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# **The Tübingen Corpus of Eastern European English (TCEEE): From a small-scale corpus study to a newly emerging non-native English variety**

Elena Salakhyan

*Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen*

## ABSTRACT

Research in the field of World Englishes aims to pin down, as precisely as possible, the linguistic and pragmatic properties a certain variety displays or does not display. The status of English in the Expanding Circle has been of significant interest in recent years (Berns 1995, 2005; House 2002; Knapp – Meierkord 2002; Jenkins 2007; Sedlhofer – Widdowson 2009, etc.). Nevertheless, the use of English by Slavic speakers in Post-Soviet Space has been largely ignored. Given the typological similarities among the Slavic languages (and similar historical and societal developments in the region) the paper proposes to view the Eastern European English(es) as a variety of English within the Expanding Circle. In particular, the paper questions which morphosemantic patterns, especially those of tense and aspect, emerge in the data. The study draws on spontaneously produced language data of fifteen Slavic speakers of English with L1 Ukrainian, Russian, Polish or Slovak which have been compiled into the Tübingen Corpus of Eastern European English (TCEEE: sixty thousand words). The paper argues that a variety of Eastern European English(es) is indeed emerging and that further studies examining the domains of morphosyntax, morphosemantics and lexis are necessary to provide additional evidence of this development.

## **1. Introduction**

Within the domain of World Englishes, various scholars have closely examined and described regional non-native varieties of English. The availability of typological feature analyses has in turn led to the need to evaluate and give a particular status to these newly emerging varieties. Indian English

(Mukherjee 2010), Sri Lankan Englishes (Mendis – Rambukwella 2010: 181), East and West African Englishes (Simo Bobda 2000: 185), Malay and Singapore English (Lim – Low 2005: 64), East Asian Englishes (Moody 2007: 209; Takeshita 2010: 265) and Chinese English (Bolton 2003), to name a few, have thus obtained the status of distinct varieties of English. With regard to English in Europe, even though Europe is considered to be one geo-political entity, “Slavic Englishes seem to warrant separate treatment” (Seidlhofer 2010: 355).

Thus, as the use of English by Eastern European and Russian speakers in the ELF context has not been given sufficient attention (for some studies on Slavic English see Ustinova 2006; Proshina – Etkin 2005; Proshina 2010; Salakhyan 2012), I decided to explore this newly emerging Expanding Circle<sup>1</sup> variety and describe its morphosemantic features.

Slavic languages, especially East Slavic (Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian) and West Slavic (Polish and Slovak) share many similar linguistic features. Rich morphology, which is often fusional, free word order, rich agreement systems, and the category of aspect are salient features of Slavic languages (Comrie – Corbett 2002: 6-11).

The motivation behind this paper is the need to examine a newly emerging Expanding Circle variety of Eastern European English in order to add to accumulated knowledge about World Englishes.

## 2. Tense and aspect in the Eastern European English variety

In what follows, I discuss the linguistic features of the newly emerging Eastern European English variety. In this paper, the Eastern European English feature profile will be restricted to the discussion of temporal-aspectual features which, in my opinion, stand out in this Expanding Circle variety of English.

In a typical ESL classroom as well as in a natural second language acquisition environment, the acquisition of temporal and aspectual markers and their subsequent use in spoken narration tends to be particularly

<sup>1</sup> Kachru’s (1988) Circles Model of World Englishes conceptualizes the use of English in terms of three Circles - the Inner Circle (L1 English), the Outer Circle (ESL) and the Expanding Circle (EFL) where the Inner Circle English varieties are ‘norm-providing’. Schneider’s (2003) model is not based on geography and politics; instead it is based on the underlying processes of language change.

challenging for language learners and consolidated language users. In multifaceted language and culture contact situations in which English acts as a *lingua franca* and speakers are multilingual, the situation becomes even more complex.

Given that the English and Slavic-like temporal-aspectual systems differ immensely, it is necessary to examine how Slavic speakers mark temporal relations and express aspectual perspectives when they are involved in language contact situations. Based on the spontaneously produced spoken data<sup>2</sup>, the way in which Slavic speakers render temporality in spoken narration will thus be discussed.

Before we look at the manifestations of tense and aspect in the speakers' performance, let me give a brief overview of what the traditional account of Slavic aspect is based on.

Contrary to English, where the category of aspect is grammaticalized, in Slavic aspectual systems the category of aspect is lexicalized; in other words, all verbs exist in aspectual pairs – perfective and imperfective, e.g. *to read* (imperfective) and *to have read* (perfective) (Dahl 1985). Thus, narrating events that occurred in the past, the Slavic speakers are obliged to decide whether they view the event as perfective (i.e. complete) or imperfective (i.e. incomplete)<sup>3</sup>. Aspect usually combines with tense, to provide the basic structure of the narrative (Bogdan – Sullivan 2009: 50). The tense-aspect form of the verb then tells which function the clause performs in the overall narrative (Bogdan – Sullivan 2009: 50). In contrast to English, where marking past events as progressive or non-progressive is possible, in Slavic languages it is not. In other words, narrating events which occurred in the past, a Slavic speaker is only able to convey that (i) the event occurred in the past, and (ii) the event was either complete or incomplete. Thus, no information as to the process of an action, i.e. progressive vs. non-progressive, as it is in English, is conveyed<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> The Tübingen Corpus of Eastern European English (TCEEE) is a small-sized corpus (sixty thousand words) of semi-structured video interviews with fifteen Slavic speakers of English (the speakers' proficiency varies from the B1 to the C1 level according to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages classification), with L1 Russian, Ukrainian, Polish or Slovak. Interview questions elicited introspective data (information about each speaker's English learning history, professional life and involvement in international projects), and the spontaneous production data.

<sup>3</sup> The Hopper (1977), Lamb (1991) and Bogdan – Sullivan (2009) studies on Russian and Polish demonstrate the insufficiency of the binary assumption.

<sup>4</sup> Bogdan – Sullivan (2009: 43-44) argue, taking Polish into account, that aspect in Slavic languages communicates both aspect (by prefixes or suffixes related to the verb stem) and Aktionsart (from the point of view of the verb stem).

The differences between the Slavic-like and the non-Slavic-like temporal-aspectual systems lie not only in the overt manifestations of tense and aspect but also in how Slavic and non-Slavic speakers view reality and the representation of past and non-past events.

An account proposed by Durst-Anderson (1994) attempts to link overt linguistic manifestations with cognition and mental models (Durst-Andersen 1994: 81). As he claims, events and processes first find their manifestation in human cognition and only then are realized in a real language (Durst-Andersen 1994: 62). The central claim of Andersen's argument thus revolves around the assumption that human cognition, regardless of its membership in a particular speech community, differentiates between different types of events (and non-events). In other words, the human mind is capable of drawing a line between actions and non-actions, states and activities, events and processes. Disregarding the common principle of human cognition, languages, however, "essentially differ in what they must convey and not in what they may convey" (Jakobson 1959: 236). The fact that the Russian verb must convey the perfective-imperfective distinction implies that there is a distinction between the way languages manifest basic cognitive principles (universal), such as representation of time and space. For a Russian native speaker in particular, this representation is a fundamental dichotomy.

Recent accounts of Russian aspect, such as that of Kravchenko (2004), also propose to look at aspect from a cognitive perspective. Kravchenko (2004) argues, based on the morphological and syntactic evidence from Russian, that aspectual oppositions have little to do with "boundedness" and "totality" as it has often been claimed in formal descriptions of aspect (Smith 1991; Comrie 1976; Dahl 1985).

Instead, the choice between aspectual pairs is thus determined by the speaker's source of information about the event, i.e. the speaker's knowledge of the event and the speaker's observation of the event.

Below, we shall examine (i) markers, which are available for Slavic speakers for expressing temporal-aspectual relations, and (ii) functions these markers perform in the discourse of Slavic speakers of English. The use of tenses for non-past anchoring – the simple present, the present progressive and the present perfect – will be examined first. A consideration of tenses used for past-based anchoring, such as the simple past and the past progressive, will follow. The functions these tenses perform in the lingua franca context will be spelled out in the discussion.

## 2.1 The non-past-based anchoring

The simple present, the present progressive and the present perfect are tenses which are used to anchor the events in the non-past according to prescriptive grammar. In Standard English (Huddleston – Pullum 2002) the simple present is used to: 1) refer to events which habitually/regularly happen; 2) refer to events when the time is indeterminate and irrelevant as in giving facts; 3) refer to events which will happen in the future; 4) create an additional effect and bring the hearer/reader into the event, i.e. the historical present.

In the data, the simple present is the tense, which is widely used by all speakers in the study. Contrary to the functions of the simple present in Standard English, in the Eastern European variation of English, the simple present extends its functions and goes beyond the boundaries of simple present use. Below we shall consider some of the functions the simple present performs in the speaker data.

One of the functions of the simple present is to carry out a function of the present perfect. It is even used where the obligatory present perfect use is triggered by the temporal adverbials, such as *since*, *for a long time*, and *many times*. In (1), for example, the English temporal system requires placing the event *to be interested in politics* into the recent past. The Ukrainian speaker, however, does the opposite and only places the event in the present, given that it is allowed by the Ukrainian language.

- (1) I started learning English when I was twelve at school, and I have a very strong motivation because, since my childhood I am interested in politics, in history. (L1 Ukrainian)

The simple present is also used by Slavic speakers to represent the duration of events, as for example, with the adverb *for a long time*. In Standard English, this function is normally performed by the present perfect. Consider this example from the performance data of a Ukrainian speaker of English:

- (2) Of course, when I am doing my research, I am usually using my reading skills, reading skills, but I feel that I need some more oral practice, because when you live very long in your native country, so the language is forgotten. (L1 Ukrainian)

Another function of the English present perfect, namely, the use of the present perfect in the obligatory context with the temporal adverbial *now*, is

also performed by the present simple in the spoken data. In (3), the hearer is also faced with a tense shift, which makes it difficult to order the events.

- (3) That was actually time when I had to catch my English, I have to improve, actually. I can't say that right now that I really improve it, but </break>. (L1 Ukrainian)

It is possible to account for the use of the simple present in the obligatory context of the present perfect by the difference the Slavic languages and English have in the threshold of the present time. The tense system of Russian, constructed with descending time, allows for the use of the non-past for events that began in the past and extend into the present (Hewson – Bubenik 1997: 333). The following sentence, for example, is possible in Russian:

*Я уже говорю десять минут.*

Ya uzhe govoru desyat minut.

I already speak ten minutes.

PRONOUN, 1<sup>st</sup> PS., SG., – VERB – PRESENT – ADV. – NUM. – NOUN – PL.

English, however, requires locating the event into the recent past<sup>5</sup>. Another extension of the simple present is rendering events in the past, i.e. in the obligatory context of the simple past. The excerpt in (4) illustrates the use of the simple present in the past-based anchoring by a Russian speaker of English:

- (4) Yeah, but but today I can say that mhm I really find what I wanted. (L1 Russian)

Accounting for this type of occurrence of the simple present, it is possible to suggest that speakers have difficulties retrieving the past tense forms, which result, in turn, in the simplification of the temporal-aspectual system. Another tense, which locates the events in the present, additionally representing the internal consistency of the event, is the present progressive. In English, the category of the progressive is fully grammaticalized. In contrast to the events, which are used in the simple present and have a habitual reading, events in

<sup>5</sup> This question has been examined in detail by Korrel (1991). She argues that the difference in the usage of the present perfect and the present simple in English and other I-E languages stems from a representation of the present as “just actualized” (Russian, German, Dutch) and ‘not actualized’ (English) as in *\*I speak for ten minutes*.

the present progressive have a single occasion interpretation and a dynamic character (Huddleston – Pullum 2002: 155). Dahl (1985) and Comrie (1976) claim that the English progressive is used in a wider range of contexts than progressives in other languages (Dahl 1985; Comrie 1976). It conveys more than a simple aspectual meaning. Bybee sees the function of the progressive in describing “subjects in the midst of doing something” (Bybee 1994: 35). Slavic languages, unlike English, do not have an obligatory progressive marking and the duration or progressivity of an action is inherently encoded into the verb semantics. Although, there is no obligatory marking for the progressive in Slavic languages, Slavic speakers tend to overuse this category.

If morphosemantic transfer cannot account for the emergence of this category, what is it that has an influence? A closer look at the data allows me to suggest the following: when marking verbs as progressive, the Slavic speakers do not intend to convey the predicate type/*Aktionsart*<sup>6</sup>; instead, they intend to convey the distinction between the Slavic perfective and imperfective, falsely associating the Slavic imperfective with the English progressive and the Slavic perfective with the English simple past. This assumption causes the use of the English progressive in the non-obligatory context, which leads to the over-extensive use of this aspectual marker.

Contrary to the temporal-aspectual constraints of English, the present progressive in the Eastern European manifestation is extensively used to convey habitual events and repetitive actions. Some occurrences of rendering habitual actions by the progressive aspect are presented below:

- (5) I’m listening to the songs, and I’m reading, I try to read in English, and when it happens I try speak with people in English. (L1 Polish)

In (5) the Polish speaker intends to convey events, which happen on a daily basis, i.e. *the speaker reads books in English and listens to the music*. The use of the progressive aspect, therefore, is not obligatory here. It is also observed that the progressive aspect is used with the simple present triggers, such as temporal adverbials, which mark habituality and repetitiveness, for example, *usually, from time to time* as it is illustrated in the following example extracted from the performance of a Ukrainian speaker:

<sup>6</sup> Vendler (1967) suggested a four-way categorization of verbs (states, activities, achievements and accomplishments) based on their semantics. This classification gave rise to further investigations of the effect the lexical aspect has in First and Second Language Acquisition. Bogdan – Sullivan (2009: 40) criticize Vendlerian categorization and propose a cognitive classification of *Aktionsart* that applies to both English and Polish.



- (6) Of course, when I am doing my research, I am usually using my reading skills, reading skills, but I feel that I need some more oral practice, because when you live very long in your native country, so the language is forgotten. (L1 Ukrainian)

Here, the speaker uses the progressive aspect to speak about events which are habitual acts, and not actions in progress. Thus, the present progressive emerges in the obligatory context of the simple present, even when the use of the simple present is triggered by the temporal adverbial *usually*. Similarly, in the set of utterances which follow below (7-9), actions refer to habitual events and not to single occurrences that require the use of the simple present. Because the verbs *to speak* and *to try* are inherently durative in Russian, they emerge in the imperfective aspect. In (8) a Ukrainian speaker of English coins a verb *to maturitize* and uses it in the progressive aspect. Thus, speakers with L1 Russian and Ukrainian make use of the progressive aspect to convey the imperfective durative meaning as the examples (7-9) below illustrate:

- (7) In Belarus, English is very useful. We are speaking Russian and second international language for us is English. (L1 Russian)
- (8) You can learn eh some new words, but for people who are maturitizing as I think main thing is to have something interesting, some literature, or some text of the subject. (L1 Ukrainian)
- (9) Well I am trying to participate in some international conferences, for example, in a few days, I will be in Istanbul at seminar. (L1 Ukrainian)

Thus, the present progressive is used with activities, as they are durative and unbound. Interestingly enough, not only activities are used in the progressive aspect. Even accomplishments which are bound (Vendler 1967), as it is illustrated in the set of examples (10-11) *to come from a small town* or as in *to come from Eastern Europe*, emerge in the progressive aspect. This, again, is not in accordance with the English temporal-aspectual system.

- (10) I am coming from a small town, but I was I was studying in the village school, where my grandparents <break/> and <break/> living. (L1 Ukrainian)

- (11) Everybody understood that we are coming from Eastern Europe, and actually Slovaks are also somehow at the same situation. (L1 Ukrainian)

As the progressive views action as ongoing at reference time it applies typically to dynamic predicates and not to stative ones (Comrie 1976). Slavic speakers of English, however, tend to extend the use of the progressive from dynamic predicates to stative ones (see above). Again, the underlying reason might be the speaker's willingness to render events which are imperfective in Russian. Stative verbs such as *to think* and *to feel*, for instance, do not tend to be used in the progressive aspect. In the performance of Slavic speakers, however, this is not the case. Consider the two sets of data excerpts with verb phrases *to think* in (12-13) and *to feel comfortable* in (14):

- (12) They are thinking maybe I am Englishman you know. (L1 Russian)
- (13) Maybe its sounds really not polite, but I am thinking that we better do some practical things then just to waste five years at university, without doing anything. (L1 Ukrainian)
- (14) Its shows, that I no sometimes it depends, in some situation I am feeling comfortable and I have no problem with understanding, and in other situations, I have to ask more and more please, repeat. It's my worst feeling. (L1 Ukrainian)

Apart from the use of the progressive discussed above, it is used by Slavic speakers for rendering events which began in the past and were still going on at the time of utterance. The present progressive thus extends its functions to the domain of the present perfect progressive. Even when temporal adverbials such as *how long* and *over the last years*, which trigger the use of the present perfect progressive, are present, Slavic speaker use the progressive aspect only. The utterances in (15) and (16) that follow illustrate this:

- (15) It's it's not easy to ask somebody oh how long are you studying English if she or he just started to study English, okay. (L1 Ukrainian)
- (16) Mhm, yes, but it's a difference in how long they are studying language eh English language English language, and what is what is their using of English, eh mhm so. (L1 Ukrainian)

Now, let us examine the use of the present perfect in the speakers' production data. First, a closer look at the data shows that the present perfect is used by Slavic speakers when they recount events which happened at a definite point in time. In Standard English, however, this function is performed by the simple past. The excerpt in (17), for example, illustrates how a Ukrainian speaker narrates an event which commenced in the past and was over in the past, also specifying the time of the event. Thus, the event had no relevance for the utterance time.

- (17) I've graduated this university in nineteen ninety nine, then I was a student of post-graduate program and I've, after that I defended my thesis. (L1 Ukrainian)

So far we have seen that non-native speakers of English tend to overextend the functions of the simple and progressive and use them in the obligatory contexts of other tense forms.

## 2.2 The past-based anchoring

The past-based tenses occurring in the data are the simple past and the past progressive. It was mentioned above that because aspect marking is obligatory in Slavic languages, Slavic speakers mark English verbs for aspect when constructing their past-based narrations. In doing so, Slavic speakers associate the Slavic unmarked imperfective with the English past progressive, and the Slavic perfective with the English simple past.

In what follows, I suggest taking a look at how these two past-based tenses are used by speakers in their narrations. Taking the data into account, it becomes possible to claim that in the Eastern European English variety, the simple past acquires the functions of the simple past and the present perfect. To illustrate this, let us consider the excerpt below:

- (18) I hope I will get fractionation because one year ago, actually, not one year ago, this year, it was in March, when I participated in labs, and I did this actually liked this topic, because it's very interesting, and when we did it we didn't see any fractionation, we didn't do it properly, and my supervisor told me that it's also result, yeah, but, nevertheless, they will continue, and this probably we have to study more. (L1 Russian)

The speaker recalls the events in the past. She explicitly says that an action took place in the past, so the past tense seems to be acceptable and applicable for that. However, where there is a present time reference, the simple past is used to convey the function of the present perfect. In the following two excerpts (19) and (20), the events have a present time reference, which requires the use of the present perfect. Even the present perfect triggers, such as *now* and *for*, are ignored.

- (19) Because now I finished institute, university, and I want to have some maybe Master. (L1 Ukrainian)
- (20) It's normally, and I understood now because year by year, you just have to live to saw how life is, it's very important, and knowledges in books, they are also important, but knowing about life, just life. (L1 Ukrainian)

For rendering past actions which are imperfective in Slavic languages, the English past progressive is at the speakers' disposal. Similarly to the present progressive, it is used by Slavic speakers not to show the duration of an action but to convey the imperfective aspect in Slavic. Apart from instances where the past progressive is used in the past progressive non-obligatory context (in place of the simple past), it is also used in the context where the progressive aspect is unacceptable in English, as, for example, with predicate types which are neither durative nor unbound (what Vendler 1967 referred to as "achievements"). Examples in (21) and (22) extracted from the performance of a Ukrainian speaker illustrate this:

- (21) I was travelling to Pakistan and <NLU> Arabsky Emiraty </NLU>, Dubai and even I have to speak, when I was speaking very good English language, or with good pronunciation, they can't understand me. (L1 Ukrainian)
- (22) And sometimes, I was visiting some exhibitions in business and I try to speak English, because when I am speaking English they are more polite with me, they are more polite with me, they are thinking maybe I am Englishman you know. (L1 Ukrainian)

In the examples, the past progressive was used in the simple past obligatory context. Such predicate types as *to travel from Pakistan* as in (21) and *to*

*visit exhibitions* as in (22) are neither durative nor unbound in English. In Slavic languages, however, verbs *приезжать* (*priezhat*) 'to come', *путешествовать* (*puteshestvovat*) 'to travel', and *посещать* (*poseshat*) 'to visit' are imperfective. They, therefore, emerge in the progressive aspect in the speakers' performance.

### 3. Conclusion

This paper is restricted to a discussion of morphosemantic variables in the Eastern European English variety such as tense and aspect. Given that Slavic-like and non-Slavic-like temporal aspectual systems differ in how they construct the representation of events in time, the use of such morphosemantic categories as tense and aspect is likely to deviate from what one may find in Standard English. In general, a question was raised as to what it was that caused Slavic speakers to construct their temporal discourse in a certain way. The study drew on data from spontaneous spoken production of Ukrainian, Polish, Russian and Slovak speakers, compiled into a small-sized corpus of the Eastern European English variety.

Two general tendencies are observed here. First, as the category of aspect is a grammatical one, and the aspect marking is obligatory in Slavic, Slavic users of English tend to mark verbs as perfective and imperfective, falsely associating Slavic perfective with the English simple past, and the Slavic imperfective with the English progressive aspect. Second, as the English progressive is used by Slavic speakers for rendering imperfective actions, it emerges in the progressive non-obligatory context, which, in turn, leads to the overuse of the English progressive. The past progressive and the simple past are the basic tenses which render the past-based events. The non-past events are rendered by the simple present and the present progressive, where the present progressive conveys what is imperfective in Slavic.

In summary, Slavic speakers of English do not seem to fully use the available tense repertoire. Tense functions and boundaries become non-rigid and less fixed where the use is concerned; the English temporal-aspectual system in its Eastern European manifestation thus gets simplified and reduced. Based on what was mentioned above, it is possible to suggest that an Eastern European English(es) is indeed emerging. Additional studies, examining the domains of morphosemantics, morphosyntax and lexis, however, are necessary to provide further linguistic evidence.

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