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Specific restrictions on the use of *byt'*-passive in Russian: The reality restriction

The article focuses on a specific restriction on the use of Russian past passive forms with an auxiliary (*byl postroen* 'was built', *byla svarena* 'was cooked') in embedded clauses. These forms are known to differ from forms without an auxiliary (*postroen* 'is/was built', *svarena* 'is/was cooked') by the absence of resultative meaning component. However, it turns out that other restrictions exist: forms with *byt'* in embedded clauses disfavor irrealty and repeatedness contexts. I explain this saying that in general, forms with explicit *byt'* are likely to be used when the situation has taken place in reality (this generalization also excludes repeated action contexts, because they do not refer to a specific realized situation). I make a preliminary conclusion that this generalization also manifests itself in independent clauses. No reality-based restrictions are valid for passive forms without auxiliary.

Key words: passive, auxiliary, resultative, reality/irrealty, repeatedness, pluperfect, retrospective shift

FOR CITATION: Letuchiy A. Specific restrictions on the use of *byt'*-passive in Russian: The reality restriction. *Rhema*. 2022. No. 4. Pp. 101–116. DOI: 10.31862/2500-2953-2022-4-101-116

DOI: 10.31862/2500-2953-2022-4-101-116

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О некоторых ограничениях на употребление пассива со вспомогательным глаголом *быть* в русском языке: ограничение на реальность ситуации

В статье рассматривается нетривиальное ограничение на русские формы пассивного залога прошедшего времени (*Дом был построен, Картошка была сварена*) в зависимых клаузах. Об этих формах известно, что они отличаются от форм без вспомогательного глагола (*построен, сварена*) отсутствием результирующего значения. Однако обнаруживаются другие ограничения: формы с глаголом *быть* в зависимой клаузе плохо сочетаются с ирреальными контекстами и контекстами повторяемости. Мы объясняем это тем, что формы с *быть* плохо допустимы, когда обозначаемая ситуация не имела места в реальности (при этом повторяемые контексты также подпадают под это обобщение, т.к. не обозначают референтной определенной ситуации). Проявления этого свойства можно увидеть и вне зависимых клауз. Пассивные формы без вспомогательного глагола типа *Картошка сварена* не подпадают под данные ограничения.

Ключевые слова: пассив, вспомогательный глагол, результирующее, реальность/ирреальность, повторяемость, плюсквамперфект, ретроспективный сдвиг

Для ЦИТИРОВАНИЯ: Летучий А.Б. О некоторых ограничениях на употребление пассива со вспомогательным глаголом *быть* в русском языке: ограничение на реальность ситуации // Рема. Rhema. 2022. № 4. С. 101–116. DOI: 10.31862/2500-2953-2022-4-101-116

1. Introduction

1.1. A brief outline

In my article, I will describe some specific properties of the passive construction with the verb *byt* 'be' (*dom byl postroen* 'the house was / has been built') that differ both from passive tense forms without an auxiliary and past tense forms of active voice. These features regard combinations of passive forms with some aspect values and modality. They have to do with the semantic opposition postulated for the form with a verb *byt*', marked for tense, and the other variant of passive, unmarked for tense and containing no explicit form of *byt*', but are not reducible to the binary opposition of resultative vs. non-resultative contexts.

It is well-known that in some respects, periphrastic passive forms with 'be' sometimes behave differently from synthetic verb forms. This is also the case in Russian: as Knjazev (1998, 2002) shows, the whole passive paradigm (which in Russian usually contains a form of *byt*') is organized differently from the active one in what concerns the use of forms and their systematic properties. Knjazev (1988) and Paducheva (1996, 1998) show that the passive voice has a present tense form without an explicit auxiliary (*dom postroen*) and a form with an auxiliary marked for past or future tense (here only past tense forms like *dom byl postroen* are addressed). The form without an auxiliary is sometimes labeled 'stative', though, paradigmatically, it corresponds to the form with an auxiliary as a present tense form.

The form with the past tense auxiliary usually cannot be used if the situation is actual at the moment of speech. For instance, (1) is impossible in the sense 'the faculty was created, and this result (existence of the department) is relevant at the time of speech':

(1) Fakul'tet uže (#byl) sozdan.¹

'The department has already been created.' (see [Orosz, 2001; Knjazev, 2002] on the special features of the present form without an auxiliary)

At the same time, the variant with the explicit form *byl* is possible if the construction focuses on the situation taking place at the particular moment of time, not on its current relevance. One can regard (1) as having a perfect reading, and (2) as a perfective. The contrast is almost identical to the English opposition of Present Perfect and Past Indefinite.

¹ As one of anonymous reviewers points out, (1) is acceptable, but only if the reference point for the state 'the department was created' is in past: e.g., 'The department had been created for a long time when I entered the university'. If the reference point is at the moment of speech, i.e., '(Now), the department has already been created', the use of *byl* in (1) leads to ungrammaticality.

- (2) Fakul'tet byl sozdan odinnadcat' let nazad.
'The department was created eleven years ago.'

Knjazev (1988) discusses the place of the passive form in the typology of stative aspectual meanings (stative and resultative). The only problem of his detailed semantic analysis is that he does not always take into account the use of forms in embedded clause. As Comrie (1976) shows, sometimes one of ways to distinguish between perfective past, perfect, resultative and stative is their contextual behavior.

In this article, I will focus on restrictions on the use of past tense form with *byt'*. I will show that they are not derivable either from the general opposition between resultative vs. non-resultative use, or from the general rules of use of Russian past tense forms. Restrictions I describe result from some special features of past tense passive forms that have been previously ignored.

1.2. Stative proper uses

In this article, I ignore the uses of past tense passive forms that can be termed 'stative proper' (they are discussed by Orosz (2001), Paslawska & von Stechow (2002)). In this type of reading, the moment of change is defocused, and the passive form describe only the stative phase, where the state of things does not change:

- (3) Dver' polčasa byla otkryta.
'The door was open for half an hour.'

Most examples in the paper describe sequence of events or hypothetical events, and these contexts are incompatible with stative proper uses. Examples are taken from the Russian National Corpus (www.ruscorpora.ru), Google search, or sometimes are based on my intuition.

2. Specific features of unmarked forms

Paducheva (1996) and Egorova, Egorov & Plungian (2020) show some specific features of unmarked forms like those in (4) and (5):

- (4) Včera **polučeno** izvestie.
'Yesterday the news was received.'
- (5) Zdanie uže **postroeno**.
'The building has already been built.'

Paducheva regards the forms *polučeno* and *postroeno* without an auxiliary as a variant of passive that normally has a resultative reading. (4) and (5) are preferably used when the effect of news being known and the building finished exists at the time of speech. Otherwise, the *byt'*-variant had

to be chosen.² At the same time, Egorova et al. (2020) show that this rule of ‘result relevance’ can be violated.³ Note that sometimes the resultative reading is called perfect reading and compared to perfect forms in European languages: for instance, Bidem (1988) and Chvany (1990) adopt this type of argumentation.

In the following two subsections, I demonstrate that the difference in two contexts I discuss between the form with vs. without an auxiliary is not reducible to contexts of present relevance.

The main type of contexts I consider is the use of passive voice forms in adjunct embedded clauses. This choice is not accidental: in embedded clauses, the properties of event depend on the semantic properties of the main clause event, rather than are defined on independent semantic grounds, such as resultativity. Thus, the data under analysis will allow us to analyze tendencies of form use, not reducible to the resultative vs. non-resultative past opposition. I will describe restrictions related to repeatedness (2.1) and irreality (2.2).

2.1. Restriction I: Repeated situation

One of special features of the *byl*-form is its restricted compatibility with repeatedness contexts, where repeatedness is marked with the default temporal subordinator *kogda* ‘when’. For example, in (6), the main event (*prixodit* ‘comes’) is repeated and situated in present, but in the embedded clause, the active voice past tense form is impossible in the relative reading (‘they have eaten everything by this moment’). The same type of use is impossible for a past tense passive form in (7).

(6) On vseгда *prixodit*, *kogda* vsju edu uže ***sjeli***.

‘He always comes when all food has already been eaten
(lit. ‘they ate / have eaten all the food’).’⁴

² The situation, however, was different in the 19th century, when the unmarked form could be used without a necessary resultative component. Paducheva (1996) confirms this fact by quoting Lermontov’s “Borodino”, where *Moskva ... francuzu otdana* ‘Moscow is/has been given to French people’ is used in the situation where Napoleon had already lost the war, and Moscow is not possessed by the French army – thus, the situation has no current relevance for the speaker.

³ Here, I do not discuss in detail an approach represented by Schoorlemmer (1995), saying that all Russian participial passive constructions are stative. Its radical version seems to contradict some data (this is well demonstrated by [Paslawska, von Stechow, 2003]). The moderate version of the same approach may be correct: it says that the interpretation of the participle itself always includes a stative component, but it does not necessarily result in the stative interpretation of the whole construction. I do not either discuss the role of causativity and transitivity in the passive formation, which is given much attention in [Bulanin, 1978; Kokochkina, 2008].

⁴ Note that here I do not discuss issues related to aspect. Grønn (2008) and Corre (2015) discuss the behavior and distribution of aspectual values in various forms of Russian verbs, but their findings are not related to passive form use.

(7) On vseгда prixodit, kogda vsja eda uže (^{??}**byla**) **sjedena**.

Intended: 'He always comes when all food has already been eaten.'

(8) I vozvraščajutsja, kogda uže gusto **повысypали** zvezdy nad morem.

(Г.Я. Бакланов. В месте светлом, в месте злачном, в месте покойном (1995))

'And (they) return when many stars have appeared above the sea.'

(9) I vozvraščajutsja, kogda nebo uže (***bylo**) **usypano** zvezdami.

Intended: 'And (they) return when the sky is covered by stars.'

Uses like (6) are special in that tense and aspect is used relatively in the adjunct (temporal) clause with the marker *kogda*. Russian adjunct clauses mostly contain absolute tense and aspect.

At the same time, if the matrix predicate is in past, the use of *byl*-forms is not only possible, but even obligatory.

(10) On vseгда prixodil, kogda vsju edu uže **sjedali**.

(11) On vseгда prixodil, kogda vsja eda uže ***(byla) sjedena**.

'He always comes when all food has already been eaten.'

Note that the impossibility of the past passive in (7) is not covered by the aforementioned component of current relevance, which blocks the use of *byl*-forms. Even the use of *davno* does not make the use of *byla* perfect.

(12) On vseгда prixodit, kogda vsja eda uže davno (^{??}**byla**) **sjedena**.

'He always comes when all food has already been eaten for a long time.'

Moreover, the fact that in repeated action context the tense-marked form with *byt'* is undesirable leads to the use of present tense forms without an auxiliary in a non-resultative context of subsequent event chain (which is non-characteristic of them, according to [Knjazev, 1988, p. 349]:

(13) Kogda den'gi (^{??}**byli**) **polučeny**, a zatem **potračeny**, ja beru iz moix staryx zapasov.

'When the money has been gotten, and then spent, I take some from my old reserves.'

2.2. Restriction II: Irreal situation

Another context where the construction with *byt'* is impossible is irreal situation. Active voice past tense forms are sometimes used in the relative reading where the situation precedes another one, and both are not realized:

- (14) *Glavnoe, stavit' mjaso na ogon' uže posle togo, kak kartoška*
zakupela.
 'The main thing is to put the meat to cook after the potatoes has begun to boil.'
- (15) *Imenno oni pomogajut bolezni vernut'sja posle togo, kak pacient*
prošel polnyj kurs lečenija i pobedil rak. (Журнальное обозрение // Знание-сила. 2013)
 'It's they who result in the return of the illness after the patient has undergone a medical course and recovered from the cancer.'
- (16) *Ix osveščenie ... vključaetsja ne s "gabaritami" ili svetom far, a neposredstvenno pri nažatii samoj knopki, to est' posle togo, kak ee uže*
naščupal! (Владимир Арбузов. Огни панели (2004) // За рулем. 15.04.2004)
 'Their light ... switches on not together with the parking lights or headlights, but when the button itself is pushed, when (you) have already found it!'

The same context is impossible for passive past forms with *byl*, only stative forms without an auxiliary are possible:

- (17) *Glavnoe – stavit' mjaso na ogon' uže posle togo kak kartoška* (***byla**)
svarena.
 'The main thing is to put the meat to cook after the potatoes are/have been cooked.'
- (18) *Socializm nado stroit' posle togo, kak* (**#byl**) **postroen** kapitalizm. (Борис Немцов: Кремль и есть правительство // Газета. 2003.06.20)
 'The socialism should be construed after the capitalism has been construed.'

The change of the same context to a specific real situation makes the past tense passive form acceptable.

- (19) *Posle togo, kak kartoška* **byla svarena**, on postavil mjaso na ogon'.'
 'After the potatoes had been cooked, he put the meat to cook.'

Example (20) is theoretically compatible with both types of interpretation. However, the use of the past tense makes the speaker choose the 'real' reading. A broader context shows that this is really the case: the subject has already lost much with the old Russia, and not just mentions a hypothetical situation:

- (20) Im bylo čto terjat'. Vnov' terjat', posle togo, kak sliškom mnogoe **bylo poterjano** vmeste so staroj Rossiej. (Н.Д. Старосельская. Повседневная жизнь «русского» Китая (2006))
'They had something to lose. To lose again, after they lose too much with the old Russia.'
- (21) a. Posle togo kak kartu **vypustili**, vse gotovye karty otpravljajut v otdelenija banka.
'After the card has been issued, all cards are delivered to branches of the bank.'
- b. Posle togo kak karta (**#byla**) **zablokirovana**, bank uvedomit vas, kogda vy smožete polučit' novuju kartu.
'After the card is/has been blocked, the bank will notify you of the date of getting a new card.'

This class of examples should be distinguished from sentences like (22), where infinitive marks an unreal situation, but the embedded clause denotes a real one (the past tense *naučilis'* '(they) learnt' means that the situation is specific and has been realized). In such sentences, the passive construction with *byt'* is acceptable (23):

- (22) Nynješnij kanatohodec rabotaet na oslablennoj provoloke. I ne begaet. ... Čto možno ešče pridumat' posle togo, kak **naučilis'** xodit' po provoloke, odnovremenno žongliruja kipjaščim samovarom... (Ю.К. Олеша. В цирке (1928))
'The present day tightrope walker works on a loose wirer. And he does not run any longer. What could they elaborate after they learnt to go on the cord, holding a hot samovar?'
- (23) Čto real'no možno sdelat', posle togo kak **byl uničtožen** Groznyj, posle togo kak boeviki ušli v gory (<https://www.yabloko.ru/Publ/2000/Radio/ivan-echo-2.html>)
'What can really be made after Groznyj has been destroyed, and after the fighters has gone to the mountains?'
- (24) Kak my mogli tuda poexat' posle togo, kak granica **byla zakryta**?
'How could we go there after the border was closed.'
- (25) Nado uxodit' posle togo, kak obeščanie **bylo narušeno**.
'You should leave, after the promise has been broken.'

It may seem tempting to regard the contrast between the form with and without an auxiliary as an opposition between the resultative meaning and the meaning of canceled result. However, this does not seem to be the case.

For instance, some examples where the embedded event is realized also contain the component of relevant result, but *byl* is possible there.

- (26) Ty vse-taki gotoviš salat posle toga, kak **byla svarena** kartoška?
 ‘Are you nevertheless cooking a salad, after potatoes have been cooked?’

In other words, it is the irreal meaning that prevents *byl*-forms from being used in examples like (17) and (18).

3. Analysis of restrictions: Possible approaches

The special restrictions on the use of *byl*-forms allow for several types of analysis: one in terms of reality status, the other one in terms of time localization. Under the first analysis, we can suppose that the passive form with *byl* (*byla*, *bylo*, *byli*) is compatible only with real context. The second analysis claims that *byt'*-forms are incompatible with relative tense readings.

3.1. Tense approach

The claim that *byl*-forms are incompatible with relative reading is apparently false. For instance, under the matrix predicate in future, the passive construction in the complement clause can be marked for past with *byl*, which is apparently relative (in other words, it only denotes the precedence of the embedded event to the main one, not necessarily to the speech act:

- (27) Esli my éto sdelaem, on ved' pojmet, čto den'gi **byli** kem-to **ukradeny**, a ne sami propali!
 ‘If we do it, he will understand that the money has been stolen by someone, and not disappeared by themselves!’

In other words, the fact that (17) and (18) sound strange does not result for a general ban on the relative use of tense. Only the use of *byl*-forms in some particular contexts is restricted.

3.2. Modal approach

The modal approach as it is (in the formulation ‘the past tense passive form is incompatible with irreal contexts’) is more appropriate than the temporal one. This approach, however, seems to have one disadvantage: it proves to be inconsistent in that not all types of embedded clauses with irreal meaning disallow past tense passive forms. For example, conditional clauses allow past tense in non-specific meaning:

- (28) Esli **byl sdelan** nepravil'no rasčet naloga, k zajavleniju neobxodimo prilozhit' uočnennyj variant deklaracii. (<https://kskgroup.ru/services/vozvrat-izlishne-uplachennogo-naloga/>)
 'If the tax was counted in a wrong way, you should attach the corrected variant of the declaration to the application.'

However, this fact does not undermine the modal approach. It can be saved taking into account the semantic differences between embedded clause types. The difference between them results from the fact that temporal clauses do not show the reality type. We can assume that *byl*-forms by default denote a realized situation. This rule can be overridden by a strong context that presupposes irreality: conditional constructions constitute such a context, while temporal ones do not. A similar case is constituted by examples like (29) and (30), where the temporal marker *posle togo kak* 'after' denotes a temporal sequence with a modal flavor.

- (29) Vy ne dolžny imet' osobyx problem s polučeniem vida na žitel'stvo posle togo, kak uže **byla vydana** sootvetstvujuščaja viza.
 'You should not have a serious problem with getting a residence permit after an appropriate type of visa has been issued.'
- (30) Daetsja li otsročka po 13g, posle togo kak uže **byla dana** otsročka po učebe? (<https://www.prizyvnik.info/topic/127184...>)
 'Can the deferment from the military service, based on paragraph 13g, be given, if someone has already gotten a deferment for students?'

In these cases, the embedded clause does not really mark purely the sequence of events. There is another component in the sentence: that is not marked explicitly: 'if the appropriate visa has been issued', 'if a deferment for students has been given'. The whole example in (29) and (30) should be analyzed in the possible world meaning:

- (29') 'Assume that the visa has been issued. In this case, you should have no problem with a residence permit.'
- (30') 'Assume that the 13g deferment has been given. In this case, can a person get a deferment for students?'

This is not the case in (17) and (18), where the same subordinator *posle togo kak* introduces the temporal clause in the proper sense. Thus, I claim that the restriction illustrated by (7) and (17)–(18) results from the default reality built into the meaning of *byl*-forms.

This claim may seem to be contradictory: as mentioned before, unmarked forms without an auxiliary bear a resultative component, while forms of *byl*'

often make the reading of passive non-resultative and denote that the result has been canceled. So why *byl*-forms tend to denote a real event? In fact, this tendency is rather natural. *Byl*-forms do not only mark **canceled** result. They often denote that the event took place before a reference point in past (pluperfect meaning, see Section 4 below). However, from this component it follows that the event took place at all – otherwise, the event could not be assigned a temporal localization before another event. By contrast, the form without an auxiliary have no default temporal localization, which allows it to be used in context where the event has not been realized at all.

The fact that repeated contexts are also usually incompatible with *byl*-forms can also be accounted for by the modal approach. In repeated contexts, the situation (both the main and the embedded one) is often non-specific, and we do not speak of any particular specific situation that has been realized. This is why the repeated non-specific reading deviates from the prototype of the realized situation and are semantically close to irreality.

3.3. A parallel: Irreal contexts in independent clauses

The relevance of the reality parameter is also manifested in a separate context outside subordinate clause domain. In Russian, past indicative is sometimes used in contexts where the addressee is proposed to imagine a hypothetical scenario.

- (31) Ty **vyšel** iz metro i tut že vidiš vxođ v bank.
 ‘(Imagine that/if) you have just gotten off the subway, and you (will) immediately see the entrance to the bank.’
- (32) **Posolil, poperčil**, dobavljaeš maslo.
 ‘When you (have) salted and peppered (it), you should add some butter.’

In this context, *byl*-passive forms are impossible with an irreal reading (just as in embedded clauses in (17) and (18)), while forms without an auxiliary are possible.

- (33) Itak, mjaso (**#bylo**) **požareno**, teper’ emu nado otdoxnut’.
 (<https://singlmolt.livejournal.com/1167.html>)
 ‘So, the meat is fried, now it needs to ‘rest’ (to cool down).’
- (34) Itak, den’gi (**#byli**) **snjaty** s karty i **potračeny**.
 ‘So, the money is withdrawn from the card and wasted.’

In both cases, the past tense form with an auxiliary is only possible in another meaning: it supposes that the situation ‘the money is withdrawn’, ‘the meat is fried’ has taken the place in reality. In the meaning ‘imagine that

the situation took place', only the form without an auxiliary is possible. This contrast confirms the claim that the embedded clause data leads to: the past tense form with an auxiliary is incompatible with irreal contexts or at least strongly disfavors them.

4. Absence of restriction in some uses of past tense passive

A special question regards the scope of restriction: The question is whether all uses of past tense passive forms with *byl* are incompatible with irreal and repeated contexts, or this restriction is only valid for some particular readings. In fact, the second is true: only the regular past use is incompatible with these contexts. This fact is confirmed by the existence of some perfectly acceptable examples with *byl*-forms referring to irreal situations.

- (35) Každýj raz, kogda eda **byla prigotovlena**, ingredijenty ubiralis' v xolodil'nik.
'Every time when the food had been prepared, the ingredients were put back to the fridge.'
- (36) Vsegda nado bylo gotovit' mjaso posle togo, kak **byla prigotovlena** kartoška.
'The meat had to be prepared after the potatoes had been prepared.'

I propose that there exist three types of *byl*-forms (in addition to the purely stative type that I excluded from the analysis):

- 1) regular past / cancelled result *byl*-forms (subject to irrealis restriction);
- 2) *byl*-forms of retrospective shift;
- 3) pluperfect / long temporal distance *byl*-forms.

The existence of **retrospective shift** reading is confirmed by examples like (37), where the past tense form with an auxiliary is obligatory:

- (37) Ona priexala, kogda zdanie ***(bylo) postroeno**.
'She came when the house had already been building.'

The same form would be impossible if the passive form occurred in the main clause. The context does not contain a long temporal distance component either. The focus is on the fact that the state 'the house has been built' is relevant for the moment she comes. Thus, only the past tense localization of the main event line makes the *byl*-form possible: it marks 'relevance for the past', the resultative meaning shifted to the past.

In the **retrospective shift** use, the *byl*-form is possible, even if the situation is irreal. For instance, (38) is possible, even in the hypothetical reading, because the whole line of events, including the main situation, belongs to past.

(38) On sčital važnym stavit' mjaso na ogon' uže posle togo, kak kartoška
(**byla**) **svarena**.

'He considered it to be important put the meat to cook after
the potatoes are / have been cooked.'

(38) can refer to a generic situation where no specific potatoes have been cooked ('in any case you cook potatoes, and they have already been cooked'). In a similar sentence (17), a past passive *byl*-form is impossible. However, the same form is possible in (39), because the past tense auxiliary is used here as a retrospective shift marker, deriving the past tense form from the present tense.

The existence of separate pluperfect use explains the possibility of examples like (39). The whole line of events belongs to present. However, the focus is on the fact that the event has taken place much time ago. Moreover, in (39a), the fact that the embedded situation is unreal is irrelevant due to the explicit marking of large temporal distance (this facilitates the second type of reading). In (39b), the same type of use is also possible because the second part explicitly points to the fact that the result has been cancelled.

(39) a. Socializm nado stroit', kogda kapitalizm uže davno **byl postroen**.⁵
'The socialism should be built after the capitalism has / had already
been built long time ago.'

b. Socializm nado stroit', kogda kapitalizm uže **byl postroen**, a zatem
sнова **byla vosstanovlena** monarxija.
'The socialism should be built after the capitalism has/had already
been built, and then the monarchy was restored.'

The absence of restrictions on the pluperfect and retrospective shift reading is explicable. Both readings are by nature anchored to the main event (the event precedes the main one or belongs to the same line of events). This is why the repeatedness or unreality is derivable from the main event characteristics. Under the past (non-resultative) meaning, the reading of the passive form is not derivable from the other event, and the semantic restrictions are valid.⁶

Thus, the claim made by Knjazev (1988), who describes the readings of Russian passive forms as uses of the same form should be clarified: these are not contextual uses, but rather the polysemy of the passive past tense

⁵ To my intuition, this example is well-formed, although native speakers' judgments on (39a) significantly vary.

⁶ The status of the two readings seems to be different from the status of readings of non-passive past tense forms. Of course, they also can be used with different readings. However, for active forms, the reading chosen does not result in the ungrammaticality of any construction.

form. Not only are the uses discussed here semantically different, their combinational properties also differ. Perhaps, the opposition of the cancelled result reading vs. retrospective shift reading should be treated in the same way as the opposition of the stative vs. dynamic uses of the passive forms.

Conclusions

In this paper, I focused on the special distributional features of participial passive with past tense forms of *byt'*. The main zones where the use of *byt'* is blocked are contexts of repeatedness and irrealis. None of these restrictions is reducible to the current relevance semantic component, which is often described as a part of semantics of passive forms without an auxiliary.

I considered that the feature that restrict the use of *byl*-forms is a modal meaning (namely, the reality status). *Byl*-forms tend to be used in cases when the embedded situation is realized (which is not the case in the two contexts under analysis). It turns out that minimal pairs can be found where only the unmarked form can be used in the unreal context, but the *byl*-form is possible if the event is realized.

This restriction is only valid for the canonical (non-resultative) past tense use. In the 'retrospective shift' and the 'pluperfect' use, the use of past passive with *byl* is possible even in unreal contexts: in these uses, the past tense marking is regulated by the relation of the event in the embedded clause with the main event, while the semantic restrictions are irrelevant.

One of possible reasons of existence of special restrictions on the use of passive is the fact that passive forms with *byt'* and without it do not distinguish aspects. While in the active paradigm, according to Grønn (2008), the use of perfective vs. imperfective aspect allows to distinguish between precedence vs. simultaneity and resultative vs. non-resultative meaning, in the passive one this aspect function is unavailable.

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The article was received on 13.09.2022

Статья поступила в редакцию 13.09.2022

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