

Slavic Languages in the Black Box
Workshop on Empirical Psycholinguistic Methods

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Slavic language studied: Czech

Topic: Aspectual Interpretation of the Bi-aspectual Verbs in Czech

Abstract:

In Czech there is a class of loaned verbs that could express either perfective or imperfective meaning. The paper focuses on how Czech speakers interpret these bi-aspectual verbs in ambiguous contexts.

The research was based on a questionnaire experiment. We hypothesized that the interpretation of a bi-aspectual verb is determined by the verb tense, i.e. that a bi-aspectual verb in past tense tends to be interpreted as perfective while the same verb in present tense tends to be understood imperfectively.

There were two versions of the questionnaire and each consisted of 14 sentences (each contained three loanwords including the bi-aspectual verb). Participants (N=60) had to reformulate these sentences and create a sentence with the same meaning but without any loanwords. The two versions contained same sentences but they differed in the tense of the verbs. Participants were randomly divided into two groups of 30, each group had to fill in only one questionnaire. The discourse meaning of the bi-aspectual verb was determined based on the aspect of the Czech translation.

11 of the 14 analyzed verbs showed statistically significant preference of the perfective interpretation in the past tense and 12 of the 14 verbs preferred imperfective meaning in the present tense. Comparison between the distribution of perfective and imperfective interpretation in the past tense and in the present tense yields statistically significant difference for all the verbs. This suggests that the tense of the verb has a strong impact on the aspectual interpretation of the bi-aspectual verbs in Czech during language processing.