

In Search of Russian *Seichas* ('Now') as the Conceptual Specious Present*

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ABSTRACT Human time is distinguishably different from real time as the latter, understood as a dimension of spacetime in physics, does not flow and as such does not have any changing present moment. Meanwhile, the constantly altering present moment can be viewed as a key starting point for the research of human time. However, it has mostly been examined in the domain of psychology, there remains a lot of scope for relevant research within linguistics as well as utilising an interdisciplinary approach. The main limitation of psychological studies of the human present is that it is investigated mainly as *a unit of experience* and in terms of its duration (as the so-called 'specious' present). I argue that in order to understand the flowing and changing nature of human time, and especially the unit that we call the present, research should be conducted not at the level of sense experience, but rather at the level of concepts. This will allow us to identify linguistic and extralinguistic parameters influencing the conceptualisation of the present moment (or what I call *the conceptual specious present*, or CSP). To reach this aim, I designed a questionnaire-based experiment, testing the use of Russian *seichas* ('now'), in which adults ($n = 65$) decided on how they conceptualised the duration of CSP. The outcomes of the experiment demonstrated that not only linguistic features, such as the type of eventuality,¹ but also extralinguistic ones, such as conventions and scenarios, influenced the conceptualisation of CSP. These findings highlight the necessity for an interdisciplinary research of CSP and prepare the ground for further contrastive studies.

1 INTRODUCTION

Time is one of the most pervasive notions which have been occupying human minds for centuries and have been causing a lot of debates. It has raised a number of questions regarding its reality, structure and conceptualisation in metaphysics, psychology and linguistics. Despite a number of works on it, the question 'How do we conceptualise time and its parts?' is still open. In this paper, I am going to begin by touching upon the metaphysical and psychological perspectives and approaches to time in order to provide some essential background for understanding the difference between real time of spacetime on the one hand and human time on the other, moving to temporal experiences and concepts. But the main object of this

* I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Kasia M. Jaszczolt for productive supervisions and whole-hearted support.

¹ Following Bach (1981), 'eventuality' is used here as a generic label for events, states and processes.

work is not human time in general but one of its parts – the human present – and its conceptualisation.

The unit pertaining to the human present is usually referred to as *the 'specious' present* (SP) and is viewed as a unit of experience and sense datum in the existing literature. The main idea behind 'specious' present is that, although the 'now' is a moment without duration, this moment is 'extended to', so to speak, a short interval that corresponds to *the unit of experience*. Although there is a considerable amount of work on it in psychology, its analysis is significantly limited to the question of its duration. Consequently, its definition still remains fuzzy and its boundaries seem not to be clear-cut. A shift from the level of senses to the level of concepts, accordingly from SP to what I call here *the conceptual specious present* (CSP),² might be seen as a possible solution and offer a broader scope of research. The concept of the human present time is crucial for the understanding of human time and the way why humans conceptualise time as something flowing. That is why my main objective is to outline the parameters which influence the conceptualisation of CSP and to shed light on to what extent CSP can be protracted in different contexts. Rather than addressing this issue only from the philosophical domain, this research aims to provide some experimental insights into CSP. Therefore, concepts are accessed through linguistic means on the material of Russian *seichas* ('now'), which is tested in a questionnaire-based study. This work is part of a larger project on the conceptualisation of NOW³ in British English and Russian and helps prepare the ground for further research on the boundaries between events and the ways to delimit them.

In this paper I address the following research questions:

- i. What are the means of expressing CSP, particularly in Russian?
- ii. What factors influence the duration of CSP?
- iii. To what extent can CSP be protracted?

The structure of the paper is as follows. In [section 2](#), I present the metaphysical approach to real time. In [section 3](#), I specify the main differences between real time and human time and move forward to the views on SP in psychology. [Section 4](#) presents CSP and provides the necessary theoretical background for the pilot study. [Section 5](#) addresses the question of two NOWs in Russian and justifies the choice of *seichas* as well as provides the methodological description of the pilot study. [Section 6](#) outlines the main findings of the questionnaire-based experiment. [Section 7](#) discusses the main patterns and possible linguistic and extralinguistic means influencing the duration of CSP. [Section 8](#) draws the conclusions and sets the tone for further research.

² I am grateful to Professor Kasia M. Jaszczolt who suggested using this term.

³ Following the standard practice in semantics, block capitals stand for concepts.

2 THE METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATIONS OF TIME

Understanding the metaphysics of time, where time is viewed as a dimension of the universe, is significantly important for the analysis of human time as some interesting analogies can be made and significant differences can be outlined. One of the most influential works on the reality of time, and particularly on the place and features of the present moment in metaphysics, belongs to [McTaggart](#) who classified and described possible sequences of time positions as A and B series ([McTaggart 1908](#)). The main criteria on which the series are distinguished are change and direction. Change is considered by [McTaggart](#) as necessary for time ([McTaggart 1908](#): 459). The idea of time involving change became known as the A-theory ([McTaggart 1908](#): 461) or as a tensed theory of time ([Jaszczolt 2009](#), [Prosser 2016](#)). Since the A-theory is based on a change in events, they are seen as unfolding from the past, then through the near past, to the present moment, and then to the near future, and the far future ([McTaggart 1908](#): 458). The present moment has a special position in this theory, which can be seen in [Figure 1](#), as it constantly alters what event should be viewed as being present.



Figure 1 McTaggart's A-theory.

In contrast to the A-theory, [McTaggart](#) considers a tenseless series of time positions as well. He calls it the B-theory, the main postulates of which are the lack of any flow and change and the existence of direction. In the B-theory, events can be divided only in two categories, based on what event happened earlier or later in relation to each other ([McTaggart 1908](#): 458). Such a sequence of events cannot change as the position of every single event will always remain the same – either earlier or later than another event ([McTaggart 1908](#): 460): event B is always later than A, but is constantly earlier than C (see [Figure 2](#)). It is obvious that in such a theory, there is no space for the moment of now and no division into the past, present or future. In other words, on the B series, time does not flow.



Figure 2 McTaggart's B-theory.

However, the A-series and B-series coincide in one aspect: they both have a direction. In the A-series, events are unfolding from the future to the past, while

in the B-series, they are lined up from being in earlier positions to being in later ones. Although both theories are temporal, McTaggart's finally rejects them both, concluding that time (which for him means temporal change) is unreal. First, he rejects the B-theory as it shows no changes in the time dimension. Next, he finds drawbacks in the A-theory in that an event cannot have all the characteristics of the past, present and future *at the same time*. So, time has to be presupposed, which creates circularity and a paradox as there is no A-series without time.

Although McTaggart's theories seemed inoperative to him, they promoted a lot of further debates on real time and gave rise to a number of other real time theories, such as Presentism, Growing Block Theory, Moving Spotlight Theory, etc. (Prosser 2016). They also led to possible tangential analogies between real time and human time, which will be discussed in the next section.

3 TIME OF SPACETIME AND HUMAN TIME: THE QUESTION OF THE "SPECIOUS" PRESENT

Temporal changes were essential for McTaggart (1908) to claim if time existed. However, in the framework of modern physics, time is generally viewed as something static (Ismael 2016, Callender 2017, Farr 2020). But if real time is static, why does human time seem to involve change? Why do humans tend to perceive time as divided into the past, present and future, with the constantly changing present moment? In other words, why does human perception of time seem to tangentially reflect the A-theory structure suggested by McTaggart?⁴

The explanation for this 'analogy' can possibly be provided by different levels of reality and views on them (Ismael 2016, Jaszczolt 2023a). The microlevel is the level where the universe operates in the framework of physical laws and where no time flow or time parts exist. The macrolevel is the level of humans as self-governing systems, with their consciousness and their understanding reality, where time flow occurs. Ismael defines self-governance as the ability to create 'an internal point of view on the world' (Ismael 2016: 39), which means that humans are capable of various perspectives on the reality. Thus human time is a matter of memories (the past), experiences (the present) and anticipations (the future), which are referred to a particular individual. This explains the main difference between real time and human time and shows how important it is to understand human time conceptualisation as the emergent property in the universe of what is really 'static time'.

One unique feature of human time is the perception and conceptualisation of the present moment which is seen as constantly altering, correlating with a particular individual and being interconnected with this person's experience (James 1890, Pöppel 2004, Andersen 2014, Ismael 2016, Jaszczolt 2023a). This means that the duration of the present moment as a unit of experience can vary significantly

⁴ Importantly, McTaggart's work concerns real time only and has no connections to human time. Real time and human time cannot be directly compared and contrasted as they represent two different – although influencing each other's perception – spheres. The analogy between the A-theory of real time and the way humans perceive time is made for better understanding of the origins of why the present moment is seen as something constantly changing by humans if real time is claimed to be static by physicists.

depending on the number of factors and an individual. As a result, it reveals its fuzzy structure and raises a lot of questions on its boundaries and duration, which leads to calling it the 'specious' present (SP) – the term which reflects not only the fuzziness of the human present moment but also the vagueness of the term itself.⁵

The term indeed has received little attention in the existing literature and was not properly defined or described in terms of its parameters. However, one way of describing it can be borrowed from [James](#) who characterised SP as follows:

no knife-edge, but a saddle-back, with a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched, and from which we look into two directions into time. The unit of composition of our perception of time is a duration, with a bow and a stern, as it were – a rearward – and a forward-looking end.
([James 1890](#): 315-316)

This description reveals a few things about SP: (i) it concerns not only the present moment but is also strongly connected to the past and the future and (ii) it should be considered as an interval. However, these statements contradict the sense data theory which claims that perception is prior to cognitive processes ([Huemer 2017](#)). This means no memories can be retrieved from the past as well as no anticipations can be held at the level of senses as it requires more advanced cognitive capabilities. Statement (ii) seems also controversial as experience gained through senses is believed to be of immediate nature ([Huemer 2017](#)), which does not imply any duration, which SP certainly does. As a counterbalance to these claims, psychologists argue that a short period of time being merely a flash cannot be captured by human attention and processed by the human brain that is why SP should be analysed as an interval ([James 1890](#), [Andersen 2014](#)). Moreover, the perception of SP is achieved in another way in comparison to the perception of a colour, which makes SP of special nature and shows how crucial it is for the understanding of human time ([Le Poidevin 2019](#)).

Although the examination of SP is indeed important for the understanding of how humans perceive and process human time, there is another aspect of the extended present that is important in everyday life and it cannot be achieved on the level of senses. The reason behind is that SP as a unit of experience is measured in terms of sense data with the help of ordinary stop clocks, which are initially created for space time ([James 1890](#), [Pöppel 2004](#)). This does not yet give us access to the domain of the conceptualisation of human time. In what follows, I offer such an investigation into how humans conceptualise the interval of the present, thereby moving to the level of thoughts and concepts.

⁵ By this, I mean that 'specious' is defined as 'seeming to be true or correct, but actually false' itself ("[Specious](#)" 2024)

4 THE CONCEPTUAL SPECIOUS PRESENT (CSP)

The level of concepts can provides us with more flexibility in identifying units of human time, and particularly the unit of the present that I have referred to above as the conceptual specious present (CSP). While there is a difficulty in identifying SP's duration as a sense datum, the concept of the extended present does not pose such limitations. In other words, CSP can be conceptualised as a protracted present moment as concepts function at a level higher than senses and include more advanced cognitive activities, which are likely to require some time, i.e. more than a second, for their processing. Therefore, concepts and their perception are not considered to be of immediate experience by default as it was with sense data.

Another important characteristic of concepts is that they can represent concrete objects as well as abstract ideas. For example, unicorns cannot be seen but it does not impede humans from having a concept UNICORN. Furthermore, the methods to examine concepts, particularly CSP, imply the means directly connected to (and belonging to) humans – their language, which makes concepts more relevant and sufficient for the purposes of this research than measuring a unit of human time experience with devices connected to real time as it is conducted for SP (Laurence & Margolis 1999).

Now, language serves a crucial function for expressing concepts stored in the human mind and allows to access concepts via lexemes which are considered to be labels for concepts (e.g. Laurence & Margolis 1999). In that case, word meaning and context will play a significant role in delimiting the concept and outlining its characteristics (Jaszczolt 2023b). In terms of CSP, adverbs of time are among the linguistic means to represent it. These devices allow to explicitly specify what period of time is referred to as the present by a speaker. One of the most often ways to express now in English is, simply, *now*, while in Russian there can be found two adverbs referring to the present – *seichas* and *teper'* (the differences between them will be discussed in section 5).

Another important lexical class to take into account is the class of verbs as they contain various devices for accessing the domain of the past, present and future (Vendler 1967, Rothstein 2004, Jaszczolt 2009). In English, the concepts of these time parts can be expressed with the help of finite verb forms and suffixes or by combining non-finite verbs with finite ones (Huddleston & Pullum 2002). In contrast to it, the Russian verb and tense system is built upon aspectual classes (perfective and imperfective), realised as suffixes and prefixes (Comrie 1989, Paducheva 1996). This is particularly important for CSP and its ways of expression in Russian. So, the choice of the Russian language for the current study can be justified by (i) its peculiar aspectual and tense structure as well as (ii) its non-obligatory usage of auxiliary verbs.⁶ These characteristics play an important role in reflecting the

⁶ In detail, the Russian verb system allows to form the future tense in two different ways: by using a suffix and by using an auxiliary verb. The first method is more widespread and easier (e.g. *pisat'* ('write' INF.) – *napishu* ('I will write' FUT.PERF.)). The latter one is considered more sophisticated and used in fewer cases (e.g. *pisat'* ('write' INF.) – *budu pisat'* ('I will write'; an auxiliary verb 'budu' + 'pisat' INF.)).

conceptualisation of the temporal domain. Therefore, a contrastive analysis of such different systems (Petrenko in progress) will be timely and relevant for time studies, the first part of which – describing the duration and structure of CSP in Russian – is conducted in this paper.

Since verbs play a crucial part in defining and delimiting the duration and structure of CSP, they should become the starting point for delving into CSP in Russian. As their forms are able to indicate and refer to CSP explicitly,⁷ it becomes possible to investigate them in terms of a semantic category of temporality. But tense and aspect are not the only parameters that can influence CSP. What can have an impact on CSP is the types of verbs itself (Rothstein 2004, Jaszczolt 2023b). Vendler (1967), for example, outlines four types of verbs, such as *activities*, *accomplishments*, *achievements and states*, each of the class being characterised in relation to its duration and relation to the *t* moment. However, for the purposes of the current research, I use Bach's classification, where *accomplishments* and *achievements* are combined in the class of *events*, while *activities* are called *processes*, with *states* having their name unchanged (Bach 1981). The reason behind is that the division into achievements and accomplishments does not seem relevant in term of Russian in that it has aspectual classes. For example, while accomplishments often include the specification of a particular period of time in English, such as 'in three hours', it is excessive in Russian as the perfective case, suffixes and prefixes are able to make it explicit. What should be noted here is Rothstein's imperfective paradox where achievements can be seen as protracted (Rothstein 2004). So, it might be assumed that the Russian perfective case might indicate a protracted event as well, not only a punctual one. Meanwhile, states are assumed to occupy some extended, variable amount of *t*, which correlates with Vendler's and Rothstein's postulates. Then, processes representing an extended activity by default should be conceptualised as extended eventualities only. These hypotheses are to be tested on the material of Russian NOW.

5 TWO NOWS IN THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE

5.1 Justifying the choice of data

The first step before designing a pilot study was to distinguish two Russian NOWS – *seichas* and *teper'* and justify that *teper'* has to be excluded for the purposes of this study as it (i) covers a broader scope of NOW and (ii) performs mainly the contrastive function between the present and the past rather than focusing only on the present, which is essential for CSP. To justify the relevance of its exclusion, there are elaborated four examples⁸ of how *teper'* might be used with different grammatical devices in various situations. The examples meet the following criteria: (i) *teper'* has to be used in frequently used expressions; (ii) the sense of *teper'* in

⁷ Due to having suffixes and prefixes, as well as aspectual classes, Russian verbs do not tend to implicitly express temporal references in contrast to English where the present tense can refer to the future.

⁸ All examples used are purpose-made by the author of this paper who is a native speaker of Russian.

the statements has to be easily retrievable by native speakers and (iii) the examples have to illustrate different types of eventualities.

To begin, the thesaurus defines this lexeme as *v nastoiashchee vremia* ('at the present moment'), *nyne* ('today', 'nowadays') and *seichas* ('now'). It remarks that the lexeme might be used (i) for the comparison of the current moment to the previous one or old times; (ii) with a specific connotation when the circumstances have changed or when the specific conditions have been created; and (iii) for the transition from one topic to another ("Teper" 1940).⁹ Since such definitions as 'at the present moment' and 'now' might seem ambiguous, it becomes necessary to look at some examples to justify its exclusion from this research.

- (1) *Teper' zhizn' izmenilas'.*
nowadays life change-PST.PERF.

Nowadays, life has changed.

For example, (1)¹⁰ contains a Russian verb *izmenilas'* in the past tense expressed by the perfective case as well as the prefix *iz-* usually used for marking something as complete. So, such an example structure could be classified as representing an event. Although *teper'* should be read as a temporal adverb referring to NOW, it becomes obvious that the instance's main focus is not on the current state of affairs but on something that has significantly affected the present moment before and led to these alterations. As a result, *teper'* activates a much broader scope than CSP and shifts the main focus from the present moment to its contrast with the past. Meanwhile, it is highly important for CSP to lie into the domain of a unit of thought accessed at present and to represent the interval of NOW without activating its further contrasting with the past.

(2) is another example to support this argumentation:

- (2) *Teper' deti chitaiut men'she knig.*
nowadays children read-PRES.IMP. fewer books

Nowadays, children are reading fewer books.

The present tense and the imperfective case of the verb *chitaut* are chosen to test *teper'* in different conditions. This structure represents another type of eventuality – a process. Moreover, (2) focuses on a less abstract topic – not on life in general but on a certain trend in children, which should have a strong connection to the current state of affairs. Despite the form of present tense and imperfective case being used, *teper'* shifts the focus again to (i) contrasting the current picture with the one from the past and underlining that children read fewer books *than it used to be* and (ii) employing the emotionally negative connotation. Consequently, a native speaker

⁹ This source contains digitalized copies of dictionaries and encyclopedias of the Russian language, such as influential Ushakov's 'The Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language' and Ozhegov's 'Dictionary of the Russian Language'.

¹⁰ The word-for-word translation omits the grammatical categories not directly relevant for the discussion at hand.

does not focus on CSP in this example but on possible reasons which might have led to such a situation. Again, *teper'* activates a contrastive function rather than CSP, a unit of thought at present.

To make this argument more compelling, let us analyse one more example with *teper'* serving as a state.

- (3) *Teper' ona schastlivaia*
nowadays she happy.

Nowadays, she is happy.

This instance demonstrates the usage of an adjective form *schastlivaia*, which expresses implicitly the present tense. However, this example does not focus much on the present interval and the subject of *being happy* but on the change of states. In other words, *teper'* serves the function of contrasting the present and the past: after something has happened in the past, the female became happy and is happy at the moment of speaking as a result of this change.

Therefore, *teper'* was tested on the material of different eventuality types – such as an event, process and state – with various grammatical parameters – such as the past, present and future tenses with perfective and imperfective cases and an adjective. Although the present tense and future tense assumed the focus on the current state of affairs, *teper'* shifted the focus to the past situation and its contrast with the present one. The same could be claimed for the usage of imperfective case and an adjective: instead of expressing an extended nature of a situation, they were read as highlighting the change in the situation in comparison to the past. As a result, it might be assumed that the concept of PRESENT should be subdivided into two different concepts of SEICHAS (presumably, representing a fragment of the present experienced directly) and TEPER' (which covers a broader scope of time, contrasting PRESENT with PAST and demonstrating the result of past situations in the present, which is closer to English NOWADAYS). As CSP is considered to be directly related to the present without relying heavily on the past, *teper'* has to be excluded as a potential candidate for representing CSP in Russian.

Next, *seichas* is considered as an alternative way to express the unit of the present in Russian. The thesaurus provides the following definitions for it: (i) *ochen' skoro, nemedlenno, srazu* ('very soon', 'immediately', 'at once'); (ii) *srazu, s pervogo vzgliada* ('at once', 'at first glance'), (iii) *v nastoiashchee vremia, teper'* ('at the present moment', 'now') ("*Seichas*" 1940). The dictionary entry is less detailed in comparison to *teper'* and does not include any special remarks on how and in which contexts the word should be used. However, I as a native speaker could argue that the first striking difference between *teper'* and *seichas* is that *seichas* could not be found in contexts with the past tense, which correlates with the assumption of its strong connection to the present moment. Moreover, it is difficult to find any examples with *seichas* in the sentence expressed by a verb in the present tense and the perfective case without any help of other adverbs. This might signify the conceptualisation of *seichas* as something incomplete and extended by default, but which is to be tested in the pilot study. Regarding the last definition in the thesaurus, which includes

teper' as a synonym, it has already been argued in this work that *teper'* is not an absolute synonym of *seichas* in that *teper'* has a broader scope and should be closer to English 'nowadays' or 'today'.

To justify that *seichas* is a representation of CSP in the Russian language and could shed some light on its structure and prepare ground for its future analysis, let us test it on a few examples.

- (4) *Seichas ona obo vsem dogadaetsia.*
 now she about everything figure-out-FUT.PERF

Now she will figure out everything.

So, to contrast *seichas* with (1), an instance with a verb in the perfective case and the future tense is created, which is classified as an event. In comparison to (1), (4) focuses mostly on the female and something happening at present which makes it possible to predict that she will figure out everything very soon. There might be identified no connection to the past events which has led to such a situation as it was in (1). As a result, *seichas* shows that its main focus is on the current state of affairs.

(5) is another example to take into account:

- (5) *Seichas ia naslazhdaius' progulkoj v parke.*
 now I enjoy-PRES.IMP. walk in park

Now I am enjoying a walk in the park.

This example represents a process with the help of the present tense and imperfective case of *naslazhdaius'*. There could be found no information about or any connection to what a speaker has done before this walk or how the situation has been changed. In comparison to *teper'* which has led to contrasting the current trend in children and the previous one, *seichas* does not prove anything like that. What *seichas* makes is mainly focusing on an extended situation at present.

Last but not least, there is created an instance with the use of an adjective implicitly expressing the present tense:

- (6) *Seichas den' ochen' korotkii.*
 now day very short

Now a day is very short.

(6) describes the duration of the daytime at the current state of affairs. Although there could be some assumptions that a day was longer yesterday, no information of it could be directly retrieved from the sentence. Moreover, this sentence might also express a metaphorical meaning connected not to the season but to an individual's perception of time or running out of time for finishing their work. So, again, *seichas* does not shift the main focus of the utterance to the past and expresses the judgment about a situation at present.

Therefore, it is *seichas*, not *teper'*, that could represent experience-based CSP and focus directly on the present interval. Meanwhile, *teper'* expresses the concept of NOWADAYS, which is predominantly contrastive and falls out of the scope of this research.

5.2 *The design of a questionnaire-based study*

To shed some light on how Russian native speakers conceptualise CSP, a study on the material with *seichas* was created. 20 examples with *seichas* in different contexts were designed by the author of this paper. The following criteria were met: the examples (i) represented the most frequent situations in which *seichas* might be used by Russian speakers; (ii) demonstrated typical grammatical use of *seichas* (in other words, *seichas* had to serve as an adverb, not as a discourse marker in the framework of this study); (iii) belonged to different classes of eventualities, such as states, events and processes; (iv) contained positive or negative emotional connotations.

The reason why the Russian National Corpus ([Institute of Russian Language 2024](#)) or any other Russian corpora were not used was their being outdated or representing a narrow context. In other words, most texts from the oral segment of the Russian National Corpus were collected before 2019 and did not represent the changes in technology or online communication after the pandemic which significantly influenced the reality. Moreover, most texts in the oral section were either too personal (demonstrating dialogues between relatives) or too formal (providing some extracts from lectures or courts). These factors did not meet the criteria for the data choice which is why the corpora data were not used.

5.3 *Participants and experimental procedure*

Participants were recruited via the website of a Saint Petersburg's public library where the questionnaire-based experiment¹¹ was posted as a Google form and preceded by a consent form. Potential participants were informed that they should take part in the pilot study only willingly and were able to withdraw from it at any stage. In case of a participant's withdrawal from the experiment, their answers were automatically deleted by Google. To take part in the study, participants had to satisfy the following three requirements: (i) they had to be native speakers of the Russian language who spent at least the last three years in the country; (ii) they had to be in the age range of 18-40 years old; (iii) they had to have an undergraduate degree. This helped minimise the differences in variables. As a result, a total of 65 responses from eligible participants were collected.¹²

After the consent was received from a participant, the following instructions were given: 'There are twenty statements. Please read them and answer what the duration of *seichas* ('now') is in every statement.' (see [Appendix](#)). So, participants

¹¹ The study received the ethics approval from the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages and Linguistics of the University of Cambridge.

¹² No subsequent requests for withdrawal were received.

Original version	Translation
<i>Okolo sekundy</i>	About a second
<i>Okolo minuty</i>	About a minute
<i>Okolo chasa</i>	About an hour
<i>Neskol'ko chasov</i>	Several hours
<i>Okolo 1 dnia</i>	About 1 day
<i>Neskol'ko dney</i>	Several days
<i>Okolo nedeli</i>	About a week
<i>Okolo mesiatsa</i>	About a month
<i>Okolo goda</i>	About a year
<i>Bol'she goda</i>	More than a year

Table 1 Response options in the questionnaire on *seichas* ('now').

were to read each statement and answer the question 'How long is *seichas* ('now')?' by checking out one of the response options illustrated below.

Although the presupposed responses might be considered as limitations, it helped minimise the unlimited number of variants in this study. In other words, there would not be any benefit in receiving the answers such as 'three minutes' and 'four minutes' as they would be classified as being extended and could be combined under the umbrella response option of 'five minutes'. Also, it eradicated the option 'I do not know' as a possible response in that it leads to unnecessary distortions in the study; providing participants with multiple but clear options made the organisation of the questionnaire more coherent. Moreover, such a decision helped make the research ecologically valid as participants were to think that the exact duration was measured in seconds, minutes, hours, etc. rather than to what extent the present could be conceptualised as being extended.

6 RESULTS

This section focuses on summarising the results gained in the pilot study and outlining the main trends.

Overall, there were collected 1,300 cases of how the duration of CSP in Russian was conceptualised by each of 65 participants classifying 20 examples with *seichas*. Figure 3 demonstrates the overall picture of how long the duration of CSP in Russian was perceived. Noticeably, CSP was conceptualised as 'about a minute' in most cases, which accounted for 31.77%. It was followed by the responses of 'about an hour', making up for 27.54%, and 'about a second', reaching 13.62%. The least frequent response was 'about a week', showing only 0.92%. Such a fluctuation in results was expected for CSP, which is considered as a protracted present interval.

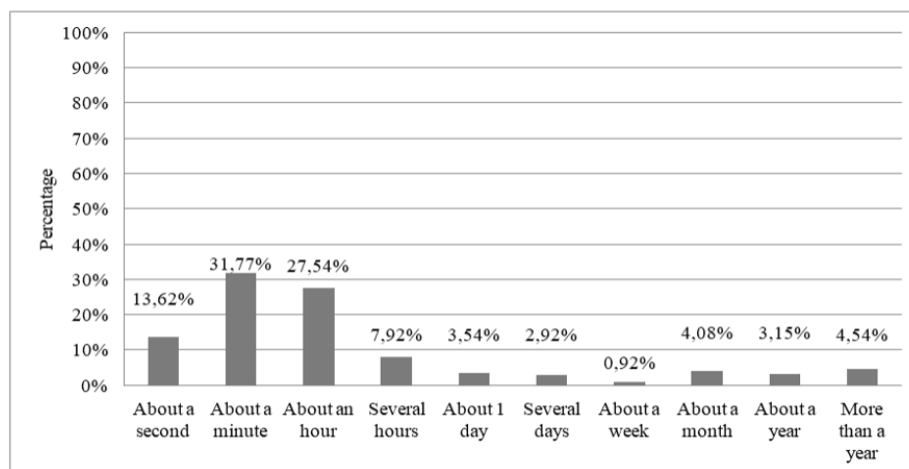


Figure 3 The distribution of the duration of NOW expressed in a form of 'seichas'.

However, this distribution of results does not shed much light on possible patterns which lead to conceptualising CSP of different duration and requires more detailed investigation and discussion, which will be presented in the next section.

7 DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The present study aimed at addressing the following research questions: (i) what are the means of expressing CSP in Russian, (ii) what factors influence the duration of CSP, and (iii) to what extent CSP could be protracted.

It was assumed that (i) the type of eventuality, (ii) the choice of perfective or imperfective case and (iii) conventions would influence the duration of CSP to a great extent.

To begin with the type of eventualities, six out of twenty examples with *seichas* presented in the study were categorised as processes, eight of them – as events, and six of them – as states. The outcomes of how the duration of CSP was conceptualised in each of the categories were summarised in [Figure 4](#).

[Figure 4](#) revealed a strong correlation between how the duration of CSP expressed in forms of states and processes was conceptualised. The most frequent response for both categories was 'about an hour', accounting for 18.97% for states and 47.70% for processes. A similar percentage of responses was also gained for such options as 'about a minute' (16.67% and 18.98%, respectively), 'more than a year' (7.95% and 7.18%, respectively), 'about a year' (4.62% and 5.39%, respectively), 'several days' (4.10% and 4.10%, respectively), with the least popular response being 'about a week' (1.79% and 1.02%, respectively). Such a correlation between results could be explained by their telic nature. Regarding events, the most common option was 'about a minute', accounting for 52.69%, with the options 'about a month' and 'about a year' hitting zero. So, this parameter proves an assumption that CSP can indeed extend far beyond the original SP. However, this does not shed much light on how

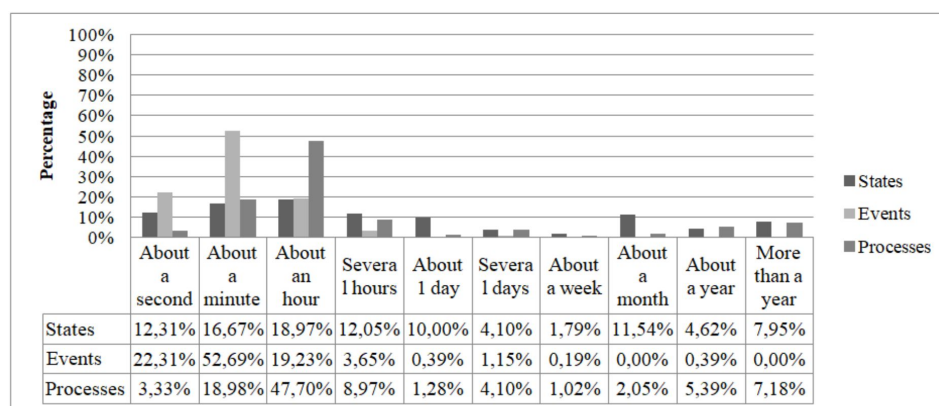


Figure 4 The distribution of the duration of now expressed in a form of 'seichas' as different types of eventualities.

exactly this parameter influences to what extent CSP could be protracted in that the duration of the interval seems to be more controlled by the scenario rather than by the type of eventuality. If it is the case, then the fact that the events did not exceed much the duration of 'several hours' in this study might be explained again not by the specificity of the type of eventuality but by the choice of the type of situations for this study.

The second parameter to test was the perfective and imperfective cases in Russian. While the imperfective case showed consistent results of conceptualising CSP as lasting for more than a second and being protracted, the perfective case accounted for a broader range of results than specified in the existing literature – varying from 'about a second' to 'about a year' (see Examples 8, 14, 18, 20 in Appendix). Although Lander (2003) and Paducheva (1996, 1998) argue that the perfective case could be read as an extended situation only at the moment of speech, Examples (8) and (20) (Appendix) demonstrated that they might be prolonged even after the moment of speech, with these options being categorised as lasting more than an hour by 9.23% and 32.30% of respondents, respectively. Thus the outcomes of the pilot study highlighted the necessity of further investigation of how various situations expressed by the perfective case could be conceptualised and further elaboration of a new verb classification system in Russian. Another characteristic of the Russian grammar system which also justified the relevance and necessity of modernising the classification system is the possibility of expressing the grammatical tense in Russian not only in a form of finite verbs but also by adjectives and modal verbs (see Examples 2, 4, 5, 10, and 12 in Appendix), which significantly impacted the duration of CSP as well. This should be addressed in further research.

Heretofore, linguistic means have little effect on delimiting the duration of CSP and helping explaining the patterns, which leads to the necessity of testing an

extralinguistic parameter – conventions. It could be assumed that it is the type of a socially regulated situation or typical scenarios that would have a greater effect on determining the duration of CSP. Let us consider Example (4) *Seichas mne nuzhno idti* ('Now I have to go') (Appendix). This situation illustrated some cultural peculiarities as 40% of respondents considered it as lasting for 'about a second' and 47.69% – as lasting 'about a minute' – due to the fact that a long procedure of saying 'Goodbye!' is not obligatory in Russian society. It would be acceptable for people just to leave if they were in a hurry without informing anyone of their leaving in any form of situations – formal and informal ones (Vigovskaia 2014, Formanoskaia & Gabdullina 2008). In contrast to British culture, such behaviour would not be acceptable and polite (Fox 2005).

Another example of a convention is Example (6) *Seichas my budem pozdravliat' imenninika* ('Now we will congratulate a birthday person') (Appendix). While it is more appropriate to briefly say 'Happy Birthday!' in English society without listing what exactly we wish to a person, in Russian culture, such a behavioural pattern would be considered inappropriate and rude. Russians usually produce a long list of wishing such things as happiness, strong health, luck, prosperity, etc. to a birthday person (Formanoskaia & Gabdullina 2008). The evidence for this convention taking place was received in responses: the majority of the participants chose the options of the situation lasting longer than a minute, which accounted for 89.23% of the outcomes.

Therefore, conventions played a more significant role in defining the duration of CSP than grammatical means.

8 CONCLUSION

The present pilot study sought to identify the factors influencing the conceptualisation of the duration of CSP in the Russian language on the material of *seichas* and to outline to what extent CSP could be protracted, at least within the scope of the situations specified in the questionnaire. The results demonstrated that it was not the type of eventuality or grammatical case in Russian which accounted for the change in conceptualising the duration of CSP but the extralinguistic factor of conventions associated with the scenario which played a crucial role in determining the way of understanding CSP as a protracted event lasting from 'about a second' to 'more than a year' according to the norms and behavioural norms accepted by the society. Thus this paper, presenting work in progress, expanded the research area of CSP in Russian by shifting its main focus from the type of eventualities, highlighted the relevance of modernising the verb classification in Russian using semantic and pragmatic criteria and helped make preliminary steps for further delimiting the boundaries of CSP and eventualities within it.

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APPENDIX

The statements with seichas used in the pilot study.

- (1) *Seichas ia naslazhdaius' progulkoi v parke.*
 now I enjoy walk in park
 Now I am enjoying a walk in the park.

- (2) *Seichas den' ochen' korotkii.*
 now day very short
 Now a day is very short.

- (3) *Seichas ia vybiraiu, kakoe plat'e / kostium mne nadet' na uzhin.*
 now I choose what dress / suit me wear on dinner
 Now I am choosing what dress/suit I should wear for the dinner.

- (4) *Seichas mne nuzhno idti.*
 now me need go
 Now I have to go.

- (5) *Seichas na ulitse ochen' kholodno.*
 now on street very cold
 Now it is very cold outside.

- (6) *Seichas my budem pozdravliat' immeninika.*
 now we will congratulate birthday.person
 Now we will congratulate a birthday person.

- (7) *Seichas my tshchatel'nee zabotimsia o svoem zdorov'e.*
 now we thoroughly care about our health
 Now we care about our health more thoroughly.

- (8) *Seichas ia raskazhu vam koe-cto interesnoe.*
 now I tell you something interesting
 Now I will tell you something interesting.

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- (9) *Seichas ia dosmotriu serial i poidu spat'.*
now I watch serial and go sleep
Now I will watch the serial to the end and go to bed.
- (10) *Seichas ia ne v nastroenii.*
now I not in mood
Now I am not in the mood.
- (11) *Seichas my bol'she boimsia virusov.*
now we bigger fear viruses
Now we are more afraid of viruses.
- (12) *Seichas ia ne mogy govorit'.*
now I not can speak
Now I cannot speak.
- (13) *Seichas ia vkusno zavtrakaiu.*
now I tasty have.breakfast
Now I am having a tasty breakfast.
- (14) *Seichas on budet ego rugat'.*
now he will him scold
Now he will scold him.
- (15) *Seichas ia dumaiu nad reshenium problemy.*
now I think about solution problem
Now I am thinking about the problem solution.
- (16) *Seichas ia stoiu v probke.*
now I stand in traffic.jam
Now I am in a traffic jam.

(17) *Seichas moia kollega pridet, i my nachnem.*
now my colleague come and we start

Now my colleague will come and we will start.

(18) *Seichas ia otvechu na zvonok.*
now I answer on call

Now I will answer the phone.

(19) *Seichas nachnetsia kontsert.*
now start concert

Now the concert will start.

(20) *Seichas ona obo vsem dogadaetsia.*
now she about everything figure.out

Now she will figure out everything.

All further data, including results for individual examples, are available [here](#).

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