

## Embedded Aspect in L2 Acquisition: Evidence from L1 Russian Learners of Greek

According to the Interpretability Hypothesis (Tsimpli 2003), aspect is a grammaticalized, interpretable feature in Greek relevant to the syntax–semantics and the syntax–discourse interfaces. This study investigates L1 influence on L2 acquisition of aspect, comparing participants with homogeneous L1 background (Russian) in Mainland Greece (L2 Standard Modern Greek/SMG) and Cyprus (L2 Cypriot Greek/CG).

In both varieties of Modern Greek, verb complementation takes a finite form instead of an infinitival form as in Russian. Sentences with the particle *na* are subjunctive clauses with *na* traditionally analyzed as a subjunctive marker (Veloudis & Philippaki-Warbuton 1983, Roussou 2009). The *na*-clause is a complement clause that is controlled by the main verb. Aspect in the subjunctive subordinate *na*-clauses depends on the kind of verb in the main clause (Malagardi 1994). According to Moser (1994), there is an interaction between lexical and grammatical aspect that influences the aspect of the embedded verb in *na*-clauses. Four lexical aspects (states, activities, achievements, and accomplishments) interact with two grammatical aspects (perfective and imperfective).

In Russian, if the complementation is infinitival, the subject of the main clause and the embedded clause should be the same. If the complementation is with a finite verb, the complementizer *čtoby* ‘in order to’ is used; there is a restriction on tense of the embedded finite verb, the verb should be only in the past, and the subjects of the main and embedded clauses should be different.

There were two tasks in the present study and over 200 participants took part.

(A) In the written task:

- 75 bilingual Russian–CG (25 adults, 50 children)
- 58 bilingual Russian–SMG (8 adults, 50 children)
- 75 monolingual SMG controls (25 adults, 50 children) and
- 58 monolingual CG controls (8 adults, 50 children)

(B) In the oral-production video task:

- 30 bilingual Russian–CG (15 adults and 15 children)
- 30 monolingual CG (15 adults and 15 children)

For the written task, the participants were offered a sentence picture-matching task and an elicited-production written tasks. They were expected to choose:

- (i) perfective in embedded environments which allow only perfective aspect in Greek but either perfective or imperfective in Russian: with an accomplishment main verb that has a continuous interpretation (*prospathusa* ‘try’), a perfective non-ingressive state main verb (*fovithika* ‘be afraid’), a perfective ingressive state main verb (*boresa* ‘be able’), a perfective volitional verb (*ithela* ‘want’), and an activity verb expressing a purpose or a goal with *na* being a short form of *gia na* ‘in order to’ (literally, ‘for *na*’); and
- (ii) imperfective aspect of the complement verb in sentences where both Russian and Greek allow only imperfective: when the main verb is inchoative (*arhise* ‘start’).

The oral-production video task included 36 short video stimuli with 6 types of the main verbs (6 video clips for each type) and two conditions: perfective and imperfective. The video clips showed on-going actions and the participants were asked to complete the sentence with the embedded clause in the past tense, such as (1b) to complete (1a) for the imperfective condition and (2b) to complete (2a) for the perfective condition.

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|-----|----|--|-------------------------------------|
| (1) | a. | <i>to koritsi arhise na...</i>             | ‘the girl began NA...’              |
|     | b. | <i>... pleni ta heria</i>                  | ‘...to wash her hands-IMP’          |
| (2) | a. | <i>to koritsi pire tin petra gia na...</i> | ‘the girl took the stone for NA...’ |
|     | b. | <i>... petaksi sti thalassa</i>            | ‘...throw-PERF into-the sea’        |

The results of the written task show that native speakers performed better than the non-native groups for both conditions, perfective and imperfective. The non-native groups had more non-target performance for the perfective condition than for the imperfective condition. The non-native participants with more than 5 years of residence in the L2 country, children and adults alike, performed better in the tasks than those who had lived in the L2 country for less than 4 years.

Interestingly, however, Russian–SMG speakers, both adults and children, performed better on the aspectual task than the comparable Russian–CG group. Neither the Russian–SMG nor the Russian–CG groups had a problem with the imperfective condition; they chose imperfective aspect correctly, due to the positive transfer from L1 Russian, where only embedded imperfective aspect is allowed with an inchoative main clause verb. As for the perfective condition, it was more problematic for both groups, since in L1 Russian both perfective and imperfective aspect are possible, so either positive or negative transfer might take place.

The results of the video task are consistent with the written task, though for logistical reasons, only participants in Cyprus could be tested so far. The non-native group of Russian–CG speakers performed worse than the native group of CG speakers. In addition, Russian–CG children performed better than the adults. The video task is going to be expanded to the participants in Greece, allowing for a comparison between the results of the test production.

The data from the written and oral experiment are in line with the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (Andersen 1991, Salaberry 1998), according to which learners first acquire perfective and then imperfective aspect, and that the telicity of the verbal predicate influences the mapping between lexical aspect and verb morphology in the initial stage of learning. So at the beginning of the L2 acquisition process, dynamic and durative predicates are combined with imperfective aspect, and telic predicates with perfective aspect.

The pictures and videos in the experiments showed on-going events, so the L2 beginners were more likely to choose the imperfective aspect in comparison to L2 intermediate or advanced learners (Kempchinsky & Slabakova 2005, Chin 2009). Besides, according to Borik (2002), imperfective aspect in Russian describes not only on-going and episodic situations, but also the knowledge about facts, so the participants might have chosen the imperfective aspect instead of the correct perfective simply to state the fact about the picture or a video in front of them.

The findings of the study support the Full Transfer/Full Access Hypothesis (Schwartz & Sprouse 1994, 1996; Montrul & Slabakova 2002, 2003; Slabakova 2000, 2001, 2005): Aspect is part of Universal Grammar, L2 learners can reach native-like attainment due to the access to UG, while at the initial stage of L2 acquisition transfer from L1 into L2 takes place. This study provides evidence in support of the Full Transfer/Full Access Hypothesis by investigating how learners with a homogeneous L1 background acquire L2 aspect in bi-dialectal settings (SMG and CG).

The non-target test production by the Russian–CG group may be due to the diglossic or bilingual-like situation in Cyprus that influences language acquisition and learning in very interesting ways and puts subjects at a disadvantage similar to what is observed in delayed language development. Such sociolinguistic concerns seem to play an increasing role in L1 acquisition (Grohmann 2010), and might also influence L2 acquisition processes.