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THE USE OF ASPECTUAL FORMS BY A TWO-YEAR-OLD RUSSIAN CHILD

This paper is devoted to the problem of functioning of verbal aspect in the speech of a 2;6-year-old Russian child. In the whole corpus 3978 verb forms were found, for various reasons, only 2545 were taken into consideration. The recorded data show a variety of usage of both perfective and imperfective forms (future and past tense of the indicative, imperative forms and infinitives). Incorrect forms are of minor importance and they have a specific character. The questions considered in the paper are preceded by a discussion on the category of verbal aspect.

Perfectivity and imperfectivity

Bernard Comrie (1976) defines verbal aspect as “different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation”. According to him, perfectivity does not explicitly express the internal constituency of a situation. It describes a situation as a single unanalysable whole, without indicating any separate phases that make up that situation¹. Verbs with perfective meaning have the effect of reducing a situation to a single point.

It is possible, in some cases, to use perfective forms in order to describe internally complex situations. Thus, perfective verbs can refer to situations lasting for a certain period of time (durative), and to situations defined as momentary (punctual)². Perfectivity can denote a complete action: a situation with a beginning, a middle and an end (and all these components can bear equal emphasis). In one case the meaning of a perfective verb can indicate the end of a situation (achievement and accomplishment meanings), in another – the beginning of a situation (ingressive or inchoative meaning).

In Comrie's opinion, the general characterisation of imperfectivity is to indicate the internal temporal structure of a situation (phasal sequences); it is to view a situation from within. It means that imperfective verbs cannot be used to describe situations lacking

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¹Or, as Comrie proposes, to a blob.

²If a verb is used to express a punctual situation that takes place only once it is referred to as a semelfactive verb.

internal structure. Imperfective verbs can express different semantic shades: they are verbs with habitual and continuous (progressive and nonprogressive) meanings.

Verbs with habitual meaning describe a situation as a characteristic feature of a whole period, not as an incidental property of the moment. A situation is expressed as habitual if it is protracted in time or can be iterated a number of times over a long enough period. The important feature of habituality is the fact that habituality cannot be identified with iterativity each time: only if the situation referred to cannot be protracted indefinitely in time will the interpretation involve iterativity.

Continuousness is imperfectivity that is not occasioned by habituality, and progressiveness is a combination of continuousness with non-stativity.

Verbs can also bear the so-called perfect meaning. Comrie says that perfect, unlike perfectivity and imperfectivity, does not say anything about the situation in itself: it expresses only a relation between two time-points. He distinguishes four types of perfect, emphasising that perfect can be used only to relate some state to a preceding situation. The first type is the perfect of result, where a present state is a clear result of a past situation. The second is the experiential (indefinite) perfect, which indicates that a situation has taken place at least once in the past leading up to the present. The third type is the perfect of persistent situation, which describes a situation that started in the past, but persists into the present (in Russian this is expressed by forms of the present tense). The last type – the perfect of recent past – describes a present situation as a result of very recent past³.

Valuable remarks on verbal aspect, especially Slavonic, have been made by Holvoet (1989). According to him, Slavonic aspect is primarily a semantic category. Indicating situations which are protracted in time is the basic meaning of imperfective forms. The meaning of perfective forms depends on the kind of verb. The so-called mutational predicates indicate a lack of temporal extension; non-mutational predicates require the introduction of temporal boundaries.

Lyons (1977) describes verbal aspect as a non-deictic category - without any reference to the speech act time. The Russian aspectual system is a system of semantic oppositions characterised by momentariness and nonmomentariness. The oppositions are privative: the perfective is the marked member of the opposition. Perfectivity represents a situation as an event, that is, a momentary dynamic situation, whereas imperfectivity does not represent a situation as an event. In Lyons' opinion (1976), the Russian perfective indicates that the action has been completed, while the imperfective does not say anything about the completion of an action, and only informs that a certain time has been spent on this action.

According to Russkaja Grammatika (1980), the Russian aspectual system is based on the so-called aspectual pair. The perfective/imperfective distinction is coded by prefixation: perfective verbs are formed by adding a prefix to the imperfective form (*chitat'*-IPFV : *prochitat'*-PFV, 'to read') or by suffixation; imperfective verbs are formed by adding a suffix to the perfective form (*perepisat'*-PFV : *perepisyvat'*-IMPV, 'to rewrite'). In Russian there are several verbs which constitute aspectual pairs by suppletion (*brat'*-IMPV : *vzjat'*-PFV 'to take', *vozvrashchat'*-IMPV : *vernut'*-PFV 'to come back', *klast'*-IMPV :

³For further discussion cf. Comrie (1976).

polozhit'-PFV 'to put', *govorit'*-IMPF : *skazat'*-PFV 'to speak'). Some verbs in Russian are used in both aspects without any changes in their forms (the so-called bi-aspectual verbs).

In the present tense in Russian only imperfective verbs are allowed. Clear aspectual distinctions exist in the past tense. Imperfective forms of the future tense are periphrastic: they consist of the verb *byt'* 'to be' conjugated by person and an imperfective infinitive. Perfective forms are synthetic (and they are the same as the forms of present).

According to Comrie, Russian has one general imperfective form, corresponding to English habitual and progressive (as well as non-progressive form without perfective meaning). In Russian, however, it is possible to express habitual meaning by using a perfective verb (but only if habituality involves iterativity). Very often habitual meaning is emphasized by adverbs. Russian also has no distinct perfect forms. Perfect meaning is mainly expressed by (past) perfective⁴.

The "defective tense hypothesis" and Richard Weist's findings

In 1976 Antinucci and Miller argued that children from 1;6 to 2;6 lack "an abstract conception of time". Hence children can pay attention to a prior situation only if it has results in the present.

The position taken by Antinucci and Miller is referred to by Weist et al. (1984) as the defective tense hypothesis (DT). According to him, the DT hypothesis can be explained as having three components. First, a temporal one: children are able to make references only to the immediate past situation. The second is a semantic component: only telic⁵ (not activity) verbs will receive past tense inflections in children's speech. According to Antinucci and Miller, at the very beginning aspectual distinction will not be made independently of tense distinctions; tense morphology will express only aspectual distinctions between completed and ongoing situations (syntactic component). So early tensed child utterances will not express deictic relationships (between speech time and event time). This means that in the early stage of development tense is defective as compared with its normal functions.

Weist et al. (1984) argues against the DT hypothesis. He analysed data of several Polish speaking children, ranging in age from 1;7 to 2;2. In the data Weist found utterances containing activity verbs with past inflections, imperfective past forms and remote past references. They were not very frequent, but this does not mean that they do not appear at all. Weist proved that in child Polish the aspectual distinctions between perfective and imperfective forms emerge simultaneously with tense distinctions. Children from the very start use forms with appropriate tense value. They very easily shift from one form (i.e. present imperfective) to the others (i.e. past imperfective, past perfective and future perfective). Starting from the age of 1;6 children are able to conceptualize a situation from an external perspective and from an internal one. The distinction (perfective/imperfective) is coded rapidly if a child is learning a language like Polish (or Russian - my note), in

⁴ See *Russkaja Grammatika* (1980), too.

⁵ A telic situation involves an activity that requires a well-defined terminal point as opposed to an atelic situation, which involves pure action.

which verb prefixes and suffixes represent the dominant aspectual coding.

Weist's findings are in general supported by Smoczyńska (1986). She wrote that Polish speaking children after the very emergence of tense/aspectual distinctions, use tense forms in appropriate contexts (and activity verbs were found in the imperfective past tense). Nevertheless, some aspectual errors were found in the corpora of Polish children, but they were insignificant because of low frequency.

Aspectual forms in Tanya's utterances

The analysis of aspectual forms presented in this paper was carried out on the basis of the utterances of a 2;6-year-old Russian girl, Tanya. Tanya's utterances were recorded and transcribed within a month by Marina Russakowa, a linguist. The material I used was considerably rich, the child's utterances were tape recorded and written down non-selectively. However, only the girl's utterances were transcribed, whereas the utterances of the other speakers (context) were not. Unfortunately, the tapes were not preserved. I decided to use these data in spite of this obvious drawback since there are virtually no other non-selective child language data for Russian. Until recently Russian researchers concentrated on describing those child forms which deviated from the adult model (so-called occasionalisms⁶). Their main source remained Gvozdev's diary which consists of very rich but, nonetheless, selectively collected data.

Thus, in the material I used 3978 verb forms were found. For various reasons verbs *byt'* 'to be' (functioning both as auxiliary and as full verb) and *moch'* 'can', as well as the non-verbal lexemes functioning as predicates: *mozhno* 'one can', *nel'zja* 'one must not', *nado* 'one must', *nuzhno* 'one should' and *net* 'there is no', have been excluded. The remaining 3610 verb forms could be classified into perfective/imperfective. Perfective forms constitute 55 percent of all these forms, imperfective forms 45 percent. However, the opposition of perfectivity/imperfectivity is not found within present tense forms, all of which being by definition imperfective. Therefore, present tense forms were excluded. Two other categories, namely, conditional forms and participles, were excluded too, although they can be formed from verbs in both aspects. This decision was motivated by their low frequency of occurrence (9 and 18 respectively) - it was difficult to make valid conclusions about their usage.

The analysis presented below concerns four categories: the past and future tense of the indicative, the imperative, and the infinitive. A total of 2545 occurrences of verb forms were noted, out of which 23 percent (592 tokens) were imperfective and 77 percent (1953 tokens) were perfective.

Past tense

In the past tense in Tanya's utterances only 52 imperfective forms were found, i.e. 10 percent of the total number of past tense forms. Although perfective forms clearly prevail, it should be noted that among imperfective forms both activity and telic verbs appeared. Thus, in Russian, like in Polish, there is no support for Antinucci and Miller's hypothesis. Here are some examples of the usage of activity verbs by the child (it is

⁶See Ceytlin (1988 et. al.).

worth noting that the last two utterances are excellent examples of making reference to the remote past):

Ja v tufel'kax begala.

I in slipper:LOC:PL ran:IPFV:PAST:1:SG:F

'I was running with my slippers on.'

Ja smotrela knizhku "Mazaj".

I look:IPFV:PAST:1:SG:F book:ACC:SG "Mazaj"

'I was looking at the book "Mazaj".'

Kogda my v avtobuse exali, my rvali etot biletik.

when we in bus:LOC:SG go:IPFV:PAST:1:PL, we tear:IPFV:PAST:1:PL

this:ACC:SG:M ticket:ACC:SG

'When we were travelling by bus, we were tearing this ticket.'

Mama, mne rasskazyvali skazku.

mummy, me:DAT tell:IPFV:PAST:3:PL tale:ACC:SG

'Mummy, they were telling me a tale.'

In Tanya's utterances examples can be found of all the subcategories of imperfective verbs singled out by Comrie. In the following utterance the imperfective form is used in its habitual meaning and at the same time it expresses iterativity.

Na maminu tetradku kapali.

on mummy's exercise-book:ACC:SG drop:IPFV:PAST:3:PL

'(It) was dropping on mummy's exercise-book.'

In the utterance:

Stojala, stojala i baxnulas'.

stand:IPFV:PAST:1:SG:F, stand:IPFV:PAST:1:SG:F and

fall+down:PFV:PAST:1:SG:F

'I was standing, standing, and I fell down.'

the continuous meaning of the imperfective verb *stojala* is additionally emphasized by repetition.

The following utterance contains a verb with progressive meaning:

Vo vremja kupalis'.

on time bath:IPFV:PAST:1:PL

'We were bathing at the right moment.'

The majority of Tanya's past tense usages constitute perfective verbs. I found 476 of them, 90 percent of the total number of all tokens in the past tense). Let us first quote some utterances which are a good illustration of Comrie's claim that perfective verbs can be

used to describe situations lasting for a period of time in order to reduce the situation to a single point.

Ja pochitala tebe.

I read:PV:PAST:1:SG you:DAT

'I read for you.'

Net, ne poigrala.

no, not play:PV:PAST:0:SG

'No, I did not play.'

The next utterance is an example of the use of a perfective verb to describe an internally complex situation:

Sama rasstjognula pugovichki.

myself undo:PV:PAST:1;SG button:ACC:PL

'I unbuttoned myself.'

Some utterances contained semelfactive verbs with past inflections:

Kak stuknula?

how knock:PV:PAST:0:SG

'How did (she) knock?'

Idjot, idjot princ, prjamo prygnul na divan.

go:IMPV:PRES:3:SG, go:IMPV:PRES:3:SG prince, just jump:PV:PAST:3:SG

on sofa:ACC:SG

'The prince is going, going, he just jumped on the sofa.'

It is possible that the utterances:

Tretij raz upala s divana.

third time fall+off:PV:PAST:0:SG sofa:GEN:PL

'(She) fell off the sofa for the third time.'

*Teper' druguju vynula rastopilku*⁷.*

now second take+off:PV:PAST:0:SG rastopilka:ACC:SG

'Now (she) took off the second rastopilka.'

are examples of the use of perfective forms to express habitual (+ iterative) meaning. However, it is difficult to evaluate their meaning because of the lack of context.

As Comrie claims, perfective verbs are used in ingressive (inchoative) meaning. Here are some examples from Tanya's corpus:

⁷ An asterisk is used to mark unacceptable forms (grammatical errors) and neologisms.

Pochemu ty rasserdilas'?
 why you get+angry:PV:PAST:2:SG
 'Why did you get angry?'

Zabolel zub?
 get+toothache:PV:PAST:3:SG tooth:NOM:SG
 'Did you get a toothache?'

A Tanechka ego zabojalas ' (=ispugalas').*
 and Tanechka:NOM:SG him:GEN get+afraid:PV:PAST:3:SG
 'And Tanechka got afraid of him.'

Nevertheless, most often perfective forms are used to indicate the completion of an action.

Podrzhili (=dogovorilis').
 understand:PV:PAST:0:PL
 '(We) understood each other.'

Lefa (=l'va) i krokodila ty vyrezala.*
 lion:ACC:SG and crocodile:ACC:SG cut+off:PV:PAST:2:SG
 'You cut off the lion and the crocodile.'

Kukle Kate svarila obed.
 doll:DAT:SG Katja:DAT:SG cook:PV:PAST:0:SG dinner:ACC:SG
 'I cooked dinner for the doll Katja.'

The last possibility for the use of past perfective forms is to express the so-called perfect meaning. I chose from Tanya's corpus some utterances in which perfect meaning is quite clear, i.e. where it is emphasized by an adverb or particle. That is why I give examples only for two types of perfect: the perfect of result (first two utterances) and the indefinite perfect (the last utterance).

Ja uzhe napisala kartochki.
 I already write:PV:PAST:1:SG sheet:ACC:PL
 'I have already written the sheets.'

Papochka uzhe ushol na rabotu.
 daddy:NOM:SG already go:PV:PAST:3:SG for work:ACC:SG
 'Daddy has already left for work.'

Vot zdes' kusoček oblomalsja.
 just here piece:NOM:SG break+off:PV:PAST:3:SG
 'The piece has broken off just here.'

Future tense

In the future tense 156 imperfective tokens were found in Tanya's utterances, that is, 25 per cent of all future tense forms. It should also be noted that imperfective future tense forms were formed with both activity and telic verbs:

Ja budu ej pisat'.

I write:IMPV:FUT:1:SG her:INS
'I will write with it.'

Rukami budem kopat'.

hand:INS:PL dig:IMPV:FUT:1:PL
'We will dig with [our] hands.'

A ja budu vyrezat' vot e~tu kartinku.

and I cut+off:IMPV:FUT:1:SG just this:ACC:SG picture:ACC:SG
'And I will cut out this picture.'

I igrushki budu podnimat'.

and toy:ACC:PL pick+up:IMPV:FUT:1:SG
'And I will pick up the toys.'

In principle, among future tense imperfective forms the same semantic categories can be found as in those of the past tense. Thus, habitual verbs with salient iterativity meaning have been found:

Opjat' budu tak zasyvat' (=zasovyvat').*

again push:IMPV:FUT:1:SG this way
'I will push this way again.'

Some tokens were used in the continuous meaning:

A ja budu stojat'.

and I stand:IMPV:FUT:1:SG
'And I will be standing.'

A ja budu derzhat'.

and I hold:IMPV:FUT:1:SG
'And I will be holding.'

However, the majority of imperfective future forms expressed progressiveness:

Ja jejo budu raschosyvat'.

I her:ACC comb+out:IMPV:FUT:1:SG
'I will be combing her out.'

V krovati kolgotki budu razdevat'.
 in bed:LOC:SG tights:ACC:PL take+off:IMPV:FUT:1:SG
 'I will take off (my) tights in bed.'

Further, I would like to draw attention to the specific role of Russian future imperfective, which is to define activities that follow an utterance. This usage is emphasised by adverbs of time, such as: *sejchas, teper'* 'now'. Used with future tense verb forms, these adverbs refer not to the moment of speaking but to the immediate future:

Net, sejchas budet babushka smotret'.
 no, now look:IMPV:FUT:3:SG grandma:NOM:SG
 'No, now grandma will be watching.'

Teper' budem risovat'.
 now draw:IMPV:FUT:1:PL
 'Now we will be drawing.'

Three-quarters of all the future tense forms (477 tokens) were perfective. Their semantic functions are less differentiated than those of the perfective past tense tokens. The frequency of occurrence of forms representing particular semantic categories differs, too. The majority of these future forms expresses the durative aspect of a situation:

Ja poshalju nemnozhko.
 I play:PF:FUT:1:SG some
 'I will play the fool.'

A ja pososu sosku.
 and I suck:PV:FUT:1:SG dummy:ACC:SG
 'And I will suck (my) dummy.'

Eshcho pochitajem.
 still read:PV:FUT:1:SG
 'We will keep reading.'

Relatively numerous future perfective forms expressed situations which are designated by Comrie as internally complex:

A teper' vsjo soberjom zdes'.
 and now all gather:PF:FUT:1:PL here
 'And now we will gather everything here.'

Vsex tovarishchej tuda polozhim.
 all friend:ACC:PL here put:PF:FUT:1:PL
 'We will put all the friends here.'

Some of the perfective forms were used to indicate a planned completion of a situation:

A drugoj kukle Tane ja nosok odenu.

and second:DAT:SG doll:DAT:SG Tanja:DAT:SG I sock:ACC:SG
dress+up:PF:FUT:1:SG

'And I will dress up the sock for the second doll Tanya.'

Dojesh' bulochku.

eat+up:PV:FUT:2:SG roll:ACC:SG

'You will eat up the roll.'

Chto pribjom?

what nail:PF:FUT:1:PL

'What will we nail?'

A few seem to have been used in the ingressive meaning:

I ja tak zakrichu.

and I this way cry:PV:FUT:1:SG

'And I will cry in this way.'

Skol'ko ja zaxochu.

how+many I like:PV:FUT:1:SG

'As many as I will like.'

Infinitive

As Holvoet (1989) claims, aspectual oppositions in temporal verb forms are only indirectly based on temporal deixis. Simplifying Holvoet's argument, one can say that the use of imperfective forms of infinitives in some types of modal constructions refers to the present, whereas perfective forms refer to the future.

In Tanya's utterances 164 imperfective infinitives were found, which make up almost one-third of all of her infinitival forms⁸. The other two-thirds (393 tokens) were perfective. The majority of infinitives were used in modal constructions, involving such predicates as: *(ne) nado* 'one must (not)', *nel'zja* 'it is not allowed', *(ne) xochu* 'I (do not) want', *(ne) mogu* 'I can (not)', *mozhno* 'one can'. In some cases these predicates were only implicit. The interpretation proposed by Holvoet seems satisfactory in most cases. Some examples are given below. The first two are imperfective, and the last two are perfective:

Ne xochu odevat' noski.

not want:IMPV:PRES:1:SG put+on:IMPV:INF sock:ACC:PL

'I don't want to put my socks on.'

⁸ All the infinitives functioning as parts of analytical grammatical forms, e.g. compound future tense of imperfective verbs, were excluded from the analysis.

Rukami možno est' rybku?

hand:INS:PL can+one eat:IMPV:INF fish:ACC:SG
'Can one eat fish with [one's] fingers?'

Xochu nadet'.

want:IMPV:PRES:1:SG put+on:PV:INF
'I want to put on.'

Možno mne na odnu kartochku postavit'?

one+can me:DAT on one sheet:ACC:SG put:PV:INF
'May I put it on one sheet of paper?'

A relatively large number of imperfective infinitive forms were used by the child in habitual meaning (especially in adverbial clauses of purpose after verbs of movement):

My pojdjom sejchas guljat'.

we go:PV:FUT:1:PL now walk:IMPV:INF
'We will now go [in order to walk.] and walk.'

Pojdjom vytirat' posudu.

go:PV:FUT:1:PL dry:IMPV:INF dish:ACC:SG
'We will go and dry the dishes.'

Ja umeju sovat'.

I can:IMPV:PRES:1:SG push:IMPV:INF
'I can push.'

Some perfective infinitives functioning as adverbials of purpose were also found, but all of them expressed internally complex situations (the meaning of perfective forms here is very close to that of imperfective ones):

Pojdjom poigrat'.

go:PV:FUT:1:PL play:PV:INF
'We will go [in order to play] and play.'

In some instances infinitives seemed to be used in order to replace forms of the future tense or the imperative. The lack of context, however, precludes an unequivocal interpretation but this function of infinitives does not seem preponderant. Examples:

A potom spat'.

and then sleep:IMPV:INF
'And then to sleep.'

Teper' pochinju sejchas i bol'she ne snimat'.

now repair:PF:FUT:1:SG now and more not pull+off:PV:INF
'I am going to repair (it) and (please) not to pull (it) off more.'

Imperative

Tanya used 220 imperfective forms in the imperative mood (27 percent of imperatives), but the lexeme *smotri* 'look:IMPER:2:SG', used in the specific pragmatic function, constituted one-third of these forms. Here are some examples of the pragmatic use of *smotri*:

Smotri, ja snjala trusishki.

look:IMPV:IMPER:2:SG, I take+off:PV:PAST:1:SG trousers:ACC:PL
'Look, I took off my trousers.'

Smotri, kakaja bol'shaja fol'ga.

look:IMPV:IMPER:2:SG, what big:NOM:SG:F foil:NOM:SG
'Look, what a large [piece of] foil.'

A relatively large number of imperfective imperatives were been found in negative sentences. In Russian, imperfective forms are more common in such constructions; perfective forms are less frequent and they are used only in a limited number of contexts. A few examples are given below:

Shapku nashu ne beri.

cap:GEN:SG our:GEN:SG not take:IMPV:IMPER:2:SG
'Don't take our cap.'

Babushka, ne uxodi.

grandma, not leave:IMPV:IMPER:2:SG
'Grandma, don't leave.'

In the imperative the prevalence of perfective forms (607 tokens, which is 73 percent of all imperatives) may be explained by semantic factors. If we consider the fact that the basic function of the imperative is to express an order, the presence of perfective forms is a matter of course. Moreover, imperatives usually refer to situations which are supposed to take place only once, and perfectivity expresses precisely that meaning. In Tanya's corpus the majority of orders were expressed in affirmative sentences and in Russian perfective imperatives are more often used in such sentences.

Aspectual errors in Tanya's utterances

Tanya's speech was very close to the adult model, thus the number of errors of different types was low. Only a few aspectual errors were found, and they are discussed below. I would like to emphasize once more that the girl's utterances are contextless: hence, the explanations are merely hypothetical.

Aspectual forms in modal constructions (after negation)

Most of the errors concern the use of aspectual forms after negation in constructions with modal meaning. Once Tanya used the perfective verb (after negation) in the imperative:

*Net, net, ne otkroj**. (= *ne otkryvaj*)
 no, no, not open:PV:IMPER:2:SG
 'No, no, don't open.'

The occurrence of perfective verbs in such constructions is problematic. Some linguists (among them Russian) claim that a perfective form used in such a case could be correct only if it expressed a warning. In Holvoet's (1989) opinion, it is rather unlikely that the meaning of a warning could determine aspect. In general, he does not suggest that utterances like *ne otkroj* 'don't open:PV:IMPER:2:SG' are semantically incorrect. Such a construction could be correct if it referred to an action independent of the listener's will. (The verb *otkryt* 'to open' belongs, in Holvoet's opinion, to a group of predicates whose use in the imperfective refers to an action performed in a way which is foreseeable in view of the desired result).

Twice Tanya used perfective infinitives after *ne nado* 'one must not' in predicative function:

*Ne nado sjuda polozhit** (= *klast*) tetradku.
 one must not here put:PV:INF exercise-book:ACC:SG
 'One must not put the exercise-book here.'

*Ne nado pochitat** (= *chitat*).
 one must not read:PV:INF
 'One must not read.'

What is very interesting is that Gvozdev noticed similar errors in his son's utterances (*Zakryt' ne nado* [Zhenya 2;2,28]). In Gvozdev's opinion, the usage of perfective forms in such contexts (single action is considered) is far more justified and consequent than the usage of imperfective forms. Also Ceytlin (1988) drew attention to frequent errors in the choice of aspectual form after *ne nado* 'one must not' (her example: *Ne ujudi*:PV:IMPER:2:SG, *mamochka!* 'Don't go, mummy!').

In two other utterances perfective infinitives were used after *ne xochu* 'I don't want':

*Ja poka ne xochu sunut** (= *sovat*).
 I for+now not want:IMPF:PRES:1:SG put:PV:INF
 'I don't want to put (it).'

*Ne xochu sprjatat** (= *prjatat*).
 not want:IMPV:PRES:1:SG hide:PV:INF
 'I don't want to hide (it).'

Holvoet suggests that a specific custom determines the use of aspectual forms in modal constructions: sometimes the aspect makes it possible to distinguish the semantics of an expression.. Predicates such as *ne nado* 'one must not' and *ne xochu* + imperfective form denote volitive expressions. Thus Tanya's utterances containing modal predicates after negation and incorrect perfective verbs should be considered on a semantic, rather

than grammatical, level. Therefore, such mistakes do not negate Tanya's grammatical competence. I will repeat after Gvozdev that a perfective form seems to be more justified.

Other aspectual errors

As stated above, past perfective verbs in Russian can express perfect meaning. Very often the verb with perfect meaning is occasioned by an appropriate adverb. Tanya's following utterance expresses clear perfect meaning (the meaning is emphasized by the adverb *uzhe* 'already'):

*Ja uzhe prikladyvala** (= *prilozhila*).

I already put:IMPV:PAST:1:SG:F

'I have already put (it).'

In the above example the perfective form of the verb should be used, not the imperfective one. Maybe (if we exclude the possibility of an incorrect use of the adverb) in using the imperfective form the girl wanted to draw attention to the fact that her activity had taken place several times (iterativity).

Once Tanya created the form of compound future tense from a perfective verb, which is an unacceptable form in Russian:

*Net, ne budu vzjat'** (= *budu brat'* or = *ne voz'mu*)

no, not take:PV:FUT:1:SG

'No, I will not take.'

The error was most likely caused by the fact that the perfective verb *vzjat'* 'to take' has its imperfective counterpart *brat'*, which is a suppletive form, not a regular one.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that verbal aspect is one of the earliest acquired grammatical categories. Aspectual distinctions are properly marked, even in the early stages of language acquisition, when children learn their first verbs. This claim is confirmed by many linguists. Gvozdev (1949), for example, from the analysis of the data collected on his son, Zhenya, concluded that acquisition of aspectual distinctions takes place at an early age (about 1;9). Aspectual forms of verbs were hardly ever misused. Present tense forms were formed only with imperfective verbs. In past tense forms, both aspects were used by Zhenya from the very start. Gvozdev did not notice any errors in the formation of future tense forms: periphrastic forms were coined on the basis of imperfective verbs, and analytic ones on the basis of perfective verbs.

Also Ceytlin's (1988) research on verbal "occasionalisms" confirmed Gvozdev's claim about the early acquisition of aspectual differences by children. Weist's and Smoczyńska's findings also account for the early acquisition of verbal aspect.

Thus, the variety of aspectual forms in a 2;6-year-old child does not come as a surprise. Tanya efficiently uses both perfective and imperfective forms. It may sound paradoxical that the nature of some errors (I mean the functioning of aspect in modal constructions) confirms Tanya's grammatical competence. In accordance with (among others)

Holvoet's hypothesis, the presence of perfective forms after negation is not unjustified from the grammatical point of view. Thus, we cannot negate the girl's grammatical competence. The lack of knowledge of, let us say, language custom underlies such errors: language custom leads to such constructions being perceived as erroneous.

The other mistakes are of no importance if we consider their frequency of occurrence.

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