The goal of this paper is to show how theory can inform pedagogy, and also how pedagogy can inform theory. This is the story of how a new model was conceived based on purely linguistic criteria. When we tried to take the results of this research and apply them to the vocabulary of Russian L2 learners, we discovered that the model was confirmed, but the distribution of relevant facts was very different, suggesting a more straightforward strategy for application both in the classroom and in the theoretical model.

The “cluster” model of Russian aspect has been suggested as an alternative to the traditional “pair” model (Janda forthcoming). According to the cluster model, an Imperfective Activity (A) verb играть ‘play’ or чихать ‘sneeze’ can have up to four types of Perfectives in its cluster: Natural Perfective (NP) like сыграть ‘play’, equivalent to the Perfective “partner” in the pair model; Specialized Perfective (SP) like выиграть ‘win’; Complex Act Perfective (CA) like поиграть ‘play for a while’ or почихать ‘sneeze for a while’; and Single Act Perfective (SA) like чихнуть ‘sneeze once’. The Natural and Specialized Perfectives describe a Completable (telic) event, whereas the other Perfectives do not. There can be several Specialized Perfectives and Complex Act Perfectives in a cluster. Secondary Imperfectives are regularly derived only from Specialized Perfectives.

The cluster model has evolved from and been tested on two databases of similar size (each containing approximately 250 clusters, including a few thousand verbs): a linguistic database (Janda forthcoming), and a pedagogical database (Janda & Korba forthcoming). The linguistic database was constructed from a multiply stratified sample which fully (and thus disproportionately) represented all possible morphological types of verbs (including all irregular verbs and all exponents of non-productive classes, plus samples from all productive classes). On the basis of this data, it was shown that the structure of all existing clusters (with the exception of the rare Perfectiva tantum) can be predicted on the basis of a single Implicational Hierarchy: A > (NP/SP) > CA > SA. This means that the presence of an item after the > sign implies the presence also of items to the left of the sign, and that the items in parentheses are optional and unordered. On the basis of this study, the following three cluster structures were by far most common:

1. A + NP + SP + CA (e.g., благодарить ‘thank’ + поблагодарить)
2. A + NP + SP (e.g., красть ‘steal’ + украсть + обокрасть)
3. A + SP + CA (e.g., работать ‘work’ + заработать + поработать)

The pedagogical database was constructed from the combined vocabulary lists of first-year (Nachalo 1 & 2) and second-year (V puti) textbooks of Russian, which presumably reflect frequency, but do not fully represent all morphological classes of Russian verbs. This database fully confirmed the cluster model in that all of the clusters represented by these verbs are predicted by the Implicational Hierarchy. However the distribution of the three most common cluster structures was quite different:

1. A + NP (e.g., благодарить ‘thank’ + поблагодарить)
2. A + NP + SP (e.g., красть ‘steal’ + украсть + обокрасть)
3. A + NP + SP + CA (e.g., играть^1 ‘play’ + сыграть^2 + выиграть^2 + поиграть^2)

This order of frequency in the pedagogical database, combined with the fact that
the motion verbs represent the maximal cluster type (A + NP + SP + CA + SA), motivate
a very coherent pedagogical strategy, whereby the student can learn the four types of
Perfectives and their order. Then on the basis of two simple rules the student can generate
all possible cluster structures in Russian. Furthermore, with a few guidelines the student
can predict, based on the meanings of verbs, what their cluster structures are likely to be.
This presentation will also include a brief demonstration of the online pedagogical

Janda, Laura A. Forthcoming. “Aspectual clusters of Russian verbs”, Studies in

clusters for learners of Russian”, submitted to Slavic and East European Journal.