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## The role of markedness in the acquisition of aspectual features of Polish as a foreign language

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SUMMARY

In the literature on language acquisition the issue of aspect acquisition in L1 and L2 has been gaining enormous popularity recently. Although there has appeared a number of studies investigating the development of aspectuality in various languages, research into L2 Polish is not abundant. To my best knowledge, the findings presented below represent a pioneer study of the acquisition of aspect in L1 English and Slavic users of Polish.

In the paper a compositional approach to aspect in Polish has been adopted. Thus, it is seen as a combination of the Vendlerian distinctions and the perfective/imperfective opposition, traditionally applied to Slavic languages. The fact of combining the Western and Eastern views on aspect results in three types of Polish verb phrases, divided with respect to the value of telicity and perfectivity, the ease of acquisition of which has been tested on a group of L1 English and L1 Slavic speakers of Polish. The results of the empirical study show without a doubt that the so called unmarked constellations develop first (the L1 English group has acquired them too) due to the similarity of inherent and grammatical aspect perceived by the testees. As for the marked combinations of aspects, the Slavic group have scored significantly higher than the English group, although a few L1 English users have displayed a knowledge of this type of verb phrases. All in all, the findings of the research are in line with other SLA studies of aspect.

KEY WORDS: aspect acquisition, lexical aspect, grammatical aspect.

## 1. Introduction

In the domain of second language acquisition there has recently appeared a number of studies devoted to the development of aspect. Researchers in the development of temporality have approached the issue from a variety of perspectives. Numerous studies have been conducted in the framework of the Primacy of Aspect Hypothesis, which has so far proved the most popular explanation of the use of verbal inflection in FLA and SLA. Other well-established accounts are the discourse motivation[1], the prototype account[2], the Discourse Hypothesis[3]

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[1] See e.g. R. W. A n d e r s e n, Y. S h i r a i, *Discourse motivations for some cognitive acquisition principles*. 'Studies in Second Language Acquisition' 1994, no. 16, pp.133–156.

[2] E. R o s c h, *Cognitive representations of semantic categories*, 'Journal of Experimental Psychology: General' 1975, no. 104, pp.192–233.

[3] See e.g. L. K u m p f, *Temporal systems and universality in interlanguage: A case study* [in:]

or Universal Grammar approaches[4], which have only recently started to be utilized in the domain of the acquisition of temporality. A new trend, being an attempt to reconcile the nativist and functionalist proposals, has been initiated by studies of the language used by second-generation of Russian-speaking emigrants settled in the US[5]. Pereltsvaig (2005) employs a revised version of the Primacy of Aspect Hypothesis, referred to as 'Lexical Aspect Hypothesis', to claim that the aspectual morphology in American Russian marks the telicity distinction[6].

It is believed that the universal category of aspect exhibits a parametric structure which brings about differences in the acquisition rate related to language distance. Aspect is defined as an inherent property of verb phrases that can be investigated on the level of the verb phrase (lexical aspect, connected to the opposition of telicity/atelicty) and IP (grammatical, or viewpoint, aspect, connected to perfectivity and imperfectivity). Quite importantly, the two levels contribute to the ultimate picture of aspectuality of the whole sentence[7], which is especially prominent in Slavic languages like Polish. In the present paper a study in the acquisition of aspectuality in L2 Polish by native speakers of Slavic and English is going to be reported on. The main concern of the research was to show that prototypical combinations of aspects develop prior to those non-prototypical in L1 English language users, which is in line with results of SLA studies of aspect. In order to clarify the idea of marked and unmarked aspectual constellations, a brief overview of the most popular approaches to inherent temporality with reference to Polish is going to be submitted. In the subsequent sections, the study is going to be introduced in terms of its hypothesis, subjects, and task. Then the results are going to be presented and discussed.

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*Universals of second language acquisition*, F. R. E c k m a n, L. H. B e l l, D. N e l s o n (eds.), Newbury House, Rowley 1984; K. B a r d o v i - H a r l i g, *A narrative perspective on the development of the tense/ aspect system in second language acquisition*, 'Studies in Second Language Acquisition', 1995, no. 17, pp. 263–291; A. B e r g s t r ö m, *The expression of past temporal reference by English-speaking learners of French*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA, 1995.

[4] See e.g. R. S l a b a k o v a, *Bulgarian preverbs: Aspect in phrase structure*, 'Linguistics' 1997, no. 35 (4), pp.673–704; *idem, L1 transfer revisited: The L2 acquisition of telicity marking in English by Spanish and Bulgarian native speakers*, 'Linguistics' 2000, no. 38 (4), pp.739–770; *idem, Telicity in the second language*, Benjamins, Amsterdam 2001; *idem, Viewpoint aspect in Bulgarian-English interlanguage* [in:] *Proceedings of the 25th Boston University Conference on Language Development*, Cascadilla Press 2001; *idem, Semantic and morphological reflexes of functional categories: The case of telicity marking in L2 Russian*, [in:], *Proceedings of the 6th Generative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition*, J. M. L i c e r a s e t a l. (eds.), Cascadilla Proceedings Project, Somerville 2003, pp. 284–297; S. M o n t r u l, R. S l a b a k o v a, *Competence similarities between native and near-native speakers*, 'Studies in Second Language Acquisition' 2003, no. 25, 351–398.

[5] M. P o l i n s k y, ( ), *American Russian: Language loss meets language acquisition* [in:] *Annual Workshop on Formal Approaches to Slavic Linguistics*, W. B r o w n e, E. D o r n i s c h, N K o n d r a s h o v a, D. Z e c (eds.), Ann Arbor, MI: Slavic Publishers 1997, pp. 370–406.

[6] A. P e r e l t s v a i g, *Aspect lost, aspect regained: Restructuring of aspectual marking in American Russian*, [in:] *Aspectual inquiries*, P. K e m p c h i n s k y, R. S l a b a k o v a (eds.),Springer 2005.

[7] See e.g. B. C o m r i e, *Aspect*, CUP., Cambridge 1976; O. D a h l, ( ), *Tense and aspect systems*, Blackwell, London 1985; H. F i l i p, *Aspect, eventuality and NP semantics*, Proceedings of Perspectives on Aspect Conference, Utrecht 2001; R. S l a b a k o v a, *Telicity in the second...*

## 2. Lexical (inherent) aspect

The existence of lexical aspect was first discovered by Aristotle, whose philosophical discussion led to constructing a threefold classification of verbs which in turn gave rise to the groupings of verbs by Kenny and Ryle[8]. The work of Vendler[9], however, is probably the best-known in the field of aspect acquisition and it is the most frequent starting point for analysing the ways of acquiring temporality. Vendler proposes four classes of verbs, defined in terms of continuity versus punctuality and homogeneity versus heterogeneity. He maintains that state and achievement verbs are punctual, whereas accomplishments and activities are continuous.

Particular inherent aspectual classes are schematically represented as in Fig. 1[10].

| | |
|---|---|
| State | _____ |
| Activity | ~~~~~~~~~~ |
| Accomplishment | ~~~~~~~~~~x |
| Achievement | x |

Fig. 1. Vendlerian classes as represented in Andersen (1991)

Relying on the assumption that aspectual classes differ from one another in one feature, we may discuss Vendlerian quadripartition in the following way. The primary division is between statives (states) and nonstatives (activities, achievements and accomplishments). States are the only non-dynamic member of the classification; we describe them as holding over time unless they are interrupted by a change of state. The feature distinguishing activities from other nonstatives is telicity. Activities are the category in which the described action does not lead to a determined goal or another terminal point[11]. Vendlerian classification was later developed and supplemented by Dowty[12]. Achievements and accomplishments are [+telic], differing in punctuality. Accomplishments, which involve a process, display duration, and thus are non-punctual, while achievements are punctual occurrences. This taxonomy is summarized in table 1.

Table 1. Lexical classes according to Mourelatos[13]

| Features | States | Activities | Accomplishments | Achievements |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| punctual | − | − | − | + |
| telic | − | − | + | + |
| dynamic | − | + | + | + |

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[8] A. K e n n y, *Action, emotion and will*, Routledge and Kegan, London 1963; G. R y l e, *The concept of mind*, Hutchinson's University Library, London 1949.

[9] Z. V e n d l e r, *Linguistic in philosophy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, New York 1967.

[10] R. W. A n d e r s e n, ( ). *Developmental sequences: The emergence of aspect marking in second language acquisition* [in:] *Crosscurrents in second language acquisition and linguistic theories*, T. H e u b n e r, C. A. F e r g u s o n (eds.), Benjamins, Amsterdam 1991, pp. 305–324.

[11] See e.g. H. B. G a r e y, *Verbal aspects in French*, 'Language' 1957, no. 33, pp. 91–110.

[12] D. D o w t y, *Word meaning and Montague grammar*, Reidel, Dordrecht 1979.

[13] A. M o u r e l a t o s, *Events, processes and states*, 'Syntax and Semantics' 1981, no. 14, pp.79–90.

Table 2 illustrates the grouping of English verbs according to their membership in lexical aspectual classes.

Table 2. Verbs grouped according to inherent aspect

| | **States** | **Activities** | **Accomplishments** | **Achievements** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Examples | be famous, be small, understand, live. | walk, ride a bike, swim in the lake, drink. | walk to school, ride a bike to London, drink three cups of tea. | notice, fall asleep, win the race, find. |

Table 3 groups Polish verbs with regard to Vendlerian classes, yet it is obvious that verbs in Polish have specific viewpoint aspect and they do not appear as "aspectless". Thus, each verb can be analyzed in terms of morphology and the function of individual morphemes can be identified, as presented in (1).

(1)
a. napisać – na-: a marker of perfectivity; pisa-: 'write', Imperf; -ć: an infinitival marker
b. pisać – pisa-: 'write', Imperf; -ć: an infinitival marker

Hence, in the class of accomplishments and achievements two verb forms are given. The accomplishments without the bracketed prefixes are imperfectives; the achievements in the brackets are imperfectives whereas the unbracketed ones are perfective.

Table 3. Inherent aspect in Polish VPs.

| **State** | być 'be'; mieć 'have'; interesować się 'be interested in'; pamiętać 'remember'; kochać 'love'; wiedzieć 'know' |
|---|---|
| **Activity** | bawić się 'play'; czekać 'wait'; pomagać 'help'; budować 'build'; śpiewać 'sing'; malować 'paint ' |
| **Accomplishment** | (na)pisać (wiersz) 'write (a/the poem)'; (prze)czytać (książkę) 'read (a book)'; (wy)pić (kawę) 'drink (the coffee)' |
| **Achievement** | wrócić (wracać) 'come back'; znaleźć (znajdować) 'find'; wziąć (brać) 'take'; spotkać (spotykać) 'meet' |

### 3. Viewpoint (grammatical) aspect

According to the traditional literature, aspect in Polish is a binary category [14]. The perfective-imperfective opposition is represented by two separate classes of verbs since aspect charac-

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[14] See for example: A. W i e r z b i c k a, *On the semantics of verbal aspect in Polish* [in:] *To honor Roman Jakobson*, Vol. 3, Mouton, The Hague, Paris 1967, pp. 2231–2249; R. G r z e g o r c z y k o w a, R. L a s k o w s k i, H. W r ó b e l, *Gramatyka współczesnego języka polskiego: morfologia*, PWN, Warszawa 1984; W. Ś m i e c h, *Derywacja prefiksalna czasowników polskich*, „Rozprawy Komisji Językowej ŁTN"1986, no. 33, pp. 129–134; J. S t r u t y ń s k i, ( ). *Gramatyka polska: wprowadzenie, fonetyka, fonologia, morfologia*, Wydawnictwa Księgarni Akademickiej, Kraków 1996.

terizes the verb in much the same way as gender describes the noun, i.e. a verb is either perfective or imperfective and its aspect cannot be changed through inflection[15]. There are a few Polish verbs whose aspect cannot be specified and, which, depending on the context, can denote a completed or an ongoing action, for instance *ofiarować* 'to give/donate', *aresztować* 'to arrest', *imitować* 'to imitate'. According to the viewpoint opposition can be represented schematically as in (2)[16]:

(2)
Perfective　　　　/…………/　　Janek zjadł ciastko.
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　Janek PERF-eat-3sg/PAST a/the cake
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　'Janek ate a/the cake.'
Imperfective …//////////…　　Janek jadł ciastko.
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　Janek eat-3sg/PAST a/the cake
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　'Janek ate a/the cake.'

As is clear from the diagram in (2), perfective aspect does not present the situation as consisting of particular phases yet it is perceived from the outside as single whole. When expressed as imperfective, the event of consuming the cake was either in progress or unfinished at a specific time (progressive, incomplete event) or used to happen regularly (habitual action). Presenting a situation with the focus on its phases without seeing a result or the beginning of the action denoted by the verb is specific for the imperfective aspect.

## 4. The interaction of aspects

Thus, we contend that viewpoint is a matter of the speaker's choice, whereas inherent aspect is a result of a set of lexical characteristics of a verb or a verb phrase. Inherent aspect of a VP is stable in the sense that a specific predicate will show roughly the same properties independently of the context. On the contrary, any viewpoint aspect value may easily be altered within the description of the same situation, as can be seen in the examples from Polish in (3). Both sentences are equally plausible in a situation when John intends to mow the lawn yet (3a) emphasizes the durativity of the act and (3b) looks to the result of the act and includes a final boundary of the situation.

(3)
a. Jan będzie kosił trawnik.
　 Jan will mow-Imperf-Past lawn
　 'John will be mowing the lawn.'
b. Jan skosi trawnik.
　 Jan Perf-mow-Fut lawn
　 'John will mow the lawn.'

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[15] R. G r z e g o r c z y k o w a, *Nowe spojrzenie na kategorię aspektu w perspektywie semantyki kognitywnej* [in:] *Semantyczna struktura słownictwa i wypowiedzi*, R. G r z e g o r c z y k o w a, Z. Z a r o n, (eds.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 1997.

[16] C. S. S m i t h, *The parameter of aspect*, Second edition, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1997.

As has been mentioned earlier, the two aspects, i.e. lexical and grammatical, contribute to calculating the value of aspect of a sentence. It may be assumed that the assignment of a particular inherent aspect frame to a verbal predicate is followed by selecting a proper viewpoint. Hence, telicity has to be distinguished from perfectivity, especially in the case of a Slavic language as Polish, since not all telic VPs are perfective but all perfective verbs are telic[17]. The holistic perfective operator[18] on atelic VPs in (4a, c) induces their telicity.

(4)
a. Janek pośpiewał$_{Perf}$ piosenki.
   'John sang (all) the songs'.
   b. Janek zaśpiewał$_{perf}$ piosenkę.
   'John sang a/the song'.
c. Janek zaśpiewał$_{Perf}$ piosenki.
   'John sang the songs'.
d. Janek śpiewał piosenki.
   'John sang songs'.
e. Janek śpiewał piosenkę.
   'John was singing a song'.

The sentences in show the possible combinations of aspects in Polish, viz. marked and unmarked. A constellation bearing the features of atelic and imperfective as well as one with the properties of telic and perfective is considered unmarked or prototypical, as the features of the two aspectual layers are similar (for instance, 4d and 4a, respectively). When a telic eventuality is shown through the perfective aspect, it is a marked combination and as such it is acquired anterior to prototypical ones (4e). This claim is a basis for the alternative hypothesis of the presented study, which is as follows:

$H_1$: Predicates combining perfective aspect and telic verbs as well as those with imperfective aspect on atelic predicates will be acquired earlier and more easily than non-prototypical, i.e. combinations of imperfective aspect and telic predicates. Also, the effect of group will be evident and the Slavs will perform better than non-Slavs.

## 5. The subjects and the task

In order to examine the acquisition of aspect in L2 Polish I conducted research in two groups of speakers with comparable time of exposure to the language, similar age and sex structure and proficiency. The first group, which I will refer to as the Slavic group, consisted of 30 subjects representing three different Slavonic languages as their L1s. Participants of Russian origin prevailed in the sample (n=24), accompanied by three Macedonians and three

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[17] See e.g. H. F i l i p, *The quantization puzzle* [in:] *Events as grammatical objects, from the combined perspectives of lexical semantics, logical semantics and syntax*, J. P u s t e j o v s k y, C. T e n n y (eds.), CSLI Press, Stanford 2000.

[18] H. F i l i p, *Aspect and the interpretation of nominal arguments* [in:] *Proceedings of the Twenty-Eighth Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*, C. P. C a n a k i s, G. P. C h a n, J. M. D e n t o n (eds.), The University of Chicago, Chicago 1992, pp. 139–158.

Ukrainians. All subjects were adults, mean age of the Slavic group being 18.09, which ensures the completion of the puberty phase. There were 20 females and 10 males in the group. The subjects were selected from a few large groups of students receiving formal instruction of Polish at state universities in Poland. All Slavic subjects had been receiving four hours of instruction weekly. Apart from that they had daily contact with native speakers of Polish and hence a lot of occasions to communicate in this language in everyday life. The period of exposure to Polish varied from a few months to four years.

The second test group were native speakers of English learning Polish as their L2. The group encompassed the same number of subjects as the Slavic one although it is a challenge for a researcher to find English-speaking persons acquiring Polish in the host country. Hence, the English group is more diverse in terms of age and, more importantly, time and mode of exposure to Polish, as compared to the Slavic group. The mean age was 19.7. Only one language is represented here, if we ignore the fact that there were 18 Americans and 12 English people in the sample. I assume that users of both varieties of English will acquire Polish in the same way as the sheer dialectal differences do not influence the process of learning an L2 in any significant way. Most of the speakers were males (n=21), the number of females in the group equaled 9. Two thirds of the participants were receiving formal instruction in L2 Polish at the time of conducting the study, whereas the remaining third had completed courses of Polish organized by universities or private schools earlier. Apart from classroom instruction, the subjects experienced daily contact with native speakers of Polish in the L2 environment. The declared period of exposure to the L2 ranged from one to five years, i.e. the participants spent somewhat more time learning Polish and living in Poland than the researched Slavs but the periods are comparable. The results obtained from the test groups were compared against the responses from a control group. First-year students college students (n=30) from Teacher Training College in Legnica, Poland constituted the control group. Mean age of the students was 20; there were 22 females and 8 males in the sample, all of them native speakers of Polish.

The participants were asked to complete a verb-selection task aiming at revealing the aspectual concepts they were able to acquire. Each item in the first task involved a short description of a situation and a test sentence with two or three different verbs to choose from. The sentence with the selected verb was to summarize the depicted mini-story best. In the majority of cases the correct choice was the marked choice, i.e. a non-prototypical yet feasible in Polish combination of aspects. In half of the items a prototypical constellation was sought after, while in the other twenty sentences a non-prototypical arrangement was the intended option. Table 4 lists types of VPs utilized in the exercise.

Table 4. Selected test items from the task

| Unmarked combinations | Marked combinations |
|---|---|
| **Perfective + achievement** <br> *wylądować* 'land', *rozpocząć się* 'begin' | **Imperfective + achievement** <br> *osiągać swój cel* 'achieve one's aim', *odczuwać ból* 'feel the pain' |
| **Perfective + accomplishment** <br> *pójść na lekcje* 'go to classes', *obejrzeć wieczorny film* 'watch the evening film' | **Imperfective + accomplishment** <br> *kasować bilet* 'punch a ticket', *gotować obiad* 'cook dinner' |
| **Imperfective + state** <br> *nienawidzić kolegi ze szkoły* 'hate a classmate', *ważyć 70 kilogramów* 'weigh 70 kilograms' | **Perfective + state** <br> Does not exist |

In constructing a grammatical summarizing sentence the participants were to choose between a perfective or imperfective verb in the past tense or an imperfective verb in the present. It is common for all Slavic languages that non-past perfectives refer to the future, while non-past imperfectives express the reference to the present moment.

### 6. The results of the study

In this section I report on how the test groups performed in the task and how their responses compare to those of the control group. I investigated 90 subjects in three equal number groups varying in the level of Polish and L1 and got 3,590 responses. The assumed alpha decision level was set at a<0.01. Beside gathering support for the research hypothesis, I wanted to reveal the percentage of the non-native speakers from both Slavic and English group who actually acquired the complex aspectual system of Polish. Deciding on the percentage of target-like responses in test assignments indicating that a notion has been incorporated into L2 grammar may be quite an obstacle, though. In fact, some researchers subscribe to an option of 75 per cent[19] yet I believe that this criterion is somewhat lenient and results of eighty per cent of productive use and above will suggest that a specific part of the Polish grammar of aspect has been acquired. The following lines of this section provide a discussion of findings in the light of the research hypothesis and further research suggestions.

Firstly, I will refer to the total statistics relevant to the task. An ANOVA analysis was performed on the data and it showed a strong effect of group (F(2, 87)=139.1, p<0.0001). The observed F-ratio was 29 times greater than the critical one ($F_{crit}$(2, 120)=4.79, p<0.01). Table 5 presents the results of the test.

Table 5. Results of the ANOVA

| Source | Sum of squares | df | Mean squares | $F_{obs}$ | p-value |
|--------|----------------|-----|--------------|-----------|---------|
| Groups | 4186.76 | 2 | 2093.38 | 139.1 | <0.0001 |
| Error | 1309.3 | 87 | 15.05 | | |
| Total | 5496.06 | 89 | | | |

Figure 4 is an illustration of the mean scores of the three groups. It is quite clear that the mean of the Slavic group is much closer to the one of the controls than the English group mean (29.63, 39.56, and 22.96, respectively).

In order to prove that the given means are significantly different I used the t-test, which is probably the most common practice among applied linguists. The following values were computed in the statistic (5):

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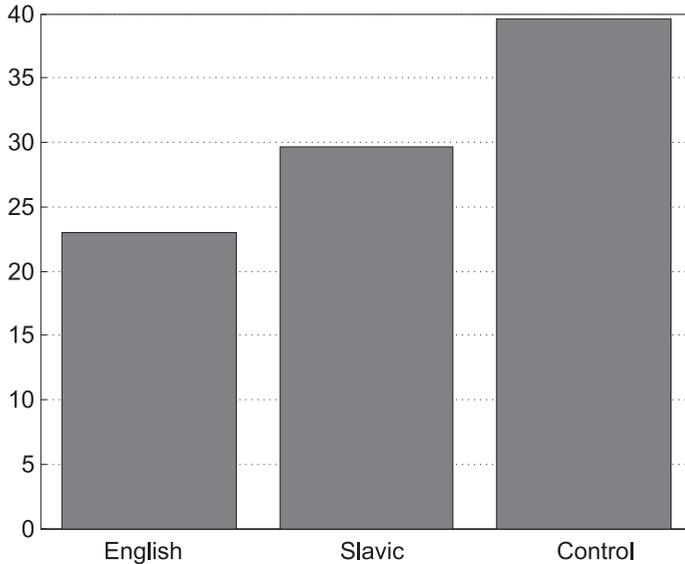[19] See e.g. R. S l a b a k o v a, *Viewpoint aspect in Bulgarian-English…*

Fig. 4. A comparison of means

(5)
Values obtained in the t-test statistic
English versus Slavic group          t=5.466
English versus Control group         t=18.397
Slavic versus Control group          t=11.801
$t_{crit}(60)$=2.390 at p<0.01

Thus, as each of the computed values is greater than the critical value of t, the pairs of means given in (5) differ significantly at p<0.01 but the difference between the English and control group is reflected by the highest t-value. If we take a look at the value of the range and standard deviation in particular groups, we will contend that the responses of the English group are the most diverse (r=20, SD=4.88 versus r=13 and SD=4.55 for the Slavic group; r=2 and SD=0.52 for the controls).

Secondly, the subjects' performance on unmarked and marked combinations was addressed. If the experiment is to support the research hypothesis, then the numbers have to reveal a statistically significant difference between the two factors as well as across groups. Thus, an ANOVA was calculated for the two conditions for each group and it evinced a strong effect of condition only among the English subjects ($F(1, 58)$=17.45 at p=0.0001; $F_{crit}(1, 60)$ =7.08 at p<0.01). Tables 6 – 8 are a summary of the statistics.

Table 6. ANOVA table for unmarked versus marked combinations in the Slavic group

| Source | Sum of squares | df | Mean squares | $F_{obs}$ | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| VP type | 10.41 | 1 | 10.41 | 1.38 | 0.24 |
| Error | 438.56 | 58 | 7.56 | | |
| Total | 448.98 | 59 | | | |

Table 7. ANOVA table for unmarked versus marked combinations in the English group

| Source | Sum of squares | Df | Mean squares | $F_{obs}$ | p-value |
|--------|----------------|-----|--------------|-----------|---------|
| VP type | 183.75 | 1 | 183.75 | 17.45 | 0.0001 |
| Error | 610.83 | 58 | 10.53 | | |
| Total | 794.58 | 59 | | | |

Table 8. ANOVA table for unmarked versus marked combinations in the control group

| Source | Sum of squares | Df | Mean squares | $F_{obs}$ | p-value |
|--------|----------------|-----|--------------|-----------|---------|
| VP type | 0.016 | 1 | 0.016 | 0.07 | 0.79 |
| Error | 14.16 | 58 | 0.024 | | |
| Total | 14.18 | 59 | | | |

The mean accuracy in the English group was 13.66 for the prototypical and 10.16 for the non-prototypical combinations of aspects. As for the Slavic group, the corresponding values were 15.23 and 14.4, while the analogous means obtained by the controls equaled 19.8 for the unmarked and 19.76 for the marked combinations. The discussed figures are contrasted in fig. 2.
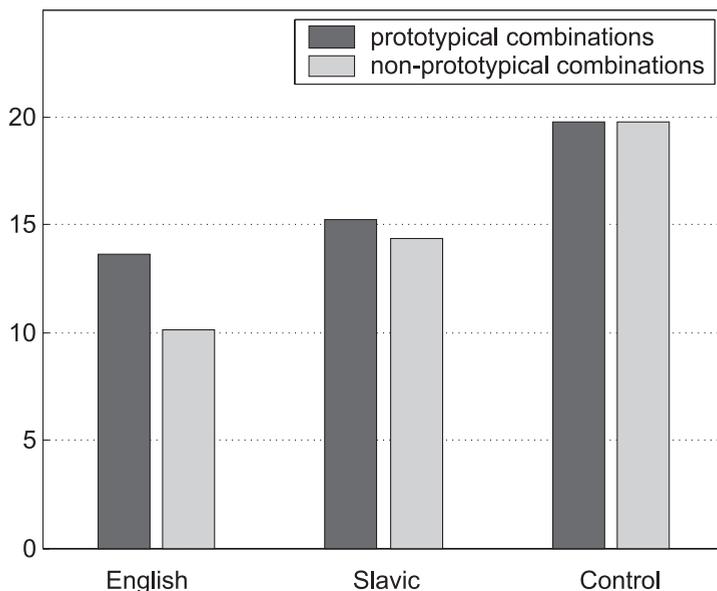


Fig. 2. Means for prototypical and non-prototypical aspectual constellations.

Again, a t-test was carried out so as to confirm the results of ANOVA. It occurred that in fact the means of the English group are the only to show a strong effect of the marked-unmarked condition, which suggests that these participants do not accept the imperfective operator on inherently telic VPs. $t_{crit}$ for the corresponding degrees of freedom at $p<0.01$ equaled

2.390, while the observed value for the English group was t(60)=4.17. Table 9 presents the results of the calculations.

Table 9. t-test results for the non-prototypical versus
prototypical combinations of aspects

|  | $t_{obs}$ |
|---|---|
| English group | 4.17 |
| Slavic group | 1.17 |
| Control group | 0.26 |

## 7. Discussion of the results

From the figures and calculations presented in the previous section it is incontrovertible that the English subjects did not display as great knowledge of the contrast between prototypical and non-prototypical VPs as the Slavs did. Their performance was characterized by probably random selection of answers, which was reflected in the frequency ratio obtained for the contrast in question. The F-value for the English was 17.45, whereas the one for the Slavic group equaled 1.38, i.e. only the first result exceeded $F_{crit}$=7.08 at p<0.01. More importantly, on the basis of the quoted numbers and the means I submitted to the statistics, it is plain to conclude that the Slavic users of Polish do not rely on common features of the viewpoint and inherent aspect of a VP to be able to utilize a predicate correctly, while the tested English certainly perform much better when the values of the aspects tally with each other. Further support for the advanced researched hypothesis is provided by the figures showing how many subjects can be claimed to not to rely on the feature of prototypicality any more. Both test groups were diverse enough for us to encounter learners who really acquired the discussed contrast. I assumed that it was in place when a subject achieved 80 per cent and above of correct responses in the given task. The number of the L1 English participants meeting the criterion was not higher than 1 compared to 13 in the Slavic group. The truth of the statement that prototypicality is salient to some speakers in the course of acquisition was also reflected in the number of participants to have scored about 80 per cent in the unmarked constellations (perfective+telic, imperfective+atelic) but not in the marked ones (imperfective+atelic). 16 Slavic subjects scored 80 per cent and above in the prototypical constellations, while only 7 English natives were that successful. As for the non-prototypical combinations of aspects, the figures are 12 and 1, respectively.

No matter how the data is approached mathematically, the Slavic group appears to have performed better than the English group. Thus, the hypothesis of reliance on prototypicality by the English speakers was fully supported by the data. One of the potential reasons may lie in the level of the target language represented by the participants. Although according to the subjects' declarations submitted in the questionnaire the exposure to L2 Polish was similar in both test groups, the L1 English learners did not acquire as much as the Slavs within the specified period of time due to the effect of language typology. As claimed by Odlin[20], the amount

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[20] T. O d l i n, *Language transfer*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989.

of time necessary to master a language is determined by typological distance between the language systems in question. This factor is referred to as differing lengths of acquisition and, incidentally, it constitutes quite an important dissimilarity between first and second language acquisition. Namely, the time interval within which the process of constructing the mother tongue grammar is similar crosslinguistically, unlike L2 acquisition which is dependent on how far the target language is from the L1 on the typology scale. It has been recently evinced with regard to tense-aspect morphology that while learning semantic contrasts expressed morpho-syntactically, L3 learners rely on the language typologically closest to L3, i.e. L1 or L2, contingent on what language systems are involved[21]. Thereby, in my study the English subjects' performance may have been worse than that of the Slavs since any Polish is a Slavic language and hence L1 Slavic participants are inherently aware of the link between particular verbal prefixes and perfectivity as well as the fact that telic predicates can be easily combined with the imperfective operator without producing any inconsistency. Consequently, the test items to have resulted in the largest number of incorrect responses were achievements and accomplishments with the imperfective viewpoint. The idea of language typology and distance is connected to the role of positive and negative transfer (interference) in language acquisition. The Slavic learners did not commit so many mistakes owing to their L1s, where aspect is realized analogously to Polish. The English natives, on the other hand, might have at least partially drawn on their L1 competence. If they did so, they would assume that all Polish verbs are essentially specified as perfective[22] and that telicity is rendered by a count singular entity in the denotation of the object NP. At the same time, the speakers partaking in the study were advanced enough to know that perfective verbs in Polish are signaled by prefixes. This knowledge might have made them reject non-prototypical constellations of aspects in favor of prototypical ones.

What is more, it is clear on the basis of the abovementioned examples of incorrect responses that the English subjects did not act in accordance with the predictions of the Aspect Hypothesis. Specifically, the VPs which caused them most trouble were inherently telic ones yet with the imperfective viewpoint. It is significant that many of the difficult items were characterized by a [+SQA] object, that is they had a structure typical for telic VPs in English. Furthermore, the learnt items included a vast number of atelic verbs, such as *kłócić się ze wszystkimi* 'argue with everyone', *bawić się w ogrodzie* 'play in the garden', *ważyć 70 kilogramów* 'weigh 70 kilos' in the first task and *bać się* 'be afraid of', *biegać* 'run', *cieszyć się* 'enjoy' in the second, which is in conflict with the hypothesis of acquiring telic before atelic predicates.

Another element, crucial also in language acquisition in general, is language input. To say that it shapes the output would be almost a cliché yet it is a basic and substantiated claim. Robison[23] observes that not only non-native speakers of English but also natives use the past tense marking more frequently with achievements than any other predicate type. The native speakers, of course, use the inflection in the target-like way and their performance is emulat-

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[21] R.K. P h i l l i p s, *Semantic transfer in L2 acquisition: The role of typology*, Paper presented at EUROSLA '04, 2004 (http://www.vc.es/eurosla2004/program/papers10-am.html).

[22] See e.g. A. G o r g i, F. P i a n e s i, *Tense and aspect: From semantics to morphosyntax*, OUP, Oxford 1997.

[23] R.E. R o b i s o n, *The aspect hypothesis revisited: A cross-sectional study of tense and aspect marking in interlanguage*, 'Applied Linguistics' 1995, no. 16, pp. 344–370.

ed by learners. In line with this opinion we can presume that learners of L2 Polish receive input that is more representative of prototypical than non-prototypical aspectual constellations. In order to confirm or discard this presupposition I analyzed a body of texts from a popular coursebook tailored for teaching Polish as a foreign language, utilized to instruct most of the participants of the study, namely *Już mówię po polsku*[24]. It occurred that verbs and verb phrases are first introduced in their prototypical arrangements, regardless of tense marking. As our concern is past tense, I scrutinized texts and exercises targeting at teaching past tense inflection and perfective-imperfective contrast in this tense. Again, it is easy to notice that unmarked aspectual constellations are predominant, though predicates composed of telic verbs and imperfective aspect begin to appear too. If they do, however, they rather represent VPs frequent in native day-to-day usage and not some plausible but peripheral ones. Nonetheless, we cannot forget that the learners engaged in this research were not strictly limited to classroom input since they mingled with L1 Polish speakers in student communities on daily basis. Taking this into account, we can risk a claim that because the subjects had access to these two types of input, that is non-authentic texts in the coursebook and authentic spoken (everyday conversations, TV, radio in L1) and written (newspapers, magazines, books in L1), their performance was a sum of these factors. I believe the results would be much worse if the testees were deprived of daily contact with the language in the host country; still, this has to be probed into experimentally for us to be able to formulate an ultimate conclusion. Research conducted with respect to other languages shows that past-tense inflection emerges quicker in academic than naturalistic settings yet the tense-aspect concepts are in place permanently only when motivated by proper context, available in natural rather than classroom acquisition. Therefore, I conjecture that the scores achieved by both Slavic and English in the study reflect the effect of direct teaching of the inflection as well as the opportunity to receive natural L2 input and are high enough.

The results of the research are evidence for the legitimacy of the advocated hypothesis. And thus, not only did the English-speaking participants respond less accurately in marked aspect arrangements than in unmarked ones but they also occurred to perform much worse than the Slavic group. No matter how faulty the responses of the English group were, some L1 English participants actually did acquire non-prototypical aspect constellations. The number of successful English subjects, though, was noticeably lower than the percentage of Slavs who appeared to have the notions in place.

In sum, the results of the study can be attributed to the influence of L1 setting of the parameter of aspect. If the mother tongue grammar was not crucial in the development of the L2 grammar, all learners of Polish as L2 would display a similar rate and sequence of aspect acquisition, notwithstanding the L1 they use. Still, in accordance with the results of my study, I contend that the approach of L2 acquisition to which they conform should include the mother tongue parameter setting as the starting point. This is in compliance with the Schwartz and Sprouse's[25] full transfer/full access hypothesis, where the authors maintain that the process of interlanguage development conforms to UG since a natural language is implicated. The final-state grammar is characterized by more or less successful parameter

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[24] *Już mówię po polsku*, 'I can already speak Polish', by J. K u c h a r c z y k is an advanced level coursebook of Polish for foreigners and it is a continuation of the beginner book by the same author.

[25] B. S c h w a r t z, R. S p r o u s e, *L2 cognitive states and the Full Transfer/Full Access model*, 'Second Language Research' 1996, no. 12, pp. 40–72.

resetting to the value typical for the L2. Clearly, the mentioned claim can be applied to the gathered data, especially that I was able to track down learners in various stages of aspect acquisition in the sample. What is more, a greater number of Slavic-speaking than English-speaking participants displayed a close-to-native knowledge of the Polish system, which is an explicit indicator of relying on L1 rather than constructing output on any other basis. In the future it would be interesting to investigate the matter with respect to two or more groups of speakers of languages with aspectual distinctions different from those of L2 Polish and each group representing a number of levels of the target language. In such a design it would be much more straightforward to trace the development of aspect in Polish as L2 and sketch the developmental sequences.

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ABSTRAKT

**Rola nacechowania w przyswajaniu aspektu w języku polskim jako obcym**

W anglojęzycznej literaturze na temat przyswajania języka zagadnienie nabywania aspektu w języku ojczystym i obcym jest obecnie jednym z najczęściej analizowanych zjawisk, aczkolwiek opracowania dotyczące języka polskiego należą do nielicznych. Zgodnie z moją najlepszą wiedzą prezentowane poniżej badania są najprawdopodobniej jedynymi z dziedziny rozwoju aspektu w kontekście przyswajania języka polskiego jako obcego.

Omawiane badania wpisują się w trend zwany kompozycyjnym podejściem do aspektu, polegający na rozpatrywaniu tej kategorii gramatycznej nie tylko z punktu widzenia tradycyjnego podziału na dokonaność i niedokonaność, ale również zróżnicowania na grupy czasownikowe teliczne i ateliczne. Co ważne, w zastosowanym w artykule rozumieniu aspektu nie stawia się znaku równości pomiędzy dokonanością i telicznością, dzięki czemu możliwe są trzy kombinacje wartości tych cech. Celem przeprowadzonych badań było stwierdzenie, czy i które konstelacje wartości teliczności i dokonaności są łatwiejsze do rozpoznania i przyswojenia przez nierodzimych użytkowników języka polskiego posługujących się językami słowiańskimi lub angielskim jako ojczystym. Rezultaty badań niezbicie pokazują, iż tzw. kombinacje nienacechowane są nabywane przed kombinacjami nacechowanymi, ponieważ podobieństwo ich cech składowych jest dostrzegane przez respondentów. W przypadku kombinacji nacechowanych wyniki grupy angielskiej pokazują, że rozbieżne wartości teliczności i dokonaności sprawiają, iż znajomość pewnych fraz werbalnych rozwija się znacznie później, niż kiedy te cechy są zgodne. Badania pokazują też znacznie większą zdolność rodzimych użytkowników języków słowiańskich do prawidłowego rozpoznawania nacechowanych fraz werbalnych, niż jest to w przypadku respondentów posługujących się językiem angielskim jako ojczystym. W tej grupie badawczej zaledwie kilku ankietowanych zdołało zidentyfikować frazy z różnymi wartościami cech.

Podsumowując, przedstawione w artykule badania zgodne są z innymi opracowaniami z dziedziny przyswajania aspektu w języku drugim.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: przyswajanie aspektu, aspekt leksykalny, aspekt gramatyczny.