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Verbal aspect in Old Church Slavonic

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3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

3.0 Research questions

I started out this study with a very general research question:

What does the OCS verbal aspect system look like?

Now that I have discussed the two major pillars of this study, Old Church Slavonic and verbal aspect, it is possible to break down this question into a number of more specific questions:

1. *How can the aspect of OCS verbs be established?*
2. *Which verbs participate in the OCS verbal aspect system?*
3. *What are the functions of verbal aspect in OCS?*
4. *How does the verbal aspect system in OCS compare to the modern Slavic aspect system?*
5. *What can the verbal aspect system in OCS reveal about the origin and development of Slavic verbal aspect?*

3.1 Hypotheses and further outline of the study

Based on the fact that the opposition between perfective and imperfective verbs exists in all modern Slavic languages and that the same morphological means are already present in OCS, it seems reasonable to assume that the opposition between perfective and imperfective verbs is already present in OCS. However, as I have shown in the discussion of grammatical aspect in various Slavic and non-Slavic languages, it is not enough to simply state that grammatical aspect is part of the verbal system, because there are various types of aspect. Moreover, aspect is continuously developing, both with regard to morphology and functionally. Therefore, aspect needs to be clearly defined in an individual language, in this case OCS, to give meaning to such a statement. In order to do so, one needs to first identify which verbs express aspect. Only then the functions of the aspects can be established.

In **Chapter 4** I will discuss three studies that have the specific purpose of establishing the aspect of OCS verbs. The three studies reach different conclusions and I will demonstrate that this is due to the different methods they apply. Dostál (1954) uses semantic analysis of individual verb forms, Amse-de Jong (1974) bases her categorization on the morphological characteristics of the verb, and Eckhoff & Janda (2014) use a statistical technique called ‘grammatical profiling’ to establish aspect. My hypothesis is that the best predictor of the aspect of a verb is its morphology, as also advocated by Amse-de Jong.

By taking the morphological characteristics of verbs as the starting point for the determination of the aspect of a verb, as opposed to semantics of individual attestations or the grammatical profile of individual verbs, it is easier to study the intrinsic relationship of derivational aspect with lexical aspect, the functions of aspect in various contexts and interaction of the category of derivational aspect with inflectional aspect, because in my approach grammatical aspect is a category in its own right and not the result of those other factors. In other words, in my approach grammatical aspect contributes to the meaning of an utterance and interacts with other elements in that utterance as well as with inflection, rather than being derived from those elements.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to the morphological markers of aspect in OCS, on the basis of which I will categorize verbs into groups. This will allow me to distinguish between pairs like perfective *sostaviti* ‘compose’ and imperfective *sostavljati* ‘compose’, which would seem prototypical aspect pairs based on our knowledge of the modern Slavic languages, and other pairs like verbs of motion (VOMs) *iti* ‘go’ and *xoditi* ‘go’, but also prefixed verbs without a derived partner like *ubojati se* ‘become afraid’.

An important consequence of basing the aspectual categorization of a verb on morphological markers of aspect is that verbs without such morphological markers, like *viděti* ‘see’ or *plakati* ‘cry’ are regarded as **anaspectual** (cf. section 4.1). There have been several scholars who have identified verbs in OCS and Old Russian as neutral with regard to aspect (Růžička 1957, Birnbaum 1958, Maslov 1961, Forsyth 1972, Amse-de Jong 1974, Bermel 1997), but only Amse-de Jong does so purely based on morphological criteria. However, she does not indicate the size of the group anaspectual verbs, while in other studies these verbs are presented as rather marginal. The approach taken in this study shows that the anaspectual group is a large group in OCS: about 30% of all attested verb forms are attestations of anaspectual verbs. Together with **perfective** (*sostaviti*) and **imperfective** (*sostavljati*) verbs these anaspectual verbs form the three core groups for the analysis of the functions of the OCS derivational aspect system. In addition to those core groups I identify a number of additional groups the aspectual status of which can only be determined on the basis of a comparison with the core groups.

In **Chapter 6** I will discuss all forms of the OCS verb and their functions. This is a necessary step for understanding the mechanism behind the method of grammatical profiling, which is based on the relative distribution of verb forms. It is also necessary for the semantic analysis of individual verb forms in the following chapters.

In **Chapter 7** I will apply the method of grammatical profiling to the morphologically categorized groups of verbs. This will provide the statistical support for my hypothesis that morphological markers of aspect are the best

indicator of the aspect of a verb, as well as additional information regarding the status of verbs that are not in the prototypical perfective and imperfective groups.

The functions of verbal aspect are the subject of **Chapter 8**. I will perform a semantic analysis of perfective, imperfective and aspectual verbs to be able to answer the question regarding the functions of verbal aspect in OCS. Since OCS is a Slavic language, my hypothesis is that the prototypical morphological opposition between verbs such as *sostaviti* and *sostavljati* 'compose' in OCS is a Slavic-style opposition in which the perfective aspect expresses Slavic style 'totality', the attainment of an inherent (lexical) boundary, whereas the imperfective aspect defocuses the attainment of the inherent boundary. Historical and diachronic studies of the development of Slavic aspect show that the particular meaning of aspect in the eastern languages is a late innovation, so I hypothesize that aspect in OCS will be more similar to aspect in the western group of Slavic languages, in which sequential connection is not part of the meaning of the perfective aspect.

The non-core groups are the subject of **Chapter 9**, in which I will perform a semantic analysis of individual attestations from those groups and thereby come to a better understanding of the position of these verbs with regard to the core-groups. Insight in the status of these groups can also provide a better understanding of the stage of development of the derivational verbal aspect system in OCS.

Finally, given the morphological and functional similarities between the imperfect (tense) and the derived imperfective verbs, I hypothesize that the imperfect, which is a Slavic innovation, was the catalyst of the other Slavic innovation, namely the derivation of imperfective verbs. Hence, the derivational aspect system possibly started out as an inflectional system that grew into a derivational system when other forms joined the imperfect. In **Chapter 10** I will discuss a particular group of verbs in which the derivational aspect opposition shows traits of an inflectional opposition and subsequently I will describe the possible role of the imperfect in the origin and development of Slavic derivational aspect.

Chapter 11 contains the conclusion of this study.

