

The Modality of Impossibility and Possibility of Verbs with Infinitive Component (On the Material of Russian Proverbs and Sayings)

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Abstract

In the given article the integrated approach was used. Its basis is made by the structural-semantic method which is showing in joint consideration of the formal and substantial parties of the language of Russian proverbs and sayings.

1. Introduction

The problem of modality, and also means of its realization in the language is difficult and many-sided. The modality is allocated among the main categories which represent a necessary element of the statement. Many known linguists devoted their works to researching of the category of modality. The basic provisions, defining the essence of the category of modality in the modern Russian language, are stated in V. V. Vinogradov's work: *About the category of modality and modal words*. The linguist characterizes this concept: "Each sentence includes modal meaning as an essential constructive sign, i.e. comprises the indication on the relation to reality" (Vinogradov, 1950, p. 38).

2. Discussion

It is well-known, that the modality joins predicativity and it is one of the main signs of any sentence, i.e. it is actually syntactic category. Following V. V. Vinogradov's concept, we understood modality as the relation of the contents of the statement to reality (reported to its real implementation) from the point of view of the speaking. There are objective and modal meaning of reality / irreality, subjective-modal meaning of reliability / probability, predicate modality of possibility, impossibility, etc. actions marked out in linguistics.

Proverbs and sayings is a widespread genre of folklore, accompanying people for a long time. Such means of expression as an exact rhyme, the simple form, brevity, made proverbs and sayings resistant, remembered and necessary in everyday speech. They give clear positive and negative lines of life, claiming or criticizing, eulogizing or mocking. The material for this research is 150 units (proverbs and sayings), taken from the dictionary of *The proverbs of the Russian People* by V. I. Dahl. There is a debatable problem of differentiation of proverbs and sayings from phraseological units. The essence of proverbs and sayings, as language phenomena, isn't found out up to the end, thus, the presented material as the lingvo-creative phenomenon, having a huge flow of historical and cultural, lingvo-cultural information, is still actual and draws a lot of attention of researchers all over the world.

As well as any other modal meaning in the Russian language, the meaning of possibility and impossibility in proverbs and sayings can be expressed lexically - by means of special vocabulary, morphologically – by special modal words, syntactically – by special constructions.

Within this article we will stop on constructions with an infinitive as the predicative center. It should be noted that, the category of modality of possibility, impossibility has no formal expression in an infinitive paradigm. Nevertheless, the research of proverbs and the sayings, containing an infinitive or verbs with infinitive component, allows finding certain modal meanings in this verbal form. It is necessary to note, that the expression of the modal relation to the action, fulfilled by an infinitive, makes the main content of the various constructions which are formed with an infinitive.

Many works in linguistics are devoted to researching of the category of modality of possibility, impossibility: (V. V. Vinogradov, A. V. Bondarko, G. A. Zolotova, O. L. Kamenskaya, I. B. Khlebnikova, U. S. Stepanov, V. V. Gurevich, E. I. Belyaeva, V. V. Panfilov, N. M. Makovka and others).

Thus, under «possibility of implementation of an action» we understand its potentiality: an action will probably be carried out under any conditions, and, respectively, becomes reality, and it is also possible it won't be carried out, and, thus, remains only unrealized possibility or potentiality. Actually possibility is defined by ability or inability of the subject to this action, or conditions in which the action proceeds. Under impossibility – modal meaning of an impracticability, an action impracticability; lack of the conditions are favorable for implementation of this or that action. In the sentence modal meaning of impossibility is created by various means. The basic – the existence of negative components in the sentence structure.

3. Results

It is known, that on common use among the constructions expressing modal meanings of possibility and impossibility, it is possible to allocate connections with the following verbs: can, dare, be able that has already been noted by V. V. Vinogradov. The modal meaning of possibility of an action is realized as a part of sentences by means of the following words: can, be able/manage, to be in time, to manage, be successful, to guess, to cope, to risk, to manage, to have possibility (Vinogradov, 1950, p. 45). *Who is able to live in the house, he doesn't go to tell fortunes*. Imperfective aspect of the verb in this proverb shows that the action expressed by this construction is represented in its current, in the process of commission, and thereby in duration or repeatability. The form of imperfective aspect of an infinitive with meaning of duration of action emphasizes its potentiality. *You were able to live, be able and to die. You were able to lose, be able and to find*. The use of an infinitive in these constructions in the form of perfective aspect also shows potential action, as the meaning of potentiality itself is inherent in an infinitive. The form of an imperative mood of an auxiliary verb «be able» attaches to all sentence the significance of obligation, though the meaning of possibility of fulfilling of an action here remains: to find possibility, be able, *to die, find*. Telling itself doesn't carry out action, and demands its performance. The action is unreal, demanded.

In the above described examples, the construction *be able* with an infinitive has meaning of *possessing ability, be able*. This verb doesn't express the action, but only informs of possibility of its performance, so, reviewing the last presented examples, we understand that: *if one managed to lose something, he should have possibility to find the lost, the person who lives in a family peacefully and observing family traditions, he doesn't go to fortunetellers*. Constructions of a verb "to be able" and an infinitive: "is able to live", "be able to die", "be able to find", express possibility caused by the situation.

The modal meaning of impossibility is connected with a number of such phenomena, as: particle *not*, pronouns and adverbs with prefixes *not* and some other predicatives with a prefix *not*. T.V. Markelova marks out the following means of expression of denial: particle *not*, negative pronouns: *anybody, anything, etc.*, adverbs *anywhere, never, nowhere, etc.* (Markelova, 1981, p. 47). *Why should I become reconciled with one who isn't able to quarrel. It will be done harm to those who aren't able to live the house*. In these examples the form of imperfective aspect of an verbs with infinitive component caused impossibility of commission of action by the situation: *we won't be able to reconcile with the person who isn't able to swear since there is no reason for reconciliation, as we weren't at odds; if the person isn't able to live at home, in a family, by the family rules established by norms, customs then inevitably some trouble may happen*.

There are some frequent cases of expression of the modality of possibility, impossibility, within one proverb: *I managed to speak but I didn't dare to speak. I am able to speak but I don't dare to speak*. From the presented examples we understand that: the person had (has) possibility to tell, express his opinion, but there was no possibility to fulfill this action owing to any subjective or objective circumstances.

Thus, proverbs and the sayings containing constructions of verbs "to be able, can, dare" and an infinitive react to all phenomena of reality, reflect life and outlook of the people, transfer household, social, philosophical, moral and ethical, esthetic national views, have modal semantics of possibility, impossibility of commission of action with various shades of meaning: approvals, disapproval, extreme persistence, the recommendation, advise of commission, or not commission, quite often they have instructive character: *You were able to live, be able and to die. He is not able to do serious work by himself, but shouts one for all. I don't dare to show the face*.

Prepotent position among explicators of modal meaning of possibility in proverbs and sayings occupies the predicative *it is possible*, possessing capacious modal semantics and being stylistically neutral. There is quite often the determining situation in sentences with meaning of possibility which is cornerstone of a potential situation: *To marry is not to sneeze: it is possible to tell beforehand*.

Thus, we will investigate functioning of the predicative *it is possible* in the verbs with infinitive component. Predicative «it is possible» in an impersonal construction with an infinitive has the meaning: *probably, there is an possibility to do (to make) something, it is allowed: It is possible to get a sin, and destroy precisely*. In the presented example the following opinion is expressed: to sin or make something bad doesn't make special work, and it will be difficult to get rid of a sin. The predicative used in a postposition to an infinitive, emphasizes, increases the modal meaning of possibility.

The bridge is not the Lent, it is possible and to drive all over. In the given example, it is spoken about physical capacity to make action: *the bridge, it is simply a bridge, an obstacle in a way which can be overcome, in comparison with the Lent, which is impossible to break by no means*. The possibility of implementation of the action by an infinitive is estimated by the speaker.

The modifier *it is possible* in Russian proverbs and sayings most often acts in impersonal sentences where verbal not expressiveness of the subject and action is represented as independent of the figure: *Dashingly to trouble a misfortune, it is possible to be gone soon*. In this example the semantic emphasis in a construction without "the dative subject" is placed not on the figure, but on the action, on possibility of its implementation irrespectively of those who have such possibility. Here the figure as if is detached is *placed off-screen* (Askochenskaya, 1998, p. 78) therefore the meaning of possibility in an impersonal sentence is given in a generalized view: *It is possible to correct but will be worse. It is possible to eat this trouble with bread*. (Action can concern anyone).

The nature of impossibility is transferred in proverbs and sayings by antonymous to a predicative *it is possible* a modal adverb *it is impossible*, here possibility of realization of a situation is exposed to denial. A. M. Peshkovsky considers these words remarkable by that, *being not adverbs, i.e. without meaning a sign, they are used, nevertheless, only with verbs* (Peshkovsky, 2001, p. 166). These sentences enter the relations with sentences either with obligatory, or with facultative denial, depending on a verbal aspect. I. G. Osetrov considers constructions *it is impossible* with an infinitive of imperfective aspect to the statements expressing the modal meaning of obligation (Osetrov, 1985, p. 35).

Semantic specifics of a predicative *it is impossible* is in realization of meaning of objective possibility not to have possibility, and also conditions for action performance, the modifier is characterized by dispassionateness of an action, independence of process and a state from the active figure: *It is impossible not to heat up at the furnace*. This example testifies to *impossibility of sitting at the furnace and not to heat up*. The construction of this predicative with a negative particle at an infinitive has the meaning: «it is necessary, has to» expresses the modal meaning of obligation. A. M. Peshkovsky notes here weakening of denial: *... denial repetition... creates positive sense* (Peshkovsky, 2001, p. 389). Action is presented as potential with an obligation shade: *it is impossible not to heat up = it is necessary to heat up*.

The modal meaning of impossibility can be implemented in impersonal sentences. It is possible to note complication of this modal type by a meaning shade *the absence of hope for success: Don't order to tell, it is impossible to conceal*.

The sentences with an infinitive of perfective aspect and a predicative *it is impossible* mean impossibility of implementation something and correspond to actually negative infinitive sentences: *It is possible to tell lies, and it is impossible to muddle*. Action is presented as potential, impossible owing to certain conditions.

Sentences with an infinitive of imperfective aspect and a predicative «it is impossible» in the same meaning are correlative with sentences with *there is no possibility: At a loss to trade (it is impossible to sell). The earth can't stand without tsar (it is impossible)*. Such sentences can also mean prohibition, and then they correspond to sentences with facultative denial with *it isn't allowed* or with sentences without denial with *it is forbidden*. Action is presented as potential. In such constructions the meaning of impossibility of an action is expressed.

There is an interesting fact, that the large number of realization presented by expressional versions of sentences with a predicate infinitive + *it is impossible* in Russian proverbs and sayings, where on the first place the infinitive is taken out, and the word-form depending on it, remains on the last place, it is a sentences with *frame accent structure* (Shvedova, 1980, p. 325). Such inversion with a preposition of an infinitive and a postposition of a predicative *it is impossible* is an aberration, that is more usual for statements of colloquial style. This discrepancy of the language phenomena to the standard, being cornerstone of expressivity, not typicalness and therefore singularity and expressiveness of the speech, are inherent in the style of Russian proverbs and sayings: *Mother the earth, it is impossible to speak. The song is over, it is impossible to sing more*.

Therefore, in proverbs and sayings, in semantics of a modality of possibility, impossibility compatibility of modal modifiers *it is possible, it is impossible* with an infinitive both perfect, and imperfective aspects are used.

4. Conclusion

Summing up the above results, it should be noted that semantics of a modality of possibility and impossibility of verbs with infinitive component in proverbs and sayings can create various private modal meanings and shades: allowed possibility, possibility of an action with an estimation shade, potential impossibility, impossibility of an action with a meaning shade the absence of hope for success, approval, disapproval, the recommendation, caution etc. The constructions of modal components and infinitives can express real/irreal/potential action, depending on forms of an inclination and time of a verb, functional type of the sentence and a lexical meaning of a modal component.

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