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On the Status of Russian Perfective Passives in *-sja*

James S. Levine

Introduction

In an early and important study of voice in Russian, Babby and Brecht (1975) introduced significant theoretical revisions to prevailing transformational analyses of passives in Russian. In their article, B&B demonstrated the inadequacies of previous analyses, which posited a single “passive transformation” for Russian. Instead, they proposed an analysis of voice that achieved maximum generality by accounting in a principled way for the syntactic relations between active, passive, and middle sentences. In particular, they argued that passives formed with the suffix *-en-* must be derived differently from passives in *-sja*, the former resulting from a lexical process that derived *-en-*adjectives from perfective transitive verbs, while the latter were derived from imperfective verbs by syntactic rules.

Further, and most importantly, they showed that while both *-sja* and *-en-* could derive passives, they are also used in the derivation of middles (and other non-passive constructions), and consequently, neither could be considered a “passive morpheme.” Rather, they characterized *-sja* as the “voice morpheme” in Russian, and they defined voice as “the relationship between a verb’s subcategorization feature and the realization of this feature in the surface structure of the sentence” (364). In their analysis, *-sja* functions as a morphological indicator of a marked voice relation, for example, it signals that a verb’s subcategorized direct internal argument (direct object) appears in the surface structure as the external argument (subject).¹ The theory of *-sja* elaborated by B&B accounts for the formation of active, middle, and passive sentences of both imperfective and perfective verbs,² the “complete paradigms”

¹ B&B point out that as the indicator of a marked voice relation, *-sja* may also signal the non-occurrence of the subject in the surface, or its appearance in a case other than the Nominative (see also Brecht and Levine 1984:124).

² The significant generalization achieved by this analysis of *-sja*, along with its intuitive appeal, led to the adaptation of the theory for teaching the various *-sja* constructions in Russian. For example, see the treatment of *-sja* in *Russian Stage Two* (1985), a textbook authored by R. Brecht (with N. Baranova, D. Davidson, and N. Kostromina).

of which they illustrated with the examples in (1a-d) and (2a-d):³

- | | | |
|-----|---|----------------|
| (1) | IMPERFECTIVE PARADIGM | |
| a. | Oleg otkryval kalitku. 'Oleg was opening the gate.' | Active |
| b. | Kalitka otkryvalas'. 'The gate was opening/was being opened.' | Middle/Passive |
| c. | Kalitka otkryvalas' Olegom. 'The gate was being opened by Oleg.' | Passive |
| d. | *Kalitka byla otkryvana Olegom. | Passive |
| (2) | PERFECTIVE PARADIGM | |
| a. | Oleg otkryl kalitku. 'Oleg opened the gate.' | Active |
| b. | Kalitka otkrylas'. 'The gate opened.' | Middle |
| c. | *Kalitka otkrylas' Olegom. 'The gate was opened by Oleg.' | Passive |
| d. | Kalitka byla otkryta Olegom. 'The gate was opened by Oleg.' | Passive |

Note that in the imperfective paradigm, *Kalitka otkryvalas'* (1b) shows a middle/passive ambiguity. This ambiguity, characteristic of imperfective verbs in *-sja*, is resolved by an agent adjunct in the Instrumental case (1c), which can occur in passives, but not in middles. In the perfective paradigm, *Kalitka otkrylas'* (2b) is identified as a middle, while the passive is expressed by the short passive particle (2d) formed with the suffix *-en* (which may be realized as *-n-*, *-en-* or *-t-*). Examples (1d) and (2c) are both marked unacceptable as passives. B&B state (342): "In Contemporary Standard Russian

³ The analysis proposed in Babby and Brecht 1975 is an elaboration of Babby 1975, which treated *-sja* as the marker of "syntactically derived intransitivity," as it signals that a verb's subcategorized direct object has been removed from its initial position by a rule of preposing or deletion. During this period of generative theory, it was widely assumed that movement rules and other transformations were the only way to capture generalizations over constructions like actives, passives, and middles. In Babby's more recent work on voice (e.g., Babby 1993), he has argued that morpholexical operations on argument structure may account for much of what in earlier generative theory was assumed to be determined syntactically. In other studies (Babby 1994, 1998), he has proposed that *-sja* is affixed to a verb as part of a set of morpholexical rules that alter a verb's initial argument structure, or diathesis (See section 3). On this view, what are traditionally called active, passive, and middle "voices" are assumed to be particular diathetic alternations, which taken together, produce a given verb's "diathetic paradigm."

(CSR), perfective verbs do not form their passives with –SJA, and imperfective verbs do not form their passives with –EN-,...”. The purpose of this paper is to re-examine the first part of this statement regarding the non-occurrence of perfective passives in –*sja*. In Section 1, I will give a brief overview of the long-standing controversy regarding the existence of passives formed from perfective verbs in –*sja*. In Section 2, I will review recent studies that document the use of such passives on Russian Internet sites, as well as in edited literary, scientific, and journalistic texts. I will also present examples elicited from native informants. Section 3 provides a brief summary and conclusion, which speculates on how an emergent perfective passive may be altering the aspectually determined means of expressing passive voice in Russian, and raises some implications for theoretical treatments of voice in Russian.

1. Historical Overview

The existence of perfective passives in –*sja* in Contemporary Russian has been a topic of long-standing debate. Some scholars take the strict view that perfective verbs cannot form passives with the affix –*sja* (Isačenko 1960: 362), and even exclude the possibility of a passive interpretation for perfectives in –*sja* (Padučeva 2001:53). Others acknowledge the existence of perfective passives in –*sja* but place some qualification on their occurrence. For example, Vinogradov (1972: 497) claims that such passives are possible, but only in the future tense. According to Harrison (1967: 17), the perfective form of “reflexive verbs” of certain semantic classes can express passive meaning, but unlike passive participles, these perfective passives are “not used with an animate agent” in the instrumental case.⁴ In contrast, Janko-Trinickaja (1962: 148) asserts that perfective passives in –*sja* may occur in both the past and future tense, and with an animate agent, but views them as limited in their usage. Similarly, Švedova (1970: 352) states that perfective verbs may form a passive in –*sja*, but characterizes them as “unproductive,” while Apresjan (2002: 19) asserts that “episodically” cited examples of perfective passives in –*sja*, such as *Vse èto potom zabetoniruetsja* ‘All this will later be paved with concrete’, do not extend beyond the “occasional” occurrence.

Disagreement over the existence and range of usage of perfective passives in –*sja* in Contemporary Russian is perhaps at least in part due to the history of this voice construction. From the late eighteenth to the first half of the nineteenth century, passives in –*sja* formed from perfective verbs were widely used and within the norms of

⁴ It should be noted that many of the semantic groups of verbs that Harrison characterizes as expressing perfective passives, such as verbs denoting “covering” (*Ploščad’ pokrylas’ snegom* ‘The square became covered in snow’), “filling” (*Komnata napolnilas’ dymom* ‘(The room filled up with smoke’), and “illuminating” (*Ulica osvetilas’ fonarjami* ‘(The street was illuminated by/with street lights’) are now widely assumed to derive middles, not passives. For a different opinion, see Wade 2011:332.

standard Russian.⁵ As Gradinarova (2009) demonstrates, V. Dal's four-volume *Tolkovyj slovar' živogo velikogo ruskogo jazyka* (Dal' 1956), originally published 1880-1882, provides abundant illustrative examples of "reflexive perfective passives," many with an Instrumental agentive adjunct.⁶ Among the numerous examples she cites from Dal' are: *Obvinilsja ljud'mi, da opravdalsja pered Bogom* 'Accused by people, but vindicated before God'; *Delo uviditsja nami, kogda uže budet pozdno* 'The matter will be seen by us, when it will already be too late.'

Throughout this period, however, perfective passives in *-sja* were already in the process of being reinterpreted as middles (decausatives).⁷ As Gradinarova points out, passive meaning in this construction was weakening, especially in the past tense, and in sentences involving non-agentive causers, such as in *Tvoim učen'em nam svet otkrylsja* 'The world (was) opened up for us through your teaching.' Also during this period of reinterpretation, the Instrumental (causer) adjunct NP characteristic of the passive construction was being replaced by the PP *ot* + NP Gen, an adjunct found in middles: *Gajka otvinčivaetsja trjaskoj* (Instr)/*ot trjaski* (Gen) 'The nut gets loose (lit. 'unscrews') from shaking.' Illustrative examples in Dal' cited by Gradinarova suggest that at this time perfective passives in *-sja* still occurred with an Instrumental NP denoting natural force, e.g. *Borota vetrom rasxlestnulis'* 'The gates were whipped opened by the wind,' but these sentences too were being supplanted by alternative constructions, such as the "demiactive" *Vorota raspaxnul veter* 'The wind flung open the gates'), or "adversity impersonal" *Vorota raspaxnulo vetrom* 'The gates got opened by the wind'). In addition, Gradinarova suggests that perfective passives in *-sja* were being forced out of use by the passive participle in *-n/-t* (*Vorota raspaxnuty veterom* 'The gates have been opened by the wind') because the participles were "semantically transparent" and unambiguous.

2. The "Revival" of a Voice Construction

With their widespread reinterpretation as middles, and replacement by competing constructions, the perfective passives in *-sja*, once a prevalent and fully acceptable voice category, receded to the periphery. However, as noted in section 1, perfective passives in *-sja* have survived to the present day and there are indications that this voice category is in the process of a revival. In their 1975 article, Babby and Brecht generally ruled out the formation of passives from perfective verbs in *-sja*, but they did

⁵ On the passive interpretation of perfective verbs in *-sja*, and examples of their use in the first half of the 19th century, see Bulaxovskij (1954:119-20; 315).

⁶ The adjective "reflexive" is used here to refer to any verb formed with the morpheme *-sja*. Thus the term "reflexive perfective passive" (*vozvratnyj perfektivnyj passiv*) is used by Gradinarova and many others to refer to the passive construction that is the subject of this paper.

⁷ A term for middle often used in the Russian grammatical tradition is "sredne-vozvratnoe značenie." Regarding the reinterpretation of passives as middles, Gradinarova references Švedova 1964.

acknowledge that a small number of perfective verbs that take experiencer subjects (e.g. *zabyt'* 'to forget', *počuvstvovat'* 'to feel', *uslyšat'* 'to hear') can form passives in *-sja*. The sentences in (3), cited in Jones and Levine 2010: 295 (fn. 1), are two such examples:

- (3) a. Èffekt ètogo lekarstva počuvstvuetsja vami srazu.
'The effect of this medicine will be felt by you immediately.'
b. Èto sobytie ne zabudetsja nami.
'This event will not be forgotten by us.'

In fact, perfective passives in *-sja* are not limited to the class of experiencer verbs, but occur across a range of verb classes, and show up regularly in forums on Russian Internet sites, as well as in edited scientific, literary, and journalistic texts. In sections 2.1-2.3, I will introduce a sampling of examples taken from these sources, including those adduced by scholars in recent studies, and by native informants.

2.1. Distinguishing passives and middles

As is well known, passives and middles formed with the morpheme *-sja* are intransitive constructions that are normally characterized by their relationship to a corresponding transitive with respect to both the syntactic and semantic roles of the NPs associated with the verb. Specifically, when compared with their transitive counterparts, both passives and middles share the characteristic that the direct object (patient) argument of the transitive appears as the grammatical subject of the passive or middle. The two constructions differ in the fate of the subject (typically the agent) argument of the initial transitive: in passives, the subject is either implied, or appears as an argument adjunct in the Instrumental case, while in middles the initial subject is eliminated.

- (4) a. Menedžer otkryvaet dveri.
'The manager is opening the doors.'
- b. Dveri otkryvajutsja.
'The doors are opening.' [middle reading]
'The doors are being opened.' [passive reading]
- c. Dveri otkryvajutsja menedžerom.
'The doors are being opened by the manager.'

As the examples in (4) indicate, when formed from an imperfective verb, the derived intransitive is ambiguous (4b), susceptible to either a middle or passive interpretation.

This ambiguity is resolved in favor of the passive by the presence of an Instrumental adjunct (4c).

When a derived intransitive in *-sja* is formed from a perfective verb, the normal interpretation is that of a middle, as in (5a). However, as indicated by the example in (5b) taken from a Russian Internet site, a perfective derived intransitive like *otkryt'sja* can occur in Contemporary Russian with passive meaning.

- (5) a. Dver' otkrylas.'
'The door opened.'
b. Dver' otkrylas' kem-to v parallel'nom mire.
'The door was opened by someone in a parallel world.'

The function of the middle voice, according to Babby (1993:12), is to "dissociate the agent from its initial AS [Argument Structure]" and to present the action from the point of view of the direct internal argument (direct object). Further, middles "do not assert the absence of an agent"; rather their function is to present an action without reference to the participation of an agent. Babby gives the example in (6) to illustrate his point.

- (6) Ja staralas' est' konfetu pomedlennee, no ona kak-to nezametno s''elas', očen' bystro.
'I tried to eat the candy slowly, but it somehow got eaten [lit. 'ate-up'] without my noticing, very quickly.'

Babby comments (12) that "the middle voice *s''elas'* is used here rather than the active or passive to underscore the dissociation of the agent from the action of eating the candy." While this may be an apt characterization of the middle, it appears that a middle reading of a perfective in *-sja* may be cancelled out in the same way as it is in imperfective verbs, by an agentive adjunct in the Instrumental case. Consider the examples in (7) - (9).

- (7) a. Vse šokoladki bystro s''elis'.
'All the chocolates quickly got eaten [lit. 'ate-up'].'
b. Vse šokoladki uže s''elis'. Interesno kem.
'All the chocolates already got/were eaten. I wonder by whom.'
- (8) Včera večerom byli bliny. Sdelalis' i tut že vsej sem'ej s''elis'.

'Last night there were pancakes. They got made and were immediately eaten by the whole family.'

- (9) ...ne xotelos', čtoby vsja butylka vypilas' by v pervyj že den' odnim čelovekom.
'... didn't want a whole bottle to be drunk on the very first day by one person.'

The sentence in (7a) contains the middle *s''elis'*. However, in (7b), suggested by a native informant, the expected middle reading of *s''elis'* in the first sentence is supplanted by a passive interpretation, due to the agentive instrumental NP in the following sentence, *Interesno kem*. In (8) and (9), examples taken from the Internet, the presence of the Instrumental adjunct NPs *vsej sem''ej* 'by the whole family' and *odnim čelovekom* 'by one person,' respectively, make the verbs *s''elis'* and *vypilas'* in these sentences unambiguous perfective passives.

2.2. Recent Studies

In the recent literature, there has been a lively discussion among Russian linguists surrounding the intransitive use (with *-sja*) of perfective verbs such as *napisat'* 'to write', *pročitat'/pročest'* 'to read', *perevesti* 'to translate', *sostavit'* 'to calculate, put together', *kupit'* 'to buy', *počinit'* 'to repair', etc., with opinions varying as to whether or not these forms have passive meaning (see Nikitina 2006). The examples cited in these studies do not occur with an Instrumental agent NP, which leaves their interpretation open to question. For example, Gavrilova (2001: 163) discusses the examples in (10)-(12), which she characterizes as constructions with "quasi-passive" meaning:

- (10) Tekst uže otredaktirovalsja.
'The text already got edited.'
- (11) Stat'ja uže perevelas'.
'The article already got translated.'
- (12) Smeta skoro sostavitsja.
'An estimate will soon calculate.'

As my glosses of these examples indicate, sentences of this type, outside of context, are likely to be interpreted as middles (Gavrilova's quasi-passives). Gavrilova argues that sentences like (10)-(12) are widely used in spoken Russian, and she attributes the increasing use of such forms to the application of computer technology to

processes such as accounting, the editing and translating of texts, i.e., processes that had previously been performed by an agent without the assistance of technology.⁸ On the other hand, verbs such as *napisat'sja*, *pročest'sja*, *počinit'sja*, etc. as used in examples (13)-(15) are characterized by Padučeva (2001: 73) as having “passive-potential” meaning, a term she attributes to V.A. Plungjan:

(13) 'Stat'ja napisalas.'
'The article got/was written.'

(14) 'Roman pročelsja.'
'The novel got/was read.'

(15) 'Časy počinilis.'
'The watch got/was repaired.'

According to Padučeva, the actions denoted by verbs like those in (13)-(15) require the exertion of effort to achieve the desired result and therefore presuppose an agent.⁹ In fact, the verbs in (13)-(15), as well those in (10)-(12) characterized by Gavrilova as “quasi-passive” in meaning, can occur with an overt agent in the Instrumental case, that is, in the form of the prototypical passive. Consider the following examples, all taken from the Internet:

(16) Esli v stat'e budet zamečeno takoe, ona otredaktiruetsja
perevodčikom...
'If such a thing is noticed in the article, it will be edited by the
translator...'

(17) Nu, pesn'ja “My vmeste” napisalas' mnoj v Moskve...
'Well, the song “We are together” was written by me in Moscow...'

(18) V takom vide kniga pročetsja vzroslymi, kotorye sami vospolnjat
nedostojščee.
'In this form the book will be read by adults who will themselves fill in
what is missing.'

⁸ The examples in (10)-(12), as well as Gavrilova's (2001) characterization and explanation of the use of these forms, are found in Percov 2003:46-47; 69.

⁹ To illustrate her point, Padučeva (p. 73) offers the following contextualized example: *Iskal vo vsej uglax – vse naprasno: ona ne otyskalas'* 'I searched in every corner, all in vain: it didn't turn up.' She distinguishes agentive perfective *V-sja* of this type from decausatives (e.g. *Okno razbilos'* 'The window broke'), since the latter “exclude an agent.”

- (19) Kstati, bilety uže pokupajutsja, točnee, 2 uže točno kupilis' mnoj.
'By the way, the tickets are already being bought, in fact 2 were just bought by me.'
- (20) ... otdaju tačku utrom v remont, spokojno delaju svoi dela, znaja čto vse počinitsja i vse ispravitsja xorošim mexanikom...
'...I take my wheels in the morning for repairs, calmly go about my affairs, knowing that everything will be repaired and fixed by a good mechanic.'

The growing use of perfective verbs in *-sja* with passive meaning, like those in (7b; 8-9) and (16)-(20), have led Percov (2003: 47) to remark that "the reflexive perfective passive – moreover sometimes with an accompanying agent in the instrumental case – in recent decades has been experiencing a kind of renaissance in the Russian language." Percov sees this construction taking hold primarily in informal, conversational style, both oral and written, as well as serving a "poetic function" in the language. He acknowledges (46) that no firm norm has been established for usage of these forms, and therefore, informants' judgments of the acceptability of individual examples of perfective passives in *-sja* can diverge significantly. The examples in (21)-(24) (Percov's examples 4-6) are among several Percov discusses, and that he personally considers fully acceptable in the contemporary spoken language.

- (21) Ètot fil'm raskupitsja fanami, da i ne tol'ko, mimimum v 10 millionov kopij.
'This film will be bought up by fans, and not only [by fans], 10 million copies at a minimum.'
- (22) Xorošo li rabotaet vaša programma buxgalterskogo učeta?
– Nu kak vam skazat'? Obyčnaja smeta rasxodov sostavitjsa eju minuty za dve.
'Does your accounting software work well?
– Well how can I put it? The usual estimate of expenses will be calculated by it in about two minutes.'
- (23) Takoj oravoj vse èto moloko vyp'etsja za dva dnja.
'By such a horde all this milk will be drunk in two days.'

Based on his observations, and polls he has conducted with several philologist-colleagues, Percov argues that reflexive perfective passives, though sometimes judged

acceptable to varying degrees by his informants, nevertheless, in his view, are an “indisputable fact” in Contemporary Russian.

Percov suggests several factors contributing to the use of the reflexive perfective passive in contemporary speech. First, he points out that there is historical precedence for this voice category, given its acceptability in the nineteenth century, which Percov considers to be well established, and amply illustrated by Janko-Trinickaja (1962). Second, he suggests a stylistic factor, namely, that in relaxed-colloquial style (“*v neprinuždenno-razgovornom stile*”) a more compact form is generally preferred to a more diffuse form, and this is exemplified by the synthetic vs. analytic passives, respectively. Specifically, he notes that in all forms except the masculine past tense there are 1-2 fewer syllables to pronounce in the passive derived from the finite verb in *-sja*, than in the periphrastic passive participle in *-en*, e.g., four syllables in the future tense *so-sta-voit-sja* vs. six syllables in *bu-det so-stav-le-na*. Finally, he perceives a semantic distinction between the synthetic and analytical passives, which may be a factor contributing to the use of the former. Thus, according to Percov, in the sentences *Èkzempljary raskupjatsja* and *Èkzempljary budut raskupleny* ‘The copies will be bought up’, the situation described may be the same, but attention is focused on different aspects of the event: in the first sentence there is a focus on the “actional” aspect, on the future “buying up” of the books, while in the second sentence the focus is on the result of the action, on the state arising after the books have been bought up. Thus a speaker’s intent to depict an event from an actional (rather than resultative) point of view may be a factor motivating the use of the perfective passive in *-sja*.

An important study substantiating the use of the reflexive perfective passive in literary, scholarly, and journalistic texts, is the corpus investigation of Kolomatskij (2007, 2009), whose primary goal was to identify the parameters for the distribution of “passive markers” in Russian. Kolomatskij examined Russian passive forms and lexemes in nearly 6,000 sentences compiled from the databases of two corpora: the Uppsala Russian Corpus of Uppsala University in Tuebingen and the National Corpus of the Russian Language. One surprising finding of his investigation is what he characterizes (2009: 10) as the “large percentage” (*velika dolja*) of perfective verbs that form a passive with the reflexive affix *-sja*, as well as the passive participle in *-en*, such as the verb *vyrabotat’*, as in (24 a and b):

- (24) a. V rezul’tate rjada èksperimentov *nami vyrabotalas’* predlagaemaja sxema dyxanija biatlonista.

‘As a result of a series of experiments the proposed scheme of a biathlete’s breathing was developed by us.’

b. V itoge *nami byla vyrabotana* «gibridnaja» metodologija ...

'In the end, a «hybrid» methodology was developed by us ...

According to Kolomatskij (2007: 19), 30% of the passive constructions in his database are formed from perfective verbs in *-sja*, though if one considers only those examples occurring with an agentive adjunct in the Instrumental case, the percentage falls to about 15%.¹⁰ These findings suggest to him that the reflexive perfective passive is undergoing a process of «rehabilitation». He points out (p. 18) (as does Percov 2003) that unlike the «statal» meaning characteristic of the participial passive, the finite passive form in *-sja* has an «actional» (processual) nuance, and therefore, “successfully occupies its own niche” among the possible means of expressing passive voice in Russian.

3. Summary and Conclusions

Based on the findings of current research on the passive voice discussed in this article, it appears that the morpheme *-sja* may indeed be affixed to perfective verbs in Contemporary Russian to express passive meaning. Evidence of this usage derives from several sources: from forums on the Internet, from the informal, conversational speech observed and used by educated native speakers, as well as from modern Russian literary and informative texts.¹¹ There are several factors that may be contributing to this development. First, as discussed in section 1, in the nineteenth century the morpheme *-sja* was used to form passives from both perfective and imperfective verbs. Thus Babby and Brecht (1975: 363) aptly note that “there does not appear to be any semantic motivation for the non-occurrence of perfective passives in *-sja*.” They point out that the cognate morphemes of Russian *-sja* and *-en* in certain other Slavic languages are used to form passives in both aspects. For example, in Bulgarian the cognates of *-sja* (*se*) and *-en* are used to form passives from both perfective and imperfective verbs, so that each aspect may have two passives, one in *se* and one in *-en*. By contrast, Polish *-się* is not used in the formation of passives in either aspect, while *-en* is used in both. Second, as discussed in section 2, there is the possibility, suggested by Percov, that when compared with the *-en* passive participle, the shorter syllable structure of perfectives in

¹⁰ Not all the examples that Kolomackij characterizes as passive may qualify as such. For instance, in his example (6), given below, the italicized phrase in the second sentence is arguably a middle, not a passive. *Vpervye perešagnut vuzovskij porog 654 tysjači junošej i devušek – stol’ko že i v prošlom gody. Kem popolnilas’ studenčeskaja sem’ja?* ‘For the first time 654 thousand boys and girls will step over the threshold into a higher educational institution – the same number as last year. *With whom* did the student family fill up (replenish)?’

¹¹ For numerous textual examples culled from the National Corpus of the Russian Language, see Gradinarova 2008.

-sja, favors their use in colloquial speech. Finally, the perceived “actional” nuance of the perfective *-sja* passives, in contrast to the “resultative” meaning of *-en* passives, may provide a semantic rationale for their occurrence.

The emergent perfective passive in *-sja* poses challenges to theoretical accounts of voice phenomena in Russian, specifically, the formation of passives and middles. Based on the data presented in section 2, it is clear that the morpheme *-sja* may be affixed to a perfective verb in the derivation of both middle and passive sentences, resulting in a middle/passive ambiguity analogous to that manifested in imperfective verbs in *-sja* (as in 4b above). Consider, for example, sentences (25-27) cited by Percov (2003:48).

- (25) Publika dovol’no bystro raskupila knigu. Active
 ‘The public rather quickly bought up the book.’
- (26) Kniga dovol’no bystro raskupilas’.
 ‘The book rather quickly bought up.’ [Middle reading]
 ‘The book was rather quickly bought up.’ [Passive reading]
- (27) Kniga dovol’no bystro raskupilas’ publikoj. Passive
 ‘The book was rather quickly bought up by the public.’

At the same time, perfective verbs regularly passivize via affixation of the morpheme *-en*. Thus, the same verb may derive two passive constructions, the passive participle in *-en* (28), as well as a perfective passive in *-sja*.

- (28) Kniga byla raskuplena.
 ‘The book was bought up.’

It is not clear how these facts are to be accounted for in a theoretical account of voice in Russian. In the theta-theoretic analysis of voice developed by Babby (e.g., 1993, 1994, 1998), middle and passive sentences are viewed as diathetic alternations of the base verb’s initial argument structure, or diathesis.¹² The key element in the formation and interpretation of middles and passives is the fate of the initial verb’s characteristic external argument. In the derivation of middles, the external argument is “dissociated”

¹² Babby and Brecht (1975:364, fn 23) note that their definition of voice, “the relationship of a verb’s subcategorization feature and the realization of this feature in the surface structure of the sentence,” is related to the concept of diathesis proposed in Xolodovič 1970 and Mel’čuk and Xolodovič 1970. This point is also made in Brecht and Levine 1986: 135 (fn. 2).

from the action by eliminating it. In contrast, in the derivation of passives, the external argument is “defocused” or deemphasized, by making it an implicit argument, which licenses an optional adjunct NP in the Instrumental case. In both middle and passive formation, the direct internal argument is externalized to subject position, and either *-sja* or *-en* is affixed to the verb stem.

In the analysis of passives proposed by B&B 1975, and more recently by Babby (1998), the aspect of the verb is assumed to determine which morpheme is affixed to the verb: imperfective verbs form a passive with *-sja*, while perfective verbs with *-en*. However, as the data discussed above indicate, this distribution does not hold for all verbs. For some perfective verbs, and apparently a growing number, it would seem necessary to stipulate that in deriving a passive, either *-en* or *-sja*, may be affixed to the verb. Such an approach assumes that *-sja*, and *-en*, already used in the derivation of middles from perfective verbs, do the same work in deriving perfective passives.¹³ Any perceived differences in interpretation, such as the “resultant state” reading of the *-en* passive participle, versus the “actional” reading of the *-sja* passive, would need to be accounted for elsewhere.

An alternative theoretical treatment would be to suppose that the two morphemes operate in different ways, giving rise to different structures, which happen to share the resultant property that the external argument is (more or less) out of the picture. This is the line of development pursued in Jones and Levine 2010. This kind of treatment holds out the possibility (certainly not exhaustively worked out in J&L) that the differing interpretive preferences, as well as the peculiarities of the differences between decausatives and middle constructions (with their apparently obligatory attendant adverbial modification) might be tied to differences in structure. Assuming these interpretive differences are real, at this point it seems safe to say that it is not clear where an account of them should be located.

¹³ B&B (1975 :356) argue that not only *-sja*, but also *-en* can be affixed to the stem of a perfective verb to form a middle sentence. They show that certain verbs, presumably a small number, can form two middle constructions, as in (i) and (ii) below (B&B’s example (29 a and b):

(i) Ruki (starika) *smorščilis’* ‘The hands (of the old man) became wrinkled.’

(ii) Ruki (starika) *byli smorščeny’* ‘The hands (of the old man) were wrinkled.’

As the glosses of these sentences indicate, they differ in interpretation: the middle in *-sja* focuses on the action, while the *-en* middle has a stative meaning. Note that this semantic contrast, and the affix distribution of perfective middles is parallel to that of the perfective passives, such as *Kniga raskupilas’/byla raskuplena publikoj* ‘The book was bought up by the public’. Thus, perfective verbs in Russian have rich derivational possibilities, being capable of deriving, via the morphemes *-sja* and *-en*, a pair of passives and a pair of middles.

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