EXAMINATION OF TELICITY IN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND TRANSLATION

ВИВЧЕННЯ ГРАНИЧНОСТІ У ЗАСВОЄННІ МОВИ ТА ПЕРЕКЛАДІ

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This paper examines the phenomenon of telicity, or goal-orientedness of events, in language acquisition and translation, focusing on the cross-linguistic differences between Ukrainian and English. The study explores how these distinctions influence first (L1) and second (L2) language acquisition and affect translation accuracy and processing. The research highlights two primary methods of telicity marking: English employs a compositional system dependent on direct object properties, whereas Ukrainian, like other Slavic languages, uses morphological markers such as perfective prefixes. Findings from first language acquisition studies suggest that predicate-based telicity systems, as found in Ukrainian, facilitate earlier and more accurate acquisition due to their explicit morphological encoding. Conversely, languages that mark telicity compositionally, such as English, require learners to integrate multiple linguistic components, resulting in a more protracted acquisition process. Second language acquisition research reveals that L2 learners of English from languages without a determiner system often struggle with compositional telicity but show improvement with proficiency. Similarly, English-speaking Ukrainian learners initially rely on their L1 mechanisms but eventually acquire predicate telicity marking as their proficiency increases.

These findings hold significant implications for translation studies. The inherent structural differences in telicity marking between English and Ukrainian can lead to translation challenges, particularly regarding aspectual nuances. Professional translators must be aware of these linguistic contrasts to ensure accurate cross-linguistic interpretation of event structures. Ultimately, this study underscores the role of telicity in shaping cognitive and linguistic processes, highlighting its relevance for both theoretical linguistics and applied translation studies.

Keywords: *aspectual marking, telicity, language acquisition, cross-linguistic differences, translation studies.*

Ця стаття репрезентує дослідження явища граничності або цілеспрямованості подій у мовних конструкціях під час вивчення мови й перекладу, акцентуючи увагу на міжмовних відмінностях між українською та англійською

мовами. Представлено, як ці відмінності впливають на засвоєння рідної та другої мов, а також на точність перекладу та його обробку. Дослідження виокремлює два основні способи позначення граничності: англійська мова використовує композиційну систему, залежну від властивостей граматичного додатка, тоді як українська, як і інші слов'янські мови, використовує морфологічні маркери, такі як префікси зі значенням завершеності. Результати досліджень, присвячених вивченню рідної мови, свідчать про те, що системи граничності на основі предикатів, як в українській мові, сприяють більш ранньому і точному засвоєнню мови завдяки чіткому морфологічному кодуванню. І навпаки, мови, які маркують граничність композиційно, як наприклад англійська, вимагають інтегрування різних видів інформації, що призводить до більш тривалого процесу засвоєння. Дослідження вивчення другої мови показують, що ті, хто вивчає англійську з мов без детермінантної системи артиклів часто відчувають труднощі з композиційною граничністю. Аналогічно, англомовні студенти, які вивчають українську мову, спочатку покладаються на свої механізми, але з часом набувають предикатної граничності в міру того, як їхній рівень володіння мовою зростає. Ці висновки мають важливе значення для перекладознавства.

***Ключові слова**: аспектуальне маркування, граничность, засвоєння мови, міжмовні відмінності, перекладознавство.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The ways in which different languages express different events reveal intriguing facts about the subtle distinctions we must draw to understand and act upon the surrounding world and to make proper inferences about our environment. Among the potentially endless number of possible distinctions, we choose to verbalize only a tiny subset and, in doing so, often select different linguistic means across different languages. Examination of the cross-linguistic patterns in the expression of events has received considerable attention in cognitive science. It has brought to light a number of fundamental properties of linguistic and non-linguistic cognition. The current project addresses one such cross-linguistic pattern adopting an applied linguistics perspective: In this paper, we review the phenomenon of *telicity* (viz. goal-orientedness of events) in first and second language acquisition and examine how the cross-linguistic differences between Ukrainian and English telicity marking can impact translation accuracy and processing. In what follows, we first introduce the phenomenon of telicity in language and present two different ways Ukrainian (among many other Slavic languages) and English choose to express telic and atelic events. Then, we review research addressing the acquisition of telicity in first (L1) and second (L2) language learning. Finally, we review the potential implications of the available studies for translation professionals, focusing on how the cross-linguistic patterns in telicity expression can affect translations.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Telicity in Language and Cognition

The term *telicity* refers to a construal or conceptualization of an action or event that can be thought of as having a natural, inherent endpoint, goal, or culmination after which it cannot continue. (Folli & Harley, 2006; Krifka, 1998; Slabakova, 2008; Vendler, 1967). To illustrate this, let us examine sentences in (1). Both (1a) and (1b) denote events that took place in the past. At the same time, the event in the sentence (1b), (but not (1a)), can be generally understood as reaching its inherent endpoint or culmination: an Agent *Bill* who was engaged in an activity consuming a particular eatable entity completed this action by entirely *eating* the fruit, *apple*. Once completed, this activity cannot

proceed further. In contrast, the sentence in (1a) denotes the same activity (*eating*) taking place in the past but does not necessarily specify whether or not it was completed.

(1)   (a) Bill ate.   *atelic*
             (b) Bill ate an apple.   *Telic*

The human capacity to construe events as having a natural endpoint (telic events) or as lacking such inherent completeness (atelic events) has a privileged status among many other semantic distinctions encoded in the language (Folli & Harley, 2006). Slabakova (2005) suggests that a/telicity is linked to the presence or absence of the semantic feature [change of state] in the meaning of verb phrases. This feature is one of the two binary elements Vendler (1967) used to represent the relationship among meanings of all possible verbal predicates expressed in human languages. Table 1 summarizes Vendler's (1967) classification of verb types. According to this classification, all verbs fall into one of the four classes: *state*, *achievement*, *activity*, and *accomplishment*. Each of these classes is a product of a combination of features [+/- change of state] and [+/- process]. All achievements and states, for example, are inherently telic or atelic, respectively, as they represent non-dynamic changes of states or lack of such changes. However, the relationship between activities and accomplishments is more relevant for the current discussion, which both specify dynamic events. For instance, the activity verbs *run*, *eat*, or *read* denote dynamic events ([+ process]) that do not bring about any changes of affairs in the external world [-change of state]: The events can continue indefinitely or might be stopped at any arbitrary point. In contrast, such verb phrases as *run a mile*, *eat an apple* or *read a book* signify dynamic events ([+process]) bearing specific resultative interpretations ([+ change of state]) of the linguistic messages. The privileged status of telicity and its reliance on primitive semantic distinctions explains a variety of the morphosyntactic mechanisms employed to express this semantic property across different languages. The following sections introduce the ways in which telicity is encoded in English and Ukrainian.

Table 1

Vendler's (1967) classification of verb-types

	- Process	+ Process
-Change of State	State	Activity
+Change of State	Achievement	Accomplishment

Telicity in English: Compositional Telicity

In English, the telicity of a sentence is contingent on the properties of a direct object taken by dynamic ([+process]) verbal predicates. The examples in (2) illustrate this point.

(2)   (a) Mary wrote a letter/the letter/three letters/the letters/her letters.
             (b) Mary wrote letters.
             (c) Mary wrote poetry.

The sentences in (2a) all represent events generally understood as having an inherent endpoint or culmination when the agent, Mary, fully completes the writing activity. This is not generally true for the sentences (2b) and (2c). They both signify events that do not have a culmination point and can continue for some indefinite period of time. What distinguishes the statements in (2a), on the one hand, and the statements (2b) and (2c), on the other hand, is that the direct objects in (2a) are all morphologically marked as exhaustively countable or measurable. The countability of the direct objects in (2a) is used to compute the telicity of the verbal predicate (Jackendoff, 1996; Verkuyl, 1972, 1993). At the same time, the direct objects of (2b) and (2c) are inherently uncountable and

cannot "measure out" the activity denoted by the verb. Neither the bare plural direct object *letters* in (2b) nor the mass direct object *poetry* in (2c) is capable of measuring out the writing activity: Mary can continue writing letters or poetry, and this activity can proceed without any inherent culminating point for any extended period of time. In sum, English employs compositional computation of telicity: specific properties of direct objects (viz. exhaustive countability or quantizability) marked morphologically by articles or quantifiers are used by English speakers to determine the telicity of verbal predicates.

Telicity in Ukrainian: Predicate Telicity

In contrast to English, the telicity of verb phrases in Slavic languages, in general, and Ukrainian, in particular, is signified morphologically by perfective prefixes added to verb stems. The examples in (3) demonstrate the morphological mechanism of telicity marking used in Ukrainian.

(3)   (a)   Maria pysala lysta/try lysty/jiji lysty.
                "Mary wrote-PAST a letter/the letter/three letters/the letters/her letters".
        (b)   Maria <u>na</u>-pysala lysta/tri lysta/jiji lysta.
                "Maria   PERF-wrote-PAST a letter/the letter/three letters/the letters/her letters".
        (c)   Maria pysala lysty.
                "Maria wrote-PAST letters.
        (d)   Maria <u>na</u>-pysala lysty.
                "Maria PERF-wrote-PAST letters.
        (e)   Maria <u>pysala</u> poeziju.
                "Mary wrote-PAST poetry".
        (f)   Maria PERF-na-pysala-PAST poeziju.

All sentences in (3) are translations of the examples (2) into Ukrainian. The verb *na-pysala* in (3b), (3d), and (3f) is explicitly marked by the perfective prefix na- and consistently understood by native speakers of Ukrainian as denoting a completed telic event, regardless of the specific properties of its direct objects. Correspondingly, sentences (3a), (3c), and (3e) all denote atelic events despite the inherent exhaustive (un)countability of their direct objects. Thus, the interpretation of telicity in Ukrainian is not dependent on the properties of the direct objects and is regularly read off from the overt morphological markers: perfective prefixes (Slabakova, 1997, 2001) .

Acquisition of Telicity in L1

The two alternative ways of computing telicity introduced in the previous sections present two possible settings of a telicity marking parameter available cross-linguistically. (Slabakova, 1997, 2000, 2001; Smith, 1991). Children acquiring English or Ukrainian as their L1 select the appropriate parametric configuration based on the available input and develop the corresponding system for computing the telicity of linguistic messages. What tasks do children need to accomplish to acquire any specific telicity parameter, and are any of these two settings easier to acquire, or do both alternatives present equal challenges for L1 acquirers? Answering the latter question, van Hout (2007) suggested that "predicate telicity" (Slavic settings) seems to be much easier. The author reviewed a series of empirical investigations in which young children L1 acquirers of Germanic, Slavic languages and Finnish were tested on whether they could interpret the telicity of the sentences in their L1. The findings of the studies demonstrated that young speakers of Slavic languages (Polish and other Slavic languages) were capable of acquiring knowledge of telicity entailments much more quickly than their Dutch, English and Finnish peers did: children speaking Slavic languages as young as 2,6 or 3 years were able to correctly differentiate situations of the telic and atelic meanings of the

test sentences. Following Bybee (1985), van Hout suggested that the "predicate telicity" making mechanisms can be thought of as more "relevant' for the expression of events' completeness denoted by verbs: verbal inflections signifying telicity of a verb explicitly mark this semantic information relevant for the interpretation of the verb meaning. On the other hand, the compositional telicity systems depend on the quantizability of direct objects and, correspondingly, require mastery of determiners which signify this quantizability.

These findings suggest that each telicity marking system's cognitive and linguistic demands may vary, influencing the trajectory of first language acquisition. In languages with predicate-based telicity marking, such as Ukrainian and other Slavic languages, children benefit from a more direct mapping between morphosyntactic markers and telicity entailments. Since verbal inflections explicitly encode event boundedness, young learners can rely on morphophonological cues rather than needing to infer telicity from syntactic structures or contextual elements. Consequently, the early mastery of telicity in Slavic-speaking children aligns with theories of linguistic transparency, which posit that morphological encoding facilitates language acquisition by reducing processing complexity (Bybee, 1985; Slobin, 2013).

In contrast, languages employing compositional telicity, such as English and Dutch, require children to integrate multiple linguistic components to correctly interpret telicity. Since aspectual interpretation depends on the quantizability of the direct object and the presence or absence of a determiner (e.g., *eat an apple* vs. *eat apples*), children acquiring these languages must first develop a robust understanding of determiner usage and nominal specificity. The delayed acquisition of telicity in English- and Dutch-speaking children may therefore stem from the additional syntactic and semantic computations required to construct aspectual meaning. Moreover, given that determiner systems themselves present acquisition challenges in article-based languages (Brown, 1973; Maratsos, 1976), it is plausible that the later emergence of telicity entailments in these languages reflects the gradual development of a broader syntactic and referential system.

Further evidence supporting this asymmetry comes from cross-linguistic studies on acquiring aspectual distinctions in typologically diverse languages (van Hout, 2007). These studies suggest that while children acquiring morphologically transparent telicity systems demonstrate early competence in aspectual interpretation, those learning compositional systems exhibit a more protracted developmental trajectory. Such findings contribute to the broader debate on whether morphosyntactic complexity directly correlates with acquisition difficulty, reinforcing the notion that linguistic structures with overt and systematic encoding tend to be acquired more readily.

Ultimately, the disparity in the ease of acquiring telicity across language types highlights the interplay between morphosyntactic structure and cognitive processing in first language acquisition. The cross-linguistic variation observed in telicity marking suggests that languages with explicit morphological cues provide a more accessible pathway for early aspectual comprehension, whereas those relying on compositional cues introduce additional syntactic and semantic demands.

Acquisition of Predicate Telicity in L2

Second language literature addressed the issues of acquisition of telicity in L2 in a rather sporadic manner, focusing mainly on whether or not L1 speakers of languages that lack morphological systems of determiners and/or plural/singular markers are capable of acquiring "compositional telicity mechanisms" in English as L2 (Kaku, Liceras, & Kazanina, 2008; Slabakova, 1997, 2000, 2001). The common findings of these studies are that L2 learner of English are capable of progressing in their interpretation of the telicity as they advance in their L2 competence and that acquisition of semantic computation of telicity is not necessarily related to the accurate use of inflectional morphology, signifying direct object' quantizability. In contrast to the investigations of the L2 acquisition of "composite telicity," which seems to be a prototypical research object in L2

acquisition studies, the acquisition of "predicate telicity" in L2 remains largely untapped. To date, the only published study that explored the acquisition of morphological mechanisms of "predicate telicity" in L2 is the study of Slabakova (2005). The following section presents a summary of this investigation. In comparison to van Hoult's (2007) claims about the relative transparency of the Slavic telicity systems in L1 acquisition, there is a common belief that the "predicate telicity" mechanisms of Slavic present considerable challenges to L2 Slavic learners. Slabakova (2005) directly addressed what is so difficult about telicity marking in L2 Slavic. To answer this question, she conducted an empirical investigation. In this study, sixty-six English-speaking L2 Slavic learners and 45 Slavic native controls participated in the experiment. A cloze test divided the L2 learners into different proficiency groups. In this task, respondents were presented with a continuous text, a fairy tale, and asked to select the best word out of three choices that would fit a particular sentence structure. Based on the results of this test, the author categorized L2 Slavic participants as Advanced (n=26), High Intermediate (n=20), and Low Intermediate (n=20). All three groups of L2 Slavic learners and native controls then took part in the interpretation test: the main task was tapping into the subject's capacities of telicity interpretation of Slavic statements. Sentences in (4) and (5) demonstrate the overall structure of this task.

   (4) *Maria vezla ditej dodomy...*
     "Maria drove children home..."
    (a) *ale dity shche ne vdoma.* "and the children are not at home yet."
    (b) *i diti uje vdoma.*   "and the children are not at home yet."
    (c) *Obydva A i B mozhlyvi*   ← CORRECT
     "Both continuations above are possible."

   (5) *Maria pry-vezla ditej dodomu..*
     "Maria PERF-drove children home..."
    (a) *ale dity shche ne vdoma.* "and the children are not at home yet."
    (b) *i diti zhe vdoma.*   "and the children are at home." ← CORRECT
    (c) *Obudva A i B mozhlyvi*
   "Both continuations above are possible."

In this task, participants read a sentence, for example, *Maria vezla ditej dodomy...* ("Maria drove children home..."), and chose which of the three continuations (labeled by letters (a), (b), or (c) in (4) and (5)) was logically possible, or made sense. The idea of using this task was that to choose the correct continuation, participants had to construct a proper interpretation of the cue sentence, interpreting it as complete (telic) or incomplete (atelic). For instance, in the sentence (4) the verb *vezla* ("drove"), which appears without perfective prefix and is generally construed by native speakers of Slavic as atelic, can take either continuation (a) or (b) and, therefore, the option (c) is the best answer. Although generally understood as atelic, the verb *vezla*, allows both atelic and telic interpretations. The verb in (5) *pry-vezla*, (PERF-drove), on the other hand, is necessarily understood as telic, and the option (b), *i dity zhe vdoma*, ("and the children are at home."), is the only possible continuation of the cue sentence.

In order to test transfer from L1, the author created three treatment conditions in which properties of direct objects were manipulated. In the first condition (condition A), represented in (4) and (5), direct objects of the cue sentences were mass or bare plural nouns. In the second condition (condition B), all objects of the sentences were countable, singular entities. In the third condition, (condition C), all direct objects were modified by over demonstrative pronouns or quantifiers. In this manner, the author investigated whether native speakers of English learning Slavic as their L2 were capable of acquiring Slavic telicity settings or kept relying on their native language mechanisms.

The overall findings of the experiment showed that Advanced and High Intermediate, but not Low intermediate L2 Slavic learners, could accurately interpret imperfective Slavic verbs (i.e., verbs without perfective prefixes), as well as perfective verbs and that their performance was comparable to the native controls. Also, the results revealed that the properties of the direct objects did not influence the judgments of the Advanced and High Intermediate L2 Slavic learners but seemed to bias Low Intermediate L2 learners in their decision-making (for further details of the study, see pp. 71-73).

Slabakova (2005) interpreted the study's findings as evidence that English-speaking L2 learners of Slavic can reset the telicity marking parameters once they reach the advanced or high-intermediate level of proficiency. Moreover, she suggested that even low-intermediate L2 Slavic learners also successfully acquired the telicity mechanism in L2: Their performance on both perfective and imperfective sentences, although differed from Slavic natives, advanced, and high-intermediate L2 Slavic learners, was higher than chance, and therefore can be thought of as evidence of acquisition of the L2 telicity marking settings.

The acquisition of telicity in both L1 and L2 highlights the influence of morphosyntactic transparency on language development. In L1 acquisition, children acquiring languages with predicate-based telicity marking, such as Slavic languages, demonstrate an earlier mastery of telicity due to the explicit morphological cues available in their input. In contrast, learners of compositional telicity languages, such as English and Dutch, face additional syntactic and semantic challenges, leading to a more protracted developmental trajectory. Similarly, in L2 acquisition, advanced and high-intermediate learners of Slavic as an L2 can successfully reset telicity marking parameters, aligning their interpretations with native speakers. However, lower-proficiency learners initially rely on their L1 mechanisms, particularly in their sensitivity to direct object properties. These findings suggest that telicity acquisition is facilitated when a language provides overt morphological markers, reducing processing demands.

Telicity in Translation

The final part of the current report deals with the implications for the translation field. The different patterns of expressing telicity across languages do affect how language learners acquire these mechanisms in L1 development and appear to be acquirable in L2 when learners attain more advanced proficiency levels. What does it mean for translators' training and translation studies? The potential implications for the translation field are tentative and should be viewed cautiously, as no empirical investigations are available. In fact, they can be best viewed as a call for such studies.

Nevertheless, several notable directions can be suggested for greater attention in translators' training and experimental investigations. First, we must deal directly with the potential challenges in translating between English and Ukrainian constructions utilizing compositional and predicate telicity. It is necessary to validate experimentally the hypothetical issues that can arise and determine specific contexts that might lead to such aspectual mismatches in translation. The close examination of the potential translation challenges, which can be inferred from the acquisition data, must be tested in recognition and production. It is essential to determine whether native speakers of Ukrainian successfully detect subtle nuances of the compositional telicity in English and can deliver accurate translations in Ukrainian. Similarly, testing whether Ukrainian-speaking translators in training can reproduce in the morphosyntactically transparent native structures using English compositional mechanisms is essential for understanding the crosslinguistic influences. Recognition and production can be further assessed across translators with different levels of English proficiency and experience, therefore providing data on the potential developmental trajectory in telicity translation. Furthermore, it is crucial to observe the specific patterns of recognition and production of translation data in written and oral translation, primarily focusing on simultaneous and consecutive translation performance in comparison to offline interpretation modes, therefore bringing to light the effects of cognitive load,

differences in working memory capacity, as well as other cognitive and psychological factors that are likely to affect translators' accuracy.

The necessary groundwork for understanding how English Ukrainian translators process compositional and predicate telicity can and should be done through translator training programs and, in fact, can be best considered as a promising avenue of action research. Regardless of the specific patterns of potential issues in translating telicity constructions, the questions related to the different kinds of instructions and their effectiveness should be focused on: What educational interventions can be employed? What is the role of explicit instructions for short and long-term development? What would be the most effective and efficient course of interventions for the most optimal results in translators' competence? All these questions and many more can be addressed in translator training programs and provide data on the growth and development of telicity expression in translation.

III. CONCLUSION

The study of telicity in both first (L1) and second (L2) language acquisition underscores the significance of cross-linguistic variation in encoding event structure. The findings suggest that morphosyntactic transparency plays a crucial role in the ease with which telicity is acquired. Specifically, languages with predicate-based telicity marking, such as Ukrainian and other Slavic languages, facilitate earlier and more robust acquisition due to their explicit morphological cues. These cues directly map onto aspectual distinctions, allowing young learners to process telicity without relying on complex syntactic inferences. In contrast, compositional telicity systems, such as English and Dutch, require children to integrate multiple linguistic components, such as the quantizability of direct objects and determiner use, which prolongs the acquisition process.

The differences in telicity encoding also manifest in second language acquisition. While learners of Slavic as an L2 initially struggle with the morphological marking of telicity, advanced and high-intermediate learners demonstrate the ability to reset their telicity marking parameters, eventually aligning their interpretations with native speakers. The findings of Slabakova (2005) suggest that despite initial L1 transfer effects, learners can acquire the morphological mechanisms of telicity through increased exposure and proficiency. Moreover, the study indicates that direct object properties influence interpretation primarily in lower-intermediate learners, reinforcing the idea that compositional telicity mechanisms pose additional challenges in L2 learning.

These findings have practical implications for language pedagogy and translation studies. Given that telicity marking differs significantly between Ukrainian and English, translation professionals must account for these linguistic disparities to ensure accurate cross-linguistic interpretation of event structure. Errors in telicity marking can lead to mistranslations, particularly in contexts where event completion is crucial for conveying meaning. Therefore, instruction on telicity and aspectual distinctions in language learning curricula can aid both L2 learners and translation professionals in refining their interpretative and communicative accuracy.

Future research should explore additional factors influencing telicity acquisition, such as cognitive processing constraints and the role of contextual cues in interpretation. Investigating telicity marking in other language families may further illuminate the broader principles governing aspectual acquisition. Additionally, studies on how bilingual speakers navigate telicity differences in their languages can provide insights into cross-linguistic influence and cognitive flexibility in bilingual processing.

Overall, telicity serves as a fundamental component of linguistic and cognitive processing, shaping how speakers conceptualize and express event completion. The variation in telicity encoding across languages highlights the intricate interplay between syntax, semantics, and morphology in language acquisition and use. Understanding these cross-linguistic differences enhances our knowledge of linguistic relativity and contributes to more effective approaches in second language instruction and translation practices.

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