

An analysis of Russian perfective negative imperatives in terms of the causal model

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1 Introduction: Kuehnast's (2008) analysis of preventive negative imperatives with perfective aspect

This paper aims at shedding a new light on negative imperatives with perfective aspect in Russian by applying a version of Copley & Kagan's (2021) analysis of Russian perfective aspect in the context of negation. In Russian, prohibitive negative imperatives about an intentional action (e.g. Don't open the window! / Don't kill Ivan! etc.) are marked by imperfective aspect only, while preventive imperatives towards a non-intentional situation are marked by perfective aspect, as in (1) and (2).

- (1) Ne upadi! (Kuehnast 2008: 189)
not fall-PFV.IMP 'Be careful! Don't (inadvertently) fall down!'
- (2) Ne razbej čašku! (*idem.* 190)
not break-PFV.IMP cup 'Don't (inadvertently) break the cup!'

This aspectual “division of labor” leads to ask why and how perfective aspect allows, in the negative context, non-intentional situations to be compatible with imperatives, which by their essence require an intentional action on the part of the addressee. Kuehnast (2008: 190) points out that “preventives depict a complex situation representing cause-effect chain, from which only the last link is addressed”. According to this author, (2) may thus be uttered by a mother when “there is a cup on a table and [her] child is pulling the tablecloth” (*idem.* 192). The child understands that pulling the tablecloth may cause the cup's falling down and ultimately its breaking and can infer that (2) “is a hint to change the current behavior, which is not mentioned explicitly” (*ibid.*). Therefore, “the imperative force is directed to an activity or a state of affairs [in the preparatory phase] which the addressee is indeed able to control” in (2)]” (*ibid.*). Kuehnast (2008: 184) further points out that “negation affects the perfectivity of the predicate by discarding the change of state expressed by the perfective verbs. The spotlight of the verbal reference time span moves from the resulting state [where the cup is broken for (2)] back to the source state [where the child is pulling the tablecloth]”. Thus, according to this author, the role of perfective consists of invoking an implicit state of affairs in the preparatory phase which is controllable by the addressee. However insightful, Kuehnast's analysis seems to remain speculative and even ad hoc: it crucially refers to an implicit preparatory phase, whose status should be clarified and independently justified. It should further be stated in a more general and principled way to be applicable to other cases. Copley & Kagan's (2021) analysis of perfective aspect in past negative contexts turns out to offer such a general framework.

2 Copley & Kagan's (2021) analysis of perfective aspect in past negative sentences

Copley & Kagan (2021) first point out that, in past negative sentences, “the choice of [perfective] aspect means that something happened in the world that made an instantiation of the negated event plausible, expected, or feasible”. They use the term ‘specificity effect’ to refer to this meaning of perfective aspect. Thus, the example (3) “informs the addressee that, although the killing of Ivan by Anna did not successfully take place, it was reasonable to expect such a murder. For instance, it is possible that Anna tried to kill Ivan but failed as he was stronger [in this case, the murder event effectively took place but did not reach completion]. Alternatively, she may have planned the murder but ultimately decided not to perform it (because that would be too risky) [in this case, the murder event did not even begin].”

- (3) Anna ne ubila Ivana. (Copley & Kagan 2021: 4)
Anna NEG killed-PERF Ivan 'Anna didn't kill Ivan (end up killing Ivan).'

They further propose a causal model “ $\textcircled{X} \rightarrow \textcircled{E} \rightarrow \textcircled{R}$ ”, which is read as follows: \textcircled{X} (= implicit state of affairs in the preparatory phase: e.g. Anna-plan-to-kill-Ivan) is efficacious for \textcircled{E} (= denoted event: e.g. Anna-kill-Ivan), which is efficacious for \textcircled{R} (= result: e.g. Ivan-dead). The “specificity effect” is due to a presupposition, induced by the perfective aspect, that \textcircled{X} effectively occurs (represented by $\exists s. \textcircled{X}(s)=1$). Now, the above two scenarios conceived for (3) are modeled by (4a) and (4b), where \textcircled{Y} represents some inhibitory influence.

