

IMPERFECTIVE OF NEGATION IN RUSSIAN

In Russian there is a strong tendency to substitute Imperfective for Perfective in a sentence that counts as a “pragmatic negation” (Borschev e.a. in print) of a positive one. For example, in order to deny (1a) one is likely to say (1b):

- (1) a. Ivan *vzjal* [PFV] s soboj plashch ili kurtku ‘John *took* a cloak or a jacket’;
b. Ivan ni plashcha ni kurtki s soboj *ne bral* [IPFV] ‘John *took* neither cloak nor jacket’.

In (1b) Imperfective is optional – (1c) is also acceptable:

- (1) c. Ivan ni plashcha ni kurtki s soboj *ne bral* [PFV].

However, there are contexts where substitution is obligatory; see an example discussed in Rappaport 1985:

- (2) a. Nado *ujti* [PFV] ‘it is recommended *to go away*’;
b. Ne nado *uxodit'* [IPFV] ‘it is not recommended *to go away*’
c. *Ne nado *ujti* [PFV].

On the contrary, in (3) Imperfective is impossible:

- (3) <Pogovori s nej!> Ona poka *ne ushla* [PFV] (**ne uxodila*) ‘<Talk to her!> She hasn’t yet left’.

How to explain the tendency demonstrated by (1)? What is the semantic difference, if any, between (1b), with the verb in the imperfective, and (1c) with the perfective? What are semantic relationships between imperfective in negative and positive context? And why perfective is impossible in (2b) and obligatory in (3)?

Imperfective of negation should be compared not with the progressive, which imposes a synchronic perspective, but with the so called “factual”, i.e. retrospective imperfective. No wonder that the latter resembles perfective, which also presents a retrospective view of the situation.

The meaning of the perfective includes the following semantic components (with different communicative statuses): activity, result, preservation of result, singularity, definiteness of time (Paducheva 1996: 54). Factual imperfective lacks the last three components, while the second component has the status of an easily cancelable implicature.

As a rule, in a negative context only the result is denied. Thus, *ne resh'al* [IPFV] ‘didn’t solve’ denies the activity, while *ne resh'il* [PFV] denies the result, the activity being kind of presupposition. In the semantics of momentary *vzjat'* ‘take’ in example (1) these two components, activity and result, are semantically inseparable, the verb then being partly indifferent to the choice of aspect. In (2), with its deontic modality, recommendation concerns activity in the first place – hence practically obligatory imperfective (Rappaport 1985). On the contrary, in (3) perfective is chosen, because temporal definiteness is in focus. Other examples of semantically motivated imperfective are to be discussed.

References

Borschev e.a. (in press) – Borschev V., Paducheva E., Partee B., Testelefs Y., and Yanovich I. Sentential and constituent negation in Russian BE-sentences revisited. To appear in *Formal Approaches to Slavic Linguistics: The Princeton Meeting 2005 (FASL 14)*. Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications.

Paducheva 1996 – Paducheva E.V. *Semanticheskie issledovanija*. Moscow: Shkola “Jazyki russkoj kul'tury”, 1996.

Rappaport 1985 – Rappaport G. Aspect and modality in contexts of negation. // M. Flier, A. Timberlake (eds). *The Scope of Slavic Aspect*. Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1985, 194–223.