Absolute tense marking in Russian embedded clauses as formal identity

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Russian, as noted by Barentsen (1995), Khomitsevich (2007), Say (2016), is a mixed language in the respect of subordinate tense marking. The default strategy for complement clauses is taxis/relative tense, however, the absolute marking is also possible. It seems that the absolute marking has two functions: 'autonomous' and 'non-autonomous' one. The former type is observed in clausal adjuncts and will not be discussed in detail. I will concentrate on the latter type, which is mostly observed in complement clauses. I will show that it can be regarded as an identity tendency for the form in the matrix and the embedded clause.

There are two arguments for the fact that absolute marking can be regarded as a tendency to identity.

    (i)   Combinations with non-finite forms

If an adjunct clause is embedded under a complement clause, some restrictions are valid: for instance, if the complement clause is marked for relative tense (present in (1)), the adjunct clause cannot be marked for absolute tense. By contrast, the adjunct clause can be marked for absolute tense if it is embedded under a participle marked for relative tense (present in (2)). This fact shows that the restriction is not on the **absolute tense marking**, but rather on the **form identity**: in (1), the absolute tense form in the adjunct (*byl odet*) differs from the tense form in the complement. By contrast, in (2), the participle impose no restrictions on the tense form in the adjunct, because of their formal difference.

(1)   **On uvidel, čto Vasja **pereživaet** iz-za togo čto on **<u>byl odet</u>** v grjaznuju odeždu.*

       'He saw that Vasja worried because he was dressed in dirty clothes.'

(2)   *On uvidel čeloveka, **pereživayusčego** iz-za togo čto on **byl odet** v grjaznuju odeždu.*

       'He saw a man who worried because he was dressed in dirty clothes.'

Here also belong constructions with infinitives like *nacinat'*, as in (4) – they make the absolute use of past tense less probable, though the simultaneous interpretation is semantically possible. The reason seems to be that only in (3), but not in (4), is the form of the lexical verb identical. In (4), the lexical verb is in infinitive.

(3)   *On **perežival** čto **govoril** vse nepravil'no.*

       'He was worried by the fact that he was saying everything in a wrong way.'

(4)   *??On **nacal pereživat'** čto **postupal** nepravil'no.*

       'He began to be worried by the fact that he was making something wrong.'

    (ii)   Aspect use

As shown by Letuchiy (2021), the use of absolute marking is more appropriate when the matrix predicate is imperfective than when it is perfective:

(5)   *On čuvstvoval, čto govoril čuš.*

       'He felt that he was saying nonsense.' (imperfective)

(6)   *?/#On počuvstvoval čto govoril čuš.*

       'He felt that he was saying nonsense.' (perfective)

Example (6) is mainly possible if the past tense form *govoril* is interpreted in the precedence relative meaning. In (5), the simultaneity reading is normal.

In the talk, the advantages and the disadvantages of the identity account of absolute tense will be addressed.

References

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