Semantics or Morphosyntax?
Verb Aspect Processing Depends on Obligatoriness of Morphological Encoding
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Introduction

What is Aspect?

How is aspect encoded?

English aspect:
• Perfective = past simple
• Not aspectually marked
• Perfective reading from context
• Imperfective = past progressive
• Aspectually marked

Russian aspect:
• Perfective / Imperfective marked obligatorily

HYPOTHESIS:
Obligatory aspect marking = morphosyntactic (P600)
Not obligatory aspect marking = semantic (N400)

Methods

Design
2 Event Status (completed, in-progress) x 2 Aspect (perfective, imperfective)
Separately for English, Russian

Picture-sentence matching
ERPs recorded from 64 channels
64 picture-sentence combinations per block, 32 per condition

Trial Structure

Participants:
16 English native
19 Russian native
Data collection ongoing

PERFECTIVE

ENGLISH Findings

IMPERFECTIVE

RUSSIAN Findings

Findings

• English:
  • Semantic processing in both aspects
    (negativity beginning 280 ms)
  • Distinct form–event stage association with both aspects
  • In imperfective, aspect processed at auxiliary verb ('was')

• Russian:
  • Morphosyntactic processing (positivity beginning 600 ms)
  • Form–event stage association only in perfective

Discussion

• Aspect marking obligatoriness:
  • Obligatory aspect marking (Russian) = morphosyntactic processing
  • Not obligatory aspect marking (English) = semantic processing

• Semantic flexibility (Blaszczak et al., 2014)
  • More flexible = semantic (English perf & imperf; Russian imperf)
  • Less flexible = morphosyntactic (Russian perf)

• Aspect marking transparency:
  • English: transparent (V+ed, was V+ing)
  • Russian: obscure
    • Simplex forms (мыла)
    • Prefixes (домыла)
    • Suffixes (домылла)

ENGLISH Findings

RUSSIAN Findings

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