Stefan Heck

Verbal Aspect in the Czech and Russian Imperative

Abstract The opposing perfective (PV) and imperfective (IPV) aspects are not used uniformly across Slavic languages. One of the areas of variation is the imperative, where especially Russian is known to express special pragmatic meanings (politeness and rudeness) through the IPV (Padučeva ²2010, Benacchio 2010), a possibility which other languages like Czech possibly lack. Using corpus data, this paper attempts to check Benacchio's claims that Czech makes almost no use of the pragmatic IPV imperative. One study compares the relative frequencies of PV and IPV imperatives for a chosen number of aspect pairs in Czech, Polish and Russian using the *Aranea* webcorpora; the other study uses the parallel corpus *InterCorp* (v9) to compare the frequency of Czech IPV imperatives corresponding to Russian PV and vice versa. Both studies show the IPV imperative to be more widespread in Russian than in Czech (and Polish), lending support to Benacchio's claims.

Keywords Verbal aspect, imperative, politeness, parallel corpus, Slavic

1 Introduction[1]

From a morphological point of view, Slavic aspect is expressed derivationally. Aspectual verb pairs like Polish imperfective (IPV) *robić* and perfective (PV) *zrobić* 'do', or Czech PV *odhalit* and IPV *odhalovat* 'reveal', are formed using a number of derivational affixes, sometimes with slight changes to the verb stem, and in some few cases with suppletive forms. Thanks to this, the aspectual opposition permeates almost the entire verbal paradigm including participles, the infinitive, and the imperative. While the inventory of aspectual morphology is

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remarkably similar across Slavic languages, the way in which the grammemes [PV] and [IPV] are employed in certain domains (iteration, performative speech acts, Historical Present etc.) shows considerable inner-Slavic variation. Eckert (1984) and Stunová (1993) for example, compare Czech and Russian aspect, and Dickey (2000) compares aspect in all major Slavic languages for several phenomena (but not the imperative), concluding that Slavic aspect use can be divided roughly into an Eastern type (Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Bulgarian and Macedonian) and a Western type (Czech, Slovak, Slovenian and the Sorbian languages), with Polish and Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian in a transitional zone.

1.1 Standard aspect use in the imperative

Aspect use in the imperative has been described among others by Padučeva (²2010), Lehmann (2008), Wiemer (2008), and by Benacchio (2010) in a comparative monograph comprising all major Slavic standard languages. In general, aspect use in the imperative follows what may be called "canonic" aspect functions as they are described e.g. in the AG-80 or Lehmann (2009) for Russian or in Dickey (2000) for Slavic languages in general: the PV is used for achievements and accomplishments, the IPV for states and activities. Cf. the following PV examples:

(1) a. Otevři   dveře, prosím!   (Cz)
     b. Otwórz   drzwi, proszę!   (Pl)
     c. Otkroj   dver', požalujsta!   (Ru)
         open.PV.IMP.SG door   please
         'Please open the door!' (Benacchio 2000: 80)

The IPV is used also in open iterations, as in general advice, cf. the following:

(2) Chladničku otevírejte   vždy   pouze na krátkou dobu.   (Cz)
     freezer   open.IPV.IMP.PL always only on short   time
     'Always open the freezer for a short time only!' (SYN2015)

(3) Kupuj   zawsze u mnie.   (Pl)
     buy.IPV.IMP.SG always at me
     'Always buy from me.' (NKJP)

(4) Pokupaj,   poka   deševle.   (Ru)
     buy.IPV.IMP.SG as-long-as cheap.COMP
     'Buy while it's cheaper.' (NKRJa)

Note that Czech and Russian differ in that Czech also allows for the PV in iteration, being able to focus on the perfective micro-event rather than the macrolevel of iteration, whereas Russian allows the PV only in the so-called summary meaning (Stunová 1993, Dübbers 2015).

Finally, the IPV is also regularly used under negation, the negated PV being possible only in non-volitional contexts (cf. Wiemer 2001 or Lehmann 2009).

Up to this point, aspect usage in the imperative has not been very surprising. Let us now turn to a new set of examples.

1.2 The pragmatic use of aspect: politeness/rudeness

(5) a. Segodnja na ulice xolodno, oden'tes'.PV   teplee.   (Ru)
     b. Segodnja na ulice xolodno, odevajtes'.IPV teplee.
         today   on street cold   dress.IMP.PL warm.COMP
         'It is cold outside today, dress warmer.' (Benacchio 2010: 50)

(6) a. Pokažite.PV   dokumenty!   (Ru)
     b. Pokazyvajte.IPV dokumenty!
         show.IMP.PL   documents
         'Show your documents!' (Benacchio 2010: 51)

In (5) and (6), Russian allows the use of the IPV aspect although the situation described by the verb is neither an activity, nor iterated, nor negated. The PV is just as possible in this context. The IPV is said to make the statement more soft and polite in (5), more rude in (6). These pragmatic effects of politeness/ rudeness are the focus of Benacchio (2010) and are well known and described for Russian (cf. also Padučeva ²2010, Wiemer 2008, Lehmann 2008). Both Padučeva and Benacchio also explain, in different ways, how the effects of positive politeness vs. rudeness arise in the situational context. Whether this pragmatic use of the IPV is also found in Polish or Czech is less clear. Eckert (1984) notes that the IPV is used in "certain standard etiquette forms of polite address" and also "to add politeness to an order expressed by verbs rendering a concrete movement" (139) in Russian, but not in Czech, that is to say, she acknowledges a pragmatic difference, but does not point out the possible rudeness of the IPV. According to Benacchio (2010), the positive-politeness effect is completely unavailable in Czech and the rudeness effect is also very limited, possibly exclusive to substandard language, while in Polish both are possible, but still more limited than in Russian. The exact nature of these limitations is not clear.

This is where this paper comes in. I conducted two studies to test Benacchio's informant-based claims against corpora, more specifically, to find out whether

Russian really uses the IPV imperative more than Polish, and Polish in turn more than Czech.

There has been a previous corpus study on aspect in the Slavic imperative by von Waldenfels (2012), who analysed 11 Slavic languages in his parallel corpus ParaSol. He calculated and visualised distances between the individual languages, however his study considered only whether languages differed or not for each imperative in the text, but not in which way (i.e. a Czech IPV corresponding to a Russian PV imperative was not distinguished from a Cz.PV-Ru.IPV pairing), so this is of little help here.

2 Corpus study #1: Comparison of the frequency of IPV and PV partners in the imperatives

This study was conducted using Vladimír Benko's *Aranea* webcorpora in Czech (Araneum Bohemicum Maius 15.04), Polish (Araneum Polonicum Maius 15.02) and Russian (Araneum Russicum Maius 15.02).

I extracted the frequencies of occurrence of IPV and PV non-negated imperatives by lemma, paired the aspectual partners together and calculated the percentage of how many imperatives of the given aspect pair are IPV. These are given in table 1. For reference, I added the percentage of IPV tokens for each aspectual pair from the entire lexemes. For the sake of brevity and for ease of comparison, I will discuss only the singular here: while Czech and Russian both have a simple T-V-distinction for formality comparable to French, Polish uses a system of address nouns (*pan* 'sir', *pani* 'madam', *państwo* for mixed groups, among others) with third-person agreement. This means that a Czech 2PL imperative like *dejte!* 'give!' can have several Polish equivalents, depending on who exactly is addressed, which complicates comparison between these languages.

The image is not as clear-cut as we might have hoped, but our predictions are at least confirmed. Consider, for example, the equivalents of English *to sit down*: Czech makes almost exclusive use of the PV while Polish and Russian use the IPV as well, with Russian even favoring it. The situation for *to look (at)* is very similar, and to a lesser extent for others as well. In some cases, Polish appears closer to Czech than Russian, in other cases it even uses less IPV than Czech does. For some verbs, there is no discernible difference between languages (e.g. *to allow, to stop, to try*), while for *to help* and *to ask* Czech surprisingly has the highest percentage of IPV imperatives.

The high percentage of Czech IPV *dávat* 'give' surprises at first glance, but about half of these cases (745 out of 1423) are part of the phraseologism *dávat (si) pozor/dávat (si) bacha* 'to be careful'. In these cases the IPV is perfectly natural.

Table 1: Percentages of IPV partner verbs in singular imperatives vs. for all wordforms.

English	CZ PV	CZ IPV	% IPV in imp	% IPV total	PL PV	PL IPV	% IPV in imp	% IPV total	RU PV	RU IPV	% IPV in imp	% IPV total
allow	dovolit	dovolovat	0.6	23.1	pozwolić	pozwalać	2.3	61.7	razrešit'	razrešat'	3.1	23.4
ask	zeptat	ptát	29.4	42.6	s-, zapytać	pytać	15.2	45.7	sprosit'	sprašivat'	12.8	38.9
close	zavřít	zavírat	12.5	21.1	zamknąć	zamykać	2.4	30.1	zakryt'	zakryvat'	13.7	27.5
do	udělat	dělat	45.9	55.8	zrobić	robić	24.1	49.8	sdelat'	delat'	50.1	47.7
find	najít	nacházet	0.9	29.6	znaleźć	znajdować	0.0	42.8	najti	naxodit'	3.5	16.0
give	dát	dávat	48.2	19.8	dać	dawać	10.0	45.1	dat'	davat'	20.8	46.9
help	pomoct	pomáhat	24.7	34.1	pomóc	pomagać	5.2	38.8	pomoč'	pomogat'	9.7	36.3
listen	poslechnout	poslouchat	77.3	71.9	posłuchać	słuchać	55.5	80.8	poslušat'	slušat'	66.2	78.3
look	podívat	dívat	10.7	27.1	popatrzeć	patrzeć	84.4	90.1	posmotret'	smotret'	92.2	63.8
pay	zaplatit	platit	20.3	73.4	zapłacić	płacić	20.4	58.1	zaplatit'	platit'	74.6	70.9
remain	zůstat	zůstávat	2.9	32.1	zostać	zostawać	0.0	6.5	ostat'sja	ostavat'sja	61.1	47.2
return	vrátit	vracet	1.3	29.6	wrócić	wracać	34.4	48.4	vernut'sja, vozvratit'sja	vozvraščat'sja	37.2	30.6
say, tell	říci	říkat	8.4	38.7	powiedzieć	mówić	22.0	57.9	skazat'	govorit'	24.1	53.2
id.	povědět	povídat	42.3	70.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
show	ukázat	ukazovat	2.0	35.5	pokazać	pokazywać	3.3	45.9	pokazat'	pokazyvat'	9.9	36.3
sit down	sednout	sedat	1.8	10.3	usiąść	siadać	34.2	41.0	sest'	sadit'sja	68.9	27.5
id.	posadit	posazovat	0.3	1.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
stop	přestat	přestávat	0.0	16.8	przestać	przestawać	0.0	28.2	perestat'	perestavat'	0.0	28.0
take	vzít	brát	1.1	43.8	wziąć	brać	13.9	50.5	vzjat'	brat'	32.0	34.6
try	zkusit	zkoušet	2.5	31.4	spróbować	próbować	6.4	63.9	poprobovat'	probovat'	4.7	22.9
wait	počkat	čekat	8.6	87.5	poczekać	czekać	47.4	91.3	podoždat'	ždat'	52.3	91.3
write	napsat	psát	26.9	50.9	napisać	pisać	24.4	59.5	napisat'	pisat'	58.2	57.7

This leads us to an important point: the respective verbs in one row of the above table are of course not perfect equivalents. To illustrate this on *to give*, Czech PV *dát* is often used as 'to put' as in *dej to na stůl* 'put this on the table', and the Russian IPV imperative *davaj/davajte* is often used with an exhortative meaning, to such an extent that it can be described as a particle meaning 'come on!'. While it is important to keep such differences in mind, the general point still stands: Russian is more prone to using the IPV in a pragmatic way and should thus have a higher percentage of IPV imperatives. The very fact that the IPV *davaj* and not the PV *daj* developed into an exhortative particle is, I believe, a testament to that.

3 Corpus study #2: Parallel corpus InterCorp (v9), Czech and Russian

For the second corpus study, I used Alexandr Rosen's parallel corpus InterCorp (v9). I looked for non-negated Czech PV imperatives with an IPV imperative as a Russian equivalent, and vice versa, in both singular and plural. Note that singular and plural are strictly morphological categories here and that both the Czech and the Russian plural covers informal address of a group as well as formal address of individuals or groups. Including Polish with its more complex (pro)nominal system of formal address in this second study was beyond the scope of this paper.

If the pragmatic use of the IPV imperative is in fact much more restricted in Czech, as Benacchio (2010) claims, then there should be more Cz.PV-Ru.IPV correspondences than the other way round. Because translations are aligned by sentence in InterCorp, I went through the results manually to remove any mistakes, e.g. where a Russian IPV imperative just happens to appear in a sentence but is not, in fact, a translation or equivalent of a Czech PV imperative. Figure 1 shows the results for both singular and plural pairings of Cz.PV-Ru.IPV and Cz.IPV-Ru.PV.

As expected, in both singular and plural the pairing Cz.PV-Ru.IPV is more frequent than Cz.IPV-Ru.PV, possibly due to the more widespread use of the pragmatic IPV in Russian. In the following two examples, the Russian IPV can in fact be interpreted pragmatically as "urging":

(7) a. Míšo,   prosím   tě,   prijeď   domů.   (Cz)
         Míša.voc ask.1sg.pres you.acc come-(driving).pv.imp.sg to-home
     b. Miša, požalujsta, priezžaj   domoj.   (Ru)
         Miša please   come-(driving).ipv.imp.sg to-home
         'Miša, please come home.' (InterCorp v9)
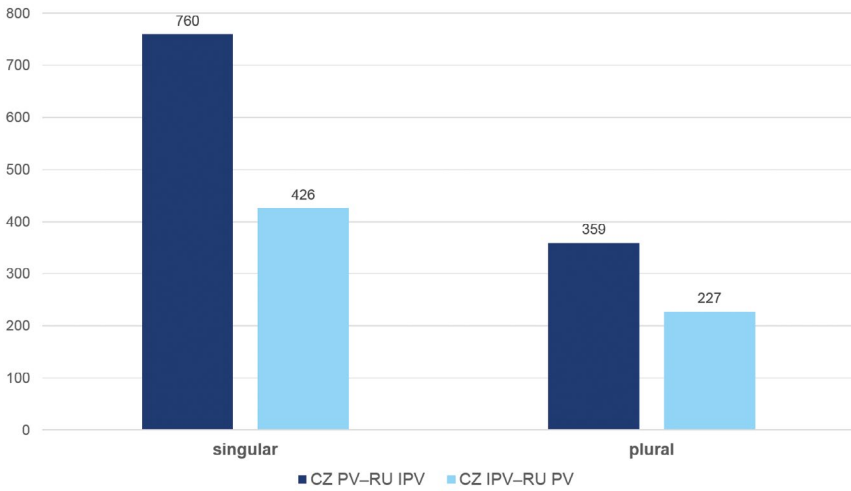
Figure 1: Search results InterCorp (v9), Czech and Russian pairings.

(8) a. Kupte   si   ho   bez   řečí.   (Cz)
         buy.PV.IMP.PL REFL.DAT 3SG.M/N without speeches
     b. Pokupajte   bez   razgovorov   (Ru)
         buy.IPV.IMP.PL without conversations
         'Buy it without talking too long.' (InterCorp v9)

One might also expect that the observed asymmetry between Czech and Russian is due to the fact that Czech also allows PV in iterations, which Russian disprefers. However, iterative examples are in fact very rare in our sample. One example of this is given in (9):

(9) a. Na každé stanici si   kup   zpátečný_lístek.   (Cz)
         on every stop   REFL.DAT buy.PV.MP.SG return-ticket
     b. Prosto na každoj ostanovke pokupaj   po   (Ru)
         obratnomu_biletu.
         simply on every   stop   buy.PV.IMP.SG one-each-of
         return-ticket
         'Just buy a return ticket on every stop.' (InterCorp v9)

The most frequent Czech PV imperatives translated using a Russian IPV are (singular only): *podívej* 'look' (139), *posaď (se)* 'sit down' (28), *poslechni* 'listen'

(24), *vrať (se)* 'return' (24), *zůstaň* 'remain' (21), *rozděl* 'divide' (19)[2], *sedni (si)* 'sit down' (20), *spusť* 'start, get going' (19), *odpověz* 'answer' (15), *chyť* 'grab' (14).

The most frequent Czech IPV imperatives to be translated with a Russian PV are (again, only singular): *poslouchej* 'listen' (42), *pojď*[3] 'come' (37), *pamatuj* 'remember' (35), *jdi* 'go' (30), *věř* 'believe' (23), *běž* 'run' (21), *drž* 'hold' (19), *mlč* 'be silent' (18), *povídej* 'tell' (17), *snaž (se)* 'try' (13).

One can ask, of course, why there are any Cz.IPV-Ru.PV pairings at all. When we look at the Czech lexemes in question here, we find that a quarter of these cases belong to "partnerless" IPV verbs and do not therefore participate in the aspectual opposition. These are motion verbs[4] like *jít* 'go', *běžet* 'run', but also *vyprávět* 'tell (a story)' and *držet* 'hold'[5]. We can speculate that maybe they would express their imperative in a PV form if they could. Figure 2 is an update of Figure 1, with the added column showing Cz.IPV-Ru.PV pairings with these partnerless verbs removed, which makes the asymmetry even more pronounced.

Regarding Czech IPV *poslouchej* 'listen'; I believe that in these cases listening is seen as an atelic "state of paying attention", hence the IPV. The fact that they correspond to PV Russian *poslušaj* is due to the nature of the Russian prefix *po-*, which can convey a delimitative meaning of 'doing s.th. for some time' (cf. AG-80:365), combining perfectivity and atelicity, whereas Czech does not have this option and thus by necessity uses the IPV to convey atelicity. When combined with a concrete object, the listening becomes telic and the PV becomes the preferred choice in Czech as well.

2   All of these are part of the fixed expression *rozděl a panuj* going back to Latin *divide et impera* (conventionally rendered into English as 'divide and conquer'). This is not a true imperative but rather a name for a certain strategic approach.

3   *pojď* is a second imperative of *jít* 'go' next to *jdi*. The difference is not one of aspect, however: *pojď* is used to mean 'come here!', whereas *jdi* means 'go away!'

4   Note that Czech simplex motion verbs are peculiar in this regard, as the Russian equivalents of these motion verbs do have a PV partner, as do lexically derived motion verbs in Czech, such as *odejít*.PV – *odcházet*.IPV 'go away'. There is some confusion as to the aspectual nature of Czech simplex motion verbs, especially because their preterite is often used like a PV verb might. Since they can, however, be used in progressive contexts, which prohibit the PV, I opt for describing them as IPV, possibly biaspectual in the preterite. This is not of direct import for this study, however, because they still do not partake in a formal aspectual opposition with a partner verb.

5   18 of 19 tokens of *drž* 'hold' are part of the phraseologism *drž hubu!* 'shut up!', possibly a Germanism.
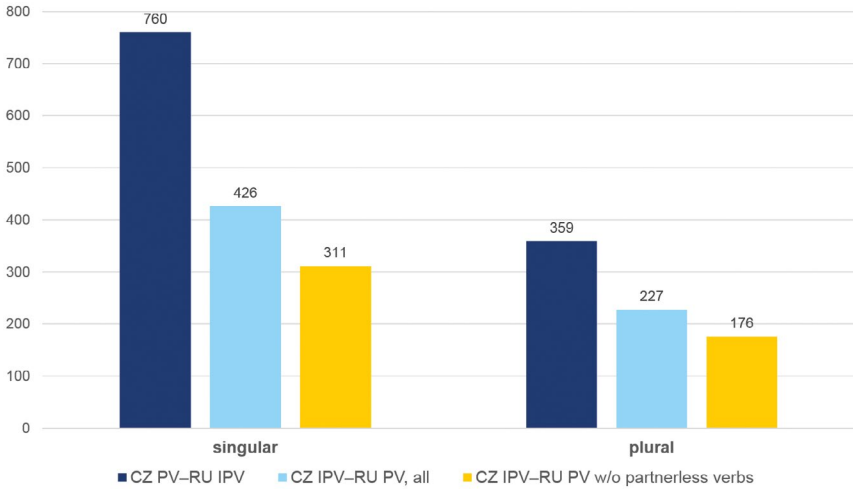
Figure 2: Search results InterCorp (v9), Czech and Russian pairings w/o partnerless verbs.

4 Conclusion

Czech and Russian clearly show an asymmetry in the way they use verbal aspect in the imperative, confirming our prediction based on Benacchio's claims. The first study, which also included Polish, has shown that in most cases the relative frequency of the IPV imperative is higher in Russian than it is in Czech and Polish. In the second study we have seen that Cz.IPV-Ru.PV pairings are less frequent than Cz.PV-Ru.IPV, which points us in the same direction: Russian uses the IPV imperative more often than Czech does. While the immediate context (phraseologisms) and lexical idiosyncrasies (missing partner verbs, language-specific additional meanings of a given verb form) certainly play a role as well, this asymmetry between Czech and Russian is at least partially due to a difference in pragmatics between the two, namely the widespread use of the pragmatically-motivated „polite" or „rude" IPV imperative in Russian.

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