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## Impact of the meanings of the verb *moč'* on its ability to form past tense and perfective

### Abstract

It has long been noted that *moč'* – *smoč'* ‘can, be able to, may’ is an unusual aspectual pair, yet *moč'* has been commonly treated as having three meanings: alethic, deontic and epistemic. The article abandons this traditional treatment and identifies seven distinct meanings of the verb *moč'*: internal ability, permissive, epistemic, warning, perceived right, permission to begin, and external possibility. Their distinctions are not only semantic but also prosodic and in their ability to have a past tense form and/or to form a perfective based on *smoč'*.

### Keywords

modality, possibility, aspect, verb classes, intonation

## Introduction

The modal verb *moč'* ‘can, be able to, may’, just like its English counterparts *may*, *must*, *should*, represents a polysemic entity, and the goal of the present article is to identify its meanings, to disambiguate them and to determine how they correlate with tense and aspect.

Many studies discuss Russian modality in very general terms and include various expressions of modality, such as adverbials, conjugated modal verbs,

adjectives, etc. (Bulygina & Šmelëv (1997), Beljaeva (1990)). Van der Auwera & Plungian (1998) discuss possibility and necessity together and advance the distinction of participant-internal modality vs. participant-external modality. Petrušina & Li (2015) take the Van der Auwera & Plungian model verbatim and apply it to Russian future. Both of these studies have a very general approach to modality and attempt to create a very complex structure of modality, similar to a Periodic Table of Elements, and then to fill in individual boxes.

The traditional, top-down approach to modality as alethic, deontic and epistemic (Bulygina & Šmelëv (1997), Sokolova (ms), Petrova (2005), while applicable to Russian, does not capture the full range of meanings. Beljaeva (1990) and Choi (1999) examine ‘possibility (probability)’ and the verbs *moč’* – *smoč’* respectively thus narrowing the scope. Most works on *moč’* intermix present tense and past tense examples, for example Beljaeva (1990). Dictionaries treat *moč’* – *smoč’* as an aspectual pair, but Choi (1999) questions this assumption, while Janda (2018) emphasizes the unusual status of *smoč’* and its growing frequency. As will be shown later, some meanings of *moč’* can have a perfective variant and some cannot.

Strictly speaking, one has to explore each iteration of *moč’* separately:

možet V <sup>i1</sup>	ne možet V <sup>i</sup>	smožet V <sup>i</sup>	ne smožet V <sup>i</sup>	možet ne V <sup>i</sup>
možet V <sup>p</sup>	ne možet V <sup>p</sup>	smožet V <sup>p</sup>	ne smožet V <sup>p</sup>	možet ne V <sup>p</sup>
mog V <sup>i</sup>	ne mog V <sup>i</sup>	smog V <sup>i</sup>	ne smog V <sup>i</sup>	mog ne V <sup>i</sup>
mog V <sup>p</sup>	ne mog V <sup>p</sup>	smog V <sup>p</sup>	ne smog V <sup>p</sup>	mog ne V <sup>p</sup>

For example, *Ona mogla<sup>i</sup> zvonit<sup>i1</sup>* may mean ‘She could have called (and we did not know)’ or ‘She would (repeatedly) call’, a repeated action in the past. Meanwhile *Ona smogla<sup>p</sup> zvonit<sup>i2</sup>* is unlikely and hence hard to interpret. At the same time *Ona smogla<sup>p</sup> govorit<sup>i</sup>* ‘She could speak’ is perfectly correct. In other words,

<sup>1</sup> There are a number of abbreviations used in this article: V means the verb; superscripts p and I mean ‘perfective’ and ‘imperfective’ respectively; p preceded by a number, for example 1 p., means ‘first person’; sg. means ‘singular’, pl. means ‘plural’.

<sup>2</sup> The anonymous reviewer suggested that *Ona smogla<sup>p</sup> zvonit<sup>i</sup> čašče* ‘She managed to call more often’ is possible. I was unable to find a single example of “*smog\* zvonit<sup>i</sup> čašče*” (\* signifies truncation) either in the RNC or on the web. However, there are multiple examples of *smogu/smogut zvonit<sup>i</sup> čašče* ‘I / they will be able to call more often.’ which only points to the fact that this modal verb functions differently in different tenses and indicates that additional investigation is needed.

the combination  $MOG^{P3} + V^P$  is possible but not for all verbs. But the present tense meanings of *moč'* introduce a number of meanings that are not represented by the past tense and vice versa. And not even all persons can be used with all meanings. For example, one of the meanings is 'granting permission' *On možet vojti* 'He may enter', which by definition cannot have 1 p. sg. The reason for this is that in order to grant permission, there should be a verbal or non-verbal (conventional) prohibition of the action, for example one cannot enter a doctor's office or an official's office without permission. Yet it is hard to imagine circumstances where the prohibition comes from the speaker herself to herself, and where she can cancel the ban by granting herself permission.

Previous approaches to the verb in question have not identified all possible meanings of *moč'*. This empiric study attempts to remedy this lacuna. I will identify additional meanings<sup>4</sup> (numbers in subscript will identify each type) and explore their correlation with the past tense and the perfective counterpart. As will be shown, not all meanings can have a perfective counterpart. I will also present the intonation pattern used with each meaning. Methodologically, the study is akin to an enhanced lexicographic entry, since it will expand the existing entry in BTS, which only lists four meanings. This modal verb is a classic case of polysemy (*mnogoznačnost'*) as discussed in Apresjan (1995). An analysis of the twenty morphologico-syntactic patterns listed above is beyond the scope of this article. Examples are drawn either from the Russian National Corpus ([www.ruscorpora.ru](http://www.ruscorpora.ru) hereafter RNC) or from internet sources. For readability, citations from the internet are uniformly marked as [WEB].

Let us examine the meanings of the verb *moč'* based on present tense usage.

## **I. Speaker (S) states that the Participant (P) has the ability to perform V (*moč'*)**

Here the Speaker only assesses the Participant's ability. For skills, both impf (activity) and pf (accomplishments) are possible. The intonation is neutral.

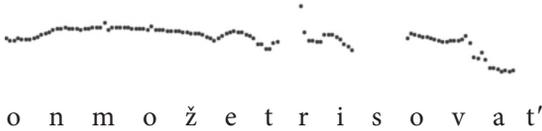
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<sup>3</sup> *Mog* is the masculine past tense form of *moč'*. Here *MOG* stands for any past tense form, masculine, feminine or neuter, sg. or pl.

<sup>4</sup> Since it is impossible to prove the negative, I cannot prove that there are no other meanings, but in three years of collecting data I have not come across any additional meanings. Being a native speaker of Russian, I used my own intuition as well as the data I came across in addition to searching the RNC.

- (1) *On mo<sup>ti</sup>žet risovat*.  
 ‘He can draw.’ (has the general skill)

Here is the intonation contour<sup>5</sup> of (1):



It is very similar to IK-1 of Bryzgunova's (1977) classification; however, as the other six intonation contours below will suggest, her classification is limited and schematic and does not account for semantic variations.

The listed meaning of (1) is one of the possible meanings of this utterance, the other being permission, which I will discuss later. But what is important here is that *možet risovat*' may mean the skill.

- (2) *On mo<sup>ti</sup>žet <sup>ri</sup>risovat / narisovat<sup>p</sup> glavu l'va*. (has the specific skill)  
 ‘He can draw the head of a lion.’
- (3) *Čto mo<sup>ti</sup>žet risovat<sup>ri</sup> re<sup>ti</sup>běnok v poltora goda, kogda ešče net nužnoj motoriki?*  
 ‘What can a one year and a half old child draw when he has none of the necessary hand motor skills?’ [D. Rubina. Na solnečnoj storone ulicy (1980–2006)]
- (4) *Ona mo<sup>ti</sup>žet risovat<sup>ri</sup> kartiny, dobavila ona, no ona ne mo<sup>ti</sup>žet narisovat<sup>p</sup> ni odnogo ieroglifa, daže ieroglifa, izobražajuščego ee sobstvennuju familiju*.  
 ‘She can draw/paint paintings, she added, but she cannot draw a single [Japanese] character, even the one designating her own last name.’ [K. Simonov. Rasskazy o japonskom iskusstve (1958)]

With verbs of motion (VOMs), one would expect impf indeterminate infinitives.

- (5) *On mo<sup>ti</sup>žet xodit' / plavat' / katat'sja na kon'kax*.  
 ‘He can walk / swim / skate.’

<sup>5</sup> Many thanks to Paul R. Bennett for his help with the technology.

When the object is bounded (telic), only pf is licensed, as in (6), while in the absence of scope limitation represented by plural of the nouns, we find impf, as in (7):

(6) *On možet dokazat'<sup>pf</sup> / \*dokazyvat'<sup>im</sup> ètu teoremu.*  
 'He can prove this theorem.' (has the ability)

(7) *On možet dokazyvat'<sup>im</sup> teoremy, rešat' zadači.*  
 'He can prove theorems, solve problems.'

On the other hand, (6') with the imperfective V is the permission to begin the action of proving and belongs to subtype VI.

(6') *On možet<sub>6</sub> dokazyvat'<sup>im</sup> ètu teoremu.*  
 'He may begin proving this theorem.'

Example (8) shows scope limitation:

(8) *Nakonec, esli emu ne verjat, on sam lično možet dokazat'<sup>pf</sup>, i daze sejščas, siju minutu, što on, Saška, nyrnët i probudet pod vodoj rovno desjat' minut.*  
 'Finally, if they don't believe him, he himself personally can prove, even now, this minute, that he, Sashka, can dive and stay under water exactly ten minutes.' [A. Kuprin. Listrogony (1911)]

The past tense of this particular meaning means the loss of the skill. It could be the consequence of some event, such as an accident, aging or death, as in the next example, about the late artist Uemura Shōen or the late actor Cameron Boyce:

(9) *Ona mogla<sub>1</sub> risovat' obyčnyx ženščin točno takimi že, kak princess i naoborot.*  
 'She could draw regular women exactly like a princess and vice versa.'  
 [Ženščiny glazami japonskoj xudožnicy Uëmury Sëèn, WEB (17.7.2025)]

(10) *On mog<sub>1</sub> pet', tancevat', igrat', on delal vsë èto s bleskom...*  
 'He could sing, dance, act, he did everything brilliantly...'  
 [Poslednjaja rol' Këmerona Bojsa v grjaduščem seriale «Rajskij gorod» — kak smotret', WEB (17.7.2025)]

## Negative construction

The negative construction of the type *on ne možit / ne mog risovat'* does not convey the meaning of lack of skill but rather of physical or emotional inability:

- (11) *On sovsem postarel. Ne mog xodit'. Ja byl k nemu očen' privjazan...*  
(internal physical inability)  
'He got quite old. He could not walk. I was very attached to him...' [S. Dovlatov. *Naši* (1983)]
- (12) *Posle smerti Georgija Aleksandroviča ja ne mogu xodit' v ètot teatr.* (internal emotional inability, not loss of skill but an inability to bear the pain associated with loss)  
'After the death of G.A. I cannot go to this theater.' [S. Spivakova. *Ne vsě* (2002)]

Meanwhile a lack of skill is conveyed by the verb *umet'*:

- (13) *A umenija takogo ne bylo. Kris sovsem ne umel risovat'. Nikak.*  
'He did not have such a skill. Chris did not know at all how to draw. Not a bit.' [M. Kantor. *Čestnyj angličanin* (2011)]
- (14) *Mal'čik eščë ne umeet xodit' — potomu tak devstvenno bely ego bašmački.*  
'The boy still does not (know how to) walk — that is why his little shoes are so virgin white.' [does not have the walking skill] [I. Grekova. *Fazan* (1984)]

## Perfective construction

Perfective *smoč'* can combine with the pf infinitive:

- (15) *On smožet<sup>p</sup> dokazat'<sup>p</sup> ètu teoremu / narisovat'<sup>p</sup> golovu l'va.*  
'He will be able to prove this theorem / draw a lion's head.'

Example (16) means that even mother will have enough skill to draw this:

- (16) *Èto smožet narisovat'<sup>p</sup> daže mama!*  
'Even Mom will be able to draw this!' [WEB (17.7.2025)]

The future perfective of *smoč'* conveys either a simple future, as in (17) or a potential conditional, as in (18):

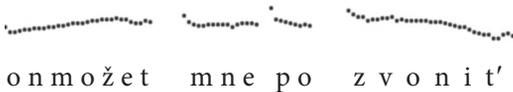
- (17) *On otob'ětsja, **smožet<sup>P</sup> dokazat<sup>FP</sup>**, čto èto pustye domysly.*  
 'He will defend himself, he will be able to prove that this is all empty conjectures.' [A. Marinina. Illjuzija grexa (1996)]
- (18) *Esli est' malejšee narušenie v oformlenii dokumentov ili uščemleny prava graždan, ljuboj gramotnyj jurist **smožet<sup>P</sup> dokazat<sup>FP</sup>** nezakonnost' sdelki.*  
 'If there is the slightest violation in filling out of the documents or violation of citizens' rights, any qualified lawyer could prove the illegality of the deal.'  
 [A. Zaxarov. Sem' sposobov obmanut' bližnego (2002)]

## II. Speaker gives P permission to do V or suggests that P do V (*možet<sub>2</sub> napisat' mne*)

Permission for a specific pf action (19) vs. background impf permission (20):

- (19) *On **možet mne** <sup>?</sup>zvoniť / pozvoniť<sup>FP</sup>.*  
 'He can call me.'
- (20) *Možete / on **možet mne** zvoniť<sup>NI</sup> / <sup>?</sup>pozvoniť<sup>FP</sup> v ljuboe vremja.*  
 'You can / he can call me any time.'

The intonation contour of (19) (with *pozvoniť<sup>FP</sup>*) is as follows:



Permission for an action stipulates a unique act, hence perfective, meanwhile giving permission to perform the action at *any time*. It must be noted that (20') is not incorrect, but rather than permission it means Speaker's assessment of Participant's possible behavior:

- (20') *On **možet mne** pozvoniť<sup>FP</sup> v ljuboe vremja.*  
 'He can call me any time [I expect him to call any time, it is possible that he would call any time].'

Permission cannot have past tense since there is no tense concord in Russian. Permission not to do something is also possible:

- (21) — *Načalo možete ne čitat'*<sup>i</sup>, — *govoril Viktoru Petroviču Kolja*.  
 “‘You don’t have to read the beginning,’ Kolya would say to Viktor Petrovich.’

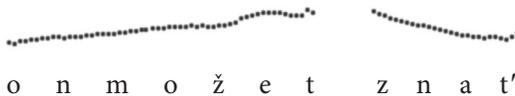
This type also has a neutral intonation. [B. Sarnov. Jura Krasikov tvorit čude-sa (1969)]

### III. Speaker surmises Participant’s state (in Vendler’s sense) or whereabouts (*možet<sub>3</sub> guljat'*), the epistemic meaning

The Speaker’s assumption covers the realm of possibilities regarding the Participant, based on Speaker’s knowledge regarding that same Participant:

- (22) *On možet znat'*<sup>i</sup>.  
 ‘He may know.’

Here is the intonation contour for (22):



- (23) *On možet guljat'*<sup>i</sup> / *byt'*<sup>i</sup> *na rabote*.  
 ‘He may be walking (be outside) / at work.’

- (24) *On možet pozvonit'*<sup>p</sup> / *prijti*<sup>p</sup> *v ljubuju minutu*.  
 ‘He may call / come at any minute.’

- (25) *On možet<sub>3</sub> uznat'*<sup>p</sup> (find out).  
 ‘He may find out.’

Example (25) deserves additional comment. Example (25') means that *he* has the ability to find out the issue at hand, while (25) means that the knowledge may befall him.

- (25') *On možet<sub>1</sub> uznat'<sub>1</sub><sup>P</sup>* (find out).  
'He can find out.'

All of these assessments can be used in the past tense:

- (26) *Vdrug est' kakie-to izvestija, ved' Sokolov **mog pozvonit'<sup>P</sup>**...*  
'What if there is some news, Sokolov indeed could call...?' [V. Kungurceva. Vedogoni, ili Novye poxoždenija Vani Žitnogo (2009)]

Not all the English MAY- constructions lend themselves to the Russian *možet*:

- (27) He may be sleeping. — ?*On možet spat'*. / *On možet byt' spit*.

Although it works well for *sleeping consciousness*:

- (28) *Vot tak i sovest': ež možno zagnat' v ugol, eju možno ne pol'zovat'sja, **ona možet spat'** — no v takom slučae ona eščě sposobna probudit'sja.*  
'It is the same with consciousness: you can corner it, not use it, it may be asleep, but in this case it may still be awakened.' [Protoierej Dimitrij Smirnov. Propovedi (1984–1989)]

- (29) a. *On mog znat'<sup>ni</sup>*.  
'He may have known.'  
b. *On mog ne znat'<sup>ni</sup>*.  
'He may not have known.'  
c. *On mog pozvonit'<sup>P</sup>*.  
'He could call.'  
d. *On mog prijti<sup>P</sup> v ljubuju minutu.*  
'He could come at any minute.'

Perfectivisation is possible for pf verbs while not for impf:

- (30) *On smožet<sup>P</sup> uznat'<sup>P</sup>*.  
'He is capable of recognizing.' or 'He could find out.'  
(31) \**On smožet<sup>P</sup> znat'<sup>ni</sup> / guljat'<sup>ni</sup> / spat'<sup>ni</sup>*.  
'He will be able to know / to stroll / be asleep.'

In both readings of (30), the Speaker implies that *he* will inadvertently be able to recognize the object or to find out something of which he has not been informed.

Negation is also possible:

(32) a. *On mo**ž**et ne znat'<sup>fi</sup>.*

'He may not know.'

b. *On mo**ž**et ne ponjat'<sup>fi</sup>.*

'He may not understand.'

While the intonation so far has been neutral, here there is a difference in emphatic stress (marked by bold letters):

(33) *On m**o**žet<sub>2</sub> katat'sja'<sup>i</sup>.*

'He may skate.'

(34) *On mo**ž**et<sub>3</sub> kat**a**t'sja'<sup>i</sup>.*

'He may be skating.'

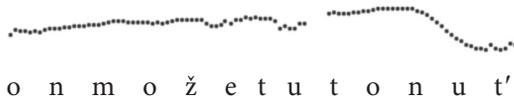
#### IV. Speaker fears Participant performing V and possible, likely negative, consequences or outcome (*možet<sub>4</sub> utonut'<sup>p</sup>*)

This meaning manifests itself in cases when the action V is highly undesirable:

(35) *On mo**ž**et<sub>4</sub> utonut'<sup>p</sup> / pogibnut'<sup>p</sup> / zabolet'<sup>p</sup> / ozjabnut'<sup>p</sup>.*

'He may drown / perish / fall ill / get cold.'

Here is the intonation contour for (40) with *utonut'*:



(36) *On mo**ž**et<sub>4</sub> ploxo o nas podumat'<sup>p</sup>.*

'He may get a bad opinion about us.'

(37) *On mo<sub>ž</sub>et<sub>4</sub> nas uznat'<sub>2</sub><sup>P</sup>* (recognize).

'He may recognize us.'

(38) *On mo<sub>ž</sub>et<sub>4</sub> ne prijti<sup>P</sup>*.

'He may not come.'

(39) *Volodja znal, čto on-to sygraet, no čto orkestr mo<sub>ž</sub>et<sub>4</sub> ne potjanut'<sup>P</sup>*.

'Volodya knew that *he* would be able to play (it), but that the orchestra might not be up to the task.' [S. Spivakova. *Ne vsë* (2002)]

Past tense is possible:

(40) *On mog<sub>4</sub> utonut'<sup>P</sup> / pogibrnut'<sup>P</sup> / zabolet'<sup>P</sup> / ozjabnut'<sup>P</sup>*.

'He could drown / perish / fall ill / get cold.'

(41) *On mog<sub>4</sub> ploxo o nas podumat'<sup>P</sup>*.

'He could get a bad opinion about us.'

(42) "*On-to znal, čto èto označael!*" "*Mog<sub>4</sub> ne uspet'<sup>P</sup>...*" — *neuverenno pred-položil Myškin.*

'"He (of all people) knew what that meant!" "He may not have had enough time..." haltingly surmised Myshkin.' [V. Belousova. *Vtoroj vystrel* (2000)]

Perfectivization is impossible, as if there were some effort on the part of the Participant to perform the negative action and achieve the negative result, which were in fact what the Speaker was dreading (both the action and the result):

(43) *\*On smo<sub>ž</sub>et utonut'<sup>P</sup>*.

'He will be able to drown.'

(44) *\*On smog utonut'<sup>P</sup>*.

'He was able to drown.'

In the case of *mo<sub>ž</sub>et<sub>4</sub>* there is a slight rise in intonation towards the end; the syntagmatic stress is marked by bold letters.

(45) *On m**o**žet<sub>2</sub> \ ne prixodit'<sup>i</sup>*. — permission

'He doesn't have to come.'

- (46) *On mošet<sub>4</sub> ne prijti<sup>P</sup> ↗*. — apprehension, warning  
‘He may not come.’
- (47) *On mošet<sub>2</sub> ↘ zarezat' barana*. — permission  
‘I give him my permission to slaughter a ram.’
- (48) *On mošet<sub>4</sub> zarezat' ↗ barana*. — apprehension, warning  
‘He may kill the ram.’
- (49) *On mošet<sub>4</sub> zarezat' barana ↗*. — apprehension, warning, fear  
‘I fear, he may kill the ram.’

### V. Speaker states that Participant thinks that he has the right to do V (*mošet<sub>5</sub> nakazat'*)

Unlike *mošet<sub>4</sub>* which signifies inadvertent damage (and the intonation goes up on the damaging action), *mošet<sub>5</sub>* signifies Speaker's assessment of Participant's possible damaging action due to Participant's belief in his right to behave this way (and the intonation goes down on the damaging action). The Speaker is not in favor of the damaging or negative action V.

- (50) *On mošet<sub>5</sub> nakazat'<sup>P</sup> ↘*.  
‘He can punish.’

Here is the intonation contour for (53):



o n m o ž e t n a k a z a t'

- (51) *On mošet<sub>5</sub> izdevat'sja<sup>i</sup> ↘*.  
‘He may taunt.’
- (52) *On mošet<sub>5</sub> nasmexat'sja<sup>i</sup> ↘*.  
‘He may ridicule.’
- (53) *On mošet<sub>5</sub> nakričat'<sup>P</sup> ↘/ nagrubit'<sup>P</sup> ↘*.  
‘He may scold, be rude.’

Past tense is possible:

- (54) *On mog<sub>5</sub> nakazat'<sup>IP</sup> √.*  
 'He could punish.'
- (55) *On mog<sub>5</sub> izdevat'sja<sup>i</sup> √.*  
 'He could taunt.'
- (56) *On mog<sub>5</sub> nasmexat'sja<sup>i</sup> √.*  
 'He could ridicule.'
- (57) *On mog<sub>5</sub> nakričat'<sup>IP</sup> √/ nagrubit'<sup>IP</sup> √.*  
 'He could scold, be rude.'

Perfective is impossible since this is an epistemological meaning and no effort on the part of the Participant is possible:

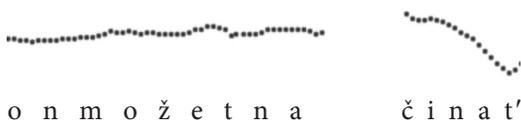
- (58) \**On smožet<sub>5</sub> nasmexat'sja<sup>i</sup> √.*  
 'He will be able to ridicule.'

## VI. Speaker gives the Participant permission directly or indirectly to begin V (*možet<sub>6</sub> načinat'<sup>i</sup>*)

The intonation here is very interesting: it goes down and then slightly up over the same vowel:

- (59) *On možet<sub>6</sub> načinat'<sup>i</sup> √.*  
 'He may begin.'

Here is the intonation contour for (59):



- (60) *On možet<sub>6</sub> razdavat'<sup>i</sup> √/ načat'<sup>IP</sup> razdavat'<sup>i</sup> √.*  
 'He may begin distributing.'

(61) *On mozet<sub>6</sub> vojti<sup>P</sup>* ↘.

‘He may come in now.’

(62) *On mozet<sub>6</sub> nalivat<sup>ri</sup>* ↘.

‘He may start pouring (wine).’

### VII. Speaker assesses the external reasons for the Participant’s ability (or more often inability — *on ne mozet<sub>7</sub> priiti*) to perform the action V

The external obstacles and overcoming them are more visible in negative and perfective constructions, that is when the action was prevented from taking place or where the Participant was or will be unable to overcome the obstacle. Choi (1999: 49) discusses a person’s ability to swim; one has to have the skill, the inner ability (*mozet<sub>1</sub>*), but also there must be a swimming pool where that person can exercise his or her ability:

(63) a) *Zdes’ on mozet<sub>7</sub> plavat<sup>ri</sup>* ↘.

‘He can swim here.’

Here is the intonation contour of (63a):



z d e s' o n m o ž e t p l a v a t'

b) *On zdes’ smozet<sup>P</sup><sub>7</sub> plavat<sup>ri</sup>*.

‘He will be able to swim here.’

c) *On mog<sup>i</sup><sub>7</sub> zdes’ plavat<sup>ri</sup>*.

‘He could swim here’

d) \**On smog<sup>i</sup> zdes’ plavat<sup>ri</sup>*.

Similarly to type I, impf past tense, as in (63c), signals that some major life event took place which caused further inability to swim, or that the person moved away and the place designated as *here* is no longer available to him. In

example (63d) pf *smog* would mean that he overcame some single obstacle, yet impf *plavat'* indicates a process, consequently there is a clash. It can be made acceptable by replacing the activity with a pf verb:

d') *On smog<sup>1</sup> zdes' poplavat'<sup>p</sup>.*  
 'He managed to have a swim here.'

This example underscores the fact that there is no mechanical correlation between the aspectual pair *moč'* – *smoč'*.

Another important point is that not all verbs combine with every meaning of *moč'*, including the three additional meanings. Some meanings are more restrictive than others: 'granting permission', 'permission to begin an action', and 'surmising the state or action' are considerably more restrictive.

In conclusion, I have described seven meanings of *moč'* based on present tense usage. They can be grouped as follows: One meaning is internal (internal ability), three are external (external conditions for V, permission to perform V, and directive to Begin V), and three are epistemic (whereabouts of P or engagement of P in some activity V, apprehension of P's perceived right to perform a negative V, and fear that P may accidentally perform an action with a negative outcome). I have thus subdivided Petrova's alethic group, which included both internal ability and external conditions. I have also enlarged her epistemic group by two types and her deontic group by one additional type.

I have shown that some meanings by the nature of their action (for example directive to begin) cannot have either past tense or a perfective counterpart or both. This explains the limitation of perfective *smoč'*.

Additionally, I have shown the importance of intonation for the disambiguation of modal constructions with *moč'*. It is worth noting that the intonation contours in the traditional (Bryzgunova) model are inadequate for categorizing the intonations used with *moč'*.

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