




*Alexander Letuchiy*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4151-2550>

# Partial observation and nonstandard tense uses: Russian perfective verbs in progressive interpretation

## Abstract

The article focuses on a special use of the Russian perfective past, which is virtually similar to a progressive one: it is illustrated by examples like *Smotri, samolët poletel* 'Look, a plane is flying'. I show that, in fact, this use, though characteristic of a small group of motion predicates, is a part of the whole class of uses that express the partial access of the speaker to the situation ('partial observation'): in this particular case, the speaker can only observe the middle phase of the situation, while the initial phase remains invisible. The use of perfective aspect denotes the fact that the observation period is short and represents the starting point of the observation as if it were the starting point of the situation itself. Similar phenomena are found both in the class of resultative constructions and in other construction classes: the speaker cannot observe a part of the situation and describes only the observable phase as if it was the only one. At the same time, the class of the partial observation readings is heterogeneous. First, some of them allow temporal clauses with the simultaneity meaning and other contexts, characteristic of progressive constructions, while others are incompatible with those mechanisms. Second, only some of those constructions are lexically productive, while others, like, for instance, our progressive-like constructions, characterize a small group of lexemes. I conclude that our use does not, in fact, demonstrate combinatorial properties, characteristic of progressives, thus, no nonstandard progressive past tense use is observed. The meaning of a past event is retained in the construction under analysis, and what is nonstandard is the fact that the speaker describes in the 'online' mode those events that have just taken place before the speech act (this use can be called 'immediate comment').

## Keywords

perfective aspect, progressive, resultative, argument structure, evidential meanings, observation period, adverbials, nonstandard uses of tense and aspect

## Introduction

Russian is known to lack a specialized progressive form: the same present tense form is used in progressive, habitual, and iterative contexts. However, some prefixed perfective verbs can have a non-canonical interpretation, typical for tense-aspect forms in richer systems. In my article, I describe a special use of the form with the prefix *po-* in the interpretation that I will label as the ‘progressive interpretation.’ This use is illustrated by examples like *Smotri, samolët poletel* ‘Look, a plane is flying’, where the speaker uses a perfective verb *poletel* to describe the movement of the plane (s)he is observing.

The main aims of the study are 1) to analyze the mechanism lying behind the progressivelike interpretation of perfective past forms and 2) to show that similar mechanisms explain other nonstandard uses of grammatical forms.

The rest of the article is organized in the following way. In Section 1, I describe and analyze the progressive use of perfective verbs. Section 2 focuses on the group of resultative uses, which are similar to the progressive use under analysis in that that the situation is only partially observed by the speaker. In Section 3, other types of partial observation effects are analyzed, including evidential uses of tense forms and argument structure changes – the emergence of both phenomena result from the fact that some subevents or some participants are ignored in the description of the situation. Section 4 addresses the combinatorial properties of the progressive and similar uses: it turns out that the progressive use shows no shift in combinatorial properties in comparison to the standard use of the past tense. This leads to a conclusion that is put forward in Section 5: in the use that I called ‘progressive’, past tense forms are, in fact, used in the standard way – what is nonstandard, is the choice of the perfective aspect and the discourse function of this construction: it is used as a commentary on the event that is taking place or has just taken place. In the Conclusions section, the results of the study are briefly described.

Examples are taken from the *Russian National Corpus* ([www.ruscorpora.ru](http://www.ruscorpora.ru)) or from internet search queries. For the sake of readability, citations taken from the internet are simply marked as [WEB].

## 1. Progressive use

### 1.1. Basic description

Below I show some examples where motion verbs in the perfective past ('moved, began to move') are semantically similar to progressive constructions in some languages ('is moving'): they denote a situation that is taking place at the moment of speech.<sup>1</sup> The group of verbs showing this use includes *poexat'* 'begin to drive', *pojti* 'begin to go', *poplyt'* 'begin to sail', *poletet'* 'begin to fly', and so on.<sup>2</sup>

All verbs I describe contain the prefix *po-*. In the main use, they have the inceptive meaning, referring to the beginning of the situation.<sup>3</sup> For instance, (1) shows the standard inceptive meaning of *pojti* 'begin to go', and (2) the progressive use.

(1) *Utrom ja pošel v magazin za xlebom.*

'In the morning, I went to the shop to buy some bread.'

(2) *Kto-to skazal, gljadja v okno: — Legavyj pošel (Legavym zvali direktora školj — Čebotarëva.*

'Someone said looking out the window: "Legavyj is going" (lit. 'went'). "Legavyj" was a nickname of Chebotarëv, the principal of the school.' [S. Dovlatov. *Naši* (1983)]

The context of the form *pošel* is similar to the usual context of progressive forms: the actual state of things is described, which takes place at the moment of speech: the principal Legavyj is going outside the window, and at this moment the speaker notices him. This context satisfies the definitions of a progressive, given by Chung and Timberlake (1985) (they say that progressive is a "language-particular

<sup>1</sup> See Guillaume (1929) and Jajez (1999) on the relation between progressive and similar meanings of the imperfective domain.

<sup>2</sup> The very phenomenon of shifted tense use have been addressed in many typological and theoretical studies: for instance, Comrie (1985, p. 16) points at the case observed in Roman letters: "... Roman society, presumably for reasons of politeness, recommended use of the recipient's deictic centre". Another case of the same sort (Comrie, 1985, p. 19) is the use of past in polite requests: "I just wanted to ask you if you could lend me a pound." Comrie (1985, p. 20) also cites the Russian use of past tense like *Ja pošel* 'lit. I came' for immediate future events and the use of past tense for surprise expression in present in Norwegian.

<sup>3</sup> As Stojnova (2020) shows, Russian has several prefixal patterns that express the inceptive, the main being *za-* (*zapet'* 'begin to sing', *zaigrat'* 'begin to play', *zabëgat'* 'begin to run', *zarabotat'* 'begin to work', and so on). However, only *po-* shows the use under analysis.

morphological category that signals that an event is dynamic over the event frame”) or by Bybee & Dahl (1989) (they understand progressive as “indicating the situation is in progress at reference time”) (Bybee & Dahl, 1989, p. 55). The only difference is the fact that the Russian progressive use does not have a specialized morphological marking.

The starting point of the motion is not observed by the speaker. While in non-progressive uses (1) and (6), the beginning of the motion is visible (the speaker who says *ja pošël* in (6), only begins his movement). By contrast, in examples (2) and (3)–(5), the speaker does not see the starting point of the movement of “Lexus”, of the plane or of a worm: what is relevant, is only the beginning of observation time:

- (3) *Mama znakomogo s SŠA, priexav v Biš, na každyj Leksus pal'cem pokazyvala, vo smotri, Leksus poexal.*  
 ‘The mother of my friend from the USA, when she visited Bish (Bishkek), pointed by her finger to each ‘Lexus’ car, [saying]: look, a ‘Lexus’ is driving!’ [WEB]
- (4) *Letat' xotel. Uvidit samoljët, srazu “mam, gljadi, samoljët poletel”.*  
 ‘He wanted to fly. If he saw a plane, he immediately said: “Mummy, look, a plane is flying”.’ [WEB]
- (5) *Xoma govorit matuške: — Viš', do čego sgnil pux, vot kakoj červjak popolz!*  
 ‘Homa says to his mother: “Look, how rotten is the fluff, what a worm is crawling”.’ [WEB]

Below I will call this feature of the progressive use ‘partial observation reading’. The partial observation reading is understood in the following way:

- (I) **The utterance has a partial observation reading if:**
- (i) **Only some phases of the situation are visible to the speaker and are described in the utterance, while other phases are invisible or irrelevant.**
  - (ii) **The speaker describes the visible phase, as if it was the only phase of the situation and does not mention other phases.**
  - (iii) **Often some elements of the utterance are re-interpreted to point only to the visible and relevant part of the situation.**

Syntactically, the progressive use is also different from the standard one: in the progressive use, the final point can be left unexpressed and even unclear from the context. In standard examples like (1), the final point is typically expressed

or clear from the context. More problematic are uses with the future meaning like (6), where the final point is often unexpressed, but is often recoverable from the context:

- (6) — *Nu, ja pošël, poka, — skazal Andrej, podxvativ svoi udočki.*  
 ‘Now I will go, bye, Andrei said, picking up his rods.’ [E. Kolina. Dnevnik izmeny (2011)]

Along with intransitive verbs like *pojti*, *poletet'*, *popolzti*, some causative motion verbs also allow the progressive use (cf. examples (7) and (8)). Interestingly, they are usually used in the construction with zero 3PL subject, (8) being more natural than (9). In other words, not only the initial phase, but also the agent related to this phase are eliminated – see Section 3 about the relation between nonstandard verb form use and argument structure.

- (7) *Uvidel zaxodjaščij na posadku IL-76 i vzjal da i ljapnul: smotri, povezli trupaki UPA.*

‘He saw an IL-76 coming in for a landing, and he just blurted out: look, they are bringing UPA corpses.’

- (8) — *Gljadi, rebjata, vot soglašatelja ponesli!*  
 ‘Look, guys, they are carrying a collaborator there!’ [Krasnyj prazdnik (1924)]

- (9) *Gljadi, rebjata, Ivanov soglašatelja ponës.*  
 ‘Look, guys, Ivanov is carrying a collaborator there!’

A special context is constituted by interrogative constructions with motion verbs. Of course, they can be taken to be simple uses of past tense.

- (10) — *Kuda popolz?! — ryknula tvar'!*  
 ‘Where are you crawling, – the creature growled.’ (Kalinov most. Trilogija).

This type of questions has a special illocutionary force, which facilitates the progressive meaning: the speaker condemns the addressee for his / her action. Contrary to examples like (2)–(5), the initial phase can well be known. In this type of examples, we observe a pragmatic shift, rather than a semantic one: the middle phrase of the situation is central for the question, rather than the starting point of the motion.

In the following two sections, I will try to explain the two prominent features of the progressive use of perfective verbs: namely, (i) the use of the perfective aspect and (ii) the fact that it is precisely the group of motion verbs that allows this type of use.

## 1.2. Why perfective aspect?

The first feature of progressive uses to be explained is the choice of perfective aspect. The progressive is mostly associated with the imperfective aspect, and, in turn, the perfective aspect is taken to denote a finished situation.

The function of perfective in the progressive use under analysis is not the same as in resultative readings of examples like (11). The resultative reading of (11) ('He has fallen asleep and is sleeping now') results from the metonymy "Finished situation – result of the situation" (see also Batiukova & al., 2012): the two phases are adjacent in time, which facilitates the semantic shift.

(11) *On tol'ko čto zasnul.*

'He has just fallen asleep (and is sleeping now).'

This metonymy is hardly relevant for the progressive use under analysis, which does not result from the reinterpretation of more standard perfective readings – in examples like (2)–(6), the perfective reading of starting point is hardly available at all. Still, the use of perfective aspect – and, in particular, a perfective verb with the inceptive meaning – is explicable. It seems that this aspectual type is used here to express (i) the fact that the observation period (the time when the speaker can observe the situation) is short and (ii) started right before the utterance. In other words, (2) means 'I have just started to see that the director is going there.' Two other variants that could be used instead of the inceptive verb are semantically different: the standard present tense version (12) does not express any of those two components, while the variant with a non-inceptive perfective verb (13) expresses the shortness of the observation time, but does not emphasize the fact that the observation has just started.

(12) *Smotri, samolët letit.*

'Look a plane is flying.'

(13) *Smotri, samolët proletel.*

'Look, a plane flew past.'

As will be shown below, the fact that the observation period does not cover the whole situation is relevant in other cases, addressed in Section 2 below.

### 1.3. Why motion verbs?

The fact that the special progressive use is only or mainly compatible with motion verbs is not accidental either. It has to do with semantics of directed motion, in particular, the fact that, as noted by Dowty (1991) and Krifka (1998) the path argument of motion verbs is an incremental theme. As Rothstein puts it (2001, p. 139), the path is “used up ‘bit by bit’ as the event denoted by the verb progresses”: in every following moment the path covered by the motion is longer than in the previous one. This means that the observation of motion often (though not always) begins when the moving object becomes visible to the speaker and ends when the object is out of sight: for instance, in (2), someone said *Legavyyj pošël* at the moment when he could see the director. Since the object has just started to be visible, the speaker can represent the beginning of the observation period as if the motion has just started, and this is why the inceptive prefixed verb is used.

This is not the case, for instance, with singing: the person who sings does not move to the zone of speaker’s visibility, and the moment when the speaker begins to hear the singer cannot be represented as the beginning of singing. This is why the majority of inceptives, including a large group of *za*-verbs *zapat’* ‘begin to sing’, *zaigrat’* ‘begin to play’, *zaplakat’* ‘begin to sing’, *zaprygat’* ‘begin to jump’, *zabëgat’* ‘begin to run in different directions’, and so on) do not have this reading. Examples like (14) are not used in the progressive reading:

(14) #*Petja zapel.*

Intended: ‘Petja is singing.’<sup>4</sup>

The perfective use under analysis are somewhat close to those addressed by Fedotov (2017, 2020) and Fedotov & Čujkova (2013), who use the notion ‘okno nabludenija’ (‘observation window’), which Plungjan (2000, 2011, 2016) introduces as a Russian analogue to Klein’s (1994) ‘topic time’. Fedotov describes it as “time interval that embraces the relevant part of situation time – the interval in which the speaker is sure” (Fedotov, 2020, p. 467). In other words, each

<sup>4</sup> They are, of course, possible in the standard inceptive reading: the speaker can say (14) if (s)he perceives the moment when Petja begins to sing. This reading can be extended to the process phase (example (14) can mean ‘Petja began to sing and is singing now’). However, the same sentence is not typically used if the speaker did not hear the beginning of the song.

use of tense and aspect presupposes that only a particular interval is relevant for the description of the situation in language and behavior of various elements. However, the progressive use under analysis has some special features that are not covered by the standard notion of topic time. First, in my data, the relevant part of the situation is the only one visible to the speaker. Second, in the case under analysis, this partial observation results in a nonstandard aspect use.

Although the progressive use is only compatible with the small class of motion verbs, there are other nonstandard tense and aspect uses that can be explained using the notion of partial observation. Some of them belong to the group of resultative meanings, which I will discuss in Section 2. Others belong to another class of phenomena, where the partial observation reading adds evidential components to the sentence meaning or changes the properties of syntactic arguments. Cases of this sort will be analyzed in Section 3.

## **2. Other uses of tenses, related to partial observation: resultative uses and subordinate tense forms**

Russian possesses a family of resultative constructions that share the partial observation reading with the progressive use. Here belong resultative uses, where a part of the situation is unavailable for observation, and some uses of tense forms in subordinate clauses, where the whole situation is observed, but only a part of the situation is focused.

### **2.1. Resultative uses**

The main class of tense uses to show the partial observation reading are resultative uses of perfective past. In this case, neither the beginning of the situation, nor its final point can be observed. Only the resulting state of affairs ('the shop works', (15), 'the guy is sleeping', (16) and (17), 'someone thinks', (18)) is visible to the subject or observer.

(15) *Odnaždy on uexal otdyxat' na leto, a kogda vernulsja, uvidel, što v ego dome otkryli restoran.*

'Once he went for summer holidays, and when he returned, he saw that they had opened a restaurant at his home.' [Ě. Radzinskij. Jusupovskaja noč].

- (16) [...] *obščij tualet s dušem, v katerom **zasnul** kakoj-to mužik.*  
 ‘Shared toilet and shower, where some bloke fell asleep.’ (and is sleeping now). [WEB]
- (17) *Nebol’šoj skverik, vokrug doma, a na skamejke **prikornul** paren’. Tëmnye volosy vzloxmačeny, budto korova liznula, rot priotkryt, kažetsja, čto sejčas zaxrapit.*  
 ‘A small public garden, houses all around, and on a bench a guy is lying down. His dark hair was dishevelled, as if a cow had licked it, his mouth was open, and he looked like he was about to snore.’ [WEB]
- (18) *Ty čego **zadumalsja**? Pojdem spirtu vmažem!*  
 ‘What are you thinking about? Let’s go get some alcohol...’ [M. Žukov. Tret’ja stepen’, 2012]

Resultative uses of perfective past forms in (15)–(18) differ from the progressive use under analysis (see also the discussion of example (11) above). First, in the progressive use, as I showed in Sections 1.2 and 1.3, the speaker represents the beginning of the observation as the beginning of the situation: for instance, *pošël* in (2) means ‘I began to see the motion (of the director)’, rather than ‘The director began to move’. In resultative uses (15)–(18), the speaker does not represent the beginning of the observation as the beginning of the situation: for example, in (16), *zasnul* refers to the beginning of sleeping as the inceptive phase – the thing is that the speaker cannot observe this initial phase. Second, in the resultative use of perfective past, the situation is not represented as a short one. By contrast, states and processes, illustrated in (15)–(18), are taken to be long and can be modified by adverbials like *nadolgo* ‘for a long time’. Third, in examples (15)–(18), but not in the progressive use, the resultative component constitutes a separate phase that can be distinguished from the inceptive / process one: for instance, if someone fell asleep, it is possible to distinguish the dynamic phase (falling asleep) from the statal one (sleeping). In progressive uses like (2), the dynamic phase is described, and the situation includes no resultant state. This is why resultatives (19), but not progressive uses (20) are compatible with contexts, where the resultative and the process phase are opposed: in the resultative use, the resulting state (sleeping) can be separated from the process phase (falling asleep). By contrast, in progressive uses, like (20), the process phase (driving) is inseparable from the initial phase (starting), and the sentence sounds unnatural.

(19) *On spit, no dolgo ne mog zasnut'.*

'He is sleeping, but he could not fall asleep for a long time.'

(20) *#On edet na rabotu, no dolgo ne mog poexat'.*

Intended: 'He is going (*lit.* 'driving') to work, but he could not leave for a long time.'

One verb, namely, *zaladit'* 'begin to say something intensely' (see example (21)), allows only the resultative use of perfective past. The past tense form *zaladil* can neither be used in the canonical inceptive meaning, nor replaced with the present tense imperfective form *ladit'*, since this verb does not have the use under analysis. As shown in (22), the resultative use is also central for intensive verbs like *razlečsja* 'lie down, sprawl out'. In those examples, the speaker emphasizes the resultant state, namely, 'the addressee says something' and 'the addressee is lying / sitting' respectively.

(21) *Ty čego zaladil: ipostasi, ipostasi ?*

'Why do you repeat: hypostases, hypostases?'

(22) *A poka edet po pyl'noj doroge telega s kopnoj sena, na kotoroj razleglis' troe ustalyx mal'čiček.*

'Meanwhile, a cart with a stack of hay is moving along a dusty road, on which three tired boys are sprawled out.' [WEB]

Motion verbs and semantically similar predicates are also compatible with resultative uses (23). In contrast to progressive uses, the perfective form refers to the initial phase ('the subject hid'), although the speaker only observes the resultant state ('the subject is in a secret spot').

(23) — *Vot on gde sprjatsja, — vzvignul nevdaleke golos Zinki Fokinoj.*

'"That's where he is hiding," Zinka Fokina's voice shrieked closely to me.' [Valerij Medvedev. Barankin, bud' čelovekom! (1957)]

The resultative uses do not form a homogenous class. In particular, uses like (15) are most similar to the standard use of the past tense: although the speaker observes only the resultant state, (s)he makes an assumption about the previous, process phase – the sentence means 'The restaurant was opened and worked by the time he returned', not just 'The restaurant was worked by the time he returned' (the precise time when the shop was opened is marked in (15)).

By contrast, sentences (16) and (17) (and, most probably, (18)) mean just ‘The guy is sleeping’, ‘Why did you start thinking?’. This difference is confirmed by the fact that the temporal adverbs like *nedavno* ‘recently’ are more natural in contexts like (15) than in (16)–(18).

(24) *On uvidel magazin, kotoryj nedavno otkryli.*

‘He saw a shop that was recently opened.’

(25) *#On uvidel parnja, kotoryj nedavno prikornul na trave.*

Intended: ‘He saw a guy that has recently fallen asleep on the grass.’

(26) *#On uvidel kollegu, kotoryj o čem-to nedavno zadumalsja.*

‘He saw a colleague that has recently started to think about something.’

This is why I will further refer to examples like (15) and (24) as ‘resultative contexts combining the resultative and the process phase’, while (16)–(18) and (25)–(26) will be described as simply ‘resultative uses’. Combinatorial properties of these construction types, compared to the properties of the progressive use, will be described in Section 4.

## 2.2. Special use of present tense in subordinate clauses

Some other uses of tense forms are also close to partial observation contexts. The difference is that one of the parts of the situation is foregrounded, and the other parts are backgrounded, though (contrary to the progressive use) all parts can be observed.

The first of those uses is the use of present tense in some subordinate clauses marked with the simultaneity marker *poka* ‘while’. Alongside the tense marking strategy, typical for adjunct clauses (28), a nonstandard strategy is possible (27).

(27) *Reb jat, ja tut, poka sižu doma, načal rabotat' na frilanse.*

‘Guys, I started to work as a freelancer, while I am at home.’ [WEB]

(28) *Poka ja pisal sta'ju, mne pozvonila žena.*

‘While I was writing an article, my wife called.’

In (28), both events – ‘I was writing an article’ and ‘my wife called’ – take place simultaneously and precede the speech act. As in most Russian adjunct

clauses, both verbs are marked for absolute past. By contrast, in (27), the event in the subordinate clause ('I am at home') covers a long time span that includes both the time when the speaker began to work and the speech act time. However, the speech act time tends to be more important for the speaker than any moment in the past. This is why the present tense is chosen, though this present tense marking violates the general tendency saying that if the adjunct clause denotes an event simultaneous to the main one, tense marking is the same in both clauses.

There also exists an opposite case, when the moment in past is more relevant for the speaker than the moment in present (the speech act time). This is the case with some generic contexts that describe inherent properties of the world (including real, such as 'The Sun is hot', and fantastic ones, such as 'The Sun is a glowing rock'). If this type of statement is made by a person in past, past tense marking can be used, as in (29). By the use of past tense because the speaker emphasizes the fact that the opinion (s)he describes belongs to another person in past, although Anaxagoras made his statement about a general property of the Sun.

(29) *Solnce, po ego mneniju, bylo raskalënnoj skaloj.*

'In his [Anaxagoras] opinion, the Sun was a glowing rock.' [WEB]

### 3. Nontemporal effects of partial observation

In the previous sections, I described the effect of partial observation reading on tense form selection. Importantly, sometimes the partial observation feature affects other features of the sentence, not reducible to tense and aspect use: for instance, it results in evidential readings or argument structure changes. These types of cases are described in the next two sections.

#### 3.1. Past tense in memory evidence

One of the cases under analysis is what can be called 'past of memory evidence' (Aikhenvald (2004) lists memory contexts as a type of evidential contexts). The use of the past tense denotes the fact that the speaker does not remember exactly the present state of affairs but describes his / her hypothesis concerning

the present state by referring to the previous state of affairs.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the state may persist at the moment of speech, but the speaker can only understand the current state through the memories about the previous one, and this is why the past tense form is used:

(30) — *Aktivirovannyj ugol' est'?* — *Vrode **byl** gde-to, — neuverenno skazala Rimma Alekseevna. — Xorošo. Rastolkite neskol'ko ložek i vysyp'te v vodu.*

‘Do you have any activated carbon? – It seems as if it was somewhere. – Well, grind a few spoonfuls and pour into the water.’ [V. Valeeva. *Skoraja pomošč'* (2002)]

(31) [...] *navigator v telephone (da i maršrut znakom), a pro compressor vrode **ležal** v багаžнике, nado proverit'!!*

‘the navigator is in the telephone, I know the path. About the compressor, it was in the boot, I have to check it!’ [WEB]

Many examples are compatible with two readings, a standard past tense reading and a memory evidence reading.

(32) — *Ty menja pomniš'?* — *Ty vrode **rabotal** na zavode v Xevrone.*

‘Do you remember me? – It seems that you worked at the factory in Hevron.’

(i) ‘Previously you worked at the factory.’

(ii) ‘It seems to me that you work at the factory.’

The past of memory evidence, as well as our ‘progressive use’, is related to the partial observation reading. The use of the past tense results from the fact that the speaker is not fully aware of the current state of affairs (as if it was invisible to the speaker) and uses the past tense form, referring to the situation in past.

### 3.2. Aspectual change meets argument structure change: passive participles and similar uses

Finally, the partial observation reading sometimes influences argument structure of the verb and strategies of argument expression: this can be demonstrated on

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<sup>5</sup> This evidential use of past does not seem to be described in any linguistic studies, contrary to some other means of expressing evidential uses in Russian (see, for instance, Xrakovskij (2005), Padučeva (2017), and many others).

some uses of passive participles. As Saj (2011) shows, the morphologically passive forms like *odet(yj)* ‘dressed’ or *otkryt(yj)* ‘opened’ are semantically resultative, but not necessarily passive: it may be the case that a person dressed him/herself, and the door opened by itself. Resultative participles share the partial observation reading with our data: only the resultative phase is visible to the speaker.

(33) *Tam, za dver'ju, sidit' čelovek v furážke, **odetyj** v polufurmennye sero-zelěnye tona.*

‘Beyond the door, someone is sitting, dressed in semiformal gray-green tones.’ [Sergej Jursky. Bumažnik Goffmana (1993)]

(34) *Dver' za spinoj moej nastež' **otkryta**, v sosednej komnate temno.*

‘The door behind my back is wide open, it is dark in the neighbouring room.’ [N. Iljina. Dorogi i sud’by (1957–1985)]

(35) *Fortočka v kuxne **byla raspaxnuta** ot vetra, v kvartire stojal xolod.*

‘The window was opened in the wind, and it was cold in the flat.’ [WEB]

Examples (33)–(35) are similar to examples (15)–(18), where finite past tense forms have a resultative meaning. The difference is that in the participial construction, the partial observation affects the argument structure: as the agent only takes part in the dynamic phase, the partial observation semantics makes the agent / causer irrelevant for the speaker. Note that the argument structure changes in the resultative uses of participles also affect the strategy of agent / causer coding: cf. examples (36)–(38), compared to the resultative construction in (35):

(36) *Fortočka srazu **raspaxnulas'** ot vetra, i stalo xolodno.*

‘The window immediately opened in the wind and it was cold.’

(37) \**Fortočka srazu **byla raspaxnuta** ot vetra, i stalo xolodno.*

Intended: ‘The window was immediately opened in the wind and it was cold.’

(38) *Fortočka srazu **byla raspaxnuta** vetrom, i stalo xolodno.*

‘The window was immediately opened in the wind and it was cold.’

The construction with the preposition *ot* is only compatible with nonagentive causers. However, it mainly occurs with *-sja*-forms. Passive participles are

combined with *ot* only in the resultative meaning – in the dynamic process meaning, their combination is ungrammatical (37): *ot* is only compatible with reflexive forms, as in (36), while participial passive constructions allow only the standard instrumental agent marking, as in (38).

There are equally other cases, in which the partial observation reading results in the agent elimination. In constructions with active voice forms, the agent cannot be completely eliminated – however, the subject position can be occupied by a nonagentive and inanimate participant (a natural force or another type of inagentive cause). The canonical agent, which, of course, participated in the process phase of the situation (in (39), there was someone who covered the toilet seats with down (eider feathers)), can be left unexpressed – which is impossible in the canonical process reading (40).

(39) *Rosli tam rozy v vazax, V vazonax rozan ros, Siden'ja ž unitazov Pokryl gagačij vors.*

‘Roses grew there in vases, and the toilet seats were covered with eider feathers.’ (S. Sokolov. *Škola dlja durakov*).

(40) ??*Kogda vors pokryl sidenja unitazov, my pozvali vsax vnutr'.*

‘When the eiderdown covered the toilet seats, we called everyone inside.’

The same strategy is demonstrated by reflexive verbs, such as *smenit'sja* ‘be replaced’ in (41) or *skryt'sja* ‘be covered, hide’ in (42): only the resultative phase is observed by the speaker, while the dynamic phase (and, correspondingly, the agent that takes part in this phase) is invisible and / or irrelevant: this is why the change in the car makeup in (41) is represented as spontaneous.

(41) *Sidenja pokryla koža dvojnoj vydelki “parra”, klassičeskaja rukojatka AKPP smenilas' na èlektronnyj “gribok”-kačalku...*

‘The seats are covered with double nappa leather, the classic automatic transmission knob has been replaced by an electronic ‘mushroom’ rocking arm’ [WEB]<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> I do not consider here the stative uses of imperfective verbs. They, of course, also go back to agentive dynamic uses, but currently the stative use can be described as marking the stative phase, where the agent does not play any role. *Na nëm po-prežnemu byl tot samyj sinij gabardinovyj plašč, tol'ko teper' ego pokryvala grjaz'.* ‘He wore the same blue raincoat of gabardine, but now it was covered by dirt.’ [A. Čakovskij. *Blokada* (1968)]

- (42) *Moi zapjast'ja, šeja i pal'cy skrylis' pod urkašenijami, a golovu pokryl platok.*  
 'My wrists, neck and fingers were hidden under jewellery and my head was covered by a shawl.' [WEB]

Similarly, the partial observation reading affects the meaning of another, colloquial, group of reflexive verbs. In principle, perfective *-sja*-verbs normally do not have a passive meaning. However, in the colloquial Russian, perfective *sja*-verbs allow for a resultative passive meaning, illustrated in like (43) and (44). As in the previous cases, verb forms *postavjatsja* '(they) will be put in' (43) and *otremontiruetsja* '(it) will be repaired' (44) have a resultative meaning, the role of agent in the process phase being ignored.

- (43) [...] *kogda postavjatsja porogi, štany budut večno grjaznye.*  
 'When the sills are put in, the trousers will always be dirty.' [WEB]
- (44) *Kogda otremontiruetsja banja?*  
 'When will the bathhouse be repaired?' [WEB]<sup>7</sup>

### 3.3. Partial observation and evidentiality

Our uses are in a sense close to another phenomenon, also associated with partial observation: namely, the inferential evidential uses. Contrary to other phenomena under analysis, the inferential meaning lacks a grammatical marking: in (45), the evidential meaning is conveyed by the parenthetical *poxože* 'likely, seemingly'.

- (45) *Prjamo ot dverej kak by vymytaja dorožka idet; poxože, vytirali tam, gde xodili, it takoe vpečatlenie, sovsem nedavno.*  
 'Right from the door, there is a recently washed lane. It seems that one cleaned the place where everyone walked, and, presumably, not long ago.' [E. & V. Gordeevy. *Ne vse my umrëm* (2002)]

While in the reportative evidential, there is a speech act that the speaker is relying on, this is not the case with the inferential meaning like that in (45). Here the speaker observes one of phases of the situation (the resultant state 'the lane

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<sup>7</sup> It is very probable that a similar mechanism is also relevant for anticausative uses of reflexive verbs. Padučeva (2001) argues that the agent is not necessarily absent in the anticausative use: it can just be irrelevant for the speaker.

is clean') and can only hypothesize on the other one ('someone cleaned the lanes not long ago').

The difference is that the link between the phases is more trivial in the resultative and progressive use than in evidential constructions like (45). For instance, the fact that the lane is clean does not necessarily imply that it has recently been washed (for instance, the reason can be that nobody has lived in the house for last several months and walked along the lanes). By contrast, the resultative phase, for instance, the fact that the guy is sleeping, in examples like (17), always results from the fact that he fell asleep, and the fact that the restaurant is open (15) always implies that someone has opened it – this is why evidential markers are incompatible with contexts like (46) and (47): example (46) looks strange if used in the situation when the speaker stands in front of the shop, and (47) is incompatible with the situation when the speaker sees a sleeping guy. The logical relation between two parts of the situation is too trivial here to use an evidential marker.

(46) #*Zdes', poxože, otkryli magazin.*

'It seems that a shop was opened here.'

(47) #*Poxože, paren' zasnul.*

'It seems that the guy fell asleep.'

#### **4. Combinatorial properties: shifts in the use of adverbs, embedded clauses and negation**

As mentioned before, progressive and resultative readings presuppose a non-standard form-meaning correspondence: their interpretation is not typical for tense-aspect forms that are used. A question arises whether these nonstandard uses also demonstrate nonstandard combinatorial properties: whether temporal adjuncts, temporal embedded clauses, and other elements have a shifted interpretation in the nonstandard uses, or their interpretation does not change. In other words, if only a part of the situation is available for observation, is it true that temporal modifiers refer to the observed part of the situation? In particular, I will check combinations of nonstandard tense uses with temporal adverbs, negation and embedded clauses marking simultaneity, as well as the reference of the tense form.

Only the combinatorial properties of resultative and progressive uses of tense forms are checked below, while other uses addressed in Sections 2 and 3 are not analyzed here.

#### 4.1. Adverbials with the meaning of present

The first diagnostic uses adverbials with the present time meaning (e.g., *segodnja* ‘today’ or *v dannyj moment* ‘at present moment’). Normally, *segodnja* can mark the state relevant for today, and *v dannyj moment* refers to the situation taking place at the moment of speech. In some nonstandard uses, the time interval that these adverbials denote shifts from the process phase to the resultant one. With **resultatives in the proper sense** like (48)–(52), those adverbials can refer to the time when the resultant state takes place (this special property is also mentioned by Padučeva (1996/2011: 271) and Fedotov (2020)).

(48) *Novejšaja sistema otsleživaet povedenie učnikov, sčityvaet vyraženiya ix lic i opredeljaet, kto segodnja ne podgotovilsja k uroku.*

‘The new system traces the behavior of pupils their face expression and finds out who is not ready for the lesson today.’ [WEB]

(49) *Prosto ja za natural'nost' i estestvennost' otnošenij, ne vižu bedy sdelat' to, što v dannyj moment nazrelo, tem bolee, što vse ravno prorvët.*

‘In fact, everything is, of course, very individual. I simply prefer relationships to be natural, and I see no trouble to do what became relevant to the moment, especially because it will burst anyway.’ [Naši deti: Podroščki (2004)]

(50) *Oni s moim bratom segodnja oformili otnošenija. V dannyj moment otbyli v svadebnoe putešestvie. P'jut šampanskoe v poezde.* [N. Nesterova. Zefir v šokolade (2013)]

‘She and my brother married (lit. ‘formalized their relations’) today. At the moment, they left to their honeymoon. They are drinking champagne in the train.’

(51) *V dannyj moment poexal v očerednuju komandirovku, po finansam sovsem ne spravljajus'.*

‘At the moment, I left to another business trip – I’m really struggling financially.’ [WEB]

(52) *V **dannyj moment zasnul** na rukax, no dërgaet nožkoj periodičeski ili ručkoj, budto pugaetsja čego-to.*

‘At the moment, he fell asleep on her mother’s hands, but periodically he moves his leg or arm, as if he was afraid of something.’ [WEB]

Resultative contexts **combining the resultative and the process phase** behave in a more complicated way: some present tense adverbials like *v **dannyj moment*** ‘currently’ can refer to the resultative state (53). However, most adverbials, for instance, *segodnja* ‘today’ or *v ètom mèsjace* ‘in this month’ refer to the process state, rather than to the resultative one: (54) means that the shop was opened in this month / today, and not that in this month or today, the shop is already opened.

(53) *Tam v **dannyj moment otkryli** magazin.*

‘Currently / today a shop was opened there.’

(54) *Tam #v ètom mesjace / #segodnja otkryli magazin.*

Intended: ‘In this month / today, a shop is opened there.’

With past in the progressive interpretation, the test yields a negative result: in examples like (55) or (56), the adverbial modifiers *v **dannyj moment*** or *sejčas* either look strange or do not have the meaning ‘the situation takes place at the moment of speech’. The adverbial modifier *tol’ko čto* ‘just’ with the precedence meaning sounds better in these contexts.

(55) *Mne pokazalos’ ili tam **tol’ko čto poplyl** glaz.*

‘It seemed to me or I have just seen an eye sailing on the water.’ [WEB] (*v **dannyj moment*** would be semantically strange).

(56) *#O, tam v **dannyj moment direktor pošël.***

Intended: ‘Look, at this moment /

## 4.2. Negation

Another diagnostic is the interpretation of verbal negation: if the tense use is shifted, we could expect that the observed phase is negated. However, it turns out that none of the tense uses that we have discussed allows the resultative phase to be negated. Constructions with the **progressive** (57) and **resultative** meanings (58)

are incompatible with negation – examples (57) and (58) are grammatically correct, but have the standard meaning of precedence ('The plane did not started'; 'The guy did not fall asleep'). Resultative uses **combining the resultative and the process phase** (59) behave in the same way: they can be negated, but it seems that the speaker hypothesizes on the process phase ('The addressee did not put on her hat'), rather than describes the resultative phase ('The addressee does not wear a hat').

(57) #*Samolët ne poletel.*

Intended: 'A plane is not flying.'

(58) *Paren' #ne prikornul / #ne zasnul na lavke.*

Intended: 'At the moment, the guy is not sleeping on a bench.'

(59) #*O, ty segodnja šljapu ne nadela!*

'Oh, you did not put your hat on today!'

#### 4.3. Simultaneity clauses with *poka*

More illustrative is the test based on the use of temporal clauses marked with *poka* 'while' – a specialized temporal subordinator that denotes simultaneity. If the shift in the use of tense forms is really strong, it is expected that the construction is compatible with this type of clauses, and that *poka*-clauses state the simultaneity relation with the phase which is observed by the speaker. In fact, **progressive** uses (60) cannot be combined with *poka*-clauses, but this is possible for some resultative constructions – only for **resultatives in the proper sense**, more precisely, for those cases when the result phase is rather short and visible, as in (61) and (62). In those examples, the embedded situation is marked as simultaneous to the resultant state ('He is sleeping'; 'The door is opened'), and not to the process state ('He fell asleep'; 'Someone opened the door'). The nonstandard interpretation of *poka*-clauses is confirmed by the fact that the embedded clauses in (61) and (62) contain a perfective verb, which is not characteristic of simultaneity contexts: here it is possible, because the simultaneity relation is stated between the main situation and the result phase, which is not finished, while the process phase is irrelevant.

(60) #*Poka poletel samolët, my na nego smotreli.*

Intended: 'While a plane was flying we were looking at it.'

(61) [...] **Poka on zasnul** na solnyške, odin mužik toporikom čast' xvosta emu ottjuknul.

'While he was sleeping on the sun, one man cut him out a part of the tale with an axe.' [WEB]

(62) ... **poka dver' otkryli**, my bistro nyrnuli nazad, skazav, čto zamerzli.

'While the door was opened (lit. 'While they opened the door'), we fast ran in, saying that we were cold.' [WEB]

Constructions **combining the resultative and the process phase** (63)–(65) are usually incompatible with *poka*-clauses: both the dynamic state and the result are focused, and the constructions are unacceptable. Example (64) is grammatically possible, but in another meaning: 'Until she put her hat on.'

(63) \***Poka v dome otkryli magazin / poka ona nadela pročital knigu**, on byl v otpuske.

Intended: 'While they opened a shop in the house / while he has read a book, he was on his holidays.'

(64) #**Poka ona ne nadela šljapu**, golovu napeklo solnce.

Intended: 'While she was not wearing her hat, she has got sunstroke.'

(65) \***Poka ona nadela pal'to**, ej bylo žarko.

Intended: 'While she was wearing her coat, she was hot.'

#### 4.4. The use of participle forms

Although the constructions under analysis share the feature of partial observation, they differ in the degree of stability of the nonstandard tense use. To check the properties of the tense value, I use contexts where the nonstandard form is embedded under another, matrix, verb, namely, *videt'* 'see'. The nonstandard use of the finite past tense form is changed to the past participle. If this substitution is possible and does not change the meaning of the past tense form, I conclude that the nonstandard tense use is rather stable and is retained in nonfinite forms. Otherwise, the past tense form is used dynamically. It turns out that the past participle sounds strange in the **progressive use** (66), while in **constructions combining the resultative and the process phase** like *On ne nadel pal'to* 'He did not put his coat on' the participle does not express the resultative / stative

meaning (67)–(68). By contrast, **resultatives** in the proper sense (69) retain the resultative meaning when the finite form is changed to the participle:

(66) ??*Ja uvidel pošedšego direktora.*

Intended: ‘I saw the director who was going.’

(67) *Ja uvidel ženščinu, ne nadevšuju šljapu.*

(i) #‘I saw a woman who did not wear her hat.’

(ii) ‘I saw a woman who did not put on her hat (before).’

(68) *Ja uvidel otkrytyj na pervom etaže magazin.*

‘I saw a shop that was opened on the first floor.’<sup>8</sup>

(69) *Ja uvidel parnja, prikornuvšego na trave.*

‘I saw a guy who was sleeping / fell asleep on the grass.’

Table 1 shows combinatorial properties of progressive and other constructions. The table shows that, contrary to other nonstandard uses, the progressive use of past tense forms is incompatible with any nonstandard interpretations addressed in this section. This behavior of the progressive use will be explained in Section 5 below.

**Table 1.**

*Combinatorial properties of progressive and resultative constructions*

	Present tense adverbials	Negation	Poka-clauses	Participles
Progressive	-	-	-	-
Resultative in the proper sense	+	-	+	+
Resultative + process phase	+ -	-	-	-

<sup>8</sup> Example (65) differs from the rest of sentences, because passive past participles show a clear tendency to the resultative use (see 3.2 for details).

## 5. Progressive is not progressive: discourse characteristics

As mentioned before, Table 1 shows that no contextual diagnosis confirm the progressive nature of uses like (2)–(8). Negation, adverbials with the present time meaning and embedded clauses with the meaning of simultaneity are either incompatible with the progressive use like *Legavyj pošel* or change the meaning of relevant examples to the standard precedence reading.

In this case, a question arises whether our uses are really progressive. It turns out that a special discourse property of the constructions under analysis can give an answer to this question. The progressive use of perfective is incompatible with the indirect speech context (for instance, it is normally not used in subordinate clauses) and with a description in the narrative mode, but only compatible with the dialogue mode. Example (70) seems to be strange in the progressive reading:

(70) #*On mne skazal, čto direktor poexal / samolět poletel.*

‘He told me that the director was going.’

The other constructions addressed here do not share this property. For instance, resultative constructions are compatible with indirect speech, so they can be used in subordinate clause contexts (71):

(71) *On mne skazal, čto na trave zadremal paren’.*

‘He told me that a guy had fallen asleep on the grass / was sleeping on the grass.’

Provided that the perfective aspect is used to denote the dynamic nature and the short duration of the situation, I should conclude that the ‘progressive’ use is not, in fact, progressive. It rather constitutes a special type of construction that describes events that took place before the speaker’s eyes (this mode of description can thus be called ‘immediate comment’). This construction type is different from the neutral type of event description in some respects, including the word order. The immediate comment construction prefers the SOV word order with transitive verbs (72) and SV with intransitive verbs (examples (2)–(5) above), while the neutral description often uses SVO (with transitive verbs, cf. (73)) and allows VS (with intransitive verbs).

Immediate comment:

(72) *Smotri, menty xuligana povezli.*

‘Look, cops are driving a bully.’

Neutral description:

(73) *Menty povezli kuda-to xuligana / on videl, kak menty povezli kuda-to xuligana.*

‘Cops were driving a bully somewhere / He saw cops driving a bully somewhere.’

Another possible component of semantics of this use is a mirative meaning (‘the situation was not expected to occur and surprises the speaker’). For instance, in examples (3) and (4), repeated here as (74) and (75), the situation is apparently unexpected for the speaker. An unexpected event is often foregrounded in comparison to other events, which makes the use of perfective more natural, while a standard situation like ‘A car is moving there’ would rather be described with a present tense form. However, the mirative component is not obligatory, for instance, in (2), repeated as (76), it is hardly unexpected that the director appeared on the schoolyard<sup>9</sup>.

(74) *Mama znakomogo s SŠA, priexav v Biš, na každyj Leksus pal'cem pokazyvala, vo smotri, Leksus poexal.*

‘The mother of my friend from the USA, when she visited Bish (Bishkek), pointed by her finger to each ‘Lexus’ car, [saying]: look, there is ‘Lexus’ driving!’ [WEB]

(75) *Letat' xotel. Uvidit samolët, srazu “mam, gljadi, samolët poletel”.*

‘He wanted to fly. If he saw a plane, he immediately said: “Mummy, look, a plane is flying”.’ [WEB]

(76) *Kto-to skazal, gljadja v okno: – Legavyj pošël (Legavym zvali direktora školy – Čebotarëva).*

‘Someone said looking to the window: “Legavyj is going” (lit. ‘went’). “Legavyj” was a nickname of Chebotarev, the principal of the school.’ [S. Dovlatov. Naši (1983)]

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the semantics of immediately preceding situation is more important than the mirative meaning. As Weiss (2022) shows, some mirative constructions, such as the Russian construction *vzjal i sdelał* ‘unexpectedly did’, ‘took and did’, are compatible with the narrative mode and indirect speech.

This special discourse function of ‘immediate comment’ explains several important features of our construction. Since it marks the immediately preceding situation, the fact that it is compatible with the perfective aspect is very natural: an observer who looks at the situation and comments on them is not prepared in advance, this is why (s)he describes the situation as a sequence of short events. The fact that the construction is incompatible with modifiers and negation not only results from the fact that immediate past is described, but also from the discourse properties: the comment on the situation does not typically mention temporal relations between events or a description of events that do not take place. The immediate comment only makes sense if the speaker directly perceives the situation and immediately informs the addressee of the news. Finally, the fact that the arguments typical for motion verbs (path and final point) are often left unexpressed also results from the meanings of immediately preceding situation: the final point is unknown, while the path is clear from the context of communication: the speaker describes the motion (s)he is observing, and usually also sees the motion and understands where it is taking place.

All these facts show that, in fact, the tense use in the construction is standard (the verb is marked for past to denote an event in immediate past). The nonstandard features of the construction under analysis are (1) the discourse function of a comment on an immediately precedent event; (2) the special word order and (3) the use of the perfective aspect and the inceptive verb pattern to mark the starting point of the observation as if it was the starting point of the situation, explained in 1.2 and 1.3., rather than the use of tense.

## Conclusions

In my article, I analyzed the functioning of ‘progressive use of perfective past forms’ and compared it to other nonstandard uses of tenses. It turned out that the progressive use is, in fact, different from the canonical progressive in languages like English. Although it really focuses on the situation that is in progress, it adds to the standard present tense use a dynamic component: the perfective past tense form is chosen to mark that the observation time is short and conceptualizes the beginning of the observation interval as the beginning of the situation itself (directed motion). To describe this use, I used the notion of “partial observation reading” – the reading in which the speaker observes only a particular

part of the situation and describes it as if it was the whole situation. This reading is crucial for the progressive use under analysis.

This is why the perfective aspect form is chosen for the progressive meaning, which is normally associated with imperfective verbs (the process phase is relevant and described in detail, while the final and initial states are unknown or irrelevant). This use is a result of metonymy:

Base meaning of perfective	Derived meaning of perfective
The initial stage is short (momentary)	The time of observation is short (momentary)
The situation has just begun	The observation has just begun

I showed that some other uses of Russian tense forms are also based on the partial observation, on the fact that only a part of the situation is visible to the speaker. This class includes resultative uses, marked with perfective verbs (*zasnul* 'fell asleep', *prikornul* 'fell asleep for a short time'). Many of those uses confirm their special status by the ability to combine with adverbials and adverbial constructions, associated with present tense contexts. While our progressive use is colloquial, other resultative and stative uses, addressed above, are frequent in the standard literary register.

The partial observation reading also affects phenomena outside the tense domain: for instance, it results in nonagentive uses of passive and passive-like forms and in the evidential uses of past tenses. In those cases, the irrelevance of some phases of the situation results in the elimination of participants and / or semantic components associated with those phases.

The nonstandard use of forms under analysis is to certain degree associated with nonstandard combinatorial properties: for instance, the semantic change leads to shifts in the use and semantic scope of temporal adverbs and temporal embedded clauses. However, this shift is only partial: for example, no present tense adverbs are compatible with the progressive uses. Similarly, progressive uses are incompatible with negation, while other nonstandard uses are only partially compatible with it. In other words, nonstandard tense form uses do not form a homogenous semantic class and do not behave uniformly with temporal markers.

The fact that the progressive use is incompatible with typical present tense modifiers shows that, in fact, this use is not really progressive. The past tense forms with the prefix *po-* denote an event immediately preceding the speech act and are thus used in the standard way. What is really nonstandard is that uses described here are specialized for the comment on an immediately

preceding event. Another special feature is the use of the inceptive perfective verbs to mark the starting point of the observation as if it was the starting point of the situation.

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