Event Conceptualization in English and Russian Monolinguals and Bilinguals

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Introduction

• Does language shape thought?
Grammaticalized categories lead to automatized preferences when selecting and structuring information for verbalization [2, 3, 7, 8].

• What is Verb Aspect?

IMPERFECTIVE: He was washing the dishes.

PERFECTIVE: He washed the dishes.

• A cross-linguistic difference:
Russian: selection of the aspectual form is obligatory
English: selection of the aspectual form is optional

• Hypothesis: Native speakers of Russian pay attention to the completion status of events in order to select the appropriate aspectual form, while native speakers of English pay less attention to the completion status of the event.

RQ1. Are imperfective forms (-ing) more frequent in L1 Russian than in L1 English in event descriptions?

RQ2. Do native speakers of Russian and English conceptualize event completion status in event descriptions?

RQ3. Do L2 speakers show L1 transfer when describing events in L2?

Methods

Design: Native language (Russian, English) x Task language (Russian, English) x Event status (in-progress, completed)

Stimuli: Target pictures (N=30) and fillers (N=20); Task: Complete the sentence

In-Progress (N=15)

Completed (N=15)

Participants

• Monolingual mode:
  - Russian NSs tested in Russian (n=51)
  - English NSs tested in English (n=48)

• Bilingual mode:
  - English NSs tested in Russian (n=72)
  - AoA Russian: 16.8 yrs
  - Russian NSs tested in English (n=124)
  - Proficiency 39.2 on a 0-45 scale
  - AoA English: 10.7 yrs

Procedure

• Online survey (English and Russian versions)

RQ1: Imperfective is more frequent in L1/L2 Russian

RQ2: When tested in L1/L2 Russian, more imperfective used for in-progress pictures

RQ2&3: When tested in L2 English: More imperfective used for in-progress items (p<.001)

Results

BONUS: When tested in L2 Russian: More perfective for completed (p=.001).

Discussion

RQ1 & R2: Thinking for Speaking [8]:
- Imperfective is used more frequently in L1/L2 Russian, and is used differently to mark event status
- More perfective was used to describe in-progress pictures.

RQ3: L1 Transfer from Russian:
- Conceptual transfer from L1 Russian to L2 English: more imperfective used overall, especially for in-progress events.

L2 Russian speakers: overgeneralization?

- In Russian, imperfective forms can be used to describe completed events when the completion is not relevant for discourse.
- For completed events, L1 Russian speakers used imperfective and perfective forms at chance.
- L2 Russian speakers used more perfective forms to describe completed events in Russian: rule overgeneralization or effect of prototypical association between perfectivity and completion [1].

References


Stimuli:

Yesterday she _____________________ the bananas.

Yesterday she _____________________ the cake.