

Towards a lexicographic description of the Russian verb *терпеть*

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Abstract

The paper provides a lexicographic portrait (or, rather, a rough sketch for a lexicographic portrait) of the Russian verb *терпеть* along the lines suggested in (Шмелев, 2003). Special attention is paid to the aspectual behavior of the verb and to its numerous derivatives since it is morphologically very productive and different derivatives correspond to its different lexical meanings (in addition, some of the connotations of the verb may become a part of the lexical meaning of a derivative). A brief overview of the lexical meanings of the verb follows:

1.1 'to bear suffering with patience'

1.2 'to resist impatience'

2 'to tolerate'

3 OPER ('an occurrence of something bad')

In addition, the cultural significance of the attitudes encoded in various readings of the verb *терпеть* and its derivatives is discussed.

Keywords

Lexicography, polysemy, cultural semantics

1 Introductory remarks

In the paper, I will provide a lexicographic portrait (or, rather, a rough sketch for a lexicographic portrait) of the Russian verb *терпеть* along the lines suggested in (Шмелев, 2003). I will pay special attention to the aspectual behavior of the verb and to its numerous derivatives since it is morphologically very productive and different derivatives correspond to its different lexical meanings (in addition, some of the connotations of the verb may become a

part of the lexical meaning of a derivative). A brief overview of the lexical meanings of the verb follows:

- 1.1 ‘to bear suffering with patience’
- 1.2 ‘to resist impatience’
- 2 ‘to tolerate’
- 3 OPER (‘an occurrence of something bad’)

In addition, I will discuss the cultural significance of the attitudes encoded in various readings of the verb *терпеть* and its derivatives. It is sometimes claimed that the attitude described as *терпеть* is very salient in Russian culture because a long history of oppressive rule in combination with a severe climate have led to the idea that the ability to endure suffering is the only way to survive (Gladkova, 2007, p. 143-144). Whether or not we accept this claim, one should agree that *терпеть* is a very common language-specific verb and deserves a detailed semantic description.

2 *Терпеть* 1 (sufferance, patience)

2.1 *Терпеть* 1.1

2.1.1 *Explication*

X терпим (Y) ‘A person X experiences something bad (Y) against X’s will; this leads to X’s bad emotional state; X does not lose self-control, does not try to change the situation and continues to bear it’

In other words, the verb *терпеть* denotes an attitude of a person toward hardships and sufferings. For some reason, this person accepts a difficult condition, makes no attempt to interrupt this state by performing some action and remains in this state.

2.1.2 *Aspectual properties*

Терпеть 1.1 is an imperfectivum tantum. The delimitative derivative *потерпеть* is no aspectual correlate of *терпеть*; it means ‘*терпеть* for some time’. A doctor may say to a child as an unpleasant procedure starts: *Сейчас может быть больно, но ты немного потерпи* ‘It may be a little painful; you’ll have to grin and bear the pain’.

2.1.3 *Constructions*

Терпеть 1.1 may be used with or without an object (typical objects of *терпеть* 1.1 refer to states related to experiencing physical or mental pain: *боль, муки, страдания*). In both cases, it may refer to a patient acceptance of a temporary pain or discomfort as well as a general attitude to life. The delimitative derivative *потерпеть* tends to be used without an object:

- *«Потерпи! – соседи хором говорят. – Милого побои не долго болят!»* (Nikolai Nekrasov, *Katerina*).

2.1.4 Derivatives

Verbs: *вытерпеть* <боль>, *стерпеть* <обиду>, *перетерпеть*:

- *Сейчас – только бы лечение как-нибудь перетерпеть!* ‘If only he could somehow get through the treatment’ (Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Cancer Ward*)

Noun: *терпение*

Adjectives and corresponding adverbs: *терпеливый*, *нестерпимый*; *терпеливо*, *нестерпимо*:

- *И ему нестерпимо представилось, что ещё это всё он должен напрягаться делать, неизвестно зачем и для кого* ‘It seemed intolerable to have to bring himself to do all these things, goodness knows who or what for’ (Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Cancer Ward*).

2.1.5 Cultural evaluation

The ability to endure temporary suffering, e. g. physical pain, and never complain is generally valued as a manifestation of courage and fortitude. On the other hand, this attitude is open to question: some people ask *Почему я обязан терпеть эти мучения?* ‘Why am I obliged to endure these torments?’ A physician may say, *Лучше не терпеть боль, а принять болеутоляющее* ‘It is better not to bear pain but to take a pain-killer’.

The general attitude to life denoted by *терпеть* 1.1 is valued in traditional Russian culture. Many Russian proverbs emphasize the importance of the ability to accept sufferings without protest: *Христос терпел и нам велел* ‘Christ endured/suffered and ordered us to suffer’; *He потерпев, не спасешься* ‘Without suffering/enduring/bearing, one will not be saved’; *С бедой не перекоряйся, терпи!* ‘Do not argue with misfortune, bear it’, etc. Anna Gladkova noted that it is difficult to find proverbs with similar meanings among common English proverbs or sayings (Gladkova, 2007, p. 144).

On the contrary, Russian revolutionaries of the 1860s regarded *терпение* in this reading as something very bad. Murray B. Peppard observed that the poem “Katerina” (quoted above) was an example of Nikolai Nekrasov’s “reworking of a folklore source”: an old folk song tells how a young peasant submits to the will of her in-laws and prides herself on her patience; but Nekrasov converted the sense of the poem into an attack on such docile behavior (Peppard, 1967: 97). Consider also the following couplet *Чем хуже был бы твой удел, / Когда б ты менее терпел?* ‘How much worse would be your lot in life / If you should cease your passive enduring?’ (Nikolai Nekrasov, *On the Volga*).

The quality referred to with the adjective *терпеливый* (and the corresponding noun *терпеливость*) may get different evaluations as well. To quote Vladimir Solovyov, a famous Russian philosopher:

- *Терпеливость* (как добродетель) есть только страдательная сторона того душевного качества, которое в деятельном своем проявлении называется великодушием, или духовным мужеством. Тут почти вся разница исчерпывается субъективными оттенками, не допускающими твердых разграничений. <...> С другой стороны, единство внешних признаков может и здесь <...> прикрывать существенное различие этического содержания. Можно терпеливо переносить физические и душевные страдания или вследствие малой восприимчивости нервов, тупости ума и апатичности темперамента – и тогда это вовсе не добродетель; или вследствие внутренней силы духа, не уступающего внешним воздействиям, – и тогда это есть добродетель аскетическая (сводимая к нашей первой нравственной основе); или вследствие кротости и любви к ближнему (*caritas*), не желающей воздавать злом за зло и обидой за обиду, – и в таком случае это есть добродетель альтруистическая (сводимая ко второй основе: жалости, распространяемой здесь даже на врага и обидчика); или, наконец, терпеливость происходит из покорности высшей воле, от которой зависит все совершающееся, – и тогда это есть добродетель пиетистическая, или религиозная (сводимая к третьей основе) (*The Justification of the Good*).

Patience (as a virtue) is only the passive aspect of that quality of the soul which, in its active manifestation, is called magnanimity of spiritual fortitude. The difference is almost entirely subjective, and no hard and fast line can be drawn between the two. <...> On the other hand, the identity of the external expression may <...> conceal important differences in the moral content. A man may patiently endure physical or mental suffering owing to a low degree of nervous sensitivity, dullness of mind and an apathetic temperament, and in that case patience is not a virtue at all. Or patience may be due to the inner force of the spirit, which does not give way to external influences – and then it is an ascetic virtue (reducible to our first basis of morality) or it may arise from meekness and love of one's neighbors (*caritas*), which does not wish to pay back evil for evil and injury for injury – and in that case it is an altruistic virtue (reducible to the second principle – pity, which here extends even to enemies who inflict the injury). Finally, patience may spring from obedience to the higher will upon which all that happens depends – and then it is a religious virtue (reducible to the third principle) (Solovyof 1918: 103-104).

2.2 *Терпеть* 1.2

2.2.1 *Explication*

X терпим 'A person X wants something to happen; however s/he does not show his/her desire and does not act to precipitate it'

No "painful situation" is implied. The verb suggests rejecting a possible scenario of precipitating the desired event. A metonymical shift of this meaning is illustrated by the expressions *время терпим* 'time would wait; there's still time' and *время не терпим* 'time would not wait'.

2.2.2 Aspectual properties

Терпеть 1.2 as well as *терпеть* 1.1 is an imperfectivum tantum. The delimitative derivative *потерпеть* is no aspectual correlate of *терпеть*; it means ‘*терпеть* for some time’, e. g. *потерпи, и я все тебе отдам* ‘be patient, and I will pay back everything’.

2.2.3 Constructions

Since no “painful situation” is implied, the verb *терпеть* 1.2 is intransitive.

2.2.4 Derivatives

Some of the derivatives are morphologically the same as of the former meaning: the noun *терпение*, the adjective *терпеливый* (together with the adverb *терпеливо* and the noun *терпеливость*), the verb *вытерпеть* (in this meaning it is used with no object and for the most part with negation).

However, this lexical meaning has its own derivatives, among them a very peculiar noun *нетерпение* (consider the phrase *сгорать от нетерпения* ‘to burn with impatience’). In general, the derivatives of the verb *терпеть* in this lexical meaning tend to include (or to collocate with) negation and to suggest that the person who wants something rejects the scenario of not showing his/her desire and not acting to precipitate the desired event: *нетерпеливый, нетерпеливо, не стерпеть, не утерпеть, не вытерпеть, не терпится, нестерпеж*: e. g. *не утерпел, чтобы не сказать, засмеяться*, etc. ‘could not help saying, laughing, etc.’; *Баба тоже не стерпела – кочергой его огрела* ‘The old woman did not endure it either and did not restrain herself from hitting him with a poker’.

Yet another meaning has evolved from the connotations of the meaning in question of the verb *терпеть*, namely, a reference to laborious task performed without expecting immediate result. This connotation has become a lexical meaning of the noun *терпение*. The adjective *терпеливый* may also be used in this way, e. g. *И Кларе открылся его затылок: как у мальчика слабый затылок, но обработанный **терпеливым** умелым парикмахером* ‘Klara could see the back of his neck. It was scrawny, like that of a little boy, but it had received the *unhurried* attention of a skillful hairdresser’ (Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *In the First Circle*). It should be noted that the verb itself does not have this lexical meaning; in other words, it never refers to performing laborious task.

2.2.5 Cultural evaluation

The ability to wait and to work without expecting immediate result is positively valued in the linguistic worldview. The following proverb refers to such a work: *Терпенье и труд все перепрут* ‘Perseverance and labor will win’.

3 Терпеть 2 (tolerance)

3.1.1 Explication

X *терпит* Y ‘A person X does not like some other person or a thing Y; however, X expresses no dissatisfaction’

In the context of negation, a distinctly negative evaluation of Y by X is emphasized: X *не терпит* / *терпеть не может* Y ‘X does not / cannot tolerate Y’, e. g. *Я не терплю ресторанов, водочки, закусок, музычки – и задушевных бесед* (Vladimir Nabokov, *Drugie Berega*; cf. the English version in his *Speak, Memory*: *I happen to have a morbid dislike for restaurants and cafés... I detest crowds, harried waiters, Bohemians, vermouth concoctions, coffee, zakuski, floor shows and so forth*); *Они сидели и беседовали как равный с равным, вполне приятно, хотя каждый из них презирал и терпеть не мог другого* ‘They sat and talked as equals, amicably, even though each despised and loathed the other’ (Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *In the First Circle*).

3.1.2 Aspectual properties

The perfective quasi-correlate *потерпеть* in this meaning is almost exclusively used with negation, e. g. *...она знает толк в нарядах, в книгах и в хорошей обстановке, и у себя дома не потерпела бы такой комнатки, как эта, где пахнет сапогами и дешевой водкой* ‘...she has a good taste in dress, in furniture, in books, and in her own home she would not have put up with a room like this, smelling of boots and cheap vodka’ (Anton Chekhov, *Neighbors*); *Я не потерплю в своем доме воров* ‘I cannot put up with thieves in my house’ (Anton Chekhov, *An Upheaval*).

3.1.3 Constructions

Терпеть 2 requires a direct object, which may only be omitted in case it is evident from the context, e. g. *Василисе казалось, что никто ее больше не замечает, никто с ней не считается, а только терпят* ‘It seemed to Vasilisa that nobody noticed her anymore, nobody gave her consideration; they put up with her that was all’ (Valentin Rasputin, *Vasili and Vasilisa*). (Consider, however, the famous Prayer of the Optina Elders mentioned below, in the *Concluding remarks*.)

3.1.4 Derivatives

The adjectives *терпимый* and *нетерпимый* (and, accordingly, the nouns *терпимость* and *нетерпимость*) are derived from this meaning of the verb *терпеть*. These words refer to the ability / inability of being patient and not hostile towards the views, opinions and behavior of other people (roughly, ‘tolerant/intolerant’). They should be distinguished from the passive adjective *терпимый* and its negated form *нетерпимый* (roughly, ‘tolerable/intolerable’). Consider the examples from the Russian National Corpus: *...будьте терпимы к нам, как и мы терпимы к вам* (Василий Аксенов); *Даже терпимого Павла Алексеевича он умел вывести из себя* (Людмила Улицкая); *Экстремальный жизненный опыт не сделал*

Райх-Раницкого ни более снисходительным к писательскому тщеславию, ни более **терпимым** к людским слабостям вообще (Ревекка Фрумкина), on the one hand ('tolerant'), and «Ну как, – говорю я, – что там передают насчёт погоды? Ветер с востока?» «Нет, – радостно отвечают москвичи, – ветер юго-западный до умеренного». – «Ну, если до умеренного, – говорю, – это ещё **терпимо**» (Фазиль Искандер); А тут круговая порука. Разве это в советской школе **терпимо**? (Юрий Домбровский); Он недоумевал: «Как же можно так жить? Вы же все нищие!» Соседи, в свою очередь удивлённые его восприятием того, что им казалось вполне **терпимым**, обычным, отвечали: «Почему же? У нас есть всё необходимое – жильё, еда, мы одеты, работаем, живём дружно...» (Ирина Архипова); ...это было ещё **терпимое** неудобство (Вячеслав Пьецух), on the other ('tolerable').

3.1.5 Cultural evaluation

The attitude referred to with the verb *терпеть* 2 does not have a component of evaluation since the reason why the person chooses not to express his/her dissatisfaction may lie in selfish considerations. It may also be perceived as a kind of humiliation by its object.

The same is true with regard to *терпимость* and *нетерпимость*. To quote Vladimir Solovyov again:

- Особая разновидность терпеливости есть качество, которому присвоено по-русски неправильное в грамматическом отношении название терпимости (*passivum pro activo*). Так называется допущение чужой свободы, хотя бы предполагалось, что она ведет к теоретическим и практическим заблуждениям. И это свойство и отношение не есть само по себе ни добродетель, ни порок, а может быть в различных случаях тем или другим, смотря по предмету (наприм., торжествующее злодеяние сильного над слабым не должно быть терпимо, и потому «терпимость» к нему не добродетельна, а безнравственна), главным же образом – смотря по внутренним мотивам, каковыми могут быть здесь великодушие, и малодушие, и уважение к правам других, и пренебрежение к их благу, и глубокая уверенность в побеждающей силе высшей истины, и равнодушие к этой истине (*The Justification of the Good*).

A particular variety of patience is the quality which is designated in the Russian language by the grammatically incorrect term '*terpimost*' – tolerance (*passivum pro activo*). It means the admission of other people's freedom even when it seems to lead to error. This attitude is in itself neither a vice nor a virtue, but may in different circumstances, become either. It depends on the object to which it refers (thus injury of the weak by the strong must not be tolerated, and 'tolerance' of it is immoral and not virtuous), and still more, on the inner motives from which it arises. It may spring from the magnanimity or from cowardice, from respect for the rights of others and from contempt of the good of others, from profound faith in the conquering power of the higher truth and from indifference to that truth (Solovyov 1918: 104).

However, more often than not *терпимость* is evaluated positively. It is often named among other human virtues. Anna Gladkova has suggested that it is regarded in the Russian "naïve" axiology as an essential quality in interpersonal relations, especially within a family. She adds

that this quality is more often associated with women than with men. Many women providing information about themselves on a Russian website of single people looking for partners write that they are *терпимы* (along with such qualities as being *оптимистичны*, *жизнерадостны*, *общительны*) presenting it as one of their virtues. Apparently, they do so because they think that this quality will be attractive to men and that it will convey their ability to accept weakness and faults in men, e. g. excessive drinking (Gladkova, 2007, p. 151).

In her contrastive analysis of two virtues in English and Russian (*tolerant* and *терпимый*), Anna Gladkova states that *tolerant* has a more “social” character since it is an attitude towards something seen as deviating from social norms. *Терпимый* is more personal since it is a reaction towards personal offense. She attributes the differences in meaning to different cultural ideas prevailing in Russian- and English-speaking society. *Tolerant* is related to the idea of ‘not imposing one’s views on others’ and to the idea of social harmony as an opportunity for people to behave and think in the way they want. *Терпимый* is about not developing negative reactions to other people’s behavior and about maintaining the social harmony of positive feelings among people (Gladkova, 2007, p. 159-164). However, *терпимость* may be used to refer to the respect for other people’s views. Consider the following reasoning: *Терпимость – любимая категория и высшая ценность Самойлова. На переходе к терпимому обществу мы должны прежде всего научиться уважать любое другое мнение, даже не нравящееся нам. / Дай-то Бог. Всем нам* ‘Tolerance is Samoilov’s favorite category and supreme value. At the transition to a tolerant society, we have to learn to respect other people’s opinion even when we dislike it. / God grant it. To all of us’ (Alexander Solzhenitsyn on David Samoilov).

4 *Терпеть* 3 (lexical function)

4.1.1 *Explication*

X терпит Y ‘Something bad Y happens to X’

The verb is used in collocation to refer to experiencing a negative condition, e. g. *терпеть поражение* ‘to suffer defeat’. Since it is a manifestation of the lexical function OPER, it is semantically void in the context of its keywords; the semantic component ‘something bad’ is included in the meaning of the possible keywords. It is idiomatic to a certain extent: it only collocates with nouns denoting ‘bad conditions’; however, all nouns denoting ‘bad conditions’ do not collocate with it.

4.1.2 *Aspectual properties*

If the keyword denotes a state, *терпеть* 3 is an imperfectivum tantum (and no delimitative verb can be derived from it: consider *терпеть нужду*, but not **потерпеть нужду*). If the keyword denotes an event, he may be used as a “trivial” aspectual correlate of *потерпеть* (Зализняк, Шмелев, 2000, p. 56): *потерпеть/терпеть поражение*; *потерпеть/терпеть неудачу* ‘to suffer a setback’. A special type of aspectual correlation is represented by such constructions as *потерпеть / терпеть аварию* ‘to get into accident’; *бедствие*,

катастрофу ‘to suffer a disaster’; *кораблекрушение* ‘to suffer a shipwreck’. The imperfective member of such a pair can denote a state resulting from the event denoted by the perfective member, this state may last for some time.

4.1.3 Constructions

As a manifestation of the LF OPER, *терпеть* 3 requires a direct object (a keyword). It is rare for it to be used with no object when “the bad condition” can be inferred from the context (e. g. an indirect object). Consider: *...такой просвещенный гость, и терпим, от кого же? от каких-нибудь негодных клопов* ‘Such a cultured visitor and to suffer from what? – Worthless bugs’ (Nikolai Gogol, *The Inspector General*).

4.1.4 Derivatives

Терпеть 3 has few derivatives. The substantivized participle *потерпевший* / *потерпевшая* ‘victim; injured party’ is a legal term. The syntactic valence of an object is reduced, but the semantic valence remains obligatory and is to be filled on the basis of the situation. In addition, *терпеть* 3 has the verbs *претерпеть* and *претерпевать* (a “potential” aspectual pair in terms of (Зализняк, Шмелев, 2000)) among its derivatives as well as the saturative verb *натерпеться*.

4.1.5 Cultural evaluation

Since the situation denoted by the collocation with *терпеть* 3 is beyond control, it has no evaluation in the Russian “naïve” axiology; meanwhile the disastrous state of the person in question can arouse sympathy.

5 Concluding remarks

The verb *терпеть* as it usually is with polysemous words (Шмелев 1973) has vague uses, which are difficult to assign to one of its lexical meanings. Thus, the famous Prayer of the Optina Elders addresses God with the following words:

- ...научи меня молиться, надеяться, верить, любить, **терпеть** и прощать!

The attitude denoted by *терпеть* is mentioned along with other important virtues. One might think that we deal with a very rare absolutive usage *терпеть* 2, which roughly means ‘to be tolerant’. On the other hand, (Gladkova, 2007, p. 144) cites this prayer and translates the above words as “...teach me to pray, to hope, to believe, to love, to endure and to forgive” implicitly suggesting that a reference is made to the ability of accepting sufferings (*to endure*). It should be noted that in the accepted English version of the prayer, the verb *to suffer* is used: *teach me to pray, to believe, to hope, to suffer, to forgive, and to love*. The more so, the verb *to suffer* is somewhat vague and has tolerating other people’s defects among its readings: e. g. the Church Slavonic *долготерпеливый* is rendered into English as *long-suffering*. The morale of this story is that the semantic potential of *терпеть* is by no means unique to Russian; however, the linguistic characteristics of the verb (including its derivational patterns) are

language-specific in the sense that the whole set of its lexical meanings (as well as of its derivatives) reflects Russian cultural values.

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