

# THE ETIQUETTE OF ASPECT

## How and why *prositi* stopped worrying and entered a pair

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**Abstract** – On the basis of the linguistic and extralinguistic data gathered from a variety of Old Russian (henceforth OR) and Middle Russian (henceforth MR) written sources (the Laurentian Codex of the *Tale of Bygone Years*, the corpus of birch bark letters, Daniel the Traveller’s *Pilgrimage*, Afanasij Nikitin’s *The Journey Beyond Three Seas*, testaments and treaties signed between princes, Avvakum’s *Life*, and other texts retrieved from the OR and MR subcorpora of the Russian National Corpus), this paper explores the possible reasons for the absence of preverbed proto-perfective first person non-past forms of *prositi* ‘to ask (for)’ in directive speech acts up to the second half the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is argued that this restriction can be primarily accounted for on the basis of morphosyntactic and sociolinguistic evidence, namely, on the one hand, the actional properties of verbs of communication and, on the other, the lack of a proper allocutionary pronoun (in the sense of a T-V distinction) consistent with the etiquette of hierarchically-oriented social relationships.

**Keywords:** aspect; pragmaphilology; sociolinguistics; morphosyntax; performatives.

## 1. Introductory remarks

During the historical evolution that ultimately led to the standardization of the literary variant of the language here defined as Contemporary Russian (henceforth CR), the category of verbal aspect underwent great structural changes. The gradual grammaticalization of the aspectual system – a process which has lasted for centuries and is still in force – has made the encoding of aspect mandatory and morphologically transparent for every verbal lexeme. Speaking in the most general terms, that means that every verbal lexeme is assigned either to the perfective (henceforth PF) or imperfective (henceforth

IPF) aspect.<sup>1</sup> Morphologically simple verbs are, with few exceptions, IPF (e.g. *čítat* ‘to read’): adding a preverb creates a new PF lexeme, which in turn – following Janda *et al.* (2013, pp. 3-4) – can be labeled *natural* (e.g. *pročítat* ‘to read through’) or *specialized* (e.g. *vyčítat* ‘to proofread’). In the former case the semantics of the preverb, which historically derives from a homographic and homophonic preposition encoding spatial and/or temporal primitive meanings, overlaps with that of the verb, which therefore enters an aspectual pair with the IPF partner.<sup>2</sup> In the latter case, the preverb adds a semantic component to the lexical basis: in order to form an aspectual pair of its own, the specialized PF resorts to the morphological mechanism of suffixation (*vyčityvat*’), which in turn gives rise to a so-called secondary IPF.

The first and by far most important consequence of having such a grammaticalized aspectual system is that the expression of temporal features is often conveyed through aspect (therefore the term *vido-vremennye formy* ‘tempo-aspectual forms’ is frequently used). The most relevant case is represented by the present<sup>3</sup> perfective (henceforth NP<sup>PF</sup>), formerly a non-actual present, which has been reinterpreted as a future tense already from the very first written occurrences of OR (*drevnerusskij*, see again 3.2),<sup>4</sup> thus overcoming the riddle of what in literature has recently been called *present perfective paradox* (De Wit 2017). Furthermore, transitioning towards CR, the functional sphere of the aspectual system has increasingly been incorporating a wide array of linguistic variables, pertaining to the area of

<sup>1</sup> A couple of points need to be clarified here. I will not take a definite stand on the much-debated question as to whether an independent Aspectual Phrase (henceforth AspP) projection exists in CR. The interested reader is referred to Bailyn (2012, pp. 30-33, 129-139) for further material. I stick to the definition of PF given for East Slavic languages in Dickey (2000, p. 19 ff.), that is, the semantic (cognitive) conceptualization of topologically closed events occupying a uniquely located point in time (with IPF events, on the other hand, not being assigned a unique point in time). As for the description of the CR aspectual system, for the present purposes the framework I am sketching out is obviously oversimplified. We will not deal with such important theoretical questions as aspectual triplets (*vidovye trojki*), *perfectiva* and *imperfectiva tantum*, and biaspectual verbs (Zaliznjak *et al.* 2015).

<sup>2</sup> This came to be known as the ‘Vey-Schooneveld effect’, from the name of the two linguists that worked separately on a semantic theory of Czech (Vey 1952) and CR preverbs (van Schooneveld 1959) during the 1950s, reaching more or less the same conclusions independently of each other.

<sup>3</sup> In this article the term *neprošedšee* ‘non-past’ (henceforth NP) is used, which unifies on the time axis the functions of both present and future tenses as opposed to past ones. Also, in CR two other terms can be used in order to disambiguate the vaguer English ‘present’: the first one, *prezens*, refers to the morphological characteristics of the tense (whose semantic functions can nevertheless imply a future anchorage, as for CR NP<sup>PF</sup>), while the second one, *nastojščee* (*vremja*) ‘present (tense)’, refers exclusively to its semantic (tactic, temporal) reference.

<sup>4</sup> The label *Old Russian* will be used when denoting the language spoken in Kievan Rus’ between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> century rather than the more common term *Old East Slavic*. Finally, for the sake of simplicity, any reference to dialectal differences or geographical isoglosses – North-Western territories aside – will be disregarded.

pragmatics, sociolinguistics, the organization of discourse, and presuppositions (Israeli 2001; Vimer 2014).

Amidst the pragmatic-conversational factors which have proved relevant for the aspectual choice are the adoption of politeness strategies, the interpersonal distance between the interlocutors, and the degree of illocutionary force carried by the very utterance. These factors do exert a considerable influence on the aspectual properties of linguistic categories of great semantic complexity, i.e. the imperative (Benakk'o 2010) and different types of performative verbs (Slavkova 2014; Vimer 2014).

In recent years, great attention has been devoted to the so-called *verbs of communication* (henceforth VOCs). VOCs represent a semantically heterogeneous class of telic predicates taking either a noun phrase or an entire clause as their direct object; their basic function is to signal the nature of the verbal interaction between the participants to the speech event. It has further been noted that, in directive illocutionary acts (henceforth DIAs), namely requests and orders (following the taxonomy of Searle 1976), the aspectual fluctuation of a small subset of CR *verba rogandi*, such as *prostit*<sup>IPF</sup>/*poprostit*<sup>PF</sup> 'to ask for' or *sprašivat*<sup>IPF</sup>/*sprostit*<sup>PF</sup> 'to ask', when used performatively, is determined not only by the actional features of the verbs, but also by the presence or absence of the aforementioned pragmatic-conversational strategies and circumstances (politeness, distance, authority and the like). It has been suggested, for instance, that the choice of NP<sup>PF</sup> is widely recommended in formal contexts, while NP<sup>IPF</sup> is highly preferred in informal communication. In the former case, the participants to the DIA event do not belong to the same social class or, conversely, while belonging to the same social class, strive to display some kind of courtesy based on distance. In the latter case, the participants to the DIA event are likely to be on closer terms (they enter a horizontal or symmetric relationship), otherwise the allocation is perceived improper at best, if not rude (Slavkova 2014).

The expression of a great variety of functions via aspect assignment is thought to be an indication of a refined, highly grammaticalized aspectual system. However, we do not know whether the same pragmatic-conversational nuances could be conveyed through the OR or MR (*staroruskij*)<sup>5</sup> aspectual systems. To tackle this issue, it would be necessary not only to investigate morphosemantic evidence, but also to understand the nature of power relationships as attested in the language usage of a given time.

<sup>5</sup> The label *MR* will be used in order to refer to the dominant linguistic variety spoken in the Muscovy between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

This contribution explores the possible reasons underlying the aspectual distribution of the *verbum rogandi prositi* ‘to ask (for)’<sup>6</sup> and its derived preverbed forms when used performatively in OR and MR DIAs<sup>7</sup> so as to explain the differences between the secondary functions (i.e. pragmatic, interaction-oriented) of the CR vs. OR/MR aspectual systems and shed more light on the diachronic evolution of the aspectual system.<sup>8</sup> In doing so, I will also analyze the structure of the situation of the communicative events represented in the texts, adopting the tools of the scientific discipline known as *pragmaphilology*.<sup>9</sup>

The qualitative-quantitative analysis will be limited exclusively to NP<sup>PF</sup> and NP<sup>IPF</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> p. sing., to avoid the possibility of other morphological forms being (mis)interpreted as futures (in descriptive and reportative function) or exhortatives (typically 1<sup>st</sup> p. pl.).

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces the theoretical problem, with a general overview of the CR data. Section 3 outlines the method used in choosing and approaching OR and MR textual sources, after which I comment upon the OR data. Section 4 presents a morphosyntactic (4.1), and sociolinguistic (4.2) tentative solution to the problem. Section 5 draws preliminary conclusions.

## 2. Approaching the problem

In this section I will first approach the core theoretical problem providing a sample of CR data (2.1), before tackling the issue in more detail with a review of the relevant literature (2.2).

<sup>6</sup> Unlike CR, where the predicates denoting the events of ‘asking (sb.)’ and ‘asking (for sth.)’ are lexically distinguished (cf. the similar difference in Latin between the forms *petō* and *rogō*), OR and MR unified the two notions under the lexeme *prositi*, which was then disambiguated contextually (or, as we will see, via creation of a specialized preverbed form).

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that other (semi) performative VOCs partially synonymous with *prositi*, such as *moliti* ‘to ask for’, ‘to pray’, do not posit any problems for this research. They are typically used in stylistically marked (e.g. religious) contexts; thus they tend to be used in fixed constructions and are not subject to aspectual fluctuation (this also applies to CR *umoljat*<sup>IPF</sup> ‘to beg’, which does not alternate with the PF *umolit*’ in DIAs; Israeli 2001, p. 82).

<sup>8</sup> Assuming that the OR and MR aspectual systems were, even to a considerable extent, less grammaticalized than that of CR, the definitions *proto-perfective* and *proto-imperfective* have therefore been adopted (Bermel 1997, pp. 9-10) to refer to the alleged aspectual profile (i.e. aspect marking) of OR and MR verbs.

<sup>9</sup> Taavitsainen and Jucker (2010, p. 12) define *pragmaphilology* as the pragmatic study of the use of language in earlier periods, thus distinguishing it both from diachronic pragmatics (which focuses on the change in meaning of one or more forms during a definite time span) and historical discourse analysis (which is rather concerned with the application of discourse analysis to language history).

## 2.1. PF-IPF fluctuation of CR verba rogandi in DIAs

As the study of speech acts gained a foothold in the Soviet Union, especially from the second half of the 1970s onward, one of the most debated theoretical questions revolved around the alleged interchangeability between PF and IPF in a performative context,<sup>10</sup> with regard to a small group of lexically heterogeneous predicates, mostly *verba dicendi* (i.e. *povtorjat*<sup>'IPF/povtorit</sup><sup>'PF</sup> 'to repeat', *zamečat*<sup>'IPF/zametit</sup><sup>'PF</sup> 'to remark', *pribavljat*<sup>'IPF/pribavit</sup><sup>'PF</sup> 'to add'). Particularly interesting is the case of VOCs (as defined in Section 1).

Let us consider the following DIAs with *prošiti*<sup>'IPF/poprositi</sup><sup>'PF</sup>, which could be uttered on a bus by a ticket inspector asking the passengers to show their validated tickets:

(1a) Prošu ASK FOR.NP <sup>IPF</sup> .1.SING.	vaši YOUR.ACC.M.PL.IN.	bilety. TICKET.ACC.M.PL.
(1b) Poprošu ASK FOR.NP <sup>PF</sup> .1.SING.	vaši YOUR.ACC.M.PL.IN.	bilety. TICKET.ACC.M.PL.

“Tickets, please” (lit. “I ask for your tickets”).<sup>11</sup>

Aspectual pairs of VOCs such as *prošiti*<sup>'IPF/poprositi</sup><sup>'PF</sup> are allegedly regulated by mechanisms which can be only partially identified with the standard semantic criteria influencing aspect (e.g. telicity/atelicity, boundedness/unboundedness etc.). These criteria are generally evoked to justify the aspectual choice for all the verbs belonging to the Vendlerian-based actional classes of accomplishments or achievements. However, for *prošiti*<sup>'IPF/poprositi</sup><sup>'PF</sup> the dichotomy of repeated vs. resultative action does not apply,<sup>12</sup> neither does the traditional distinction between an ongoing action (prototypically denoted by IPF) and an action which has reached its internal endpoint (prototypically denoted by PF).

<sup>10</sup> Already at the dawn of Slavic aspectology, straddling the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the problem of the tempo-aspectual characteristics of the performative verbs had been given a great amount of attention, decades before the classic definition of the analytic Oxfordian school was formulated (an accurate historical sketch can be found in Žagar and Grgič 2011). The philosophical issue of performativity will not be considered here.

<sup>11</sup> All the translations, except where explicitly stated, are mine. For the sake of brevity, full morphosyntactic annotations are given for CR examples only. Apart from those already mentioned in the text, the following abbreviations are used: SING – singular, PL – plural, M – masculine, F – feminine, N – neuter, NOM – nominative, GEN – genitive, DAT – dative, PR – prepositional, INSTR – instrumental, IN – inanimate, INF – infinitive, COMP – comparative, HYP – hypocoristic (diminutive), INTER – interjection, SH – short form (of adjectives).

<sup>12</sup> This dichotomy is assumed in literature to explain the aspectual behavior of pairs such as *naxodit*<sup>'IPF/najti</sup><sup>'PF</sup> ‘to find’ and the like (here reference is clearly made to a single action for both sentences).

It seems strange, to say the least, to conceptualize the aspectual discrepancy between (1a) and (1b) in terms of the presence and/or absence of the semantic feature of durativity because, even if the event they denote necessarily stretches over a given span of time, it is conceived of as instantaneous in both cases. Although still lacking a systematic definition, that is the reason why several aspectologists – Zaliznjak *et al.* (2015) among others – have proposed to label aspectual pairs denoting events of this kind *semiotic pairs* (*semiotičeskie pary*), e.g. *prosit*<sup>’IPF</sup>/*poprosit*<sup>’PF</sup> (*kogo-libo*) ‘to ask (for sth.)’, *soobščat*<sup>’IPF</sup>/*soobščit*<sup>’PF</sup> [*komu-libo(čto-libo)*] ‘to provide [sb. (with a piece of information)]’, or *zvonit*<sup>’IPF</sup>/*pozvonit*<sup>’PF</sup> (*v dver*) ‘to ring (the bell)’.

The aspectual properties of semiotic pairs – being durative although perceived as instantaneous – have direct consequences on their temporal representation. As already mentioned in Section 1, the default meaning of NP<sup>PF</sup> in CR is future. In (1b), though, the common futurate reading is not triggered at all. In other words, taking into consideration their temporal anchorage only, (1a) and (1b) are claimed to be synonymous. This is not the case for other types of achievements used outside directives (e.g. *vzryvat*<sup>’IPF</sup>/*vzorvat*<sup>’PF</sup> ‘to blow up’) or for the same aspectual pair *prosit*<sup>’IPF</sup>/*poprosit*<sup>’PF</sup> when employed outside the performative use in the DIAs, as shown below.<sup>13</sup>

(2a) Begaem	tam,	bombočki	vzryvaem,
RUN.NP <sup>IPF</sup> .1.PL.	THERE	BOMB.ACC.F.PL.IN.HYP.	BLOW UP.NP <sup>IPF</sup> .1.PL.
nu	v	smysle	– xlopuški...
INTER.	IN	SENSE.PR.M.SING.	PARTY POPPER.ACC.M.PL.IN.

[Bela Belousova. Vtoroj vystrel (2000)]

“We run there, we blow up some bombs – I mean, party poppers”.

(2b) Esli	im	udastsja	raskačat’
IF	THEY.DAT.	SUCCESS.NP <sup>PF</sup> .3.SING.	UNDERMINE.INF <sup>PF</sup>
situaciju	v	Alžire,	èto
SITUATION.ACC.F.SING.	IN	ALGERIA.PR.M.SING.	THIS
vzorvet	region.		
BLOW UP.NP <sup>PF</sup> .3.SING.	REGION.ACC.M.SING.IN.		

[Nikolaj Petrov. Islamisty protiv vsex // «Russkij reporter», 2013]

“If they succeed in undermining the situation in Algeria, this will tear the region apart”.

<sup>13</sup> Here and elsewhere, except where otherwise stated, all the CR examples are taken from the Russian National Corpus (*Nacional’nyj Korpus Russkogo Jazyka*, henceforth NKRJa, available at <http://www.ruscorpora.ru/new/>).

- (3a) Pered smert'ju on prostit povernut'  
 BEFORE DEATH.INSTR.F.SING. HE.NOM. ASK FOR.NP<sup>IPF</sup>.1.SING. TURN.INF<sup>PF</sup>  
 ego licom k stene, gde  
 HE.ACC. FACE.INSTR.N.SING. TOWARDS WALL.DAT.F.SING. WHERE  
 tancuet Terri.  
 DANCE.NP<sup>IPF</sup>.3.SING. TERRY.NOM.  
 [Božestvennyj Čarli (2004) //«Ėkran i scena», 2004.05.06]

“On his deathbed, he asks to be turned face to the wall, where Terry dances”.

- (3b) [akinfeev, muž] Uveren, čto kto-to poprostit  
 SURE.NOM.M.SING.SH. THAT SOMEONE.NOM ASK FOR.NP<sup>PF</sup>.3.SING.  
 rasskazat' obo vsem popodrobnee, no  
 TELL.INF<sup>PF</sup> ABOUT ALL.PR.N.SING IN DETAIL.COMP.HYP. BUT  
 umyšlenno ne stanu ètogo delat'.  
 INTENTIONALLY NOT BECOME.NP<sup>PF</sup>.1.SING. THIS.GEN.N.SING. DO.INF<sup>IPF</sup>  
 [kollektivnyj. Forum: Poxod v cirk (2010)]

“I’m sure that someone will ask (me) to tell everything in more detail, but I will not, on purpose”.

In order to explain effectively why verbs like *prostit*<sup>IPF</sup>/*poprostit*<sup>PF</sup> can alternate in DIAs, apparently without a change in tense, one has to take into account concepts such as politeness, face, and the principle of solidarity. In the following subsection these concepts will be traced back to their origin and then discussed with reference to the present work.

## 2.2. Aspect, politeness, and the pragmatic turn of the 1980s

The linguistic study of politeness arose within the field of pragmatics from the very beginning of the ‘60s onward, especially with the contributions by Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1983). The Gricean taxonomy of conversational maxims – Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner, which are part of the Cooperative Principle<sup>14</sup> – accounts for communicative effectiveness, while politeness theory account for interpersonal appropriateness. For example, Leech’s (1983) Politeness Principle describes perceived politeness on the basis of the interplay of a cost-benefit scale for handling the interlocutors’ rights and duties and a directness-indirectness scale for encoding them. In particular, Leech (1983) posited six further maxims under his Politeness Principle: Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy. Of particular interest is the Tact Maxim, which applies directly, among other things, to DIAs. According to the general principle and this

<sup>14</sup> The principle is formulated as follows: “make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Grice 1975, p. 45).

maxim, the more beneficial an act is for the addressee, and the more indirectly it is phrased, the politer it will be perceived to be. In parallel, the more costly an act is for the addressee, and the more directly it is phrased, the less polite it will turn out to be. For example, a request for the addressee to answer the phone is necessarily costly to the addressee, but it is politer if phrased indirectly in the form of an interrogative than an imperative. Indirectness in potential offences and directness in benefits are at the basis of the difference between negative and positive politeness, respectively.

Indeed, in their well-known monograph, Brown and Levinson develop their theory of politeness from the socio-anthropological notion of face, that is “the public self-image that every member [of a society, *M.B.*] wants to claim for himself” (Brown, Levinson 1988, p. 61). Face comprises two components: negative face stresses one’s freedom of action and freedom from imposition, while positive face is all about one’s yearning to be socially appreciated and approved of. Similarly, politeness has two components. Positive politeness is oriented towards positive face: it is therefore inclusive (“approach-based”), presuming that the speaker (*s*) and *h* share at least some wants and goals. On the other hand, negative politeness is oriented towards negative face (“avoidance-based”), e.g. it takes for granted *h*’s will not to be constrained and therefore “is characterized by self-effacement, formality and restraint” (Brown and Levinson 1988, p. 70).

The linguistic resources of politeness can be lexical, grammatical, strategic and paralinguistic, as already noted by Brown and Levinson (1988, pp. 91-210). The research on Slavic languages and, more specifically, on CR has been primarily carried out on selected and widely discussed topics, e.g. the imperative and performative verbs (i.e. those self-referential verbs which make explicit the illocutionary force of their utterances, in the sense of Austin 1975). The focus has therefore been on grammatical resources.

Studying the functioning of aspect in the imperative, Benacchio (Benack’o 2010) shows how politeness is a discrete category encoded in the CR aspectual system. That is, the choice between PF and IPF in the imperative of telic verbs is influenced by conversational strategies such as (positive or negative) politeness, and awareness and recognition of the interplay of social factors such as the interpersonal distance between the interlocutors and their relative social status, which can be symmetrical or hierarchical (Brown, Gilman 1960, pp. 257-262).

PF is considered to be the neutral member of the pair with respect to these factors: it generally displays negative politeness, addressing *h*’s negative face and maintaining the interpersonal distance between the interlocutors, which is perceived as the appropriate choice in formal (or, more properly, non-informal) contexts. On the other hand, IPF displays positive politeness, hinting at the friendly and/or more informal nature of the



relationship between the interlocutors. However, if *h* is not close to *s* the use of IPF is generally improper, if not rude (Benakk'o 2010, pp. 44-64). These pragmatic overtones are contextually derived from the core meanings of each aspect. Using PF, *s* focuses on the final stage of the action they want to be carried out: on the other hand, IPF constitutes a more direct form, as it focuses either on the initial or the intermediate stage of the action, prompting *h* to start or continue doing it. This can be positive or negative, depending whether it is beneficial or detrimental to the addressee (Benakk'o 2010, pp. 23-32).

Not surprisingly, the pragmatic account given on the use of the imperative also holds for performative verbs. Slavkova (2014) studies the complementary distribution of *prostit*<sup>IPF</sup>/*poprostit*<sup>PF</sup> and the equivalent Bulgarian forms *molja*<sup>IPF</sup>/*pomolja*<sup>PF</sup> in DIAs. Unlike CR, Bulgarian has overcome the present perfective paradox by positing a condition of ungrammaticality on the use of NP<sup>PF</sup> in main clauses: future has therefore been formed by resorting to other lexical sources, namely, the grammaticalization of the lexical verb *šta*<sup>IPF</sup> 'to want'. This implies that Bulgarian can contrast CR NP<sup>PF</sup> and NP<sup>IPF</sup> with three different tempo-aspectual morphological forms (Pres<sup>IPF</sup> *molja*, Fut<sup>PF</sup> *šte pomolja*, Fut<sup>IPF</sup> *šte molja*). Slavkova (2014, pp. 242-249) shows that, while *prostit*'-*molja* and *poprostit*'-*šte pomolja* overlap in function (the former signaling the existence of a horizontal relationship between the interlocutors, the latter addressing negative face wants and thus being more appropriate in formal contexts), Fut<sup>IPF</sup> *šte molja* is a form of calculated artificiality that mixes up the formal register without overtly pointing at the social difference between the interlocutors.

These varied functions can only be encoded in highly grammaticalized aspectual systems. Therefore, similarities and differences between Slavic languages not only give us a chance to measure the level of grammaticalization reached in their aspectual systems; they also allow us to explore how secondary functions, unevenly spread in the Slavic area, have developed from others which are thought to be primary, strictly aspectual. This is what Wiemer (Vimer 2014, pp. 91-92) put forward in a study on the tempo-aspectual properties of Slavic performatives, where he argued that actional functions (e.g. "event", "process", "state") are founding, while discourse functions and presuppositions are reasonably assumed to be newer. The above theoretical considerations form the basis of the following analysis.

### 3. Sketching the data

#### 3.1. Sources and methodology

The sources from which the data was selected mainly consist of literary texts. Part of the sources were browsed through the OR and MR subsections of NKRJa, a small monitor corpus, to which new, tagged data is constantly being added.<sup>15</sup> The remaining material (which will be analyzed later in this order) comprises:

- The Laurentian Codex of the *Tale of Bygone Years (Povest' vremennyx let*, henceforth PVL: PVL 1978). The PVL is the most ancient chronicle written in OR which has survived up to the present day. The Laurentian Codex is named after Lavrentij, the monk who copied it in 1377, at the behest of the then-Prince of Suzdal' and Nižnij Novgorod Dmitrij Konstantinovič (1365-1383);
- The corpus of birch bark letters (DND 2004, NGB 2015), a series of daily life documents (private letters, personal communications, wills and testaments, war dispatches etc.) etched on the inner layer of birch bark and spanning approximately four centuries (11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>). They give us a precious insight into the social dynamics of several medieval centres of north-western Russia – Velikij Novgorod, Staraja Russa, Toržok, and Tver' among others;
- Daniel the Traveller's *Pilgrimage (Žitie i xoždenie Daniila, Rus'skyja zemli igumena*: XD 1970), one of the first literary examples of a travelogue in the Kievan Rus'. The manuscript we rely on is thought to have been handwritten in 1495, although the travel itself was completed within the first decades of the 12<sup>th</sup> century;
- Afanasij Nikitin's *The Journey Beyond Three Seas (Xoženie za tri morja*: XAN 1986), another travelogue based on the notes of a merchant from Tver', Afanasij Nikitin, who traveled in India between 1466 and 1472. The reference manuscript dates back to 1489;
- Testaments, treaties, and the private correspondence between grand and appanage princes in and around Muscovy, a series of documents covering the time between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries (DDG 1950), as well as a legal document from Pskov (PSG 1896);

<sup>15</sup> The full list of the OR sources can be retrieved directly at the following link: [http://www.ruscorpora.ru/new/search-old\\_rus.html](http://www.ruscorpora.ru/new/search-old_rus.html). No source list has yet been provided for the MR corpus, which is currently under construction.

- Avvakum's *Life* (*Žitie protopopa Avvakuma, im samim napisannoe*: Avvakum 1997), the autobiography of the protopope and fierce opponent of then-Patriarch Nikon Avvakum Petrov, completed in 1672.

Two criteria were followed to select the data to be analyzed. The first one relates to their linguistic features. They all had to pertain to different literary genres, thus displaying different stylistic (and, only for the birch bark letters, dialectal) registers of OR and MR.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, all the texts exemplifying the Old Church Slavonic language register (which is known to be a target-language that offers little interest to our research) were ruled out first. Thus, for example, no OCR biblical translation from Greek has been included in the final corpus, and several records from the birch bark letters corpus were disregarded as well.

The second criterion takes into account a bundle of relevant pragmaphilological features, such as the number and the role of the participants to the speech act event, the nature of their relationship, their ontological status (e.g. whether they are real persons or fictitious characters), the external circumstances that allowed or hindered the production and/or reception of the text etc. Needless to say, when approaching a textual source with pragmaphilological methods, one needs to bear in mind there is no one-to-one correlation between the form and the function of a given linguistic object, as such it can only be properly understood only with reference to its sociopolitical setting (Taavitsainen, Jucker 2010, p. 12). Such an attempt has been undertaken by Gippius (2004), whose detailed article on the communicative organization of birch bark letters provided a quite complex yet useful taxonomy for the analysis of older OR texts,<sup>17</sup> and has paved the way for even more systematic studies (see, for instance, Dekker 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Orthography, which can often function as a stylistic factor of its own, does not play a relevant role for the present analysis: therefore, the transliteration has been simplified (e.g. all the Greek-oriented ligatures like  $\bar{\omega}$  for  $\omega$  [ot],  $\omega y/8$  for  $y$  [u] etc. have been undone, orthographic literate variants such as  $\bar{i}$  for  $\bar{u}$  [i] and  $\bar{o}/w$  for  $\bar{o}$  [o] led back to the current norm) and conformed to the rules of contemporary language. The interested reader is referred to the original source.

<sup>17</sup> For the purposes of this study, I have greatly simplified Gippius's (2004) taxonomy. This defines the six different roles (variously intertwined to each other) of the participants in the so-called "speech act in written form" (*pis'mennyj rečevoj akt*) – that is, the sender of the text, its creator, its writer, the messenger, the reader and the addressee. I only take into account the participants to the speech event, disregarding the other roles.

### 3.2. Data analysis

This section presents the analysis of the data.

#### 3.2.1. PVL

As reported by Bermel (1997, p. 181), there are 57 instances<sup>18</sup> of the simple verb *prošiti* in the Laurentian Codex. Judging from the morphological coding of tense-aspect features and the contexts the verbal lexeme is used in, Bermel (1997, p. 9) states that OR *prošiti* shows signs of anaspectuality, that is, “an ability to apply across a range of tenses and functions normally associated with opposing aspects”. However, as the formulation itself reveals and Bermel’s analysis crucially shows, the concept of anaspectuality applies to past tense contexts only (e.g. when one and the same verbal lexeme is conjugated in the aorist and in the imperfect), while the temporal reading of non-past ones is mostly (although not automatically) determined by the aspectual (proto-perfectivity) and actional (telicity) features of the verbal lexeme, i.e. with natural, telic proto-perfective verbs most likely already reinterpreted as aspectual futures (Bermel 1997, pp. 470-474). In non-past contexts, more specifically, the simple *prošiti* clearly behaves like a proto-imperfective verbal form, i.e. it has a present deixis.

Out of the total 57 occurrences identified, only two suitable (i.e. performative) contexts were found. In both DIAs shown below, the verb used is the simple *prošiti*:

(4) Ona že reče imъ: «Nyně u vasъ něst’ medu, ni skory, no malo u vasъ **prošju**<sup>NPIPF</sup>: dajte mi ot dvora po 3 golubi da po 3 vorob’i. Azъ bo ne xoščju tjažьki dani vъzložiti, jakože i mužь moj, cego **prošju**<sup>NPIPF</sup> u vasъ malo».

(PVL 1978, p. 72, ll. 29-33)

“She said to them: «Now you have neither honey nor furs, I ask you for this little thing: give me three pigeons and three sparrows from each house. I do not want to impose a heavy tribute on you, as my husband [did], here’s why I ask you for this little thing»”.

Speaking up in this excerpt is Ol’ga, regent of Kievan Rus’ (945-960) and grandmother of the initiator of Christianity in the realm, Vladimir Svjatoslavič the Great (980-1015). Taking part in the DIAs are also the

<sup>18</sup> Differently from the present study, the number of total occurrences in Bermel (1997) is drawn from the analysis of the Laurentian Codex as reprinted in the *Polnoe sobranie russkich letopisej* (*Complete Collection of Russian Chronicles*), where every gap of the original manuscript is filled by resorting to other, later codices.

addressees, the tribe of Derevljans, who had been overtly refusing Kievan Rus' supremacy to the point they turned against Ol'ga's husband, Igor', and killed him. In order to get her payback, Ol'ga tricks them: after pretending to make peace with them, she orders her soldiers to tie to the birds a piece of sulphur laden tissue, so that, once free to fly back to their nests, they inadvertently set the village on fire, burning it down.

The setting is military-like,<sup>19</sup> the DIA is reported as a dialogic part of the chronicle and Ol'ga is wielding power over the Derevljans (i.e. she is supposed to be in a vertical, asymmetrical relationship with them), which is confirmed by her addressing them with an alleged NP<sup>IPF</sup> form, the condescending *prošju*.

No preverbed forms were found in similar performative DIAs, although a variety of morphological variants can be recovered from other (descriptive, non-performative) contexts: among them are *isprositi* 'to solicit', *všprositi* 'to ask' (also in the variant *všprositi*),<sup>20</sup> *zaprošati* 'to ask (for)', and *sšuprašati sja* 'to make contact', but not *poprositi*. Interestingly, not all of them are formed from the simple *prositi*: in some cases, the preverb is attached to an already suffixed form, *prašati* (Bermel 1997, p. 185), which is thought to cover actional functions akin to a CR iterative-frequentative Aktionsart.

### 3.2.2. Birch bark letters and the travelogues

Although *prositi* is featured overall six times, three of which as the NP<sup>IPF</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> p. pl. *prosja(t')* (DND 2004, pp. 269, 684; NGB 2015, p. 105), these occurrences are found in dialogic and descriptive contexts. This may not only indicate that we still lack complete data in the birch bark documents, but also that such explicit performatives are unlikely to be morphologically realized in a DIA and therefore used in everyday language, for they can be perceived as excessively ceremonial in informal communication.

No preverbed forms of any kind were featured in DIAs. However, *prositi* (and its iterative variant *prašati*) do still form a great variety of preverbed proto-perfectives. Among them, except for *všprositi*, *rasprašati* 'to make inquiries' and the like, an occurrence is found of *poprositi* (as the 2<sup>nd</sup> p. dual imperative *poprosita*: DND 2004, p. 297) and two different

<sup>19</sup> An anonymous reviewer argues that Ol'ga and the Derevljans appear to be negotiating. However, as the wider communicative situation shows, they are not: Ol'ga has already defeated them in multiple battles and starved them to death in their own villages, so that they are ready to surrender and pay their levy: the Derevljans are simply complying with Ol'ga's orders.

<sup>20</sup> More on the historical allomorphy of *všs-* and *vš-* can be found in Endresen and Plungian (2011).

occurrences of *poprašati* (both in the bare infinitive and the conditional m. sing. *by... poprošal*: DND 2004, p. 550).

Not a single occurrence of *prositi* was found in Daniel the Traveller's *Pilgrimage*. VOCs overall are barely attested, except for the single preverbed *uprositi*, here used as a reported speech verb in the 1<sup>st</sup> p. sing. aorist *uprosixъ* (XD 1970, p. 128, ll. 14-15). The same applies to Afanasij Nikitin's *Journey*, where both *prositi* and *prašati* are absent and the only attested form is *otprositi* 'to receive (after having asked for)' in the perfect m. sing. *otprosil* (XAN 1986, p. 8, l. 10). Neither *poprositi* nor *poprašati* are attested in either of the sources.

### 3.2.3. Other letters

The study of epistolary sources attributable to merchants, nobles, gentry, and (great) princes has always had a prominent role inside Russian (and therefore Soviet) philological tradition, with several volumes edited to this day spanning at least three centuries (14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>) and focusing on various geographical territories (Pskov, the Muscovy, Novgorod, and the like). Here only two records have been addressed overall, the first one being a legal document from Pskov, written between 1397 and 1462 (*Pskovskaja sudnaja gramota*, PSG 1896), the second one collecting various official documents written by appanage and grand princes, including such personalities as Ivan I Daniilovič "Kalita" and Ivan IV Vasil'evič "the Terrible" (DDG 1950).

In the first record only two occurrences of *prositi* were found, none of them in a DIA (an infinitive after the deontic auxiliary *imetъ* 'to have to', a NP<sup>IPF</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> p. sing. *prositъ*: PSG 1896, pp. 7, 37). Only *oprositi* 'to inquire' was retrieved among the preverbed forms, both times in an impersonal context governed by an infinitive (the first occurrence shows the variant *oprositъ*: PSG 1896, pp. 8, 21). The relative association of VOCs with deontic contexts fits well with the authoritative nature of the source, but again it should be noted that no aspectually divergent choice is provided, let alone *poprositi*.

In the second record the reflexive variant *prosisja* is mainly attested, as part of the fixed deontic collocation *imet prositi(sja) na izvodъ* 'if it should be required to show an evidence (to the witnesses)', which seems to be a recurring formula typical of commercial treaties as a literary genre in itself (DDG 1950, p. 42, l. 37; see also p. 188, l. 43; p. 204, l. 8; p. 206, l. 45; p. 298, l. 42).<sup>21</sup> NP<sup>IPF</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> p. sing. is never found, either in descriptive or performative contexts. The plural variant *prosim* is found in an excerpt from the spiritual testament of Ivan IV, written in 1572 (DDG 1950, p. 427, l. 3),

<sup>21</sup> The modal verb, in two of the examples above (DDG 1950, p. 204, l. 8; p. 298, l. 42), is preceded by the NP<sup>PF</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> p. sing. of the phasal verb *učati* "to begin".

where the czar speaks directly to God, although in a formulaic fashion (it is no coincidence that *prositi* is used in another fixed collocation, *milosti prosim* ‘we beg for mercy’).<sup>22</sup> Among the preverbed forms are the NP<sup>PF</sup> 3<sup>st</sup> p. sing. of *vsprositi* (DDG 1950, p. 200, l. 52) and the perfect m. sing. form *pereprosil* from *pereprositi* ‘to beg smb. for’ (DDG 1950, p. 163, ll. 26-27). Again, no preverbed forms are featured performatively in DIAs, although the conversational shift towards a highly standardized language would require them, in the spirit of the principle of solidarity.

### 3.2.4. Avvakum

Dating back to the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a transitional period towards the standardization of CR, Avvakum’s autobiography is the most recent source among those considered in this study. *Prositi* is featured at least ten times, three of which performatively in DIAs, where it enters a lexical combination with an abstract direct object marked by the genitive case (*blagoslovenie* ‘blessing’, *proščenie* ‘forgiving’):

(5) Potom ko mne komnatye ljudi mnogaždy prisylany byli, Artemon i Dementej, i govorili mne carevym glagolom: «protopop, vedaju-de ja tvoe čistoe i neporočnoe i bogopodražatel’noe žitie, **prošu**<sup>NPIPF</sup>-de tvoevo blagoslovenija i s cariceju i s čady, — pomolisja o nas!».

(Avvakum 1997, p. 132, ll. 24-29; p. 133, l. 1)

“Then several times Artemon and Dementej, who were his emissaries, were brought to me and they reported the czar’s words: «protopope, I know for sure that your life is clean, immaculate and godlike, so that the *carica*, our children and I ask you for your blessing – pray for us!»”

(6) Posem u vsjakago pravovernago proščeniija **prošu**<sup>NPIPF</sup> [...]

(Avvakum 1997, p. 139, ll. 24-25)

“And then I beg every Orthodox for forgiveness”

(7) I egda v Petrov den’ sobraljsja v doščennik, prišel ko mne Feodor celoumen, na doščennike pri narode klanjaetsja na nogi moi, a sam govorit: «spasi bog, batjuško, za milost’ tvoju, čto pomiloval mja. Po pustyni-de ja bežal tret’eva dni, a ty-de mne javilsja i blagoslovil menja krestom, i besi-de proč’ otbežali ot menja i ja prišel k tebe poklonitca i paki **prošu**<sup>NPIPF</sup> blagoslovenija ot tebja».

(Avvakum 1997, p. 149, ll. 19-27)

<sup>22</sup> The NP<sup>IPF</sup> 2<sup>st</sup> p. pl. imperative form *prositi* was also found, which is featured in a biblical quote from M 11:24 (Jesus speaking up to the apostles) and therefore, being heavily influenced by Old Church Slavonic, has been disregarded.

“When, on Saint Peter’s Day, I got into the *doščanik* [a flat-bottomed river vessel made of boards, *M.B.*], my Feodor, a wise man, came to me. He kneels down to my feet, in front of all those people, and says: «God save you, my Father, for your mercifulness, that you have showed me mercy. The day before yesterday I was wandering through the waste lands, but you showed up to me and gifted me with the Holy Cross, and the devils fled out of me, so I came to you to kneel down and I ask you again for blessing”

In (5) the czar himself speaks to Avvakum through his emissaries Artemon Matveev and Dementij Bašmakov: in (6), addressing the Old Believers is the same Avvakum; lastly, in (7), the dialogue between the fool for Christ Feodor and his spiritual father Avvakum is described. Despite the difference in context no aspectual variation can be found, whatever the relationship between the interlocutors may be (the czar and Avvakum do not belong to the same social class, neither does Avvakum and the Old Believers coven, let alone Avvakum and Feodor): in every case, *prošu* remains the standard form. Although some preverbed forms are used throughout the text (*otprositi*, the “new” *vyprositi* and *sprositi*, whose meanings are akin to those of CR), they can only be found in descriptive and/or dialogic contexts, mostly in past tense.

### 3.2.5. OR and MR corpora

Running a search query for the word *prositi* in the OR corpus (with minimal restrictive tags included, such as “present tense” and “1<sup>st</sup> p. sing.”) we obtain eleven results. Except for those already known (e.g. the PVL), here two of them are adduced:

(8) Moljasja i klanjasja reka tako: bra(t) se boľenъ esmi velmi, a **prošju**<sup>NPIPF</sup>  
u tebe postrizenija [...]

[Kievskaja letopis’]

“[...] Saying so while praying and bowing down: «Brother, I am terribly ill, I ask you for the monastic tonsure»”

(9) i prošenъja jegože azъ **prošju**<sup>NPIPF</sup> dažъ mi

[Suzdal’skaja letopis’]

“and the request which I ask for, grant me” (Bermel 1997, p. 182)

In (8), Igor Ol’govič begs his cousin and bitter rival, Izjaslav Mstislavič, to set him free from captivity and let him take vows. In (9), Vasil’ko Konstantinovič, the appanage prince of Rostov imprisoned by the Mongolian army, prays to God to protect his children and relieve his pain. No occurrence of *poprositi* (whatever the tags defined) was found overall.



The same applies for the MR corpus, where, from among 211 results on the search query *prošu*, only one occurrence of *poprošu* was found<sup>23</sup> (the source is an embassy ledger recounting the business relationships between the Muscovy and the Nogai Horde, written between 1551 and 1556). However, even this single token should be counted out: not only is it preceded by a negation (which would automatically change the nature of the speech act itself, switching it from directive to commissive), but it is also inserted in a wider context featuring reported speech.

### 3.2.6. Preliminary findings

The findings so far show the following:

- Both OR and MR show a similar aspectual distribution of performative *prositi* in DIAs. Not a single preverbed form was found in the same performative context, independently of the communicative situation involved (i.e. the power relationship between the interlocutors, the use of politeness strategies etc.).
- *Prositi* seems to join an aspectual network with several forms (preverbed, e.g. *vъsprositi*, suffixed, e.g. *prašati*, and preverbed-suffixed, e.g. *sъuprašati sja*), each one of them carrying a more specific meaning, which restricts and disambiguates the primary one (i.e. they seem to be either *Aktionsarten* or specialized proto-perfectives in Janda *et al.*'s 2013 sense). However, apparently none of them enters a true aspectual pair with *prositi*.
- *Poprositi* is less attested, whatever its morphological features. Its aspectual status with reference to *prositi* remains unclear.

The conundrum of why such great differences have arisen between OR/MR and CR needs explaining both in linguistic (structural) and extralinguistic terms. This is addressed in the next Section.

## 4. A twofold theoretical proposal

If we run a search in the NKRJa for the word form *poprošu* and compare its distribution in a time span approximately from the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century to 2014, we get the following picture (see Figure 1 below):

<sup>23</sup> An anonymous reviewer underlines that *poprositi* is attested thirteen times overall in the MR corpus. True as this may be, however, this global quantitative evaluation of *poprositi* does not either address or explain the effective lack of NP<sup>PF</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> p. sing. of performative *poprositi* in DIAs.

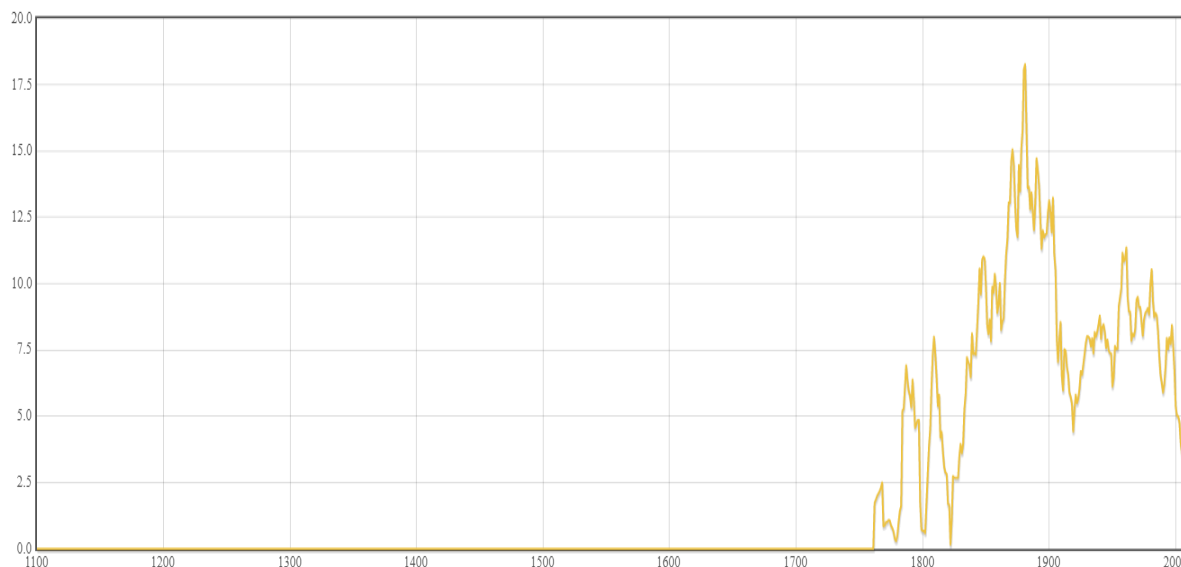


Figure 1

Distribution of *poprošu* from 1100 to 2014. The x axis shows the time progression, the y axis shows the number of tokens retrieved (screenshot taken from NKRJa).

Three main points can be made in this respect:

- NP<sup>PF</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> p. sing. forms of *poprositi* are statistically irrelevant at least up to the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- The occurrences of (performative) *poprošu* in DIAs keep growing from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward, the first one allegedly being an excerpt from Sumarokov's comedy *The Guardian (Opekun, 1765)*.
- While scant at best in OR and MR periods, evidence for the use of NP<sup>PF</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> p. sing. forms of performative *poprositi* in DIAs is already much more substantial at the beginning of the CR period (from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward), with a peak in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The questions are: what kind of linguistic and/or extralinguistic causes prompted the new rise of the aspectual opposition in DIAs, and why? What factors turned the possibility of an aspectual alternation in the given context, slight as it might have been, into a systematic linguistic tendency? These questions will be addressed next, from two different perspectives: morphosyntactic (Subsection 4.1) and sociolinguistic (Subsection 4.2).

#### 4.1. The morphosyntactic profile of VOC

The diachronic evolution of (East) Slavic aspect is an incredibly complex matter that is still unresolved to this day and cannot even be touched upon here. Essentially, two different phenomena seem to have exerted the greatest influence on the grammaticalization of the aspectual system. On the one

hand, the preverbalization of simple stems with an inherently telic meaning<sup>24</sup> leaned towards the creation of aspectual pairs joined by both verbal lexemes (with a contextual shift in temporal reference, although still non-automatic, for the NP<sup>PF</sup> form). On the other hand, the morphological mechanism of suffixation, especially from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onward, considerably increased the number of new lexical units from specialized preverbed proto-perfectives: such new IPF forms could express a habitual or repeated action. The aspectual mechanism then permeated the vast majority of the verbal system, becoming more and more grammaticalized<sup>25</sup> (Mende 1999). It is commonly believed that the process leveled off between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with constant but minor changes, which seems to be supported by the data depicted in Figure 1.

VOCs somehow do not entirely fit in the given scheme because of their actional properties (see Section 2). In a recent study, Dickey (2015, p. 271) underlines that in OR, performatives – including VOCs in DIAs – are almost always found as NP<sup>IPF</sup>, the few exceptions being non-performative verbs occurring performatively (e.g. *pohvaliti* ‘to praise’) in cases of absolute control by the speaker. This is in line with Israeli (2001, pp. 54-70, 78-88) observations on the aspectual oscillation in CR VOCs, both in performative and descriptive contexts. The author points out that PF is used 1) when the hearer *h* is thought to have previously engaged in a communication process with a third party (whether an external pragmatic contract stands between the interlocutors or not) and 2) when the speaker *s* believes *h* to have properly reacted to the communicative situation (thus adhering to an internal pragmatic contract). In both cases, *s* needs to wield a pragmatic feature of authority over *h*, otherwise the aspectual choice is considered infelicitous.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Here the formal definition of telicity proposed by Borik (2006) is adopted, based on the temporal argument of every predicate.

<sup>25</sup> In the early stages of OR, when aspectual and temporal reference was split between two different systems, part of the aspectual meanings was conveyed by certain tenses, e.g. the aorist, which most typically expressed an action seen in its entirety. The definitive collapse of the OR temporal system and its coalescence into the aspectual one, which basically led to an internal reorganization of verbal morphology and to the enrichment of aspect functions, played a pivotal role in this process (Dickey 2018b).

<sup>26</sup> An anonymous reviewer argues that the aspectual profile of VOCs is effectively influenced only by the (presence or absence of the) authority feature as defined in Israeli (2001), thus questioning the role Slavkova (2014) and, by analogy, Benakk'o (2010) grant to politeness. In my opinion, three points need to be addressed here. First, it is not clear to me why and how the pragmatic parameters of authority and (negative and/or positive) politeness would necessarily clash with each other: a speaker may variously act (un)authoritatively and (im)politely, depending on the given communicative situation, i.e. the variables can combine with each other in different ways and with different effects, along a *gradatum*. Authority does play a role in determining the aspectual choice (I myself stress that, see Section 1), but it is far from being the only peripheral feature (in the post-structural sense of Vimer 2014) which is relevant here. Hardly can we explain the Russian (and Bulgarian) examples exhibiting NP<sup>PF</sup> in Slavkova (2014, pp. 239-244)

Such a range of heterogeneous properties, although already potentially conveyable in the early stages of OR, appeared in too sporadic a fashion to systematically enter in a bijective function with the respective aspect (in the sense of a one-to-one correspondence between form and function). This correlation was to become stronger only in the following centuries, approaching the drastic mutations Russian society would undergo from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward.

#### 4.2. *A window on the West, or the Etiquette of Aspect*

Internally motivated language change is often counterbalanced and completed by externally motivated language change, as discussed in Hickey (2012). If we treat language as “an abstraction over the collective behavior of a speech community” (Hickey 2012, p. 390), the study of language becomes part of the study of a whole cultural system and its manifestation in a given spatiotemporal framework. Resorting once again to the differences in the distribution of *poprošu* as displayed by Figure 1, it comes as no surprise that such a linguistic innovation characterizes a time span, the second half of 18<sup>th</sup> century, which first greatly benefited from the radical cultural reforms of Peter the Great (Živov 2002, pp. 381-435).

Although some substantial cultural advancements had been reached even before his advent to the throne, what Peter did was speed up the pace of these transformations, in accordance with both the internally motivated language change observed in the previous subsections and the innovations

resorting to authority alone. Moreover, one of the counterexamples adduced by the reviewer, reported below as (10), does not reveal much on the presence of effective (i.e. non self-proclaimed) authority, as it features abusive and grotesque slang register, which is by its own nature exceptional:

- (10) – Vsta-a-at’! Ja **poprošu**<sup>NPPF</sup>! Ja tebe tak **poprošu**<sup>NPPF</sup>, gad! – I vdrug, zakusiv gubu, on razmaxnulsja i prjamo-taki vsadil sapog emu v koleno.  
 “«Up! This I request! From you this I request, asshole!». And suddenly, having bitten his lips, he swung his arm and stuck his boot in [Zybin’s] knee”  
 [Ju. O. Dombrovskij, Fakul’tet nenužnyx veščej, čast’ 2 (1978)]

Second, aside from authority Israeli (2001, pp. 74-78, 81-94) lists consequentiality and new information among the relevant parameters for VOCs’ aspectual choice. The features of authority, consequentiality and new information stem naturally from the semantics of (East Slavic) PF (Dickey 2000, p. 19 ff.), which would also explain why in more recent work Dickey (2018a) sees the effect of authority as an effect of temporal sequencing. This leads to the third point: temporal sequencing can be reduced in turn to the expression of the speaker’s positive epistemic stance towards the situation described (“full and instant identifiability”, using the terms of De Wit *et al.* 2018), then hinting at the covert modal properties of performative tempo-aspectual grammemes. Again, not only is the feature of authority only one of the parameters involved, but it can also be brought back (and explained through) the semantics of PF aspect.

(mostly contact-induced or contact-borrowed) spreading from the highest to the lowest social classes. The sociocultural reforms of Peter the Great overtly aimed at bringing the Russian Empire closer to the European countries and, consequently, to their social habits (thus overcoming the strict and frozen division in the distribution of social roles, typical of a medieval-like society).

A massive innovation affected the allocutive forms of the pronominal referential system, which, starting from the first decades of 17<sup>th</sup> century, had been undergoing radical changes. The standard allocutionary pronoun, at least up to early MR (15<sup>th</sup> century), was the 2<sup>nd</sup> p. sing. *ty*, independent of the characteristics of the specific communicative situation and the social status of the communication participants. Examples (4)-(9) show that *s* addresses their conversation partner without regard to the social differences existing between them. This allocutionary mode is regularly accompanied, in a DIA, by a NP<sup>IPF</sup> form of *prosi*, without any room left for aspectual choice. Still, it would be unreasonable to assert that every *ty* serves the same semantic and pragmatic functions: at least three different tokens of *ty* can be isolated – the first one displaying condescendence, as in (5), the second one total subordination, as in (7), and the third one a sort of mutual, deferential recognition, as in (8).<sup>27</sup> In the first two cases, we are dealing with a hierarchical relationship: in the last one, the relationship between interlocutors is rather symmetrical.

Things changed when the ceremonial 2<sup>nd</sup> p. pl. *Vy*, previously restricted to courtyard environments, began to penetrate and actively circulate in everyday language use. Studying the dating of a late MR tale, the *Tale of Froot Skobeev* (*Povest' o Froole Skobeeve*), Benacchio Berto (1980) asserts the existence of two different types of *Vy*. The first one, asymmetrical, has a distinct reverential flavor. The second one conforms to the principle of solidarity, being used mostly by interlocutors who share the same social class (nobles, gentry, and the like). As a further development, it was also employed by other social classes to address negative face, so as to signal the interpersonal distance between the interlocutors.<sup>28</sup>

This last innovation is particularly impressive, for it witnesses a substantial shift towards the adoption of a conversational etiquette, typical of

<sup>27</sup> Frequent, in this respect, are examples from the corpus of birch bark letters (e.g. № 157: cf. DND 2004, p. 666), where peasants address their landlord with a formulaic incipit (most notably *bit' čelom*, lit. 'to beat one's head' in the sense of 'to express a humble greeting') with the pronoun of overt subordination *ty*.

<sup>28</sup> That the process was just at the beginning and needed some time to spread properly, however, is signaled by the frequent missing syntactic agreement between the verb and the reverential pronoun *Vy* (Benacchio Berto 1980, p. 15).

hierarchically oriented social relationships.<sup>29</sup> The following examples, which appear to date back to the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward, are revealing in this respect,<sup>30</sup> as well as for the variety of literary genres and the communicative situations they pertain to – from the mockery of religious (formulaic) language in (11) to private correspondence in (12), from the conversation between business partners in (13) and lovers in (14) to the fictitious dialogue between the writer and his readers established in (15):

(11) Ja čelovek samoj grešnoj, i bezzakonija prevzydoša glavu moju; tak ja, ne upovaja bol'she na miloserdie božie, xotja i kajusja, ugodnikov božiix **poprošu**<sup>NPPF</sup>, čtoby oni za menja slovo zamolvili.

[A. P. Sumarokov, Opekun (1765)]

“I am a great sinner and my sins have overtaken me; so, not hoping anymore for God’s mercy, although I do repent, I ask for God’s pleasers to put in a good word for me”.

(12) Lučše poželaju vamъ vsjakago blagopolučija, **poprošu**<sup>NPPF</sup> vamъ byt' uvěrennymi vъ moemъ kъ vamъ iskrennemъ počitanii, i ostajus' navsegda vašь pokornějšij sluga Aleksandrъ Šiškovъ.

[A. S. Šiškov. Pis'ma Ja. I. Bardovskomu (1816)]

“I wish you every kind of prosperity, I ask you not to doubt that I hold you in sincere esteem, and I remain forever your most humble servant, Aleksandr Šiškov”.

(13) Teper' že ja **poprošu**<sup>NPPF</sup> vas uvolit' moj dom ot vašix poseščenij; smeju vas uverit', čto daže progulki vaši po zdešnej ulice budut naprasny i tol'ko vam že mogut nanesti neprijatnosti.

[O. M. Somov, Vyveska (1827)]

“And right now, I ask you to dispense with your visits to my property; I can assure you that even your strolls along this street will be vain and could do harm only to you”.

(14) «Za iskrennost' moju ja **poprošu**<sup>NPPF</sup> tebja byt' iskrennym. Skaži mne tol'ko odno, knjaz' Dmitrij Jur'evič: pravda li, čto kramol'nik bojarin Ioann teper' naxoditsja u tvoego roditelja?».

[N. A. Polevoj, Kljatva prig robe Gospodnem (1832)]

<sup>29</sup> In this respect, a non-marginal role might have been played by the German cultural paradigm, which at the time exerted the strongest influence over intellectuals and the czar himself. Suffice it to say that the first handbooks where the new conversational rules were propagated, including the reconstructed allocutionary system, were mostly Russian translations from German (Benacchio Berto 1980, p. 13).

<sup>30</sup> Full annotations are not given because of space limitations.

“«For me to be sincere I ask you to be sincere as well. Tell me just one thing, prince Dmitrij Jur’evič: is it true that the rioter boyar Ioann is now by your parents?»”.

(15) Ja **poprošu**<sup>NPPF</sup> svoego ili svoix ljubeznyx čitatelej perenestis’ voobraženiem v tu maluju lesnuju dereven’ku, gde Boris Petrovič so svoej oxotoj osnoval glavnuju svoju kvartiru, naxodja ee centrom svoix operacionnyx punktov.

[M. Ju. Lermontov, Vadim (1833-1834)]

“I ask my gentle reader, or readers, to flee with their imagination to that small woodland village, where Boris Petrovič, following his desire, established his main quarters as the center of his operative stations”.

Borrowing Niculescu’s (1974) taxonomy, the choice of the most appropriate allocutionary pronoun seems to be based equally on social, internal (strictly linguistic, structural) and psycho-individual ground.<sup>31</sup>

This might also explain why, in Figure 1, the percentage of the total occurrences of *poprošu* is still barely curving upwards at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. If we begin to assign the new PF form new pragmatic-conversational functions akin to those we find in CR, e.g. the expression of negative politeness, authority, and the like, it is not difficult to notice the connection between the occurrences of NP<sup>PF</sup> VOCs and the reorganization of the pronominal referential system. In other words, if there was no need for OR and MR morphosyntax to encode the pragmatic notion of interpersonal distance – if it was present, it was so ample that it would have been redundant even to mark it – the cultural shift encouraged by Peter’s reforms created a new sociolinguistic environment which did demand a proper adjustment of verbal (aspectual) and pronominal morphology.<sup>32</sup>

This leads us to the issue of the choice of the perfectivizing preverb, which, for many simple VOCs entering an aspectual pair via prevervation, tends – although needs not – to be *po-* (cf. *poprosit’* with *poblagodarit’*<sup>PF</sup> ‘to thank’, *poobeščat’*<sup>PF</sup> ‘to promise’, *posovetovat’*<sup>PF</sup> ‘to suggest’, *poželat’*<sup>PF</sup> ‘to wish’, *poxodatajstvovat’*<sup>PF</sup> ‘to solicit’ etc.). *Po-* has been shown to play a

<sup>31</sup> It has been argued that the relation between the speaker and the addressee (and, in a broader sense, the pragmatic roles of discourse participants) may be also encoded in the syntactic structures of the single languages, as recently proposed for Korean by Portner *et al.* (2019).

<sup>32</sup> The reason why the curve, having reached its peak at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, sharply decreases in the following decades and remains stable until then may be found in two considerations. The first one revolves around the language policy pursued by the Bolsheviks, which overtly aimed at dismantling pre-revolutionary linguistic capital, including conversational manners and the etiquette (all men had to be considered equal even in the most trivial communicative situation). The second one echoes Brown and Gilman’s final remark (1960, p. 280): “We have suggested that the modern direction of change in pronoun usage expresses a will to extend the solidary ethic to everyone”.

pivotal role in the grammaticalization of the East Slavic aspectual system, especially with reference to its abstract (empty) perfectivizing nature<sup>33</sup> (Dickey 2005: 45-48). Should this assumption be true, to enter a new aspectual pair, VOC like *prostiti* would have rather relied on partners whose preverb functioned as a neutral marker of perfectivity, not displaying any sign of semantic autonomy<sup>34</sup> (unlike, for instance, the specialized proto-perfectives listed in Section 3). This, however, is only a tentative suggestion. The question of the interaction between *po-*, VOCs, and East Slavic aspectual system lies beyond the scope of the present research.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper the theoretical proposal has been put forward that the aspectual restriction on Old and Middle Russian verbs of communication (VOCs) such as *prostiti* ‘to ask (for)’ used performatively in directive speech acts (DIAs) – namely, the absence of a proper preverbed proto-perfective form, akin to Contemporary Russian *poprosit’* – can be accounted for on two different linguistic levels: 1) morphosyntactic (the actional properties of VOCs) and 2) sociolinguistic (the lack of a proper allocutionary pronoun consistent with the etiquette of hierarchically-oriented social relationships).

To check the validity and the accuracy of the present account, a wider range of *verba dicendi* must be looked at. Also, a more detailed study of the syntactic expression of pronominal subjects and the syntactic-semantic interaction between preverbs and verbal lexemes should be undertaken, with special reference to the so-called empty preverbs. Lastly, a more thorough overview of the textual sources must be carried out, providing additional new data, so as to conduct a more extensive contrastive analysis.

<sup>33</sup> An anonymous reviewer underlines that, on the basis of the data available from the NKRJa, the alleged spread of *po-* as a marker of perfectivity from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward affected not only VOCs, but also other classes of lexical predicates (among the adduced examples are *porabotat*<sup>PF</sup> ‘to work for a while’ and *pogovorit*<sup>PF</sup> ‘to have a conversation’). In these cases, however, *po-* is not a neutral marker of perfectivity, for it is added to atelic verbs (Vendlerian activities), which gives consequent rise to the delimitative reading (in the sense of *Aktionsart*) of the resulting lexical (perfective) verb. The diachronic evolution of delimitative *po-*, with particular reference to verbs of motion, is sketched out in Dickey (2005). More formal considerations on the syntax and semantics of *po-* in various Slavic languages can be found in Biskup (2019, pp. 127-157).

<sup>34</sup> As correctly pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, some verbs (e.g. *blagodarit*<sup>PF</sup>) happen to have more than one perfective partner (e.g. *otblagodarit*<sup>PF</sup>), although in this case *ot-* has not fully undergone semantic bleaching, retaining part of its original semantics (the lexical component *bounce*, i.e. ‘make an action in return’, of Janda *et al.* 2013).



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