

Biaspectual verbs as polysemes

On homonymy, aspectual neutrality, and the conative reading

The paper starts from the question whether biaspectual verbs like Russian *ispol'zovat'* 'to use (IPFV/PFV)' or *motivirovat'* 'to motivate (IPFV/PFV)' are homonymous pairs of a perfective and an imperfective verb or just one aspectually neutral verb that receives its aspectual meaning from the context. If they are homonyms, they ought to have all the meanings of non-homonymous verbs, including the so-called conative reading of attempt and success, as in *On sdaval_{IPFV}, no ne sdal_{PFV} ékzamen* 'He took the test but did not pass'. If they are aspectually neutral, sentences given out of the blue without context ought to be read as perfective or as imperfective with equal probabilities. A small corpus analysis and an online survey with 1295 native speakers test these hypotheses. The results show that biaspectual verbs are neither homonyms (since they cannot have the conative reading) nor aspectually neutral (since they all show a clear tendency towards either a perfective or an imperfective interpretation). Consequently, they must be viewed as polysemous, with an α -meaning according to their lexical-actional function and a β -meaning achieved by recategorization where the context demands it.

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0. What is this about?

This article deals with the so-called biaspectual verbs in Russian,¹ which are traditionally regarded as verbs with homonymous aspectual forms (Section 1). The interpretation in terms of homonymy is contrasted with an alternative analysis, according to which these verbs are aspectually neutral and derive their aspectual meaning only from the context (2). I will try to resolve this question by testing if they can have the so-called conative reading (3), using a corpus analysis (4) and a survey (5). Since the results do not fit either homonymy or aspect neutrality, biaspectual verbs are finally analyzed as polysemes with α - and β -meanings (6). On this basis, an explanation for biaspectuality is then proposed (7), which seems more adequate than previous purely semantic and purely formal explanations.

As is well known, some Russian verbs are an exception to the otherwise all-encompassing aspect opposition in that they do not show any formal distinction

¹ Since the phenomenon also exists in other Slavic languages, it is not impossible that the results of this study can also be transferred to other languages. However, I have not examined them specifically and do not want to assume an identity *a priori*.

for the two verbal aspects. These include, for example, verbs such as *ispol'zovat'*_{IPFV/PFV} 'use' or *krestit'*_{IPFV/PFV} 'baptize', but above all many foreign words such as *rekomendovat'*_{IPFV/PFV} 'recommend', *motivirovat'*_{IPFV/PFV} 'motivate', *bojkotirovat'*_{IPFV/PFV} 'boycott', etc. Even verbs that do have a morphologically marked aspect partner **□37** can be biaspectual. Examples are *obeščat'*_{IPFV/PFV} 'promise', which now has a perfective partner *poobeščat'*_{PFV} but which can still be used in the perfective aspect, or *obrazovat'*_{IPFV/PFV} 'form', which has an imperfective correlate *obrazovyvat'*_{IPFV}, which, however, has not (yet) completely displaced its derivational base in imperfective use. According to Gorobec (2008: 12), 19% of biaspectual verbs have such aspect partners.²

The phenomenon of biaspectual verbs is often dismissed as unimportant. Klein (1995: 671), for example, calls it "atypical [...] and not of particular interest", and Zaliznjak & Šmelëv (1997: 65, 2000: 75) also state:

«Двувидовые глаголы в современном русском языке представляют собою периферийное явление, так как языковая система стремится к тому, чтобы грамматическим различиям соответствовали формальные.»

"In Modern Russian, biaspectual verbs are a peripheral phenomenon, as the language system strives to ensure that grammatical distinctions correspond to formal ones."

Dickey (2000: 11) also includes perfectiva tantum and imperfectiva tantum in his judgment: "unpaired verbs constitute various kinds of peripheral or marginal cases."

In contrast to this, Elena Gorobec (2008) compiled a list of 1,378 (!) biaspectual verbs in Modern Russian, which she checked individually to see whether they still function in both aspects today.³ This number does not give the impression of a peripheral phenomenon. Admittedly, this total only provides information about dictionary entries (types) and consists partly of technical vocabulary such as *anodirovat'* 'anodize' or *azotirovat'* 'to nitride', so that it says little about the frequency in the text (tokens). However, corpus research has shown that, on average, about every 430th word in the text (or every 75th verb token) is a biaspectual verb.⁴

² Čertkova & Čang (1998: 17) count 41% verbs with aspect partners, but on the basis of only 412 biaspectual verbs.

³ She herself gives the total number as 1,394, but 16 verbs (from *pauperizovat'* 'pauperize' to *perekul'tivirovat'* 'cultivate (the ground) again with a cultivator', cf. Gorobec 2008: 193f., 204, 95) are counted double by mistake. The total also contains reflexive formations with *-sja*, some of which are listed as separate lexemes.

⁴ In the Russian National Corpus, you can search for verbs that the automatic tagger has tagged as both perfective and imperfective (by searching for the grammatical feature "pf" at a distance of "0" from "ipf" in the non-disambiguated subcorpus). Among the 203,258,919 words (including 35,458,500 verbs) comprising the subcorpus, 1,211,432 hits

Random samples in printed books have □ 38 confirmed these values: On average, you read a biaspectual verb about every 2–3 pages, and in specialist literature sometimes almost on every page. The phenomenon is therefore not completely negligible.

Furthermore, it is often assumed that the number of biaspectual verbs is shrinking (Zaliznjak & Šmelëv 1997: 62; Breu 2009: 213; cf. Čertkova & Čang 1998: 15) because new aspect partners are constantly being formed and these displace the original verbs in one of the aspects, so that one day there will be no more biaspectual verbs in Russian. However, new biaspectual verbs are constantly being added through borrowing (Zaliznjak & Šmelëv 2000: 71f.; Čertkova & Čang 1998: 14, 31), e.g. *skanirovat'* 'scan', *šrederovat'* 'shred', *dajdžestirovat'* 'summarize into a digest', *dampirovat'* 'put into a dump', etc. (all from Gorobec 2008: 177–204), because "the mode of formation of such verbs, which can express both aspects, is unrestrictedly productive" ("[d]ie Bildungsweise solcher Verben, die beide Aspekte ausdrücken können, ist unbeschränkt produktiv", Isačenko 1962: 354, §204). At the moment, it seems impossible to say which tendency will gain the upper hand in the long term.

The disqualification of biaspectual verbs as a marginal phenomenon is probably also due to the desire to back Slavic verbal aspect as a grammatical category, while the very expression of aspect by devices of word-formation is already atypical of a grammatical category. The concession that aspect is not expressed obligatorily in all verbs without exception would further undermine the foundation of this category. (However, as will be shown below, a closer examination of biaspectual verbs can confirm rather than cast doubt on the all-encompassing validity of the aspect category).

were obtained. However, not all of these are biaspectual verbs, as the tagger also assigns both aspect labels to:

- homographs such as *priznaet* (for *priznáet* from *priznat'*_{PFV} or *priznaët* from *priznavat'*_{IPFV} 'recognize') or *otrezat'* (for *otrézat'*_{PFV} or *otrezát'*_{IPFV} 'cut off')
- lexical homonyms such as *naxodit'sja* ('be situated (IPFV)' or 'walk to exhaustion (PFV)') or *pokupat'* ('buy (IPFV)' or 'bathe for a while (PFV)')
- words not included in the tagger's vocabulary list that it classifies as verbs, such as the proper name *Džal'aj* or the slang verb *zaknokat'*_{PFV} 'catch (?)'
- forms that are homonymous (or homographic) with biaspectual verbs, such as *kazni* (with the stress *kázni* GEN.SG of *kazn'* 'execution' instead of IMP.SG *kazní* from *kaznit'*_{IPFV/PFV} 'execute') or *bežat'* ('run (IPFV)' instead of 'flee (IPFV/PFV)')

A check of the first 300 hits showed that approx. 39% of them are actually biaspectual verbs. Extrapolated to the 1.2 million hits of this search, the partial corpus used should therefore contain approx. 470,000 biaspectual verbs.

1. The traditional interpretation: homonymy

The treatment of biaspectual verbs as a case of homonymy is also based on the desire to assign two aspectual forms to all Russian verbs without exception (cf. Isačenko 1962: 355, §204; Maslov 1984: 69f.; Zaliznjak & Šmelëv 2000: 71). Most researchers (39) regard aspect pairs as forms of one and the same lexeme (e.g. Isačenko 1962: 352, §203; Maslov 1984: 88; Lehmann 1999: 227f.; Dickey 2000: 45; Anstatt 2003: 58; Breu 2000: 23, 2009: 210). Biaspectual verbs are then regarded as lexemes with homonymous aspectual forms:

ispol'zovat' (IPFV: *ispol'zuju* etc.; PFV: *ispol'zuju* etc.) 'use'

If aspect pairs are interpreted as two different verb lexemes with the same lexical meaning but different aspects, biaspectual verbs are viewed as lexical homonyms (cf. Švedova 1980: §1388; very consistent also in notation: Gorobec 2008: 45f.):

*ispol'zovat'*₁ 'use (IPFV)'

*ispol'zovat'*₂ 'use (PFV)'

According to this interpretation, biaspectual verbs have two different forms for the perfective and the imperfective aspect, just like aspect pairs, but the two forms 'happen to be' identical.

2. The antithesis: aspectual neutrality

Koschmieder (1934: 11), however, described biaspectual verbs as "aspectless" ("bezaspektowe") or "communia". This approach suggests itself particularly if one considers that the few biaspectual verbs of Slavic origin preserve a state prior to the grammaticalization of the aspectual opposition and that the loanwords owe their biaspectuality to the lack of an aspectual opposition in the source language. Nevertheless, this explanation has been dropped in recent decades in favor of the homonymy thesis. My idea of taking it up in a new form and subjecting it to a tangible test was inspired by Carlota Smith (1997). In her aspect theory, there are three "viewpoint aspects": perfective, imperfective and, additionally, neutral aspect.⁵ Among the examples she uses to justify the necessity of the latter is French, where, for example, one can say in the past tense:

- (1) *Le cheval gagnait_{IPFV} le course, mais il n'a pas gagné_{PFV}.*
'The horse was winning the race but it did not win.'

In the future tense, however, one cannot say:

⁵ As part of her general linguistic study, Smith also deals with Russian and briefly mentions biaspectual verbs there, but without assigning them to the *neutral viewpoint*: "The [...] few bi-aspectual verbs [...] may serve to express either viewpoint" (Smith 1997: 258).

- (2) **Le cheval gagnera_{FUT} le course, mais il ne gagnera_{FUT} pas.*
 ‘The horse will be winning the race but it will not win.’ (Smith 1997: 80)

▣40 Admittedly, the assumption of a third aspect seems unnecessarily complicated to me. In Smith’s case, it is based on universal grammar: A “neutral viewpoint aspect” is also present in languages that have no grammatical aspect opposition at all. It seems more reasonable to me to assume that the French future tense does not participate in the aspect opposition.

However, it seems useful to assume that belonging to an aspect also conveys meanings that an aspectually neutral verb cannot convey (or that would then have to be expressed by other elements in the sentence). And, as can be seen here, this also applies to the imperfective aspect, which is often regarded as an unmarked member of the aspect opposition. Applied to Russian biaspectual verbs, the question would therefore be whether a sentence like (3) is possible with a biaspectual verb or not:

- (3) ²*Bioximiki v laboratorii izolirovali_{IPFV/PFV} virus, no ne izolirovali_{IPFV/PFV} ego.*
 ‘The biochemists isolated the virus in the laboratory, but they did not isolate it.’
 ≙ ‘The biochemists tried to isolate the virus, but without success.’

According to the unanimous opinion of grammars and the aspectual literature, such a construction is possible with paired verbs, since the so-called conative reading of the imperfective aspect comes into play here, and Zel’dovič (2009: 287) also considers this to be unproblematic for most biaspectual verbs.

The fact that in (3) the same word form occurs twice in a sentence, making it potentially ambiguous, should not render it ungrammatical, because the same phenomenon can also be observed with lexical homonyms such as in (4) or with homonymous word forms such as the singular and plural of English *fish* in (5), and yet both sentences are undoubtedly grammatical:

- (4) *Miru mir!* ‘Peace (world) for the world (peace)!’
 (5) *The big fish ate the small fish.*

3. The criterion: the conative reading

It is therefore worth taking a closer look at the conative reading. *Conative* (from Latin *cōnātus* ‘attempt, effort’) is the term for the use of the imperfective aspect of an accomplishment verb to denote an attempt (without saying anything about its success). Some examples of this use that are repeatedly cited are:

- (6) *utešal_{IPFV}, no ne utešil_{PFV}*
 ‘he comforted_{IPFV} but did not comfort_{PFV}’ (Zaliznjak & Šmelëv 1997: 20)
 (7) *sdaval_{IPFV}, no ne sdal_{PFV} èkzamen*
 ‘he took_{IPFV} the exam but did not pass_{PFV}’ (ibid.) ▣41

- (8) *ubivali*_{IPFV}, *da ne ubili*_{PFV}
 ‘they killed_{IPFV} but did not kill_{PFV} (him)’ (ibid.; A. N. Tolstoj, Švedova 1980: §1441)
- (9) [Antipa:] *A začem mundir snjal,* [Antipa:] Why did you take off your
službu brosil? uniform, quit the service?
 [Tarakanov:] *Ob”jasnjal*_{IPFV} *ja éto.* [Tarakanov:] I have already explained_{IPFV}
 [Antipa:] *Ob”jasnjal*_{IPFV}, *da ne ob”jas-* this.
*nil*_{PFV}. [Antipa:] Explained_{IPFV} yes, but not
 (Gor’kij, Švedova 1980: §1441) explained_{PFV}.

If ‘biaspectual’ verbs really have two homonymous aspectual forms, they should be able to fulfill all the functions of the imperfective and perfective aspect, i.e. they should also allow the conative reading. If they do not allow this reading, at least their ‘imperfective forms’ are not full-fledged imperfectives. Then biaspectual verbs probably ought to be classified as aspectually neutral, although, as explained above, I would not assume a “neutral aspect” as Smith (1997) does but would suppose that the biaspectual verbs then possibly derive their aspectual meaning exclusively from the context.

4. Corpus study

My first approach to answering this question was to search the Russian National Corpus (*Nacional’nyj korpus russkogo jazyka*, <https://ruscorpora.ru/>), which currently contains over 200 million words. As a search pattern I used $V_{IPFV} \dots no/a/da$ ‘but’ ... *ne* ‘not’ ... V_{IPFV} , where V_i denotes the same verb twice, entered once in the imperfective and once in the perfective aspect, and “...” represents 0–4 words.

First, 14 classic examples of the conative reading from the literature on verbal aspect were searched for in this way. The only verb pair that occurs more frequently in this construction, namely 12 times in total, is *lovit’/pojmat’* ‘hunt/catch’ (e.g. *Tri dnja ego lovili*_{IPFV} *v lesu u derevni, no tak i ne pojмали*_{PFV}, *potom sdalsja sam* ‘For three days he was hunted_{IPFV} in the forest near the village but not caught_{PFV}, then he turned himself in’, Mixail Tarkovskij, 2002). The pair *ubivat’/ubit’* ‘kill’ occurs exactly three times, exclusively in works by A. N. Tolstoj from 1928, which is where the standard example cited in (8) comes from. Similarly, *utešat’/utešit’* ‘comfort’ (cf. (6)) can be found three times, with the most recent of the three occurrences coming from Gor’kij and dating from 1928. With the aspect pairs *sdavat’/sdat’* ‘take/pass (a test)’ and *ob”jasnjal’/ob”jasnit’* ‘explain’ (cf. (7) and (9)), as well as with *pisat’/napisat’* ‘write’ and *ubeždat’/ubedit’* ‘convince’), this construction does not occur at all in the Russian National Corpus. Together with a few other examples (2 × *vstrečat’/vstretit’* ‘meet, pick up’ in Ostrovskij, 1879, and 42 A. B. B. 1999; 2 × *rešat’/rešit’* ‘solve’ in *Nezavisimaja Gazeta*, 2003, and L. Zorin, 2008; 1 × *dogonjal’/dognat’* ‘catch up’ in Furmanov, 1923; 1 × *davat’/dat’* ‘give’ in Leskov, 1864; 1 × *ugovarivat’/ugovorit’* ‘persuade’ in Dostoevskij, 1872; 1 × *postupat’/postupit’*

‘enter’ in P’ecux, 2001; $1 \times$ “*dokazyvat’*”/“*dokazat’*” ‘prove’ (in quotation marks) in S. Mejen, 1987), the search yielded a total of 27 hits (12 of them after 1945).

The same pattern was then used to search for 15 common biaspectual verbs (where V_{IPFV} and V_{IPFV} were of course identical in each case), whose semantics allow for an interpretation of attempt–success (cf. Maslov 1984: 49f.; Zaliznjak & Šmelëv 1997: 20, 2000: 22), namely for *assimilirovat’(sja)* ‘assimilate (oneself)’, *bežat’* ‘flee’, *identificirovat’(sja)* ‘identify (oneself)’, *ispol’zovat’* ‘use’, *izolirovat’(sja)* ‘isolate (oneself)’, *kaznit’* ‘execute’, *likvidirovat’* ‘liquidate’, *obeščat’* ‘promise’, *obrazovat’* ‘educate’, *organizovat’* ‘organize’, *razminirovat’* ‘demine’, *rodit’(sja)* ‘give birth/be born’, *rusificirovat’(sja)* ‘russify (oneself)’, *velet’* ‘command’ and *ženit’(sja)* ‘marry’. This search yielded no hits.

However, the difference is of course not meaningful. If only about every 75th occurring verb is biaspectual anyway, with 27 occurrences for aspect pairs, only about $\frac{1}{3}$ of a hit for biaspectual verbs could be expected statistically. The corpus analysis obviously reaches its limits here.

It has to be noted, however, that the standard examples of the conative reading that are repeatedly cited are surprisingly rare in the corpus. It is therefore astonishing that biaspectual verbs, which are found 470,000 times in the Russian National Corpus, are often dismissed as a peripheral phenomenon, while a sentence pattern that is found 27 times in the same 200-million-word corpus can apparently not be left out of any treatise on Russian verbal aspect (cf. Maslov 1984: 48; Comrie 1976: 47f.; Klein 1995: 692f.; Smith 1997: 238; Zaliznjak & Šmelëv 1997: 20, 2000: 22). The conative reading of the imperfective aspect thus does not seem to have the status in the language that it is accorded in the aspectological literature. At least the sentence pattern V_{IPFV} ‘but not’ V_{IPFV} is obviously more an artistic exploitation of the aspect category in literature than a part of everyday usage. In the few cases in which the imperfective aspect can actually regularly denote an attempt in everyday life, one can probably assume a lexicalized or idiomatized meaning. This applies in particular to the verbs *lovit’_{IPFV}}* ‘hunt’ (vs. *pojmat’_{PFV}}* ‘catch’) and *rešat’_{IPFV}}* ‘take care of’ (vs. *rešit’_{PFV}}* ‘solve’), *lečit’_{IPFV}}* ‘treat’ (vs. *vylečit’_{PFV}}* ‘heal’) 43 and the phrase *sdavat’_{IPFV}} èkzamen* ‘take an exam’ (vs. *sdat’_{PFV}} èkzamen* ‘pass an exam’).⁶

⁶ In *iskat’_{IPFV}}* ‘seek’ (vs. *najti_{PFV}}* ‘find’), the character of an attempt is also clearly recognizable in the lexical meaning, but the difference here is so great that the two verbs do not function as aspectual partners at all: *iskat’* has the perfective partner *poiskat’* ‘seek for a while’ (cf. Breu 2000: 41f.) and *najti* has the imperfective partner *naxodit’* (since one can find without seeking, and maybe repeatedly or in the historical present tense). The verb *ždat’_{IPFV}}* ‘wait’ (vs. *doždat’sja_{PFV}}* or *doždat’sja_{IPFV}}* ‘expect successfully’) behaves similarly. The same situation actually applies to *lovit’_{IPFV}}* and *pojmat’_{PFV}}*, but these form an aspect pair according to Maslov’s criteria, i.e. *lovit’* can not only mean ‘hunt’ but also ‘catch’, e.g. when repeated or in the historical present (Zaliznjak & Šmelëv 1997: 43).

Incidentally, the rarity of this construction in the corpus is not caused by the verbs' semantics. The fact that the verbs tested can certainly be used to express an attempt can be seen from the frequency with which they occur immediately after the verbs *(po)pytat'sja* 'try', *(po)starat'sja* 'make an effort' and *(po)probavat'* 'try': The perfective partners of the 14 aspect pairs tested above all in all occur 3,591 times in these combinations (of which *ob'jasnit'* 'explain' alone occurs 874 times, and *vstretit'* 'meet, pick up' is the rarest with 15 hits). For the 15 biaspectual verbs, the result is even clearer in relation to each other, because after the verbs expressing an attempt, they come to a total of approx.⁷ 630 occurrences (of which *ispol'zovat'* 'use' has the most hits with 305, but *obeščat'* 'promise', *rusificirovat'* 'russify' and *razminirovat'* 'demine' are also used once each).

5. Online survey

Since the typical conative construction with biaspectual verbs could not be found in the corpus, an online questionnaire was constructed to find out whether it is considered acceptable by Russian native speakers.

A total of 1,295 respondents took part in the survey, almost all of whom came from Russia.⁸ Of these, 65% were male 44 and 30% female (71 people did not specify their gender). 68% had a university degree, 13% of the respondents—relatively few for linguistic surveys—were students and 19% did not have a degree. 18% of the respondents (19% of the graduates and 39% of the students) identified themselves as philologists.

5.1 First part: Conative sample sentences

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of sentences of the familiar type V_{IPFV} , *no ne V_{\text{IPFV}}*, which I constructed with 6 biaspectual verbs. These verbs were selected in such a way that they semantically allowed the interpretation attempt–success and quasi-synonymous sentences with paired verbs could be formed for them. For

⁷ In the case of the verb *bežat'*, it was necessary to extrapolate how often the biaspectual verb *bežat'* 'flee' and how often the imperfective verb *bežat'* 'run' was meant.

⁸ This large number is due to the fortunate circumstance that a respondent who had learned about the survey via the *vkontakte.ru* network was also one of the more than 35,000 authors of the popular collective blog *dirty.ru* under the pseudonym *charlespetzold* and wrote a short post about the survey there on 28 March 2012 (<https://d3.ru/343475/>, last checked 22 Mar 2026). He begins his post with the deliberately contradictory filler sentence *Oni nadejalis', čto on peredumaet, no ne nadejalis'* 'They hoped he would change his mind, but they did not hope', which he takes as an allusion to 4 March 2012, the date when Putin was elected president for the third time, and promises that the questionnaire will "potentially [...] generate a bunch of funny memes" ("потенциально [...] породит кучу забавных мемов").

example, quasi-synonymous sentences with the aspect pair *očičat'*_{IPFV}/*očistit'*_{PFV} *ot min* 'clear of mines' could be formed for sentences with the biaspectual verb *razminirovat'* 'demine'. In order to present each subject with each biaspectual verb and each quasi-synonymous aspect pair without juxtaposing them in the same sentence context, the verbs were each placed in two different contexts. In addition, each sentence was available in three different types. The first type consisted of the bare repetition of the same verb:

- (10) *Pjat' let nazad na etom pole byli švejcarcy, kotorye ego razminirovali*_{IPFV/PFV}, *no ne razminirovali*_{IPFV/PFV}.
 'Five years ago there were Swiss on this field who demined_{IPFV/PFV} it, but did not demine_{IPFV/PFV} it.'

The first half of the sentence was the same for all sentence types. In the second type, however, a clarifying addition was added in the second half:

- (11) ... *no ne razminirovali*_{IPFV/PFV} *polnost'ju*.
 '... but did not completely demine_{IPFV/PFV} it.'

Finally, in the third type, the failure of the attempt was paraphrased with a different verb:

- (12) ... *no ne našli*_{PFV} *vse x min*.
 '... but they did not find_{PFV} all the mines'.

In this way, a total of $6 \times 2 \times 2 \times 3 = 72$ sentences were obtained, 12 of which were presented to each test subject, in a pseudorandomized way so that each biaspectual verb and each aspect pair occurred once each. In addition, there were 24 D45 fillers taken from the Russian National Corpus, all of which also contained the words *no ... ne* 'but ... not' and half of which were manipulated so that they were logically contradictory or grammatically incorrect.

The respondents were asked to rate the sentences with grades between 5 and 1 (which also correspond to Russian school grades and were additionally highlighted with traffic light colors).⁹ For the evaluation, these scores were converted into a scale from +1 to -1, as shown in the following table. (Detailed results for the individual sentences can be viewed at <http://anketa.buncic.de/>.)

⁹ There was also a field for optional comments under each sentence, which was completed in 2.7% of the cases. The 423 comments submitted in this way provided information on whether the reasons for the negative evaluation of a sentence were actually to be found in the conative reading or whether individual sentences were perceived as problematic for other reasons. For example, there was a typo in one sentence, in sentences of the type *Palač Džona Li kaznil...* it was criticized that it was not possible to tell whether *Džona Li* was accusative or genitive, etc. To be on the safe side, a total of 13 of the 72 sentences were therefore not included in the statistics.

n ≥ 1731	Biaspectual verbs			Aspect pairs		
	bare	addition	paraphrase	bare	addition	paraphrase
+1.0	3%	6%	32%	30%	37%	51%
+0.5	4%	12%	21%	22%	25%	22%
±0.0	8%	17%	17%	19%	16%	14%
-0.5	15%	21%	14%	16%	12%	8%
-1.0	70%	45%	17%	13%	11%	5%
∅	-0.72	-0.43	+0.20	+0.20	+0.32	+0.53

As can be seen in this summary of the overall results, those sentences in which a biaspectual verb appears in both imperfective and perfective function are, as expected, judged very bad, while the corresponding sentences with aspect pairs show positive mean values. There is also a difference between biaspectual verbs and aspect pairs in the sentences with a paraphrase in the second part, albeit a much smaller one.

5.2 Second part: Contextless aspect determination

The second part of the questionnaire is much smaller. Here, the 6 biaspectual verbs from the first part were each embedded in a sentence that gave no indication of which time it referred to. Since the verbs were each in the ‘non-preterite’ form, their temporal meaning depended on the aspectual interpretation (cf. Čertkova & Čang 2016: 13): If the verb is interpreted as imperfective, this form has present tense meaning; if it is interpreted as a perfective, it is future tense. The task was to select one of three paraphrases that disambiguated the original sentence:

- (13) *Ělektrik izoliruet_{IPFV/PFV} kabel' izolentoj.*
 ‘The electrician insulates/is insulating/will insulate the cable with electrical tape ...’
- a) *Ělektrik sejčas zanimaetsja_{IPFV} izolaciej kabelja.*
 ‘The electrician is now dealing_{IPFV} with the insulation of the cable.’
- b) *Izoljacija kabelej javljaetsja_{IPFV} reguljarnoj zadačej elektrika.*
 ‘The insulation of cables is_{IPFV} a regular task of the electrician.’
- c) *Ělektrik skoro pridēt_{PFV}, čtoby obespečit' izoljaciju kabelja.*
 ‘The electrician will come_{PFV} soon to secure the insulation of the cable.’

Each respondent was presented with two of these sentences and four fillers, two of which contained an imperfective verb in the present tense and two of which contained a perfective verb in the future tense. The results are shown in the following table (where the answers for the present and habitual present tense are combined into one sum).

n ≥ 391	Present tense (→ IPFV)	Future tense (→ PFV)
<i>kaznit'</i> 'execute'	12%	88%
<i>razminirovat'</i> 'demine'	17%	83%
<i>identificirovat'</i> 'identify'	70%	30%
<i>likvidirovat'</i> 'liquidate'	80%	20%
<i>assimilirovat'sja</i> 'assimilate'	90%	10%
<i>izolirovat'</i> 'isolate/insulate'	94%	6%

A clear dichotomy can be seen here: While for the first two verbs more than four-fifths of the test subjects spontaneously tended towards the future-tense and therefore perfective-aspect interpretation, for the other four verbs more than two-thirds tended towards the present-tense and therefore imperfective-aspect reading. In other words: biaspectual does not equal biaspectual; obviously, some 'biaspectual' verbs are rather more imperfective and others are rather more perfective.

The fact that not all biaspectual verbs are completely biaspectual in all parts of the paradigm is, of course, nothing new. For example, *organizovat'*_{IPFV/PFV} 'organize' in the past tense can only be used as a perfective verb (Zaliznjak & Šmelëv 1997: 65), *ženit'sja*_{IPFV/PFV} 'marry' is only imperfective in the plural (ibid. 62), *arestovat'*_{IPFV/PFV} 'arrest' cannot form a *budu*-future, i.e. in the future tense it is exclusively perfective (Isačenko 1962: 354, §204.1), and *realizovat'*_{IPFV/PFV} cannot be combined with phase verbs (Čertkova & Čang 1998: 22f.). However, such 'gaps' in biaspectuality have so far only been explained by the existence of aspect partners (here: *organizovyvat'*_{IPFV}, *poženit'sja*_{PFV}, *arestovyvat'*_{IPFV}, and *realizovyvat'*_{IPFV}) that have already displaced the corresponding biaspectual verb in certain uses (and subsequently also penetrate other contexts; in the case of *arestovat'*_{IPFV/PFV}, Gorobec (2008: 53)—three decades after Isačenko—considers the imperfective use already obsolete). Maslov and Zel'dovič go a bit further by assuming that prefixed verbs (Maslov 1984: 87) and verba dicendi (Zel'dovič 2009: 279, 286f.) generally tend towards the perfective aspect.

However, the preference for a particular aspect that can be recognized here is of a different quality, since it is independent of the existence of an aspectual partner or membership in a particular morphological or semantic class and is obviously of a systematic nature.¹⁰ Even though the number of verbs tested is very small, this finding, together with what we have already seen, suggests that the tendency towards one of the two aspects is not a symptom of biaspectuality coming to an end, but is inherent in all biaspectual verbs from the very beginning. The "true biaspectuality" ("подлинная двувидовость") as such, which

¹⁰ Of the six verbs above, only *izolirovat'*_{IPFV/PFV} has an aspect partner in *zaizolirovat'*_{PFV} (cf. Gorobec 2008: 228–234), only *razminirovat'* is prefixed, and none is a verbum dicendi (not even *kaznit'* 'execute', cf. Zel'dovič 2009: 289).

Maslov (1984: 87) assumes to be the center of a scale between (rather) perfective and (rather) imperfective verbs, does not seem to exist.

5.3 Comparison of some individual results

The results of the first and second parts will be put into context using two examples. The first involves the verb *kaznit'* 'execute'. One of the two contexts reads *Preljubodejku kaznili_{IPFV/PFV}, no ne kaznili_{IPFV/PFV}* 'The adulteress was executed_{IPFV/PFV}, but not executed_{IPFV/PFV}' or *Preljubodejku zabivali_{IPFV} kamnjami, no ne zabilo_{PFV}* 'The adulteress was stoned_{IPFV}, but not stoned_{PFV}'. As an addition, *do smerti* 'to death' was inserted, the paraphrase was *no vdrug pojavilsja pervosvjaščennik, i ostanovil kazn'* 'but suddenly the high priest appeared and stopped the execution'. The following table shows the mean values of the ratings.

n ≥ 211	biaspectual verb	Aspect pair
bare	-0.85	+0.27
addition	-0.69	+0.41
paraphrase	-0.49	+0.59

▣48 Compared with the overall result given in Section 5.1, this individual result is downright exemplary: the values for the biaspectual verb are clearly negative throughout (even in the sentence with the paraphrase), the values for the aspect pair are clearly positive, the difference between the two values for all three sentence types is approx. 1.1—i.e. more than half of the overall scale. However, the verb tested here was also the one that 88% of the test subjects interpreted out of context as future tense, i.e. as perfective. And if it tends towards the perfective aspect, it is not surprising that it is less acceptable in a special function of the imperfective aspect.

The other example is the verb *izolirovat'* 'isolate/insulate', here in the context already mentioned in (3), *Bioximiki v laboratorii izolirovali_{IPFV/PFV} virus, no ne izolirovali_{IPFV/PFV} ego* 'The biochemists isolated_{IPFV/PFV} the virus in the lab, but did not isolate_{IPFV/PFV} it' and *Bioximiki v laboratorii opredeljali_{IPFV} virus, no ne opredelili_{PFV} ego* 'The biochemists determined_{IPFV} the virus in the lab, but did not determine_{PFV} it'. As an addition, *im ne udalos'...* 'they did not succeed...' was inserted, and *no bez rezul'tata, tak kak proba okazalas' zagrjaznënoj* 'but without result, as the sample was contaminated' was used as a paraphrase. The following table shows the mean values again.

n ≥ 209	biaspectual verb	aspect pair
bare	-0.72	+0.36
addition	-0.57	+0.28
paraphrase	+0.17	+0.44

While the two sentences with the repetition of the biaspectual verb are, as always, clearly unacceptable, the rating of the sentence containing the biaspectual verb *izolirovat'* in the first part and the paraphrase in the second part is above zero. The difference to the paired equivalent here is only 0.27—i.e. only a bit more than an eighth of the scale. To determine how significant these differences are, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was necessary. It showed that even this small difference is still highly significant ($p < 0.001$) but the effect is small ($\eta^2 = 0.03$) due to high variance.¹¹ It should be borne in mind that the word *izolirovat'* was spontaneously classified as imperfective by 94% of the test subjects. This may explain why the difference to the 'real' imperfective is so small in the sentences with the paraphrase. In contrast to *kaznit'*, the relatively bad rating of the sentences with a repeated biaspectual verb could possibly be due to the repetition of the verb in perfective function in the second part of the sentence rather than the conative function in the first part.

6. Synthesis: polysemy

Notwithstanding the rare use of the conative construction with 'but not', the questionnaire revealed that it is significantly less acceptable for all biaspectual verbs than for quasi-synonymous 'pure' imperfectives. This difference cannot be explained by the common theory according to which biaspectual verbs have homonymous aspectual forms, because there is no indication why the imperfective form of a biaspectual verb should function differently from the imperfective member of an aspectual pair. However, in contrast to Smith's (1997: 80) explanation of the French future tense, aspect neutrality is not the solution either, because Russian biaspectual verbs are, as the second part of the questionnaire has shown, either somewhat perfective or somewhat imperfective, i.e. by no means completely aspectually neutral.

The difference between the more perfective and the more imperfective biaspectual verbs is obviously part of the lexicon entry and should also be taken seriously by linguistics, lexicography and language didactics. Instead of *kaznit'* (PFV and IPFV) and *izolirovat'* (PFV and IPFV), dictionaries should therefore indicate such verbs as *kaznit'* (PFV; also IPFV) or *izolirovat'* (IPFV; also PFV) or similar.

The concept of α - and β -verbs, which goes back to Lehmann (1993), can therefore also be applied to biaspectual verbs:

¹¹ The high significance can be explained by the fact that the two mean values are based on 215 and 212 individual ratings, respectively, so that the result is easily replicable. The explained variance is denoted by $\eta^2 = 0.03$, i.e. 97% of the variance (the distribution across the five answer options) is due to random, individual, or in any case different reasons, and only 3% has anything to do with the verb selected. In the sentences with bare verb repetition, this value is still $\eta^2 = 0.45$ (a medium effect).

«Вид одного из партнеров всегда ближе к ЛАФ [лексической акциональной функции — D. B.], в то время как видо-вые функции другого (или других) основаны на рекатегоризации.»
(VARGOS 2011: 46)

“The aspect of one of the partners is always closer to the LAF [lexical actional function—D. B.], while the aspectual functions of the other (or others) are based on recategorization.”

Similarly, one of the aspects of biaspectual verbs is also closer to the lexical actional function (cf. Lehmann 1999: 227–229; VARGOS 2011: 28–29), i.e. to Vendler’s “situation type” that the lexical meaning of the verb expresses by default (Dickey 2000: 40–43). This aspect is its α -meaning, the other its β -meaning. Biaspectual verbs that denote processes or states are therefore α -imperfective; verbs that denote events are α -perfective. The β -meaning, i.e. the respective other aspect, is only possible in contexts that already make it sufficiently clear that the α -meaning is not meant. This is because, while in other verbs recategorization is expressed morphologically, in the case of biaspectual verbs it must be triggered by other linguistic means.

Speaking of two different meanings already shows that biaspectual verbs are not a case of homonymy, but of polysemy. They behave similarly to lexical polysemes, such as the word *noga* ‘leg’, which in its basic meaning denotes a human limb, but in the context of talking about a chair it can also represent a component of that chair. The relationship between the α - and β -meaning of biaspectual verbs is that of metaphor: if an imperfective expression for ‘execute’ is needed, the perfective expression for ‘execute’ (the verb *kaznit*) is used because of its similarity (which is already given because of the identical lexical meaning).

In this respect, biaspectual verbs differ from perfectiva tantum and imperfectiva tantum only in the fact that such metaphorical use is blocked in the latter: In contrast to *kaznit*_{IPFV/PFV}, a verb such as *zaplakat*_{PFV} ‘burst into tears’ cannot simply fill this function in the rare cases where this meaning is needed in the imperfective aspect (e.g. in habitual use or in the historical present) but must be replaced by a paraphrase such as *načinat*_{IPFV} *plakat*_{IPFV} ‘start to cry’.

The classification of biaspectual verbs as polysemes also explains why even those verbs that tend strongly towards the imperfective aspect allow the conative reading less than ‘pure’ imperfectives. The full functionality of aspect as a grammatical category only arises from the opposition between different aspectual forms. However, there is no opposition between the different meanings of one and the same polysemous sign (in Saussure’s sense).

7. Why are biaspectual verbs biaspectual?

Two main reasons are generally given for biaspectuality: On the one hand, biaspectual verbs are seen as remnants of older language stages or a temporary phe-

nomenon in the borrowing process. The formation of aspectual partners and ‘monoaspectualization’ (cf. *odnovidovoj*, Maslov 1984: 87) is seen as an element of integration into the Modern Russian grammatical system. On the other hand, morphological obstacles are identified (cf. *ibid.* 69f.; Gorobec 2008: 52): The unstressed suffix *-ovat’* does not allow suffixation with *-yva-* (cf. *obrazovat’*_{IPFV/PFV} → *obrazóvyvat’*_{IPFV} ‘form’, but *zaimstvovat’*_{IPFV/PFV} ‘borrow’ → **zaimstvovyvat’*_{IPFV}), and some lexical prefixes prevent further aspectual prefixation (cf. *kodirovat’*_{IPFV/PFV} → *zakodirovat’*_{PFV} ‘encode’, □51 but *perekodirovat’*_{IPFV/PFV} ‘recode’ → **zaperekodirovat’*_{PFV}).¹² However, this does not explain why many unprefixated biaspectual verbs ending in *-ovat’* do not form an aspectual partner by prefixation.

Gennadij Zel’dovič (2009) therefore attempts to find a semantic commonality. Based on the *verba dicendi*, which he regards as the “prototype of the biaspectual verb” (“прототипом двувидового глагола”, *ibid.* 287), he claims that in all biaspectual verbs the actants must be obligatorily specified, i.e. they can only denote a very specific situation, which partially neutralizes the opposition between uniqueness and multiplicity, since such a specific situation does not usually repeat (*ibid.* 296). According to Zel’dovič (2009: 315f.), this greater specificity means that biaspectual verbs are ‘more binding’ than quasi-synonymous paired verbs. Therefore, the following sentences, among others, are better with a ‘normal’ perfective verb than with a biaspectual one:

- (14) *Načal’nik prikazal_{PFV}/velel_{IPFV/PFV} prinesti dokumentaciju, no niko ne pošeloxnulsja.*
‘The boss commanded_{PFV}/ordered_{IPFV/PFV} to bring the documentation, but nobody stirred.’ (Zel’dovič 2009: 317)
- (15) *V delo vložili_{PFV}/investirovali_{IPFV/PFV} million dollarov, no zakončit’ stroitel’stvo ne smogli.*
‘A million dollars was put_{PFV}/invested_{IPFV/PFV} into the project, but the construction work could not be completed.’ (*ibid.*)
- (16) *Čas nazad ob’javili_{PFV}/?anonsirovali_{IPFV/PFV} novuju peredaču, da tut že i otmenili.*
‘An hour ago a new program was advertised_{PFV}/??announced_{IPFV/PFV} but immediately canceled again.’ (*ibid.* 316)

However, the information on the acceptability of these sentences seems to be based purely on introspection. I therefore also asked about these sentences in the first part of my online survey (with each questionnaire containing two of these sentences and four more fillers). The mean values of the ratings are shown in the following table.

¹² In the online survey, however, some respondents disregarded these restrictions and suggested ‘improvements’ for the sentences presented, including **assimilirovyvat’*, **razmini-rovyvat’* and ?*dorazminirovat’*.

n ≥ 424	perfective verb	biaspectual verb
(14)	+0.18	+0.27
(15)	+0.91	+0.88
(16)	+0.61	+0.56
∅	+0.57	+0.57

□ 52 According to the comments made, the low values for sentence (14) are clearly due to the somewhat unusual verb *pošeloxnut'sja* 'stir'. An analysis of variance shows that the differences between the perfective and the biaspectual verb are neither significant nor meaningful ($p > 0.1$; $\eta^2 < 0.01$), both in the individual sentences and overall—despite the large amount of data involved. Zel'dovič's theory therefore appears to have no empirical basis, at least in the sub-area examined.

As far as the biaspectual verba dicendi are concerned, one may indeed assume a semantic reason for the biaspectuality, which has something to do with the performative character of these words. However, other explanations are needed for the entire set of biaspectual verbs.

One approach to such an explanation could lie in the α - and β -meanings of biaspectual verbs. By determining which aspect represents the α - and which the β -meaning, one ought to be able to make predictions about the formation of aspect partners: it can be assumed that aspect partners are only formed for the β -meaning of biaspectual verbs.¹³ However, the formation of such a verb may be morphologically blocked if an α -perfective verb ends in unstressed *-ovat'*, which does not allow the formation of an imperfective β -verb with *-yva-*, or if an α -imperfective verb already has a prefix that prevents the formation of a perfective β -verb with another prefix. This could explain why some biaspectual verbs form aspect partners very quickly and become 'monoaspectual' over time, while others steadily remain biaspectual.

This explanation of biaspectuality based on the analysis of biaspectual verbs as polysemes would combine a semantic factor (the lexical actional function of the verb) and a formal factor (a morphological obstacle against the formation of the corresponding β -partner) and would thus do better justice to the nature of biaspectuality than purely formal or purely semantic explanations.

¹³ An example also found in VARGOS (see above) is the β -partner *obrazovyvat'*_{IPFV} of the α -verb *obrazovat'*_{IPFV/PFV} 'form'. As with aspectual pairs, there are of course also 'diffuse' α/β -verbs (cf. *ibid.* 38–39). This could explain why some biaspectual verbs at least occasionally form both an imperfective and a perfective aspect partner, such as *organizovat'*_{IPFV/PFV}, for which there is (normatively) the imperfective β -partner *organizovyvat'* as well as (today rather colloquially and not in all meanings) the perfective partner *sorganizovat'* (Čertkova & Čang 1998: 24). Of course, 'anti-iconic' cases in which the α -verb is morphologically marked and the β -partner is unmarked also occur here as well as in paired verbs (Lehmann 1993: 288–293), e.g. *poprivetstvovat'*_{PFV} vs. *privetstvovat'*_{IPFV/PFV} 'greet, welcome'.

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