

## CASE AND ASPECT IN AMERICAN RUSSIAN:

### WHAT DOES AMERICAN RUSSIAN MORPHOLOGY TELL US ABOUT SYNTAX?

**Hypothesis.** In this paper, I will explore the interaction of [ $\pm$ Interpretable] features, morphological marking and syntactic movement, focusing in particular on Aspect and Case features. It has been proposed that Structural Accusative Case (SAC) is checked in the specifier of the (Inner) Aspect Phrase (Travis 1992, Borer 1994, Pereltsvaig 2000; or in a position governed by Asp<sup>o</sup>, as in Ramchand 1997). More recently, Svenonius (2001) has argued that SAC is the uninterpretable instantiation of (Inner) Aspect on the noun phrase. In this paper, I will argue that this hypothesis provides an interesting account for several previously unrelated phenomena in American Russian, the variety of Russian spoken by second generation immigrants in the USA (see Polinsky 1994, 1996, 1997). In particular, I will argue that a number of phenomena that have been characterized as morphological attrition are in fact manifestations of a deeper syntactic property of American Russian: its inability to mark uninterpretable syntactic features. Thus, the uninterpretable instantiation of Inner Aspect (i.e., SAC) is lost, and the interpretable instantiation of Inner Aspect (i.e., overt marking for telicity) appears instead.

**Data.** First, American Russian exhibits **loss of SAC** (on direct objects). Crucially, this loss of the accusative marking cannot be attributed to a pure loss of inflectional morphology because accusative forms are retained and used for indirect objects instead – (1). In this, American Russian contrasts with Full Russian, which uses dative on indirect objects. Yet, it cannot be claimed that accusative morphology is reanalyzed as dative because prepositions selecting dative in Full Russian appear with nominative (and not accusative) complements in American Russian; see (2). Thus, the conclusion is that SAC is lost in American Russian for reasons other than just loss (or reanalysis) of morphological forms. Note that data like (2) also indicate that the loss of SAC is a distinct phenomenon from the loss of inherent case marking.

Second, as argued by Polinsky (1994, 1996, 1997), verbal aspectual morphology in American Russian functions as overt **morphological marking for telicity rather than perfectivity** (its function in Full Russian). Thus, telic verbs (denoting achievements and accomplishments) appear in American Russian only in their perfective form, even in contexts where Full Russian requires an imperfective form, as in (3). On the other hand, atelic verbs (denoting states and activities) appear only in their imperfective form, even in contexts where Full Russian requires a perfective form, as in (4). Furthermore, American Russian uses an analytic construction for inceptives with atelic verbs like *bolet* ‘be-sick’ instead of the synthetic perfective form (as in Full Russian); see (5).

To recap, the two phenomena described above – the loss of SAC and overt morphology for telicity – are not a simple reduction in the complexity of the morphological system of the language, but a result of the loss of uninterpretable (instantiations of) features in syntax.

**Implications.** The hypothesis that American Russian does not have (or cannot mark) uninterpretable (instantiations of) features has two further implications. A detailed investigation of these implications cannot be attempted here due to time limitations; however, they deserve at least a brief discussion. The first implication is that American Russian speakers are expected to “have problems” with other uninterpretable instantiations of features, such as agreement (the uninterpretable instantiations of  $\phi$ -features). Second, given Chomsky’s (1995, 1998) hypothesis that uninterpretable features drive movement, American Russian is expected to have no (feature-driven) movement. Time permitting, I will explore these predictions and will show to what extent they are borne out for American Russian. In particular, I will show that American Russian speakers do indeed make mistakes with agreement (see (4)). With respect to movement, I will examine the contrast between Full Russian, which is a fairly free word order language, and American Russian, which exhibits much more limited word order possibilities. In particular, I will focus on the ditransitive construction, which allows only one order in American Russian, as in (1); in contrast, Full Russian allows both orders of the accusative and the dative arguments. I will argue that this “frozen” word order phenomenon is not a result of register reduction or influence of English, but rather of the inability of American Russian to mark uninterpretable features.

- (1) a. American Russian  
 papa rasskazal devoèk-u istori-ja  
 Daddy.NOM told girl-ACC story-NOM [Polinsky 1997:380]  
 b. Full Russian  
 papa rasskazal devoèk-e istori-ju  
 Daddy.NOM told girl-DAT story-ACC  
 ‘Father told the girl a story.’
- (2) a. American Russian  
 i on pošël k roditeli, foster parents  
 and he went to parents.NOM foster parents [Polinsky 1997:379]  
 b. Full Russian  
 i on pošël k roditel-jam, k prijëmn-ym roditel-jam  
 and he went to parents-DAT to foster-DAT parents-DAT  
 ‘And he went to the parents’ house, to the foster parents’ house.’
- (3) a. American Russian  
 ego otec snaèala on otdal ego den’gi i potom on ne otdal  
 his father first he gave.PERF him.ACC money and then he not gave.PERF  
 [Polinsky 1996:53-54]  
 b. Full Russian  
 ego otec snaèala davat / otdavat emu den’gi...  
 his father first gave.IMPF / gave-away.IMPF him.DAT money  
 ‘His father was first ready to give him the money and then he changed his mind.’
- (4) a. American Russian  
 esli ty use natural fertilizers, i u tebja èti cvety rastet  
 if you use natural fertilizers and by you these flowers grow.IMPF.3.SG  
 [Polinsky 1994, her (21)]  
 b. Full Russian  
 ... èti cvety vyrastut  
 ... these flowers grow.PERF.3.PL  
 ‘If you use natural fertilizers, these flowers will grow.’
- (5) a. American Russian  
 v Cleveland moja mama naèala bolet’ i ona pošla v hospital  
 in Cleveland my mom began to-be-sick and she went/walked in hospital  
 [Polinsky 1996:50-51]  
 b. Full Russian  
 v klivlende moja mama za-bolela i legla v bol’nicu  
 in Cleveland.PREP my mom INC-was-sick and lay in hospital.ACC  
 ‘In Cleveland, my mother got sick and went to hospital.’

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