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Daniel Altshuler - University of California, Los Angeles ***A simultaneous perception of things: SOT in Russian***

daltshul@ucla.edu

Previous research on the interpretation of embedded tense in Russian has investigated the complements of verbs like “say” and “believe”. In this snippet, I present data showing that the complements of perception verbs may behave differently. I point out a fact that has not received attention in the literature: in Russian, the Sequence of Tense (SOT) phenomenon is found specifically with perception verbs.

It is generally accepted in the literature that the embedded Russian Present provides simultaneous readings while the embedded Russian Past provides past shifted readings when the matrix is Past. For example, consider the following from Kondrashova (1998: 8):

- (1) Maša skazala, što Vova spit.
Masha say-past that Vova sleep-present
“Masha said that Vova was sleeping.”
- (2) Maša skazala, što Vova spal.
Masha say-past that Vova sleep-past
“Masha said that Vova had been sleeping.”

In (1), only a simultaneous reading is available and in (2), only a past shifted reading is available. Kondrashova claims that this shows that Russian complement clauses do not exhibit SOT effects. However, consider the following:

- (3) Dina videla, što/kak voda l’etsja iz vedra.
Dina see-past that/how water pour-present from bucket
“Dina saw that/how the water was pouring from the bucket.”
- (4) Dina videla, što/kak voda lilas’ iz vedra.
Dina see-past that/how water pour-past from bucket
“Dina saw that/how the water was pouring from the bucket.”

In (3) and (4), there is a simultaneous reading available; (3) has an optional double access interpretation (i.e. the water is also spilling at the utterance time) whereas (4) does not. The available interpretation in (3) is not surprising, but the fact that (4) exemplifies a vacuous past tense morpheme in a complement clause suggests that the position taken in Stowell 1995, Kondrashova 1998, Kusumoto 1999, Schlenker 2003, among many others who conclude that there is no SOT in Russian, is empirically inadequate. That is, (4) suggests that (unlike in English) the SOT phe-

nomenon in Russian depends on semantic properties of the embedding verb. The question, then, is: what is so special about the semantic properties of perception verbs?

Reference

- Kondrashova, Natalia (1998) "Embedded Tenses in English and Russian", ms., Cornell University.
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