Comparative analysis of the interface of verbal semantics and morphosyntax in Russian and Bangla

In this paper we examine verbal morphology of Russian and Bangla (Bengali) that is related to telicity as expressed in semantics and morphosyntax using the framework of Event Structure. In particular, we consider effects that lexical and superlexical prefixes in Russian and different types of compounding verbs in Bangla have on telicity of the predicate.

Telicity as a conceptual component of the predicate has been described for many languages, spoken and signed (see Ramchand 2008 for theoretical analysis, and Folli & Harley 2006 for a survey of psycholinguistic and language acquisition research on telicity). Because of the relative prominence of this verbal feature in natural languages, and its effect on both grammar and semantics of the predicate (cf. van Hout 2001), grammaticalization of telicity is especially interesting to consider in languages with rich verbal morphology, such as Russian and Bangla. We utilize Event Structure approach (Ramchand 2008) in considering this phenomenon at the syntax-semantics interface.

We propose that both Russian verbal prefixes and Bangla compounding verbs act as operators that affect the event structure of the predicate. By analyzing the comparative results of various telicity tests on the verbs in two languages (combinability of specific morphemes with temporal adverbs, adverb almost, verbs stop/finish, and the semantics of the resulting constructions) we demonstrate that both Russian verbal prefixes and Bangla compound verbs fall into three categories with regard to their semantics, and ability to license an internal argument. Thus, the three types of verbal morphemes in the two languages appear to have similar distribution on the event structure tree (Figure 1); we further claim that such distribution can be explained by grammaticalization processes affecting different components of the verb, but leading to a similar result: overtly morphologically specified event structure.

In breaking down Russian and Bangla verbal morphemes by their semantic contribution to the predicate, we arrive at three verbal types corresponding to the morpheme’s semantics and position in event/argument structure tree: 1) verbs referring to the end-point of the event (in Russian, these verbs also incorporate spatial or temporal boundary; in Bangla, they encode both event completion and benefaction); 2) verbs with additional meanings regarding the onset of the event, such as intensity or suddenness; 3) verbs imparting meaning of an ongoing or iterative process, which is not specified for end-point or onset time, but is limited in duration/quantification (cf. examples (1)-(6)).

Based on converging data from adverbial scope interaction and syntactic combinability of the verb with adverbs and nominal arguments, we propose that in Bangla, the ‘bleached’ verbs (the second verb in the compound comprising V1V2) in verb compounds, and in Russian, the verbal prefixes have both been grammaticalized to impart more generalized modifications to the event structure of the verb. As a consequence of breaking down verbal morphemes in Russian and Bangla into 3 groups by meaning, and further showing that these 3 groups indeed behave differently from each other syntactically in each language, but similarly across languages, we demonstrate two possible grammaticalization paths for event structure, and explain verbal semantics resulting from morpheme ordering in both Russian and Bangla.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>resultP (group 1)</th>
<th>initP (group 2)</th>
<th>QuantP (group 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>v-, do-, vy-, pere-</td>
<td>za-, ot-</td>
<td>po-, pri-, na-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangla</td>
<td>phel-, di-, ni-, tol-</td>
<td>oth-, por-, bosh-</td>
<td>path-, rakh-, ash-, mor-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sentences with examples of resultP (1, 2), initP (3, 4) and QuantP (5, 6) morphemes:

1. Sasha pere-shel ulitsu (za pyat' minut). (Russian)
   Sasha cross-walk.Past.masc.3sg street.Acc (in five minutes.Gen.pl.)
   ‘Sasha crossed the street (in five minutes).’

2. Mary du minit-e dudh-ta khe-ye ni-lo. (Bangla)
   Mary two minute- in milk –CL eat-Perf. take.Perf-Be.3.sg
   ‘Mary drank up the milk in two minutes.’

3. (Cherez pyat’ minut) Artem za-pel. (Russian)
   (After 5 minutes) Artem on-sing.Past.masc.3sg shelf.Acc.
   ‘(In five minutes) Artem started singing.’

4. Mary du minit-e kotha-ta bol-e bosh-lo. (Bangla)
   Mary two minute- in word –CL say-Perf. sit-.Perf-Be.3.sg
   ‘Mary blurted out the words in two minutes.’ (the event initiation was within two minutes.)

5. Ya po-chital etu stat’ju vsego pyat’ minut, i ne pomnu soderzhanija.
   I read-some.Past.Masc.3sg this article only five minutes, and not remember content.
   ‘I only spent 5 minutes reading this article, and I don’t remember its contents.’

   I you-Dat two year for house buy-GEN word say-Perf go-Be-1P.
   ‘I have been telling you to buy a house for the last two years.’

References:
