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Aspects of conativity in Russian: towards a linguistics of attempt and success

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Abstract: The psychological notion ‘conation’ refers to “the element in psychological processes that tends towards activity or change and appears as desire, volition, and striving” (CED). Similarly, the term ‘conative’ figures also in linguistics, where it has been used in a variety of ways (see Vincent 2013 for an overview), among them as a label for the addressee-oriented function of language (Jakobson 1992 [1960]) as instantiated, e.g., by vocatives and imperatives, and as identifying “morphemes or constructions in which there is a sense of trying” (Vincent 2013: 284). This latter understanding is central for the present paper, which focuses on the *konativnoe značenie* ‘conative reading’ of the Russian *ipfv1* aspect and conation as expressed by verbs of trying. Particular attention will be paid to the semantic conditions and pragmatic mechanism based on which the conative reading may arise. To this end, the lexical and event semantic properties of conative verbs and verbs of trying will be systematised and embedded into philosophical considerations on the nature of intention, attempt and action. This helps to elucidate the regularities underlying the linguistic expression of conation and provides a basis for further investigations on the linguistics of attempt at the semantics-pragmatics interface and in the context of closely related domains such as (anti-)resultativity (in the sense of Plungjan 2001) and the intersection of ability and modality. The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 introduces examples illustrating the linguistic expression of conativity in Russian, which is imbedded in a more general discussion concerning the relation of intention, attempt and success in section 3. Section 4 elaborates a semantic description of verbs allowing for a conative interpretation and of verbs of trying. This provides the basis for the comparison of implicit and explicit conativity in section 5. Section 6 offers a short outlook, embedding the topic of conativity into a broader context.

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Aspects of conativity in Russian: towards a linguistics of attempt and success

1 Introduction

The psychological notion ‘conation’ refers to “the element in psychological processes that tends towards activity or change and appears as desire, volition, and striving” (CED). Similarly, the term ‘conative’ figures also in linguistics, where it has been used in a variety of ways (see Vincent 2013 for an overview), among them as a label for the addressee-oriented function of language (Jakobson 1992 [1960]) as instantiated, e.g., by vocatives and imperatives, and as identifying “morphemes or constructions in which there is a sense of trying” (Vincent 2013: 284). This latter understanding is central for the present paper, which focuses on the *konativnoe značenie* ‘conative reading’ of the Russian ipfv¹ aspect and conation as expressed by verbs of trying. Particular attention will be paid to the semantic conditions and pragmatic mechanism based on which the conative reading may arise.

To this end, the lexical and event semantic properties of conative verbs and verbs of trying will be systematised and embedded into philosophical considerations on the nature of intention, attempt and action. This helps to elucidate the regularities underlying the linguistic expression of conation and provides a basis for further investigations on the linguistics of attempt at the semantics-pragmatics interface and in the context of closely related domains such as (anti-)resultativity (in the sense of Plungjan 2001) and the intersection of ability and modality.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 introduces examples illustrating the linguistic expression of conativity in Russian, which is imbedded in a more general discussion concerning the relation of intention, attempt and success in section 3. Section 4 elaborates a semantic description of verbs allowing for a conative interpretation and of verbs of trying. This provides the basis for the comparison of implicit and explicit conativity in section 5. Section 6 offers a short outlook, embedding the topic of conativity into a broader context.

1 ipfv = imperfective (aspect), pfv = perfective (aspect).

2 The data

In Russian, conativity – the conceptual domain of attempt and success – can be expressed by various linguistic means, among them one particular interpretation of the ipfv aspect. This ‘conative interpretation’ is commonly illustrated by examples such as (1), where the ipfv *ubeždal* is interpreted as ‘attempt to convince’:

- (1) a. *On ubeždal ee, no ne ubedil.*
 he convince.IPFV.PST her but not convince.PFV.PST
 ‘He tried to convince her, but did not succeed’
 (Durst-Andersen 1992: 161)
- b. *Tak ona sebja ubeždala, no nikak ubedit’ ne mogla*
 so she herself convince.IPFV.PST but in.no.way
 convince.PFV.INF not can.IPFV.PST
 ‘That is how she tried to convince herself, but she could not succeed in no way.’ (NKRJa)
- c. *Ja dolgo ubeždal, i nakonec ubedil*
 I long.time convince.IPFV.PST and in.the.end convince.PFV.PST
ego pisat’ i o detstve
 him write.IPFV.INF also about childhood
 ‘For a long time I tried to convince him to write also about his childhood, and finally succeeded in doing so.’ (NKRJa)

As Glovinskaja (2001: 103) points out, this particular interpretation arises for verbs that are part of an aspectual pair which is characterized by the relation ‘acting to achieve some goal’ (ipfv) vs. ‘goal realized’ (pfv) (“dejstvovat’ s cel’ju” vs. “cel’ realizovana”).

The meaning of attempt can also be expressed in an explicit way by verbs of trying, such as *pytat’sja*, cf. (2):

- (2) *Pytalas’ tam popast’ na koncert ‘Depeche mode’*
 try.IPFV.PST there to.get.PFV.INF to concert Depeche mode
 ‘She tried there to get in to the concert of Depeche Mode.’ (NKRJa)

In addition to the conative interpretation and the ‘analytical’ expression of attempt by verbs of trying, Mustajoki (2005: 235) lists ‘suppletive’ means. As example of the latter he cites *učastvovat’ v konkurse* ‘to take part in a competition’, cf. (3), assuming that here, too, an attempt is suggested:

- (3) *Ja togda učastvoval v konkurse na éto mesto.*
 I back.then take.part.PST.IPFV in competition.PRP for this position
 ‘Back then, I took part in the competition for that position.’
 (Mustajoki 2005: 235)

What examples (1)–(3) share is the explicit or implicit expression of a goal-directed action for which the activity part is interpreted as ‘attempt’ and the goal as ‘success’. To a considerable part, the attempt interpretation hinges on the contextually given assertion or negation of this success. In (1), it is conveyed by means of the (negated) corresponding pfv verb, whereas for (2) and (3) it is provided by further context, see (2’) and (3’):

- (2’) *Ne popala lišnie bilety byli dorogi [...]*
 not get.in.PFV.PST remaining tickets were.PL expensive.PL
 ‘She did not get in, the remaining tickets were expensive.’ (NKRJa)
- (3’) *[...] i u menja byli vse šansy, i ty éto znaeš’.*
 and at me were all chances, and you this know.PRS.2SG
A začem togda byl ves’ étot užas [...]
 but what.for back.then was all this horror
 ‘I had all chances, and you know that. But why was there all this horror back then?’ (NKRJa)

These examples comply with Vincent’s (2013: 284) observation that speakers often “refer to the attempt when it was unsuccessful”, which leads him to assume “a frequent association of trying with non-completion”. At any rate, the close relation between attempt and success is the defining feature of conativity and the linguistic means serving its expression.

3 Attempt and success

Padučeva (2004b: 38) defines ‘conative verbs’ as verbs for which the components of attempt and success are characteristic, with grammatical aspect playing a crucial role in their actualisation in a given utterance:

U konativov dejstvie sostoit kak by iz dvux častej – popytki i uspexa. Inymi slovami, konativy – éto glagoly, kotorye v nesov. vide oboznačajut popytki dostić rezul’tat, sr. *ubeždat’* [...]. Otsjuda svojstvo konativov – prezumpcija popytki v otricateľ’nom kontexte: *ne ubedil* ⊃ ‘ubeždal’, t.e. ‘pytalsja ubedit’.

[With conatives, the action consists, as it were, of two parts – attempt and success. In other words, conatives are verbs, which in the ipfv aspect denote the attempt to achieve a result, cf. *ubeždat* ‘convince’. Based on this is a property of conatives, the presumption of attempt arises in a negated context: *ne ubedil* ‘did not convince_{ipfv}’ \supset ‘ubeždal’ ‘convinced_{ipfv}’, i.e. ‘tried to convince’.]

This tight link between attempt and failure/success calls for a closer investigation of the nature of ‘attempt’ and its relation to intentions on the one hand, and actions on the other. On this basis, the linguistic expression of conation, i.e. the properties of conative verbs and their relation to verbs of trying (see Padučeva’s paraphrase *pytalsja ubedit*), can be described more precisely.

3.1 Intention, attempt and action

Intentions as mental states differ from attempts, which are mental processes. As Lorini and Herzig (2008: 50) emphasise, “*trying to do a* is more than the disposition of intending to do *a* now”, that is, an attempt “already refers to the initiation of the basic action performance”. Importantly, *trying to do x* presupposes the intention to do *x* – “the entity named by the subject [has to] bear an intention relative to the given event description” (Grano 2011: 438). While ‘future-oriented intentions’ concern some later action, ‘present-oriented intentions’ pertain to the here and now, i.e. “when the time point of the planned action execution is attained” (Lorini and Herzig 2008: 51–52). This type of intentions is basic to the process of trying, which “consists in an agent exerting voluntary control over the initiation and the execution” (2008: 52) of an action.

Trivially, any intentional activity presupposes an attempt. Intentional actions fully controlled by the agent “are always executed when the agent attempts to perform them and the preconditions for action execution hold” (Lorini 2006: 2). However, this default holds for ‘basic actions’ only; it does not hold for ‘complex actions’. Their successful execution depends on specific external or internal circumstances. Moreover, in order to carry out a complex action *x*, one or more different actions *y* have to be executed (e.g. baking a cake calls for various other actions to be performed). This in turn requires a specific, more complex type of mental activity on part of the agent which is not necessary for basic actions, in particular knowledge about cause and effect relations. These two aspects of non-basic, complex actions are summarized by Lorini and Herzig (2008: 49) as follows:

[W]hen an agent intends to do some *non-basic action x*, he necessarily intends to do a different action *y* in order to do *x*. Thus, as far as the mental aspect of non-basic actions is

concerned: if action x is non-basic for agent i , i can intend to do x only if he has a cause-and-effect knowledge of the way he can do x . As far as the executive aspect of a non-basic action is concerned: if an agent does a non-basic action x , he necessarily does x by doing a different action y [...]. This means that a non-basic action is an action that is performed by way of one or more actions.

The distinction of basic and complex actions in terms of the mental and the executive aspect is linguistically relevant in that it underlies the regularities involved in the conative interpretation of particular verbs and the differences of this interpretation to verbs of trying.

3.2 Linguistic expression of conation

As regards the linguistic expression of attempt, Goldberg (1995: 63–64) identifies a ‘conative construction’ of the form ‘X DIRECTS ACTION AT Y’, as in (4):

- (4) a. *Ethel struck at Fred.*
 b. *Ethel shot at Fred.*

Here the verb designates the intended result of the action; that is “Ethel does not necessarily strike Fred”, instead “striking him is the intended result of the directed action” (Goldberg 1995: 63). Such constructions are outside the scope of the present paper, which focuses on the expressions listed in section 2.

Forsyth’s (1970: 71) paraphrase of the conative interpretation as “a conscious attempt to perform an action” suggests this type of attempt to be related to a complex action (see section 3.1). Here, the ipfv aspect may “require a different translation equivalent from that of the perfective past tense” (1970: 71), as in (5):

- (5) *Oni ne ugovorili ee ujtī s nimi, xotja*
 they neg persuade.PFV.PST her go.away with them although
dolgo ugovarivali.
 long.time persuade.IPFV.PST
 ‘They didn’t succeed in persuading her to go away with them, although they spent a long time trying to.’ (Forsyth 1970 : 71)

This “additional meaning” of attempt for the ipfv verb arises “from contrast with the unambiguous meaning of the perfective”, which in certain cases embraces not only the totality of an event, but also “its ‘successful’ conclusion” (Forsyth 1970: 49). Frequently, this successful conclusion is explicitly denied in the

context (see section 2), e.g. by the negated pfv as in (1). In (6), the negation of success is expressed more overtly with *ne mogla rešit* ‘was not able to determine’, whereas in (7) it is left more implicit:

- (6) *Sidja odna doma, myslenno vzvešivala i*
 sit.ADV.PTCP alone at.home in.her.mind ponder.IPFV.PST and
rešala: ljubov' éto ili ne ljubov'? I ne
 determine.IPFV.PST love this or neg love and neg
mogla rešit' [...]
 be.able.IPFV.PST decide.PFV.PST
 ‘Sitting at home, she was pondering and trying to determine: is this love
 or no love? And she was not able to determine [it].’ (NKRJa)
- (7) *potom dooolgo [sic] revela, drug uspokaival menja po*
 then long cry.IPFV.PST friend calm.IPFV.PST me at
telefonu i utverždal, čto ja ne takaja no ja-to
 phone and affirm.IPFV.PST that I neg such but I-emph
znaju, čto éto ne tak
 know.PRS.1SG that this neg so
 ‘After that I cried for a long time, my friend tried to calm me on the phone
 and affirmed that I am not such a person, but, after all, I know that it is
 not like that.’ (NKRJa)

The conative interpretation is often regarded as a specific variant of the actual-processual reading of the ipfv aspect:

S nesov. vidom svjazana konativnaja raznovidnost' [...] konkretnoprocessnogo tipa upotreblenija: konkretnyj process predstavlen kak stremlenie, napravlennnoe na dostiženie celi, kak popytka. Posledujuščij kontekst ukazyvaet na bezuspešnost' ili uspešnost' étoj popytki [...].
 (RG 1980: § 1441)

[Related to the ipfv aspect is the conative variety of the concrete-processual usage type: a concrete process is imagined as striving, directed to the reaching of a goal, like an attempt. The following context points towards the failure or success of this attempt.]

This assumption is supported by the quite frequent oscillation between the conative and the processual interpretations. In (8), *rešala primery* can have both

readings, with a slight preference for the former, which is less likely for *pisala teksty* and not at all likely for *delala ošibki*.²

- (8) *Sama pisala teksty, rešala, primery,*
 on.my.own write.IPFV.PST texts solve.IPFV.PST examples
delala ošibki i sama že ix potom
 make.IPFV.PST mistakes and on.my.own emph them then
ispravjala
 correct.IPFV.PST
 ‘I was writing (tried to write) texts on my own, tried to solve examples, (repeatedly) made mistakes and corrected (tried to correct) them afterwards.’ (NKRJa)

However, even for ‘prototypical’ conative verbs as *rešat* ‘to solve, to decide’, the contrast between attempt and (un)successful performance is not present in all contexts (see also Forsyth 1970: 49). A case in point is (9), where the processual interpretation seems the most likely option:

- (9) *V rukax u nego byl „Ogonek“, on rešal crossword.*
 in hands at him was Ogonek he solve.IPFV.PST crossword
 ‘In his hands, he had the *Ogonek*, he was solving a crossword.’ (NKRJa)

To sum up, the conative interpretation suggests an attempt to carry out a complex action and thereby reach some goal. It tends to be triggered by contextual indications of failure/success and does not mandatorily arise.

² The same holds for other predicates denoting (the progress towards) a presumably undesired result, such as *proigrat* ‘to lose (a game)’ – unless, of course, exactly this result is aimed at, e.g. in betting fraud or extraordinary circumstances as in (i):

- (i) *[D]va dnja pytalsja proigrat’ 20 tys. tenge. Ne smog – v itoge vse prosto propil.*
 ‘For two days I have been trying to gamble away 20 thousand Tenge. I was not able to – in the end, I wasted it all on drinking.’
 (<http://horde.me/Predictorkz/moy-opyt-v-azartnyh-igrah.html>, 12.1.2016)

Note that for these predicates the potential reading of the ipfv is highly improbable, too. Moreover, if combined with *moč* ‘to be able’, an epistemic interpretation is more likely than a dynamic interpretation (see Sonnenhauser 2008). How exactly the conative and the potential interpretations and, more generally, conativity and modality, are related, remains to be investigated (see section 6).

4 Trying and (not) succeeding

In order to be more precise on the semantic conditions underlying the emergence of the conative interpretation, it needs to be asked whether it is possible to capture a group of ‘conative verbs’ not only extensionally, by enumerating examples, but also intensionally, in terms of identifying shared features. Moreover, the semantics of verbs of trying has to be specified in order to compare both possibilities of expressing conativity.

4.1 Conative verbs

As has been shown in section 3, the conative interpretation can neither be ascribed to the contribution of aspect alone nor be regarded as a permanent feature of specific verbs (as pointed out also by Mustajoki 2005: 235). Still, it is more likely for particular verbs than for others.

4.1.1 Features

Verbs allowing for the conative interpretation denote an activity leading to some result. In order for the activity to be – potentially – interpreted as attempt and the result as success, specific requirements need to be met by the internal and external arguments, and by the activity denoted.

The external argument has to be an intentional agent, as can be seen in (10a) vs. (10b): *umirat* ‘to die’ indicates the gradual approaching of an inherently given limit, but no attempt:

- (10) a. *on umiral ... nakonec on umer*
 he die.IPFV.PST finally he die.PFV.PF
 ‘he was dying ... finally, he died’ (Forsyth 1970: 49)
- b. *my dogonjali ego ... i nakonec dognali*
 we catch.up.IPFV.PST him and finally catch.up.PFV.PST
 ‘we tried to catch up with him ... and finally caught up’ (Forsyth 1970: 49)

However, a conative interpretation does not arise for all intentional verbs. One further requirement concerns the activity component, which has to be characterized by a lack of resources or antagonism by some counterpart, since only this may add to the reaching of the goal an element of success (Padučeva 2004a: 52).

Furthermore, the internal argument is in some way affected by the activity, but the ‘process in the object’ is not synchronous with the activity carried out by the agent (Padučeva 1996: 112).

These features characterise two groups of verbs that both denote a dynamic process and a result component, but differ as to which component they focus upon. This is implicit in Mustajoki’s (2005: 228) distinction of ‘dynamic conatives’, i.e. predicates with a dynamic meaning and an additional conative-modal phase, and ‘resultative conatives’, i.e. the predicates with a resultative-statal meaning that may be interpreted as success. Both types are coded by pairs of predicates (2005: 235): aspectual (ipfv – pfv), analytical (*try to P – P*) and suppletive (*učastvovat’ v konkurse – vyigrat’*) pairs.³ In a similar way, Padučeva (1996, 2004a,b, 2008) distinguishes *predel’nye konativy* ‘bounded conatives’, which are primary ipfv verbs, from *dostiženija* ‘attainments’, which are primary pfv verbs.

In the following discussion, these two types are referred to as ‘conative accomplishments’ and ‘conative achievements’.

4.1.2 Conative accomplishments

‘Conative accomplishments’ differ from other accomplishments by their specific activity component: the activity does not proceed in an ordinary way, consists of several sub-activities and is not simultaneous to the changes going on in the object.

Breu (1980) differentiates ‘conative’ from ‘terminative-resultative’ ipfv verbs according to the process leading to the result. This process is ‘straightforward’ for the latter but not the former. Glovinskaja (2001: 104) captures the specific character of the activity component of conative verbs by pointing out that the ipfv aspect here means “*dejstvovat’ opredelennym obrazom s cel’ju, čtoby v rezul’tate éтого dejstvija načala suščestvovat’ situacija*” [acting in a particular manner pursuing the objective that as a result of that action the situation starts to exist]. According to Forsyth (1970: 49), the activity asserted by a conative ipfv does not indicate “any real performance”.

Mehlig (2013: 68) notes that conative accomplishments are characterised by an inhomogeneous activity component consisting out of various actions that are not ordered in a particular way. This inhomogeneity impedes the bringing about of the result in a default manner. Consequently, the activity does not lead

³ Of course, the interlocutors have to be aware of this pairedness such that attempt and success can be inferred in the course of interpretation.

straightforwardly to the result and the relation between ‘ongoing process’ and ‘result’ is overlain by a relation of ‘attempt’ vs. ‘successful execution’ (Breu 1980: 170). This suggests some obstacles having to be overcome by particular efforts (Breu 1980 speaks of *Hemmfaktoren* ‘inhibiting factors’, Padučeva 2004a of *nedostatok ressursov* ‘lack of resources’) and only partial control on part of the agent concerning the intended result. These features of the activity component account for the fact that the process does not go hand in hand with changes in the object. Instead, the affectedness of the object sets in with some delay, as observed by Padučeva (1996: 112) and Mehlig (2013: 66).

This particular activity component is obvious in predicates such as *rešat* ‘to solve’ or *ubeždat* ‘to convince’. Here, several sub-activities need to be carried out in order to attain the intended result. Moreover, these sub-activities are not ordered in a particular way, which is the reason for why the result cannot be achieved in a default manner.

As shown by Mehlig (2013), the conative interpretation may also arise with complex activity accomplishments for which there is, as a default, a preferred order of sequences for their sub-activities. These predicates may receive a conative interpretation in contexts including some reference to success. In (11), *udalos*’ suggests an unusual manner of opening, by which the default sequence of sub-actions has been in need of change or some additional, non-typical sub-actions had to be applied.

- (11) – *Tebe udalos’ otkryt’ okno?*
 you succeed.REFL.PFV.PST open.PFV.INF window.ACC
 – *Ja ego otkryval desjat’ minut. Ničego ne polučilos’.*
 I it open.IPFV.PST ten minutes nothing neg result.REFL.PFV.PST
 – ‘Did you manage to open the window?’
 – ‘I tried for ten minutes to open it. Without any result.’ (Mehlig 2013: 67)

Upon activating this complex, non-prototypical activity component, *otkryvat* ‘to open’ (similarly also *perevodit* ‘to translate’ and others) may be perfectivised with the prefix *po-*, which then excludes the temporal delimitative interpretation (Mehlig 2013: 70–72), cf. (12):

- (12) *my pootkryvali, pootkryvali okno, i, nakonec,*
 we *po.open.IPFV.PST po.open.IPFV.PST* window.ACC and, in.the.end
ono otkrylos'
 it open.REFL.PFV.PST
 'we tried and tried to open the window and in the end it opened'
 (Mehlig 2013: 70)

Rothstein (2012: 91–93) draws a similar distinction between accomplishments with a lexically specified activity component and accomplishments with a general activity component. The activity component of the former, e.g. *read a book*, is homogeneous, i.e. consists of “an iteration of a minimal activity event” (2012: 91), whereas for the latter it is inhomogeneous, consisting “of a series of very different activities” (2012: 92). This latter class can be further subdivided according to whether the activity is strictly structured in a particular way (such as *open a window*) or less strictly structured (such as *build a house*). The distinction between accomplishments with a general and a lexically specified activity component is linguistically visible, in that the former may receive a ‘failed attempt interpretation’ with the delimitative prefix, see (13a) as opposed to a ‘partial success interpretation’ for the latter, see (13b):

- (13) a. *Vasja pootkryval dver' pjat' minut i brosil.*
 Vasja *po.open.PFV.PST* door.ACC five minutes.GEN and give.up.PFV.PST
 ‘Vasja tried to open the door for five minutes and gave up.’
 (Rothstein 2012: 97)
- b. *Vasja pozapolnjal anketu pjat' minut.*
 Vasja *po.fill.in.PFV.PST* form.ACC five minutes.GEN
 ‘Vasja spent five minutes filling in the form.’
 *‘Vasja tried to fill in the form for five minutes, (but hasn’t filled in a single entry).’ (Rothstein 2012: 98)

As has been shown on the example of (11), for predicates of the type *open a window* the strict structuring of the sub-activities can be loosened in particular contexts and a failed attempt interpretation becomes possible.

The overarching distinction between lexicalized and general activity components illustrates the linguistic relevance of the philosophical considerations presented in section 3: this distinction corresponds to the two types of actions – simple and complex – noted by Lorini and Herzig (2008). Only complex actions require intentional attempts to be carried out, only accomplishments coding a non-default activity component may receive a conative interpretation.

A non-default activity component is also involved in the second group of conative verbs, presented in section 4.1.3.

4.1.3 Conative achievements

As Padučeva (2004a: 38) points out, “[k]onativy est’ ne tol’ko sredi predel’nyx glagolov (takix kak *ubedit’*), no i sredi dejstvij s akcentom na rezul’tate” [conatives can be found not only among terminative predicates (such as *ubedit’* ‘convince’), but also among actions with a focus on the result]. The latter she calls *dostiženija* ‘attainments’, i.e. “dejstvi[ja] s akcentom na rezul’tate i s semantičeskim komponentom ‘udalos’” [actions with a focus on the result and a semantic component ‘succeeded’] (1996: 110–111). By this component, attainments constitute a sub-class of Vendlerian achievements, triggering specific inferences (indicated by ‘ \supset ’ in the following quote) under negation:

Dejstvija s akcentom na rezul’tate ne vse javljajutsja dostiženijami; tak, *najti*, *dostič’*, *vyigrat’* – èto konativy, t.e. dostiženija, a *priiti*, *poobeščat’* – net: *ne našel* \supset ‘iskal’, togda kak iz *ne prišel* ne sleduet ‘šel’.

(Padučeva 2004b: 38)

[Actions with a focus on the result are not in general attainments; that is, *najti* ‘find’, *dostič’* ‘reach’, *vyigrat’* ‘win’ are conatives, i.e. attainments, but *priiti* ‘arrive’, *poobeščat’* ‘promise’ are not: *ne našel* ‘he did not find’ \supset ‘he searched’, while from *ne prišel* ‘he did not come’ does not follow ‘he went’.]

While conative accomplishments are primary ipfv, attainments are primary pfv, with the corresponding derived ipfv denoting a *tendencija* ‘tendency’. These tendencies describe the left interval of some change of state, cf. *vyigryvat’* ‘(to be about) to win_{ipfv}’ or *pobeždat’*_{ipfv} ‘(to be about) to defeat’. Being derived from *dostiženija*, the semantics of which includes a component of ‘success’, *tendencija* appear in the context of incomplete control (Padučeva 1996: 111).

Padučeva’s ‘attainments’ resemble a class of right boundary achievements, for which Malink (2008) describes a specific kind of negation – ‘conative negation’. Under negation, these achievements presuppose an activity of trying, based on the inference of a left interval, i.e. an activity preceding the denoted endpoint.⁴

⁴ This analysis of conative right boundary achievements seems to be applicable also for Bavarian *Erfolgsverben* ‘verbs of success’ (term coined by Merkle 1976), which resemble conative accomplishments in several respects, most prominently in their behavior under negation (Sonnenhauser 2012).

Malink (2008: 152) illustrates this by the difference in negation in the present tense: while the ipfv negation implies an attempt (14a), pfv negation receives a prospective interpretation (14b):

- (14) a. *Petr nenachází svůj klíč* (Czech)
 Petr not.find.IPFV.PRS his key
 ‘Petr does not find his key’ (Malink 2008: 152)
- b. *Petr svůj klíč nenajde* (Czech)
 Petr his key not.find.PFV.PRS
 ‘Petr will not find his key.’ (Malink 2008: 152)

It is with respect to this left interval that “the imperfective aspectual properties are licensed” (Malink 2008: 156). The licensing of the ipfv due to the inference of a left interval is an important hint as towards the linguistic status of ‘attempt’: obviously, this interpretation is not contributed by aspect (see also section 5.3). Rather, aspect contributes its usual function and keeps the expected input requirements (ipfv: interval; pfv: boundary).

It can be seen from predicates like *leave* or *stop*, that not all right-boundary achievements are sensitive to conative negation, but merely those that “denote endpoints of a directed trying activity” (Malink 2008: 150). Since the left interval, i.e. the activity component, has to be inferred, it is not lexically specified and hence resembles the default activity component Rothstein (2012) observes for failed success accomplishment (see section 4.1.2). Right-boundary achievements sensitive to conativity are distinguished from other achievements by their specific activity component – as are conative accomplishments from resultative accomplishments. Thus the basic preconditions on the activity component are the same for both classes of verbs; what they differ in is the status of this activity as being semantically coded (accomplishments) or inferred (achievements).⁵ Therefore, they differ also in their interpretations, in that “conative negation readings suggest that the activity is going to be unsuccessful while the conative imperfect [i.e. ipfv accomplishments, BS] lacks this kind of implication” (Malink 2008: 155).

⁵ For the ‘suppletive type’ (see section 2), too, the conative component arises only under negation. Since there is no corresponding verbal partner, the attempt has to be lexically circumscribed in assertive sentences.

4.2 Verbs of trying

The most obvious way of expressing conativity is by means of verbs of trying, i.e. “glagoly s problematičeskim dostiženiem celi (rezul'tata)” [verbs involving the problematic achievement of some goal or result] (Šatunovskij 2015: 1).⁶ More precisely, “S nameren P⁷; S soveršæet dejstvija, kotoryie, vozmožno, vyzovut P” [S intends to P; S carries out actions, which possibly generate P] (Šatunovskij 1989: 162). Note the plural *dejstvija* ‘actions’, which suggests that the activity is complex and the result cannot be achieved by default.

Russian has various verbs of trying, among them *pytat'sja*, *probovat'* and *starat'sja* (see Apresjan 2003 for more details). Šatunovskij (2015: 2) differentiates them according to the factors that are decisive for the reaching of the result: *slučaj*, *udača* ‘chance, fortune’ for *(po)pytat'sja*, *uslovija* ‘conditions’ for *(po)probovat'* and *usilija* ‘efforts’ for *(po)starat'sja*. Hence, what these verbs share is some kind of *Hemmfaktor* ‘impeding factor’ as part of their semantics. Consequently, verbs of trying carry the presupposition ‘result partially controllable’ (Šatunovskij 1989: 162), whereas the action itself – or rather: the sum of actions to be executed in order to bring about the state of affairs described by the infinitival complement – is completely controlled by the agent:

S polnost'ju kontroliruet popytku (dejstvie), no častično – rezul'tat. Častično kontroliruemye P (imejuščie struktury: ‘kontroliruemoje dejstvie → častično kontroliruemyj rezul'tat’) oboznačajutsja glagolamy SV.

(Šatunovskij 1989: 163)

[The subject completely controls the attempt (activity) but only partially the result. Partially controllable states of affairs (having the structure ‘controllable activity → partially controllable result’) are denoted by pfv verbs.]

Apart from controllability there is no requirement concerning the internal structure of the verbal complements. That is, verbs of trying may freely combine with conative, (15) and non conative, (16), verbs:

⁶ Šatunovskij (2015) calls these verbs ‘conative verbs’. Here, they are referred to as ‘verbs of trying’ in order to distinguish them from those verbs that may, under specific contextual circumstances, allow for a conative interpretation.

⁷ Šatunovskij (1989, 2015) uses this symbol both for *položenie veščej* ‘state of affairs’ and proposition (see Šatunovskij 1989: 155). In the passages quoted here, it is understood as ‘state of affairs’.

- (15) *Galina Starovojstova pytalas' ubedit' svoix kolleg*
 G.S. try.IPFV.PST convince.PFV.INF her colleagues
v tom, čto nikakix muzykal'nyx trudnostej v rossijskom
 in this, that no musical difficulties in Russian
gimne ne suščestvuet.
 anthem neg exist
 'Galina Starovojstova tried to convince her colleagues that the Russian
 anthem does not contain any difficulties in music.' (NKRJa)
- (16) *Vse sideli za stolikami i pytalis' spat',*
 all sit.IPFV.PST at small.tables and try.IPFV.PST sleep.IPFV.INF
položiv golovu na ruki
 put.PFV.ADV.PTCP head.ACC on hands.ACC
 'All were sitting at the little tables and tried to sleep, having put the head
 on the hands.' (NKRJa)

This raises the question as to the difference between verbs of trying and 'conative verb', i.e. the difference between explicit and implicit conativity.

5 Implicit and explicit conativity

A close relation between verbs of trying and aspect has been pointed out for English *try* and the progressive aspect by Sharvit (2008), who proposes a semantic description of *try* in terms of the semantics of the progressive. The situation in Russian seems comparable, with *pytat'sja nečto delat'* commonly given as a paraphrase for the conative interpretation (Zaliznjak and Šmelev 1997: 20; RG 1980⁸).

⁸ RG 1980 also gives *probovat' nečto delat'* as a possible paraphrase. Both paraphrases indicate that the possible success also depends upon some circumstantial factors or upon chance. They differ, however, in one crucial respect, which Šatunovskij (2015) describes as 'objective' vs. 'subjective' possibility, relating to two different conceptions of the world. 'Objective' possibility is characteristic of *pytat'sja*. Here, the attempt is directed towards some result, whereby the result is not given in the future and two outcomes are possible (indeterminism). For *probovat'*, the possibility is subjective in that the subject does not know whether s/he will be able to achieve the result, which is given in the future (determinism). This difference can be paraphrased as 'aiming at bringing something about (where this something does not exist yet)' for *pytat'sja* vs. 'testing whether something (which is already given in the future) can be brought about' for *probovat'*. Against this background, *pytat'sja* seems the more appropriate paraphrase of implicit conativity. This also fits the assumption of RG 1980 concerning the modal quality of this interpretation,

In both cases, a component of attempt is added to the activity in question. This activity may be part of the assertion (infinitival complement of ‘try’; event structure of conative accomplishments) or a lexical presupposition (conative achievements), see section 4. As concerns the ‘attempt’ component, the main differences between explicit and implicit conativity concern its object, its linguistic status, and the relation between attempt and activity.

5.1 Object of attempt

Using the example of (17), Grano (2011) illustrates the different entailment patterns for progressive sentences and sentences with a verb of trying: only the former “entail that the theme has begun to change in the appropriate way” (2011: 435).

- (17) a. *she was raising her arm* (Grano 2011: 433)
 → entailment: arm moved
 b. *she tried to raise her arm* (Grano 2011: 433)
 → no entailment concerning movement of the arm

Grano takes this as indicating that for intentional events, the prototypical event structure of process/inner stage, endpoint and resultant state has to be amended by a preparatory stage, which covers the intention and precedes the process phase. The entailment patterns observed in (17) relate to this underlying event structure in that “the progressive aspect entails that an event progresses to somewhere in the ‘inner stage’”, whereas “*try* entails that an event progresses to somewhere in either the ‘preparatory stage’ or the ‘inner stage’” (Grano 2011: 435). But even if the event progresses only in the preparatory stage, it is more than simple intention (see section 3).

Although in Russian, the relation between the process phase and the change in the object does not seem to be as straightforward as for the English progressive aspect (this difference remains to be investigated), the basic difference outlined holds for Russian as well: *pytat’sja* and the conative interpretation relate to different parts of the event structure and thus impose different requirements on the activity they pertain to. The most evident difference is observable in examples such as (16): the fact that *pytat’sja* freely combines with such predicates, whereas

which is said to consist in the striving for the attaining of a result, “*kotoryj ešče ne stal ili voobšče ne stanovitsja real’nost’ju*” [which is not realised yet or may never be realised at all].

the conative interpretation arises only for verbs that code or presuppose a dynamic activity developing towards some inherent goal suggests that for the former the activity itself constitutes the object of attempt, while for the latter it is the attaining of a goal.⁹ In both cases, however, the action is complex. If applied to a basic action, both turn it into a complex one, i.e. they recategorise – explicitly in the case of verbs of trying, contextually conditioned in the case of the conative interpretation – the verbal predicate in their scope. Consequently, the pfv and ipfv aspect apply to these recategorised verbs and their particular characteristics (see 4.1.3 on the licensing of the ipfv aspect for conative achievements).

5.2 Status of attempt

With verbs of trying, the component of ‘attempt’ is semantically coded and no inferences as towards success or failure arise. In this, they differ from conative verbs, the semantics of which “xarakterizuetsja otčetlivym členením situacii na dva komponenta – popytka i uspex” [is characterized by a distinct division of the situation into two components – attempt and success] (Padučeva 2008: 11). Note that here, Padučeva speaks of ‘semantics’. However, examples such as (9) call for a closer look on this assumption, since, obviously, neither ‘attempt’ nor ‘success’ are part of the semantic information, but result from pragmatic mechanisms. As to the basis and the nature of these inferences, different assumptions can be found in the literature.

⁹ Another possible difference (to be investigated further) might consist in the intensional vs. extensional character of both. Verbs of trying can be classified as intensional transitive verb, allowing for a *de re* and *de dicto* interpretation of the activity they apply to (see Forbes 2013 on intensional transitive verbs and Larson, den Dikken and Ludlow 1997 for a more restricted view on *try*, regarding ‘try-to-find’ as paraphrase for verbs of seeking such that intensionality is about some object individual). That is, the activity in the scope of *try* needs to have reached its preparatory stage (and thus be more than mere intention), but does not necessarily have to progress already within its inner stage – hence, no activity might be visible at all (*de dicto*). The conative interpretation, in contrast, is possible only if the action in question progresses already in its inner stage, i.e. if some kind of activity exists (*de re*). This can be seen in (ii) vs. (iii), taken from Grano (2011: 432):

- (ii) *John was unknowingly paralyzed and tried to raise his arm.*
- (iii) *#John was unknowingly paralyzed and was raising his arm.*

As shown in section 3.2, RG 1980 regards the conative interpretation as being based on the processual interpretation of the ipfv aspect. Plungjan (2001: 7) analyses it as an implicature from the durative meaning of an ipfv terminative verb. Durst-Andersen (1992: 157) relates it to the general-factual meaning of the ipfv aspect, arguing that for particular verbs (which he calls as ‘attainment verbs’ as opposed to ‘implementation verbs’), “the completed action referred to is specified as an unsuccessful attempt”.

Concerning the pragmatic status of this inference as implicature or presupposition¹⁰, too, different assumptions can be found. Padučeva (2004a: 51–52) regards the conative interpretation as an implicature. It is instable in that it is possible only in specific contexts for very different verbs (see section 4.1). On the other hand, the attempt-interpretation seems to be a presupposition, since it is preserved under pfv negation. Padučeva (2008: 10–11) shows this on the example of (18): The pfv negation in (18b) can be paraphrased as ‘*pytalsja rešit’ i ne rešil* [tried to solve but did not succeed]’, i.e. the attempt is preserved. In order to negate the occurring of the event in general, the ipfv negation has to be applied. Thus (18c) can be paraphrased as ‘*ne pytal’sja rešit’* [did not try to solve]’:

- (18) a. *Vanja rešil zadaču*
 Vanja solve.PFV.PST exercise.ACC
 ‘Vaja solved the exercise.’ (Padučeva 2008: 11)
- b. *Vanja ne rešil zadaču*
 Vanja neg solve.PFV.PST exercise.ACC
- c. *Vanja ne rešal zadaču*
 Vanja neg solve.IPFV.PST exercise.ACC

This behaviour under negation differs from the negation of non-conative accomplishments as *čitat’ stat’ju* ‘read a paper’, cf. (19), for which the activity component is not preserved neither under ipfv nor pfv negation:

¹⁰ The ‘attempt’ component could also be regarded as conventional implicature. This would account for the fact that it does not necessarily arise and does not influence the validity of the utterance. As Grice (1989: 25–26) puts it: “I do not want to say that my utterance of [a sentence containing a conventional implicature, BS] would be, strictly speaking, false should the consequence in question fail to hold. So some implicatures are conventional.” Classical examples for lexical items carrying a conventional implicature are implicative verbs, among them *fail* and *succeed* for which ‘try hard’ may be inferred (see Potts 2007 for more details and for the delineation of conventional implicatures from presuppositions).

- (19) a. *ja ešče ne pročitaj vašu stat'ju*
 I yet neg read.PFV.PST your.PL paper.ACC
 b. *ja ešče ne čital vašu stat'ju*
 I yet neg read.IPFV.PST your.PL paper.ACC
 'I have not yet read your paper.' (Padučeva 2008: 11)

The *prima facie* contradictory analyses of 'attempt' as implicature or presupposition relate to the difference between conative accomplishments and conative achievements. This has also been emphasised by Malink (2008: 155), pointing out that "conative negation readings suggest that the activity is going to be unsuccessful while the conative imperfect [reading] lacks this kind of implication" (see section 4.1.3). In a similar manner, Padučeva (2004b: 38) distinguishes both classes according to whether 'attempt' arises in positive utterances (ipfv of conative accomplishments), or only under negation, indicating 'unsuccessful attempt' (*dostiženija* 'attainments', i.e. conative achievements). Given that, according to Malink's analysis, conative negation operates on the presupposed left interval, the pragmatic mechanism for this kind of inference of attempt is the same as for conative achievements – what is different is the inference of an activity component.

However, one more look on the pragmatic status of attempt is necessary. Analogously to the inference of attempt for conative accomplishments, this presupposition is highly likely to occur but not necessary to occur – not even for prototypical conative verbs such as *ubedit* 'convince'. This is evident in (20), where the negation denies not only the success, but the activity as well – and hence no conative interpretation arises:

- (20) a. *Počemu že vy ne ubedili ego poexat'*
 why emph you.PL neg convince.PFV.PST him come.PFV.INF
s nami?
 with us
 'Why didn't you convince him to come with us?' (Padučeva 2008: 11)
 b. *Počemu ty ne ugovoril ego ostat'sja?*
 why you.SG neg persuade.PFV.PST him stay.PFV.INF
 'Why didn't you persuade him to stay?' (Padučeva 2008: 11)

Examples as (20) indicate the role of the additional layer involved in conative interpretation, suggesting that this layer has its own regularities in terms of interaction with aspect.

5.3 Relation attempt – object of attempt

As has been pointed out in section 4.1, for conative verbs, a ‘secondary quality’ is assumed to be relevant. This secondary quality has to be brought about by some additional activity in order to achieve the intended result. The bringing about of the result may be impeded by various kinds of *Hemmfaktoren* ‘impeding factors’ (Breu 1980: 209). What exactly this secondary quality consists of, is left unclear. Based on the distinction between basic and complex actions introduced in section 3, it can be derived from the cause-effect-knowledge involved in complex actions, i.e. the knowledge which an agent has to dispose of in order to carry out such a complex action:

[I]f α is a *basic action type* of i then, i can intend to do α even if he lacks the beliefs about how he can do α (i.e. even if he does not have any cause-and-effect knowledge of the form “ α may be done by doing β ”). [...] if action x is non-basic for agent i , i can intend to do x only if he has a cause-and-effect knowledge of the way he can do x . [...] This implies that a basic action token is an action which is not performed by way of another action.

(Lorini and Herzig 2008: 48–49)

This necessary cause-effect knowledge suggests that the additional quality consists of a propositional attitude. It is not by chance that verbs of trying have been classified as propositional attitude verbs (cf. Šatunovskij 1989 for Russian, Grano 2011 for English). Grano (2011: 438) captures the attitudinal component of *try*-sentences stating that “the entity named by the subject bear[s] an intention relative to the given event description”. That “trying entails an intentional attitude” (2011: 438) is indicated by (21a) and the unacceptability of (21b), taken from Grano (2011: 438):

- (21) a. *John intended to eat an apple, but he never tried to do so.*
 b. *#John tried to eat an apple, but he never intended to do so.*

Since implicit conativity pertains to events that have progressed even further than those denoted by *try* (see section 5.1), they also imply an intention. Both differ in that the intentional attitude is directed towards different objects – the activity as such vs. the reaching of the goal (see section 5.1).

With the conative interpretation, thus, aspect applies to accomplishment and achievement verbs that have been recategorised as involving a complex action component; since complex actions necessarily require cause-effect knowledge on part of the agent concerning the sub-activities that need to be carried out in order to bring about the intended result, they involve an attitudinal layer. As a conse-

quence, aspect is applied to that attitudinal level involving intention and attempt. Thus, the question as to whether the conative interpretation is based on or derived from the durative, the processual or the general-factual reading is invalid – it is a primary interpretation, based on the specific characteristics of the underlying, potentially recategorised, verbal predicate.

6 Outlook

Analysing the semantic components and pragmatic mechanisms characterising the conative interpretation of the ipfv aspect and verbs of trying in Russian, it has been shown how philosophical considerations concerning the nature of intention, attempt and action are reflected in language. This integration of philosophy of action and event semantics provides a starting point for a more detailed elaboration of a linguistics of attempt and success. To this end, related domains such as modality and resultativity need to be integrated as well.

For the linguistic expression of conativity, cause-effect knowledge is a central component. It is related to the domain of ‘knowing-how’ (see, e.g., Ryle 1945), which is located at the intersection of ability and modality. The modal aspects of the conative interpretation pertain to the ability of the agent on the one hand and external conditions on the other. This combination of agent related and situation related factors is characteristic of circumstantial modality (see Sonnenhauser 2012). A more detailed elaboration of the relation between conativity and modality has to take into account the contribution of tense as well – a factor that has not been considered in the present paper.

As regards the various points of linguistic access to the different aspects of conativity – such as attempt, success or failure – via processes of assertion, negation, presupposition or implicature, the topic ties in with Plungjan’s (2001) considerations on ‘antiresultativity’. This notion captures two closely related semantic domains in the meaning and interpretation of verbs: ‘result not attained’ and ‘result cancelled’. With the expression of attempt constituting a basic exponent of the former, antiresultativity seems a promising background for describing the linguistics of attempt and success also from a broader typological perspective.

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