

THE ROLE OF VERBAL ASPECT IN EXPRESSING VALUES IN RUSSIAN PROVERBS

Ruzieva Zilola Mustafayevna

e-mail: zi101ruzieva@gmail.com

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Philological Sciences,
Associate Professor at the Department of Russian Language and Literature,
Navoi State University

Abstract. The article examines how the Russian grammatical category of verbal aspect participates in the value organization of proverbial speech. The material is a manually selected micro-corpus of Russian proverbs from V. I. Dahl's collection, with additional control examples from common Russian paremiological usage. The analysis does not treat perfective and imperfective forms only as temporal or formal markers. It asks what type of moral knowledge each aspect helps to frame: stable norm, repeated habit, completed deed, irreversible result, warning, or permitted rest after work. The study shows that imperfective forms usually support axiological generalization, while perfective forms often compress consequence and accountability. Mixed constructions create a small but productive value scenario: first complete the necessary action, then judge, rest, or accept the result. The findings are relevant for Russian grammar, paremiology, linguoculturology, and teaching Russian as a foreign language.

Keywords Russian verbal aspect, axiological linguistics, proverbs, paremiology, perfective aspect, imperfective aspect

Introduction

Russian verbal aspect usually enters grammar descriptions through the opposition between imperfective and perfective forms. This is correct, but it is not enough for proverbial material. A proverb rarely describes only an action. It weighs action. It says whether work feeds a person, whether haste will shame him, whether fear stops movement, or whether a completed task gives the right to rest. In such contexts, aspect becomes not a decorative grammatical detail, but a small mechanism of evaluation.

The topic is important for Russian linguistics because proverbs keep old moral formulas in very economical syntax. One verb form can carry the whole practical judgement. In *Труд человека кормит, а лень портит*, the imperfective present does not report one concrete act of feeding or spoiling. It states a norm that is expected to be valid again and again. In *Что посеешь, то и пожнешь*, two perfective future forms produce another logic: a concrete deed will return as a concrete result. The grammar is short; the axiological pressure is strong.

The purpose of the article is to identify the main value functions of Russian verbal aspect in proverbs. The study answers three questions. First, what values are usually connected with imperfective forms? Second, what values are activated by perfective forms? Third, what happens when both aspects are placed in one proverb. The object of the study is Russian proverbial discourse. The subject is the axiological use of aspectual forms in proverbs containing verbs that can be interpreted as imperfective or perfective.

The article uses a qualitative method. I selected proverbs from Dahl's collection and from stable Russian proverb usage, then grouped them by grammatical configuration and value meaning. The sample is not presented as a complete frequency corpus. It is a focused analytical set. This limitation is intentional, because the task here is to show the semantic mechanism with clear examples, not to count all possible verbal forms in the Russian paremiological tradition.

Theoretical orientation

The category of aspect has been one of the central problems of Slavic grammar. Comrie (1976) describes aspect as a way of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation, and this definition remains useful because it separates aspect from simple tense reference. Russian aspectology develops this opposition further: the perfective often presents an action as a bounded whole, while the imperfective may show process, repetition, duration, or general fact. In the Russian tradition, Bondarko (1971) and Zaliznyak and Shmelev (2000) also insist that aspectual meaning depends on context. This point is especially important for proverbs. A proverb is already a context with a strong pragmatic direction.

The axiological side of the problem requires another theoretical step. Axiology in language studies deals with the way linguistic signs organize values, such as work, patience, caution, moderation, responsibility, truth, and social usefulness. Karasik (2002) and Wierzbicka (1997) show, from different methodological positions, that language is not a neutral storage of meanings. It gives a culture its preferred routes of evaluation. In proverbs this feature becomes very visible because a proverb is designed to be remembered, repeated, and used as social evidence.

Paremiology and phraseology also support this approach. Mieder (2004) treats proverbs as concise forms of folk wisdom that live in use, not only in dictionaries. Telia (1996) shows that phraseological units carry cultural and pragmatic information together with their lexical structure. Baranov and Dobrovolskij (2008) add that fixed expressions need semantic analysis that respects their internal form and idiomatic function. For the present article, this means that a proverb must be read twice: first as grammar, then as value speech. The two readings should not be separated by a wall. They feed each other.

Material and method

The main material consists of thirty-four Russian proverbs in which the verbal predicate is important for evaluation. Most examples are taken from V. I. Dahl's *Poslovitsy russkogo naroda*, first published in 1862. Dahl's collection is suitable for this research because it preserves not only moral sayings but also their thematic distribution: labour and idleness, mind

and foolishness, fear, speech, poverty, social behaviour, and fate. I excluded nominal proverbs without a verb, even if their value meaning was strong, because they do not show the grammatical category under discussion.

Each proverb was tagged according to four parameters: aspect of the central verb or verbs, verbal form, value field, and axiological operation. By axiological operation I mean the evaluative work done by the proverb: approval, warning, blame, permission, restraint, or causal judgement. For example, *Глаза боятся, а руки делают* was tagged as imperfective present, work and courage, approval of practical action. *Поспешишь – людей насмешишь* was tagged as perfective future, caution, warning through consequence.

The tagging inevitably contains several difficult cases. Russian imperatives, infinitives, and future forms can have contextual nuances. Some prefixed forms are not only aspectual but also lexical. Because of this, I did not reduce the analysis to mechanical labeling. The decision was checked by asking what the proverb needs the verb form to do. If the form presents a stable rule, it belongs to the imperfective value zone. If it closes an action and makes the result morally visible, it belongs to the perfective value zone. Mixed proverbs are discussed separately.

Table 1. Analytical grouping of selected proverbs

Aspectual pattern	Example	Value field	Axiological operation
Imperfective present	<i>Труд человека кормит, а лень портит</i>	labour / idleness	approval and blame as stable norm
Imperfective present	<i>Глаза боятся, а руки делают</i>	courage / work	support of repeated practical action
Perfective future	<i>Что посеешь, то и пожнёшь</i>	responsibility	consequence and moral return
Perfective future	<i>Поспешишь – людей насмешишь</i>	prudence	warning through completed outcome
Perfective imperative	<i>Семь раз отмерь, один раз отрежь</i>	caution	ordered sequence before final act
Mixed pattern	<i>Сделал дело – гуляй смело</i>	work / rest	permission after completed duty
Mixed pattern	<i>Не откладывай на завтра то, что можно сделать сегодня</i>	discipline	ban on delay plus completed target

Imperfective aspect and the value of repeated norm

The imperfective forms in Russian proverbs often create a wide moral horizon. They do not ask the hearer to imagine one isolated event. They make behaviour look regular. This is why proverbs about labour prefer the imperfective present so often. In *Труд человека кормит, а лень портит*, the verbs *кормит* and *портит* transform work and laziness into two constant forces. Work is not only useful today. It is a feeding principle. Laziness is not one mistake. It is an agent that damages a person slowly, almost like rust on metal.

The same pattern appears in *Глаза боятся, а руки делают*. The proverb accepts that fear may exist, but it refuses to give fear the final word. The imperfective present shows a repeated human situation: eyes are afraid, hands still work. Here grammar supports a practical ethic. The value is not heroic noise, but ordinary continuation. A similar moral arrangement is visible in *Дело мастера боится*. The verb form does not describe one frightened task. It says that skilled action regularly overcomes difficulty. Mastery becomes a stable value, and the proverb gives it a grammatical form of recurrence.

In learning proverbs, imperfective forms serve another value. *Век живи – век учишь* uses imperative forms, but their aspectual reading is not a closed achievement. The instruction is endless. Living and learning must go together for the whole life. In this sentence, the proverb does not promise that knowledge will be finished. It values process. For education and upbringing, this is not a small point. The Russian imperfective here makes learning a moral duration, not a diploma-like result.

There is also a negative side. *Волков бояться – в лес не ходить* uses imperfective infinitives. The proverb does not condemn fear as a single feeling. It criticizes fear when fear becomes a repeated reason for inaction. In other words, the imperfective helps to model a behavioural type. A person who is always afraid will never enter the forest. The forest may be a real forest, but in the proverb it is also the space of necessary risk.

Perfective aspect and the value of consequence

Perfective forms work differently. They often close the action and bring the result near. The proverb *Что посеешь, то и пожнёшь* is a clear example. Both verbs are perfective future forms. The grammar presents moral causality as a completed chain: sowing will become harvesting. The value is responsibility. The person cannot separate the beginning of action from its final return. The proverb is agrarian in imagery, but its logic is wider than agriculture.

Another frequent perfective model is warning. In *Поспешишь – людей насмешишь*, the first action is completed too quickly, and the second result is also completed: people will laugh at the person. The proverb does not need many adjectives. It punishes haste through aspectual closure. A similar structure occurs in *За двумя зайцами погонишься – ни одного не поймаешь*. The perfective future creates a small moral experiment: try to catch two objects, and the result will close as failure. The value is concentration.

Perfective aspect also helps proverbs express the irreversibility of some acts. *Снявши голову, по волосам не плачут* begins with a perfective adverbial participle. The main damage has already been completed. After that, crying about smaller details becomes useless. The proverb criticizes wrong timing of emotion. The moral is severe, but accurate: certain actions

cannot be undone by later regret. The perfective form is therefore not only a grammatical form of completion. It becomes a form of moral finality.

The imperative pattern gives perfective aspect a special force. In *Семь раз отмерь, один раз отрежь*, the proverb orders repeated preparation before one final act. The first verb may be read as an ordered measuring action repeated seven times; the second verb is the decisive cut. The value is caution before irreversibility. The proverb does not praise endless thinking. It requires enough preparation to make the final act safe. This is a precise grammatical economy: repetition is placed before completion.

Mixed aspectual constructions

The richest axiological effect appears where imperfective and perfective meanings meet. *Сделал дело – гуляй смело* is probably the most transparent case. The perfective past *сделал* marks the necessary task as completed. Only after that does the imperative *гуляй* receive positive value. Rest is not condemned; it is permitted. But permission comes after completion. The proverb therefore balances two values that can easily conflict: work and pleasure.

The proverb *Не откладывай на завтра то, что можно сделать сегодня* has another mixed structure. The negative imperative *не откладывай* attacks a habit of delay. The infinitive *сделать* points to a completed result that can be reached today. The value is discipline. More exactly, it is anti-postponement as a moral rule. The proverb uses grammar to separate two temporal attitudes: postponing is a repeated bad habit, completing is the desired action.

A social form of restraint appears in *Не плюй в колодец, пригодится воды напиться*. The first verb warns against a destructive act toward a shared resource. The later forms open a future need: the person may have to drink from the same well. The proverb is not only ecological or household wisdom. It is social ethics. Do not spoil what may later support you. Aspect and modality together make the future morally present.

One more mixed pattern can be seen in *Любишь кататься, люби и саночки возить*. The proverb is built on imperfective forms. But its value logic links pleasure with repeated obligation. The hearer is not told to enjoy once and pay once. Enjoyment and responsibility are a pair of habitual behaviours. This is why the proverb is useful in educational speech: it does not reject desire, but it grammatically attaches desire to work.

The analysed material shows that aspect is not simply a grammatical category placed inside ready-made values. It helps values take shape. Imperfective forms usually support norms that are repeated, socially recognized, and expected to be valid beyond one situation. They suit such value fields as labour, learning, endurance, practical courage, and social habit. Perfective forms, in contrast, usually make the result sharp. They suit warning, punishment, accountability, completed duty, irreversible loss, and final permission.

This difference can be formulated carefully. Imperfective aspect does not always mean positive value, and perfective aspect does not always mean negative result. The proverb *Лень мужика не кормит* contains an imperfective form but gives a negative evaluation. The proverb *Кашу маслом не испортишь* contains a perfective future but carries a positive or

tolerant judgment. Therefore, the aspect itself does not mechanically produce the value. It organizes the way the value becomes visible. The noun, situation, metaphor, and cultural background still matter.

For teaching Russian, this observation has practical use. Learners often meet aspect as a list of rules: process, result, repetition, one-time action. Proverbs make these rules less dry. A teacher can show that *делать* and *сделать* are not only grammar pairs but also moral positions in speech. In *Глаза боятся, а руки делают*, the imperfective form supports the idea of continuing despite fear. In *Сделал дело – гуляй смело*, the perfective form makes rest legitimate only after the task is finished. Grammar enters life, quietly but firmly.

The Uzbek scientific context also benefits from such analysis. Russian is studied not only as a foreign language but as a language with a long cultural presence in education, translation, media, and academic communication. Proverbs are useful because they connect grammar with worldview. A contrastive continuation of this research may compare Russian aspectual proverbs with Uzbek paremiological equivalents. Uzbek does not have the same grammatical aspectual opposition as Russian, so value relations may be expressed through lexical means, auxiliary verbs, temporal adverbs, or syntactic parallelism. This question deserves separate work.

Table 2. Main value tendencies found in the sample

Dominant form	Typical semantic work	Typical value effect
Imperfective present / infinitive	habituality, general fact, repeated process	norm, endurance, skill, learning, practical courage
Perfective future / past / imperative	bounded act, result, consequence, irreversible action	accountability, warning, finality, permission after completed duty
Mixed aspectual pattern	contrast between process and result or delay and completion	discipline, restraint, balance between work and rest

Conclusion

The axiological reading of Russian verbal aspect in proverbs shows a compact interaction between grammar and cultural value. In the analysed material, imperfective forms tend to present values as stable laws of everyday life: work feeds, laziness damages, hands continue working, a person learns while living. Perfective forms more often show the moral edge of a completed deed: what was sown will be harvested, haste will become shame, wrong choice will end in loss, finished work gives the right to rest.

The main conclusion is therefore not that one aspect is good and the other is bad. Such a conclusion would be too simple and not true to the material. The better conclusion is this: aspect gives value its temporal and actional shape. Imperfective aspect stretches value into a norm. Perfective aspect closes value into a result. Mixed constructions make the movement

between the two visible. This movement is the small grammar engine of many Russian proverbs.

Further research should expand the corpus and include quantitative tagging. It would also be useful to compare printed collections, school proverb lists, modern media uses, and oral speech. Some proverbs may change their evaluative force when used ironically or politically. For the present article, however, the focused sample already confirms the central point: Russian verbal aspect is not only a category of action description. In proverbial discourse it is also a category of value orientation.

References

1. Baranov, A. N., & Dobrovolskij, D. O. (2008). *Aspekty teorii frazeologii* [Aspects of the theory of phraseology]. Znak.
2. Bondarko, A. V. (1971). *Vid i vremya russkogo glagola: Znachenie i upotreblenie* [Aspect and tense of the Russian verb: Meaning and use]. Prosveshchenie.
3. Comrie, B. (1976). *Aspect: An introduction to the study of verbal aspect and related problems*. Cambridge University Press.
4. Dal, V. I. (1862). *Poslovitsy russkogo naroda: Sbornik poslovits, pogovorok, recheniy, prisloviy, chistogovorok, zagadok, poveriy i proch.* Universitetskaya tipografiya.
5. Karasik, V. I. (2002). *Yazykovoy krug: Lichnost', kontsepty, diskurs* [Language circle: Personality, concepts, discourse]. Peremena.
6. Mieder, W. (2004). *Proverbs: A handbook*. Greenwood Press.
7. Telia, V. N. (1996). *Russkaya frazeologiya: Semanticheskij, pragmaticheskij i lingvokulturologicheskij aspekty* [Russian phraseology: Semantic, pragmatic and linguocultural aspects]. *Yazyki russkoy kultury*.
8. Wierzbicka, A. (1997). *Understanding cultures through their key words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese*. Oxford University Press.
9. Zaliznyak, A. A., & Shmelev, A. D. (2000). *Vvedenie v russkuyu aspektologiyu* [Introduction to Russian aspectology]. *Yazyki russkoy kultury*.