

THE CATEGORISATION OF TIME IN ENGLISH vs. RUSSIAN

VLADIMIR KHAIROULLINE

Bashkir State University, Ufa

1. Introduction

Time as the general form of material existence manifests itself at different levels and expresses "dlitel'nost' bytia i posledovatel'nost' ... vseh material'nyh sistem ... v mire" [the duration of being and a sequence ... of all material systems ... in the world] (*PED* 1983: 157). This means that each and every entity or action correlates with time and possesses temporal localization.

The objective time is not identical to the time reflected in language. The former exists irrespective of human perception, whereas the latter is the result of a psychological process: man perceives the world, selects different properties of reality, grades these properties, tries to set them in order and transfers them into his own coding system which is the language system. So when we interpret different real properties, for example the properties of time, the subjective factor is of great importance. To illustrate this point, linguists "consider how short sometimes ten minutes can be, and, some other time how long it is" (Papp 1985: 96).

Besides, time reference may be determined by the peculiarities of different cognitive systems based on different languages.

Hence, on the one hand, linguistic time is the reflection of real objective time. Its organization is determined by the regularities of the world shared by humanity. On the other hand, linguistic time has specifics of a peculiar set and combinations of time reference in different languages and cultures.

The present paper discusses how time is structured in the English and Russian language systems.

2. Time perceived as space

An analysis of the English language has exposed that time may be perceived in terms of space in English. This interconnection of the two categories is illustrated by such units as *upcoming*. The linguistic consciousness of the English system representatives is capable of interpreting space so that the latter is used to describe time.

Upcoming literally means 'coming upwards'. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1990), the physical basis of perceiving time through properties like *upcoming* is as follows: our eyes normally look in the direction we move, i.e. forward. As a thing approaches the observer or the observer approaches a thing, this very thing increases in size. The observer's location is assumed fixed, while the upper part of the thing moves upwards (Lakoff and Johnson 1990: 398-399).

As for the cognitive basis, it is in the desire to perceive time properties in terms of space, because space is of special importance in the English system.

Examples like *upcoming* allow us to speak of time and space as a unity. Simultaneously, the dialectics of these categories is that each preserves "independent existence" (*EB sine anno*: 103).

Time is defined as "Duration, indefinitely continued existence of this viewed as affecting persons or things" (*COD* 1978: 1212) which is often accentuated both in English and Russian:

- (1) *During the summer* I met Mrs Strickland not infrequently.
(Maugham 1969: 34)
V techenie leta ya dovol'no chasto videlsya s missis Striklend.
(Maugham 1990: 17)
'In duration of summer I quite often saw with Mrs Strickland.'

If the above English sentence is compared to the following two examples:

- (2) How long have you known him?
Over a year. (Puzo 1974: 235)
A vy davno ego znaete?
Bolshe goda, ... (Puzo 1991: 169)
'And you long him know?
More year, ...'
- (3) He thought people *over* thirty dancing were ludicrous, obscene.
(Shaw 1985: 165)
Emu kazalos' nelepym i dazhe neprilichnym, kogda ludi starshetridtsati tantsevali.
(Shaw 1986: 109)
'To-him seemed ludicrous and even indecent, when people *older* thirty danced.'

it will turn out that the utterances with *over* point out completion rather than duration of a time period, which is due to the employment of the *over* property: "over adv., n., a., and prep. 2. So as to cover or touch whole surface. ... 5. Across a street or other space or distance" (*COD* 1978: 783).

In these cases time is perceived as a flat (or plane) two-dimensional surface, so that we have the interplay of these two categories (see Richardson 1998: 131).

There are numerous instances when time is treated in English as a closed space within which various actions are performed. This is a volumetric space comprising entities that dwell there and undergo certain changes:

- (4) *Within another minute*, perhaps, it would have crumbled into ashes.
(Orwell 1984: 71)
I cherez minutu, navernoe, ona sgorela dotla.
(Orwell 1990: 65)
'And *over minute*, perhaps, she burned to-ashes.'
- (5) The doctor in the ward had told her Talbot was going to die *within the week*.
(Shaw 1985: 119)
Vrach skazal Grethen, chto parnu ne protyanut' bol'she nedeli.
(Shaw 1986: 85)
'Doctor said to-Gretchen, that to-boy not last *more week*.'

The actions described in the utterances take place within certain periods of time (*a minute, a week*). The framework of temporal space is outlined by the property *within*: "within adv. and prep. 1. adv. Inside, to or at or on the inside, in(to) house or room, internally, ... 2. To or on or in the inside of, enclosed by, ... [OE *withinnan* on the inside]" (*COD* 1978: 1340).

Moreover, time may be represented in English as an extensive space filled with something:

- (6) *Throughout the early morning* the music keeps coming and the signs keep pointing.
(Updike 1962: 35).
Vse utro, vse eti rannie temnye chasy muzyka prodolzhalo igrat', a dorozhnye znaki prodolzhali ukazyvat' emu dorogu.
(Updike 1991: 42)
'All morning, all these early dark hours music went on to play, and road signs went on to indicate him road.'

The English variant uses *throughout* ("throughout adv. and prep. Right through, in every part ..." (*COD* 1978: 1208)); it expresses the idea of both duration, fill-in and involvement of every time segment which is perceived as space. Russian is not able to offer a separate language unit that could be compared to the comprehensive English *throughout*. That is why the translation of example (6) is so detailed in Russian: *Vse utro, vse eti rannie temnye chasy* 'All morning, all these early dark hours.'

In Russian, time may also be thought of in terms of space. For example, we say in Russian

- (7) proidennyi etap
'passed-by stage'

meaning an event which had temporal duration. *Stage* implicates spatial length: when we use expressions of the *passed-by stage* type, we deal with a metaphoric transfer of spatial properties onto the temporal ones.

Obviously, in English there is also metaphoricism in spatial perception of time, though this idea is much more extensive there. When spatial properties are attached to temporal properties in English, we observe a conceptual metaphor rather than purely linguistic one.

3. The whole vs. part

Though time is a universal category, it is perceived and reflected differently in different languages. Some temporal properties may be more frequent than others, and these properties may be subdivided into sub-properties.

One of the trends in English is the implication of the whole when part is described. For example, *in the morning* does not mean just *morning*, but it often means *tomorrow* which is revealed when you use the Russian translation:

- (8) I have to get up awfully early *in the morning*.
(Shaw 1985: 221)

Zavtra mne ochen' rano vstavat'.

'Tomorrow me-dat. very early get-up-inf.'

(Shaw 1986: 137)

This trend is observed in the description of longer periods of time as well:

- (9) I had the pleasure of dining with you last *July*.
(Maugham 1969: 55)

Ya imel udovol'stvie obedat' u vas proshlym letom.

(Maugham 1990: 55)

'I had pleasure to dine at you last *summer*.'

(N.B. a general property *summer* in Russian vs. a narrower property *July* in English).

- (10) Ten gardeners used to work this land, *winter and summer*.
(Shaw 1985: 204)

Kruglyi god zdes' rabotalo desyat' sadovnikov, ...

(Shaw 1986: 128)

'Round year here worked ten gardeners, ...'

(N.B. a general property *year* in Russian vs. narrower properties *winter*, *summer* in English).

When I analyze language material, I quite often encounter cases of a specific division of time in the two languages. *Night* is one of such peculiar properties. It is employed for describing either a whole day or an evening or a night proper:

- (11) It was *a night* on which husbands turned to wives, children to parents, friends to friends, ...
(Shaw 1985: 114)

V etot den', kogda muzhia ulybalis' zhenam, deti – roditelyam, druzia – druziam, ...

(Shaw 1986: 83)

'In this *day*, when husbands smiled to-wives, children – to-parents, friends – to-friends, ...'

- (12) It was *Saturday night*.
(Steinbeck 1987: 57)

Uzhe nastupil subbotnii vecher.

(Steinbeck 1988: 233)

'Already stepped-in *Saturday evening*.'

- (13) He was up much of the *night*.
(Updike 1962: 98)

On ne spal pochti vsu noch.

(Updike 1991: 96)

'He not slept almost all *night*.'

It may be assumed that the part of the 24 hours called *night* in English refers to the previous day, whereas the part called *noch* (*night*) in Russian is the beginning of a new day.

The language consciousness of English-speakers structures the 24-hour period in such a way that *night* completes this period, and a new 24-hour period starts with *morning*: "morning n. 1, the period between midnight and noon" (Webster 1981: 346).

The sentence

- (14) I heard your children come in about *two in the morning*.
(Shaw 1982: 94)

implies that the English conceptually perceive the 24-hour period as one beginning in the morning.

For the Russian, two or three o'clock is late night. We normally say in Russian *odin, dva, tri chasa nochi* (*one, two, three o'clock of night*) and not *in the morning* as the English do. Cf. a word-for-word translation from Russian:

- (15) V tri chasa nochi v traktire ... karmannyi vorishka Grisha ... ob'yasnyal priyomy svoego remesla.
(Averchenko 1990: 84)

'In *three o'clock of-night* in tavern ... pickpocket Grisha ... explained tricks of-his trade.'

An English phraseological unit *the small hours* is defined as "1, 2, etc., a.m." (COD 1978: 521), i.e. *early morning*. This very property (viz. *early morning*) is explicated in example (14).

The English language gives the night a spell of time from about 6 p.m. until midnight (COD 1978: 736), *night* referring to the previous day. *Morning* (or *the small hours*) begins at 1 a.m., so as a new day does, though actually a new day reading starts at 0 o'clock (or at midnight): "midnight n. The middle of the night, {time near 12 o'clock at night}" (COD 1978: 690), but this hour is closer to the small hours than to the *night*. If *night* lasts since 6 p.m. until 0, then the middle of this period is 9 p.m. In this case 12 p.m. (0 o'clock) should be called *late night*, for after 0 o'clock the small hours follow. 12 p.m. (0 o'clock) is the middle of the dark part of the 24-hour period, and the language consciousness of English-speakers takes this fact into account and calls 0 o'clock *midnight*, i.e. the middle of the dark part of the day:

(16) At *midnight*, the night half gone.

(Updike 1962: 32)

Uzhe nolnoch, noch napolovinu proletela.

(Updike 1991: 39)

'Already *midnight*, night half flew-away.'

As for the opposite, viz. *noon*, it is used to denote the middle of the light part of the day, because *noon* completes *morning* and initiates a part that is called *afternoon*.

Such a peculiar subdivision of the 24-hour period in English leads to the necessity of pointing out the exact hour on the clock-face in translation:

(17) He would have to go crosstown to his 'book' to run the *noontime* action.

(Puzo 1974: 242)

Da eshcho vstavai, tashchis' cherez ves' gorod vkalyvat' v svoe zavedenie - nado pospet' k dvenadsati.

(Puzo 1991: 175)

'And you-get up, go through whole town to work in his establishment - it-is-needed to be by *twelve*.'

4. A year, a month, a day

One and the same time period, for example a year, may be described either by a direct unit (*a year*) or by a number of shorter temporal units which make up a year, that is *twelve months*. Quite often, English prefers to use the *month* unit when describing a year, while Russian tends to use the direct description, viz. *a year*:

(18) They had only been together for about *fifteen months*.

(Orwell 1984: 61)

Oni prozhili vmeste chut' bol'she goda.

(Orwell 1990: 56)

'They lived together *a little more than-year*.'

This principle (I mean shorter periods in English vs. longer periods in Russian) holds true with other temporal units as well, for example minutes and hours:

(19) They waited for nearly another *thirty minutes* ...

(Puzo 1974: 148)

Proshlo okolo poluchasa, ...

(Puzo 1991: 111)

'Passed-by about *half-hour*, ...'

(20) He seemed to grow ominously thinner in the last *twenty-four hours*.

(Shaw 1985: 119)

Za poslednie sutki on zametno pohudel

(Shaw 1986: 85)

'During last *day and night* [Russ. *sutki*] he noticeably lost weight.'

English employs shorter temporal units as compared to Russian. The matter is not that the English language does not have a special term to denote twenty-four hours as the Russian language does (Russ. *sutki*). The term exists in Russian due to the fact that the Russian cognition tends to exploit larger temporal units. Within this trend you understand why they use the past hour (i.e. a smaller temporal unit) when they speak of time in English, while we use the future hour (i.e. a larger temporal unit) in similar cases in Russian:

(21) It's *after six* o'clock.

(Updike 1962: 43)

Uzhe sed'moi chas.

(Updike 1991: 49)

'Already *seventh* hour.'

(22) It was only *half past eight*.

(Braine 1961: 137)

A seichas bylo tol'ko polovina devyatogo.

(Braine 1960: 133)

'And now was only *half to nine*.'

Sometimes you encounter another way of time indication in English that is close to the Russian type, e.g.:

(23) Promptly *at quarter of ten* p.m. Mrs Brady descended the steps of the Elevated.

(Brush 1978: 81)

but such instances are not numerous.

Russian chooses to employ larger periods of time, to combine shorter ones so as to form longer ones that could be used as independent temporal units. This fact ex-

plains why Russian has such terms as *sutki* ('day+night'), *pyatidnevka* (lit. *five days*), *dekada* (i.e. *ten days*). A Russian-speaker uses *dekada* as a unit that allows him/her to exploit still larger units. When he/she says lit. *three dekadas*, he/she does not have to split up this period into small *thirty days* because he/she can describe the period by means of a larger unit, viz. *dekada*.

English possesses the term and notion of decade as well, but it is used to describe a much more prolonged unit: "decade n. Ten years [ME, f. F *decade*]" (COD 1978: 263). A decade is borrowed from French where it is used to denote both ten days and *ten years* (Ganshina 1979: 225). The borrowed English variant means *ten years*, though the property *years* remains implied. The explicated unit is *ten* (from Greek *deka*).

If you try and place temporal units at the axis of time, you will see that larger units are in the future with regard to smaller ones. So, a twenty-four-hour period (Russ. *sutki*) is in the future with regard to a day, a year is in the future with regard to a month, a century is in the future with regard to a year, etc. My analysis allows me to point out that English utterances frequently prefer shorter (or particular) units which are in the past with regard to longer units of Russian translations:

- (24) You've been talking about the Ferrys for *six months*.
(Updike 1962: 101)

Ty uzhe polgodu tolkuesh mne pro etih Ferri.
(Updike 1991: 99)

'You already *half a year* talk to-me about these Ferrys.'
(N.B. English *month* vs. Russian *year*).

- (25) They're *forty* and smell of camphor.
(Braine 1961: 75)

Im vsem za sorok i ot nih pahnet kamfaroi.
(Braine 1960: 67)

To-them all *beyond forty* and from them smells camphor.

(N.B. English *forty* vs. Russian *more than forty*).

- (26) And *two years later* [they] were blessed with their first child, ...
(Puzo 1974: 197)

I na tretii god Gospod' poslal im perventsa, ...
(Puzo 1991: 139)

'And on *third year* God sent to-them first-child, ...'

(Both languages denote one and the same stretch of time, though Russian refers to a larger quantity which is in the future as compared to *two years* of the English sentence).

As I have tried to show above, if placed at the axis of time, smaller quantities are in the past with regard to larger ones. The wish to tackle smaller temporal units that are associated with the past is in good accord with the general notions of the English

cognitive system, the rudiments of which were traced in the elementary concepts of world order and were later developed in the medieval culture. In ancient world-views it was believed that the mill was a

symbolic representation of the Cosmos – with the lower immovable mill-stone as the plane of the earth, the upper rotary stone as the revolving heaven, and the axle stood for the Axis Mundi.

(Sadowski 1988: 193)

The changing products of grinding were a reflection of the passing ages, always from better to worse. The idea of changing from better to worse did not at all become obsolete. It survived and developed not only in every-day assumptions but in a great deal of cultural facts. According to Sadowski, Shakespeare's Hamlet quits the scene together with the 'old gods' representing the passing Order, and leaves the future in uncertainty.

Shakespeare's play indicates quite pessimistically that the old world has been brought to a close, and there is little or no hope to get things better.

(Sadowski 1988: 193)

The idea of "The Golden Age" of the past and uncertainty of the future runs through the history of the English conceptual system. If the above viewpoint is accepted, then it may be assumed that English society tends to idealize the past. Such an attitude, probably subconsciously, is revealed in how English structures time: the reference point is a smaller temporal unit that is in the past with regard to a larger one.

5. Russian liberty and neglect

What I have just said does not at all deny the possibility of identical time and age description in both English and Russian:

- (27) The daughter was *fourteen*.
(Puzo 1974: 106)

Docheri bylo chetyrnadtsat' let.
(Puzo 1991: 18)

'To-daughter was *fourteen years*.'

The important thing is that the above viewpoint helps explain the differences in time reference in English and Russian.

In addition, Russian is less scrupulous about temporal units. Quite often, Russian prefers larger quantities than those preferred by English:

- (28) She would not see Michael again until *two years* passed.
(Puzo 1974: 124)

Ona ne uvidit ego tselyh tri goda
(Puzo 1991: 95)

'She will-not-see him whole *three years*.'

The Russian 'temporal freedom' explains why English *middle-aged* is regularly translated as Russian literal *elderly*:

- (29) I looked upon him as a *middle-aged* man.
 (Maugham 1969: 61)
 [ya] ego schital chelovekom uzhe pozhylym.
 (Maugham 1990: 45)
 '[I] him considered man already *elderly*.'
- (30) Two *middle-aged* couples in plaid scarves, bird-watchers, pass them on the way down.
 (Updike 1962: 95)
 Navstrechu spuskaajutsya dve pozhilye pary v kletchatyh sharfah – lubiteli pernatyh.
 (Updike 1991: 93)
 'Towards-them descend two *elderly* couples in plaid scarves – lovers of-birds.'

These English utterances are cases of understatement. It is almost a common place that old citizens are called *senior* and not really *old* in English. Probably the same refers to the term *middle-aged* which is used to mean *elderly* rather than *of a middle age*. Understatement is less typical of Russian, so we normally translate English *middle-aged* as lit. *elderly*. In the above Russian translations two tendencies are in effect: a tendency of being more categorical and a tendency of being liberal about time units.

Sometimes, the latter leads to neglecting minor time quantities in translation. Russian considers *a second, a moment, a minute* negligible units that can be ignored:

- (31) I waited *a second* till I got my breath.
 (Salinger 1979: 30)
 [ya] perezhdal, poka ne otdyshalsya.
 (Salinger 1991: 26)
 '[I] waited, until [I] breathed.'
- (32) He did not answer for *a minute*.
 (Maugham 1969: 61)
 On otvetil ne srazu.
 (Maugham 1990: 45)
 'He answered not at once.'
- (33) Slim gazed at him for *a moment*.
 (Steinbeck 1987: 43)
 Roslyi posmotrel na nego.
 (Steinbeck 1988: 219)
 'Grown-up looked on him.'

I suppose that the units *a second, a minute, a moment* are important for temporal characterization of real situations presented in the utterances. This is so because the language consciousness places them within the framework of sentences, for one thing, and even ascribes attributes, for example *long*, for another:

- (34) She looks at him clearly *a long moment*.
 (Updike 1962: 14)
 Ona smotrit na nego dolgim yasnym vzglyadom.
 (Updike 1991: 23)
 'She looks on him with-long clear look.'
- (35) Won't do any good to go out *till after dinner*.
 (Steinbeck 1987: 23)
 Teper' uzh do obeda vam netu smysla idti.
 (Steinbeck 1988: 197)
 'Now already *till dinner* to-you no sense to go.'

English specifies its time unit using *after*, so the time is quite definite: it is the time **after** dinner. Russian is ambiguous: the time may be either before, after or during dinner. All three variants are possible here.

6. Conclusion

The analysis has confirmed the assumption that every language has specific ways for expressing and organizing information about existing reality and its properties and units, like those of time, for one. Traditionally, the specificity is seen in a peculiar subdivision of information among language units. My analysis witnesses in particular for the fact that different language world patterns as exemplified by time references do not make insuperable obstacles for communication of different language-speakers. Non-coinciding information structures are successfully equated, interchanged and interpreted in the process of translation which provides for cross-language communication, though the specificity may be very conspicuous in the two languages. For example, English chooses to use shorter time units, whereas Russian prefers longer ones and sometimes even neglects shorter intervals. On the other hand, English is rather scrupulous about time references and may tend to exploit the past hour for time indication. Such peculiarities of time description in both languages contribute to a broader pattern termed cultural and language specificity.

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