok. Na Kantemirovku.*
Igor' molča kivet golovoj, raskačivajas' s nogi na nogu.
 — *Pulemet **brosajte**. Zatvor **vykin'te**. Lenty, esli ostanutsja, **zabirajte**.*
 “Don’t sit too long,” Shiryayev says to Igor. “An hour—not more. Then come and find us. Due east, to Kantemirovka.”
 ‘Igor nods silently, shifting his weight back and forth from foot to foot.
 “Ditch.IMPF the machinegun. Remove.PF the bolt. If any ammo belts are left, take.IMPF them with you.”’

The aspect of negated imperatives, which has not been given a theoretical explanation before, can be explained with the principles outlined above.

Imperfective Prohibitions:

- (17) *Emu skazali "ne vozvraščajsja".*
'They told him "don't return.IMPF.'"

These are temporally indefinite commands and/or orders by authorities (usually both).

Of particular interest are the negated perfective warnings against inadvertent actions:

- (18) *Ostorožnej, ne upadite!*
'Careful, don't fall.PF!'

What is communicated is that the hearer should make a conscious decision to avoid an action if the relevant circumstance arise.

Here, as in negated clauses in narratives (cf. Dickey and Kresin 2009), the pf aspect **has wide scope over negation**: the meaning of *Ne upadite!* is not *do not make the decision to fall and do not fall*, but *make the decision not to fall and do not fall*.

III. Non-Temporal Case #2: Infinitives as Commands

Infinitives as commands are always authoritative and gruff. They bear similarities to imperatives, though their usage is less common, occurring primarily in contexts of extreme compulsion (military, prison, other disciplinary institutions).

PF infinitives: script commands that make explicit reference to an enabling condition (19). They are also interim commands that are made on the spot as circumstances arise by someone whose will is the authority (20). That is, they ensue following an unpredictable trigger/enabling condition. Others make explicit reference to other actions to be carried out in sequence (21).

- (19) *Vstat'! Sud idet.*
'Rise.PF! The judge is coming in.'
- (20) *Vytaščil revol'ver a pal'nul u nego nad uhom. Вытащил револьвер и пальнул у него над ухом.*
«*Vstat'!*» *On vstal, krasnyj, rasparennyj, i smotrit diko.*
'He pulled out a revolver and fired a shot over his ear. "Get up.PF!" He got up, flushed, sweating, and looked about wildly.'
- (21) — *Vstat', razbit'sja po param i za mnoj vo dvor! — skomandoval seržant Aleksandr.*
"“Get up.PF, break out.PF into pairs and follow me into the yard!” commanded Sergeant Aleksandr.’

Note that delimitatives occur with reference to sequenced events:

- (22) *[Komandir korablja, muž] Ja protestuju. [Vožak gruppy anarxistov, muž] Pomolčat'! Rešim prosto i bystro.*
'[Commander of the ship, male] I protest. [Leader of the group of anarchists, male] Be quiet.PF! We will make a simple and quick decision.'

Each of these conditions instantiates the temporal definiteness template.

IMPF Infinitives: Either function as commands to engage in some activity for an indefinite period of time (one which has usually already been performed; 23), or function as script commands (24) which instantiate a repeated event and are thus independent of particular enabling conditions.

- (23) *A potom rezko vstal. — Sidet'!* — skazal milicioner i protjanul k nemu ruku.
 ‘And then he brusquely got up. “Sit.IMPF!” said the policeman and reached out toward him.
- (24) *Bylo uže sovsem svetlo (kak okazalos' — šest' časov utra), kogda zagremel ključ v zamke i raspaxnulas' dver': vošel «korporusnoj» dlja utrennej poverki. «Vstavat'!»*
 ‘It was already completely light out (as it turned out, it was six o'clock in the morning), when a key thundered in the lock and the door flew open: the “block warden” came in for the morning roll.
 “Get up.IMPF!”’

Imperfective command infinitives do not according to my data ever include reference to an enabling condition.

The indefinite process function, as well as the script function, do not refer to total and temporally unique events, and thus cancel the temporal definiteness template.

IV. Non-Temporal Case #3: Performatives

Israeli 2001, 2013 has argued that perfective performatives, in contrast to imperfective performatives, introduce a new locutionary event and/or express the authority of the speaker. The latter, in fact seems to be regularly expressed.

- (25) a. *Priezžaj, Katjuxa, ja tebja prošu, a? Bez tebja propadaem...* (Israeli 2013)
 ‘Come over, Katjuxa, I am asking.IMPF you, huh? Without you were done for...’
- b. *Vmeste s tem poprošu ne delat' zajavlenij, kotorye možno istolkovat' kak oskorblenie v adres obitatelja besedki, ničem ne sprovcirovavšego takoe k sebe otnošenje.*
 ‘At the same time, I ask.PF you not to make statements that can be interpreted as insults directed at a visitor to the chat who has in no way provoked such an attitude towards himself.
- (26) a. *Napominaju, čto vyšeukazannye vešči prinadležali mne i ne imeli otnošenija k partijnoj kasse.* (Israeli 2013)
 I remind.IMPF [you], that the aforementioned items belonged to me and had no relation to the party's finances’
- b. *Napomnju, čto v sootvetstvii so stat'ej 24. 4 KoAP RF ljubye xodatajstva, zavjavljaemye pri rassmotrenii administrativnogo narušenii, dolžny byt' sdelany v pis'mennoj forme.* (Israeli 2013)
 ‘I remind.PF [you], that in accordance with article 24. 4 of the Code of Administrative Violations of the Russian Federation, any petition submitted during the examination of administrative violations should be made in written form.’
- (27) a. — *Sovetuju zaučit', gde pravaja storona, a gde levaja.* (Israeli 2013)
 ‘I advise.IMPF [you] to learn where right side is, and where the left side is.’
- b. — *Vozmožno, vozmožno. No vot čto ja vam posovetuju. Napišite-ka pis'mo s ètoj pros'boj Mixailu Andreeviču Suslovu. On čelovek otzyvčivyy. Dumaju, on dlja vas sdelaet.* (Israeli 2013)
 ‘Possibly, Possibly. But here's what I advise.PF you to do. Write a letter with this request to Mixail Andreevič Suslov. He's a responsive person. I think he'll do it for you.’

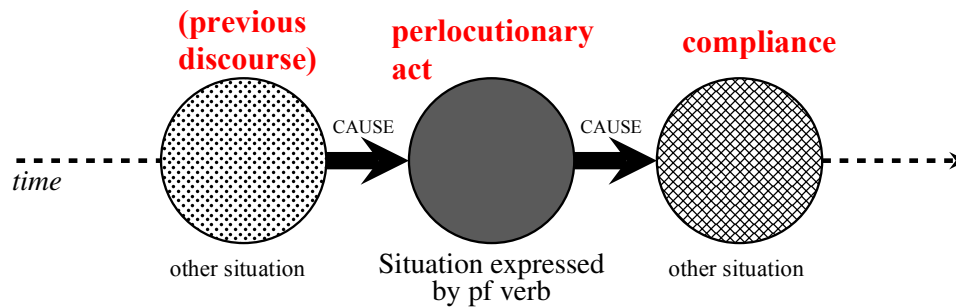


Figure 8: Authoritative Perfective Performatives as Assertions of Compliance

The semantic source for the “authority” of perfective performatives is that they assert that the perlocutionary act will have consequences. The authoritative speaker also controls the discourse, and introduces the perlocutionary act at will. Thus, perfective performatives instantiate the temporal definiteness template.

V. Conclusions

- Aspectual usage in imperatives, infinitives as commands and performatives can be easily explained with the assumption that the Russian perfective aspect asserts sequential connection with qualitatively different states of affairs (temporal definiteness), whereas the imperfective aspect presents a situation as lacking such connections.
- An important difference between such non-narrative functions and past-tense examples is that there is no issue of reference in terms of shared knowledge between speaker and hearer. If knowledge is shared, that is coincidental. However, the sequencing force of the perfective is nevertheless in effect, and perfective verbs in non-narrative functions nevertheless refer to specific tokens of events.
- Perfective imperatives are intersubjective, in that the speaker takes into account the hearer’s decision-making role, and the imperfective is conversely subjective in that the speaker is the arbiter of the hearer’s decision making (either by recognizing a decision the hearer has made, or suspending the hearer’s decision-making power).
- In contrast, perfective infinitives as commands and perfective performatives are subjective, and express the control of the speaker. Conversely, imperfective infinitives and performatives express no speaker control (in the case of infinitives the speaker at most executes an established script).
- The Russian perfective aspect *creates* time. In terms of Mental Space Theory, we may say that the perfective aspect is a space builder, i.e., it always creates an event space and another space distinct from the BASE space (Figure 9); this is done on the “lexical” level.

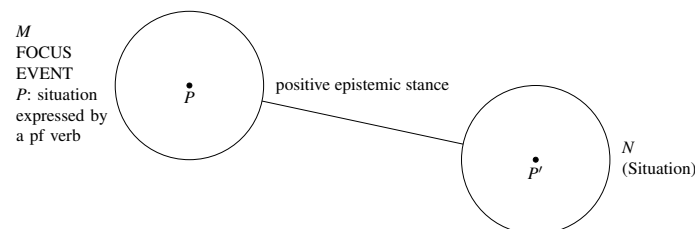


Figure 9: The Russian Perfective Aspect as a Multiple Space Builder

- In contrast, the Russian imperfective aspect does not create a new mental space.

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