

Converb constructions in Russian and English

This presentation will address the so-called converb constructions (CCs) in Russian and their counterparts in English. The converb category is a nonfinite verb form whose main function is to mark adverbial subordination (Haspelmath 1995), also known in the literature by the labels of *gerund*, *adverbial participle* and *absolute construction* (in European languages), *gérondif* (in French), *deeprichastie* (in Russian). The basic meaning of CCs is vague or underspecified (König 1995). The interpretation of a converb construction in a particular context depends on the interaction between this basic (vague) meaning and a wide variety of syntactic, semantic and contextual factors. Russian converb constructions occur in two aspectual forms (Perfective (PF) and Imperfective- IPF) and may be temporally interpreted as either simultaneous with (in the IPF form), or following/preceding (PF) the event of the matrix clause. I will first investigate what constitutes the topic time (TT) of sentences with converb clauses in Russian: i.e. whether there is one topic time shared by the CC-clause and the main clause, or whether the CC has its own topic time which contributes to the TT of the main clause. It will be suggested that an IPF converb clause temporally overlaps with the event of the finite clause, resulting in the interpretation of simultaneity, and thus does not require a TT of its own. On the other hand, a PF converb clause has its own TT, which combined with the TT of the main clause gives a joint TT for the whole sentence, e.g.:

- (1) Ona, pro-čita-v, kiv-nu-la. (RuN)
she, PF-read-CC(Past), nod-PF-Past
She, having read (it), nodded.

The aspectual form of the converb is marked by one of the PF prefixes. It seems plausible that the converb suffix *-v* bears the temporal feature of the past tense, as we observe Past Imperfective CC forms, like *čita-vši* 'read-CC.Past (from Old Russian). The suffix *-v* is most likely a shorter version of this older suffix *-vši*, which only marks tense and not aspect. In example (1), the event time ET-1 of the converb *pročitav* precedes the event time ET-2 of *kivnula*, and both event times are included in the joint Topic Time consisting of both the TT of the CC and the TT of the main clause.

I will also address the question of whether information structure (the position of the converb clause with respect to the main clause) affects how the topic time for the sentence should be defined. According to Klein (1994) and Haug (2008), if an adverbial occurs in the Topic part, it modifies the TT of the sentence, if it occurs in the Focus part, it is usually interpreted as an event modifier. Using data from a parallel corpus of Russian source and target texts (and their English equivalents), I will show what types of converbs occur in what positions (sentence-initially, sentence-medially or sentence-finally) and how their position interacts with the temporal interpretation of the whole sentence.

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