

Aspect Lost, Aspect Regained: Restructuring of aspect in American Russian

1. Introduction. American Russian (henceforth, AmRus) speakers (mostly second generation immigrants) are noted to make numerous mistakes with aspectual marking. It has been proposed that these apparent mistakes result from AmRus using aspectual marking to encode lexical or Inner aspect rather than grammatical or Outer aspect; cf. Polinsky (1994, 1997), Pereltsvaig (to appear). This paper contributes to this analysis in two ways. First, it is shown that the relevant data cannot be accounted for by Frequency Theory or L2-transfer Theory. The second question addressed here is why it is possible for AmRus to **not** mark Outer Aspect even though categories above it (notably, Tense) are marked.

2. Telicity Theory. AmRus speakers often make “mistakes” using imperfective aspect (IMPF) instead of the perfective (PERF) and vice versa; see (1) and (2). The analysis developed in this paper is based on the idea that the aspectual marking in AmRus is not at random, but rather encodes the lexical semantic properties of the verb. Thus, for most verbs AmRus retains only one of the two members of the aspectual opposition. In particular, atelic (activity and stative) verbs are retained in the IMPF (e.g., ‘like’ in (1)), whereas telic (accomplishment and achievement) verbs are retained in the PERF only (e.g., ‘give’ in (2)). (It should be noted that activity/achievement verbs like ‘read’ and ‘write’ are conceptualized as telic verbs.)

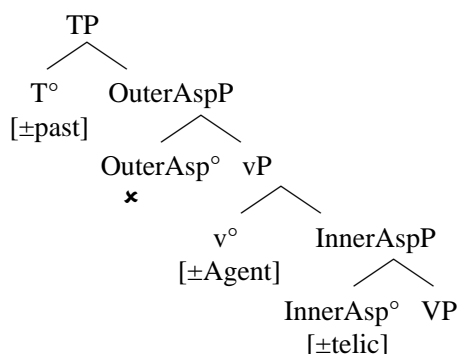
3. Telicity Theory vs. Frequency Theory. One alternative analysis is that AmRus retains forms that are more frequent statistically in Standard Russian (henceforth, StaRus). It is shown in this paper that the Telicity Theory accounts better for the relevant data than the Frequency Theory. Given the distributional bias among aspectual forms in StaRus (cf. Andersen and Shirai 1996), it is not surprising that about half of the “mistakes” in AmRus corpus can be accounted for equally well by both the Telicity Theory and the Frequency Theory. Yet, there are data (about 34% of the “mistakes”) that can be accounted for only by the Telicity Theory but not by the Frequency Theory. Crucially, **no** data can be accounted for by the Frequency Theory but not by the Telicity Theory. One example is (3), where the verb is used in the PERF instead of the IMPF (appropriate in this context in StaRus). For this verb, the PERF is statistically **less** frequent than the IMPF (according to Steinfeldt 1963 and Brown 1996), so the Frequency Theory cannot account for the fact that the PERF form is retained in preference to the IMPF form. Yet, the Telicity Theory accounts for the data in the following way: being an accomplishment verb, ‘read’ is retained in the PERF (regardless of which form is appropriate in the given context in StaRus).

4. Telicity Theory vs. L2-transfer theory. Another alternative account is that AmRus speakers use Russian aspectual morphology in a way analogous to how aspectual morphology is used in their dominant L2 (i.e., English). The most salient piece of aspectual morphology in English is the progressive *-ing*, which corresponds roughly to Russian IMPF. However, the difference between the English *-ing* and the Russian IMPF is that the former cannot be used with stative verbs. If AmRus speakers were transferring the use of aspectual morphology from English, we would not expect the IMPF to be used with stative verbs. Yet, in AmRus stative verbs are retained only in the IMPF; see (1). Thus, the L2-transfer Theory cannot account for the aspectual marking on stative verbs in AmRus.

5. Omission of Outer Aspect. Under the Telicity Theory developed in this paper, AmRus marks the Inner Aspect (i.e., telicity) and Tense, but not the Outer Aspect (i.e., perfectivity) that is situated between the two; see (4). It is widely accepted in the acquisition literature that overt realization of the categories on the tree starts from the lexical categories at the bottom of the tree and proceeds up the tree. For example, TP appears in acquisition prior to CP, and DP prior to KP. If the order of attrition is taken to be the mirror image of the order of acquisition, we would expect the tree to be “lost” from top down. Crucially, we do not expect to see any “gaps” in the middle of the tree. From this point of view, the lack of overt realization (in fact, any realization) for Outer Aspect when Tense is overtly realized (correctly in all the data available so far) is surprising.

In this paper, an attempt is made to explain these puzzling data on the basis of compositional semantics of Russian Tense and Aspect. The proposal is as follows: Outer Aspect introduces the Reference Time interval (cf. Reichenbach 1947) and orders it temporally with respect to the Event Time interval provided by the vP. Furthermore, Tense determines the temporal ordering of a time interval with respect to the Speech Time (itself an instant). In StaRus, Tense orders the Reference Time with respect to the Speech Time, but in AmRus the Reference Time is unavailable, and Tense orders the Event Time directly with respect to the Speech Time. As a result, fewer temporal relations can be expressed, but crucially the semantic computation can proceed unhampered because both the Reference Time and the Event Time are intervals, and Tense can order either one of them with respect to the Speech Time. Furthermore, it will be argued that Inner Aspect is retained in AmRus because it provides crucial information about the event itself, namely information about what physical object in the world (if any) the temporal extent of the event is mapped onto; cf. Krifka (1992) and Svenonius (2001).

- (1) a. American Russian (describing a short visit to Princeton; italics represent code-mixing)
 mne nravilos' v Princeton, no ja ljublju žit' v Chicago
 me:DAT liked:**IMPF** in Princeton but I like to-live in Chicago
 b. Full Russian
 mne ponravilos' v Prinstone...
 me:DAT liked:**PERF** in Princeton
 'I liked Princeton but I would prefer to live in Chicago.' [Polinsky to appear:54]
- (2) a. American Russian
 ego otec snačala on otdal ego den'gi i potom on ne otdal
 his father first he gave:**PERF** him:ACC money and then he not gave:PERF
 b. Full Russian
 ego otec snačala daval /otdaval emu den'gi...
 his father first was-giving:**IMPF**/was-giving away:**IMPF** him:DAT money
 'His father was first ready to give him the money and then he changed his mind.' [Polinsky to appear:53]
- (3) a. American Russian
 ja nikogda ne pročitai ta kniga
 I never not read:**PERF** that:NOM book:NOM
 b. Full Russian
 ja nikogda ne čital tu knigu
 I never not read:**IMPF** that:ACC book:ACC
 'I have never read this book.' [Polinsky to appear:53]
- (4) (Specs omitted for simplicity)



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