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Perfective, performative and present: Some non-standard combinations in Slavic and beyond


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Abstract

The combination of perfective aspect and present tense is frequently considered as an example of semantically incompatible grams. If verbal forms including markers of both perfective aspect and present tense do exist in a language, they tend not to express present resp. perfective in the strict sense. Thus, in Russian such forms usually convey the future, as in *napishu* ‘I will write’. The article discusses a specific type of contexts where these forms develop a less trivial meaning of what can be called “prospective present”. Obligatory components of these contexts are first person of the verb and negation. We focus on three instances of this kind: *ne skazhu* (lit. ‘I won’t tell’), *ne dam* (lit. ‘I won’t give’) and *ne pushchu* (lit. ‘I won’t let’). With the data of Russian National Corpus (RNC) and notably of the parallel corpora within RNC, we demonstrate that in certain uses, these constructions correspond to speech acts of refusal or prohibition and can be viewed, accordingly, as expressing a kind of performative meaning. As performatives, these verbs refer to a present situation: the speaker’s refusal or prohibition comes into operation at the moment of utterance, and not at some point in the future. The present-tense reference is corroborated by the translational counterparts of *ne skazhu* / *ne dam* / *ne pushchu* from parallel corpora, as other languages regularly use present forms in these contexts. Thus, performative-like constructions provide new data on potential non-future meanings of perfective present forms.

Keywords: *perfective, prospective, performative, negation, present, future*

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**Перфектив, перформатив и настоящее время:
некоторые нестандартные комбинации
в славянских и других языках**


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Аннотация

Перфектив и настоящее время часто называют в качестве примера семантически несовместимых граммем. Если в языке существуют глагольные формы, включающие одновременно показатели и перфектива, и настоящего времени, то, как правило, они либо не имеют семантики настоящего, либо не выражают перфективность в строгом смысле. Так, в русском языке такие формы обычно передают значение будущего, например, *напишу*. В статье рассматривается особый тип контекстов, в которых эти формы получают менее тривиальное значение – его можно было бы назвать «перспективным настоящим». Обязательными компонентами этих контекстов являются первое лицо глагола и отрицание. Подробнее мы обсудим три примера такого рода: *не скажу, не дам и не пуцу*. На материале Национального корпуса русского языка (НКРЯ) и, в частности, параллельных корпусов в составе НКРЯ мы покажем, что в некоторых случаях эти конструкции соответствуют речевым актам отказа или запрета и тем самым могут считаться своего рода перформативами. В качестве перформативов эти глаголы относятся к плану настоящего: отказ или запрет говорящего вступает в силу в момент высказывания, а не когда-то в будущем. Отсылка к плану настоящего подтверждается переводными аналогами сочетаний *не скажу, не дам и не пуцу* по данным параллельных корпусов: другие языки регулярно используют в этих контекстах формы настоящего времени. Таким образом, квази-перформативные конструкции расширяют наши представления о значениях, которые могут приобретать перфективные презентные формы.

Ключевые слова: *перфектив, перспектив, перформатив, отрицание, настоящее время, будущее время*

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Instead of a foreword

Once, Igor’ Aleksandrovich happened to write: “My very first words in life were said in Russian. And my last words <...> will most certainly be in Russian” (Mel’chuk 1995: xvii). That’s why we dare preface our paper with another piece of Russian which would significantly fade when translated.

Никому из авторов этой статьи не повезло учиться у Игоря Александровича: кто-то из нас входил в лингвистику, когда он уже уезжал, а кто-то – когда он уже давно уехал. Тогда все были уверены, что уехать – это навсегда, и русский язык отражал это грамматически: о живых и здравствующих эмигрантах обычно говорили, используя формы прошедшего времени. Обрублено было не только личное общение, но строго преследовалось и научное: запрещено было преподавать модель «Смысл \Leftrightarrow Текст», опираться на ее достижения и даже просто ссылаться на ее существование и упоминать ее автора. За этим следили, нарушители преследовались: В.М. Андриющенко, уже в 80-е осмелившийся вставить в свой обзор по машинному переводу ссылку на англоязычную работу Игоря Александровича и его коллег, был вызван на ковер и заработал сердечный приступ, от которого так и не оправился.

Но как раз в этом отношении мы были гораздо счастливее прочих: благодаря нашим учителям и старшим лингвистическим друзьям (огромное спасибо им всем за это!) мы не только знали имя Мельчука, но и, как лингвисты, «варились» в его теории. Включать ее в программу официально было, конечно, нельзя, но каким-то образом мы «проходили» ее основные положения, причем на разных курсах. Застрельщиком в этом отношении была, безусловно, Анна Константиновна Поливанова, которая успела поработать с Мельчуком в Ин'язе, в знаменитой Лаборатории машинного перевода (об этом много написано в недавней книге Бурас 2022). Первой лингвистической статьей, которая запомнилась на всю жизнь, была фундаментальная работа об определении основных понятий морфологии Мельчук 1975 (из которой впоследствии вырос пятитомный «Курс общей морфологии»): она каким-то чудом вышла перед самым отъездом автора в знаменитом тогда журнале под ред. В.А. Успенского с загадочным названием «Семиотика и информатика». Статью велено было прочесть и... предложить свои альтернативные решения. Мы были первокурсники. Более увлекательного задания трудно было себе представить. Спорили сутками. Жалко только, что без Игоря Александровича – уж он бы оценил. Дальше были другие статьи: о грамматических значениях (Мельчук 1961), о парадоксе пары *катать~кататься* (Мельчук 1968), о супплетивизме (Мельчук 1972). Мы знали их почти наизусть. По сравнению с традиционной русистикой они завораживали свободой, и не только свободой мысли, но и свободой изложения. Личность автора (сплошная невиданная свобода!) просвечивала в них в каждой строке. Сам автор был далеко в Канаде, но идеями можно было и восхищаться, и, как мы привыкли, – спорить. «В России надо жить долго»: эти споры и обсуждения всё же продолжились потом и напрямую, в переписке по поводу перевода «Курса общей морфологии» или большой публикации работы о валентностях (Mel'chuk 2004).

Так что мы тоже, конечно, учились у Мельчука...

1. Preliminaries

It is a well-known fact that grammatical markers can be mutually incompatible: in this case, they are not allowed to modify one and the same word-form even if they belong to different grammatical categories and in principle can be thought of as coexisting within one lexical unit. Usually, the incompatibility of this type is explained in semantic terms: the combination of two corresponding grams appears semantically impossible, because they include elements which are semantically contradictory. Examples of such contradictory combinations can be ‘imperative’ + ‘past’ (imperatives normally apply to a future event), ‘irreal’ + ‘assertive’ (the first, unlike the second, normally applies to a non-realized event), etc. Beyond these plain observations, few researchers have ventured so far to elaborate on this issue. However, a useful discussion, with some important findings and generalizations, can be found, for example, in (Aikhenvald & Dixon 1998/2011, Malchukov 2009, 2011, 2019, Khrakovskii 1990, 1996, Khrakovskii & Malchukov 2016).

Among the frequently mentioned examples of semantically incompatible grams the case of perfective and present seems to be one of the best studied. Indeed, what can be characterized in formal terms as ‘perfective present’ appears to be a semantically awkward combination: verbal forms including markers of both perfective aspect and present tense reference either do not exist in the world’s languages or do not express present resp. perfective in the strict sense. More specifically, if they do not express present, they usually convey either the future (as in East and West Slavic) or the (resultative or recent) past values (as in many Creoles or in Samoyedic and Tungusic). On the other hand, if they do not express perfective, they usually express habitual (as in Modern English or, in some contexts, in Bulgarian). The phenomenon is basically known as “present perfective paradox” (as proposed in Malchukov 2009); cf. also an in-depth cross-linguistic overview in De Wit 2017, with special reference to French, English, Slavic, and Sranan Tongo Creole systems, as well as some interesting additional data from West African and North Siberian languages in Shluinskii 2012. As De Wit (2017) puts it, the straightforward semantic explanation of this type of incompatibility lies in the fact that “<...> there is an epistemic alignment constraint preventing the identification and reporting of events in their entirety at the time of speaking”.

It should be noted that, if we consider this problem from a diachronic point of view, we can see that perfective presents often go back to non-perfective presents which gradually develop a perfective meaning and then impose a non-present construal via coercion (see Michaelis 2004, among others). Cf. English Present Simple (as in *plays* or *runs*) which could be considered, according to De Wit 2017, as an instance of what is a perfective present *morphologically*, an aspectually neutral present *diachronically*, and a habitual present *semantically*.

Accordingly, what we are going to discuss in the main part of this paper is related mostly to less trivial diachronic semantic changes of the perfective meaning. Especially interesting are those cases where what are now genuine perfective forms

seem to maintain (at least to some degree) the present tense reference without any prominent signs of coercion-driven effects.

One of such cases lies at the intersection of **prospective** and **performative** semantics. Russian will serve us as the main source of examples here. However, what we find in Russian is more or less typical for other East and West Slavic languages, South Slavic representing a slightly different configuration.

2. Prospective, performative, and present perfective paradox

Recall that **prospective** is an aspectual gram (in a broad sense of the term) which, roughly, describes the state corresponding to a preliminary phase of some imminent situation (as in English *be going to V*). The grammaticalization of prospective is not uncommon: it is attested in English and some Romance languages, very frequent in Turkic and elsewhere in Eurasia, Africa etc.; cf. Korn & Nevskaya 2017 for a recent cross-linguistic overview, and Kozlov 2021 for a more fine-grained theoretical account. On the other hand, **performative** (the notion goes back to J. L. Austin's and J. R. Searle's work) is a common term for first person forms V_1 such that saying V_1 is equivalent to performing the event 'V': thus, saying *I promise P*, the speaker just makes a promise to do P; saying *I declare P*, the speaker performs the act of declaring P, etc. (for the analysis of performatives in Russian cf. primarily Apresyan 1988/1995 and Voeikova 1996).

For the issues considered here it is particularly important that cross-linguistically performatives naturally tend to a present tense reference, though other configurations (for example, present perfect, perfective past or future) are also attested. On the other hand, their aspectual behaviour (if applicable) is somewhat more complicated: performative semantics can effectively draw on both perfective and imperfective – cf. notably Wiemer 2014, Dickey 2016 and Biasio 2021a, 2021b for Slavic, and de Wit et al. 2018 and Fortuin 2019 in a wider cross-linguistic perspective.

Before we proceed to a more detailed discussion, let us briefly recapitulate some well-known features of Russian verbal inflection. Modern Russian distinguishes two structurally different tense-marking systems (“past” and “present”, with a certain amount of conditionality) as well as two morphologically different aspectual stems (“imperfective” and “perfective”). The past is obtained by the suffix *-l-* followed by a set of gender/number-marking flections, whereas the present is obtained by a different set of person/number-marking flections alone. Imperfective stems, for their part, are either underived, or “simplex” (i.e. without any overt morphological marking) or contain a number of imperfective suffixes like *-yva-*, *-va-*, *-a-* and some other. Perfective stems can be also underived (very few) or – in most cases – prefixal (with a large set of verbal prefixes expressing also spatial and related values) or suffixal (with semelfactive *-nu-*). The combination of two tense forms and two aspectual stems yields four possible grammatical classes, namely imperfective and perfective past and imperfective and perfective present:

of all of them, the last one is the most problematic semantically (in line with what has already been discussed above).

Indeed, what is morphologically a perfective present in Russian (i.e., a combination of a perfective stem and suffixal person/number markers) is usually described as a form with a default (perfective) **future** reference, as in *my [nepremenno] sdelaem eto* ‘we’ll [certainly] **do** it’. In a number of specific constructions, however, this verbal form can have a (diachronically older) **present** meaning – usually, in combination with iterative, habitual, or potential readings, as in contexts like *to syadet, to vstanet* ‘always sitting down and standing up’ (iterative), *vsyakii skazhet* ‘anybody would tell you’ (potential or habitual), *otkroet lyuboi zamok za 45 sekund* ‘could open any lock in 45 seconds’ (potential). As a specific type of potential reading (primarily, in the context of negation) the so-called “present of vain expectation” can also be considered, originally described by Zaliznyak (1990); the stock example here is *deneg vse ne soberem* ≈ ‘we still haven’t been able to collect money’, a famous line by Bulat Okudzhava.

However, there exist other uses of perfective present in Russian (mostly neglected in previous studies) which are not fully consistent with the list above, i.e. perfective presents which are neither future nor habitual. We believe that they can be best labelled semantically as **prospective**, because they describe a situation that starts immediately at the moment of uttering the verbal form and then continues into the future. At the same time, they are semantically performative (or quasi-performative), because they usually correspond to speech acts of permission or prohibition.

3. Data and methodology

In what follows, we will focus on three typical instances of such performative-like prospectives (or, maybe, prospective-like performatives). These are *ne skazhu* (lit. ‘I won’t tell’), *ne dam* (lit. ‘I won’t give’) and *ne pushchu* (lit. ‘I won’t let’). Of course, this list is not intended to be exhaustive; however, these three expressions (i) are the most frequent in the corpus, (ii) form a rather homogeneous set and (iii) can easily be identified and found in the parallel corpora which were at our disposal within Russian National Corpus. Therefore, we prefer to concentrate on their semantic properties and leave aside the question about other possible representatives of this group (if any).

Recall that all the three verbal forms are morphologically perfective presents, and their default out-of-context construal is undoubtedly futural, as befits the modern Russian verbs. This standard interpretation is indeed widespread and can be illustrated by (1–2)¹ and many other examples like it:

¹ Hereinafter, all the examples are from Russian National Corpus (www.ruscorpora.ru), unless otherwise specified.

- (1) Ru > Engl
a. *Esli hochesh', ya dazhe nikomu ne skazhu, chto byl zdes' i videl vas* [A. Kuprin. Olesya (1898)]
b. *I shan't tell anybody I was here and saw you, if you don't want me to* [A. Kuprin. Olesya, transl. by Stepan Apresyan (1982)]
- (2) Ru > Engl
a. *Konechno, ya nichego ei ne skazhu, eto ee ub'et* [A. Rybakov. Deti Arbata (1966–1983)]
b. *Of course I won't say anything, it would kill her* [A. Rybakov. Children of the Arbat, transl. by Harold Shukman (1989)]
- (3) Ru > Engl
a. – *Nu ladno, Toropyzhka! – obidelsya Neznayka. – Poprosish' ty u menya chto-nibud', ya tozhe tebe ne dam.* [N. Nosov. Priklyucheniya Neznayki i ego druzei (1953–1954)]
b. *“All right, Swifty,” said Dunno sulkily, “the next time you ask me for something I won't give it to you either.”* [N. Nosov. The Adventures of Dunno and his Friends, transl. by Margaret Wettlin (1980)]

Here, in all the cases, the event of not-saying or not-giving P is clearly postponed to some moment in the future: the basic idea behind the contexts like (1–3) is, roughly, ‘whenever, at some moment M, the speaker is eventually asked about P, the reaction will not follow’. That being the case, there is an apparent temporal break between M and the moment of utterance TU: at TU, the dilemma of doing / not doing P is not (yet) at issue.

Unlike these standard contexts with future-tense reference, the contexts we are concerned with here refer to a present situation. The refusal to perform P relates to the very moment of utterance, and, more than that, the action of refusal (according to what is expected from a performative expression) is equivalent to the utterance of the type ‘I won't [tell/give/let]’. Indeed, uttering something like *ne skazhu* or *ne dam*, the speaker – in doing so – refuses to tell or give P **from now on**, and not at some moment in the future, as standard contexts like (1–3) suggest.

Obviously, a special context is needed for this “present performative” interpretation. Usually, it is obtained when a negated first-person verb functions as a short “conversational turn” of the speaker triggered by a previous request from the addressee. It is thus an immediate (negative) reaction to some proposal; its meaning approaches closely what can be labelled “discourse formulae”, i.e. a language-specific set of largely non-compositional positive or negative reactions used in conversation (see (Rakhilina et al. 2021) and (Bychkova, Rakhilina forth.) for more detail).

The present tense reference, in principle, is typical for performative expressions, though cross-linguistically the situation can be more heterogeneous, and various verbal forms (not necessarily morphologically present) can occur in this function: sometimes past or perfect, sometimes future (cf. (De Wit et al. 2018), (Fortuin 2019) for a more detailed overview). In Russian (and Slavic in general)

imperfective present tense (like *klyanus* ‘I swear’ or *obeshchayu* ‘I promise’) remaining the main grammatical device for performatives, perfective present is also possible; the distribution is not quite clear and seems to be largely lexical. The most frequent case is the verb *prosit* ‘to ask, to beg’ which expresses performative semantics equally well in the imperfective (*proshu*) and perfective (*poproshu*) forms; the latter can be exemplified by (4); nota bene the present progressive form in the English counterpart.

- (4)
- a. *Gospodin prem'er-ministr, ya poproshu vas tut ostanovit'sya.*
 - b. *Prime Minister, I'm going to ask you to stop right there.*

In (4), *poproshu* (lit., ‘I will ask’) is both perfective and performative (it represents the act of asking as such); *proshu* is also possible here, with some subtle semantic or pragmatic difference.²

4. Perfective performatives

Our three constructions (*ne skazhu*, *ne dam* and *ne pushchu*) can be seen, in a sense, as complementing the stock of perfective performatives in Russian. As performatives, they have a present-tense reference (witness many of their translational equivalents, which will be considered below in more detail); however, they do not correspond exactly to most frequently discussed types of non-standard perfective presents, because they don't belong to any type of habitual uses (mentioned earlier). As we suggested previously, the most plausible aspectual construal in these cases would be the prospective one.

Let us now consider more examples of these constructions, with the translations from RNC parallel corpora.

4.1. Telling

Recall that the essential meaning of *ne skazhu* can be rendered as ‘in reply to your request to tell you P, I let you know that I refuse to tell you P’. Cf. (5)–(6):

- (5) Ru > Engl
 – *Irina, a gde vy hranite svou poslednuiu medal' iz nastoyashchego zolota?*
 – ***Ne skazhu!*** [regional press, 2002]
 ‘– Irina, where do you keep you medal of real gold? – **I won't tell you!**’
- (6) Ru > Engl
 a. – *U menya est' eshche odna ideya. – Kakaya? – Ne skazhu. – Pochemu?*
 – *Pob'ete. – My tebya i tak pob'em.* [A. Strugackii, B. Strugackii. *Ponedel'nik nachinaetsa v subbotu* (1965)]

² Aspectual and illocutive properties of this verb in Russian and other Slavic languages (some of them display the similar type of aspectual variation) have been widely discussed: cf., for example, (Slavkova 2014) and (Biasio 2019), as well as, in a more general perspective, (Wiemer 2014, Dickey 2016, Biasio 2021a, 2021b).

b. “I have one more idea.” “What?” “**I won't say.**” “Why?” “You'll beat me.” “We'll beat you if you don't.” [A. Strugatsky, B. Strugatsky. *Monday Begins on Saturday*, transl. by Leonid Renen (1977)]

In (5)–(6), *I won't tell* actually means ‘I *tell* you right now that I refuse to tell what you require’. Other examples of this kind are as follows (let us pay special attention to the different translational strategies observed in different languages and in different translators).

(7) Ru > Engl

a. – *A vy mne ne skazhete, otkuda vy uznali pro listki i pro moi mysli? – Ne skazhu, – suho otvetil Azazello. – No vy chto-nibud' znaete o nem?* [M. Bulgakov. *Master i Margarita* (1929–1940)]

b. – *And you won't tell me how you found out about the pages and about my thoughts? – No, I won't, – Azazello replied drily. – But do you know anything about him?* [M. Bulgakov. *Master and Margarita*, transl by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (1979)]

The English translation uses here a form with future-tense reference (though mitigated by a strong modal overtone of English *will*); a more transparent strategy is observed in the Italian translation of the same passage (8), where a genuine present *dico* appears.

(8) Ru > It

b. – *E non vuol dirmi com'è venuto a sapere dei foglietti e di quello che penso? – No, non lo dico, – rispose asciutto Azazello. – Lei, però, sa qualcosa di lui?* [transl. by Vera Dridso (1967)]

Other Italian examples demonstrate that this is not an accidental correspondence: Italians seem to regularly use the present tense of the speech verbs in such contexts, both in the translations and in the original texts; (9) is taken from an Italian novel and its translation into Russian.

(9) It > Ru

a. *Qual è? – Non te lo dico. – Ora me lo devi dire.* [Niccolò Ammaniti. *Io non ho paura* (2001)]

b. *I kto èto? – Ne skazhu. – Pochemu? Tak nechestno.* [transl. by Valerij Nikolaev (2005)]

In fact, English can also use here constructions with a more direct present-tense reference, as, for example, *I am not telling you* attested in many similar passages in original English texts, as in (10):

(10) “*Did he break your heart and send you running?*” <...> *She smiled. “Well, I'm not telling you anything.”* [Michael Connelly. *City of bones* (2002)]

In (10), the present progressive is used as exactly the same conversation turn as in previous examples: the speaker informs (at the moment of utterance) that she refuses to give any clarifications asked.

A SHORT NOTE ABOUT OTHER USES OF RUSSIAN *NE SKAZHU*.

A further complication here is related to the fact that Russian *ne skazhu* can (and frequently does) represent another type of constructions with a present-tense reference, where perfective present is used in a more widespread (and, in a sense, more common) potential meaning ‘I cannot tell’. The whole expression, however, is somewhat less compositional and amounts to a marker of subjective epistemic evaluation (\approx ‘I’m not that sure; I don’t know for certain’), as in (11) or (12):

(11) Ru

Ne skazhu, chto ya horoshii fizionomist, no lyudei chuvstvuyu [regional press, 2003]

‘I wouldn’t say I am a good physiognomist, but I get a feel for people’

(12) Ru > En

a. *Ya ne skazhu, chtoby francuzskie knizhki byli i talantlivy, i umny, i blagorodny* [A. Chehov. *Skuchnaya istoriya* (1889)]

b. *I don’t say the French books have talent, cleverness, and a good tone* [A. Chekhov. *A Dreary Story*, transl. by Constance Garnett (1930)].

This type of (present) uses is not to be confused with what we consider as performative-like perfective presents, even when they occur – like performative expressions usually do – as isolated lines in a dialogue. However, the translation usually reveals their modal construal (‘I cannot tell because I don’t know / I’m not sure’), as in (13):

(13) Ru > En

a. *Skazala pered samym ukhodom, chto proshchaetsya nadolgo, potomu chto uezhaet s muzhem za granicu. Olya sprosila dovol’no ravnodushno, kuda. Galya usmehnulas: – Predstav’, na Blizhnii Vostok. Konkretno ne skazhu.* [L. Ulickaia. *Zelenyi shater* (2011)]

b. *Right before she left, she said she was saying good-bye for a long time, because she and her husband were going abroad. Olga, with seeming indifference, asked her where. Galya grinned. “Just imagine, we’re going to the Middle East. I can’t say where exactly.”* [L. Ulitskaia. *The Big Green Tent*, transl. by Bela Shayevich (2014)]

4.2. Giving

A similar behaviour is observed with *ne dam* (lit. ‘I won’t give). In fact, its more precise meaning is something like ‘in reply to your request to give you Z, I let you know that I refuse to give you Z’. A typical example is (14).

(14) Ru

– *Dai mne eshche drovishek – u nas zhe ih mnogo. – Net, – skazal Ezhik, – ne dam. V dome i tak teplo.* [Sergei Kozlov (1981)]

‘– Give me some more firewood, we’ve got it a lot, right? – No, – said the Hedgehog, – I won’t. It is warm enough in the house.’

Again, we can provide two translations from parallel corpora (one from Russian into German, another, into Italian), where the inherent present-tense reference of *ne dam* situation is rendered by grammatical means. Let it be a passage from the famous novel “Oblomov”, where the main protagonist discusses with his servant the possibility of lending his tail-coat: the servant, with the help of *ne dam*, refuses to part with it.

(15) Ru > Ge, Ru > It

a. – *Day, Zahar, frak, ne upryam'sya! – Ne dam! — kholodno otvechal Zahar. – Pust' prezhdde oni prinesut nazad zhilet da nashu rubashku: pyaty mesyac gostit tam.* [I. Goncharov. *Oblomov* (1849–1858)]

b. – *Sachar, gib den Frack her, sei nicht eigensinnig! – Ich gebe ihn nicht her! – sagte Sachar kühl, – er soll uns zuerst unsere Weste und unser Hemd zurückgeben, die sind jetzt schon fünf Monate bei ihm auf Besuch.* [transl. by Clara Brauner (1960)]

c. – *Su, Zachar, porta il frac, non essere cocciuto! – Non glielo do! – rispose freddamente Zachar. – Prima deve riportarci il nostro panciotto e la nostra camicia: sono cinque mesi che se li tiene.* [transl. by Argia Michettoni]

The translations show that English retains future *will*-forms more frequently (probably due to their modal side-values), whereas other languages (not only Italian and German, but also French) prefer other strategies:

(16) Ru > En, Ru > Fr

a. – *O net! – voskliknula Margarita, porazhaya prohodyashchih, – soglasna na vse, soglasna prodelat' etu komediyu s natiraniem maz'yu, soglasna idi k chertu na kulichki. Ne otdam!* [M. Bulgakov. *Master i Margarita* (1929–1940)]

b. – *Oh, no! – exclaimed Margarita, shocking the passers-by. – I agree to everything, I agree to perform this comedy of rubbing in the ointment, agree to go to the devil and beyond! I won't give it back!* [transl. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (1979)]

c. – *Oh non! s'exclama Marguerite, d'une voix qui fit se retourner les passants. – Je suis d'accord pour tout, je suis d'accord pour me barbouiller de crème et toute cette comédie, je suis d'accord pour aller à tous les diables! Je garde la boîte!* [transl. by Claude Ligny (1968)]

4.3. Letting

Finally, our third example of non-trivial performative is *ne pushchu* (lit. ‘I won’t let <you go>’) meaning roughly ≈ ‘in reply to your request to let you leave the place L, I let you know that I do not authorize you to leave L and obstruct it physically [e.g. closing the way out, retaining physically, etc.].’ The translated examples from “Master and Margarita” (here, again, English and Italian display two different strategies, with futurate *will*-form and genuine present tense) reproduce what we have seen previously, cf. (17).

(17) Ru > En, Ru > It

- a. *Ruchku dveri snaruzhi v eto vremya krutili i dergali, i slyshno bylo, kak kur'ersha za dveryami otchayanno krichala: – Nel'z'ya! Ne pushchu! Khot' zarezh'te! Zasedanie!* [M. Bulgakov. Master I Margarita (1929–1940)]
- b. *The door handle was all the while being turned and pulled from outside, and the messenger girl could be heard through the door crying desperately: – Impossible! I won't let you! Cut me to pieces! It's a meeting!* [transl. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (1979)]
- c. *Nel frattempo la maniglia della porta veniva girata e scrollata dall'esterno, e si sentiva l'inserviente gridare istericamente dietro la porta: – Non si può! Non vi lascio passare! Anche se mi ammazzate! Sono in riunione!* [transl. by Vera Dridso (1967)]

However, even English translations can also be sensitive to this inherent present semantics, witness the following passage from Gogol's famous novel describing an authoritarian host, cf. (18), where all the available translations (viz., English, German and Italian ones) concur:

(18) Ru > En, Ru > Ge, Ru > It

- a. — *Net, ty uzh, pozhaluysta, menya-to otpusti, — govoril belokuryy, — mne nuzhno domoy. — Pustyaki, pustiyaki, brat, ne pushchu* [N. Gogol'. Mertvye dushi (1835–1852)]
- b. “*No, no, put in the flaxen-haired man, you must excuse me, for I must be off home.*” – “*Rubbish, rubbish, I am not going to excuse you.*” [N. Gogol. *Dead Souls*, transl. by D. J. Hogarth (1931)]
- c. „*Nein, verzichte bitte auf mich*“, *sagte der Blonde*, „*ich muß nach Hause.*“ – „*Unsinn, Unsinn, Bruder, ich laß dich nicht fort.*“ [N. Gogol. *Die toten Seelen*, transl. by Michael Pfeiffer (1978)]
- d. «*No, a questo punto, per favore, lasciami andare*» disse il biondo, «*devo tornare a casa.*» «*Sciocchezze, sciocchezze, fratello, non ti lascio.*» [N. Gogol. *Anime morte*, transl. by Paolo Nori]

Here, clearly, the utterance expressing the intention of non-allowing the guest to go is accompanied by some actions performed at the moment of utterance, and the whole situation is undoubtedly present. It should be noted the repeated use of progressive form in English, which is also in keeping with the aspectual semantics of the situation.

5. Discussion

We have demonstrated that in Russian the verbal form of what is morphologically a perfective present is capable to develop, for the avoidance of “PP paradox”, a less trivial (and probably still unnoticed) meaning of **performative-like prospective present**. Its main semantics relates to an immediate start of the action described (somewhat in between of present and future). Obligatory components of this type of context are first person and negation. Diachronically,

these uses rather seem (like habitual ones) to be remnants of some more archaic state when perfectivity was not fully grammaticalized and perfective present was more present than perfective (cf. [Dickey 2016, Biasio 2021b]).

The view of performative-like contexts as archaic is corroborated by two essential features of these context: negation and first person. It is well known that negation is typical for “relict contexts” preserving the most frequent old uses [Bybee et al. 1994]; in our case, however, these relict contexts could be preserved only with first person forms responsible for a performative-like effect of the construction. Still, what we have here is probably not a prototypical performative speech act, but the moment of saying *ne dam* ‘I won’t give’ or *ne pushchu* ‘I won’t let’ is similar to the moment of saying ‘I promise’ (especially as concerns the pragmatic effects) – and is not exactly like “ordinary” uses of negated perfective present with a clear future tense reference.

The comparison of the same constructions in more ordinary contexts (where they have a future time reference) would be compelling. Cf., for example, the following passage with *ne skazhu*, where it is not an isolated conversational turn, but a part of the longer narrative:

(19) Ru > Ge

a. *Ya nikogda nikomu ne skazhu etogo, no, Bozhe moy, chto zhe mne delat’, ezheli ya nichego ne lyublyu, kak tol’ko slavu, lyubov’ lyudskuyu?* [L. Tolstoi, *Voyna i mir* (1867–1869)]

b. *Ich werde das niemals einem Menschen sagen, aber, mein Gott, was soll ich nur tun, wenn ich nun einmal nichts so sehr liebe wie den Ruhm und die Anerkennung der Menschen?* [L. Tolstoi. *Krieg und Frieden*, transl. by Hermann Röhl (1922)]

The action of (not) saying is clearly detached from the moment of speech and rendered as future even in German, where *werden*-future is used relatively rarely. Cf. a performative-like context (not detached from the moment of utterance) in (20):

(20) Ru > Ge

a. *Dolg khotel otdat’, dolg chesti, a komu – ne skazhu.* [F. Dostoevskii, *Brat’ya Karamazovy* (1878)]

b. *Ich wollte eine Schuld zurückzahlen, eine Ehrenschild wollte ich zurückzahlen. An wen, das sage ich nicht.* [F. Dostojewski. *Die Brüder Karamasow*, transl. by Hermann Röhl (1923)]

The specific type of use considered in our paper is characteristic for several predicates which seem to occur in appropriate contexts with a particularly high frequency. Semantically, these predicates represent a scenario with two participants where the one requires from the other some (profitable or necessary) action, and the other resists and refuses to perform it. This type of interpersonal interaction with a prominent component of affectedness / concernment is found primarily among predicates subcategorized for recipients and addressees (as ‘give’ or ‘tell’), but the predicates involving the semantic component of permission (‘let’) also play an

important role. Notice that the last group includes the core performative (*ne razreshat* ‘(not) to allow’ as well, which, in Russian, behaves in a fully canonical way in the sense that its performative uses require a present imperfective (and not perfective) form: – *razreshi!* ‘allow!’ – *ne razreshayu!* ‘I don’t / won’t allow!’. Cf. a less trivial (though obsolete in Modern Russian) *pozvolyat* ‘allow’ which permits the aspectual variation: – *pozvol’!* ‘allow!’ – *ne pozvolyayu!*^{IMPF} / *ne pozvolyu!*^{PF} ‘I don’t / won’t allow!’. Interestingly, the present perfective affirmative form is still standard: *pozvolyu* can have only a future-time reference and cannot describe an ongoing present. But instead, the negative form *ne pozvolyu!* behaves exactly like *ne pushchu!* ‘I won’t let’ considered in the previous sections, blurring the distinction between an actual and a future eventuality.

Another fact which deserves special attention is that the one-place predicate *idti* ‘go’ demonstrates some affinities with the two-place predicates subcategorized for beneficiary: – *idi!* ‘go!’ – *ne poydu!*^{PF} ‘I won’t go / I’m not going!’. Like the latter example, it demonstrates a kind of performativity: its semantics includes a declaration (the refusal to move) – and at the same time the action of non-moving. Some translational equivalents (from Italian or English) found in the parallel corpus corroborate this construal, because the corresponding predicates are used in the form of present tense there, as in (21) and (22).

(21) En > Ru

- a. “Mommy says you have to go to school,” Izzy says, head-butting my shoulder. “**I’m not going** to school.” That’s it: that’s how it starts. [Lauren Oliver. *Before I fall* (2010)]
- b. – *Mama govorit, tebe pora v shkolu. Ona tolkaet menya golovoi v plecho. – Ya ne poydu v shkolu. Vot kak vse nachinaetsya.* [L. Oliver. *Prezhde chem ya upadu*, transl. by A. Kilanova (2017)]

(22) It > Ru

- a. *Maria ha incrociato le braccia. “Io non ci vado.” Perché?* [Niccolò Ammaniti. *Io non ho paura* (2001)]
- b. *Maria zakinula nogu na nogu*³: – *Ya ne poydu. – Pochemu?* [N. Ammaniti. *Ya ne boyus’*, transl. by Valerij Nikolaev (2005)]

So, the phenomenon described above is somewhat larger than just three verbal units, and definitely needs further study.

6. Concluding remarks

To sum up, as we hope to have shown so far, “performative-like prospective presents” in Russian is another way of resolving the widely discussed present perfective paradox: the corresponding verbal form remains (still) present, but is not

³ Strange enough, the Russian translator has rendered *ha incrociato le braccia* ‘crossed her arms’ as *zakinula nogu na nogu* ‘crossed her legs’.

(fully) perfective, which can be considered as an aspectual archaism for East Slavic as a whole.⁴

A terminological note needs to be made at this point – namely, regarding the term ‘performative’, which is used here in a somewhat noncanonical way. Indeed, performativity has always been considered to be a property exclusive to verbs of speech (cf., for example, Wierzbicka 1987) and is sometimes viewed as their non-trivial semantic feature (cf. Apresyan 1988). Here, instead, we deal with predicates of completely different semantics.

The theoretical framework which could provide a suitable ground for our approach is Construction Grammar (see Fillmore et al. 1988, Goldberg 1995). Following this theory, one could regard performativity as a property of constructions featuring first-person verb forms and exhibiting special semantic-pragmatic characteristics. Then, like any other construction, the performative one should have core instances that combine all the features of the construction, and peripheral cases that are coerced into a performative interpretation due to the fact that they share several features with the prototype. From this perspective, utterances containing verbs of speech (such as ‘promise’, ‘declare’, etc., usually in non-negative forms) should be regarded as the core of performativity. As for the non-trivial marking of tense in negative first-person forms that we discussed here, it can serve as a kind of test for identifying non-central extensions of the performative construction.

Generally, the construction approach has repeatedly been applied to verbal grammatical categories. For performativity, this has not been the case. It is appropriate here, however, to recall an insightful remark by Yu. Apresyan (1988), which anticipated the theory by several years: “It must be emphasized that the performative formula takes precedence over a performative verb.”

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⁴ The common Slavic origin of this type of uses finds support in the fact that the most archaic Slavic aspectual systems still allow for perfective present forms in performative contexts of “stiff denial”. Notably, this is widely attested for Slovenian (and is characteristic for Slovenian performatives in general, cf. (Derganc 2012)). On the contrary, Bulgarian and Macedonian tend to use here present imperfective forms (which is more consistent semantically and more innovative morphologically), as *ne te puskam* or *ne davam* in Bulgarian, *ne davam* or *ne kažuvam* in Macedonian, etc. (we are grateful to Mladen Uhlik, Elena Ivanova and Eleni Bužarovska for personal consultations). Among South Slavic languages, Macedonian seems to have the most widespread uses of imperfective present in quasi-performative contexts. Eleni Bužarovska (2010) points to a strong morphosyntactic parallelism between Macedonian and Modern Greek in this respect: Macedonian present imperfective constructions like *ne ti kažuvam* ‘I am not telling / won’t tell you’ literally correspond to Greek *δεν σου λέω*.

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