

**On the semantics of the so-called present perfective:
what studies of the Russian language show**

“The essence of the Russian verb is the aspect, and we should proceed from the aspect in order to gain a real insight on the notion of tense in Russian grammar...” [1: 175]

1. The classical view that the temporal paradigm of the Russian perfective does not have the member “the present tense”, as perfectivity and the meaning of the present tense contradict each other, is opposed by the widespread belief that there are numerous cases when the contradiction is removed, so the temporal paradigm in Russian is not structured as straightforwardly as Table 1 depicts it.

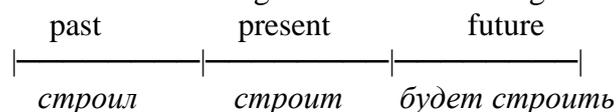
Table 1. The established view on the temporal paradigm (TP) of the Russian verb

member of the TP \ verb	imperfective	perfective
"the past tense"	√	√
"the present tense"	√	—
"the future tense"	√	√

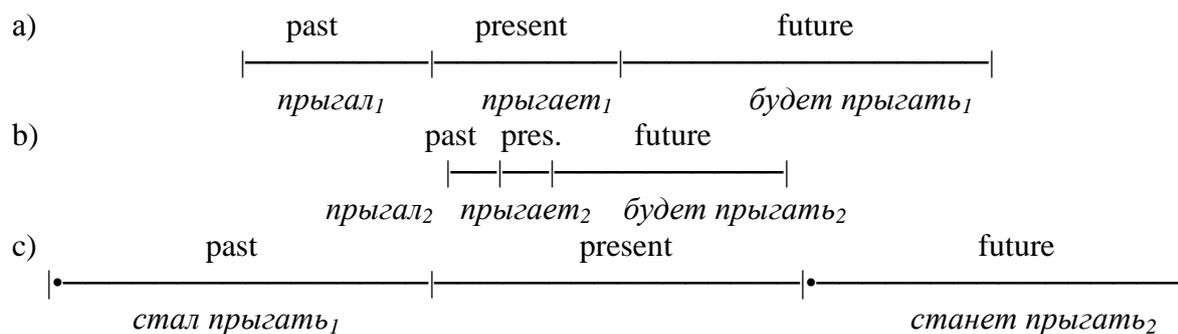
2. The paper aims to prove that modern linguistics can develop conclusive arguments to substantiate the canonical perspective. First, in line with the epigraph, I will introduce the aspectual theory I accept. It is known for corroborating ideas of the classics of aspectology about the scope of purely-aspectual pairs in Russian. Briefly, it differentiates three types of the aspectual semes: 'initial punctual bound', 'final punctual bound', and 'initial-final punctual bound'. Here, I can mention only two results of this approach: 1) differentiating two types of the meaning of beginning, namely linear and punctual (compare the visual metaphors for the synonymous constructions *начать+ИИФ* and *стать+ИИФ*: —————•————— and •—————), and 2) the semantic description of perfectives like *прыгнуть* (via the notion "process of non-standard, namely short, duration" —•).

3. Now I turn to investigating the nature of temporal meaning. Relying on their linguistic intuition, a common native speaker, when merely comparing all members of the Russian verb paradigm outside any context, will single out series like *строи́л–строи́т–бу́дет строи́ть* and *построи́л–построи́т* on the grounds that (1) their members inform about the time of the action in the real (physical) world, and (2) they are interpreted through the notions of the past, present, and future time. So it is natural to claim that each member of the temporal paradigm possesses a specific temporal seme. It is also indubitable that its defining requires the notion of the temporal reference mark (TRM). Consequently, one of the semes is 'simultaneity with the TRM' (the seme 'present tense'), while two others are, respectively, 'anteriority to the TRM' (the seme 'past tense') and 'posteriority to the TRM' (the seme 'future tense'). Thus, the key to elucidating the nature of the paradigmatic temporal meaning is the notion of the TRM.

4. First, it must be ascertained if the TRM is a point or an interval. The second assumption implies that the TRM has clear definite boundaries and, respectively, the time scale is a segment that consists of three parts. These parts are equal to each other, for it seems implausible that the temporal planes of one and the same verb differ in their length. The limits of these parts is perceived by the linguistic intuition in the same way as any Russian speaker intuitively perceives the seme 'punctual bound' in perfectives. But at the same time, those limits are distinct from the perfective seme in their cognitive nature. See Fig. 1:

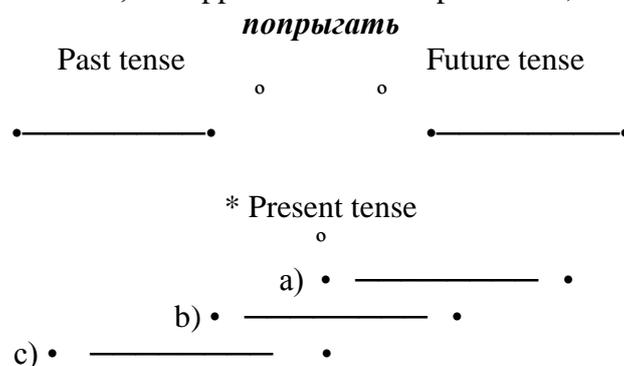


However, such a treatment of the temporal scale is in conflict with the facts that 1) verbs differ as regards the duration of the seme 'process' they have, 2) the future tense of imperfectives is analytic, and 3) the meaning of perfectives contains the seme 'punctual bound'. In other words, Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 are incompatible:



Thus, the tradition rightfully treats TRM as a point. Importantly, the temporal reference point is the moment of observation and it is static. The motion discerned by the linguistic intuition is the same 'process'.

5. Now we can see that the semes 'punctual bound' and 'process' inherent in a perfective cannot be simultaneously compatible with the seme 'simultaneity with the temporal reference point'. The complex semantic component 'process'+ 'punctual bound', so to speak, pushes away the seme 'simultaneity with the temporal reference point'. One cannot even imagine approaching of these semantic components to each other, for it would mean unavoidable "disintegration", "annihilation", "disappearance" of the perfective, see Fig. 3:



Possibly, perfectives can have the same syntagmatic meanings as the member "the present tense" of the temporal paradigm of imperfectives. However, the temporal paradigm of perfectives verbs is defective. It does not contain the member "the present tense".

The explanation proposed is expected to be advantageous not only for Russian, see [2-7].

References

1. Карцевский, С. И. (2004), Система русского глагола. In Карцевский, С.И. *Из лингвистического наследия*. Т. 2. М.: Языки славянской культуры, p. 31–207.
2. Błaszczak, J. (2019). "Be future" — *Old and Modern Views on FUTURE: Typological, Diachronic, and Psycholinguistic Aspects*. Poznań: Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza.
3. De Wit, A. (2017). *The present perfective paradox across languages*. NY: OUP.
4. Divjak, D., Janda, L.A. & Kočańska, A. (2007). Why cognitive linguists should care about the Slavic languages and vice versa. In *Cognitive paths into the Slavic domain*. Divjak, D. & Kočańska, A. (eds.). Berlin – New York: Mouton de Gruyter, p. 1-18.
5. Geld, R. & Zovko Dinković, I. (2007). Perfectives, imperfectives and the Croatian present tense. In *Cognitive paths into the Slavic domain*. Divjak, D. & Kočańska, A. (eds.). Berlin – New York: Mouton de Gruyter, p. 111-148.
6. Kočańska, A. (2007). Conflicting epistemic meanings of the Polish aspectual variants in past and in future uses: Are they a vagary of grammar? In *Cognitive paths into the Slavic domain*. Divjak, D. & Kočańska, A. (eds.). Berlin–New York: Mouton de Gruyter, p. 149-180.
7. Malchukov, A. (2009). Incompatible categories: Resolving the "present perfective paradox". In *Cross-linguistic semantics of tense, aspect and modality*. Hogeweg, L., de Hoop, H., Malchukov, A. (eds.). Amsterdam – Philadelphia: John Benjamins, p. 13-31.