

# L1 Effects in L2 Acquisition of English Viewpoint Aspect

Larissa Nossalik

## 1. Introduction

As often reported in the pedagogical literature, acquisition of aspect represents a particular challenge for adult second language learners (L2ers). Recent research reveals that the key reason behind L2ers' non-native-like behaviour might be persistent transfer from their first language (L1).

The effects of the first language on second language acquisition (SLA) are undeniable. Not only does it influence the initial state of SLA (Epstein, Flynn, & Martohardjono 1996, Schwartz & Sprouse 1996, Hawkins 2001), but also its ultimate attainment (Lardiere 1998, White 2003a). According to the Full Transfer Full Access hypothesis (FTFA) (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996), the entire L1 grammar defines the initial state of SLA. This grammar undergoes constant restructuring in the process of SLA until it can accommodate the entire L2 input. If the L2 input can be analysed by a grammar that is non-target-like, there will be no further restructuring and the grammar will fossilize short of ultimate attainment. Hence, the FTFA hypothesis predicts that 'unlearning' or rather *preemption* of the L1 properties will be particularly difficult when the L2 input is insufficient to trigger restructuring of an interlanguage grammar that generates these properties. This prediction is supported by several studies, which found L1-like properties in the grammars of highly proficient L2 speakers (White 1991, Sorace 1993, Trahey & White 1993, Juffs 1996, among many others). Often, L2ers continue to use L1 properties even after they have successfully acquired the relevant L2 properties. As reported in White (1991a, 1991b), while advanced French learners of English recognize that sentences without verb raising are grammatical in English, they occasionally judge sentences with verb raising as grammatical, as they would in their L1. These findings suggest that learning of L2 properties does not go hand in hand with preemption of the corresponding L1 properties.

Gabriele (2005, 2009) demonstrates that preemption is also problematic in acquisition of aspectual properties. Thus, in her studies both Japanese L2 learners of English and English L2 learners of Japanese struggle with preemption of the various aspectual interpretations transferred from their L1 that are not available in the L2. Consistent with previous findings, she found that, despite this problem, L2 learners succeeded in acquiring the aspectual interpretations not found in their L1. Interestingly, the Japanese L2ers of English that she investigated were more successful with preemption than the English L2ers of Japanese. Gabriele argues that one of the factors predicting overall success is the transparency of the input cues available to the learner. In other words, she believes that L2 input play a crucial role not only in learning new L2 properties, but also in blocking of L1 transfer, as suggested by the FTFA hypothesis.

Continuing the general line of inquiry, in this paper I explore what effects L1 has on the development of viewpoint aspect, through investigation of Russian adult learners of English as a second language (ESL). Does the acquisition of this type of aspect follow the developmental path reported for other linguistic properties? First, do Russian L2ers start their acquisition process by assuming that English viewpoint aspect is similar to Russian viewpoint aspect? This question is particularly interesting in light of the recent theoretical proposals which argue that viewpoint aspect is computed in its own

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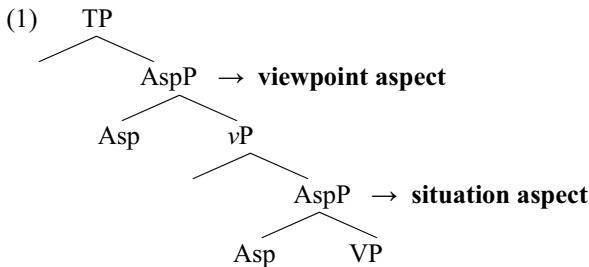
\* Larissa Nossalik, Université de Montréal. For questions, contact Larissa Nossalik at [larissa.nossalik@mcgill.com](mailto:larissa.nossalik@mcgill.com). I would like to express my gratitude to the participants of GALANA 5 conference for their questions and thoughtful remarks. All errors are mine. This research has been supported by a postdoctoral fellowship from Le Fonds de Recherche du Québec sur Société et Culture (FQRSC).

functional category (Slabakova 2001). Answering this question will, thus, add to the debate of whether or not functional categories are transferred in SLA (Vainikka & Young-Scholten 1994, 1996 vs. Schwartz & Sprouse 1996). Second, does the acquisition of viewpoint aspect display the above-mentioned asymmetry, whereby Russian learners are predicted to acquire new properties related to viewpoint aspect before they are able to preempt Russian-like properties not available in English? And if there is a delay in preempting of L1 properties as opposed to acquisition of L2 properties, can it be attributed to the type of evidence available in the English input? And last, do high proficiency speakers succeed in blocking this transfer or does their grammar fossilize short of ultimate attainment?

In short, the present study aims to discover whether there is transfer in the domain of viewpoint aspect and whether this transfer, if present, is persistent and, can then explain the non-native-like behaviour reported in the pedagogical literature.

## 2. Crosslinguistic variation

Research on aspect point to the existence of at least two types of aspect: *situation* and *viewpoint* (Comrie 1976, Dahl 1985, Dowty 1979, Smith 1991/1997, Tenny 1992, Travis 1994, Verkuyl 1993). Situation aspect is concerned with inherent boundaries of events, or the telic/atelic distinction. Viewpoint aspect is concerned with actual boundaries of events, or the bounded/unbounded distinction (Verkuyl 1993, Depraetere 1995, Smith 1991/1997, Slabakova 2001). Researchers who advocate a syntactic approach to aspect recognize that these two types of aspect are encoded by two distinct syntactic projections (AspPs). While the situation aspect is encoded by the vP-internal or simply inner AspP, the viewpoint aspect is encoded by the vP-external or simply outer AspP, as shown in (1):



### 2.1. English viewpoint aspect

In English, the outer AspP is standardly associated with the progressive morpheme *-ing* (Smith 1991/1997, Slabakova 2001). This morpheme makes the entire verbal predicate unbounded in time. Because progressive verbal predicates are construed as unbounded, they can receive one of the two unbounded interpretations: ongoing or habitual.

In (2a) and (2b), the progressive verb *eating* encodes an ongoing event. Since this verb only describes the event's progression without referring to its boundaries, it is computed as unbounded in time.

- (2)
- |  |   |
|--|---|
| a. Right now, Peter is <b>eating</b> apples.       | - <i>activity</i> (dynamic, atelic)       |
| b. Right now, Peter is <b>eating</b> an apple.     | - <i>accomplishment</i> (dynamic, telic)  |
| c. *Right now, Peter is <b>knowing</b> the answer. | - <i>state</i> (non-dynamic, atelic)      |
| d. *Right now, Peter is <b>recognizing</b> her.    | - <i>achievement</i> (non-dynamic, telic) |

One well-known restriction that *-ing* imposes on its base is that it can only attach to dynamic verbal predicates. This is why (2c) that contains a progressive form of the non-dynamic, stative verb *to know* is ungrammatical. Likewise, (2d) is ungrammatical, since it contains a progressive form of the non-

dynamic, achievement verb *to recognize*. This being said note that *-ing* can attach to both atelic and telic verbs as long as they are dynamic, as demonstrated by grammatical sentences in (2a) and (2b).<sup>1</sup>

Although the ongoing reading is undoubtedly a default reading of English progressive verbs, these verbs can alternatively receive an iterative/habitual reading. For example, in (3) the verb *drinking* does not signal a single drinking event, but rather a sequence of drinking events.<sup>2</sup> The fact that this sequence is potentially unlimited in time suggests once more that progressive verbs are unbounded.

(3) Mary gave a bottle of wine to Peter and Jane. They are **drinking** that wine every day.

So far, we have seen that in English outer AspP, occupied by *-ing*, yields unbounded interpretation. However, this projection can also be licensed by a phonologically null aspectual morpheme, as in the case of simple tense verbs. As suggested in the literature, it is due to the outer AspP that simple tense verbs can receive an unbounded habitual reading (Rothstein 2004), as in (4). Note that, just like *-ing*, the  $\emptyset$ -suffix can attach to both dynamic atelic and telic verbs, as shown in (4a) and (4b) respectively.

- (4) a. Every day Peter and Jane drink $\emptyset$  wine. - *activity* (dynamic, atelic)  
 b. Every day Peter and Jane drink $\emptyset$  that wine. - *accomplishment* (dynamic, telic)

Importantly, English verbs inflected with  $\emptyset$  cannot receive an ongoing reading and are, hence, incompatible with the adverbial *right now* which imposes such a reading, as exemplified in (5). This means that in English the ongoing reading can be encoded exclusively by progressive verbal forms.

- (5) a. \*Right now, Peter and Mary drink $\emptyset$  wine. - *activity* (dynamic, atelic)  
 b. \*Right now, Peter and Mary drink $\emptyset$  that wine. - *accomplishment* (dynamic, telic)

To recap, the main function of the outer AspP is that it renders the overall event unbounded in time. In English, this projection can be filled by the progressive suffix *-ing* or the simple tense  $\emptyset$ -suffix. Both of these suffixes can attach to dynamic telic or atelic stems. Considering their semantic functions, the suffix *-ing* is standardly used to encode ongoing events. Although both suffixes can be used to express habitual events, English speakers prefer to use  $\emptyset$  to encode such events. This preference surely makes the system less ambiguous, with each suffix being typically associated with only one reading: *-ing* with the ongoing reading and  $\emptyset$  with the habitual reading.

## 2.2. Russian viewpoint aspect

In Russian, just like in English, viewpoint aspect is encoded by the outer AspP which renders the entire event unbounded in time. In Russian too this projection can be filled either by an overt or a phonologically null morpheme (Nossalik 2009).

The overt morpheme that is standardly associated with this projection is the secondary imperfective (SI) suffix *-va*. Similarly to *-ing*, *-va* can yield either an ongoing or habitual reading, as exemplified in (6). However, neither of these readings is perceived as a default.

- (6) a. V dannyj moment Marina perečityvaet “Annu Kareninu”. - *accomplishment*  
 At this moment Marina rereads<sub>SI</sub> “Anna Karenina”. (dynamic, telic)  
 ‘At this moment, Marina is rereading “Anna Karenina”.’  
 b. Každyj god Marina perečityvaet “Annu Kareninu”. - *accomplishment* (dynamic, telic)  
 Every year Marina rereads<sub>SI</sub> “Anna Karenina”.  
 ‘Every year, Marina rereads “Anna Karenina”.’

<sup>1</sup> In English, the telicity value of a dynamic verbal predicate depends on the aspectual status of its internal argument. Only dynamic verbs that appear with a *quantity* internal argument (e.g., a singular count, definite or overtly quantificational plural/mass noun) are construed as telic (Verkuyl 1993).

<sup>2</sup> English speakers prefer to use simple tense verbs to encode the habitual reading. Speakers who exhibit a strong preference for expressing habitual using the simple tense forms may judge the sentence in (3) as ungrammatical.

While *-va* resembles *-ing* in that it can encode either an ongoing or habitual reading, it has a different selectional restriction from *-ing*. Just like *-ing*, it cannot attach to non-dynamic verbs, as shown in (7a) and (7b). But neither can it attach to dynamic atelic verbs, as demonstrated in (7c).<sup>3</sup>

- (7) a. \*V dannyj moment Marina znavaet otvet. - *state* (non-dynamic, atelic)  
 At this moment Marina knows<sub>SI</sub> answer.  
Intended: ‘At this moment, Marina is knowing the answer.’
- b. \*V dannyj moment Marina uznavaet ego. - *achievement* (non-dynamic, telic)  
 At this moment Marina recognizes<sub>SI</sub> him.  
Intended: ‘At this moment, Marina is recognizing him.’
- c. \*V dannyj moment Marina čityvaet knigi. - *activity* (dynamic, atelic)  
 At this moment Marina reads<sub>SI</sub> knigi.  
Intended: ‘At this moment, Marina reads books.’

In other words, while both *-ing* and *-va* can attach to dynamic telic stems, only *-ing* can attach to dynamic atelic stems. This is why both Russian and English sentences that contain a dynamic telic verb are grammatical, as shown in (2b) and (6a) respectively. In contrast, while the English sentence in (2a) which contains a dynamic atelic verb is grammatical, its Russian structural equivalent in (7c) is ungrammatical.

As mentioned above, in addition to *-va*, the outer AspP can be occupied by the  $\emptyset$  aspectual suffix in Russian, as in the case of dynamic primary imperfective verbs (PIs) (Nossalik 2009). Notably, both the English  $\emptyset$ -suffix ( $-\emptyset_E$ ) and the Russian  $\emptyset$ -suffix ( $-\emptyset_R$ ) can encode a habitual reading. Consequently, sentences that contain a verb inflected with  $-\emptyset$  appearing in the habitual context, such as (4a) and (8b), are grammatical in both languages.

- (8) a. V dannyj moment Marina čita $\emptyset$ et “Annu Kareninu”. - *activity* (dynamic, atelic)  
 At this moment Marina reads<sub>PI</sub> “Anna Karenina”.  
 ‘At this moment, Marina is reading “Anna Karenina”.’
- b. Každyj god Marina čita $\emptyset$ et “Annu Kareninu”. - *activity* (dynamic, atelic)  
 Every year Marina reads<sub>PI</sub> “Anna Karenina”.  
 ‘Every year, Marina rereads “Anna Karenina”.’

However,  $-\emptyset_R$  differs from  $-\emptyset_E$  in two important ways. First, contra to  $-\emptyset_E$ ,  $-\emptyset_R$  can encode an ongoing event reading. To demonstrate, compare the English sentence in (5a) and its Russian structural equivalent in (8a), both containing a verb inflected with  $-\emptyset$  in the ongoing context. Out of these two sentences, only the Russian one is grammatical, revealing that in Russian  $-\emptyset$  can indeed encode an ongoing event.

Second,  $-\emptyset_R$  has a different selectional restriction from  $-\emptyset_E$ . Unlike  $-\emptyset_E$ , it cannot attach to dynamic telic stems. This is why the English sentence in (4b) which contains a simple tense accomplishment is grammatical, whereas its Russian structural equivalent in (9b) is ungrammatical. Importantly, a verb consisting of a telic stem and the suffix  $-\emptyset_R$  is ungrammatical in Russian, regardless of whether it appears in an ongoing or habitual context, as shown in (9). These data clearly demonstrate that  $-\emptyset_R$  cannot attach to telic stems.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> In Russian, the telicity value of a verbal predicate does not depend on the aspectual status of its internal argument but rather on the morphological makeup of the verbal predicate itself. Russian telic verbs typically contain a prefix.

<sup>4</sup> Note that dynamic telic verbs that are not inflected with  $-\emptyset_R$  are grammatical in Russian. For instance, the verb *pročitaet* ‘read<sub>PERF</sub>’ homophonous with the verb in (9) does exist in Russian. Such verbs, however, do not contain an outer AspP in their syntactic structure, as revealed by the fact that they cannot assume an ongoing or habitual reading associated with this projection, as shown in (9).

- (9) a. \*V dannyj moment Marina pročita $\emptyset$ et “Annu Kareninu”. - *accomplishment*  
 At this moment Marina proreads<sub>PI</sub> “Anna Karenina”. (dynamic, telic)  
 ‘Intended: At this moment, Marina is reading “Anna Karenina”.’
- b. \*Každyj god Marina pročita $\emptyset$ et “Annu Kareninu”. - *accomplishment*  
 Every year Marina proreads<sub>PI</sub> “Anna Karenina”. (dynamic, telic)  
 ‘Intended: Every year, Marina reads “Anna Karenina”.’

To recap, in Russian, just like in English, viewpoint aspect is encoded by the outer AspP. This projection carries the same function in the two languages. Specifically, it makes the entire event unbounded in time and, as such, compatible with either an ongoing or habitual context. Moreover, in both languages the outer AspP can be filled by an overt or phonologically empty suffix. Despite these similarities, the distribution of aspectual suffixes associated with the outer AspP differs in these two languages. In English, both the overt and null suffixes can attach to dynamic atelic or dynamic telic stems. In Russian, the overt suffix can only attach to dynamic telic stems and the null one to dynamic atelic stems. Moreover, while in English each suffix is typically associated with one particular reading: the overt with ongoing and the null with habitual, in Russian both types of suffixes can express either of these readings.

In short, in English and Russian the distribution of the overt and phonologically null suffixes associated with the outer AspP is dependent on two distinct dimensions. In English, the choice between the two types of suffixes is contingent on the interpretation that they can encode: either ongoing or habitual. In Russian, however, it depends on the type of base that they can attach to: either telic or atelic. Table 1 summarizes the differences presented in this section.

Table 1: Differences between English and Russian aspectual suffixes

	Telic stem	Atelic stem
Ongoing reading	-ing /-va	-ing /- $\emptyset_R$
Habitual reading	- $\emptyset_E$ /?-ing/-va	- $\emptyset_E$ /?-ing/- $\emptyset_R$

Keeping these differences in mind, let us briefly discuss what exactly Russian learners of ESL must do in order to successfully acquire English viewpoint aspect.

### 3. The acquisition task

Assuming the FTFA hypothesis, Russian learners of ESL are predicted to initially equate *-ing* with *-va* and  $-\emptyset_E$  with  $-\emptyset_R$ . If so, they will inaccurately restrict *-ing* to telic stems and  $-\emptyset_E$  to atelic stems. In addition, they will allow for verbs inflected with *-ing* or  $-\emptyset_E$  to assume either an ongoing or habitual reading. To attain native-like competence with English viewpoint aspect, they must realize that: (i) *-ing* can attach to atelic stems and  $-\emptyset_E$  can attach to telic stems; (ii) only *-ing* can yield an ongoing interpretation and  $-\emptyset_E$  is preferred with habitual events.

The fact that *-ing* can attach to atelic stems and  $-\emptyset_E$  can attach to telic stems can be acquired based on positive evidence. In particular, English sentences that contain a progressive atelic verb as in (2a) as well as sentences that contain a simple tense telic verb as in (4b) will inform Russian speakers that they must allow for *-ing* and  $-\emptyset_E$  to attach to either telic or atelic stem. To successfully acquire the plausible interpretations of *-ing* and  $-\emptyset_E$  outlined in (ii), Russian learners must restrict the sets of options available in their L1, where each morpheme can assume either an ongoing or a habitual reading. The problem is that L2 input will not trigger all necessary changes, given that the options present in English are also available in Russian. In other words, Russian learners will not be pressed to restructure their L1-like interlanguage grammar, given that this grammar can accommodate the L2 input.

If L2 input can indeed inform L2 learners of (i) but not (ii), then we expect Russian learners of ESL to inaccurately allow for *-ing* to encode a habitual reading and for  $-\emptyset_E$  to encode an ongoing-event reading, at the time when they already accurately allow for *-ing* to attach to atelic stems and  $-\emptyset_E$  to attach to telic stems. In other words, we should be able to see a delay in acquisition of (ii) as compared with acquisition of (i). On the extreme end, Russian learners may never be able to recover from this fatal

error, exhibiting a non-native-like behavior even at the end-state of their L2 acquisition. To see whether these predictions are borne out, I conducted an experiment, the details of which I present next.

## 4. The experiment

### 4.1. Participants

25 subjects participated in the experiment: 20 Russian speakers of ESL and 5 monolingual English controls. All controls were American students studying at McGill University. Their average age was 22 years. The age of the L2 participants ranged from 28-54, with a mean age of 39. All L2ers lived in Canada or the USA at the time of testing, with the length of their residency ranging from 1-25 years. Importantly, they all moved to North America after puberty (between 22 and 29). Although 16 of L2ers were first exposed to English in school, their knowledge of English was basic at best before they moved to North America. Given this limited exposure to English during the childhood years, they were all classified as adult learners of ESL. While all of the L2ers have had formal training in English, only three were enrolled in English classes at the time of testing.<sup>5</sup>

The L2 subjects were classified into four proficiency groups, based on their performance on a Cloze test. 5 of them were classified as near native (NN), 5 as advanced (Adv), 5 as high intermediate (HI) and 5 as low intermediate (LI) speakers of English.

### 4.2. Tasks

Two tasks were used in the experiment: a grammaticality judgment task (GJT) and an interpretation task (IT). Both tasks were available online, allowing the participants to complete them in the comfort of their home, after obtaining an ID and password to access each test. They were warned, however, that they can complete each test only once, so they should plan for sufficient time (about 45 minutes for the GJT and 20 minutes for the IT) and privacy prior to performing the tasks. In the GJT, the participants were asked to indicate whether English sentences presented to them on the screen (one at the time) are grammatical or not. There were three choices of answers available: *Yes*, *No*, *Don't know*. The participants were specifically instructed to choose *Don't know* only if they encountered some unfamiliar vocabulary. They had maximum of 10 seconds to reply to each test item. In the IT, the participants read a short story imposing a habitual or an ongoing reading and then had to choose which of the two sentences presented to them, one with a simple tense verb or one with a progressive verb, better matched the situation described by the story. The respond time was limited to 20 seconds for each test item. Both tests were designed in a manner that prevented the participants from going back and changing their initial answers.

### 4.3. Stimuli

The GJT consisted of 240 test sentences and 60 distractors. Half of the tested sentences contained accomplishments – dynamic verbal predicates with a telic stem, and half activities – dynamic verbal predicates with an atelic stem. To make sure that the mistakes that L2 speakers make are not due to their failure to assign an appropriate telicity value to the verbal predicate, accomplishment verbs were construed by using singular count nouns ( $n = 10$ ), demonstrative plural nouns ( $n = 10$ ) or overtly quantificational plural nouns ( $n = 10$ ). Because these types of nominal predicates are computed as *quantities* in both English and Russian, even speakers who haven't yet acquired the full spectrum of English DPs were predicted to compute the verbs appearing with these nouns as telic. As for the activity

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<sup>5</sup> Four of the participants from Montreal also had some rudimentary knowledge of French. This was considered not to be a problem, given that the French aspectual system resembles that of Russian rather than that of English. This assumption was further confirmed by these speakers' performances on the two tasks used in the present study. In no way did their performances differ from the performances by the other L2 subjects with the same proficiency profile.

verbs, they occurred with a mass ( $n = 10$ ) or bare plural ( $n = 10$ ) internal argument or had no internal argument ( $n = 10$ ).

Half of the accomplishments as well as half of the activities were used in their simple tense forms and half in progressive forms. Of these, half appeared with the adverbial *right now* imposing an ongoing reading and half with a habitual adverbial. In sum, each accomplishment as well as each activity verb was used four times during the test, in four different conditions, listed in (10) below.

(10) Activity: *to cook lunch*

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| a. Right now, Elizabeth is cooking lunch. | ONG_PROG |
| b. *Right now, Elizabeth cooks lunch.     | ONG_ST   |
| c. ?Elizabeth is often cooking lunch.     | HAB_PROG |
| d. Elizabeth often cooks lunch.           | HAB_ST   |

Note that while the progressive form of the activity verbal predicate *to cook lunch* is perfectly grammatical in the ongoing context, as evidenced by (10a), it is only marginally acceptable in the habitual context, as shown in (10c). The simple tense form of this verb is only grammatical in the habitual context, as demonstrated by the contrast between (10b) and (10d).

In the IT, there were 40 test items and 20 distractors. Half of the test items contained an accomplishment and half an activity verb. Half of the accomplishments and half of the activities were tested in the context of a short story that described a habitual event and another half in the context of a short story that described an ongoing event. An example of the test item is provided in (11).

- (11) Albert likes to play chess. He has participated in many different competitions. But what he enjoys the most is playing chess with his best friend Edmund.

Albert plays chess.

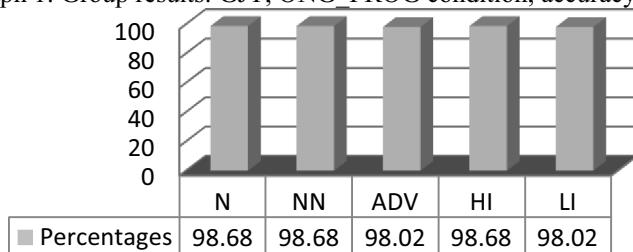
Albert is playing chess.

Since the story above encodes a habitual event, the L2 participants who have achieved native-like competence with English viewpoint aspect were expected to choose the sentence containing the simple tense form of the verb *to play*. They were expected to do the reverse when the same set of sentences appeared in the context of a story that described an ongoing event. The L2ers who haven't completed their acquisition of English viewpoint aspect were expected to randomly choose one or the other sentence in either of the two contexts.

#### 4.4. Results

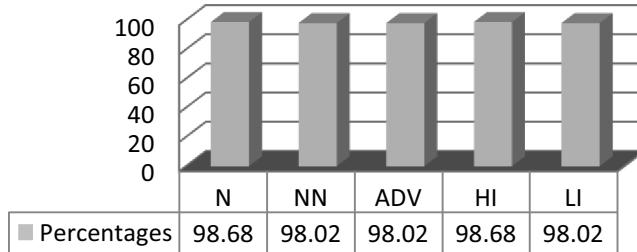
As revealed by the results of the two tests, all participants treated accomplishment and activity verbal predicates alike. Because of this uniform behaviour, the results that I report next will not take into consideration the type of the verbal stem used in each tested sentence, being telic or atelic. In other words, I will only present the combined results, on the sentences that contained an accomplishment or activity verb. Graph 1, Graph 2, Graph 3 and Graph 4 depict the results from the GJT on four conditions used.

Graph 1: Group results: GJT, ONG\_PROG condition, accuracy, %



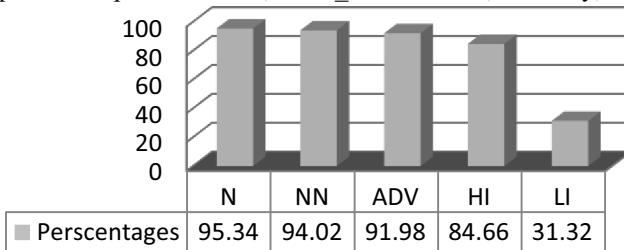
As can be seen from Graph 1, all participants performed at ceiling on the sentences containing a progressive accomplishment or activity verb along the adverbial *right now*. As confirmed by a one-way ANOVA test, the differences between the participants' performances on this condition are not statistically significant ( $F = 0.132$ ,  $p = 0.971$ ).

Graph 2: Group results: GJT, HAB\_ST condition, accuracy, %



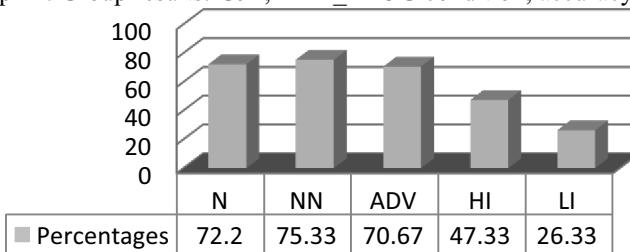
Likewise, all subjects correctly judged the sentences containing a simple tense accomplishment or activity verb together with a habitual adverbial ( $F = 0.123$ ,  $p = 0.974$ ), as shown in Graph 2.

Graph 3: Group results: GJT, ONG\_ST condition, accuracy, %



While the L2 subjects performed indistinguishably from the native controls in the ONG\_PROG and HAB\_ST conditions, in the ONG\_ST condition, the low intermediates and, to a lesser extent, the high intermediates inaccurately allowed the simple tense verbs to encode ongoing events, as depicted in Graph 3. According to the Scheffe's post hoc test, there was a group effect ( $F = 115.778$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with only the low intermediates performing significantly worse than the other groups.

Graph 4: Group results: GJT, HAB\_PROG condition, accuracy, %



Lastly, as revealed by a statistical analysis, only the near native and advanced L2ers accepted the same percentage of progressive verbs in a habitual context as native speakers ( $F = 15.778$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), revealing their preference for the progressive verbs to encode ongoing events and for the simple tense verbs to encode habitual events.

Table 2 reports the results of the interpretation task. As can be seen from this table, all participants picked a simple tense rather than progressive verb whenever the background story encoded a habitual event. In contrast, the high and low intermediate subjects exhibited less deterministic judgments when the story encoded an ongoing event. This being said note that a one-way ANOVA detected only a marginal group effect ( $F = 3.283$ ,  $p < 0.019$ ).

Table 2: Group results, IT, accuracy, %

Story	N	NN	ADV	HI	LI
Habitual reading	100	100	100	100	100
Ongoing reading	100	100	100	86	82

#### 4.5. Discussion

The perfect performance of the L2 subjects on sentences appearing in the ONG\_PROG and HAB\_ST conditions of the GJT indicates that they are aware that in English *-ing* and  $-\emptyset_E$  occupy the outer AspP – a projection responsible for ongoing and habitual interpretations.

As has been discussed in section 3, one thing that Russian L2ers must learn in relation to English viewpoint aspect is that, despite occupying the same position as *-va* and  $-\emptyset_R$ , *-ing* and  $-\emptyset_E$  have different selectional restrictions in that they can attach to both telic and atelic stems. The fact that all L2 participants, including the low intermediates, treated sentences with accomplishments and activities alike suggests that the selectional requirements of *-ing* or  $-\emptyset_E$  are acquired relatively early in the process of acquisition. This is not surprising given that the input is abundant with necessary evidence to acquire these restrictions.

In addition to acquiring selectional requirements of *-ing* and  $-\emptyset_E$ , Russian learners of ESL have to realize that these suffixes yield more restricted interpretations than their Russian counterparts. The results of the ONG\_ST condition reveal that only the near-native and advanced participants have acquired that, unlike  $-\emptyset_R$ ,  $-\emptyset_E$  cannot yield an ongoing reading. Note that the poor performance by the low intermediates (31.32%) indicates that Russian learners of ESL indeed equate  $-\emptyset_E$  with  $-\emptyset_R$  at the beginning of acquisition, as predicted by the FTFA hypothesis. Although the performance of the high intermediates does not differ significantly from that of more advanced groups, it reveals residual transfer. Interestingly, both low and high intermediates also made comparable errors in the IT, where they occasionally falsely chose a simple tense verb rather than its progressive counterpart to describe an ongoing event. The incidence of such errors in the IT, which is quite metalinguistic in nature, confirms our conclusion that these participants have not blocked transfer from Russian and, hence, still allow for  $-\emptyset_E$  to encode ongoing events.

The results of the HAB\_PROG condition of the GJT suggest that the near-native and advanced participants have the same preferences as English native speakers in that they consider progressive verbs only marginally acceptable in habitual contexts. The low intermediates and, to a lesser extent, the high intermediates, were less likely to reject sentences containing a progressive accomplishment or activity together with a habitual adverbial. Intriguingly, no L1 effect was observed in the IT, where all participants, including the low and high intermediates, correctly chose the simple tense form of a verb and not its progressive counterpart in a habitual context. In other words, when faced with a conscious decision, even less proficient participants know that in a habitual context simple tense is preferred.<sup>6</sup>

The findings from the ONGO\_ST and HAB\_PROG conditions demonstrate that Russian adult learners of ESL eventually succeed in restricting the set of interpretations that *-ing* and  $-\emptyset_E$  can yield, thus blocking transfer from Russian. This success is particularly intriguing, given that English input does not prompt learners to get rid of the Russian options. Perhaps, the L2ers' success is partially related to the metalinguistic nature of the tasks used in the present study. It might well be that the error rate of the near native and advanced subjects would increase if they participated in an on-line task.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper reports the results of an experiment that tested whether Russian adult learners of ESL can acquire selectional and interpretive properties of the two morphemes associated with English

<sup>6</sup> This unidirectionality of errors in the IT is very intriguing. Why would L2 learners allow simple tense verbs to encode a habitual or ongoing event, while restricting progressive verbs to ongoing context? It may be that they occasionally compute the simple tense verbs as progressives with an omitted suffix. This behaviour is reminiscent of SLA of German verb movement reported in Prevost & White (2000), whereby low proficiency L2 learners, in addition to finite verbs, occasionally allowed for non-finite verbs to rise.

viewpoint aspect: *-ing* and  $-\emptyset_E$ . As revealed by results, while Russian learners succeed in learning both types of properties, there is a significant delay in acquisition of interpretive components, in contrast to selectional components. The observed delay can be explained by the lack of sufficient evidence in L2 input necessary for preempting the illegitimate interpretations transferred from Russian. It remains to be established whether Russian learners indeed succeed in completely blocking transfer, given this lack of positive evidence.

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Caitlin E. Coughlin, Beatriz Lopez Prego,  
Utako Minai, and Annie Tremblay

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