

GRAMMATICAL ASPECT AND REFERENCE TIME

Olga Borik (University of Utrecht)

In this talk, I will defend two claims. The first one is that the opposition between perfectivity/imperfectivity is semantically independent from the properties of eventualities/predicates, such as telicity and/or stativity. On the basis of the well-known (e.g., Dowty 1979) telicity tests it can be proved that (a)telicity and (im)perfectivity are two different phenomena.

The second claim is that although imperfective aspect may not have an invariant meaning, but expresses different readings which are difficult to account for in the same terms (e.g., progressive and general-factual readings), this fact should not be regarded as an obstacle for giving a strict semantic definition of aspect. Thus, if A means ‘to be (im)perfective’, then the main purpose of an aspectual theory is to identify a property or a set of properties B, that allows us to give a uniform semantic definition of (im)perfective aspect in Russian, i.e., to say ‘A iff B’.

The specific proposal that I am going to advocate is that the aspectual system of Russian can be defined in terms of temporal relations. The temporal system that I adopt is developed on the basis of Reinhart (1986, 2000) and has been applied to Russian in Borik (2002). This system crucially employs the notion of ‘perspective’ or ‘viewpoint’, which is also rather common in the aspectual literature.

In Borik (2002), I proposed a formalization of the notion of ‘viewpoint’ in terms of Reference time (Reichenbach 1947) stated in the framework of interval semantics. A model based on this formalization can successfully account for aspectual differences in Russian, i.e. it allows us to state the distinction between perfective and imperfective. Moreover, the representation of imperfective aspect (which is defined as a negative counterpart of perfective, partly following Jakobson 1932) is, nevertheless, permissive enough to capture different imperfective readings.

References:

- Borik, O. (2002) *Aspect and Reference time*. Doctoral dissertation, Utrecht University.
- Dowty, D. (1979) *Word meaning and Montague grammar*. Reidel, Dordrecht.
- Jakobson, R. (1932) “Zur Struktur der Russischen Verbums”, *Charistia Cuglielmo Mathesio oblata*. Prague.
- Reichenbach, H. (1947) *Elements of Symbolic Logic*, New York: The Macmillan Company.
- Reinhart, T. (1986) “States, events and reference time”, Lecture given at the MIT Lexicon project.
- Reinhart, T. (2000) “Reference time”, a talk given at “Language in Use Symposium”, Utrecht.