Meaning components in the constitution of Russian verbs: Presuppositions or implicatures?

Yulia Zinova and Hana Filip (Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf)

The meaning of Russian imperfective and perfective verbs is often analyzed in terms of presuppositions triggered by the aspect of a whole verb and/or one of its constituting affixes. The goal of this talk is to shed doubts on the validity of such analyses by showing that at least some cases of the putative triggers of presupposition are better analyzed as triggers of scalar implicature. The focus is on the inferences triggered by the perfective aspect of whole verbs and on those associated with the completive prefix *do-* and iterative prefix *pere-*. One common way of characterizing the difference between imperfective and perfective sentences like (1) and (2) involves the claim that it is of presuppositional nature: namely, perfective verbs, but not imperfective ones, trigger an existential presupposition on (the beginning of) events in their denotation, also dubbed as the 'activity' or 'process' component, and assert the culmination component Padučeva (1996); Romanova (2004); Docekal and Kucerová (2009); Kagan (2013).

(1) Ja ne čital^{IPF} ètu knigu.
    I   not read   this book
    'I wasn't reading/didn't read this book.'

(2) Ja ne pročital^{PF} ètu knigu.
    I   not pro.read   this book
    'I didn't read this book.' ⤳ 'I started reading this book'

In this respect, perfective morphology has presuppositional properties that are comparable to those of English phasal verbs like *begin*, *start* and *continue* (Geurts, 1999). In addition to the contribution of the perfectivity, which is a property of verbs as lexical items, certain derivational prefixes used to form perfectives are also claimed to trigger presuppositions. What is at stake becomes evident when we compare a simplex imperfective verb, as in (1), with a secondary imperfective verb containing a prefix in question, here the iterative *pere-* and completive *do-*, as in (3):

(3) a. Ja ne perečityval^{IPF} ètu knigu.
       I   not pere.read   this book
       'I wasn't reading/didn't read the book again.' ⤳ I was reading/read the book (before).
    b. Ja ne dočityval^{IPF} te   knigi, kotoryje byli mne neinteresny.
       I   not do.read   those books, that   were I-dat not.interesting
       'I wasn't finishing the books that I didn't find interesting.' ⤳ I was reading books that I didn't find interesting

The iterative meaning of *pere-* being similar to *again* and the completive meaning of *do-* to *finish* also invites parallels in their presupposition triggering properties. The presuppositional nature of all the three mentioned elements (perfective morphology of lexical verbs and the two prefixes) is taken to be established based on the standard negation and question tests (Docekal and Kucerová, 2009; Kagan, 2013; Padučeva, 1996; Romanova, 2004).

Although it is tempting to consider the observed inferences in (2) and (3) as being presuppositional in nature, the following objections can be raised: the inferences triggered by the perfective aspect vanish very easily; the inferences are very vague and context-dependent; scalar implicatures exhibit the same behaviour under negation and question tests, as presuppositions do.

In fact, similar objections to the analysis of the contribution of the perfective aspect as a presupposition trigger were raised by Grønn (2004). He suggested that the inference like one in (2) is a matter of a pragmatic implicature. However, there are no tests and the cases like (3) are not discussed. To derive the observed inference in the case of (3-a) via scalar implicature (henceforth, SI, Horn, 1972), the following reasoning has to be applied: a prefixed verb is more informative than an unprefixed one, so it is a stronger alternative; under negation, the scale is reversed, so the stronger alternative to (3-a) is the sentence in (2) – the negation of the whole reading event; as the speaker used the weaker alternative, by the Gricean maxim of quantity (Grice, 1975) the hearer infers that the stronger alternative does not hold; by the negation of the stronger alternative (1), the hearer implicates that some attempt of reading the book was made, which is the inference native speakers get.

According to the presupposition projection theories (Heim, 1983; Schlenker, 2008), if a sentence S with the presupposition $P(x)$ is embedded under quantifiers *every* or *no*, the presupposition of the

resulting sentence is universal: $\forall x : P(x)$ (see discussion and experiment results in Chemla, 2009). This property does not hold for SIs: if a sentence S entails that $I(x)$, then S, embedded under *no*, implicates that $\exists x : I(x)$ (existential inference), and embedded under *every* – entails that $\forall x : I(x)$. If these predictions are correct, embedding sentences that contain inferences of unknown nature under universal quantifiers can be seen as a test for distinguishing between presuppositions and SIs: if the initial sentence contained a presupposition, the resulting inference should be universal. If it is weaker (existential inference), than the initial inference was an implicature.

In order to better understand the nature of the inferences in ex. (2) and (3), a simple questionnaire was put together, in which 97 native speakers rated different possible inferences of sentences like (2) and (3) embedded under *nikto* 'none' (resulting sentences being like those in (4), (5), and (6)).

(4) Nikto iz nas ne pročital^{PF} učebnik.
Nobody from us not pro.read manual
'None of us read the manual.'

(5) Nikto iz nas ne dočital^{PF} učebnik.
Nobody from us not do.read manual
'None of us finished reading the manual.'

The results of the questionnaire show that universal inferences (i.e., 'all of us started reading the manual') are strongly dispreferred at least for sentences like (4) and (5), while an existential inference is accepted: 'some of us started reading the manual'. This behaviour, according to the explanation above, corresponds to that of SIs. For the iterative prefix *pere-* (ex. (6), imperfective aspect used to separate contribution of the prefix from those of the aspect) the picture is much less clear. Some native speakers accept the universal inference ('all of us were reading the manual'), which points towards the presuppositional nature of the inference. On the other hand, most of the respondents rejected even existential inferences in case when the speaker of the sentence is not an actor (as in (7)). This can be explained if the inference is an SI, but not if it is a presupposition.

(6) Nikto iz nas ne perečityval^{IPF} učebnik.
Nobody from us not pere.read manual
'None of us were reading/read the manual again.'

(7) Nikto iz studentov ne perečityval^{IPF} učebnik.
Nobody from students not pere.read manual
'No student wasn't reading/didn't read the manual again.'

Conclusion. Contrary to most works that attempt to analyse the meaning of Russian imperfective and perfective verbs in terms of presuppositions triggered by the aspect of a whole verb and/or one of its constituting affixes, we found that there is no ground to claim that these inferences are presuppositions at least in the case of perfective verbs and the completive prefix *do-*. Such inferences were shown to be a matter of scalar implicature. The iterative prefix *pere-* exhibits a more complex behaviour and in order to establish the nature of the inferences it triggers, full experiments like those by Chemla (2009) would need to be done.

REFERENCES

Chemla, E. (2009). Presuppositions of quantified sentences: experimental data. *Natural Language Semantics*, **17**(4), 299–340.

Docekal, M. and Kucerová, I. (2009). Bound ability readings of imperfective verbs: A case for presupposition.

Geurts, B. (1999). *Presuppositions and pronouns*. Elsevier Oxford.

Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole and J. L. Morgan, editors, *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech acts*, pages 41–58. Academic Press, New York.

Grønn, A. (2004). *The Semantics and Pragmatics of the Russian Factual Imperfective*. Ph.D. thesis, published in Acta Humaniora 199. Oslo.

Heim, I. (1983). On the projection problem for presuppositions. *Formal semantics–the essential readings*, pages 249–260.

Horn, L. R. (1972). *On the semantic properties of logical operators in English*. Ph.D. thesis, UCLA.

Kagan, O. (2013). Scalarity in the domain of verbal prefixes. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory*, pages 1–34.

Padučeva, E. (1996). Semantičeskie issledovanija: Semantika vremeni i vida v russkom jazyke; Semantika narrativa [Semantic studies: The semantics of tense and aspect in Russian; The semantics of narrative]. *Moscow: Škola "Jazyki Russkoj Kultury"*.

Romanova, E. (2004). Superlexical versus lexical prefixes. *Nordlyd*, **32**(2).

Schlenker, P. (2008). Be articulate: A pragmatic theory of presupposition projection. *Theoretical Linguistics*, **34**(3), 157–212.