

Verbal Aspect and the Referential Status of Verbal Predicates:

On Aspect Usage in Russian *Who*-Questions

Hans Robert Mehlig (Universität Kiel)

Verbal predicates denoting situations which are located not simultaneously but retrospectively or prospectively in time with respect to an absolute or relative "present" allow two fundamentally different interpretations: an actual one and a non-actual one. Each of the two possible interpretations is based on a different conceptual level. In the actual interpretation, a predicate refers to one or more concrete situations occupying a well-defined place in time and space; in the non-actual interpretation the predicate refers to the type of the situation and thus to situations that are potentially locatable in time, but not related concretely on the time axis. This distinction between actuality and non-actuality - between reference to one or more tokens of a situation and reference to the type of the situation - is of primary importance for the category of aspect in Russian. Verbal predicates referring to actual situations can be presented from different perspectives by means of different aspectual forms; they allow a situation to be presented from an internal or an external perspective. In contrast, predicates interpreted non-actually involve a neutralization of the aspect opposition. In the latter case, only the imperfective aspect is acceptable and has no aspectual function, but functions merely as the aspectual genus proximum. It will be shown that the distinction between actual and non-actual reference - between token- and type-reference - is also relevant for aspect usage in *Who*-questions.