

**ASPECT IN RUSSIAN AND TURKISH: SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS
OF A GRAMMATICAL CATEGORY**

BARBARA SONNENHAUSER

University of Leipzig, Department of Slavic Languages

The multitude of readings of the Russian aspects – particularly the ipf¹ (Table 1) – and the comparison with aspectual usage in the respective English and Turkish equivalents raises the question of how to account for those different readings and the cross-linguistic differences. This paper deals in particular with the following questions: is there an invariant meaning to be found in the Russian pf and ipf aspect, or are we dealing with grammatical polysemy? Are there any regularities in deriving the different readings – language-internally as well as cross-linguistically? What is the common denominator that justifies the subsumption of certain phenomena under the heading of ‘grammatical aspect’?

This paper will argue for a so-called ‘selectional theory’ (Bickel 1996; Johanson 1971; 2000) of aspect in combination with well spelled-out pragmatic principles in the sense of Levinson’s heuristics (Levinson 2000). This approach has certain advantages: it captures the crucial assumption that lexical content and aspect (‘situation aspect’ and ‘viewpoint aspect’, Smith 1997) strictly have to be separated, and it provides a cross-linguistic skeleton that allows for systematic language-specific derivation of aspectual readings and for systematic explanation of the cross-linguistic differences.

Within a selectional theory of aspect (Figure 1) phases and boundaries constitute the decisive units accessible for aspectual selection by special markers like the English progressive *-ing*, the Turkish markers *-iyor(du)* and *-miş*, and the Russian pf aspect. Assumed is a tripartite event structure, consisting of a preparation phase (dynamic phase φ_{dyn}), a culmination point (boundary τ) and a consequent state (static phase φ_{stat}). Selection is to be understood as making visible a relevant part of an event and making it accessible to truth-conditional evaluation at a certain interval of time (‘točka otsčeta’/TO; Padučeva 1996) that may be located after that relevant part of the event or within that part of the event (retrospective/synchronous; Padučeva 1996), thereby distinguishing different groups of aspectual readings (Table 1). Selecting a certain part of an event does not mean dropping or cutting of the rest of the event, rather selection means ‘asserting’ and leaving the other parts of that event for presupposition or implicature.

Verbs are classified in terms of combinations of phases and boundaries (Johanson 2000; Bickel 1996), that may be part of the semantic representation of the verb, emerge as the result of VP-composition, or may be pragmatically induced. So the question of class-affiliation of verbs to one of the Vendlerian classes becomes irrelevant, at least with regard to issues of grammatical aspect. The advantage of such an approach is that ‘coercion’ or ‘recategorization’ can be captured by simple composition – semantically or pragmatically achieved. No combinations are excluded a priori, as appears to be the case within Vendlerian approaches that classify verbs according to their internal temporal properties and exclude, e.g., the combination of the progressive with stative verbs. The same holds for the argument structure of the verb that is fixed only during interpretation and not in the lexicon. This assumption avoids the difficulties of Vendlerian approaches with classifying verbs like ‘eat’ and ‘eat something’ (cf. Marten 2002 who argues within the framework of dynamic syntax for an underspecified representation of verbal argument structure that is to be fixed only during interpretation).

Figure 1 shows only the marked members of the aspectual categories in the respective languages. This does not imply that the unmarked members are semantically vacuous. Rather, they are sense-general (Atlas 1989), i.e. they have a definite meaning, but this meaning is neutral insofar as it is neither identical to one of the readings nor to the sum of them. Accordingly, these forms are instances of underspecification that receive the appropriate specific reading in the course of interpretation. This serves as an argument against grammatical polysemy and strongly suggests that semantics alone is not enough in deriving aspectual readings, and that some pragmatics is needed, pragmatics being understood as “taking context into account in a principled way” (Bunt 2000: 25).

¹ ipf = imperfective aspect, pf = perfective aspect.

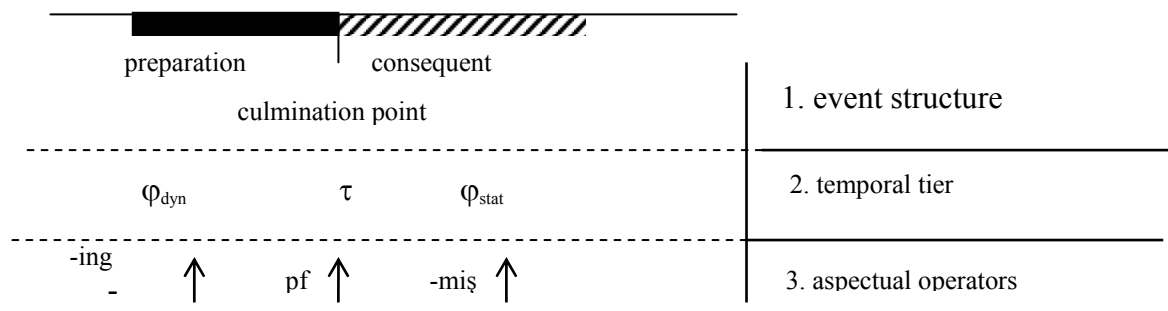


FIGURE 1: A schematic sketch of selection theory.

Here we will concentrate mainly on the pragmatic principles involved in the derivation of aspectual readings. These principles are basically Levinson's three heuristics, which are based on the Gricean Maxims of Conversation and constitute default rules for interpretation that act on different levels of aspectual composition: the I-heuristic elaborates the underspecified semantic representations to yield truth-evaluable propositions, which are taken as input to purely pragmatic inferences governed by the Q- and M-heuristics.

Q-implicatures act on the level of grammatical aspect and are based on the principle of providing the strongest statement possible, thereby inducing scalar implicatures based on hierarchically ordered sets of linguistic alternates. As regards Russian aspect, this scale is $\langle \text{pf}; \emptyset^2 \rangle$, the pf aspect explicitly selecting a boundary, whereas the ipf aspect does not exclude that selection, thus allowing also for the denotation of completed and bounded events (general-factual and durativer reading). The possibilities for the concrete interpretation of this Q-implicature are constrained by the interaction of the aspectual value of the marker with the aspectual reference interval TO which can be synchronous ('normal' and 'over-long', Padučeva 1996) or retrospective. At TO the viewpoint value of the respective marker is asserted and truth-conditionally evaluated. That aspectual value can be captured by Klein's (1995) temporal-relational analysis of aspect, where aspect is defined as the relation between the situation-time T-Sit and T-Ast, the time for which an assertion is made. According to selection theory, T-Sit has to be further specified in terms of the respective phases and boundaries that are selected.

M-implicatures are based on the principle of indicating anormal, nonstereotypical situations by using marked expressions. 'Marked' here means the application of an aspectual marker on a verbal basis that has to undergo a pragmatic inferential process to be a suitable basis for that marker to apply. This is what traditionally is labelled 'recategorisation' or 'aspectual coercion' and for which usually coercion operators are postulated (Pulman 1997). These implicatures work on the level of aspectual class, i.e. they yield to the induction of phases and boundaries if necessary.

The derivation of Q- and M-implicatures, that is the selection/induction of phases and boundaries and the specification of the temporal relation is not yet enough for specifying the concrete, contextually relevant reading. This is achieved by the derivation of I-implicatures. They differ from the former kinds of implicatures in that they are not based on linguistic alternates and thus are not metalinguistic, but instead invoke world-knowledge of stereotypical relations thereby enriching the lexical content of the aspectual phrase. As these implicatures are necessary for the generation of truth-evaluable propositions, they can not be regarded as implicatures in the sense of the above mentioned. They rather constitute what Relevance-Theory calls *explicatures*.

The selectional and pragmatic principles of computation can be claimed to be cross-linguistically valid, but their concrete realization depends on language-specific grammatical and lexical features. This is partly exemplified in Table 1, which shows the readings of the Russian ipf aspect and how TO helps in disambiguating: Whereas in Turkish TO is morpho-logically encoded in the aspectual marker, it has to be fixed contextually in Russian. The concrete readings then have to be further specified within the groups I–III (Padučeva 1996) by means of I-implicatures:

² \emptyset means 'semantically unmarked'

	Russian	Turkish	TO	Relation
I.	→ actual-processual, iterative	-iyor(du)	synchronous, normal	T-Ast included in $[\varphi_{\text{dyn}}]$
II.	→ general-factual, durative, iterative	-di	retrospective	T-Ast includes $[\varphi_{\text{dyn}} \tau \varphi_{\text{stat}}]$
III.	→ habitual, continuous, potential, permanent, atemporal	Aorist	synchronous, over-long	T-Ast simultaneous with $[\varphi_{\text{dyn}} \tau \varphi_{\text{stat}}]$

TABLE 1. Ipf aspect in Russian and Turkish.

This approach allows for a systematic account of aspect, in that it captures the cross-linguistic common denominator, namely selection of phases and boundaries. Language-internal as well as cross-linguistic regularities in deriving aspectual readings are captured by the interaction of the aspectual value with TO and the combination with the pragmatic principles stated. The cross-linguistic differences in aspectual usage are due to language-specific factors that have to be taken into account to systematically flesh out the semantic and pragmatic skeleton presented here. Within this approach, these differences can be systematically predicted and explained.

This paper has concentrated mainly on the ipf aspect in Russian and its equivalents in Turkish. But the theoretical assumptions provided can be applied along this lines to the Russian pf aspect and to the Turkish postterminality marker *-miş*, and should also be applicable to other languages with grammatical aspect.

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