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Title: TOP-Russian: Towards a Tutorial On Russian Aspectual Prefixes

Abstract:

Russian has about 1500 imperfective verbs with perfective partners (Natural Perfectives) that can be formed with the help of 16 prefixes. This makes Russian aspectual system very hard for foreign learners. One of the most broadly accepted ideas in SLA is that exposure to meaningful input is essential to successfully acquire L2. Can a “meaningful input” be offered in the case of Russian aspectual prefixes?

Janda et al. (2013) have provided strong support for the Overlap Hypothesis which states that the semantics of the aspectual prefix overlaps with the semantics of the verbal stem. They argue for the Classifier Model of Russian aspect where verbal prefixes select verbs according to broad semantic traits, the way numeral classifiers categorize nouns.

The main goal of this project is to test how the Classifier Model of Russian prefixes can improve our curricula. Using the Model we have conducted a pilot experiment where Norwegian native speakers (17) with no knowledge of Russian were asked to choose a prefix that matches the unprefix verb. Four prefixes (vy-, raz-, ob-, ot-) were each presented in three sentences (two Natural Perfectives and one Specialized Perfective), with Specialized Perfectives as control words and the prefixes pri-, pere- as distractors. For Natural Perfectives the prefix raz- has shown a high number of correct responses (more than 50%), which indicates that the Model has a high explanatory potential.

We are planning a series of experiments with L2 learners based on a pilot tutorial that will be presented at AATSEEL. The tutorial will include the radial categories of the prefixes and will take into account three factors: centrality of Natural Perfectives (central submeaning, peripheral submeaning or a marginal/slang verb); the number of Natural Perfectives with the prefix (“big” (s-, za-) vs. “small” (ot-, pri-) prefixes); complexity (levels A1/2, B1/2, C1/2).