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THE CATEGORY OF VERBAL ASPECT IN RUSSIAN GRAMMAR: PERFECTIVE AND IMPERFECTIVE VERBS AND THE PROBLEMS OF THEIR ACQUISITION

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Abstract: This article examines the grammatical category of aspect (вид) in the Russian verb system, one of the most challenging areas of Russian morphology for foreign learners. The paper describes the formal and semantic distinctions between perfective and imperfective verbs, the principal means of aspect formation (prefixation, suffixation, and suppletion), and the aspectual pairs that express the same lexical action from two different viewpoints. Particular attention is given to the difficulties that arise for Uzbek-speaking learners, whose native language does not possess a grammaticalized binary aspect opposition of this kind, and to methodological approaches that can facilitate the acquisition of Russian verbal aspect in the classroom.

Keywords: Russian language, grammar, morphology, verb, aspect, вид, perfective, imperfective, aspectual pair, prefixation, foreign language teaching methodology.

INTRODUCTION

Among the grammatical categories of the Russian verb, aspect (вид) occupies a central place, since almost every Russian verb belongs to one of two aspectual classes — perfective (совершенный вид) or imperfective (несовершенный вид). Unlike tense, which situates an action in time, aspect characterizes the internal structure of the action itself: whether it is presented as a completed, single, bounded event, or as a process, a habitual occurrence, or an action without reference to its completion.

The category of aspect is obligatory in Russian: a speaker cannot use a verb without simultaneously indicating its aspectual character, since this choice is built into the very form of the verb. This obligatory nature makes aspect one of the most pervasive, yet also one of the most difficult, categories for learners whose native language expresses similar meanings by other, non-obligatory means, such as lexical adverbs or context.

The purpose of this article is to provide a systematic description of the semantic content and formal expression of Russian verbal aspect, to outline the principal methods of forming aspectual pairs, and to identify the specific difficulties that Uzbek-speaking learners encounter when mastering this category, together with practical recommendations for teaching.

MAIN PART

1. The general notion of aspect in the Russian verb system

In Russian linguistics, aspect (вид) is defined as a grammatical category that expresses the manner in which an action unfolds in time — as a whole, completed act (perfective) or as a process, repetition, or action viewed without regard to its limits (imperfective). Every Russian verb, with a small number of exceptions known as двувидовые глаголы (bi-aspectual verbs, such as 'жениться'), belongs unambiguously to one of the two aspects. This binary opposition permeates the entire verbal system and interacts closely with tense: imperfective verbs have three tense forms (past, present, and

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future), while perfective verbs have only two (past and future), since a completed action cannot logically be expressed in the present.

The choice between the perfective and the imperfective is not merely stylistic; it is meaning-bearing. Compare 'он писал письмо' (he was writing / used to write a letter — imperfective, process or repeated action) with 'он написал письмо' (he wrote / has written the letter — perfective, a single completed action with a result). The difference lies not in the lexical content of the verb, which remains the same, but in the speaker's viewpoint on the internal temporal structure of the action.

2. Formal means of expressing aspect

Russian employs several morphological devices to form aspectual pairs. The most productive is prefixation, whereby an imperfective verb acquires a prefix that renders it perfective while adding a specific spatial or resultative nuance: 'писать' → 'написать', 'делать' → 'сделать', 'читать' → 'прочитать'. A second device is suffixation, in which a perfective verb is converted into a secondary imperfective through a suffix such as -ыва-/-ива- or -ва-: 'переписать' → 'переписывать', 'дать' → 'давать'. A smaller, closed group of verb pairs is formed suppletively, that is, from two historically unrelated roots: 'говорить' (imperfective) — 'сказать' (perfective); 'брать' (imperfective) — 'взять' (perfective).

In addition to these paired verbs, Russian possesses a considerable number of verbs that exist only in one aspect (одновидовые глаголы), as well as the small class of bi-aspectual verbs mentioned above, whose aspectual value is disambiguated only by context or by additional lexical markers.

3. Semantic functions of the perfective and imperfective aspects

The imperfective aspect typically expresses: a process in progress at a given moment ('я читаю книгу' — I am reading a book); a habitual or repeated action ('он каждый день читает газету' — he reads the newspaper every day); a general fact of an action having taken place, without emphasis on its result ('я уже читал эту книгу' — I have already read this book, i.e., at some point, possibly more than once); and the naming of an activity as such, independent of its completion. The perfective aspect, in contrast, expresses a single, complete action viewed as an integral whole, usually with an emphasis on its result or on the transition to a new state ('я прочитал книгу' — I have read the book, and now I know its content); it is also used for a sequence of consecutive completed actions in narration.

A further complicating factor for learners is that the same verb form may combine with different adverbs of time to yield different aspectual readings, and that certain contexts categorically require one aspect and exclude the other — for instance, the imperative of prohibition typically favors the imperfective ('не открывай окно'), while a positive command more often takes the perfective ('открой окно').

4. Typological contrast with Uzbek and the resulting difficulties

Uzbek, as an agglutinative Turkic language, does not possess a grammaticalized, obligatory binary aspect category comparable to the Russian perfective/imperfective opposition. Distinctions such as completedness, duration, or repetition are conveyed in Uzbek mainly through analytic constructions with auxiliary verbs (for example, forms built with '-yotgan', '-gan', or compound verbs with 'bo‘lmoq' and 'turmoq'), through lexical adverbs, or simply through context, rather than through a systematic paired opposition of the verb stem itself.

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Because of this typological gap, Uzbek-speaking learners of Russian tend to experience several recurring difficulties: first, choosing the correct aspect in a given context, since the same Uzbek sentence may correspond to either a perfective or an imperfective Russian verb depending on nuance; second, memorizing which prefix or suffix corresponds to which aspectual pair, since prefixation is not fully regular and different verbs take different prefixes; third, correctly using aspect in the imperative and in the infinitive after modal verbs, where Russian usage does not always follow an intuitively predictable pattern; and fourth, distinguishing bi-aspectual and single-aspect verbs, which do not fit the regular paired model at all.

5. Methodological recommendations for teaching aspect

Effective classroom practice suggests that verbal aspect should not be introduced as an isolated grammatical rule but should be taught contextually, from the very first stages of instruction, together with concrete communicative situations. It is useful to present aspectual pairs as lexical units from the outset, rather than teaching the imperfective first and adding the perfective later as an afterthought. Contrastive exercises that place both aspects side by side in minimally different contexts help learners perceive the semantic contrast directly. Attention to typical adverbial markers that favor one aspect over the other (such as 'уже', 'наконец', 'вдруг' for the perfective, or 'обычно', 'часто', 'долго' for the imperfective) can serve as practical anchors. Finally, drawing on comparisons with the periphrastic means Uzbek uses to express similar distinctions can help learners build a conceptual bridge between the two systems rather than relying on rote memorization alone.

CONCLUSION

The category of verbal aspect is one of the most fundamental and, at the same time, one of the most demanding areas of Russian grammar. Its obligatory character, its close interaction with tense, and the partial irregularity of its formal markers make it a persistent source of difficulty for foreign learners, particularly for speakers of typologically distant languages such as Uzbek. A systematic description of the semantic oppositions between the perfective and imperfective aspects, combined with a contrastive awareness of how the corresponding meanings are expressed in the learner's native language, provides a sound basis for developing effective teaching strategies. Further research in this area could usefully focus on corpus-based analysis of aspectual usage in authentic texts and on the design of graded exercise sequences specifically adapted to Uzbek-speaking learners of Russian.

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