The Russian perfective present in performative utterance
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The aim of this paper is to experimentally demonstrate that perfective verbs in Russian can – contrary to what experts generally agree upon – be used in performative utterances without lacking the performative force of the sentences. We ran an experiment in which we combined self-paced reading with a subsequent decision on how the described event is located in time. In this way we try to explore, first, to what extent the performative force is actually kept up despite the performative aspect and, second, whether processing differs dependent on the verbal aspect in particular in cases where the performative force is left unimpaired.

Russian is an aspect language with a grammaticalized aspect. The verbal aspect is described as a grammatical distinction between the PV and the IPV aspect. This distinction is reflected by morphologically paired verbs with different functions (pisat´ “to write” IPV: napisat´ “to write” PV). In accordance with the Russian linguistic tradition the PV aspect is the marked verbal aspect and the IPV aspect is the unmarked opposite (Jakobson, 1971). The PV aspect expresses completeness, telicity, and the limitation of an event and holds a concrete-factual meaning. The IPV aspect is used for incomplete, atelic, and unlimited situations, like processes or states (Zaliznjak & Šmelev, 2000).

In performatives the utterance and the action coincide (Austin, 1962). In Russian, by default, performatives are expressed with IPV in 1st pers. but in some cases, PV in 1st pers. can substitute the IPV verb (Rathmayr 1976). Dickey (2000) called this phenomenon the temporal coincidence of a situation that is referred to by a PV present form in the moment of utterance (cf. Bondarko 1971, Galton 1976). Koschmieder (1930) describes the so-called coincidence case as a special case of perfective future in non-future meaning when the action takes place by uttering the verb in 1st pers. (cf. Forsyth 1970, Bondarko 1971, Rassudova 1968/1982, Dickey 2000, Wiemer 2014 etc.). Our prediction was that the PV really can substitute the IPV in performative utterances and that there is a case of coincidence in performative utterances. How can we measure this temporal coincidence? We propose that PV performatives can be used to express performative utterances more frequently than conceded by Dickey (2000). We even go so far as to assume that PV performatives are interchangeable with IPV performatives. If PV performs the uttered action then PV is interpreted as present tense. Furthermore, we investigate how the different aspect use influences sentence processing.

Method. 40 native Russian speakers, all of them students at the St. Petersburg State University, took part in Experiment 1. 14 performative sentences with either IPV aspect (IPV performatives, cf. (1)) or PV aspect (PV performatives, cf. (2)) served as targets; 20 constative sentences in the past tense with either IPV aspect (IPV constatives, cf. (3)) or PV aspect (PV constatives, cf. (4)) served as controls; 46 fillers were included.

(1) Uverjaju1.pers.sg.pres.IPV Vas, čto ēta dolžnost´ – važnyj šag na puti k uspechu.
(2) Uverju1.pers.sg.pres.PV Vas, čto ēta dolžnost´ – važnyj šag na puti k uspechu.
    Assure1.pers.sg.pres.IPV,PV you that this position – fine step forward to success.
(3) Vrač uverja3.pers.sg.past.IPV ich v tom, čto oni vse skoro vyzdorovejut.
(4) Vrač uveri3.pers.sg.past.PV ich v tom, čto oni vse skoro vyzdorovejut.
    Doctor assure3.pers.sg.past.IPV,PV them therein that they all soon recover.

The first display of a trial showed a context consisting of 1 to 2 sentences. After a press of the space bar, the second display showed the first segment of the target sentence with the remaining seven segments being masked. The task of the participants was to read the sentence for comprehension and to judge whether the described event occurred in the past (= left arrow),
present (= down arrow) or future (= right arrow). Another press of the space bar uncovered the second segment. Each further press of the space bar re-masked the current segment and uncovered the next segment. Participants could stop reading the target whenever they felt they can deliver their judgment. They did so by indicating their choice by pressing the corresponding arrow key (Response 1). Thereafter they saw the complete sentence and judged the target once more (Response 2). Occasionally there was a final yes-no comprehension question. In a parallel experiment with the same stimulus material, Experiment 2, a different group of 41 native Russian speakers judged the same targets presented as a whole after the context and without an obvious opportunity to stop reading.

The central hypothesis states that PV performatives often keep up the performative force, i.e., events described by PV performatives are located in the present to a substantial extent.

**Results and Discussion.** Events were frequently located in the present if described by IPV performatives, as expected for targets with a performative interpretation (77% and 81% in Exp.s 1 and 2, respectively). Events were significantly less often located in the present when described by PV performatives, they were located in the present to a considerable extent in both experiments (51% and 70%). This is strong evidence that PV performatives do not necessarily lack performative power. In a first attempt to explain the stronger performative power in Experiment 2 without stop reading compared to Experiment 1 with stop reading we reasoned that the sentence initial verb of a performative might get more weight in judging a target. However, by inspecting the judgments in the most pertinent cases, namely, when the judgment is delivered right after the verb in ignorance of the rest of the target, events located in the present or in the future occur about equally often: 39 and 41 times located in present and future, respectively, if reading stopped right after the verb (138 and 130 times altogether). Reading times on the sentence initial verbs did not differ between IPV and PV performatives, 1210 vs. 1141 ms \( [t(39) = 1.01] \). Nor did reading times for the verbs in PV performatives differ dependent on how the described event was located, in the present or future (Response 1) \( [t(31) < 1] \). Thus, reading times on the verb so far provide no evidence for increased processing costs in PV performatives (though, admittedly, reading times are considerably high).

A simple measure of the information gathered before judging a target (segment after which reading is stopped) shows a higher need of information for constatives compared to performatives, but it does not differ between IPV and PV performatives. More fine-grained analyses of the experimental effects on the stop reading behavior of participants are currently in progress. What we can conclude with certainty by now is that the PV aspect and performative utterances do not exclude each other.

**References**


