



The Foregrounding  
Function of Praesens  
Historicum  
in Russian  
Translated  
Adventure  
Narratives  
(20th Century)

Выдвижение  
как функция  
настоящего  
исторического  
в русских  
переводах  
приключенческой  
литературы  
(XX век)

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Abstract

This research focuses on the functioning of praesens historicum forms which Russian translators use to substitute for English narrative forms referring to past events. The study applies the Theory of Grounding and Russian Communicative Functional Grammar to the comparative discourse analysis of English-language adventure stories and novels created in the 19th and 20th centuries and their Russian translations. The Theory of Grounding is still not widely used in Russian translation studies, nor have its concepts and fruitful ideas been related to the achievements of Russian Narratology and Func-

tional Grammar. This article presents an attempt to find a common basis in these academic traditions as they relate to discourse analysis and to describe the role of *praesens historicum* forms in Russian translated adventure narratives. The corpus includes 22 original texts and 72 Russian translations, and the case study involves six Russian translations of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, focusing on the translation made by Korney Chukovsky, who employed historic present more often than in other translations of the novel. It is shown that the translation strategy of substituting the original English-language past forms with Russian present forms is realized in foregrounded and focalized segments of the text, giving them additional saliency. This strategy relates the use of historic present to the functions of deictic words and words denoting visual or aural perception, locating the deictic center of the narrative in the spacetime of the events and allowing the reader to join the focalizing WHO (a narrator or a hero). Translations that regularly mark the foreground through the use of the historic present and accompanying lexical-grammatical means are often addressed to young readers.

#### Keywords

historic present, foregrounding, adventure narrative, translation, deictic center, focalization

#### Резюме

В исследовании рассматривается функционирование форм настоящего исторического, которые русские переводчики английской приключенческой литературы используют при интерпретации оригинальных форм прошедшего времени. Сопоставительный композиционно-лингвистический анализ переводных вариантов приключенческих повестей и романов основывается на идеях и понятиях теории первого плана и фона (Theory of Grounding) и русской коммуникативно-функциональной грамматики. Теория первого плана и фона, активно развивающаяся за рубежом, до сих пор практически не применяется в отечественном переводоведении, а её открытия не соотнесены с достижениями русских нарратологических и функциональных грамматических исследований. Данная статья представляет попытку сопоставить эти научные традиции применительно к функциональным текстovým характеристикам настоящего исторического, с опорой на материал русских переводов. Корпус исследования составили 22 англоязычных произведения приключенческого жанра и 72 их русских перевода, выполненных в XX веке, материалом для анализа в статье стали переводы романа "Приключения Тома Сойера" М. Твена. В центре внимания — вариант К. И. Чуковского, в котором настоящее историческое используется значительно чаще, чем в других переводах. Сопоставительный анализ оригинальных и переводных текстов показывает, что настоящее историческое появляется в переводе фокализованных фрагментов, принадлежащих первому плану текста, и сообщает им дополнительное выдвижение. Презенсные формы взаимодействуют с дейктическими словами и перцептивной лексикой, поддерживая локализацию дейктического центра нарратива в хронотопе событий и позволяя читателю присоединиться к точке зрения наблюдающего героя или повествователя. Переводы, допол-

нительно выделяющие первый план при помощи форм настоящего исторического и сопутствующих лексико-грамматических средств, часто адресованы детской аудитории.

#### Ключевые слова

настоящее историческое, выдвижение, первый план, перевод, приключенческая литература, дейктический центр, фокализация

## Introduction

In studying 20th-century Russian translations of English-language adventure novels, one can encounter praesens historicum used to render original past tense narrative forms, and the frequency of the employment of this device varies from one translation of the text to another. Some Russian translators use historic narrative often, others stick to past forms, and in many texts both of these methods of presenting past events appear. Focusing on the functioning of praesens historicum in translated adventure narratives, comparative research requires thorough study of the contexts in which the form appears. Attention should be drawn to the semantic and compositional characteristics of original texts that make the employment of historic present in Russian translation more probable, and to the linguistic means that appear in translated texts together with praesens historicum, supporting its use. The idea of clustering grammatical and semantic properties in a text according to its cognitive structure, offered by the Theory of Grounding, can be applied in this analysis together with similar findings of Narratology and Communicative Functional Grammar.

## The Theory of Grounding and the ‘Salience’ of Historic Present

The distinction between figure and ground, offered in Gestalt psychology, was used in textual analysis already in the middle of the 20th century [LABOV, WALETZKY 1967], but the linguistic underpinnings for the Theory of Grounding were thoroughly described only later, in the famous work by P. Hopper and S. Thomson [HOPPER, THOMSON 1980]. As the authors state in the article, “the distinction between foregrounded and backgrounded parts of a text [. . .] is perhaps the most basic one that can be drawn” [IBID.: 280]. Studying the characteristics of foregrounded clauses and describing the “cluster of properties” that help to highlight core information and constitute the “skeleton” of a narrative, Hopper and Thomson draw attention to the correspondence of

these properties to the means, rendering higher transitivity to a clause. The described cluster includes semantic (kinesis, punctuality, volitionality, affirmation) and formal (aspect, mode) characteristics of a predicate and the requirements for participants: subject (preferably agentive) and object (individuated and affected by the action expressed in the predicate). This set of markers reflects the idea that the ‘typical’ foreground in a narrative denotes dynamic, telic, controlled actions made by active, mostly animate, participants.

Illustrating the interrelations between transitivity and grounding, Hopper and Thomson use the material of many languages, including English and Russian (and also Malay, Chinese, French, Hindi, Samoan, and others). They suggest that “the foregrounded / backgrounded distinction is a universal—having its origins in central communicative and perhaps psychological functions” [IBID.: 283]. Describing the aspect of a verb as a grounding factor, the authors mention that “the discourse imposes a perfective interpretation on foregrounded events.” According to their data, 88% of the foregrounded clauses (compared to 27% of the backgrounded clauses) in the analyzed texts include a perfective predicate. Perfectiveness in different languages is semantically associated with telicity, and the boundaries for each action “provided by the progression of the discourse” are supported by the morphological category of aspect, if a language possesses one. Hopper and Thomson do not comment on the tense-aspect relations in different languages, and in their texts the foregrounded forms stand only in the past tense. Praesens historicum forms are not analyzed. There are two important comments to be made here. First, the authors stress the idea that “there is no single marker of foregrounding,” so any morphological feature can be interpreted as a grounding factor only within its specific context. Second, the corpus of the texts analyzed by Hopper and Thomson includes simple narratives (biographies, historical texts, travel stories), and not, as they say, “highly-polished” belletristic writing, which is why some stylistic devices employed in fiction are not discussed in their analysis. Nevertheless, the cluster of grounding properties described in their work seems highly convincing and applicable in the analysis of different types of discourse.

Many scholars have employed the Theory of Grounding in discourse and translation studies, although few works have included substantial Russian material in this research. C. V. CHVANY in several articles [1985A; 1985B; 1990] presented the idea of ‘Salience Hierarchy’ of linguistic means used in English, Russian, and Bulgarian texts, and described the phenomenon of grounding not as a dichotomy, but as a scale. Each clause in the text acquires points for having salient features, semantic or formal. These features correspond to Hopper and Thomson’s list of properties, but they are presented as scales also. For example, telicity and punctuality of a predicate are interpreted in the context of the situation type: State (0 points)—Habit (1 point)—Activity

(2 points)—Event / Achievement (3 points)—Accomplishment / Culmination (4 points).<sup>1</sup> Taking into account the special features of Slavic grammar, the author assigns more points to Transitive sentences than to Impersonal sentences. The elaborated scale of syntactic subordination attributes salience to the main clause, whereas different kinds of subordinates and embeddings (participles, predicate nominal, etc.) are assigned a lesser point value.

Chvany adds a new ‘axis’ in the list of grounding properties, dialogue vs. narrative, which reflects the foregrounding effect of direct speech. She also offers to add a point for present tense in narration. For our current study this innovation is highly relevant. It explicates the salience of deictic means (*ego-hic-nunc*) employed in the text and highlights the special foregrounding function of praesens historicum forms (which are imperfective in aspect but denote telic actions). Of course, not all present forms in the narration are equally prominent. In the article “Verbal Aspect, Discourse Saliency, and the So-called ‘Perfect of Result’ in Modern Russian,” Chvany makes the exact distinction between ‘neutral’ historic present, used to retell the plot of the story or a person’s biography, and foregrounding ‘dramatic present,’ used in contrast with the context in the past narrative as a cinematic ‘close-up’: *Vyshel starik na bereg i govorit . . . ; Devochka voshla v domik i vidit . . .* [CHVANY 1990: 224]. Chvany tests her scheme in the comparative analysis of a prose text by Marina Tsvetaeva (which is partly narrative and partly non-sequential) and its English and Bulgarian translations, explicating differences in salience of the linguistic means used. This is the first implementation of Saliency Hierarchy to a comparative study based on Russian material.

The idea of markedness of present verb forms in a narration becomes central in the studies of S. Fleischman, who considers grounding as a textual function used for “signaling levels of salience or information relevance—for creating texture within text” [FLEISCHMAN 1990: 6]. Remodeling the scheme offered by Hopper and Thomson, Fleischman introduces new properties of grounding in the text. These are: temporal sequence, human importance, causality (significance in developing the plot), and unpredictability/unexpectedness. As we can see, the psychological salience of events moves into the focus of the present research. Analyzing French medieval narratives, Fleischman points out the interrelation of these semantic properties in the foregrounded clauses, which include present tense forms: “He gives him his word; and Aucassin puts him on a horse, and himself mounts another, then led him away until he reached safety.” The author draws us to the conclusion:

The function of tense forms in narrative is frequently not the basic tense function of temporal reference, which in most narrative forms is established a priori as past.

<sup>1</sup> Chvany refers to the adaptations of Z. Vendler’s classes “in light of Slavic grammatical systems” discussed by R. BRECHT [1985].

Rather, tense contrasts may be pressed into pragmatic service in the organization of narrative discourse [IDEM 1985: 851].

Fleischman is sure that within the narrative text, present becomes a marked tense, in contrast to everyday communication, where this form is usually perceived as unmarked, neutral. According to the author's observations, the present form is employed in many languages to do the 'textual' work of foregrounding, because it helps to create a special effect:

... by abandoning the distanced, dispassionate posture of the historian and representing material in the fashion of an eyewitness observer, a narrator communicates to an audience that the information reported in the present tense clauses (events or description) is deserving of attention [IDEM 1990: 356].

Developing the study of cognitive and pragmatic aspects of grounding, N. KOYAMA [2004] relates Fleischman's criteria to the basic notions of Deictic Shift Theory [DUCHAN ET AL. 1995]. The deictic center ("the moving spacetime location from which the sentences are interpreted" [SEGAL 1995: 15]) includes four components in this research: WHO—WHEN—WHERE—WHAT, the last one described as "an object of intention by a WHO." This change of the traditional triad (*ego-hic-nunc*) into the four-element scheme correlates with the Theory of Grounding, where the strong relation between the subject and the object of an action is a salient feature. The Deictic Shift Theory incorporates some narratological ideas, for example, it postulates an opposition of the focalizing WHO (a perceiving subject, through whose eyes the events are seen) and the focalized WHO (the subject being the focus of the reader's attention). This opposition is spread onto the temporal deictic elements: "the focalizing WHEN is linguistically realized in the unmarked past tense sequentially connecting one event to another [. . .] A new time frame is introduced as the focalized WHEN, which is projected from the *story-now* time frame established by the focalizing WHEN" [KOYAMA 2004: 8]. Analyzing modern Japanese narrative, Koyama makes the observation that grounding and deixis are "in fact two sides of the same coin." The shifts of deictic center (according to any of the three main deictic axes) are crucial elements of the narration which attract the reader's attention and stimulate his or her cognitive activity in interpreting the text. Among the number of foregrounding linguistic means that are found in such segments of the analyzed texts, praesens historicum is one of the most widespread. "But why use 'historic present' if only it tags temporally sequenced narrative segments in the same way as past forms? The use of present in temporal order highlights a sense of *ongoingness* in addition to foregrounding the skeleton of the story. [. . .] It projects a strong sense of being there—for readers to be vicariously at the very time and place of event" [IBID.: 23]. The author describes historic present as one of the "fundamental (but not universal) features of Japanese foregrounded segments."

These observations can be compared to the idea expressed in the article “The historical present in Charlotte Brontë’s novels: Some discourse functions” by L. J. Brinton. Praesens historicum realizes its function in a text “not by making an event present, but by marking segments of a narrative, foregrounding events (that is, signalling that one event is particularly important, relevant to others) and marking a shift to evaluation” [BRINTON 1992].

In summary, we can highlight several important aspects that the Theory of Grounding (in its various modern versions) adds to the traditional view of praesens historicum in a text. First of all, considering the form and its usage in terms of textual salience, the potential to draw the reader’s attention, the Theory of Grounding focuses on key pragmatic functions of historic present. Second, it stresses the essential relation of this form to the range of deictic means that serve as devices of focalization in a narrative. And third, it gives an opportunity to look at the grammar and lexical context of historic present from a new angle, observing the different linguistic means that work in tandem with this verb form in foregrounding certain segments of a text.

### Pragmatics of Praesens Historicum: Russian Narratology and Functional Grammar

Present narrative forms have traditionally attracted a great deal of attention in Russian poetic, stylistic, and linguistic studies. The variety of terms, or ‘labels,’ suggested to denote this phenomenon (among them “vivid, pictorial present” [ПЕШКОВСКИЙ 1927: 208], “narrative present” [ГРАММАТИКА 1954: 484], “descriptive present” [РОЗЕНТАЛЬ, ТЕЛЕНКОВА 1976: 194], and “imaginary present” [КРУГОСВЕТ 1997–2016]) can give an idea of the different approaches to interpretation of the form and its usage. It has been noted that the forming and functioning of praesens historicum is connected to the aspectual characteristics of Russian verbs [МАСЛОВ 1984; БУЛЫГИНА, ШМЕЛЕВ 1997; ЗАЛИЗНЯК, ШМЕЛЕВ 2000; ПЕТРУХИНА 2009]. Correlating members of aspectual pairs have been described according to their semantic and grammatical potential (e.g., *печь* (process)—*испечь* (accomplishment); *ударять* (process, consisting of multiple events)—*ударить* (one event); *понимать* (state)—*понять* (event), and so forth): if the member of the pair in the perfect aspect denotes an event, the verb in the imperfect aspect can acquire the same meaning in present narrative context.

Some of the approaches to the study of praesens historicum can be described as being ‘based on grammar,’ that is, focusing on the linguistic transposition of present form used to denote a past event in various contexts; other approaches can be described as being ‘based on text,’ focusing on the general compositional (poetic, stylistic) and pragmatic effects of the use of historic pres-



ent. The first group of studies highlights the contrast of the present tense form to the surrounding context, which semantically and grammatically refers to the past [БОНДАРКО 1971; МАСЛОВ 1984; ИВАНОВ 2001]. Language elements that are in contrast, or in ‘conflict,’ with present tense are pointed out and thoroughly characterized. The second group relates the use of praesens historicum to a specific point of reference within a special perspective chosen by the author. B. A. Uspenskij writes in his *Poetics of Composition* that “each time a present tense form is used, there is a synchronic authorial position, that is, the author is located, so to say, in the same time as the described character” [УСПЕНСКИЙ 1970: 97]. E. V. Paducheva adds a very important observation: “The difference between the use of present and past tense forms has to do not with the narrator’s view of the events, but with the relationship between the narrator and the reader: present tense, so to say, includes the reader in a dialogue, locates him or her in the described space and time where the narrator<sup>2</sup> is also present, whereas past form moves the narrator—and the described situation—away from the reader” [ПАДУЧЕВА 1996: 289]. Using the terms of Deictic Shift Theory, we can say that in a case in which historic present is used, the reader is allowed to enter into the deictic center of the narration, into the spacetime of the events.

This view leads to a study of language means that verbalize the deictic center and its shifts in the text. Contemporary Russian linguistic theories, developing the ideas of A. Potebnya, K. Bühler, B. Russell, C. Bally, E. Benveniste, and V. Vinogradov, suggest a range of concepts to study these means. They offer taxonomies of “shifter categories” [ЯКОБСОН 1972: 100], “egocentric elements” [ПАДУЧЕВА 1996: 258], and “actualizing categories” [ШМЕЛЕВА 1984: 82]. Russian Functional Communicative Grammar describes the use of deictic words in different text types, opposing perception to interpretation and generalization [ЗОЛОТОВА ET AL. 1998: 29–30]. Historic present appears in text segments describing perception, it co-acts with Russian deictic pronouns, prepositions, and particles, words denoting visual, audial, tactile, and other impressions from the real or imagined events. It is employed in syntactic models that present actions happening at an exact (that is, a specific) place and time. Russian Functional Communicative Grammar offers a description of morphological, syntactical, and lexical elements used in narratives that present perception of events, and this is very helpful for studying the contexts where praesens historicum appears.

The other important taxonomy, offered by V. V. Vinogradov and elaborated by Functional Communicative Grammar, concerns textual functions of Russian tense-aspect forms. Past forms in perfective aspect realize ‘aoristic’ (denoting singular telic actions) and ‘perfective’ (denoting changes of states) functions that design the figure (foreground) of the story and move the plot forward,

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<sup>2</sup> By the “narrator” here, Paducheva means a focalizing WHO that is attributed to the speaker, through whose eyes we can see the described events in the narrative.



whereas past forms in imperfective aspect denote processes or habitual actions and “outline the wide contours of the past” [ВИНОГРАДОВ 1936: 138], and see also [ЗОЛОТОВА ET AL. 1998: 27–28]. The use of praesens historicum forms creates a special case: the imperfective aspect here can denote telic, punctual actions: “Я **сажаю** ее, бледную, дрожащую, в санки, **обхватываю** рукой и вместе с нею **низвергаюсь** в бездну . . .” (From “A Joke” by Anton Chekhov: ‘I seat her, pale and trembling, in the sledge, put my arm around her and together with her plunge into the abyss’<sup>3</sup>). The verb forms in bold are building the ‘skeleton’ of the story, moving it forward. Although usually attributed to the past tense forms in perfective aspect, this foregrounding, plot-building role can be realized by historic present, which makes the events even more salient by the “subjective shift of temporal perspective” [ВИНОГРАДОВ 1947: 573].

We can see that these ideas about the textual role of historic present and characteristics of its context are comparable to the findings of the Theory of Grounding and Deictic Shift Theory. The description of textual functions of Russian tense-aspect forms together with special grammar and lexical means locating the deictic center and marking the shifts of the ‘point of view’ in the narration, which is offered by Russian Functional Communicative Grammar studies, enables the researcher to carry out an analysis of focalized and foregrounded segments of Russian narratives.

The Theory of Grounding has not been widely applied to Russian material (and the works by P. Hopper and S. Thomson, S. Fleishman, C. Chvany, and N. Koyama have not been translated into Russian), so the detailed ‘testing’ of this theory in Russian discourse analysis is a matter for future investigations. But some observations concerning the salience of praesens historicum have already been made, and they are very interesting. E. V. Paducheva points out that present forms can be used instead of past forms in a narrative only if they describe events that are followed by some other events. For example, if we take the final phrase of the story “In a Tram” by M. Zoshchenko: “Через две остановки злополучный пассажир сошел с трамвая” (= ‘On the third stop the irritating passenger got out of the tram’) and change it into historic present: “Через две остановки злополучный пассажир сходит с трамвая” (= ‘On the third stop the irritating passenger gets out of the tram’), we will not be able to use this sentence as the final one, for the reader will remain in suspense, waiting for some further development of the situation. Paducheva supposes that this feature reflects the invariant backgrounding function of imperfective aspect [ПАДУЧЕВА 1996: 289–290]. But another interpretation is also possible here: the narration cannot be finished with the historic present form because of the maximum focalization

<sup>3</sup> Compare this back-translation to the variant offered by M. Fell: ‘I **seated** her, all pale and trembling, in the little sled, **put** my arm around her, and together we **plunged** into the abyss’ [Chekhov-Fell 1915].

created in the passage. The reader is located in the spacetime of the events, the character has entered the focus of our attention—and we expect that something should happen to him now. After that we need some device that either takes the reader out of the deictic center of the narration (and this is done in the story by Zoshchenko) or removes this character from the focus of the reader's attention, for example, “Пассажир сходит с трамвая и исчезает за углом” (= “The passenger gets out of the tram and disappears around the corner”).

O. K. Iriskhanova, presenting the Theory of Grounding to Russian readers in the monograph *Semantics, Syntax, and the Pragmatics of De-focalization*, points out that the events verbalized in narrative present “acquire the highest saliency” at the level of the text as a whole [ИРИСХАНОВА 2014: 191], and that various linguistic means “support each other” in directing attention to such segments of the narrative. The research in this sphere is continuing, and studying the means and devices of foregrounding in Russian texts [УРЖА 2012], as compared to those in English, can provide more information about the functional potential of Russian grammar.

## Russian Historic Present in Comparative Contexts

Praesens historicum is considered as a universal stylistic device “conventionally used (in English and a very wide range of languages) to make the narrative appear more vivid” [HUDDLESTON, PULLUM 2002: 130]; comparative grammar studies, however, do not focus on this form, leaving the description of subtleties differentiating the use of historic present in various languages to stylistics. Turning to investigations in the realm of style, one can easily discover that Russian and English traditions of using historic present are rather different. Sporadic implementation of praesens historicum in Old Church Slavonic translations from Greek before the 14th century (most praesens historicum forms in the Greek originals were translated by forms of the aorist in Old Church Slavonic at that time) shifted to regular use of such forms in later translations [ПЕНТКОВСКАЯ 2008] and in original texts (for example, in chronicles) from the 14th and 15th centuries, and then gradually shifted to a stylistic device [ВИНОГРАДОВ 1947: 572] based on the functional opposition to the past narrative. This method became so widespread that large portions of a literary text could be written entirely in historic present (as in “A Joke” by Anton Chekhov). In English literary narration this device has been more limited, with style and composition guides recommending writers to be cautious with it: “The historical present is one of the boldest of figures and, as is the case with all figures, its overuse makes a style cheap and ridiculous” [ROYSTER, THOMPSON 1919: 179].

In translation, Russian historic present was regularly changed into English past tense forms in the 19th and in the first part of the 20th century (this was the

case, for example, with two English translations of “A Joke” made by M. Fell, in 1915, and C. Garnett, in 1922). Susan Bassnett pointed out a similar trend, citing the monograph *On Translation* by H. Belloc (1931), that recommended “French historic present to be translated into the English narrative tense, which is past” [BASSNETT 2002: 120]. It is interesting that the situation has been changing over the last several decades: narration in present has become more and more popular in various literatures, including English and American [BJORLING 2004], and Russian novels by V. Makanin, L. Petrushevskaya, and others that employ present forms denoting past events are rendered in English by present forms (unlike the translations of Chekhov made a century ago) [УРЖА 2014А].

In comparison, if we turn to 19th- and 20th-century Russian translations of English literature, we observe a typical situation: an English-language narrative employing past tense forms is presented by means of several Russian translated versions, using either past narrative or historic present. But why did some translators prefer present forms while other stuck to narration in the past? What effect does each choice produce? Comparative discourse analysis of Russian translations using or avoiding praesens historicum can give us evidence to describe the pragmatics of this form and its functional context. The role of historic present in foregrounding segments of the narrative and focalizing some information in it can be assessed in different literary genres. We will focus on adventure literature, which addresses both children and adults. Interpreting the original differently, translators change the effect made on the target audience, and the role of historic present in designing the pragmatics of translated discourse can be revealed in the analysis of such material.

## Praesens Historicum in Russian Translations of Adventure Literature

For tales and adventure stories the distinction of figure (main events) and ground (details and descriptions) is quite natural, and it is even more significant if the text is addressed to children. A number of scholars of the Theory of Grounding use the image of a pop-up picture book as a metaphor illustrating the structure of narrative discourse, and, as we know, such books are made for young readers, for they visually present adventurous plots. In the adventure genre the readers’ attention is bound to the main line of the story, while the details of the background can be left aside, sometimes being noticed only during a re-reading of the text.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, many translators of adventure literature also pay more attention to the foreground. A special study showed that incorrectness in translating small details of background, such as the character’s hair color or some gestures or states, if they do not mean much for the whole narrative and are not specially marked, occurs much more often than similar mistakes in translating foregrounded elements of adventure texts [УРЖА 2009: 211–216].

*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain can be regarded as a representative case here. Describing their impressions of the book on internet forums, some readers confess that they skipped from one key episode to another when they were reading this book in childhood, while others say that they also liked the descriptions and comments of the author. In the preface to the book, Mark Twain noted that the text was addressed to two types of readers:

Although my book is intended mainly for the entertainment of boys and girls, I hope it will not be shunned by men and women on that account, for part of my plan has been to try to pleasantly remind adults of what they once were themselves, and of how they felt and thought and talked, and what queer enterprises they sometimes engaged in [TWIN 1982: 3].

The novel contains narrative sections and lively dialogues; the foreground is formed by the dynamic actions of the characters and their remarks, while the descriptions of the settings and the customs of the epoch [HILL 1961: 379, POWERS 1973: 311], as well as the ironic comments of the narrator, form the vast zone of background that supports the plot, but requires some additional attention and, so to say, the reader's own experience in life as reference.

In Russia *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* has always been very popular, and there have been several translations of the text made in the 20th century (M. Nikolayeva [ТВЕН-НИКОЛАЕВА 1901], Z. N. Zhuravskaya [ТВЕН-ЖУРАВСКАЯ 1909], E. A. Kudasheva [ТВЕН-КУДАШЕВА 1911], M. A. Engelgardt [ТВЕН-ЭНГЕЛЬГАРТ 1911], N. L. Daruzes [ТВЕН-ДАРУЗЕС 1949], and K. I. Chukovsky [ТВЕН-ЧУКОВСКИЙ 1950]),<sup>5</sup> the last two versions being the best known and republished many times. Comparative analysis of these translations shows that in the variant offered by K. I. Chukovsky, the English past indefinite forms and constructions with complex object are translated by Russian historic present much more often than in any other version (54 forms altogether compared to 10 forms used by N. L. Daruzes, 6 forms used by E. A. Kudasheva and Z. N. Zhuravskaya, and 4 forms used by M. A. Engelgardt and M. Nikolayeva), although the original English text lacks present narrative forms.<sup>6</sup> We find a typical example in the scene at the church, where the Sunday-school superintendent could not find a pupil deserving the reward in the presence of important guests:

<sup>5</sup> The first version of the translation was published in 1935, although later it was amended and published again in 1950. According to K. Chukovsky's notes, he worked on this text over several decades, starting around 1920.

<sup>6</sup> There is only one present narrative form in the entire novel. It is used in the phrase by Tom Sawyer telling about the unexpected adventure in the tavern, and this form (with the inversion) marks the spontaneous speech of the hero: "I tried two of the keys, just as soft as I could; but they seemed to make such a power of racket that I couldn't hardly get my breath I was so scared. They wouldn't turn in the lock, either. Well, without noticing what I was doing, I took hold of the knob, and **open comes the door!** It warn't locked!" [TWIN 1982:169].

Mark Twain	And now at this moment, when hope was dead, Tom Sawyer <b>came forward</b> with nine yellow tickets, nine red tickets, and ten blue ones, and <b>demanded</b> a Bible. This was a thunderbolt out of a clear sky.
M. A. Engelgardt	И вот в эту минуту, когда всякая надежда была потеряна, Том Сойер <b>выступил</b> вперед с девятью желтыми, девятью красными и десятью голубыми билетиками и <b>потребовал</b> Библию! Это был удар грома при ясном небе. (And now at this moment, when all hope was lost, Tom Sawyer <b>came forward</b> with nine yellow, nine red and ten blue tickets, and <b>demanded</b> a Bible. This was a thunderbolt out of a clear sky.)
N. L. Daruzes	И в ту самую минуту, когда всякая надежда покинула его, вперед <b>выступил</b> Том Сойер с девятью желтыми билетиками, девятью красными и десятью синими и <b>потребовал</b> себе Библию. Это был гром среди ясного неба. (And at that very moment, when hope left him, <b>forward came</b> Tom Sawyer with nine yellow tickets, nine red and ten blue and <b>demanded</b> a Bible. This was a thunderbolt out of a clear sky.)
K.I.Chukovsky	И вот в ту минуту, когда его надежда угасла, <b>выступает</b> вперед Том Сойер и <b>предъявляет</b> целую кучу билетиков: девять желтых, девять красных и десять синих, и <b>требует</b> себе в награду библию! Это был удар грома среди ясного неба. (And now at that moment, when his hope faded, <b>comes forward</b> Tom Sawyer and <b>produces</b> a whole lot of tickets: nine yellow, nine red and ten blue and <b>demands</b> a Bible in reward. This was a thunderbolt out of a clear sky).

Praesens historicum appears in Chukovsky's translation in the culminations of the narrative, when the plot of the story twists unexpectedly. We can see in the chosen extract that the actions of the main character, denoted by these forms, are dynamic, telic, and controlled, and that they are also influential—involving some objects and other characters. Tom realizes his energetic nature; he changes the world around him and the plot moves forward, keeping the reader in suspense. Semantically and psychologically, the actions of the main hero are foregrounded in all the translations (and in the original as well), but by using historic present Chukovsky makes them more salient. Let us now look at the verbalization of the deictic categories in the segment. The original text contains the words “and now at this moment” that locate the deictic center in the exact time of the event, letting the reader look at the situation through the eyes of Mr. Walters, a Sunday-school superintendent. So, getting to the focalized ‘now’ of the events is realized in the original text lexically, whereas Chukovsky uses a Russian means of verbalizing this device also grammatically.

We find the same change in the translation of scenes surrounded by dialogues, e.g.:

Mark Twain	K. I. Chukovsky	Back translation
<p>Neither boy spoke. [. . .] Then Tom <b>said</b>: “What’s your name?” “‘Tisn’t any of your business, maybe.” [. . .] Presently they were shoulder to shoulder. Tom <b>said</b>: “Get away from here!” “Go away yourself!” “I won’t.” “I won’t either.” [. . .] The new boy <b>took</b> two broad coppers out of his pocket and <b>held</b> them <b>out</b> with derision. Tom <b>struck</b> them to the ground. In an instant both boys were rolling and tumbling in the dirt, gripped together like cats. [. . .] Presently the confusion <b>took form</b>, and through the fog of battle Tom <b>appeared</b>, seated astride the new boy, and pounding him with his fists. “Holler ‘nuff!” <b>said</b> he. [. . .] At last the stranger <b>got out</b> a smothered “‘Nuff!” and Tom <b>let him up</b> and <b>said</b>: “Now that’ll learn you. Better look out who you’re fooling with next time.” The new boy <b>went off</b> brushing the dust from his clothes, sobbing. . .</p>	<p>Оба мальчика <i>встретились</i> в полном молчании. [. . .] Наконец Том <b>говорит</b>: — Как тебя зовут? — А тебе какое дело? [. . .] Наконец они стоят плечом к плечу. Том <b>говорит</b>: — Убирайся отсюда! — Сам убирайся! — Не желаю. — И я не желаю. [. . .] Чужой мальчик <b>вынимает</b> из кармана два больших медяка и с усмешкой <b>протягивает</b> Тому. Том <b>ударяет</b> его по руке, и медяки <b>летят</b> на землю. Через минуту оба мальчика катаются в пыли, сцепившись, как два кота. [. . .] Наконец неопределенная масса <b>принимает</b> отчетливые очертания, и в дыму сражения <b>становится видно</b>, что Том сидит верхом на враге и молотит его кулаками. — Проси пощады! — <b>требует</b> он. [. . .] Наконец чужой мальчик невнятно <b>бормочет</b>: “Довольно!” — и Том, отпуская его, <b>говорит</b>: — Это тебе наука. В другой раз гляди, с кем связываешься. Чужой мальчик <i>побрел</i> прочь, <i>страхивая</i> с костюмчика пыль, <i>всхлипывая</i>. . .</p>	<p>Both boys <i>met</i> in complete silence. [. . .] At last Tom <b>says</b>: “What’s your name?” “‘Tisn’t any of your business.” [. . .] At last they are standing shoulder to shoulder. Tom <b>says</b>: “Get away from here!” “Go away yourself!” “I won’t.” “I won’t either.” [. . .] The strange boy <b>takes</b> out of the pocket two broad coppers and with derision <b>holds</b> them <b>out</b> to Tom. Tom <b>strikes</b> him by the hand, and the coppers <b>fall</b> to the ground. In an instant both boys are rolling in the dirt, gripped together like two cats. [. . .] At last the confusion <b>takes distinct form</b>, and through the fog of battle it <b>gets</b> seen clearly that Tom is sitting on the enemy, and pounding him with his fists. “Holler ‘nuff!” <b>demands</b> he. [. . .] At last the strange boy <b>gets out</b> a smothered “‘Nuff!” and Tom, letting him up, <b>says</b>: “Now that’ll learn you. Better look out who you’re fooling with next time.” The strange boy <i>went off</i> brushing the dust from his suit, sobbing. . .</p>



In this long passage (it takes three pages in the book, so we present it with some breaks here) Chukovsky makes verbs in present tense perform many textual functions. The highlighted forms translate the original foreground, denoting punctual, telic, sequential actions. (In other Russian translations these actions are verbalized by past forms in perfective aspect, for example, in the version by N. L. Daruzes: *Новый мальчик достал из кармана два больших медяка и насмешливо протянул Тому. Том ударил его по руке, и медяки полетели на землю.* = *The new boy took out of his pocket two broad coppers and with derision held them to Tom. Tom struck him by the hand, and the coppers fell to the ground.*) Other present tense forms in Chukovsky's version denote processes and locations; they design the background and in Russian they can stand only in imperfective aspect. (That is why other translators, who did not change the tense, used past imperfective forms here: *В следующее мгновение оба мальчика катались и барахтались в пыли.* (M. A. Engelgardt) = *In an instant both boys were rolling and tumbling in the dirt.*)

The entire passage in Chukovsky's translation looks like a running commentary, although it borders on narration in the past (see the forms *встретились* 'met' and *побрёл прочь* 'went off' at the beginning and at the end of the passage). What characteristics of the segment inclined the translator to change the past tense forms to present ones? The whole scene of the quarrel is focalized in the original. The word *presently* is repeated to locate the deictic center of the narration in the spacetime of the events. The author uses expressions describing visual and audial perception: *the confusion took form, and through the fog of battle Tom appeared, got out a smothered "Nuff!", both were hot and flushed*, etc. The reader watches the fight through the eyes of the narrator who is imagined to be present at the scene.

Although no present forms are used in the original, there are some 'commenting' phrases without verbs between the characters' statements; they dramatize the passage and look like stage directions: "An uncomfortable pause. Then Tom said . . ." or "Another pause, and more eying and sidling around each other." Twain uses this device four times in the novel. In addition to the description of the fight, these are: the scene where the teacher asks the pupils about the torn book and Tom saves Becky from punishment; the impressions of Huck and Tom watching Injun Joe discovering the buried treasure; and the reaction of Becky's mother, who realizes that her daughter had got lost in the cave. All these are the emotional 'peaks' of the plot, when the reader forgets his own concerns and sympathizes with the characters with all his heart. These segments are focalized and dramatized to the maximum extent.

It can be supposed that the semantic and pragmatic characteristics of the original text, as it draws the reader into the highly focalized and emotive narration, are reflected in the use of historic present in Chukovsky's transla-



tion. We can be sure that, in this case, we observe a specially chosen device, a translator's strategy implemented on purpose (we will not assess it as good or bad, but as a real fact that can be studied). Children are the target audience of this translation, it is really "intended mainly for the entertainment of boys and girls," and there are several other devices that realize Chukovsky's strategy and support the use of historic present in the text.

**1. Growing subjectivity.** In the focalized original text, the point of view of the narrator often gets close to the views of Tom, Becky, aunt Polly, and so on. There are cases of free indirect discourse in the novel that help readers to see the situation through the characters' eyes. In Chukovsky's translation, such subjectivity becomes even greater, and Tom becomes the 'focalizing WHO' much more often. The use of nominations can illustrate this. Aunt Polly is sometimes called an 'old lady' in the original (although she is not really very old, having a little son, but she is so from Tom's point of view). Nevertheless the nomination 'aunt Polly' is more widespread. In Chukovsky's translation the common nominations are *старуха* 'old woman' (rude), *старушка* 'old woman' (familiar), and *тётка* 'aunt' (rude), while other Russian translations stick to the variants *старая леди* 'old lady' and *тётя* 'aunt.' So in Chukovsky's variant, not only the relative or temporal but the evaluative meaning is expressed in these nominations, clearly presenting Tom's point of view.<sup>7</sup> This subjectivity is transferred to young readers of the translation, who sympathize with Tom in his troubles at home.

**2. Adding deictic words.** Deictic words, such as *тут* 'here,' *там* 'there,' or *теперь* 'now', are translated and sometimes even added in focalized segments of the text, making the readers feel present in the scene:

Mark Twain	K. I. Chukovsky	N. L. Daruzes
Tom did play hookey, and he had a very good time.	Том и в самом деле не ходил <b>нынче</b> в школу и очень весело провёл время. (Tom did play hookey <b>today</b> , and he had a very good time.)	Том не пошел в школу и отлично провел время. (Tom did play hookey, and he had a very good time.)
He had shoes on—and it was only Friday.	На ногах у него были башмаки, даром, что <b>сегодня</b> ещё только пятница (He had shoes on—though <b>today</b> was only Friday.)	Он был в башмаках — это в пятницу-то! (He had shoes on—on Friday!)

<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Chukovsky prefers the nomination *чужой мальчик* 'strange boy' to *новый мальчик* 'new boy,' in translating the passage analyzed above. The chosen variant expresses Tom's unfriendliness and hostility.

**3. Inserting captions in present tense.** Chukovsky supplied all chapters of the novel with short, intriguing titles (the original novel was sometimes printed with several little subheadings for each chapter,<sup>8</sup> but not with titles). These captions mostly have the form of sentences in present tense (“present of nomination” [БОНДАРКО 1971: 74], “present tense in captions” [HUDDLESTON, PULLUM 2002: 129–130]), for example: “Том знакомится с Бекки” (‘Tom meets Becky’), “Том украдкой посещает родной дом” (‘Tom secretly visits his house’), “Тек спасает вдову Дуглас” (‘Huck saves Widow Douglas’), altogether 14 titles in present tense from 35 chapters.

We can see that historic present appears in Chukovsky’s translation as an element of overall strategy. This strategy employs grammatical, lexical, and compositional devices to make the adventure text even more impressive in the eyes of young readers. The original subjectivity and focalization are rendered and sometimes enhanced, and the foreground becomes more salient through Russian grammatical means. Nowadays this strategy can be called adaptive or domesticating [VENUTI 1995], but at any rate, it is very interesting for comparative discourse analysis. It clearly shows the foregrounding potential of Russian historic present and its functional cooperation with deictic words and other means of focalization in the adventure narrative.

## Other Data for Historic Present in Russian Translations of Adventure Literature

The corpus examined for this study included Russian translations of prose by E. A. Poe (4 tales; 25 translations), A. Conan Doyle (3 novels; 9 translations), H. G. Wells (5 stories; 9 translations), O. Henry (3 stories; 6 translations), Mark Twain (1 novel; 6 translations), J. K. Jerome (1 novel; 3 translations), P. Travers (1 novel; 2 translations), R. Bradbury (3 stories; 10 translations), and C. S. Lewis (1 tale; 2 translations).

In many cases Russian translators did not stick to a definite strategy for employing historic present in their versions, but the segments in which this form was actually used were semantically foregrounded, denoting sequential, dynamic, telic, controlled actions made by active participants. Original texts provided perceptive contexts with focalizing WHO (a narrator or a hero), so that the use of historic present in Russian translations could allow the reader to join this point of view and get closer to the scene. Making events more salient, historic present did not change them semantically but rather highlighted their role in the plot.

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<sup>8</sup> These subheadings were translated in the version by M. A. Engelgardt.

More consistent use of *praesens historicum* appeared in the translation of *Mary Poppins* (P. Travers) made by B. Zakhoder [ТРЭВЕРС-ЗАХОДЕР 1968] (it was compared to the version offered by M. Litvinova [ТРЭВЕРС-ЛИТВИНОВА 1996]) and in the translation of “The Magician’s Nephew” from *The Chronicles of Narnia* (C. S. Lewis) made by N. Trauberg [ЛЬЮИС-ТРАУБЕРГ 1991] (it was compared to the variant by D. Afinogenov [ЛЬЮИС-АФИНОГЕНОВ 2000]). Both translations preferring historic present (by B. Zakhoder and N. Trauberg) are the first and the most popular Russian versions of these English books. Addressing a children’s audience, translators interpreted the original foregrounded segments, reconstituting focalization by means of deictic words and words denoting visual, audial, and tactile perception [УРЖА 2014Б], and occasionally they employed Russian *praesens historicum* to mark these segments. This device correlates in their translations with insertions of words like *вдруг* ‘suddenly’ or *наконец* ‘at last,’ expressing to children the character’s point of view and marking the unexpectedness or importance of some events; there are also sporadic additions of deictic words like *теперь* ‘now’ and *тут* ‘here,’ indicating growing subjectivity. Both translations interpret captions and proper names more freely than in later translations, making them sound more natural in Russian. All these means, accumulated by translators, are used to attract young readers’ attention throughout the story.

## Concluding Remarks

The foregrounding function of *praesens historicum* that is shown so clearly in Russian translations of English-language adventure literature is closely related to the functional and compositional surroundings of the form and the overall strategy employed by the translator in addressing the target audience. Serving as a focalizing tool, historic present cooperates with deictic words in the given context, supports the means that locate the deictic center in the spacetime of the events, and lets the reader join the focalizing character’s view.

Translations that additionally mark the foreground by using historic present are often addressed to young readers. The insertion of historic present forms in these texts is accompanied by the addition of deictic words, expressions signifying suddenness, and perceptive words (denoting visual and audial impressions), which proves the idea of the functional interrelation of these linguistic means in attracting their readers’ attention to the ‘peaks’ of adventure narrative.

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