

## **TEXT FUNCTIONS OF THE ASPECT-TENSE VERBS FORMS AS THE BASIC PRINCIPLE FOR TEACHING THE ASPECT OF RUSSIAN VERBS**

**Olga S. Zavjalova**  
**Peoples' Friendship University of Russia,**  
**Moscow, Russian Federation**

**Abstract:** *The article deals with one of the most important problems of the methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language: learning the system of Russian verbs' aspects by students. It justifies the efficiency of the approach to the interpretation of the Russian verb aspects while understanding the principles of describing and presenting to the foreign audience the patterns of using the aspect-tense forms of Russian verbs in speech, suggested in the functional-communicative grammar by G.A. Zolotova, one of the leading schools in modern Russian Studies. The verb aspect in functional-communicative grammar is understood as a textual category. In accordance with the text organization capabilities of aspect-tense forms, we identify the following functions: aoristic, perfective for perfective verbs, and imperfective (procedural, characterizing) for imperfective verbs; suggest methods for teaching aspect-tense forms of Russian verbs to a foreign audience. The work aims to show the students why, in accordance with what requirements of the text, the perfective and imperfective verb forms with certain meanings are used. Understanding the patterns of using verbal forms in various functions in texts allows a foreigner to better analyze texts of any genre, as well as create his own verbal works, making full use of the "building" capacity of the perfective and imperfective verb forms. Ultimately, he will be able to better understand the very essence of the aspect category in Russian, which in turn will help mitigate or eliminate any difficulties that students encounter when learning this subject.*

**Keywords:** textual functions of verbs, aorist, perfective, imperfective (procedural, characterizing).

The temporal forms of the verb as differentiating attributes of style have been in the focus of style researchers for many years. Their synonymy in the system, various transpositions in usage required and will require such studies, which would consider morphology and syntax in terms of stylistics. This also determines the prospects of further research, which should include more aspects of joint research in the field of grammar and stylistics, especially in the field of functional stylistics, text linguistics, etc. The current research scope is more related to macrostylistics, while many unresolved problems persist in functional stylistics, which may be the subject of further research.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Kuznetsova, V. Plungian, E. Rakhilina, "Time as secondary to space: Russian pod 'under' and iz-pod 'from-under' in temporal constructions", in *Russ Linguist*, 37 (3), (2013), pp. 293-316.

The tense category is one of the most important categories of the space-time continuum, which is reflected in the language. Since the mid-1970s, in connection with the rapid development of text linguistics, the study of the functioning of temporal forms prioritized the text level. It was then that the research of the functioning of the grammatical category of tense at the text level was started. At present, the problem of fiction tense again causes an increased interest of linguists at the level of fiction discourse.<sup>2</sup> The relevance of the problem is due to the growing interest in space and time issues in fiction, since there is a complex intertwining of time layers, violation of the chronological sequence, fable of events, a search for new ways to implement the mechanism of expression and functioning of the fiction tense.

### Literature review

As is known, one of the main postulates in the communicative grammar school is the requirement to investigate any phenomenon of the language as an integrity of its form, meaning, and *function*. G.A. Zolotova studied the usage of verb forms in a large number of texts, paying attention to their textual functions, which allowed her to conclude that the components of the verb aspect are: 1) the *form*, a set of word-formation means of expression of aspect values; 2) the categorial semantic *meaning*, as an objective basis of the verb aspect; and 3) the *function* that determines the role of the aspect-tense verb form in the text structure. Note that the notion of the verb aspect as a textual category correlates with the approach to the description of the aspect category, which is increasingly reflected in theoretical publications.<sup>3</sup> On

---

<sup>2</sup> A. Makarova, T. Nettet, "Space-time asymmetries: Russian *v* 'in(to)' and the North Slavic Temporal Adverbial Continuum", in *Russ Linguist*, 37 (3), (2013), pp. 317-345.

<sup>3</sup> G. A. Zolotova, N. K. Onipenko, M. Yu. Sidorova, *Communicative Grammar of the Russian Language*. Moscow, Vinogradov Institute of Russian Language of RAS, PPP Nauka Printers, 2004; D. Altschuler, "Aspectual Meaning Meets Discourse Coherence: A Look at the Russian Imperfective", in *Journal of Semantics*, 29 (1), (2012), pp. 39-108; H. H. Josselson, "On teaching the aspect of the Russian verb", in *Language Learning*, 1 (4), (1990), pp. 3-8; P. Jensen, "Narrative Description or Descriptive Narration: Problems of Aspectuality in Čechov", in N. B. Thelin (ed.) *Verbal Aspect in Discourse*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 1990, pp. 383-409; N.B. Thelin, "Verbal Aspect in Discourse: on the State of the Art", in *Ibidem*, pp. 3-88; J. Forsyth, *A Grammar of Aspect: Usage and Meaning in the Russian Verb*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970; E. V. Petrukhina, "The Russian Aspect as a Morphological Derivative Category in the Context of Modern Studies of the Aspect Correlativity", in *Scando-Slavica*, 60 (2), (2014), pp. 253-274; S. M. Dickey, "On the Development of the Imperfective General-Factual in Russian", in *Scando-Slavica*, 58 (1), (2012), pp. 7-48; J. E. Dery, J. P. Koenig, "A

the other hand, the representation of the aspect-tense verb forms in connection with their functions in the text in the practical language-learning course is supported by methodological articles, where the organic connection between the grammar and the text is justified, proving that it is impossible to teach grammar outside the text.<sup>4</sup>

We believe that, from the methodological point of view, it is very important to help foreign students understand the essential fact that the verb aspect is primarily a textual category. Unfortunately, this approach to the aspect category has not yet been properly paid due attention in guidelines and educational literature for foreigners. We must state that currently the textual functions of the aspect-tense verb forms are not taken into account when teaching verb aspects. Students are encouraged to learn the form and meanings that are expressed by this form. It seems it would be useful to also show students *why, in accordance with what requirements of the text*, the Russians use the perfective and imperfective forms that have certain meanings. Understanding the patterns of using verbal forms in various functions in texts allows a foreigner to better analyze texts of any genre, as well as create his own verbal works, making full use of the “building” capacity of the perfective and imperfective verb forms. And as a result, it will allow better understanding the very essence of the verb aspect category in Russian.

Based on the V. V. Vinogradov’s publications, the following textual functions of verb forms are distinguished: The perfective aspect includes the dynamic aoristic and the resultant perfective. “The aoristic function is the main means of organizing a narrative: dynamic verbs successively replacing each other lead the story plot from the outset to the denouement”: *Тогда Руслан одной рукою Взял меч сраженной головы И, бороду схватив в другую, Отсек ее, как горсть травы* (*Then Ruslan with one hand Took the sword of the slain head And, seizing the beard with the other, Cut it off like a handful of grass*)-by Pushkin.

Perfective verbs are used to include in the story time the state (of the person, object, space) that is the result of a previous action or a

---

Narrative-Expectation-Based Approach to Temporal Update in Discourse Comprehension”, in *Discourse Processes*, 52 (7), (2015), pp. 559-584.

<sup>4</sup> N. S. Novikova, O. M. Shcherbakova, *The Blue Star. Stories and Tales of Russian and Foreign Writers with Tasks and Exercises (for Foreigners Studying the Russian Language)*, Moscow, Flinta-Nauka, 2007; J. P. Magliano, M. C. Schleich, “Verb Aspect and Situation Models”, in *Discourse Processes*, 29 (2), (2000), pp. 83-112; A. Haas, “Notes on Time and Aspect”, in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 23 (4), (2015), pp. 504-517.

limiting state that has passed into another one”: *Исполнились мои желания. Творец Тебя мне ниспослал, тебя, моя мадонна, Чистейшей прелести чистейший образец* (I have fulfilled my desires. Creator has sent you to me, my Madonna, The purest example of the purest charm)-by Pushkin. *Я памятник себе воздвиг нерукотворный, К нему не зарастет народная тропа* (I have erected a monument to myself not made by hands, People will have never forgotten me)-by Pushkin.

The imperfective aspect divides into the procedural and usual-characterizing imperfective. Processual verbs represent an action or a state “in their observable extent, not limited to a time frame”: *Редела тень. Восток алел. Огонь казачий пламенел. Пшеницу казаки варили; Дрabanты у брегу Днепра Коней расседланных поили* (The shadow was fading out. The east was flaming. Cossacks’ fire was burning red. Cossacks were cooking wheat; Bodyguards at Dnieper’s bank Were watering unsaddled horses)-by Pushkin.

“In the imperfective usual-characterizing function, the speaker speaking from a position remote in time and space represents actions, states, and relationships as ordinary occupations, skills, characteristics”:<sup>5</sup> *За морем царевна есть <...>; Днем свет божий затмеваает, Ночью землю освещает, Месяц под косой блестит, А во лбу звезда горит. А сама-то величава, Выступает будто пав, А как речь-то говорит, Словно реченька журчит* (Over the sea, there is a princess <...>; In the daytime, she outshines the world, At night, illuminates the earth, The moon shines under the braid, And a star shines on her forehead. And she herself is grand, Walks like a peacock, And when she speaks, She sounds like a little river)-by Pushkin.

## Materials and methods

This article aims to disclose and analyze some features of the implementation and functioning of the tense category in fiction texts.

Preterite is the most characteristic for the fiction style; it is well suited to the image, which is the main way of narrative in fiction. Also, authors often use the preterite in descriptions, especially in epic works. The preterite of the experienced speech and the futuristic preterite can be distinguished as special functions in the fiction style. The perfect tense manifests itself when used in artistic prose as the initial and final perfect tense, which forms the so-called “frame,” and the preterite is

---

<sup>5</sup> G. A. Zolotova, N. K. Onipenko, M. Yu. Sidorova, *Communicative Grammar of the Russian Language*, Moscow, Vinogradov Institute of Russian Language of RAS, PPP Nauka Printers, 2004.

used inside the “frame.” The perfect tense can also be included in the preterite chains, break them and thereby focus on changing the vision method. Such a change of the hourly forms of the preterite and perfect tenses has a great stylistic value in fiction.<sup>6</sup>

A very common way of creating stylistic-morphological devices is the so-called transposition of the form, i.e. the transfer of word forms to the sphere of action of another grammatical meaning, and, consequently, the use of this word form in a meaning that is not inherent in it.

Verbs have particularly broad transpositional possibilities, first of all, a combination of time-related meanings of verbal forms as a result of the combination of two tenses, one of which is expressed directly by the form with its basic dictionary meaning, and the other by a speech or situational context, e.g.: figurative use of the present tense forms.

Numerous and diverse are metaphorical reinterpretations of the simple future tense form in colloquial speech: they include the designation of an action synchronous with the time of the speech, designation of a past event that is subjectively actualized in the present tense, expression of various modal meanings, etc.<sup>7</sup>

Six tense forms of verbs provide this comprehensive system of time directions, especially when the time frame is differentiated by an additional indication of the time, with adverbs or other adverbial adjectives.

1) The dominant temporal forms are the present tense and the preterite. In colloquial speech, however, the perfect tense is more often used instead of the preterite;

2) The preterite is frequent in novels, fairy tales, detectives, etc. The present tense is used in communications, reports, scientific articles (treatises). From the stylistic point of view, the temporal row is distinguished between stories (the preterite and the past perfect tense for the long past) and communications (the present tense and the perfect tense for the long past). Likewise, in lyrical works, we are more likely to meet the present tense than the preterite, as the lyrics express feelings, moods, and thoughts;

3) In literary criticism, a very important role is played by the distinction between the tense that is used to depict an event in the text

---

<sup>6</sup> G. C. Rappaport, “The Aspectual System of Russian”, in *The Parameter of Aspect*, Dordrecht, Springer Netherlands, 1991, pp. 297-341.

<sup>7</sup> S. M. Dickey, S. C. Kresin, “Verbal aspect and negation in Russian and Czech”, in *Russ Linguist*, 33 (2), (2009), p. 121.

itself and the tense that actually occurs in the time of the event described. The course of time is also focused on in movies;

4) An important stylistic means is the change from the temporal forms of the preterite in a calm story to the present tense to convey an event that passes very quickly, and then again to a calm tempo of the narrative in the preterite;

5) Laws that relate to people, nature and mathematical laws, proverbs containing wisdom of life, popular signs about the weather—all these utterances acting constantly are made using the present tense.

Let us analyze some features of the change in temporal forms, namely, the stylistic present tense and other possibilities. A well-known stylistic means is the change from the narrative preterite to the present tense in the narrative to depict some stressful scenario.<sup>8</sup>

A relevant aspect of the tense category study as a stylistic means is the analysis of the use of temporal forms in fiction. The use of the present tense in a story about past events with the purpose to revive them is traditionally understood as the current historical time. The name of this phenomenon occurs, as is often the case in linguistics, from one of its cases, namely, from the use of the present tense in the author's text of historical chronicles. There is a fundamental difference in the current orientation between a historical chronicle and a fiction (primarily, its author's text), as noted back in the 1940s-1950s in the works of G. Muller and especially K. Hamburger: while the chronicle-documentary genre describes events that took place in reality, and, as a result, in real time, which the author tells from the viewpoint of his speech moment, the events in fiction are fictitious, or, in any case, artistically revised. Therefore, they are represented first of all in the corresponding author's story in the time, which the author has defined, and which is a special case of the text time and exists in two main versions: the story sequence (the story itself) and the story simultaneity or repeatability (description), where the second version is here versatile and, usually, is connected with the former. From what has been said, it follows that the key concepts of the above definition of the historical present time (a narrative of the past, actualization) require refinement in relation to fiction texts. In addition, the phenomenon analyzed is found in modern fiction, not in the form of everyday narrative, but as stratification of other grammatical-stylistic phenomena, which are

---

<sup>8</sup> E. Fortuin, J. Kamphuis, "The typology of Slavic aspect: a review of the East-West Theory of Slavic aspect", in *Russ Linguist*, 39 (2), (2015), pp. 163-208.

determined by the peculiarities of the types of speech and their combinations.

One of the types of such stratification is the author's speech in fiction. It is that "polar" sphere, in which real time from whatever position considered, either the author's or the reader's, is the most disparaged. While in a historical novel, it is still possible to talk about the more or less existing correlation of events that are portrayed from the point of view of both communicators, that is, to the past in the proper sense of the word, in other genres it becomes less definite, and in a fantastic futuristic novel, where real events (at least, from the author's point of view) are described, such similarity is not present at all. Therefore, neither the universal interpretation of the meaning of the tense forms, nor the use of the present tense instead of the preterite in terms of the real time can be given; this tense determines only some cases, including the examples given above. In this case, one cannot be guided only by the time of the plot, since a fiction plot (like any work of art) is always perceived as the one witnessed, that is, once and for all actualized, regardless of what verb forms it is conveyed with. Thus, the concept of real time (the present and the past) should be replaced with respect to the author's speech in general with more general concepts, and the actualization effect, on the contrary, requires a more specific interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, some illusion of visibility, which is determined by the invariant of the meaning of this form is typical for the conative present tense in general. However, when using the present tense in its descriptive and especially narrative functions, it is necessary to involve additional means of localization and expression of a completed action, which not only weaken this visibility of the created aspects, but also complement utterances with additional aspects overlapping the function, namely, the increased dynamism of the narrative and narrowed static nature or repeatability in descriptions, which can be generally defined as providing the genre of the whole text with a reportage style or as its cinematographic character.

If the main line of the author's narrative is expressed with the preterite, the historical present tense can be used within an incomplete text, most often at the junction of paragraphs. The change in the tense form causes, by contrast, the effect of an emphasis, accentuation.

---

<sup>9</sup> I. Mezhevich, "A feature-theoretic account of tense and aspect in Russian", in *Nat Lang Linguist Theory*, 26 (2), (2008), pp. 359-401.

Contrastive use of the present tense is quite typical for modern fiction. The same principle is used to introduce the “timeless” present tense, which does not belong to the historical present tense, in the author’s narrative expressed with the preterite.

In contemporary fiction prose, the author’s speech and the speech of the characters (mostly not pronounced aloud) often merge within certain stylistic devices known by the following names:

- 1) reminiscence, which, in the case of such a merger, resembles episodes from the character’s life preceding the main line of the narrative;
- 2) imagination, which conveys imaginary representations (and also dreams) of the character in the author’s vision (in the author’s interpretation);
- 3) sensualization, which likewise depicts the perceptions and feelings of the character;
- 4) meditation, which contains a similar image of the character’s reflections and is also called an experienced speech.

In all of the above methods, the historical present tense can be used, both contrastive and non-contrastive. Moreover, in the latter case (especially, in a first-person story), these types of the present tense hardly differ from each other, as well as from the general line of the narrative, since in this case there is not only no contrast of time, but also no contrast of the person since the author himself is the main character. Therefore, a wholesome text with the non-contrasting present tense forms another special genre based on the author’s original speech, the stream of conscience, in which, like in any author’s text, there can be inclusions of direct and indirect speech of the characters, digressions, etc. (as in the novel by E.M. Remarque *The Black Obelisk*).

The direct speech of the characters of fiction prose contains all of the above cases of using real historical time in a slightly differentiated form and with the least frequency. In general, we can talk about imitating the prototype of the historical present time, since it obviously arose not in the text of the chronicles, but in the colloquial speech of the pre-literate period.

## **Results and discussion**

It is best to start familiarizing students with the typical functions of the aspect-tense verb forms in texts by analyzing a specific text. It is important to show the students that the ratio of the aspect-tense verb forms that perform different functions is one of the most important



components of the text composition. Take as an example The Wonderful Doctor story by A. I. Kuprin, which, together with a set of exercises for it, is included in *The Blue Star*, a study guide by N. S. Novikova and O. M. Shcherbakova.<sup>10</sup> This is a story about a real episode from the life of Professor Pirogov. Briefly, the story is as follows: It begins with a description of the plight of the Mertsalovs because of the serious illness of the head of the family (lack of money, the death of one daughter, the illness of the other). Mertsalov goes to the city garden, where he unexpectedly for himself tells about his misfortune to a stranger who sat next to him on the bench. The stranger turned out to be a doctor who miraculously helped the Mertsalovs: he cured the sick girl and gave them some money. From the signature on the pharmacy prescription, the Mertsalovs understood that that doctor was Professor Pirogov. Soon after this meeting, the father of the family managed to find a job, and their life changed for the better, but the Mertsalovs always remembered their savior gratefully.

Thus, the exercises proposed by the study guide authors can be also supplemented by those that are aimed at:

- 1) reinforcing the skills to recognize the perfective and imperfective verb forms in the text and identify the values expressed by these forms;
- 2) familiarizing students with the typical functions of the perfective and imperfective verb forms in the text, conveying a particular meaning;
- 3) developing the skills to analyze the text composition.

After the text is read and analyzed, the teacher asks students to have a close look at five excerpts (they should be pre-printed separately, highlighting the verb forms, which will be analyzed).

In excerpt (1), the imperfective verb forms performing the imperfective procedural function are highlighted, and in excerpt (2) the aoristic perfective forms are highlighted: (1) *Двое мальчиков уже более пяти минут стояли перед большим окном гастрономического магазина. Здесь лежали целые горы красных, крепких яблок и апельсинов. Лежали огромные рыбы, висели колбасы, и стояло большое количество банок с солеными и вареными закусками. Глядя на эту эффектную картину, мальчики совсем забыли о двенадцатиградусном морозе и о важном поручении, которое просила их выполнить мать* (Two boys had been standing in front of a large window of the gastronomic store for already more than five minutes. Here, whole mountains of red, strong apples and oranges were lying. Huge fishes were lying, sausages were

---

<sup>10</sup> N. S. Novikova, O. M. Shcherbakova, *The Blue Star*.

*hanging, and a large number of cans with pickled and boiled snacks were standing. Looking at this spectacular picture, the boys completely forgot about the -12°C frost and about the important task given by their mother) (Quote from the specified study guide).*

(2) *Вдруг Мерцалов быстро поднялся со стула, на котором он до сих пор сидел, и решительно надел свою старую шляпу.*

*-Куда ты?-спросила Елизавета Ивановна.*

*Мерцалов, взявшийся уже за ручку двери, повернулся.*

*-Пойду еще,-ответил он.*

*Выйдя на улицу, он пошел бесцельно вперед. Он ничего не искал, ни на что не надеялся. Незаметно для себя он оказался в центре города у городского сада. Тут было тихо.*

*Он зашел в сад и сел отдохнуть на скамейку. В это время в конце аллеи послышались тихие шаги.*

*(Suddenly, Mertsalov stood up quickly from the chair, on which he had been sitting, and firmly put on his old hat.*

*-Where are you going? asked Elizaveta Ivanovna.*

*Having already taken hold of the door handle, Mertsalov turned around.*

*-I'll go again, he answered.*

*Having gone into the street, he headed forward aimlessly. He was not looking for anything, neither he was hoping for anything. Unwittingly, he found himself in the downtown near the city garden. It was quiet here.*

*He entered the garden and sat down to rest on the bench. At that time, he heard quiet footsteps at the end of the alley.)*

Below are the tasks we propose to perform:

Read the excerpts. Identify the aspect of the selected verbs and the meaning of these aspect forms.

Describe what these passages are: a) descriptions of what the boys saw; or b) a story about the actions of the characters.

Is it possible to replace the imperfective verbs with perfective in excerpt (1)? Do you think why?

Try to draw conclusions. Why, in your opinion, does the author need the imperfective forms? And when does the author use the perfective verbs?

In the following excerpt (3), the perfective forms in the perfective function are highlighted: (3) *В этот ужасный год у Мерцалова и его семьи случались несчастья за несчастьем. Сначала он сам заболел тифом, и на его лечение ушли все деньги. Потом, когда он выздоровел, он узнал, что его место, скромное место управляющего домом за 25 рублей в месяц, занято другим... А тут еще начали болеть дети. Три месяца назад умерла одна девочка, теперь другая лежит с высокой температурой и без сознания (During*

*that terrible year, Mertsalov and his family suffered misfortune after misfortune. At first, he himself went ill with typhus, and all the money was spent for his treatment. When he has recovered, he came to know that his job of a house manager for 25 rubles a month was taken by another person... And then the children went severely ill. Three months ago, one girl died, now the other is lying with a fever and unconscious).*

The tasks for excerpt (3) must be composed in such a way that, by comparing the use of the perfective forms in excerpts (2) and (3), and having successively answered the teacher's questions, the students realized the different textual roles of the perfective forms.

In excerpt (4), the imperfective forms are highlighted: (4) *Уже больше года жили Мерцаловы в этом подвале. Оба мальчика давно успели привыкнуть к сырým стенам, к этому ужасному запаху детского грязного белья и крыс-запаху нищеты. Но сегодня, после всего, что они видели на улице, после праздника, который они чувствовали везде, их маленькие сердца жались от острого, недетского страдания. В углу, на грязной широкой кровати, лежала девочка лет семи: ее лицо горело, дышала она с трудом, широко раскрытые глаза смотрели бесцельно. Рядом с кроваткой, в люльке, кричал грудной ребенок. Высокая худая женщина с усталым, почерневшим от горя лицом стояла на коленях около больной девочки* (For more than a year, the Mertsalovs had been living in this basement. Both boys have long got used to the damp walls, to this terrible smell of children's dirty laundry and rats-the smell of poverty. But today, after everything they had seen on the street, after the festival that they sensed everywhere, their little hearts shrank from acute, unchildish suffering. In the corner, a girl of about seven was lying on a dirty wide bed: her face was burning, she was laboring for breath, her eyes widely open were looking aimlessly. Next to the crib, a baby was screaming in the cradle. A tall thin woman with a tired face blackened by grief was standing on her knees beside the sick girl).

Formulating tasks to this excerpt, the teacher should pursue two goals: First, it is important to draw the students' attention to the different textual role of the imperfective verbs: for example, *жили* (were living/had been living) performs the imperfective usual-characterizing function, and the remaining imperfective verbs in this excerpt demonstrate the procedural use of imperfective forms. Secondly, for the development of skills in the analysis of the artistic text, it is expedient to relate this excerpt to the descriptive excerpt (1) and ask the students to think why the author placed the two excerpts almost next to each other? What role does it play in the development of the story?

In the last excerpt (5), the perfective verb forms performing the perfective function and the imperfective verb forms performing the imperfective usual-characterizing function are highlighted: (5) *Я слышал*

*этот рассказ от самого Григория Емельяновича Мерцалова-того самого Гришки, который плакал над супом в описанную мною памятную ночь. Теперь он занимает довольно большой пост в одном из банков. И каждый раз, заканчивая свой рассказ о чудесном докторе, он говорит со слезами в голосе; С этих пор все изменилось. В начале января отец нашел работу. Машутка выздоровела. Мы с братом стали учиться в гимназии. Просто чудо сделал этот человек (I had heard this story from Grigory Emelianovich Mertsalov himself, known to you as Grishka, who was crying over the soup in the memorable night I have described. Now he holds a pretty high position in one of the banks. And every time, finishing his story about the wonderful doctor, he speaks with tears in his voice. Since then, everything has changed. In the beginning of January, my father found a job. Masbutka recovered, my brother and I started going to the gymnasium. It was just a miracle that this man did).*

The tasks to excerpt (5) should be aimed at ensuring that students 1) understand what this passage is in terms of the story structure; 2) based on the conclusions drawn in the analysis of excerpts (1)-(4), tried to explain why the author chose such verbal forms with such a meaning in the epilogue.

In addition, the teacher can suggest recalling other narratives by Russian writers read by the students and answer the question “What other variants of verbal forms are possible at the end of the story, in the epilogue?”.

All the above exercises are aimed at developing the students’ skills of correlating the aspect-tense verb forms with certain elements of the semantic structure of the text.

For example, an analysis of The Wonderful Doctor by Kuprin shows that the imperfective forms meaning a process that is being observed are used by the author for the imperfective procedural function in descriptive fragments, when the narrative is told from the person of the characters. We suggested drawing students’ attention to two excerpts from the beginning of the story (excerpts (1) and (4)). Having compared these excerpts, we can see that Kuprin thoroughly “depicted” descriptive scenes. He intentionally collided the luxury and pre-Christmas rush of the city with poverty and despair of the Mertsalovs’ basement. This opposition is the opening of the story.

The imperfective verb forms in the imperfective usual-characterizing function in this text are infrequent. They are found, firstly, in fragments of the text that can be conditionally called the story background. They are not what the characters observed, but the author’s knowledge. The author reports here about the properties, characteristics, usual occupations of characters, i.e. everything that the

reader needs to know for a complete perception. And, secondly, we use this imperfective form at the end of the story, in the epilogue (excerpt (5)).

A comparison of excerpts (2) and (3) should help students understand the different textual purpose of the perfective verb forms. Excerpt (3) demonstrates the perfective use of the perfective verb forms. Perfective verb forms are found in those fragments of the text, where the author, in accordance with the logic of the narrative, needs 1) to report on facts of the past, which are significant for the story development (this also can be attributed to the story background); 2) to convey the results of actions, final states, important at the moment of narration, rather than the actions. Often, such perfective forms are found at the end of the story, in the epilogue (see excerpt (5)). Note also cases when such perfective forms are included into reproductive compositions: *Вошел Мерцалов. Он был в летнем пальто, летней шляпе и в летних ботинках. Его руки посинели от мороза. Он не сказал жене ни одного слова, она не задала ни одного вопроса. Они поняли друг друга по тому отчаянию, которое прочитали друг у друга в глазах* (*Mertsalov entered. He was wearing a summer coat, a summer hat, and summer boots. His hands turned blue because of the frost. He did not say a word to his wife, she did not ask a single question. They understood each other seeing the despair that they had read in each other's eyes*).

These perfective forms break the chain of aoristic forms, representing an interpretation, explanation of the actions, mental states of the characters.

Aoristic forms, reporting on the actions of the characters, are the main means of conveying the story dynamics (*stood up, put on, asked*, etc.; see excerpt (2)).

To reinforce this knowledge, students need to perform a number of productive exercises. For example, they can tell a story that happened to a friend/acquaintance/relative, etc. Questions and tasks should be formulated so as to make students consciously choose the perfective or imperfective verb form, implementing a particular text-related task.

We have outlined only one of the paths that shows us a new look at the aspect category in the Russian language. We tried to show that understanding the verb aspect as a text category, understanding the textual nature of the perfective and imperfective verb forms allows foreigners to navigate through the text more easily, conduct a deeper and more meaningful analysis of the text, and grammatically correctly build their own verbal works.

As a summary, it should be noted that when considering the historical present time, it is expedient to consistently distinguish between the expression aspect and the content aspect. In the former, one can talk about the present tense of the fiction prose plot, in the latter, about the present time of the plot, which typically has the following main features for the present tense, the last three of which are optional:

- 1) the invariant of the form meaning (the grammatic present);
- 2) the story actualization;
- 3) the weakened illusion of the visibility of the verb action (pseudo-relevance), conditioned by own semantics of the perfective means of the context;
- 4) the meaning of the real past;
- 5) the additional effects of tone, compaction, and deceleration, which are caused by localized inclusion of the descriptive present tense in narratives;
- 6) the additional effect of emphasis, highlighting, which occurs in the contrasting change of the story preterite to the present tense on the verge of incomplete text.

In general, it can be argued that two types of the story present time are represented in fiction prose: the present (that is, "historical") and the preterite, which differ from each other in terms of the content by the invariant meanings of the corresponding forms (the grammatical present and past tenses), and by a range of more temporary attributes. Both tenses almost never coincide with the real present and only optionally with the real past. As for the story past, in case the story is based on the present tense, it is expressed with the perfect tense or preterite, and in case the story is based on the preterite, it is expressed with the past perfect tense. And when it is developed to an independent story, it obtains the properties of the story present time and switches to the means appropriate for it: the present tense or the preterite with the same distribution of the concepts of grammatical, textual (story), and real time.

In conclusion, we would like to mention two other application areas for the communicative and grammatical theory in the methodical work:

- 1) It is necessary to investigate how it is possible to use the communicative and grammatical understanding of the aspect category when teaching foreign students at the initial stage. It is important to find out what the requirements for the text at this stage should be, and also to develop a system of exercises and detailed grammatical comments to them (we will need to consider the terminology that will be used in these comments).

2) The communicative and grammatical interpretation of the aspect category can significantly help in the development of study guides on the scientific style of speech. As is known, a scientific text, each of its varieties (text-description, text-message, text-reasoning, etc.), is characterized by a stable structure, the choice of the aspect-tense verb forms in a particular function is strictly regulated by the semantic task in each part. The task is to describe the compositional structure of various types of scientific texts, to investigate the patterns of using the aspect-tense verb forms for a certain textual function, and to present the results of these studies in the form of visual schemes/algorithms that can help a foreign student to avoid many errors. All this, from our point of view, can serve as a good addition to the already existing scientific speech study guides.