

## **Lumping Readings or Splitting Meaning?** Olav Mueller-Reichau (University of Leipzig)

A Russian imperfective verbform can be used to express a great variety of meanings (traditionally called "častnye vidovye značeniija"). In order to account for this diversity of uses there are in principle two ways to go. On the one hand, one might want to formulate an invariant meaning associated with the imperfective gram and explain the diversity of uses of imperfective verbforms by mechanisms of contextual information enrichment of this invariant core meaning. This is the traditional solution advocated e.g. in the Academy Grammar 1980:

Častnye vidovye značeniija - èto "značeniija, vyražajemye ne vidom samim po sebe, a vidom v sočetanii s kontekstom" (Grammatika 1980:104)

On the other hand, one might want to explain the observed diversity by presupposing a certain sort of ontological repartition of the "semantic space" associated with the imperfective verb form. From this perspective, one and the same form may express two (or more) different meanings, because it "covers" two (or more) different semantic domains. This is the solution argued for for example by Plungian 1997:

[N]eredko v glagol'noj sisteme konkretnogo jazyka (slavjanskije sistemy kak raz i javljajutsja takim charakternym slučajem), odin i tot že pokazatel' beret na sebja cel'nyj rjad aspektual'nyh funkcij; èto sozdaet illuziju "nediskretnosti", "nerazčlennosti" vida i vyzyvaet soblazn govorit' o kategorii "vida voobščee" s krajne razmytym semantičeskim soderžaniem. (Plungian 1997:174)

Recently, Paslawska/von Stechow made a similar proposal, distinguishing between "morphological aspects" and "semantic aspects". According to their view, the morphological imperfective aspect selects for a number of different semantic aspects, leading to the observed semantic polyfunctionality of the form.

Which of the two is the better way to go? Lumping all imperfective readings under one invariant meaning or splitting the meaning of the imperfective up into different semantic aspects? I want to argue that both positions are right. A number of readings can easily be traced back to an underlying semantic component that they share with each other, their differentiation arising due to contextual factors. Others, however, are better explained in terms of grammatical polysemy. In the talk I want to focus on the problematic cases of verbforms denoting, as they are often called, "atemporal" situations.

U vnevremennyh situacij značenie NSV ne układyvaetsja v invariant. Odnako èto ne brosaet teni na invariant, poskol'ku invariant dolžen sochranjat'sja dlja tech upotreblenij grammemy, kotorye vchodjat v oblast' opredelenija dannoj grammatičeskoj kategorii. Meždu tem vnevremennye situacii ne vchodjat v oblast' opredelenija kategorii vida (Paduceva 1996:26)

In a side remark, Filip makes virtually the same claim:

Morphologically nonderived verb stems tend to be imperfective. A large class of these is constituted by static state (individual-level) verbs, that is, verbs denoting non-temporary states of individuals. Static state verbs have no corresponding derived perfective counterparts at all [...]. The aspectual opposition is neutralized in the case of static state verbs, which can be motivated on semantic grounds. (Filip 1999:201)

Another proponent of the idea of a "neutralization" of the canonical aspectual distinction in these cases is Mehlig. According to him, in inactual contexts the imperfective form of a Russian verb is chosen as a "genus proximum". The semantic contrast between imperfective verbs and their perfective counterparts is supposed to be defined in terms of conditions of actual contexts only (cf. Mehlig 1981 and to appear).