

Imperfective Aspect in Russian Imperatives: Pragmatic Strengthening and Intersubjectivity

It is generally acknowledged that perfective aspect (Pf) reports a definitive change in the chronological time-world progression, whereas imperfective aspect (Impf) does not report definitive change. Impf, in fact, other than as a marker of the temporal indefiniteness, functions in the 'virtual' world, for implicating epistemic or speech-act causality and conversational implicature. This can be construed as a kind of informational balance between contextual support and semantic definiteness: Impf with the palest meaning should have the strongest contextual support. In Imperative Impf is employed in a range of contexts, but all these contextual environments, are pragmatically conditioned and the maximum degree of this pragmatically strengthened Impf is socially ritualized, conventional polite forms of inviting, greeting, parting as well as some rude set phrases. I shall argue that Impf in imperative is more widely used in the close interlocutor distance and the colloquial register, in which the speaker and the addressee share broader background knowledge and contexts. This shows that Impf implicates intersubjectivity and polite or rude effects of Impf is in sharp contrast with politically correct, neutral Pf. Thus Impf in imperative is a marked category in its distribution and in the semantic, pragmatic conditioning and this implies a markedness reversal or informational balance across moods and binary opposition, which substantiates a kind of homeostasis in the ecology of grammar. Drawing on the Russian National Corpus data, the study examines quantitative patterns of aspectual choice in imperatives preceded/followed by apparently optional 2nd person pronominal subjects, in imperatives including some most frequently used modal particles, as well as frequency patterns depending on the register or the interlocutor distance.

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