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Does the Presuppositional Imperfective Exist in Russian (and Slavic)?

1. Introduction

The title of this paper should not be interpreted as denying that imperfective verbs can refer to actions that have already been mentioned or are otherwise evident from the context—they clearly do. However, I question whether the prior mention/givenness of an action is a necessary and sufficient condition for the use of the imperfective in statements of fact (hereinafter: SoF), and more broadly whether it can usefully supplant other semantic elements in an analysis of these verb forms. In what follows, I raise some descriptive issues surrounding the idea of a specifically “presuppositional” imperfective in Russian, and by extension in other Slavic languages. My main purpose is to raise these issues, but I will also offer my own alternative solution to them as allowed by limitations on space.

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Based on the above, the term *presuppositional imperfective* will refer to the use in Russian of past-tense imperfective SoF when it is clear from the context that a given action has taken place. This term appears to have replaced Padučeva's term *actional imperfective* (*akcional'noe značenie nesoveršennogo vida*, of which the most recent treatment was Падучева, 1996, pp. 48–52), at least in more formally oriented analyses (e.g., Gehrke, 2022; Grønn, 2004; Klimek-Jankowska, 2022).¹ Recent work on Russian and Slavic aspect (Gehrke, 2022; Grønn, 2004; Klimek-Jankowska, 2022; Гренн & Филюшкина Краве, 2007) has proceeded under the assumption that there are two types of imperfective SoF: the existential and the presuppositional. Further, among some proponents, the thinking seems to be that the previous mention of an action (or otherwise the accessibility of the fact of an action from the context or preceding discourse) is sufficient to trigger the imperfective past in Russian. Thus, Grønn (2004, p. 116) suggests that once we know that a past-tense imperfective SoF is presuppositional, then “there should be no need to seek additional (and unmotivated) explanations for [the] factual IpF.”

This is the position with which the following takes issue. In brief, I argue that the aspectual construals of presuppositional impf SoFs are generally the same as those fulfilled by existential impf SoFs; conversely, the aspectual construal expressed by presuppositional perfectives are the same as those fulfilled by existential perfectives. I refer to the view that previous mention (or the accessibility of the fact of an action from the context/preceding discourse) triggers the imperfective past in Russian as the *presuppositional hypothesis*. Section 2 examines some examples that have been presented as cases of the presuppositional imperfective, and shows that there are complications with each that have

¹ An anonymous reviewer objects to the claim that the concept of the presuppositional imperfective is employed primarily in formal analyses of Russian aspect, citing Padučeva (Падучева, 2013) and noting that she “subsumes the older labels *konkretnoe* and *akcional'noe* under the umbrella term *retrospektivnoe konkretno-referentnoe*.” The reviewer is unwittingly making my point, because Padučeva (Падучева, 2013) does not employ the term *presuppositional* in her very brief remarks, and considers such usage to be identical with the *ograničennodlitel'noe značenie* (‘delimited-durative meaning’). A better example of a non-formalist employing the concept of a presupposition is Mehlig (2011), who characterizes such imperfective usage as anaphoric, following Grønn (2004). Note, however, that in his subsequent analysis of imperfective statements of fact (Мелиг, 2013) he employs a concept similar to Padučeva's, the *edinično-faktičeskoe značenie* (‘singular-factual meaning’), but in his discussion of SoFs referring to a particular instance of an action he includes examples that carry a presupposition that the action occurred as well as those lacking such a presupposition.

been ignored. Section 3 offers an alternative to the presuppositional hypothesis, based on the purpose of the speaker. Section 4 reconsiders achievements in presuppositional contexts. Section 5 presents a brief discussion of some data from other Slavic languages. Section 6 presents summary comments.

2. Some problematic data

Various examples have been adduced as evidence for the presuppositional hypothesis. I have taken issue with one before (cf. Dickey, 2018, pp. 89–90), which Padučeva (Падучева, 1996, p. 50) and Grønn (2004, p. 192) took from Chekhov's *Skučnaja istorija*, but omitted the last phrase. The full sentence is given in (1).

- (1) [...] v ètoj porternoj ja obdumyval svoju dissertaciju i **napisal** pervoe ljubovnoe piš'mo k Vare. **Pisal** karandašom, na liste s zagolovkom «Historia morbi».²
 '[...] in this porterhouse, I thought over my dissertation and wrote._{PFV} my first love letter to Varja. I wrote._{IPFV} in pencil, on a sheet of paper with the header *Historia morbi*.'

In this example, a narrator is passing various places and remembering what happened in them or what each of them was like; the second mention elaborates on the event as an atterminative situation, and includes the instrument (the pencil) and the appearance of the paper on which he wrote it, as background information, as Grønn (2004) observes. I now concur that this is a statement of fact, as it there is no (simultaneous) reference point that would activate the interpretation that action was ongoing at a particular point in time. However, this example should be considered a non-terminative imperfective SoF – *obščefaktičeskoe nepredel'noe* in Padučeva's (Падучева, 1996, p. 33) terms, or *processno-faktičeskoe OF* in Šatunovskij's (Шатуновский, 2009, p. 160) terms.

Šatunovskij observes that such processual imperfective SoFs focus on circumstances, as in, e.g., *Vy kogda-nibud' pisali gusinyim perom?* 'Have you ever written with a goosequill?'. While it is true that the imperfective clause in (1)

² Russian examples are taken from the referenced literature, the RNC (<https://ruscorpora.ru/en/>; RNC, n.d.), in which case they are marked as such; other examples are taken from the Internet.

relates to a previously mentioned action, unlike Šatunovskij's existential example, both kinds of imperfective SoF focus on the circumstances of the process. Circumstantial evidence for this focus on a process is the fact that there is no accusative object in the clause, which comports with Šatunovskij's observation that "processual" imperfective SoFs do not occur with direct and indirect objects (**Ja vam pisal gusinyim perom* 'I wrote.iPFV you with a goosequill', ?*Vy pisali stixi karandašom?* 'Have you written poetry with a pencil?'³).

Other examples in the Russian National Corpus also represent processual SoFs, of which an example is (2).

- (2) *Esli ètot roman na samom dele napisal ja, to, značit, ja ego pisal, figural'no govorja, krov'ju serdca, dušu svoju v nego vkladyval, a vy prjamo xotite vzjat' ego i izurodovat.* (RNC, n.d.)
 'If I really wrote.PFV that novel, then I wrote.iPFV, figuratively speaking, with the blood of my heart, I put.iPFV my soul into it, and you really want to take it and disfigure it.'

In (2) the status of *pisal* as a processual SoF is evidenced by the elaboration of the circumstances, and is complemented by another verb form, *vykladyval*, which refers to the circumstantial action of 'putting one's soul into it', which occurred simultaneously to the writing. However, while this latter verb form appears to be a SoF, it is a case of what Zel'dovič (Зельдович, 2002, p. 117) labels a "covert durative" – an imperfective past-tense verb form that refers to a situation that occurred simultaneously to another situation that is accessible from the context. There is, of course, another alternative: to consider *vykladyval* a processual existential SoF – likewise a predicate with a process focus.

If the presuppositional imperfective in such cases is a real phenomenon, a question arises regarding its relationship to secondary imperfectives.⁴ Consider the presuppositional imperfective *pil* in (3):

- (3) *Včera on vypil mnogo, pil ot obidy, čto tak pogano ustroena žizn'.* (RNC, n.d.)
 'Yesterday he drank.PFV a large amount, drank.iPFV out of indignation that life has been so despicably arranged.'

³ The latter example is presumably acceptable when *stixi* 'poetry' has mass-noun interpretation, as opposed to a single poem.

⁴ The term *secondary* imperfective does not refer to any *derived* imperfective (e.g., *zapisvat'* 'note down/record.iPFV'), but to derived imperfectives that enter into aspectual triplets, e.g., *vypivat'* 'drink up' (≈ *pit'*, both aspectually correlated with *vypit'*) and *s'edat'* 'eat up' (≈ *est'*, both aspectually correlated with *s'est'*).

If the function of the imperfective here is anaphoric, as opposed to recategorizing an event as an aterminative predicate, then the secondary imperfective *vypival* should be acceptable in the place of *pil*. But it is not. Some might be tempted to argue that *vypivat*' refers to habitual repetition, but such secondary verbs can be used to refer to single events in the narrative present, and they also occur to refer to a minimum of one event in existential SoFs as in the following:

- (4) Ja ego uže **vypival** i živ-zdorov.⁵
 'I already drank.IPFV it [a type of soap] and am alive and well.'

Importantly, secondary imperfectives also occur with the *èto*-cleft construction that Grønn (2004, pp. 115–116, 228) considers to be indicative of the presuppositional imperfective, as in (5):

- (5) Po moemu, èto ty **vypival**.⁶
 'I think it's you who's done some drinking.'

The contrasting acceptability of the secondary imperfective *vypivat*' in examples (4–5) strongly suggests that the examples in (1–2) and *èto*-cleft examples such as (5) are different phenomena.

A consideration of *èto*-cleft examples focusing on the agent reveals that there is always a limited set of possible agents. In (5) there are two, a man and a woman. This fact recalls Israeli's (1998, p. 67) emphasis for the use of the imperfective past in *kto*-questions on there being a limited group of potential agents, as well as the interchangeability of said potential agents (as well as Šatunovskij's (Шатуновский, 2009, p. 142 and *passim*) emphasis on the repeatability of an action as a factor necessary for imperfective SoFs). Both of Israeli's factors apply to (5): either the man or the woman could have done some drinking and they each indeed suggest that the other did.

In this connection it is instructive to consider an example from Rassudova (Рассудова, 1968, p. 42), discussed by Israeli (1998, p. 68) as an example of the aforementioned conditions (Israeli also gives a third condition relevant for such questions, that the action was supposed to take place):

- (6) – Krasivo ukrasili elku.
 – Kto **ukrašal**?

⁵ Source: Панченко (2023).

⁶ Note that *vypivat*' here has a slightly different meaning of 'drink some alcohol', but in this meaning it is nevertheless paired with perfective *vypit*'. Source: Озаренный Звездой (2022).

“They decorated.PFV the [Christmas] tree beautifully.”

“Who decorated.iPFV it?”

According to Israeli, the three conditions are met here: (1) there is a limited set of possible agents (people known to the speaker who might have performed the action), who are (2) interchangeable (i.e., any of them could have done it), and (3) the action was supposed to take place (due to cultural knowledge and the local context). Grønn (2004, p. 225) dismisses Israeli’s analysis and suggests the presuppositional hypothesis as the only viable explanation. Grønn’s analysis is predicated on the assumption that the perfective in such questions is “dispreferred” (he attributes this opinion to Israeli, but that is not what she wrote; rather, she gave ex. (6) as an example of her three conditions). However, perfective examples can be found, such as (7), and they support Israeli’s analysis:

(7) – My tut včera vyxodili v tuman, i obnaružili, kak krasivo ukrasili naš les!

– Kto **ukrasil**

– V ètom i sostoit zagadka!⁷

“Yesterday we went out into the fog and discovered how beautifully someone has decorated.PFV our wood.”

“Who decorated.PFV it?”

“That’s the mystery!”

Here, who decorated the wood is a riddle, a complete mystery, and there is no limited set of possible agents, and thus interchangeability does not apply, and moreover, the action was not expected. Israeli’s (1998) analysis correctly predicts the choice.

Returning to example (2), it should be pointed out that the first clause has perfective *napisal* with a rhematic subject (*esli ètot roman... napisal ja* ‘if I really wrote that novel’), i.e., the focus is on the agent, which is where we are told we should expect the imperfective. An anonymous reviewer points out that the perfective in (2) is the only possible aspect, as it refers to a unique event given the uniqueness of the authorship relation, as Israeli (1996) argues. This point is clear, but what is not clear is why the imperfective is not acceptable based on the existence of the presupposition. My point is this: if the difference between the perfective and imperfective in presuppositional contexts conforms to independently motivated principles of aspectual usage, then there is no rea-

⁷ Source: Матаков (2020).

son to resort to the presupposition that the event occurred as an explanation of the usage.

Such examples of presuppositional perfectives are easy to come by. Consider (8):

- (8) Vy **napisali** očen' xorošuju knigu. **Napisali** perom mastera. Zorkoe oko podlinnogo xudožnika pomoglo Vam razgljadet' takie podrobnosti žizni, [...] (RNC, n.d.)
 'You wrote.PFV a very good book. You wrote.PFV [it] with the pen of a master.
 The keen eye of a true artist helped.PFV you to discern such details of life, [...]'

(The example continues with further compliments that are irrelevant for the aspectual issues.) This presuppositional perfective is modified by an instrument of means similar to (1) and (2) above. In fact, the second sentence for all intents and purposes restates the first sentence, if slightly amplifying the compliment. But here, the second mention of the writing of the book, that it was written 'with the pen of a master' is presented as a consequence of the aid provided by the writer's keen eye for the details of life. Again, if this presuppositional perfective occurs because it expresses a unique event in a sequence, whereas the presuppositional imperfective in (1) and (2) expresses atemporal background situations, independently established semantic elements can explain the usage, and the presuppositional status is a descriptive detail.

Another example involves a verb of communication, *predlagat'*/*predložit'* 'offer', and is taken from Grønn (2004, p. 207).

- (9) Sdelav ètot xod [26 – Rxc3], ja predložil nič'ju. [...] Navernjaka, černye deržatsja – naprimer, 27 Ba3 Bf8 Nf5 d5 29 Bb2 [...], no mne ne xotelos' načinat' sčetnuju igru, poètomu ja i **predlagal** nič'ju.
 'Having made this move [26 – Rxc3], I offered a draw. [...] Black could probably hold on, for example, with 27 Ba3 Bf8 Nf5 d5 29 Bb2, but I didn't feel like getting into a game of heavy calculations, so that was why I offered a draw.'

The example is cited very incompletely, and it is unfortunate that no continuation is provided. The reason is that two native speakers I have consulted interpret the imperfective *predlagal* 'offered' as signaling that the offer was declined. This is the expected interpretation according to Israeli (2001), who presents a detailed examination of imperfective SoF of communication verbs including *predlagat'*/*predložit'* 'offer'. With no continuation, it is impossible to know. In any case, past-tense forms of *predlagat' nič'ju* 'offer a draw' signaling that the offer was declined are easy to find online; ex. (10) is representative.

- (10) Druguju partiju proigryval i tože **predlagal** nič'ju, no on *ne soglašalsja*.⁸
 'I was losing the second match and also offered.iPFV a draw, but he didn't agree.iPFV.'

The last clause in (10), which communicates that the offer was refused, motivates the choice according to Israeli (2001). Note that in (9) above the first instance of *predložít'/predlagat'* is perfective because it occurs in a sequence of events. Outside of the chess context, we see the same overall structure with this verb in (11).

- (11) Priexal kak-to znakomyj Kirgiz i **predložil** pomenjat'sja lošad'mi: za odnu dvux **predlagal**. [...] Teper' že on posmotrel na predloženie kirgiza, kak nastojaščij, ser'eznyj xozjain, ktoromu nekogda zanimat'sja pustjakami, i menjat'sja lošad'mi *otkazalsja*. (RNC, n.d.)
 'One time a familiar Kyrgyz came and offered.PFV to trade horses: he offered.iPFV two horses for one. [...] Presently he viewed the Kyrgyz's offer as a real, serious landlord who had no time to mess with trifles, and refused.PFV to trade horses.'

The perfective *predložil* presents the offer as in sequence with the previous arrival of the Kyrgyz. The imperfective *predlagal* presents the actual offer that was turned down by Efim, the recipient (the omitted material describes how the man in question, Efim, had responded to such offers in the past).

Israeli (2001) gives various examples in which past-tense *predlagal* 'offered/suggested' as an imperfective SoF signals that an offer was turned down, such as (11).

- (11) Mne **predlagali** novuju rabotu.
 'They offered.iPFV me a new job.'

Israeli points out that the perfective *predložil* 'offered.PFV' in the same context ordinarily signals that the offer either had been accepted, or was still under consideration at the moment of speech. Based on this and other examples one can find on the RNC, it is clear that such usage patterns occur regardless of whether the occurrence of the action is available as a presupposition. Thus, if in SoFs with *predlagat'/predložít'* the perfective regularly signals that the offer has been accepted or is still under consideration, whereas the imperfective signals that the offer has been rejected, the fact that the past tense of imperfective *predlagat'* occasionally occurs in contexts where the action has been previously mentioned or is otherwise given is not directly relevant for aspectual coding.

⁸ Source: Голубев (2019).

A further example that Grønn (2004, p. 153) adduces as evidence for the presuppositional hypothesis is given in (12).

- (12) A deti kričali: papa, papa!.. Za čto on umer?
 Tovarišči, no počemu že ko mne? Pri čem tut ja? Ja, čto li, **ubival**?
 ‘And the children screamed: Daddy, daddy! Why did he die?
 ‘Comrades, but why are you coming to me? How am I involved in this? What, did I kill him?’

The problem with this example is that the passage is less straightforward than it seems. There is no realistic narrative here. The narrator dreamed of three people whom he cannot find again, and he speculates what might have happened to them, with full knowledge that he dreamed about them and is in some way responsible for their fate. He obsesses about one of them, an obese man, whom he then imagines has died. But there is no assumption that a murder has taken place. Thus, the narrator’s question is not about whether he was the one who killed him, but whether he killed him as opposed to something else being responsible for his death. Here, it is important to know that the dreamed group is initially portrayed as being on the verge of starvation.

Further, the question in ex. (12) is quite rhetorical, and communicates a denial that the speaker killed the man in question. In my view, example (12) represents an existential imperfective SoF, where what is at issue is whether a killing took place at all. In contexts in which the identity of a killer is what is really at issue, the perfective is quite easy to find. A representative example is given in (13).

- (13) – Sprašivaet ego milicioner, – snova zagovorila Marija Ivanovna: «Ty **ubil**?»
 «Net, ne ja». «A kto?» «Ne znaju». (RNC, n.d.)
 “‘A policeman asks him,’ Marija Ivanovna started speaking again: “‘Was it you that killed him?’ ‘No, not me.’ ‘Then who?’ ‘I don’t know.’”⁹

Again, if the perfective occurs in the very presuppositional contexts that are supposed to trigger the imperfective, the idea that a presuppositional context is relevant for aspectual usage is problematic—there must be some other factor that determines the choice.

⁹ The context shows that the question presupposes a killing and is about the identity of the killer. The accompanying video clip in the RNC confirms that the intonational contour falls on *ty* ‘you’ in the question.

The next two examples from the previous literature to be discussed are taken from Grønn and Filjuškina-Krave (Грønn & Филюшкина Краве, 2007). The first is given in (14).

- (14) Prošloj vesnoj Pavlu udalos' sdat' èkzamen po vyčlistel'noj lingvistike. Nesmotrja na složnost' materiala, on **sdal/sdaval** ètot èkzamen èksternom.
'Last spring Pavel managed to pass the exam in computational linguistics. Despite the complexity of the subject matter, he took (passed).PFV/took.IPFV it as a non-degree seeking student.'

Such constructed examples are problematic, because their discourse contexts do not exist and cannot be examined. In any case, according to the native speaker I have consulted, the familiar difference between the imperfective *sdavat' èkzamen* 'take an exam' and the perfective *sdat' èkzamen* 'pass an exam' cannot be ignored here: the perfective variant stresses the fact that Pavel took (and passed) the exam as a non-degree-seeking student as something impressive, whereas the imperfective variant is simply a follow-up with a discourse purpose that cannot be accessed from such a constructed example. Given this distinction, it is hard to see how the imperfective is more economical, as Grønn and Filjuškina-Krave (Грønn & Филюшкина Краве, 2007, p. 58) suggest based on Forsyth (1970, p. 88)—the two aspects have different discourse functions here.¹⁰ The perfective variant does not so much "reintroduce" the event (as suggested by Grønn and Filjuškina-Krave), but combines with an adverbial to reframe the event, i.e., to present it as qualitatively distinct (*sdal ètot èkzamen eksternom* 'took/passed the exam as a non-degree seeking student' vs. *sdat' èkzamen po vyčlistel'noj lingvistike* 'pass the computational linguistics exam'); on the relevance of adverbials for the expression of unique events with perfective verbs in Russian, cf. Zel'dovič (Зельдович, 2002, pp. 27–28).

Given the lack of a real discourse context for (14), we can consider (15):

- (15) Na èkzamene, ne bylo počemu-to gaišnika i **sdali** počti vse, potomu čto **sdavali** svojim instruktoram. (RNC, n.d.)

¹⁰ In this respect, it should be pointed out that Forsyth's (1970, pp. 85–88) original examples from *Bronepoezd 14–69* (*Kto podavljaj vosstanie rabočix? Vy? Ja!* 'Who quelled.IPFV the workers' uprising? You? Me!' and *Kto podavil vse vosstanija rabočix? Ja!* 'Who quelled.PFV all the workers' uprisings? Me!') are not equivalent with regard to their discourse function: the imperfective question is a follow-up functioning to provide supporting evidence for the speaker's contrast between his useful activities and the carousing of his interlocutor, whereas the perfective question mentions an event which leads to a subsequently presented consequence, i.e., that the speaker should be given command of the garrison. Note also that the imperfective question mentions a limited set of two possible agents (cf. Israeli's 1998 analysis mentioned above), whereas the perfective question does not invoke such a set.

‘For some reason there was no traffic policeman at the exam and almost all of them passed.PFV, because they took.iPFV it with their instructors.’

In (15), we have imperfective *sdavali* ‘took’ occurring shortly after *sdali* ‘passed’, in a presuppositional context. However, the imperfective verb is simply occurring as a follow-up to explain why the students passed, i.e., it focuses on a circumstance of the test-taking process, to provide supporting evidence.

With *sdat’/sdavat’*, the perfective occurs in presuppositional contexts with a new adverbial to reframe the event as described above. Consider example (16).

- (16) Tos’ka **sdal** segodnja èkzamen po ximii, no **sdal** ego tol’ko na trojku, čem očen’ ogorčil menja i Varseniku. (RNC, n.d.)
 ‘Tos’ka passed.PFV the chemistry exam today, but passed.PFV it only with a ‘C’, whereby he really angered me and Varsnika.’

The fact that he passed the exam was not the source of the annoyance, but the fact that he passed it only with a C-grade: as Zel’dovič suggests, the adverbial creates a unique event with the perfective in a given context. As such, the event has unique status in some causal chain.

Another presuppositional perfective clarifying the circumstances of the event is given in (17), taken from Dickey (2018, p. 91).

- (17) Ona **kupila** korovu, – **kupila** na mednye den’gi, po slučajju, u kakoj-to èvakuirovàšejsja na vostok sem’i, – i načala xodit’ po ljudjam, trgovat’ molokom. (RNC, n.d.)
 ‘She bought.PFV a cow – she bought.PFV it with copper coins, by chance, from some family that was being evacuated to the east, – and began to make rounds among the people and to sell milk.’

In (17), the “presuppositional” perfective introduces three circumstances of the purchase: what was paid, the occasion as a spur-of-the-moment affair, and the person from whom the cow was purchased. Again, if the presuppositional context is going to be argued to be decisive for the imperfective, an explanation is needed why the perfective commonly occurs.¹¹ Anticipating

¹¹ This reasoning applies to various other purported cases of the presuppositional imperfective, such as Gehrke’s (2022, p. 12) constructed example *Zaplatili. Plačeny byli naličnymi šest’ tysjač rublej* ‘We paid.PFV. Six thousand rubles were paid.iPFV in cash.’ As argued above, such constructed examples do not allow an entire discourse context to be accessed and therefore are of very limited value for explaining aspectual usage. It is noteworthy that Gehrke’s example resembles an example in the RNC from 1915, which reads as follows: *Čto kasaetsja platy deneg, to plačeny byli naličnymi šest’ tysjač rublej, a potom ček na Russkij dlja vnešnej trgovli bank.*

section 3, it should be pointed out that in examples (16–17) the subsequent mention of the event is included in a causal sequence of events (in the former the passing of the exam and the subsequent annoyance of family members, and in the latter the purchase of the cow and the subsequent initiation of the business activity).

One more example from the previous literature is also from Grønn and Filjuškina-Krave (Гренн & Филюшкина Краве, 2007, p. 59).

- (18) A. Tebja neploxo podstrigli.
 B. Spasibo.
 A. Kto **podstrigal**? vs. (??) Kto **podstrig**?
 ‘A. You got a good haircut.
 B. Thanks.
 A. Who cut.iPFV [your hair]? vs. (??) Who cut.PFV [your hair]?’

Grønn and Filjuškina-Krave suggest that the “close proximity to the antecedent” triggers the imperfective and renders the perfective only marginally acceptable. But examples such as (19) show that this is simply not true:

- (19) Èto rabota professional’nogo parikmaxera. Nastojščaja strižka, dorogaja. Kto tebja **podstrig**?¹²
 That’s the work of a professional hairdresser. A real cut, an expensive one. Who cut.PFV your hair?

There must be something else going on, i.e., something about the purpose of the speaker in the discourse that triggers the one or the other aspect, cf. the analysis of (6) And (7) above.

Another kind of data concerns one of the questions that has been assumed to prefer the imperfective—questions with *začem* ‘what for/to what end’. Rassudova (Рассудова, 1968, pp. 42–43) and Padučeva (Падучева, 1996, p. 57) group *začem*-questions with other questions about circumstances (‘who’, ‘where’, ‘when’, etc.). Rassudova suggests that the imperfective is used to “focus attention” on the goal of the action, as in (20).

- (20) Začem ty **pokupal** plastinku, ved’ u tebja net proigryvatelja!
 ‘Why did you buy.iPFV a record album, you don’t even have a record player!’

‘As regards the payment of the money, six thousand rubles were paid.iPFV in cash, and then a check [drawn] on the Russian Bank for Foreign Commerce’ (RNC, n.d.). Here the full example contains reference to not one but two separate payments, and repetition is involved.

¹² Source: Хайд (2018).

According to Rassudova and Padučeva, the imperfective in such questions refers to the process of the action. Indeed, Padučeva (Падучева, 1996, p. 57) claims that “only processes have goals; a result does not have a goal, but only a cause.” An immediate objection to this line of thinking is that it tacitly assumes that perfective verbs refer exclusively to results, as opposed to actions along with their results. In any case, in the past tense, the perfective aspect occurs over twice as frequently as the imperfective in *začem*-questions in searches carried out on the RNC, and only some of the imperfective hits represent SoFs.

In contrast to Rassudova and Padučeva, Israeli (1998, pp. 74–75) analyzes *začem*-questions and points out that perfective functions to question the goal, whereas the imperfective questions the motivation for the action. Examples are given in (21a–b).

- (21) a. *Začem on mne dal ètot nomer telefona?*
 ‘What did he give.PFV me this phone number for?’
- b. *Začem on mne daval ètot nomer telefona, esli zapretil im pol’zovat’sja?*
 ‘What did he give.iPFV me this phone number for if he forbade me to use it?’

Thus, examples (20) and (21b) question the motivation for an action, and such imperfective examples with a follow-up comment concerning a disconnect regarding the purpose of the action are easy to find. The imperfective occurs in such examples because the speaker cannot reconcile the action undertaken and its assumed goal with the present circumstances. Thus, in (20) the speaker cannot make sense of the purchase of a record (with the ordinary goal of playing it) given that the listener has no record player, and in (21b) it makes no sense to give someone a phone number (the ordinary goal of which is for them to use it) and then stipulate that they cannot use it. In contrast, perfective examples, even if the speaker doubts the utility of the goal, nevertheless ask what the goal was. In other words, perfective *začem*-questions assume some goal and ask about it, whereas imperfective *začem*-questions question the motivation because there is no plausible goal for the action in the context. Here, it must be pointed out that Grønn’s (2004) examples of *začem* questions, given in (22) from his pages 208 and 206 respectively, follow this logic:

- (22) a. *Začem oni togda priezzali, esli bol’suju čast’ vremeni ne mogli ispolnjat’ svoi objazannosti?*
 ‘Why did they come.iPFV in the first place, if most of the time they were not able to perform their duties?’

- b. Začem ty **pleval**-to?
 ‘Why did you spit.IPFV?’

Example (22a) has the same logical structure as (21b), and is explained in the same way; (22b) is not intended as an actual question in the context, but is spoken rather to scold the boy, and the imperfective occurs because there was no acceptable reason for him to spit.

3. Goals and causal chains versus orthogonal purposes

Section 2 considered data that are problematic for the presuppositional hypothesis, and ended with a focus on *začem*-questions. It was argued that with perfective *začem*-questions the nature of the goal is at issue. In contrast, imperfective *začem*-questions communicate that the speaker cannot reconcile a valid goal with the agent’s action and its result. In this section, the aforementioned distinction is connected to a similar difference discussed by Dickey (2018, p. 91) with regard to imperfective SoFs. There I hypothesized that “actional” questions involving presuppositional imperfectives as in (23) reflect a subjective purpose on the part of the speaker, whereas perfective usage signals that the speaker is asking for information while focused on the causal chain in which the original event occurred, as in (24).

- (23) V pervyj že večer, kogda ja grimirovalsja pered novym zerkalom, Karandaš zašel k nam i skazal:
 – Zerkalo **kupili**? Xorošee, krasivoe. Pravil’no sdelali. Firma Karandaša solidnaja, i vešči u nas dolžny byt’ solidnymi.
 Potom, priščurivšis’, dolgo smotrel na zerkalo i sprosil:
 – A gde **pokupali**?
 Ja nazval magazin v centre goroda. Na drugoj den’ Mixail Nikolaevič kupil tože trel’jaž, tol’ko razmerom v dva raza bol’še.
 ‘On the first evening, when I was putting on makeup in front of the new mirror, Pencil dropped in on us and said:
 “You bought.PFV a mirror? It’s nice, pretty. You did right. Pencil’s company is solid, and our stuff should be solid too.”
 Then, squinting, he looked at the mirror for a long time and asked:
 “And where did you buy.IPFV it?”

I gave the name of the store in the center of the city. The next day Mixail Nikolaevič also bought a three-leaved mirror, only twice the size.’

In (23), the second question in the imperfective is asked because the boss, Karandash, intends to go buy a similar mirror. The situation is different in (20), in which the speaker asks a question purely out of interest.

- (24) A: Dobryj den’! **Kupil** segodnja GOLD izdanie Juniti, ne mogu najti dopolnenie Assassin’s Creed Chronicles: China. Ja čital čto ono dolžno vxodit’ v sostav gold izdanie. Otpišites’ kto znaet?

[...]

- B: Interesno, gde ty **kupil** gold izdanie AC:U? I v stime, i v juplèj prodaetsja tol’ko odna versija Juniti.¹³

‘A: Good day! Today I bought.PFV the gold edition of Unity; I can’t find the Assassin’s Creed Chronicles: China add-on. I read that it was supposed to be included in the gold edition. Please respond if you know.

[...]

- B: I’m curious, where did you buy.PFV the gold edition? Only one version of Unity is on sale in Steam and Yoplay.’

Here, speaker A says he bought the “gold edition” of a video game and wants to know if a certain add-on was included in that edition as it was supposed to be. Speaker B asks where he bought the gold edition, and points out that only one version of the gold edition is for sale in two vendor sites. Speaker B has no overriding purpose of his own, and is simply trying to help the person who posted the question. In this sense, the speaker is focused on the original circumstances and causal chain of the event.

Note that in both (23) and (24), the result is on-hand: in (23) the mirror is present in the actors’ dressing room, and in (24), the speaker has the video game in his possession. Further, as I have pointed out (Dickey, 2018, p. 91), such presuppositional imperfective usage is attested with achievement predicates, notably *naxodit’* find.IPFV, as shown in (25), in which members of an automobile forum discuss a differential gear and how to get it or a copy.

- (25) A: I skol’ko obošlas’ èta kopija? Ja **našel** za 80 dolarovv [sic]! No ja pol’zujus’ svoej ideej, èto deševle i teper’ mogu brat’ pravuju os’ ot ljubogo Forda a ne tol’ko 2.5 AKPP.

¹³ Source: *Формы Assassin’s Creed: Unity* (n.d.).

B: Privetstvuj, podskazi gde ty eë **naxodil**?¹⁴

'A: And how much did the copy cost? I found.PFV one for 80 dollars! But I'm going with my idea, that's cheaper and now I can take the right axle from any Ford, not just the 2.5 automatic.

B: Greetings, tell me, where did you find.IPFV it?'

In (25), speaker A says that he found the part for \$80 using a perfective verb, communicating that he found it on a single occasion at a single place. Speaker B is interested in getting the gear for himself, which is a concern orthogonal to the causal chain of the original event (in which speaker A bought the part for his own use and benefit), and asks with the imperfective, even though he assumes, based on speaker A's utterance, that there was only one finding event.¹⁵ Confirmation of the single event is that speaker A's subsequent response is simply to paste in a webpage—the place where he found the part. The usage in (25) can raise the hackles of educated Russians who assume that it is impossible. While very colloquial, such usage occurs online and confirms Grønn's (2004, p. 131) observation that presuppositional imperfective SoFs occur with verbs that have no process component and contradicts Padučeva's (Падучева, 1996) and Mehlig's (2001) idea that actional questions refer to a process.

Thus, in a presuppositional context, a speaker can either track the finding event in its original causal sequence, with respect to its original outcome/goal, in which case the perfective will be used, or the speaker can signal an orthogonal goal of his/her own, outside of that causal sequence, in which case the imperfective is used.

Lack of space does not allow for further consideration of examples of presuppositional imperfectives and their function to signal an orthogonal purpose on the part of the speaker. Suffice it to say that besides the purpose of carrying out some action (e.g., to go buy a mirror or a car part), as in (23, 25) it can simply be *to make a comment*, often a condemnatory one, as in Forsyth's (1970, p. 84) oft-quoted example:

- (26) Kakie u nas neudobnye mesta! Kto **pokupal** ix?
'What uncomfortable seats we've got. Who bought.IPFV them?'

¹⁴ Source: *Сателлит/дифференциал JATCO JF506E* (n.d.).

¹⁵ This is not meant to say that the finding of a source to buy the gear is not repeatable, but there need have been only one such event and the interlocutors are indeed only concerned with one in this context.

Here, the question is not really a request for information, but simply signals disapproval of the job of whoever did buy them.

The fact that a goal (as opposed to the subgoal of producing the result of an action), as a component of the causal sequence in which an action occurs, is relevant for aspectual coding in Russian has been briefly mentioned by Zel'dovič (Зельдович, 2002, p. 101), who gives the following example.

- (27) Ja **svaril/varil** sup. Pust' Ivan est'.
'I made.PFV/made.IPFV soup. Ivan can eat.'

Zel'dovič points out that the perfective *svaril* 'made.PFV' can easily be interpreted as meaning that the speaker made the soup specifically for Ivan, whereas the imperfective lowers the probability of such an interpretation considerably. These facts comport with the idea that the perfective is employed to track an event in its original causal sequence, whereas the imperfective does not.

Where circumstances are concerned, the perfective creates a causal chain that involves the circumstance. Zel'dovič's (Зельдович, 2002, pp. 111, 113) examples include the following.

- (28) Plat'je **sšila** sestra.
'My sister sewed.PFV the dress.'

Zel'dovič observes that in such cases the result, which is relevant for the speech situation, is the unique consequence of the action with the circumstance. Thus, in (28) it is not just that a dress has been sewn, but that the dress has characteristics attributable to the sister as a seamstress. The corresponding imperfective *šila* 'sewed.IPFV' contradicts the relevance of that circumstance for result present in the speech situation. The function of the perfective variant in examples (14) and of the perfective in example (16) can be explained in this way.

To sum up, this section has argued that the perfective and imperfective in presuppositional contexts differ with regard to the purpose of the speaker. If the speaker is mentioning the action in the context of its original causal chain, then the perfective is used. Here the speaker can either "track" that causal chain, or establish a causal chain connected to the speech situation (the perfect function). If the speaker has some purpose of his/her own, which may be to carry out some further action, to make a follow-up comment, or to support something that s/he has said, the imperfective is used. There are myriad variants of the orthogonal purpose; many of the examples given by

Israeli (1998) illustrate them, but cannot be cited and commented on here due to lack of space. In any case, I agree with Israeli that aspectual usage in such contexts cannot be explained without recourse to discourse functions and the purpose of the speaker.

4. Achievements reconsidered

According to a common view (cf., e.g., Рассудова, 1968, p. 39), non-volitional achievements such as *zabyvat'/zabyt'* 'forget' cannot occur in the presuppositional imperfective because they do not have a volitional process component to which the imperfective can refer. According to Grønn (2004, p. 129), the issue is not related to situation type, i.e., achievements versus accomplishments, but about whether the situation occurs under the control of an agent or not. In my view, Grønn is correct, as there are non-volitional verbs with process components that appear to pattern as achievements. In particular, the class of intensive-resultative verbs, e.g., *začityvat'sja/začitat'sja* 'read too long/read to the point of absorption', *dopivat'sja/dopit'sja* 'drink to the point of a negative result', etc., pattern with achievements in that presuppositional questions in the imperfective are impossible to find (though existential SoFs are possible, e.g., *Odnaždy on uže dopivalsja do natural'nyx čertej* 'He has already once drunk-to-the-point.IPFV where he saw natural devils'); moreover, the native speaker I have consulted has difficulty imagining a context where the imperfective of such verbs would be used in a presuppositional context. However, presuppositional perfectives can be found, as in (29).

- (29) – Prosti, *začitalas'* i poterjala sčet vremeni. Ja dumala, što prošlo tol'ko pjat' dnej – otvernulas', snova vključila vodu.
 – Gde ty *začitalas'*?! snova topnula nogoj Kobyla.¹⁶
 “Forgive me, I got-to-reading and lost track of time. I thought that only five days had passed,” she said, turning away and turning on the water again.
 “Where did you get-to-reading.PFV?!” Kobyla asked stamping her foot again.

The aspectual patterning of such predicates can be explained by the hypothesis advocated in section 3: non-volitional predicates cannot be asked about to

¹⁶ Source: *Фантастика* (n.d.).

the exclusion of their goals, i.e., they cannot be asked about with some orthogonal purpose, since such predicates are not carried out with goals in mind.¹⁷ Thus, the perfective is the only option.

5. Presuppositional usage in other Slavic languages

This section presents some brief comments on presuppositional questions in Croatian and Czech. Czech is a member of the western group in Dickey's (2000) east-west aspect division, and Croatian, though part of the South Slavic transitional zone, patterns very similar to Czech. Recently, Klimek-Jankowska (2022) and Gehrke (2022) have considered the issue of imperfective SoFs in Russian, Polish, and Czech. Klimek-Jankowska (2022) shows that Polish and Czech are very similar compared to Russian, and that Polish does not occupy an intermediate position with respect to the parameter of the imperfective general-factual (i.e., imperfective SoFs). Her point is well taken, and shows that Polish does not occupy an intermediate position for any given parameter.

Gehrke (2022) argues that Czech does not really have imperfective SoFs on a par with Russian, and that ostensible cases are really instances of the process meaning of the imperfective aspect. My consultations with Czech and Croatian speakers support her conclusion for Czech, and indicate that it applies to Croatian as well, especially where presuppositional imperfectives are concerned. Thus, with respect to 'where' questions in the imperfective, e.g., example (29), my Czech informants are unequivocal that the imperfective refers to some kind of process of shopping/comparing/picking out or buying more than one item as opposed to a single purchase viewed synoptically.

- (29) Kde jsi je **kupoval**? Také bych ten Vallorbe vyzkoušel.
Where did you buy.IPFV them? I would also like to try the Vallorbe [file].'

Similarly, Croatian speakers also maintain that an imperfective verb in such questions refers to some process component. A good example is (30).

- (30) Ivana, gdje si **kupovala** spužvu?
'Ivana, where did you buy.IPFV the foam?'

¹⁷ Note that *naxodit'*/*najti* can refer not only to accidental finding, but also to goal-oriented finding, as in (25).

Here, the singular noun *spužvu* ‘foam’ might be taken to indicate a single purchase, but the continuation *Na metre ili već rezanu?* ‘By the meter or already cut?’ and the subsequent discourse makes it clear that the foam had been bought on an ongoing basis for a reupholstering project.

Confirmation of the fact that a process component is necessary for imperfective usage in such contexts in Czech and Croatian are (a) the complete lack of any examples with Czech *nacházet* ‘find.IPFV’ and Croatian *nalaziti* ‘find.IPFV’ in corpora and the Internet on a par with Russian (25) above, and (b) the firm refusal of informants to produce such examples. Thus, pending firm evidence to the contrary, there is little reason to assume that languages of the western Slavic aspectual type have a presuppositional imperfective as such as opposed to uses of the imperfective motivated by its processual meaning. Of course, a more extensive, comparative empirical investigation based on the findings in Klimek-Jankowska (2022) is necessary, but that lies far beyond the scope of this paper.

6. Conclusions

This paper has taken issue with the idea that a presuppositional imperfective exists in Russian (and other Slavic languages) as a concept with explanatory power. On some descriptive level, Padučeva (Падучева, 1996) and Grønn (2004) are accurate in their division imperfective SoFs into two types, the existential and the presuppositional. However, the data for Russian is messy, with questions about circumstances and the *èto*-cleft examples allowing secondary imperfectives and some achievements, whereas the type in exx. (1–2) does not. Most importantly, these different imperfective SoFs can be explained by independently motivated aspectual construals and discourse functions of the imperfective aspect in Russian. Conversely, the frequently occurring presuppositional perfectives can be explained in the same terms as other perfectives (and an adequate presuppositional hypothesis should address and explain presuppositional perfectives in more detail). With regard to other Slavic languages, there is precious little evidence that any have invested aspect with the discourse functions that it has developed in East Slavic. Whatever the final explanation of imperfective SoFs in Russian is to be, it is difficult to see how an analysis that ignores subtle discourse functions can begin to handle the actual data, and it is far from clear

that there is a compelling reason for a transfer to the analysis of the Slavic languages of the western aspectual type. Taking the presuppositional hypothesis as the factual basis for empirical, cross-Slavic investigations of imperfective SoFs will result in excluding many possibly relevant factors of the kind discussed by Israeli (e.g., Israeli, 1998) and Šatunovskij (Шатуновский, 2009).

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Czy w języku rosyjskim (i słowiańszczyźnie) istnieje imperfektyw presupozycyjny?

W artykule omówiono dane, które są problematyczne z punktu widzenia hipotezy, że presupozycja, iż działanie miało miejsce, bezpośrednio motywuje użycie aspektu niedokonanego w stwierdzeniach faktu w języku rosyjskim, a tym samym w innych językach słowiańskich. Autor argumentuje, że imperfektywne stwierdzenia faktu występują w kontekstach presupozycyjnych, a takie użycie jest motywowane przez określone elementy semantyczne / efekty dyskursu, takie jak interpretacja sytuacji jako procesu aterminatywnego lub powtarzalnego, co również motywuje niepresupozycyjne imperfektywne stwierdzenia faktu. Omówione zostały ponadto przypadki presupozycyjnego użycia perfektywnego, które także są wywoływane przez elementy semantyczne, które zostały niezależnie umotywowane dla użycia niepresupozycyjnego perfektywnego. Zasugerowano, że presupozycyjne imperfektywa można wyjaśnić jako przypadki, w których nadawca komunikatu ignoruje pierwotny łańcuch przyczynowy czynności i wspomina o zdarzeniu, mając na uwadze pewne niezależne cele. W przeciwieństwie do tego, perfektyw sytuuje akcję w jej pierwotnie zamierzonym łańcuchu przyczynowym. W zakończeniu przedstawiono dane wskazujące na fakt, iż imperfektywa presupozycyjne w języku czeskim i chorwackim odzwierciedlają rozumienie akcji jako procesu.

Słowa kluczowe: język rosyjski; język czeski; język chorwacki; aspekt czasownikowy; imperfektywne stwierdzenie faktu

Does the presuppositional imperfective exist in Russian (and Slavic)?

This paper discusses data which are problematic for the hypothesis that the presupposition that an action has taken place directly motivates the use of the imperfective aspect in statements of fact in Russian, and by extension in other Slavic languages. It argues that while imperfective statements of fact occur in presuppositional contexts, such usage is instead motivated by particular semantic elements/discourse effects, such as the construal of a situation as an aterminative process or as repeatable, construals which also motivate non-presuppositional

imperfective statements of fact. Similarly, it discusses cases of presuppositional perfective usage, which are likewise triggered by semantic elements that have been independently motivated for non-presuppositional perfective usage. It is further suggested that presuppositional imperfectives can be explained as cases in which the speaker ignores the original causal chain of an action and mentions the event with some orthogonal purposes in mind. In contrast, the perfective tracks the event in its originally intended causal chain. Lastly, it presents data indicating that presuppositional imperfectives in Czech and Croatian reflect the construal of an action as a process.

Keywords: Russian language; Czech language; Croatian language; verbal aspect; imperfective statements of fact

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