Rethinking reference-points: Russian Aktionsart as reference-point constructions

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Russian Aktionsart

- Belong to the intricate aspectual system of Russian
- Aktionsarten modify the meaning of the corresponding base verb, adding quantitative and qualitative characteristics
  - Base verb *kričat* ‘shout’
  - Ingressive: *za-kričat* ‘start shouting’
  - Delimitative: *po-kričat* ‘shout for a while’
  - Intensive: *do-kričat*-sja ‘shout for a long time so that something happens’
  - Diminutive iterative: *po-krik-iva-t* ‘shout from time to time’
- Display high degree of diversity
  - Morphologically
  - Semantically
- Is it possible to provide a unified account?

Proposal: All aktionsarten include comparison to a contextually given reference point, and can be described in terms of metonymy and reference point constructions
Reference point constructions vs. Aktionsart

Traditional RP constructions

- Possessives
- *Dog’s tail*
- Target is a concrete physical object (*tail*)
- Reference point is a concrete physical object (*dog*)
- RP is explicit in context
- Tail is part of the dog

Aktionsart

- Delimitatives
- *porisovat’ ‘draw for a while’*
- Target is not a concrete object (*porisovat’, action limited in time*)
- Reference point is not a concrete object (action not limited in time, *risovat’*)
- RP is explicit (*risovat’*)
- “Drawing for a while” is part of “drawing”

Same metonymical relations between R and T Aktionsarten are reference point constructions
Aktionsarten: a closer look

- Aktionsarten participate in aspectual relations
- Aspectual relations are metonymic (Janda 2008, Nesset 2009)
- Janda (2008): Russian imperfectives and corresponding Natural Perfectives are related by contact metonymy (Peirsman, Geeraerts 2006):
  - Ja čital [...] poka ne pročel do konca ètu [...] knigu. [Paustovskij. Zolotaja roza (1955)]
    ‘I was reading (IMPF) until I had read (PF) this book to the end’
  - The perfective follows the imperfective immediately:
    Contact
    ![Diagram of IMPF and PF]
- Reference point constructions are metonymies

Are all aktionsarten related to the base metonymically, in terms of reference point constructions?
**Examples: phasal aktionsarten**

- **Ingressives, delimitatives:**
  Starting points and limited periods
  
  \textit{zapet} ‘start singing’, \textit{popet} ‘sing for a while’

- **The whole serves as a reference point**

- **Evolutives**
  
  development of processes
  
  \textit{raspogodit’sja} ‘become nicer (about weather)’

- **The initial stage serves as a reference point**

- **Cumulatives**
  
  accumulation of results
  
  \textit{napoč’ blinov} ‘bake a lot of pancakes’

- **The normal amount of result serves as a reference point**

**Phasal aktionsarten are reference-point constructions**

The reference point is not explicit in the context
Quantitative aktionsarten

- **Semelfactive**
  selects one bounded episode from an unbounded activity
  čixnut’ ‘sneeze once’
- **The whole series of repeated actions serves as a reference point**
  
  ![Diagram showing reference points](image)

- **Attenuative**
  indicates lower intensity of an action, incomplete result, secondariness
  pritixnut' ‘fade (about sound)’
- **The action with normal intensity, the complete result serve as reference points**

Quantitative aktionsarten are reference-point constructions
Iterative and distributive aktionsarten: examples

- Iteratives
  repeated activities
  *xažival* ‘used to go’
- The single event serves as a reference point

- Comitatives
  activities running parallel to main activities in the situation
  *šel i prixramyval* ‘walked and limped’
- The main activity serves as a reference point

- Distributives
  the action affects several objects
  *pereceloval vsex* ‘kissed everyone’
- The single event serves as a reference point
Wrapping up

- Russian Aktionsarten can be described as reference point constructions, where
  - Targets are actions
  - Reference points are actions
- Reference points can be implicit
- Reference points are not limited to concrete objects but extend to actions
- Actions are metaphorical objects