

Title: Russian Impersonal Infinitival *by* and Tense Disambiguation  
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The purpose of this paper is to analyze constructions of the type *Izvinit'sja by mne* and *Popit' by emu*. How does the listener know whether they refer to the past (and hence are regrets or afterthoughts) or to the present (and hence are wishes, requests or suggestions) both in and out of context? There are a number of factors that come into play.

- The type of construction, i.e. affirmative vs. negative
- The choice of aspect, i.e. perfective vs. imperfective
- The type of verb, i.e. willful vs. non-willful; willful verbs may in turn be internal or external
- The person involved, i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> person vs. 2<sup>nd</sup> person or 3<sup>rd</sup> person
- The sentence stress, i.e. logical subject vs. verb

An action may be of such nature that its performance depends strictly on the will and desire of the Logical Subject (**internal** verbs), such as *izvinit'sja* or *rasskazat'*, which are locutionary verbs of communication (in strict definition), and also *podumat'*, *porazmyslit'* etc., which are mental verbs. Some physical activity verbs that are triggered by *mental* decision also belong here: *udarit'*, *otkazat'sja*, *bežat'* and others.

In contrast there are actions (requests) that may (if accepted) involve some form of participation from another person (**external** verbs), such as *popit'*, *poexat'*. And then there are actions that may (if requests) or may not (if internal) involve another participant's actions, such as *napisat'*, *pozvonit'* and others.

Some examples of **non-willful** verbs are *vljubit'sja*, *umeret'*, etc.

The following are some examples that combine the various factors. For **affirmative, perfective** aspect:

-- The combination of an **internal** verb and **1<sup>st</sup>** person with **verb stress** invariably means *regret*, hence a *past* event. (*Mne by izvinit'sja*. — 'I should have apologized.')

-- The combination of an **internal** verb and **2<sup>nd</sup>** person with **verb stress** is more likely to mean *suggestion*, hence a *future* event, unless a counter-action is specified (*Tebe by izvinit'sja* — 'you should apologize')

-- The combination of an **internal** verb and **3<sup>rd</sup>** person with **verb stress** is more likely to mean *regret*, hence a *past* event (*Emy by podumat'* — 'he should have thought').

-- The combination of an **internal** verb and **3<sup>rd</sup>** person with **Logical Subject stress**, often supported by an interjection, is more likely to mean *a wish*, hence a *future* event (*Vot emu by rasskazat' kak on rabotaet* — 'I wish he would tell us how he does it').

On the other hand, for **affirmative, imperfective** aspect:

-- The **internal** verbs are most likely to combine with **3<sup>rd</sup>** person and the verbs are typically **reduplicated** (*Emu by žit' da žit'* — 'He could have still lived a long time'); this refers either to future but obstructed potential or to a counterfactual, impossible wish.

**Negative perfective** is limited to fears of upcoming events and hence always refers to a *future* event (*Ne zabolet' by* — 'I hope I don't get sick', *Ne opozdat' by tebe* — 'I hope you are not late').

The paper will present additional elements of the taxonomy.