

The Aspect of Verbs of Motion in Russian and Czech

The subject of my paper is the close but complex synchronic relationship between the dichotomy "determinate vs. indeterminate" (DET/IDT) of verbs of motion and the grammatical dichotomy of perfective (pfv) vs. imperfective (ipfv) aspect in Russian (Ru) and Czech (Cz). The underlying hypothesis is the theoretical claim that although the dichotomy of verbs of motion is basically a lexico-semantic category, in certain contexts such as iteration, negation, or disapproval of a directed movement towards a goal the IDT verb has to be described as a functional ipfv aspectual counterpart to the corresponding pfv DET verb, consider in Cz *Chodí domů pozdě*. ("He/She is in the habit of going home late."), in Ru *Ja bumagu ob otsročke eščë ne nosil v voenkomat*, or in Cz even *Proč jsi mi to sem nosil?* ("Why did you bring me this?"). The notion that the use of the IDT verb is motivated by the implication of the return path is only partially true (especially for the bidirectional function of Ru IDT verbs as in the sentence *Včera my xodili v kino* which has no equivalent in Cz) and it does not hold for the above cases of iterated, negated, or disapproved one-way movements. I want to base this theoretical interpretation on the theory of functional aspectual pair relations proposed by Lehmann (cf. Lehmann 1999 and Anstatt 2003), which distinguishes between primary (alpha) and secondary (beta) partners and allows multiple aspectual relations with more than one beta partner. It is true that the above-mentioned function of the IDT verb as an aspectual counterpart to the pfv DET verb is limited in that it cannot have the reading of an actual process of a directed movement. But Ru *prixodit'* as an ipfv beta-verb to pfv *prijeti*, for instance, has a similar functional limitation as *xodit'* functioning as a beta-verb to *pojti*: in both cases, the beta-verb for the actual process function is *idti*. Of course, in the general-factual reading and in the historical and the reporting present *xodit'* cannot denote a non-iterated one-way movement, unlike *prichodit'*, which shows that IDT verbs still have a somewhat peripheral status as functional aspectual partners.

Then again, contexts of iteration, negation, or disapproval of a directed movement do not always require an IDT verb. For example, under certain conditions such as focussing one direction of an iterated bidirectional movement the ipfv DET verb, too, can have the iterative function, as in the Ru sentence *Obyčno ja idu na rabotu peškom, a domoj edu na avtobuse*. Often, there is competition between the DET and the IDT verb depending on pragmatic factors, or the syntax allows only one verb, and native speakers do not always agree among themselves or with claims made in literature. This competition between DET and IDT verbs in the two languages will be another topic of my paper, illustrated contrastively for Ru and Cz and mainly by corpus and Internet data.

Finally, the behavior of verbs of motion in the two languages has to be explained against the background of the aspect systems in general. This is why I will outline the main differences between Ru and Cz aspect, the latter not being as well-known and well-investigated as the former. One crucial difference is the general possibility in Cz to use the pfv aspect in iterative contexts. Furthermore, the aspectual behavior of both DET and IDT verbs themselves has to be taken into account. In this regard, it is important to note that Cz DET verbs (at least the intransitive ones) lack a neutral perfectivizing prefix corresponding to Ru *po-* in *pojti*. Rather, the unprefixated form is functionally biaspectual and can naturally occur in pfv contexts, consider *Otec už šel domů* = Ru *Otec uže pošel domoj*. (By contrast, the prefix *po-* is the temporal marker for the future tense with the resulting forms being biaspectual as well.) With this in mind, it becomes clear that Cz unprefixated DET verbs used in iterative contexts represent an instance of aspectual neutralization, for they could be interpreted either as being ipfv (in the iterative aspectual function) or as pfv according to the general conditions for pfv verbs referring to iterated events. Thus, the clear-cut intermediate position of Ru ipv DET verbs is absent in Cz, with the pure DET vs. IDT opposition moving towards the opposition of aspect even more.

Selected Literature

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