

Verbal aspect and linguistic politeness in the Slavic imperative¹

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1. Introduction

Among Alberto Mioni's many different interests are Russian and other Slavic languages. Impressed by his engaging lecturing style, a number of students of Russian chose him as their thesis supervisor or co-supervisor over the years, carrying out research projects in such fields as phonology or sociolinguistics, among many others. Alberto always showed a great interest in my research, providing valuable advice that never failed to prove stimulating. My studies on linguistic courtesy – of which the present article is an example – are no exception in that they owe a lot to Alberto's positive influence. It is thus with a deep sense of gratitude, mixed with deep nostalgia, that I offer him this tribute.

As is well known, imperative forms in Russian are those verb forms for which it is most difficult – if not impossible – to establish clear, unambiguous rules regulating the choice of perfective (PF) vs. imperfective (IPF) aspect. Unlike the past forms of the indicative mood, imperative forms are characterized by a very restricted time span, which makes it impossible to accurately understand the process vs. result dichotomy, one of the main distinctions on which the Russian aspectual system is based.

The complexity of the problem of aspect in the imperative was emphasized by the authors of *Russkaja Grammatika* (RG 1980 I: 623), where it is argued that the different meanings of IPF vs. PF forms cannot be related to well-defined rules. More specifically, it is especially difficult to understand the consequences that the choice of one aspect (IPF vs. PF) would entail. We cannot understand why, for instance, the utterance *Встаньте*^{PF}! ('Stand

¹ This paper is the revised version of an earlier work delivered at the BASEES (British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies) Annual Conference held at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge on 29-31 March 2008. It summarizes my previous works on the use of verbal aspect in positive imperative forms in Russian (Benacchio 1993, 1997, 2002) and other Slavic languages (Benacchio 1998, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2010). In these works, special attention was paid to the pragmatic meanings related to linguistic politeness. The works, however, have all appeared only in Russian so far. This work then aims to make the relevant data and generalizations available to an international readership. A warm thank-you is also due to the editors of the present volume, who offered me the opportunity to contribute, and to Alessio Muro for editing my English in this and preceding versions of this paper.

up!'), addressed to someone who is sitting at a table, turns out to be fully correct, all the more so if accompanied by *пожалуйста* ('please'), whereas the same verb in the imperfective form (*Вставайте*^{IPF!}) sounds impolite and its combination with *пожалуйста* even ungrammatical. Similarly, as has often been noted (Šmelev 1959: 15, Forsyth 1970: 214-218), the corresponding IPF form *Садитесь*^{IPF} (*пожалуйста*)! ('Sit down (please)!'), if addressed to only one person, may express invitation or encouragement and thus takes on a particularly polite tone, but the very same form may be used to express a command characterized by a rude, impolite attitude: *Сколько раз вам повторять? Садитесь*^{IPF!} ('How many times do I have to tell you? Sit down!'). The PF form *Сядьте*^{PF!}, on the other hand, may express a peremptory, abrupt command, which, however, does not sound rude at all; rather, it is formally correct in every situation. As Padučeva (1996: 80) writes, *Сядьте*^{PF}, *пожалуйста!* does not sound less polite or correct than *Садитесь*^{IPF}, *пожалуйста!*.

It is no coincidence that different scholars who dealt with the above issue gave contrasting accounts of it at different times. For example, Mazon (1914: 66) pointed out that the IPF imperative is less categorical and imperious than the PF one. A totally different opinion was expressed by Karcevski (1927: 139) and later by Vinogradov (1986³: 484). The former pointed out that the PF imperative, which identifies a command justified by its result, is usually less arbitrary and therefore more polite than its IPF counterpart. Similarly, Vinogradov arrived at the conclusion that PF imperative forms are mostly less arbitrary and, therefore, softer than IPF ones.

A number of studies – carried out mainly within the framework of Speech Act Theory – have addressed the issue of how verbal aspect is used in imperative forms, including the problem of linguistic politeness (e.g. Chrakovskij and Volodin 1986, Culioli and Paillard 1987, Chrakovskij 1988, Lehmann 1989, Šaronov 1992, Birjulin 1994, Padučeva 1996, Gebert 1998, Rathmayr 1994, Šatunovskij 1996, Hong 2003, Tyurikova 2008, Zorichina 2012, Alvestad 2013, 2016).

Yet, such works fail to provide an account that reconciles the two opposing semantic connotations of PF and IPF imperative forms (i.e., a common principle that can make the situation seem less contradictory and inexplicable than is commonly assumed). In my opinion, it should be possible to find a general pragmatic principle – related to the semantics of verbal aspect – that could explain the presence of both courteous and discourteous tones in IPF and PF imperative forms in Russian. This general principle can be detected by assuming the

fundamental distinction between negative and positive politeness as first stated by Brown and Levinson (1987). This is what I aim to investigate in the present work.

I will begin by illustrating the primary meanings, which are strictly aspectual, of PF and IPF imperative forms, as they manifest themselves in requests for action. I aim to identify the link(s) between these primary meanings and the derived, pragmatic ones related to courtesy. In doing this, I will first discuss the use of PF (Section 2) and then that of IPF (Section 3), paying special attention to the specifics that distinguish the latter from the competitive use of the former. I will not, however, deal with all the primary meanings which IPF can take in the imperative mood. Rather, I will confine the discussion to the inchoative-like meaning called *pristup k dejstvu*.² The other two values (i.e. iterative and processual), are of little or no relevance to my enquiry: especially in the case of iteration, the use of IPF, which is grammatically obligatory in Russian, leaves no room for the emergence of pragmatic implications related to linguistic courtesy. Two special cases of the use of IPF in the imperative will be dealt with separately, i.e. permissions (Section 4) and courtesy formulas expressing invitations, farewell greetings, or well wishes (Section 5). In each case, the results of the research on Russian will be compared to the situation found in all the other Slavic languages, starting from the Eastern group (Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbo-Croatian) and then moving through the Northern group (across Slovene) to the Western group (Slovak, Czech, the two varieties of Sorbian, Polish).³ The conclusions (Section 6) illustrate the profound differences between Russian on the one hand (along with the other languages of the Eastern group, which show similar patterns), and the other Slavic languages, on the other.

A couple of clarifications are in order, though: first, in my analysis, I only deal with terminative (telic) verbs (i.e. Vendler's accomplishments and achievements). I do not consider atterminative (atelic) verbs, which designate states or activities: these verbs are *imperfectiva tantum*, and consequently do not permit a choice of aspect. Second, I do not deal with negative imperative forms: these pose different problems and thus call for separate treatment (on this issue, see Bogusławski 1985, Birjulin 1990, Gebert 2007). Finally, even though it is

² The term *pristup k dejstvu*, lit. 'access to action', has been variously translated as a.o. 'immediatization' or 'focus on the initial phase'. In the absence of general consent with regard to the English translation, the Russian term will be kept throughout the paper.

³ For a recent study on the imperative in different Slavic languages, see Waldenfelds 2012. See also Aikhenvald 2010 for a comprehensive typological study.

clear that intonation plays a pivotal role in determining politeness, in the present paper I have nevertheless chosen to abstract away from prosodic factors and to concentrate exclusively on aspectual ones. That is, I analyse the politeness nuances conveyed by utterances characterised by one and the same lexical content as well as by the same neutral intonation in cases of real “aspectual competition” (for further details on this point, see Benacchio 2002).

2. The use of PF in the imperative

In Russian, the PF imperative is mainly used – in compliance with its prototypical aspectual value – whenever the illocutionary force is focused on the final phase of an event, i.e. on achieving the result; everything that may concern the preceding phases of the event is not taken into consideration. Moreover, the use of PF signals that the requested action is generally postponed in time, although its immediate realization is not totally excluded.

As various scholars have noticed, the use of PF is particularly suitable (if not obligatory) when the requested action is mentioned for the first time, that is, when it appears *ex novo* in the communicative situation (a.o. Culioli and Paillard 1987: 530, Wiemer 2008: 40), when it is not implied by the situation itself. Consider the following, typical examples:

- (1) *Откройте^{PF}*, пожалуйста, дверь!
“Open the door, please!”

With this sentence the speaker simply expresses his desire for the door to shift from the state of being closed to that of being open.

- (2) *Прочитайте^{PF}* дома этот короткий рассказ!
“Read at home this short tale!”

With this sentence the speaker (a teacher) assigns the reading of a story as homework, which will probably be the topic of an oral test at the next class. No indication is given as to how the performers will have to carry out the task (e. g, loudly, slowly, carefully, etc.).

Considering that a request for action – at least when it concerns terminative verbs – is a request to bring about a change, i.e. a passage from a state to another, and considering that PF denotes precisely this passage, in Russian the most natural and frequent form for the imperative is the PF one, especially if the requested action is mentioned for the first time. This

primary, typically aspectual value (focalization on the result) generates a secondary, pragmatic value (deriving from the first): by highlighting the result of the action and not its actual performance (which, by the way, is often postponed in time), PF allows the speaker to keep his/her distance from the addressee; the sentences expressed in the PF aspect turn out to be polite in the formal sense, i.e. correct. That is to say, they express the kind of politeness that Brown and Levinson (1987) call “negative politeness”, as it is based on strategies that are meant to avoid or reduce contact with the addressee, so as to grant him/her freedom of action (for more details, see Benacchio 2002: 158-160).

The same situation has also been noted outside of the Russian language. In all Slavic languages, PF is used when the request is focalized on the result of the action. In these languages, too, imperative utterances expressed by PF are the most common and the most correct. For instance, the equivalent of such a typical request for action as the above mentioned Russian utterance “Откройте, пожалуйста, дверь!” (1) would be, in the other Slavic languages:

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|------|--|--------|
| (3) | <i>Адчыніце</i> ^{PF} дзверы, прашу! | [Bel.] |
| (4) | <i>Відчиніть</i> ^{PF} двері, прошу! | [Ukr.] |
| (5) | <i>Отворете</i> ^{PF} вратата, моля! | [Bg.] |
| (6) | <i>Отворете</i> ^{PF} ја вратата, молам! | [Mac.] |
| (7) | <i>Отворите</i> ^{PF} врата, молим! | [SCr.] |
| (8) | <i>Odprite</i> ^{PF} vrata, prosim! | [Sln.] |
| (9) | <i>Otvorte</i> ^{PF} dvere, prosím! | [Slk.] |
| (10) | <i>Otevřte</i> ^{PF} dveře, prosím! | [Cz.] |
| (12) | <i>Wocnińće</i> ^{PF} durje, prošu! | [USo.] |
| (12) | <i>Wocyńšo</i> ^{PF} źurja, pšosym! | [LSo.] |
| (13) | Niech pan(i) <i>otworzy</i> ^{PF} drzwi, proszę! | [Po.] |

The same observation applies to example (2): in Russian, as in all other Slavic languages, the equivalent of that sentence would be expressed by PF.

3. The use of IPF in the imperative (and its competition with PF)

More complex is the case of IPF both at the level of its primary, typically aspectual value, and its secondary, pragmatic implications, the latter deriving from the former.

Unlike PF, IPF can be used to express a request for an iterated action; in addition, it can encode a single request for action that does not draw attention to the final phase of the event, but rather to the preceding ones, i.e. on what we might call the middle or the initial phase.

In this work, I will not insist much on the iterative meaning, for which IPF is obligatory in Russian. The grammatical meaning is dominant and leaves no room for derived meanings pertaining to pragmatics.⁴ Nor will I insist much on the case of focalization of the illocutionary force on the middle phase, or processual meaning, of the requested action, which tends to be expressed mostly by IPF, in Russian as well as in the other Slavic languages. In this case, too, the grammatical meaning is the dominant one.⁵

More remarkable and meaningful to my analysis is the case of the focalization of the illocutionary force on the initial phase of the action, i.e. when the imperative form occurs as a request to perform an action immediately, without delay. Indeed, it is precisely with this important function of IPF (happily termed *pristup k dejstvu* by Rassudova (1982), see fn. 2) that the secondary, pragmatic implications associated with its use become manifest. In the case of initial-phase focus, indeed, the performance is not postponed in time; rather, it always involves the present moment, unlike what happens with PF. Moreover, unlike PF, which mainly expresses requests for actions mentioned for the first time, the requested action is already present in the communicative situation, that is, it is already active in the discourse model (e.g. in the mind of the participants), either explicitly or implicitly. Temporal and cognitive proximity combine, thereby generating a kind of personal closeness between speaker and hearer, when transferred to the level of pragmatic implications.

This means that, unlike PF, which allows the speaker to keep their distance from the hearer, IPF expresses a shorter interpersonal distance between the two. Consequently, if on the one hand, the requests for action expressed by PF turn out to be polite in the formal sense, i.e. correct, on the other hand, those expressed by IPF turn out to be less formal, or even informal and, as we will see later, this is why in different situations they may develop different meanings swinging between two opposites: extreme impoliteness and positive

⁴ On this usage and related examples see Benacchio (2002, 2010). In the other Slavic languages it is also the most commonly used form, although in some languages (a.o. Czech and Slovenian) its use is regulated by different grammatical factors, which often also admit PF as an alternative (Benacchio 2010: 83-94; Benacchio and Pila 2015; Fortuin and Pluimgraff 2015; Stunova 1993).

⁵ There are in fact cases of aspectual competition that seem to show the same pragmatic parameters that will be explained with regards to the meaning *pristup k dejstvu* (see fn. 2 above), but these cases would deserve an in-depth study, which is beyond the scope of this work (on this point, see Benacchio 2010: 26-29, 94-104).

politeness (see Brown and Levinson 1987), that is, the kind of politeness based on closeness, contact and sharedness of views and experience).⁶

Compare the following examples taken from Rassudova (1982), where two sentences (very similar lexically, but different as to aspect) reflect different situations:

- (14) a. *Включите*^{PF} телевизор, сегодня интересная передача.
'Turn the telly on, there's an interesting programme today.'
- b. *Включайте*^{IPF} телевизор, уже семь часов. Передача начинается.
'Turn the telly on, it's already seven o'clock! The programme is about to begin.'

In (14a) – expressed in PF – the requested action is introduced anew into the communicative situation (that is, it is mentioned for the first time); in the latter – expressed by IPF – the requested action has already been introduced and the imperative form occurs as a kind of starting signal for the performance. The IPF form used in (14b) is the most frequent one. It sounds stylistically neutral, without discourteous connotations. In this case the request for action does not entail particular costs for the interlocutor; on the contrary, it can even lead to a benefit: from the context it can be inferred that the interlocutor too is interested in seeing the TV programme, and the invitation to turn on the television may represent a courteous reminder. A PF form could also occur here: this form would give the utterance a more formal and distant tone, but it does not mean that it would be the preferred one. Indeed, the context of *pristup k dejstvu* fully justifies (and even favours) the IPF form.

The difference in pragmatic function between PF and IPF probably occurs more clearly in the following sentences (both fully grammatical in Russian), where the request implies an action that evidently has a cost for the hearer:

- (15) a. *Откройте*^{PF} скорее окно! Я ведь уже сказал.
b. *Открывайте*^{IPF} скорее окно! Я ведь уже сказал.
'Open the window, quickly! I already told you.'

⁶ This variation finds an adequate explanation in the concept of *cost vs. benefit scale*, developed by Leech, i.e. it depends on the degree of cost (or, on the contrary, of benefit) which the proposed action involves for the addressee (Leech 1983: 107-110). For further details about this problem, see Benacchio (2002: 161).

Apart from the difference in aspect (PF vs. IPF) of the imperative forms, the two sentences are completely synonymous (their translation in English would be more or less the same). What distinguishes the two examples is the different nuance of linguistic politeness implied in each one: the first utterance, expressed by PF, signals more distance and sounds more formal and in some way more correct than the second one (IPF), which is undoubtedly more direct, immediate and therefore even more discourteous. (It could maybe be glossed as ‘Come on, open the window, quickly!’.) We may say that the PF form, which ensures the preservation of interpersonal distance, in some way mitigates the impoliteness which characterizes the semantics of the sentence under discussion. On the contrary, IPF does not mitigate, but rather emphasises the impoliteness of the utterance, deriving from the cost involved for the addressee (which is anyway present in the sentence, as it is lexically expressed). I must remark that both sentences are perfectly acceptable in Russian. The same may be said about Belarusian and Ukrainian.

Outside of these languages, however, things are different: in most Slavic languages the use of IPF expressing *pristup k dejstvu* is accepted only when informally addressing a single person (with the 2nd person pronoun T) or many people. When formally addressing a single person (with the polite pronoun V), as in the cases mentioned above, only PF is used. IPF is felt as impolite and discourteous. Its use remains marginal in the standard language; it is mostly confined to a definitely substandard level.

If we take into consideration examples (14a) and (14b) above, and compare them to their corresponding translations into the other Slavic languages, we find that, apart from Belarusian and Ukrainian (which behave like Russian), PF is obligatory not only in the sentences in (a), where it expresses a request to perform an action that has been introduced anew into the communicative situation, but also in the ones in (b), where a starting signal is given for the immediate performance of an action that in some way is already present to the addressee’s consciousness:

- (16) a. *Уключыце*^{PF} тэлебачанне! Сёння цікавая перадача.
 b. *Уключайце*^{IPF} тэлебачанне! Ужо сем гадзін. Перадача ужо пачынаецца.
 [Bel.]
- (17) a. *Увімкніть*^{PF} тэлевізор! Сьгодні цікава перадача.
 b. *Вмикайте*^{IPF} тэлевізор! Ужe сьома година. Перадача пачынаецца. [Ukr.]
- (18) a. *Включете*^{PF} тeлeвизора! Днес има интересно предаване.
 b. Вече e седем часа. Предаването започва. *Включете*^{PF} (**Включвайте*^{IPF}) телевизора! [Bg.]

- (19) a. *Вклучете*^{PF} го телевизорот! Денеска има добар филм.
 b. *Вклучете*^{PF} (**Вклучувајте*^{IPF}) го телевизорот! Филмот почнува. Седум часот век'е [Mac.]
- (20) a. *Укључите*^{PF} телевизор! Данас ќе бити добар филм.
 b. Седам је сати. *Укључите*^{PF} (**Укључујте*^{IPF}) телевизор! Филм почиње. [SCr.]
- (21) a. *Prižgite*^{PF} televizor, danes je lep film.
 b. Ura je sedem. Film se začinja. *Prižgite*^{PF} (**Prižgajte*^{IPF}) televizor! [Sln.]
- (22) a. *Zapnite*^{PF}, televíziu. Dnes je pekný film.
 b. *Zapnite*^{PF} (**Zapínajte*^{IPF}), televíziu. Je sedem hodín. Film sa už začína. [Slk.]
- (23) a. *Zapněte*^{PF} televizi. Dnes je pěkný film.
 b. *Zapněte*^{PF} (**Zapínejte*^{IPF}) televizi. Je sedm hodin. Film už začíná. [Cz.]
- (24) a. *Zaswěćće*^{PF} telewizor! Džensa bęži zajimawy film.
 b. Je hižo w sydmich! *Zaswěćće*^{PF} (**Zaswěćejće*^{IPF}) telewizor! Film so započina. [USo.]
- (25) a. *Zaknypsnišo*^{PF} telewizor! Žęnsa pšizo zajimny film.
 b. Ga južo zeger sedymich. *Zaknypsnišo*^{PF} (**Knypsujšo*^{IPF}) telewizor! Film se zachopijo. [LSo.]
- (26) a. Niech pan(i), *właczy*^{PF} telewizor! Dają dzisiaj ciekawy film.
 b. Już siódma. Zaczyna się film. Niech pan(i), *właczy*^{PF} (**włacza*^{IPF}) telewizor! [Po.]

On the other hand, in these languages, IPF is perfectly acceptable if used when informally addressing either a single person (with T) or informally several people.⁷ Without a doubt, as we can see considering the forms in brackets below, in such cases the PF forms are possible too, and they sound more “correct”, less urgent and less pressing than their IPF equivalents (which, on the other hand, I repeat, are felt as fully acceptable, even more natural, spontaneous). Compare:⁸

⁷ This is the case except for Slovene and the two varieties of Sorbian, which even in this case do not accept IPF.

⁸ I did not take into consideration examples from Belarusian and Ukrainian, since this would have been pointless: as a matter of fact, if IPF is allowed with the polite pronominal form (i.e. with the address pronoun V), it is allowed even more with the familiar pronoun (i.e. with the address pronoun T). In a similar vein, in order not to weigh down the text, I have not reported any examples of the use of IPF in imperative forms addressed to more than one person.

- (27) Вече е седем часа. Предаването започва. *Включвай*^{IPF} / *Включи*^{PF} телевизора! [Bg.]
- (28) *Включувај*^{IPF} / *Вкључи*^{PF} го телевизорот! Филмот почнува. Седум часот е век'е. [Mac.]
- (29) Седам је сати. *Укључуј*^{IPF} / *Укључи*^{PF} телевизор! Филм почиње. [SCr.]
- (30) Ura je sedem. Film se začinja. *Prižgi*^{PF} (**Prižigaj*^{IPF}) televizor! [Sln.]
- (31) *Zapínaj*^{IPF} / *Zapni*^{PF} televíziu. Je sedem hodín. Film sa už začína. [Slk.]
- (32) *Zapínej*^{IPF} / *Zapni*^{PF} televizi. Je sedm hodin. Film už začíná. [Cz.]
- (33) Je hižo w sydmich! *Zaswěć*^{PF} (**Zaswěćej*^{IPF}) telewizor! Film so započina. [Uso.]
- (34) Ga južo zeger sedymich. *Zaknypsni*^{PF} (**Knypsuj*^{IPF}) telewizor! Film se zachopijo. [LSo.]
- (35) Już siódma. Zaczyna się film. *Włączaj*^{IPF} / *Włącz*^{PF} telewizor! [Po.]

Similarly, if we compare the Russian examples (15a) and (15b) to their equivalents in the other Slavic languages, we can note that in most cases only one form is allowed within each pair: the PF. The use of IPF is considered rude, almost sub-standard, and it is accordingly used very rarely:

- (36) Ды *адчыняйце*^{IPF} (*адчыніце*^{PF}) ж акно! Колькі разоў можна казаць? Вы што, не чуеце? [Bel.]
- (37) Та *відчиняйте*^{IPF} (*відчиніть*^{PF}) же вікно! Я вже двічі сказав. Вы мене не чуєте? [Ukr]
- (38) *Отворете*^{PF} / *Отваряйте*^{IPF} прозореца! Не ме ли чувате? [Bg.]
- (39) *Отворете*^{PF} (*Отворајте*^{IPF}) го прозорецот, Ви реков век'е! [Mac.]
- (40) *Отворите*^{PF} (*Отварајте*^{IPF}) taj prozor веч једном! [SCr.]
- (41) *Odprite*^{PF} (**Odpirajte*^{IPF}) okno vendar! [Sln.]
- (42) Už aj *otvorte*^{PF} (*otvárajte*^{IPF}) to okno! Koľkokrát vám to mám povedať. [Slk.]
- (43) *Otevřete*^{PF} (*otvírajte*^{IPF}) už to okno! Už jsem vám to řekla. [Cz.]
- (44) *Wočińće*^{PF} (**Wočinjejće*^{IPF}) wokno hnydom! [USo.]
- (45) *Wocynśo*^{PF} (**Wocynjajsó*^{IPF}) ned wokno! [LSo.]
- (46) Niech pan(i) *otworzy*^{PF} (*otwiera*^{IPF}) natychmiast okno! [Po.]

In these sentences, too, as in the previous ones, except for Slovene and the two varieties of Sorbian, IPF is the norm in informal contexts, i.e. when addressing a single person with the familiar pronoun T or when addressing several people. Of course, in these cases, beside the IPF forms, the PF ones can also occur – they are always correct.

4. The use of IPF in permissions

The difference between the behaviour of Russian (and, more generally, of the Eastern group), on the one hand, and the other Slavic languages, on the other, appears clearly if we analyze the speech acts of permission.

As I stated earlier, in such cases, where the requested action turns out to have a benefit (and not a cost) for the hearer/performer – and permission is clearly one of these cases or even the most typical one – lack of formality may give rise to so-called positive politeness, based, I repeat, on closeness or contact. This is what we can regularly observe in Russian permissions, where IPF is preferable, although PF is accepted too. For instance, in reply to the question *Можно открыть окно?* ('May I open the window?'), it is possible to answer like this, with IPF:

- (47) a. Пожалуйста. *Открывайте*^{IPF}!⁹
‘Please do! Open (it)!’

As a matter of fact, this form ensures a strongly polite tone, in the sense intended within positive politeness, that is, an informal tone expressing solidarity. More rarely, it is possible to use the corresponding PF forms, but these would give the sentence a more distant tone. Compare:

- (47) b. Пожалуйста. *Откройте*^{PF}!¹⁰
‘Please do! Open (it)!’

Once again, things are different in the other Slavic languages where, except for Belarusian and Ukrainian, the most commonly used form is the PF one. IPF is considered unacceptable, impolite, rude, or, more simply, low, barely a standard form. Compare the following examples, which are the equivalents of the Russian example in (47):

- (48) a. Калі ласка, *адчыняйце*^{IPF}!

⁹ Or, maybe better: *Открывайте*^{IPF}, *конечно!* ('Open (it), of course!').

¹⁰ Or *Откройте*^{PF}, *конечно!* ('Open (it), of course!'). Anyway, the question of the competition between PF and IPF in speech acts of permission is quite complex and concerns the so-called *effekt bezrazličija* ('indifference effect'). On this problem, see Benacchio (2002: 164-165).

- (49) b. Капі ласка, адчыніце^{IPF}! [Bel.]
 a. Будь ласка, відчиняйте^{IPF}!
 b. Будь ласка, відчиніть^{IPF}! [Ukr.]
- (50) Отворете^{IPF} (*Отваряйте^{IPF}) го, моля! [Bg.]
- (51) Повелете. Отворете^{IPF} (*Отворајте^{IPF}) го! / Отворете^{IPF} го слободно! [Mac.]
- (52) Изволите. Отворите^{IPF} (*Отварајте^{IPF})! / Отворите^{IPF} слободно! / Само га Ви отворите^{IPF}! [SCr.]
- (53) Seveda, odprite^{IPF} (*Odpirajte^{IPF}) [Sln.]
- (54) Kl'udne ho otvorte^{IPF} (*otvárajte^{IPF})! [Slk.]
- (55) Klidně ho otevřete^{IPF} (*otvírejte^{IPF})! [Cz.]
- (56) Wočinće^{IPF} (*Wočinjejće^{IPF}), prošu! [USo.]
- (57) Wocynśo^{IPF} (*Wocynjajśo^{IPF}), pšosym! [LSo.]
- (58) Niech pan(i) otworzy^{IPF} (*otwiera^{IPF}), proszę! [Po.]

5. The use of IPF in politeness formulas

In a similar way, i.e. with the connotations of positive, familiar politeness, potentially implied by IPF imperative forms (in the case, I repeat, of requesting an action that would turn out to be a benefit for the hearer), it is possible to explain the codification of a large number of polite formulas expressed by IPF in the Russian language. By way of example, it will suffice to mention the following patterns that are commonly used to address a guest who has only just arrived:

- (60) *Входите^{IPF}, раздевайтесь^{IPF}, садитесь^{IPF}!*
 ‘Come in, please, take off your coat (lit. ‘undress’) and sit down!’
- (61) *Снимайте^{IPF} пальто!*
 ‘Take off your coat!’
- (62) *Располагайтесь^{IPF}!*
 ‘Make yourself comfortable!’

Things are different in the other Slavic languages (except for Belarusian and Ukrainian) where, in such formulas, PF is the default option. Compare the following translations of (60) into all other Slavic languages:

- (63) Калі ласка, *заходзьце*^{IPF}, *распранайцеся*^{IPF}, *сядайце*^{IPF}! [Bel.]
- (64) Будь ласка, *заходзьте*^{IPF}, *роздягайтесь*^{IPF}, *сідайте*^{IPF}! [Ukr.]
- (65) *Влезте*^{PF}, *сблечете*^{PF} се и *седнете*^{PF}, моля! (*Влизайте*^{IPF}, *сбличайте*^{IPF} се и *сядайте*^{IPF}, моля!)¹¹ [Bg.]
- (66) Повелете, *влезете*^{PF}, *соблечете*^{PF} се и *седнете*^{PF}! (*Повелете, *влегувайте*^{IPF}, *соблекувайте*^{IPF} се и *седнувайте*^{IPF}!) [Mac.]
- (67) Изволите, *уђите*^{PF}, *скините*^{PF} се и *седите*^{PF}! (*Изволите, *улазите*^{IPF}, *скидајте*^{IPF} се и *седајте*^{IPF}!) [SCr.]
- (68) Izvolite, prosim, *vstopite*^{PF}, *slecite*^{PF} plašč, *sedite*^{PF}! (*Izvolite, prosim, *vstopajte*^{IPF}, *slacite*^{IPF} plašč, *sedajte*^{IPF}!) [Sln.]
- (69) *Vstúpte*^{PF}, prosím, *odložte*^{PF} si a *sadnite*^{PF} si! (**Vstupujte*^{IPF}, *odkladajte*^{IPF} si, *sadajte*^{IPF} si!) [Slc.]
- (70) *Vstupte*^{PF}, prosím, *odložte*^{PF} si, *posad'te*^{PF} se! (**Vstupujte*^{IPF}, *odkládejte*^{IPF} si, *sedejte*^{IPF} si!) [Cz.]
- (71) *Zastupće*^{PF}, *wuslěkajće*^{PF} (**slěkajće*^{IPF}) so a *sydníce*^{PF} (**sydajće*^{IPF}) so, prošu! [USo.]
- (72) *Zastupšo*^{PF} (**Zastupajšo*^{IPF}), *wotpołożćo*^{PF} (**wotpołożujšo*^{IPF}) že wašu jaku a *sednišo*^{PF}/*seńšo*^{PF} (**sedajšo*^{IPF}) se, pšosym! [LSo.]
- (73) Niech pan(i) *wejdzie*^{PF}, *zdejmie*^{PF} płaszcz i *usiądzie*^{PF}, proszę! (*Niech pan(i) *wchodzi*^{IPF}, *zdejmuje*^{IPF} płaszcz i *siada*^{IPF}, proszę!) [Pl.]

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, the comparative analysis I carried out lends support to the existence of the pragmatic mechanism I draw from analyzing the Russian data.

In most Slavic languages, IPF cannot be used when formally addressing a single person together with the polite pronoun V, whereas in familiar contexts (i.e. in informal addresses to many people or to a single person with the familiar pronoun T), on the contrary, it is largely used (maybe even more often than PF) and felt to be more “natural”. This finding is fully in line with my hypothesis that the use of IPF entails a shorter interpersonal distance between the participants of the speech act than PF does. The only difference is that Russian (along with the other languages

¹¹ Note the special position of Bulgarian, which is closer to the Eastern Slavic languages and thus appears to be some sort of *trait d'union* between the latter and those from the Southern group.

of the Eastern group) has extended the use of the aspectual form expressing closeness (i.e. IPF) even to formal addresses, i.e. those characterized by the use of the respectful pronoun V.

It is not exactly the mechanism of distance reduction related to IPF that is lacking in the Slavic languages which differ from Russian in this respect, but rather its “positive” interpretation (like positive politeness) and, above all, its extension to the field of formal (non-familiar, non-intimate) relationships.

Abbreviations

Belarusian	Bel.
Bulgarian	Bg.
Czech	Cz.
Imperfective	IPF
Lower Sorbian	Lso.
Macedonian	Mac.
Perfective	PF
Polish	Po.
Serbo-Croatian	SCr.
Slovak	Slk.
Slovenian	Sln.
Ukrainian	Ukr.
Upper Sorbian	Uso.

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