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From necessity to possibility: the modal spectrum of the dative-infinitive construction in Russian¹

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1. Introduction

The dative-infinitive construction in Russian (henceforth: DI) is a syntactic expression of modality. In sentences with an imperfective aspect it expresses different shades of (absence of) necessity, ranging from uses that have a deontic character (1-2), to uses that have an epistemic character (3-4), expressing that the infinitive event will or will not occur:²

- (1) *Поезд замедлил ход перед станцией. Дмитрий быстро протиснулся к женщине и легко коснулся ее плеча. – **Нам выходить**, – вполголоса сказал он и едва заметно подтолкнул ее к выходу из вагона.* (А. Маринина, Шестерки умирают первыми)
- (2) *Почему бы и нет, сказал он. Ведь завтра **ему не идти** в школу, и он сможет спать, сколько захочет.* (С. Кинг, Сердца в атлантиде)
- (3) *Это у тебя жизни не осталось? Тогда, получается, **мне умирать** завтра.* (Ю. Оборотень, Комната)
- (4) ***Этому не бывать!*** (Б. Васильев, Картежник и бретер, игрок и дуэлянт)

The DI can also express (im)possibility; this use is restricted foremost to sentences with negation (*не*) and the perfective aspect:

- (5) *Что мужчине нужна подруга, **женщинам не понять**.* (Ю. Безелянский, В садах любви)

¹ I would like to thank the participants of the conference *Modality in the Slavonic languages* in Regensburg in 2004 for their useful comments when I presented this paper. I also would like to thank Adrie Barentsen for his valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper, and Thomas Daiber and David Pineda for their help interpreting the old Russian data.

² In this paper, I will use this more traditional terminology, because it suffices to describe the uses of the DI. See for example Van der Auwera & Plungian (1998) for more up-to-date terminology.

In specific contexts the interpretation of possibility occurs without negation, more specifically with questions with an interrogative adverb (6), in sentences where there is a contrast between different subjects (7), in sentences with *едва* (8) or *только* or in dependent clauses after the conjunctions (9), *перед тем, как* (10) or *чтобы* (11):

- (6) *Как мне туда **попасть**?* (Internet)
- (7) ***Человеку** сдвинуть его без проблем, а **помирающей** собаке ни за что.* (Г. Щербакова, Мальчик и девочка)
- (8) *И рыбак оставил лодку и проник в эту пещеру вначале такую узкую, что едва **пройти** человеку.* (Internet)
- (9) *Нигде не увидите огня... По улицам летом стоит пыль, а тротуары так узки, что **одному** только **человеку** **пройти**.* (Internet)
- (10) *Так, чтобы мне стало как бы что-то понятно, я должна описать каждую змейку отдельно. А потом описать, как они друг с другом взаимодействуют. Рассмотреть их совокупность. Но перед тем, как **мне** это **сделать**, надо с одной разобратся, как ее описывать.* (Internet)
- (11) *Обычно, чтобы **мне** **понять** смысл стиха я читаю его несколько раз.* (Internet)

The DI can express, in very specific contexts, absence of permission:

- (12) *К перестукиваниям, говорят, тут в 20-е годы ещё относились свободно: ещё как-то жила эта нелепая традиция из царских тюрем, что если **заключенному** не **перестукиваться**, так что ему и делать?* (А. Солженицин, Архипелаг ГУЛАГ)

The interpretation of permission (without negation) does not occur. Besides the modal uses mentioned above, the DI can also be used to express different shades of wish and directivity with the particle *бы* (*Мне бы только **смотреть** на тебя.*) and in specific cases without *бы* (e.g. ***Расту** ему большим и здоровым!*). This paper focuses on the use of necessity, possibility and permission in sentences without *бы*.

An analysis of the specific distribution of use of the DI as sketched above is interesting because it may provide insights into the interconnection between different modal ‘categories’, more specifically necessity, possibility and permission. Another interesting feature of the DI is the association of possibility with negation (and the perfective aspect) (5), and the exceptions to this rule (6-11). These two issues constitute the main research focus of this paper.

Note that both phenomena – interconnection between necessity and (im)possibility, and the association of possibility with negation – are not restricted to the DI, but occur with other forms and in other languages as well.³ In the literature on the DI (e.g. Maurice 1995, 1996; Holvoet 2003), these relations are usually explained by modal logic equations that relate possibility, necessity and permission to each other by means of modal logic operators and negation. As such, these analyses focus on the ‘referential’ identity of scenes described by different modal expressions. In this paper, I will argue that an explanation of the above mentioned phenomena solely in terms of modal logic equations does not suffice. A complete analysis must take into account both the abstract meaning of the DI and the pragmatics and function of possibility.

This paper has the following structure. In paragraph 2, I will discuss the formal structure of the DI, and in paragraph 3 I will provide an analysis of the semantic-syntactic structure of the DI. In paragraph 4 I will discuss the relation between the general meaning of the DI and the ‘meaning’ of modality. In paragraphs 5-7 I will provide an analysis of the different modal uses of the DI (necessity, possibility and permission). Finally, in paragraph 8, I will give my conclusion.

2. Formal identification of the DI

The combination of the dative and infinitive as it occurs in sentences (1-12) constitutes a semantic and syntactic unit with a meaning and use that is conventionalised up to a certain degree.⁴ The unit status of the DI means that one can speak about an abstract *construction*, in the sense of construction grammar (see Goldberg 1995, 1-5 for a definition). The DI consists of a dative noun or pronoun, an infinitive and in some specific cases impersonal use of the verb *быть* in the past (*было*) or future tense (*будет*). Other elements that occur in the sentence can be seen as arguments of the infinitive or modifications of elements in the sentence or of the sentence as a whole. They are therefore not part of the *abstract* DI, although they may be part of less abstract constructions that inherit all the properties of the abstract DI.

The form *было* has a rather marginal status because its occurrence is very infrequent; it only occurs frequently with specific usage types (foremost questions and sentences with partial negation). The form *будет* is even more restricted and is confined

³ See for example Hansen (2000, 78-79) for a brief discussion of the German *müssen* (‘must’) that was used foremost to express possibility in older stages of German, whereas in modern German it expresses necessity. Maurice (1995, 281-282) provides a brief discussion of the relation between possibility and negation with other forms and in other languages than Russian.

⁴ Since the DI is an abstraction from different more or less identifiable usage types, the conventional element of the DI is the array of possible usage types, which cannot be fully predicted from the combination of the dative and infinitive.

foremost to language with archaic features (e.g. сказ) or spoken language.⁵ They are, however, an integral part of the DI, because they can be seen as the past or future tense markers of the zero ‘element’ as it occurs in the present tense. Another argument why these forms are part of the abstract DI, is that they show idiosyncratic syntactic behaviour. Unlike impersonal use of *быть* in constructions with adverbial predicates like *трудно* or *грустно* they cannot be negated:

- (13) *Теперь выхода уже не было, домой мне было не **пройти**, а вперёд идти смысла не было[.]* (Internet)
- (14) *Мы пробирались, взявшись за руки, как дети: идя об руку, **нам не пройти** было и десяти шагов.* (Оноре де Бальзак, Драма на берегу моря)
- (15) **Мне не было **пройти**.*⁶

In the DI the dative can be seen as a *dative subject*, expressing the *potential subject* of the situation expressed by the infinitive. The infinitive can be seen as the *predicate* of the construction. The forms *было* and *будет* can be seen as auxiliaries that express the tense of the construction.

In the literature (e.g. *Russkaja Grammatika* 1980) the construction under discussion is usually treated as part of the class of so-called ‘infinitive sentences’ or ‘independent infinitives’, that is, the class of constructions where the infinitive can be seen as the *predicate* of the sentence. Another name that occurs in the literature is ‘modal infinitive’ (Maurice 1995, 1996). In my analysis I will use the term *dative-infinitive construction*, or *DI*. The choice of this term is motivated by the formal structure of the sentences given above, namely the occurrence of the dative and the infinitive.

Although I use the term *dative-infinitive construction*, it must be noted that some sentences with an infinitive predicate where no dative is expressed can also be seen as instances of the DI construction. The absence of a dative in such sentences can in some cases be motivated by the generic status of the subject of the infinitive situation, for example *Здесь не пройти*. This conforms to a more general phenomenon in Russian that the non-expression of a subject may be interpreted as referring to a generic subject (‘one’). The formal connection with this type of sentence and the DI is evident from the

⁵ In the following sentence taken from a fairy tale we find an example of *будет*: *Ты жар-птицу возьми, а золотую клетку не трогай; ежели клетку возьмешь, то тебе оттуда не **уйти** **будет**: тебя тотчас поймут!* The same use also occurs in the spoken language, as is evident from the following example from a chat-session on the Internet:

Распредвал : to[Rc.if] теперь в клан?

Распредвал : to[Rc.if] а мне не пройти будет.

⁶ As such they share similarities with impersonal use of *быть* with modal adverbs (*можно*, *надо*) or adjectives (*должен*), that can also not be negated in most contexts: *Мне не надо было* versus *?Мне не было надо* (see Fortuin 2000, 298-312 for an analysis).

fact that it is possible to insert this sentence type into the paradigm of the DI (*Мне не прийти*), with preservation of its modal meaning.⁷

In other sentences the dative is not expressed because the nature of the potential agent is given contextually, and therefore not formally expressed, for example directive use *Молчать!* (subject = addressee); questions *Как доехать в центр?* (subject = speaker), and wish *Посидеть бы* (subject = speaker)). In some of these cases a dative noun may be inserted in the sentence, for example *Как мне поехать в центр?* Whereas the sentence without a dative has a more generic interpretation ('How can I/one get to the center?'), the expression of the dative pronoun makes the specific character of the subject explicit. In other cases the expression of a dative subject is not possible or at least highly restricted, e.g. *?Тебе молчать!* The connection between this construction and the DI is however evident from the possibility of using forms like *никто* or *все* in the dative (*Никому не бежать!* *Всем молчать!*). In my opinion, the above mentioned sentences without a dative can be interpreted as more peripheral instances of the DI.

In some cases the DI occurs with sentences where no infinitive is expressed, but where the identity of the situation can be inferred from the context, e.g.: *Эх.. мне бы на спектакль*. The combination of the infinitive with *бы*, the dative, together with the pragmatic context in which the sentence is uttered, implies that the situation referred to must be identified with an act of movement, comparable to 'going'. Sentences like these have an elliptical character, and are restricted to a limited set of situations, that have a more abstract character.

3. Semantic-syntactic structure of the DI

In order to describe the semantics and syntactic structure of the DI, it is necessary to look at the semantics of its constituent parts.

The infinitive expresses the idea of a 'situation type' (see also Fortuin 2000 and 2003 for a discussion). I use the term 'situation' as a cover term for those phenomena that are usually expressed by verbs such as states, actions, events, etc. In contrast to finite verbs, a situation type is abstracted from a specific agent/subject and time. In Russian, the infinitive does not abstract away from aspect and voice (*-ся*). The absence of the grammatical categories person, gender, and tense follows from the type character of the

⁷ I would like to point out that in the sentence without expressed dative subject, the reference to a place (*здесь*) is an obligatory element, which is not the case in the sentence with the dative subject. Also note that such generic sentences are restricted to sentences with a possibility interpretation and negation or other restrictive forms (*Я не верил в эту модель мира — она была для меня макетом: здесь только кино снимать*; А. Битов, *Обоснованная ревность*). Sentences like the following do not occur: * *Здесь ходить осторожно* ('Here one has to watch out while walking'). This issue deserves further analysis.

infinitive. In order to become an informative unit of linguistic communication, the infinitive needs to be ‘reconnected’ to the plan of ‘reality’. This may occur when the infinitive is embedded in a construction as an object, subject, predicate or specification (as in: *Пассажиры имеют возможность играть в шахматы*). Connecting the infinitive to the plan of reality also means (with the only exception impersonal verbs such as *дождит* ‘to rain’) that the infinitive subject is associated with an agent/subject. The identity of the infinitive subject is often given in the syntactic context (e.g. *Я_i люблю [играть в шахматы]_i*). In those cases where no participant is available for association with the infinitive subject, the infinitive subject remains unspecified (e.g.: *Играть в шахматы очень трудно*).

The dative in Russian can best be seen as a polysemous complex with a basic meaning and extensions of this basic meaning (peripheral meanings or uses). These peripheral uses or meanings show similarity to the basic meaning under a particular perspective. I would like to propose that the following three interrelated features constitute the basic meaning of the dative in Russian: (i) There is some force directed at Y (=participant expressed by dative noun); (ii) Y is potentially affected by this force; (iii) The potential effect results in a dynamic scene (‘receiving’, ‘coming into effect’, ‘experiencing’).

For a more detailed analysis of the meaning of the dative, see for example Janda (1993) and Fortuin (2000, 2003).

In the DI we find a combination of the dative and the infinitive. In combination these forms express the following: The participant in the dative is the potential subject/agent of the situation expressed by the infinitive because of the existence of some unspecified force, which is directed at the coming into being of the infinitive situation by the dative participant.

As I have already shown in paragraph 1 above, the specific abstract meaning has a modal character. Besides the above mentioned modal uses (foremost impossibility and necessity), the DI can also express other modal uses, for example different shades of wish (especially in sentences with the particle *бы*). Also note that many uses cannot be clearly classified as expressing a specific modality type, for example because they express something inbetween necessity or possibility, whereas in other cases the DI cannot be classified as being modal in the traditional sense at all. These phenomena have to do with the fact that the modality of the DI is not expressed by a specific form, but an interpretation that arises as the result of the abstract meaning of the construction and the context in which it occurs. It should therefore be kept in mind that the DI does not actually express necessity, impossibility, etc. in the strict sense, but that it expresses a more abstract meaning that, under specific conditions, can be classified with general linguistic terms as necessity, impossibility, etc.

As I mentioned above, a similar modal meaning may also occur in sentences without a dative such as *Здесь не пройму*. In my opinion, the occurrence of such sentences does not imply that in sentences where a dative *is* expressed, it does not contribute to the modal nature of the construction. Furthermore, I do not think that something like a modal *meaning* should be attributed to the infinitive form. However, the combination of the meaning of the infinitive and a specific context may yield a modal interpretation. As the infinitive expresses the idea of a situation ‘type’, it needs to be connected in some way to the plane of reality in order to become a communicatively relevant unit. It is no wonder that in constructions where the infinitive figures as the predicate of the sentence, the construction often has a ‘modal’ character, since the idea of ‘applying’ in itself may be easily associated with the idea of a force, typical for modality in general. Such is for example the case in sentences where the infinitive figures as a directive or in sentences that express impossibility with a generic agent. A sentence like *Здесь не пройму* expresses that the not reaching of the terminus of the situation expressed by the infinitive is applied to an unspecified agent. If a situation has a general application, it can be interpreted such that there must be some force that is compelling any agent (or put differently, the unspecified agent) toward this action, hence the modal interpretation. As in this case the infinitive action is not initiated by the agent himself, the agent can be seen as an entity with a status that is close to that of a recipient.

4. DI & modality

In paragraph 1, I have given an overview of some modal uses of the DI. In the preceding paragraphs I have given an analysis of the formal structure of the DI and its semantic-syntactic structure. Before I address the question of how the different modal uses of the DI are related to the abstract meaning of the DI, I will first say something about modality in general. In my description of modality of the DI, I will use the model of force dynamics given by Talmy (1985). He describes modality – more specifically necessity and possibility – in terms of two opposing forces (Agonist and Antagonist) in the following way:

Necessary X =_{def}

Subject x = Agonist

Subject x has tendency to inaction (not X) (→ Antagonist opposes this tendency)

Antagonist is stronger than subject

Possible =_{def}

Subject x = Agonist

Subject x has tendency to action (X) ($\rightarrow$ Antagonist opposes this tendency)

Subject is stronger than Antagonist

In this model ‘necessity’ is described in terms of an imposing force, whereas ‘possibility’ is described in terms of an absent potential barrier. The reason why I use this model, is that it fits the structure of the DI because of the explicit reference to the idea of a force. This ‘force’ model suits the abstract meaning of the DI better than definitions of necessity or possibility in terms of possible worlds where ‘necessary x’ is equated with ‘in all possible worlds x is true’; and ‘possible x’ is equated with ‘there is at least one possible world where x is true’. The idea of possibility given by Talmy can therefore not be equated with a logical description like $\neg \Box \neg x$ (not necessary not x): this logical description only points to the result of the modal situation, not to the way it comes about.⁸

Now, how can this description of modality – necessity and possibility – be linked to the DI? Why is it that the DI can express these notions? Proceeding from the meaning of the DI given above, and the meaning of modality given by Talmy, the two main interpretations of the DI in declarative sentences can then be modelled as follows:

⁸ The idea of a force in the case of necessity (person, rule, norm, etc.) seems more straightforward than in the case of possibility. It is therefore questionable whether the idea of a force in the case of necessity is conceptually the same as in the case of possibility, as seems to be claimed by Talmy. In the case of possibility the idea of a force must be identified with more abstract phenomena such as external circumstances (e.g. *He stepped aside so that I could get through*; that is ‘succeeded’) or internal properties (*I can sing very well*). It is also questionable whether the idea of an *absent potential barrier* can be applied equally well to all sentences that express possibility. In sentences that express something like ‘succeed’ one can actually speak about the taking away of blockage (so there is an absent barrier). This is, however, not the case in sentences like *I can sing very well*. If one really insists on analyzing such sentences in terms of a *potential barrier*, this barrier would have to be pragmatic (or epistemic, if you will) rather than physical in nature. In a sentence like *My five year old son can already write* the only potential barrier I manage to see is the presupposition that children that age are not able to write. Finally, I do not think there is such a thing as a basic (cross-linguistic) category of ‘modality’ or ‘possibility’. Rather, it seems to me that the specific ‘meaning’ of what we call possibility differs from form to form and language to language. Also note that many ‘modal’ forms are polysemous, which makes it difficult to describe these different uses in terms of one general description.

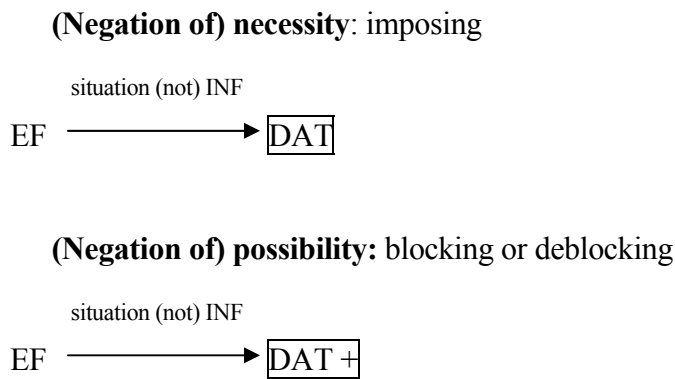


Figure 1: DAT = dative-participant ('+' points at the intention of the potential agent to fulfill the situation), EF = contextually given external force, INF = infinitive situation, arrow represents that there is a force directed at the dative participant

The difference between the *necessitive* interpretation and the *possibility* interpretation relates to the question of whether the intention or tendency of the subject to do the situation is taken into consideration.⁹ The specific interpretation is influenced by the aspect of the infinitive verb, the presence or absence of negation in the sentence, and presuppositions of the interpreter, as I will explain below.

5. Necessitive uses: an imposing force

In the case of the necessitive interpretation the idea of a force is quite straightforward. As such, these interpretations are quite natural for the DI. Necessitive cases prototypically occur in the imperfective aspect. By using the imperfective aspect, the focus is not on the possible intention of the dative subject to complete the action, but on the fact that some action is imposed, and that the force compels the subject to engage in the action.

As I said earlier there are sentences with a deontic character and sentences with an epistemic character. In the case of deontic necessity there is some force – a societal norm, rule, agreement, plan or script – that can be seen as the modal force directed at the coming into being of the infinitive situation. Linguistic contexts that favor this interpretation are partial negation, contrast, *ещё*, *же* or *ведь* (see also Fortuin, 2000, 343-344, 351-352): – *Не мне судить, должны ли отвечать власти за последствия терактов, но по закону вроде должны.* (Известия); *Мать снимала фартук, насухо*

⁹ Note, that in some cases one cannot speak about an actual tendency, but about a potential tendency. This is for example the case in sentences like *Я заметил, что если мне, к примеру, нужно что-то завтра, то Бог позаботился об этом уже сегодня. То есть еще до того, как мне подумать об этом, подумал об этом Бог.*

*вытирала тряпкой кухонный стол и ставила на него пишущую машинку. Это значило, что мальчику теперь - **спать**, а ей – **работать**.* (Д. Рубина, Терновник)

If the potential subject is inanimate as in (4), or if the situation is non-controllable as in (3), the necessity has an epistemic character. These sentences can be said to be *ontic* in nature because the force leading up to the realization of the infinitive situation can be identified with something like ‘the way things go or are’ or ‘fate’. Such sentences express that the infinitive situation will (necessarily) occur, or in the case of negation as in (4), that it is necessary that the infinitive situation won’t occur. Like the deontic interpretation they prototypically occur in the imperfective aspect.

Note that the DI is also used to express lack or absence of *deontic* necessity. There are two contexts in which the DI expresses absence of necessity.

Firstly, sentences with the conjunction *чтобы* (‘in order to’): *Настена мигом достала из подполья ведро картошки, сверху отбавила в чугунок, **чтобы старикам не гоношиться**, если понадобится вечером варить, остальное высыпала в брезентовую сумку.* (В. Распутин, Живи и помни)

Secondly, examples without *чтобы* such as (2) or as in *Закончив водные процедуры, я проревизировала содержимое роддомовской огромной сумки (ох, и запахливый же я хомяк!), и в 7 утра с громким вздохом уселась на кровать рядом с мужем и порадовала его сообщением, что на работу **ему** сегодня **не идти**.* (Internet).

The interpretation of absence of deontic necessity occurs under specific circumstances only. Firstly, the animate subject can control the infinitive situation. If this is not the case, the sentence has an ontic-epistemic character (e.g. *Он спокойно поглядывает по сторонам, будто **ему** не **умирать** через минуты...*; Internet).

Secondly, the infinitive situation is evaluated negatively. Sentences with controllable situations where the infinitive situation is not evaluated negatively either get an ontic-epistemic interpretation (*Нам нужно сейчас уже преодолевать кризисные явления и ради этого я предлагаю — **Виктору Андреевичу Юценко** и **мне** не **идти** на выборы, если результаты выборов будут признаны сфальсифицированными*; Internet), or, if the infinitive situation is evaluated positively and there is someone who blocks the intended situation, a permissive interpretation (see par. 7).

Note that sentences that express absence of deontic necessity without *чтобы* cannot be equated with sentences with explicit modal predicates. They differ from sentences with modal predicates because they cannot be used in contexts where it is clear that the infinitive situation *won’t occur*:

(16) ?*Ему не **идти** в школу, но он все-таки пойдет.*

(17) *Ему не нужно идти в школу, но он все-таки пойдет.*

As such, they also differ from non-negative use of the DI. Affirmative sentences only point at the presence of a force, but they do not express whether the dative subject will actually give in to this force. Because of this, it is possible to say *Мне еще идти в школу, но не буду*. Perhaps, this specific feature of the DI can be attributed to the meaning of the DI, which expresses the idea of a force directed at the coming into being of the infinitive situation. It may be that this abstract meaning is not in accordance with the use in (16) because here the idea of a force is *explicitly* negated (not (necessary x)). A sentence like (2) we also interpret as expressing that the presupposed necessity is absent, but here this interpretation occurs *via* the meaning of ‘the situation won’t occur’. Sentences with *чтобы* constitute an exception because of the meaning of the conjunction, which expresses the idea of a force by itself.

6. Uses with a character of (im)possibility

6.1. (Im)possibility: a blocking or deblocking force

As I mentioned above, typical for the interpretation of possibility is that the subject (potentially) wants the realization of the infinitive situation, or in the case of non-animate entities, a potential ‘tendency’ to the completion of the infinitive situation is ascribed to the dative subject: *Обычной машине здесь не пройти*. (Вести)

Whether the subject will realize the infinitive situation depends on (physical) circumstances. These circumstances can be seen as a force that blocks or gives way to the realization of the infinitive situation. Cases that express possibility prototypically occur in the perfective aspect. The perfective aspect goes well with the possibility interpretation because it focuses on the completion of the infinitive situation, intended by the dative subject.

As I said before the possibility interpretation occurs foremost with negation, as in (5). In such sentences there is an ontic force that imposes situation ‘not X’ on the potential subject; since there is a (potential) intention of the subject to realize the situation, the force is interpreted as a *blocking* force. Cases like these therefore both have an ontic and an alethic character (see Maurice 1995, 149 for a discussion of this term). They express that it is necessary that the intended situation won’t occur, because of particular circumstances.¹⁰

¹⁰ It is interesting that such sentences in fact also occur with modal verbs such as *суметь* and *сможу*: *Мне не суметь объяснить ей то, до чего сам я добрался с содранной кожей*. (А. Иванов, Географ глобус пропил); *Дробь-то девяточка, мелкая. Припас я еще с прошлого года сделал. Думал, на вальдинена по весне пойду. Но куда уж! Я на смену с трудом ковыляю, а по лесу, да в темноте - не смогу мне теперь*. (В. Логинов, Шаговая улица). This underlines the semantic difference between the meaning of the DI and cases with modal predicates of possibility.

In most contexts, an interpretation of possibility is not possible. It is therefore possible to say *Ему не пройти* but not **Ему пройти*. As I mentioned in paragraph one, there are, however, a few contexts in which the interpretation of possibility occurs *without* negation. How can one explain the fact that the interpretation of possibility is foremost restricted to negative sentences, and why do the contexts given above constitute an exception?

To my knowledge the only one who dealt with this question is Maurice (1995, 1996). She remarks that the possibility interpretation only occurs in the context of negation, either direct, as in the case of *не*, or indirect, as in the case of the adverbs *только* or *едва*, which can be seen as indirect cases of negation. Maurice (1995, 152) claims that all the possibility interpretations in fact express *necessity*. Cases that express possibility can also be seen as necessitive cases according to the modal logic rule: not possible X = necessary not X.

In my opinion, there are a number of reasons why this hypothesis is not correct. Firstly, not all the uses can in fact be explained in terms of the given rule. For example sentences with the conjunction *чтобы*; *перед тем как* or sentences that express a contrast with another situation. Secondly, logical necessity is not the same as deontic or ontic necessity. In my opinion, it would be preferable to stay closer to the actual meaning and structure of the DI in the explanation of this phenomenon. In my opinion, the array of uses of the dative-infinitive construction can – at least to a large extent – be related to the meaning of this construction, especially to the idea of the realization of the infinitive situation as the result of a force.

In the case of possibility, however, the idea of a force is less evident than in the case of necessity or impossibility. Here we find an interpretation of possibility only in a context of deblocking. As I will illustrate below, the idea of deblocking is triggered by an implicit or explicit contrast or comparison with another situation where the non-occurrence of the situation is relevant.

The adverb *едва* as in (8) is a context for the possibility interpretation. Instances of the DI with *едва* are closely related to sentences with negation since they express that the infinitive situation is almost not the case, or put differently, that the situation is just about the case. A similar context is provided by the adverb *только* or *лишь*:

- (18) *Время такое? - Настроение такое? не знаю..... но хорошо, что только мне понять написанное тут....* (Internet)
- (19) *Не одна битва и не одного столетия рвали пространство в этом архистратегическом месте. Только здесь **пройти** и **развернуться** войску. И коннице, и пешей колонне, и мирному торговому каравану.* (Internet)

- (20) *Маковки занесенных снегом тернов, шиповника, боярки. И на всем огромном белом просторе, который лишь ветру мерить, единое гнездо человечье.*

The adverb *только* (*лишь*) triggers a possibility reading because it focuses on the possibility of the situation by contrasting it with another (group of) agent(s) that is not able to realize the situation, or with another scene (for example another place) in which the agent is not able to realize the situation. Sentences like these are typical for archaic language (for example *skaz*) and for the spoken language. In standard written Russian, often an explicit modal verb is preferred (*мочь, можно, удалться*). Nevertheless, they may be considered as part of modern Russian.

Contrastive contexts trigger the possibility use in similar ways as the adverb *только*: *Пете залезть на дерево, а Мише нет*. The contrast between the realization of situation Y by agent x with another agent that is not the potential subject of situation Y triggers the idea of deblocking.

Constructions with conjunctions of anteriority are also a context for the possibility reading, although the possibility character is less straightforward here:

- (21) *До того, как человеку стать святым, его “прежний человек” должен быть “изъят”, это зло внутри должно умереть, это семя всех грехов должно погибнуть.* (Internet).
- (22) *Я заметил, что если мне, к примеру, нужно что-то завтра, то Бог позаботился об этом уже сегодня. То есть еще до того, как мне подумать об этом, подумал об этом Бог.* (Internet).

This construction triggers a possibility reading because it focuses on a situation where the infinitive situation is not (yet) the case, and the (hypothetical) transition to a situation where it is. In (21) the completion of the situation occurs under specific circumstances only, which are mentioned in the main clause. Sentences like these show similarities to sentences with *чтобы* (‘in order to do something, you must do something else first’). In (22) we find a different context; here the possible completion of the situation is intervened by another situation.

Questions with an interrogative adverb constitute a very common context for the possibility interpretation: *Как смертному человеку победить смерть?* (Октябрь) A sentence like this has the following structure. The speaker asks under what circumstances the infinitive situation can be realized. In the case of questions one can speak of deblocking because questions anticipate on an answer by the addressee. As such, answering the question can be seen as deblocking.

Constructions with the conjunction *чтобы*, which expresses purpose, can function as a context for the possibility interpretation, as is illustrated by (11) or *Чтобы ребенку играть в «дочки-матери» или в «солдатики», ему нужны друзья.* (Известия) In such sentences it is expressed that in order to remove the barrier blocking the intended infinitive situation described in the subordinate clause, one has to realize the situation described in the mainclause. Because of the inherent force semantic of *чтобы*, sentences like these exemplify quite literal cases of deblocking. They occur both with the imperfective and perfective aspect.

Rubinstein (1986) argues that sentences with *чтобы* and a dative subject are more restricted now than in the nineteenth century. Keijsper (2004) goes even further and argues that sentences like (11) that express possibility are not part of modern Russian anymore. This statement is, however, too strong, as is confirmed by the examples I have given. They are, however, rather restricted.

As I have shown, the possibility interpretation occurs in the case of negation, in the case of partial or indirect negation or in the case of special ‘deblocking’ contexts, that can partly be seen as negative polarity contexts, but partly not, especially *чтобы*. I have argued that the meaning of the DI, especially the idea of a force directed at the realization of the infinitive situation, explains the character of the contexts in which a possibility interpretation can occur.

Further evidence for the proposed hypothesis that the abstract meaning of the DI accounts for the limitations on the possibility use is that the restriction to negative contexts or the contexts of deblocking as they are given above is not a requirement of other predicates that can be interpreted as an expression of possibility such as the perfective present: *В москве все найдешь, кроме птичьего молока.* (Proverb); *Если ребенку понятны сами процессы четырех действий и основы группирования, то с помощью рисунков он решит любую задачу из начальной школы.* (Internet) This suggests that the specific meaning of either the DI or the perfective present must be taken into account in explaining the distribution of its modal use.

6.2. The (im)possibility use from a historical perspective

Above, I have argued that the restriction of possibility to foremost negative contexts can largely be attributed to the meaning of the DI. A good way to verify or refute this hypothesis or analysis is to have a look at older data of Russian. If the DI could for example express possibility in older stages of Russian without negative context (while having the same constituent parts with the same meaning), then this could be seen as a refutation of the explanation given.

If we look at historical grammars (e.g. Vinogradov & Švedova 1964, 336; Borovskij 1978, 278-282; Nikiforov 1952; Vaulina 1988, 135) we can conclude that that the

specific use of the dative-infinitive construction has changed in some respects, perhaps partly due to change of oppositional forms and due to change of the meaning of the constituents (for example the function of *быть*), but that infinitive sentences preserve a relative stability in the course of the studied period. From the discussion of the use of the DI as a way to express (im)possibility, we can conclude that there are no major differences from the current contexts for possibility. Like in modern Russian the DI expresses impossibility rather than possibility (see Vaulina 1988, 53). The three main differences between older stages of Russian and modern Russian are the following.

Firstly, in older stages of Russian the DI was freely used to express possibility with verbs of perception such as *видети*, *зрети* (see Borkovskij 1978, 280). The reason why these verbs constitute an exception probably has to be attributed to the meanings of these verbs (for example the fact that they are to some extent non-controllable situations that partly rely on external circumstances such as distance, etc., to be realized).

Secondly, in older stages of Russian, the infinitive was used in sentences *without a dative* to express so-called 'permanent possibility' (Vinogradov & Švedova 1964, 337 e.g. *да в нем же купити люди черные*; 'there one can buy black people.'). In modern Russian such cases must be paraphrased with the adverbial predicate *можно*.

Thirdly, Borkovskij (1978, 280) writes that there are a few instances of the DI with verbs other than *видети*, *зрети* where it expresses possibility rather than necessity. The examples he gives, however, either occur without dative subject or have a strong ontic character, and might also be seen as examples that share properties with both possibility and necessity:

- (23) *нестъ бо иная веры лучше нашей сею бо верою живуци грехов избыти и муки вечныя гознуги, но жизни вечныя причастнику быти.* (Borkovskij 1978, 280/Послания и поучения Феодосия Печерского)
- (24) *Дивно же бысть Божие устроение, оже на толице высоте воде быти!* (Borkovskij 1978, 280/Путешествие игумена Даниила по святой земле в начале XII в.)

Since the dative-infinitive construction is a syntactic means to express modality, it might be expected that some sentences cannot be clearly classified as either expressing necessity or possibility. A similar phenomenon can also be found in modern Russian. In older versions of Russian such sentences were probably more common, and also had a different character.

Although the historical data do not contradict the hypothesis that the specific restriction of the use of possibility of the DI to foremost negative contexts is due to the meaning of the DI, I do not think it is impossible that the DI could ever have expressed

possibility. In a system where no other or fewer modal forms that express possibility are available, the presence of a DI can be expected to have a broader use than in modern Russian. I rather think that the meaning of necessity or impossibility seems more ‘natural’ if we consider the meanings of the infinitive and the dative. The historical data from older stages of Russian support this view.

Besides this, there is a more general, crosslinguistic, statistical association of (im)possibility with negation (see for example Maurice 1996, 281-282). This association, I think, has to be explained in terms of the function and pragmatics of possibility. The basic idea expressed by predicates of possibility such as Russian *мочь*, English *can*, or German *können* of ‘being in the position to realize X’ presupposes something more than a verbal scene expressed by a normal indicative which just expresses the realization of the action. In the case of negation, it is expressed that the subject has a tendency to do the action, but that that intended situation is blocked. Such sentences differ from normal indicative sentences in that the tendency or effort of the subject to do the action is taken into consideration, stressing that the subject does not attain the intended ‘position’:

(25) *I **couldn’t understand** why she said that.*

(26) *I **didn’t understand** why she said that.*

In the case of non-negative sentences the use of *can* differs from the indicative in that it is stressed that the subject is in the position to realize the action, presupposing that attaining or being in the *can*-situation is not self-evident:

(27) *I **could understand** why she said that.*

(28) *I **understood** why she said that.*

Contexts that facilitate the use of *could* in (27) focus on relation between a context where the action referred to by *can* is the case and a context where the same or another action is not the case, for example:

(29) *Although I **could understand** why she said that, I didn’t agree.*

(30) *I wish I **could understand** why she said that.*

(31) *By listening very carefully, I **could understand** why she said that.*

These contexts are partly similar to the deblocking contexts of the possibility interpretation of the DI, and partly not. Because of its meaning (specifically the idea of a force expressed by the DI), the association of possibility with negation or deblocking

contexts is stronger with the DI than with predicates like *can* or *мочь*. Further analysis of the nature of predicates of possibility would have to be sustained by empirical and statistical evidence. I leave this for further research.

7. Permissive interpretation

There are very few instances of the DI that can be said to express permission, for example (12), which could be classified as a case of absence of permission, although it is very close to a possibility interpretation: ... *что если заключенному не перестукиваться, так что ему и делать?* Sentences with a permissive character occur exclusively in the context of negation and as such express lack of permission or prohibition.

They show similarities both to uses that express necessity and possibility. Like the possibility-interpretation, a permissive interpretation occurs if an intention to do the infinitive situation is attributed to the dative participant. The idea of a force expressed by the DI is interpreted as force which imposes ‘not X’ on the dative participant, as such blocking or forbidding the realization of the infinitive situation. They differ, however, from cases that express possibility because the force is *deontic* in nature. In this respect they show more similarities to sentences that express deontic *necessity*. Like deontic necessitive cases, sentences with a permissive character have an imperfective infinitive and occur with controllable situations.

There are two types of the DI that can be said to have a permissive character. Firstly, interrogatives (often with *же* or *бы*) where the speaker objects to an interdiction by asking – in a rhetorical manner – why this interdiction applies to him:

- (32) - *Я вас прошу этого не говорить!* - воскликнул Тургенев с раздвигающимися ноздрями.
 - *Отчего же мне не говорить того, в чем я убежден?* - отвечал Толстой.
 (Internet)

The permissive interpretation occurs because there is a *deontic* force blocking the *intended* situation. Sentences like these may as well be analyzed as expressing necessity to not do an action. Of course, extensionally speaking the situation of ‘necessity to not do X’ is identical to ‘absence of permission to do X’. Whether or not one classifies sentences like (32) as permissive therefore depends on the theoretical question whether or not one takes into account the intention of the subject to do the situation.

In declarative sentences an interpretation of prohibition (or if you will – necessity to not do an action) is very rare. The common interpretation of a sentence with negation and an imperfective infinitive is either that of ontic necessity or – if the infinitive

situation is seen as negative – absence of deontic necessity. Maurice (1995) remarks that an interpretation of absence of permission can, however, occur if an explicit reference is made to some kind of blocking force. She gives the following example: *Ему не сдавать экзамен. Запретили, так как...* (Maurice 1995, 150). Note, however, that it is difficult to differentiate between the interpretation of impossibility, ontic necessity and absence of permission in such sentences. A sentence like *Вот и бабушка приехала. 2 недели мне не курить дома* (Internet forum), could therefore be translated with ‘I can’t/won’t/may not smoke at home for two weeks’. The same ontic character is present in the example given by Maurice above, which is underlined by the fact that one cannot say ? *Ему не сдавать экзамен, запретили, но все-таки будет его сдавать*.¹¹

I have not attested sentences that can be seen as clear cases of permission (without negation), although the following sentences with a ‘deblocking context’ (cf. the contexts for possibility) such as contrast or *только* may be said to have a permissive character:

- (33) *У нас наблюдательный совет (...) который будет говорить журналисту, что ему делать и что ему не делать.* (Internet)
- (34) *Я, Верховный, вас назначал и только мне определять, кому и когда уходить!* (Internet, journal Новое время)

Nevertheless they are better analyzed as expressing deontic necessity (‘is supposed to’; ‘it is up to’) than permission. Note, for example that the modal character of sentence (34) does not differ semantically from sentences with partial negation that express deontic necessity, e.g. *Не мне определять, кому и когда уходить* (‘It ‘s not up to me to determine..’). Sentences like the following do not express permission:

- (35) ? *Ура! Мне с ним встречаться. Отец разрешил.*
[does not mean: ‘I may/am allowed to meet him’]

It may be that in older versions of Russian the use of the DI to express prohibition was more common than it is now. This can for example be concluded from the discussion by Nikiforov (1952) of the independent infinitive in the sixteenth century. He argues that “[в] правительственных грамотах и “уложениях” инфинитив обозначает действия, которые правительство своих чиновников обязует (а в

¹¹ In (12) the ontic character is less straightforward. This is probably due to the function of the conjunction. Note, however, that this sentence can be paraphrased with *будет: что если заключенный не будет перестукиваться*.

сочетании с *не* – запрещает) делать (сделать).” (Nikiforov 1952, 198). An example of such a sentence with negation is given below:

- (36) *А земскому дияку без них не судных дел и обыскных и всяких дел не записывати и у себя не держати некоторыми делы.*

He also notes that “[в] правительственных договорах с другими государствами инфинитивом выражается действие, которое обе стороны согласились (соглашаются), т.е. должны делать или не делать; названия действующих лиц стоят в форме дательного падежа.” (Nikiforov 1952: 199):

- (37) *“Таку правду възяти русину у ризе и на гочкъмь березе.” Русину не звати латина на поле битъся у рускои земли.*
- (38) *А торговым людем торговати у них з заморцы самим, без обиды.*

Nikiforov classifies sentences like these as expressing necessity. Indeed, a sentence like (37-38) could be paraphrased as the result of an agreement (‘they will/won’t’). Nevertheless, they have a permissive character. In modern Russian uses like these would be not acceptable. Instead a predicate expressing permission would be chosen.

Is there an explanation for the restriction on the permissive use in modern Russian, and the fact that in Old Russian these uses were more common? In modern Russian the DI expresses the idea of a force directed at the coming into being of the infinitive situation. In the case of an imperfective infinitive we do not conceptualize the intention of the agent to successfully complete the infinitive situation, as is the case with the perfective aspect. Negative sentences with an imperfective infinitive are therefore interpreted as expressing necessity not to do an action (‘not supposed to’) rather than as expressing absence of permission. In declarative sentences, the interpretation of absence of permission is, however, restricted because in modern Russian the more natural interpretation is that of *ontic* necessity rather than *deontic* necessity.

The reason why sentences expressing absence of permission are even more restricted or even absent from the system of interpretations of the DI, has to do be attributed, I think, to the idea of an imposing force, expressed by the DI. This idea is more easily interpreted as a case of necessity than as a case of permission. What, then, about sentences like (38) from sixteenth century Russian, that express something in between necessity and permission? In order to answer this question, an analysis of more exam-

ples would be needed. I would suggest, however, to explain the non-occurrence of such sentences in terms of the ontic character of the modern DI.¹²

There may be a more general tendency in modern Russian to use the DI in cases where it has an *ontic* character, or where the (non)realization of the situation is put forward as evident or where it is stressed. The ontic character is evident in sentences that express impossibility or ontic necessity. It is less straightforward, but still partly present in the case of deontic necessity, where the DI expresses that the situation will occur according to some script or societal norm. As I mentioned, such sentences often have an ontic character as well.¹³ The ontic character seems absent in the case of absence of deontic necessity at first sight, but as I explained, is present in most of such cases because they also express the situation won't occur. This is however not the case in sentences with the conjunction *чтобы* that form an exception, probably because they express the idea of a force purely because of their meaning.

The ontic character of the DI is, however, absent in the case of sentences that express possibility or permission. As I showed, sentences that express possibility are very restricted in modern Russian, with the exception of interrogative questions. Sentences that express permission seem absent in modern Russian.

8. Conclusion

In this paper I have given an analysis of the interconnection between the use of (absence of) necessity, (absence of) possibility and (absence of) permission of the DI in Russian; and the association of possibility with negation. I have argued that the specific semantic distribution of use of the DI can first of all be attributed to the abstract meaning of the DI, more specifically the idea of the infinitive predicate in combination with the idea of a force giving rise to the realization of the infinitive situation by the dative participant. The abstract meaning explains why the DI is foremost used to express (de)ontic necessity rather than absence of deontic necessity or (absence of) per-

¹² Maurice (1996, 280-283) suggests that the central status of the interpretation of impossibility or necessity in declarative sentences and the peripheral status of the interpretation of possibility may be explained in terms of the notion of informativeness. In her view, the DI in declarative sentences is confined to uses that express the more restrictive modality types (impossibility, necessity) because these are more informative: if one knows that someone can do something you do not know whether he will, whereas if you know that someone cannot do something, you know he won't. This explanation, however, does not account for the fact that uses that express deontic necessity are much more frequent and less restricted than uses that express absence of permission. In terms of restriction, these uses are equivalent.

¹³ Possibly, this ontic character is stronger in modern Russian than it was in the past. In older stages of Russian the range of deontic uses of the DI was larger than is the case now. Nikiforov (1952) gives a number to types where the DI expresses different shades of deontic necessity. In modern Russian, in these cases one would not use the DI, but rather a modal verb (*должен, надо, приходится*, etc.).

mission, or why the interpretation of possibility occurs foremost in negative contexts. It also explains the limited set of contexts where the DI can express possibility.

Besides this, I have argued that there may be a more general tendency to use the DI in contexts where it has an ontic meaning rather than a deontic meaning. Diachronic data seem to confirm this trend. There are, however, in modern Russian uses that are clearly deontic rather than ontic. This is possible because the abstract DI is an abstraction from different more or less independent units or constructions, that have a communicative function of their own. Because such uses are not really comparable to alternative expressions, they may have a stable function in the linguistic system.

In this paper I have focused on the unique meaning associated with the DI in the explanation of its modal meaning. The specific association of possibility with negation, I therefore attributed to the idea of a force directed at the realization of the infinitive situation. In addition to this, I have suggested that the idea of possibility *as such* may be associated with negation or negative contexts. I leave this specific association for further research.

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