Contrary to Old Russian (OR), which had an elaborate tense system –aorist, imperfect, and periphrastic perfect (ex. 1) –, contemporary standard Russian (CSR) has no dedicated perfect form using an auxiliary and a past participle. Instead, the OR perfect (in –l) followed the common “perfective path” of grammaticalization (Bybee et al. 1994) and took over the functions of the old synthetic forms, becoming a generalized past for each perfective (PFV) and imperfective (IMPFV) verb. However, many linguists have tried to defend the existence of a functional category “perfect” for CSR: for Maslov (1987), the term “perfektnost’” (“perfecthood”) is a “semantic category … that is characterized by temporal duality, by the conjunction in one predicative relation, of two temporal planes: preceding and following.” (426). Maslov then goes on to define two types of “perfektnost’”: “explicit” and “implicit”. (428) The explicit type is illustrated by means of the passive participle in -n/-t (ex. 2, 3), generally called the Šaxmatov (1941) participle; it will not be dealt with here.

Our main focus will be Maslov’s “implicit” perfect. As verbal aspect is strongly morphologised in Russian, analyzing the expression of the implicit perfect comes down to deciding which of the PFV or IMPFV past for any given verb has that function. And that is where difficulties begin, because even in those languages that do have an explicit perfect form (e.g., the English Present Perfect, EPP), that form is notoriously polysemous, as it is generally thought to express at least four main senses (McCawley 1971). Concerning the “implicit” Russian perfect, for Paillard (1979), the “parfait” is exclusively realized by the past PFV verb, whereas for Fontaine (1983), it is the IMPFV past that has the perfect value because of its “commenting” function in the speaker’s “universe of enunciation.” (156).

The research question this poses is: even if a comparative analysis based on corpus counts of forms in translated texts will reveal general trends, it does not prove or disprove the existence of a semantic category “perfect” in Russian. Rather, verb forms are the product of diachronic and idiosyncratic developments and as a consequence, they display strong language-specific features. As noted by Bybee & al. (1984), even if we observe “similar discourse functions” for given forms expressing a similar notion (e.g., the perfect), the diachronic source is still felt in these forms. For a majority of authors (Maslov 1987, Bondarko 1971, Hulanicki 1973, Leinonen 1982, Paslawska & von Stechow 2003), the PFV verb (ex. 4, 5, 6a), which has its source in prefixal formations and only one past form, always retains a strong resultative terminative flavor and functions as an aorist as much as a (resultative) perfect, and any explicit current relevance effect are merely contextually implied. The past IMPFV verb has a General Factual Imperfective (Comrie 1976) convention of use attached to it, that generally negates current relevance effects, explaining why uttered out of the blue, IMPFV pasts in examples (6b) and (7) are likely to have experiential meaning only, contrary to PFV pasts, but there are notable exceptions (ex. 8).

Therefore, uncovering a “perfect” semantic function (Maslov’s “perfektnost’) transposed from English to Russian has only limited interest; instead, the present paper seeks to point to some striking similar discourse functions fulfilled by some Russian PFV and IMPFV past forms and the EPP. The latter, besides its language-specific temporal semantics found in the Universal Perfect (Mc Cawley 1971), has developed important pragmatic functions having to do with topicality (Inoue 1979, Portner 2003): in (ex.9), the EPP has an “information management role” (Portner 2003: 501) in the conversation, whereby the speaker provides an answer to the topic question asked in the common ground (“the speaker’s offer to stay on or not”). Likewise, in (ex. 10), the IMPFV past occurs after a first occurrence of a resultative PFV past: the IMPFV serves to answer speaker B’s question, is directly relevant to speaker B’s discourse topic, confirming the presupposition (“Is that fish the one you ordered?”). The notions of topic and presupposition will be given a more precise definition.

1 We find the same definition of anteriors (or perfects) in Bybee et al. (1994): “the situation occurs prior to reference time and it relevant to the situation at reference time.” (54)
2 As in Matveeva 1978, who counted the occurrences of all PP forms contained in H.G. Wells’s Invisible Man into Russian PFV or IMPFV pasts.
The present study will thus avoid positing a semantic perfect category with clear boundaries, but will rather carry out language-specific analyses and focus on a comparative study of the EPP form and the Russian IMPFV verb forms that seem to perform similar specific communicative functions, albeit with unavoidable language-specific differences having to do with the morphological presence (for English) vs. absence (for Russian) of a present-tense morpheme in the forms under scrutiny.

**EXAMPLES:**

1. Muža tvoego oubi-x-om’, bjaše bo muž tvoi volk vosxiščaja i grabja.
   husband your-ACC kill-AOR.1PL for husband your like wolf robbing and plundering
   A naši knjazi dobri sut’, iže raspa-l-i sut’ derev’sku zemljju.
   But our princes good are who cultivate-PTCP.PL be-AUX.PL dereva land
   “We killed your husband, for your husband was like a wolf, robbing and plundering. But our princes are good, who have cultivated the land of Dereva.” (Olga’s Revenge, from the Primary Chronicle, 12th c.)

2. Stol nakry-t.
   table cover-PTCP.M
   “The table is / has been laid.”

3. Pis’mo napisa-n-o.
   letter write-PTCP.N
   “The letter is / has been written.”

4. A počemu seno ubran-o i namok-l-o? (Gor’kij)
   but why hay harvest-PTCP.N and get-wet-PFV.PST.N
   But why is the hay harvested and getting wet (lit., “got wet”)?

5. I ved’ znat, čem eë prel’stit’: tabakerku ej podar-i-l (Turgenev)
   and PART. he-knows with-what her seduce: snuff-box to-her give-PFV.PST.3SG.M
   “He knows how to seduce her: he has given her a snuff-box.”

6a. Ja uže s-kosi-l travu
   I already mow-PFV.PST.M lawn
   “I’ve already mowed the lawn.” (implied: “the lawn looks nice now.”)

6b. Ja uže kosí-l travu
   I already mow-IMPFV.PST.M lawn
   “I’ve already mowed the lawn.” (implied: “so I don’t have to / don’t ask me to, do it again.”)

7. Ja i ran’še slyša-l o takix slučajax
   I even before hear-IMPFV.PST..M about such cases
   “I’ve heard of such things before.”

8. Ty ‘OTKRYVA-L okno, ili ono samo otvorilos’?
   open-IMPFV.PST..M window or it itself open-PFV.PST.REFL
   “Did you open the window, or did it open by itself?” (NB: strong stress on otkryval; implied: the window is still open).

9) “John McSherry's mother-in-law died yesterday afternoon. The funeral's the day after tomorrow. It's a bloody nuisance.”

McSherry was one of the doctors in his group. “But you don't have to go to the funeral of McSherry's mother-in-law.”

“Wait a minute.” She heard the familiar irritation in his voice. “John's wife is laid up, she has a heart condition, you know. Anyway, I offered to hold on here for three more days to let him get things squared away at home.”

“But why does it have to be you? What about Con Cullen, he could do McSherry's work, couldn't he?”

“I've already offered to do it.” [B. Moore, TDSW]

10) On sel jiadom s Varej.
   - Ničevo ne zakaza-l-i, - opределil Kostja. (…)
   nothing not we.order-PFV.PST.PL
- Kak nazyvaetsja èta ryba? – sprosil Kostia ou Vari i predupreždajušë podnjal palec.
- Vy ved’ zakazyva-l-i karpa, - otvetila Varia, - on i est’, po-vidimomu.

He sat down next to Varia.
“Didn’t order anything,” said Kostia.
“What’s the name of that fish ?” – Kostia asked Varia, raising a menacing finger.
“Since you’ve ordered a carp,” she replied, “this must be it.”

REFERENCES: