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# Verbal aspect in Old Church Slavonic

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## *SUMMARY*

Slavic languages are well known for their aspect opposition between perfective and imperfective verbs. This aspect system shows great similarities among the various modern Slavic languages and can even be treated as a single system. However, in recent decades it has become clear that there are also large differences between the modern Slavic languages with regard to the verbal aspect system. This raises questions as to the kind of system from which the modern Slavic verbal aspect systems originate.

The language from which all Slavic languages descend, Proto-Slavic, is not attested. The closest we can get to the source of the Slavic languages is by studying Old Church Slavonic, the oldest attested Slavic language. The main research question is therefore:

*What does the verbal aspect system in Old Church Slavonic look like?*

My study is built up in two main parts: the first four chapters contain background information and treat earlier studies of verbal aspect in Old Church Slavonic, while the following six chapters contain my own analysis. Chapter 11, finally, contains the conclusions.

I start out by indicating the limitations of my research in Chapter 1, in which I discuss Old Church Slavonic. Old Church Slavonic is a South Slavic language from the tenth and eleventh centuries. From this language we have only a modest number of extant manuscripts, totalling around 1825 folios. I have based my research for a large part on a database that I compiled, containing the approximately 80.000 verb forms attested in those manuscripts.

In Chapter 2, I discuss verbal aspect, with special attention to the difference between lexical and grammatical aspect, and within grammatical aspect to the difference between *Slavic-style* aspect and *Romance-style* aspect. All three forms of aspect are present in Old Church Slavonic and for my analysis it is imperative to differentiate between the three. The aspect system to which I refer in my research question is the *Slavic-style* grammatical aspect, hence the opposition between perfective and imperfective verbs.

In Chapter 3, I specify the main research question, based on the discussion in the first two introductory chapters. This results in a number of more specific questions, such as how the aspect of a verb can be determined, what the functions of verbal aspect in Old Church Slavonic are, how it compares to aspect in the modern Slavic languages and how verbal aspect developed in Slavic. My main hypothesis is that the aspectual morphology of the verb,

hence 'outer characteristics' such as prefixed and suffixes, is the best indicator of its aspect. As a consequence of that, I expect verbs that have no aspectual morphology to not express aspect at all.

In Chapter 4, I discuss three important studies of verbal aspect in Old Church Slavonic: Dostál (1954), Amse-de Jong (1974) and Eckhoff & Janda (2014). I demonstrate that there is no consensus regarding the question what the verbal aspect system in Old Church Slavonic looks like and I argue that this is because of the differing starting points for the analysis and the different methodologies the various authors use. With that analysis I make the transition from describing the background of my research towards my own analysis.

In the next 6 chapters, which contain my analysis of the Old Church Slavonic data, the following is treated: my morphological categorization of Old Church Slavonic verbs, a check of the categorization by means of a statistical test and a second check and deepening of the overall analysis by means of a semantic analysis of individual examples. Based on the treatment of a morphologically deviating group of verbs, I also discuss the possible role of the imperfect in the development of the perfective-imperfective opposition.

First, in Chapter 5, I discuss my morphological categorization of verbs, which means: a categorization based on the outer characteristics of aspect, like prefixation or suffixation. On the basis of these characteristics, I come up with a categorization into three core groups, namely perfective, imperfective and anaspectual. I also distinguish a number of other groups based on their morphology (like verbs of motion). The anaspectual group deserves some extra explanation, because my definition of anaspectual verbs also has consequences for the definition of imperfective verbs. My premise is that verbs without any aspectual morphology, hence verbs that do not show outer characteristics of aspect, are anaspectual. It concerns verbs like *jasti* 'eat', *ležati* 'lie' en *viděti* 'see' (cf. Modern Russian: *est', ležat', videt'*). These verbs, that I categorize as anaspectual, are often regarded as imperfective, but I assume that they do not express grammatical aspect at all in Old Church Slavonic and are thus anaspectual. Imperfective verbs can be recognized by their suffix; it concerns verbs like *javljati sę* 'appear', or *sъnědati* 'eat up', 'which are derived from the perfective verbs *aviti sę* 'appear' en *sъněsti* 'eat up' by means of the suffix *-ati -aje-* (cf. Modern Russian *javljat'sja*, in relation to *javit'sja* and *s"edat'*, in relation to *s"est'*). It is good to emphasize that it is rather rare in Slavic aspectology to define such a large group of verbs as anaspectual. Verbs without aspect are recognized from time to time for older stages of Slavic. However, the group that I regard as anaspectual does not consist of a number of isolated verbs; it is rather a well-defined large group of verbs that makes up 30% of all verb attestations in Old Church Slavonic. In the following chapters I show that these verbs indeed do not express aspect.

In Chapter 6, I treat the paradigm of the Old Church Slavonic verb: the verb forms that together form the grammatical profile of the verb, like the aorist, imperfect, present, infinitive etc. The grammatical profiles of the morphologically defined groups form the input for the statistical analysis in Chapter 7. From the discussion of the various verb forms in Chapter 6, it becomes clear that there are differences between the groups with regard to their grammatical profile. Perfective verbs occur relatively often in the aorist and past participles, but not in the imperfect and present participles, while imperfective verbs show an opposite compatibility. Anaspectual verbs occur relatively evenly in the various forms and do not show preference for one form or another.

Chapter 7 contains a correspondence analysis of the grammatical profiles of the groups of verbs that were morphologically defined in Chapter 5. It was already clear that perfective and imperfective verbs have different profiles, but this analysis allows me to distinguish the factor, or dimension, that is responsible for the largest part of the differences found between the perfective and imperfective groups. Subsequently, I can establish the position on this dimension of the other groups that I distinguish.

The perfective groups cluster on one side of the dimension mentioned above and the imperfective verbs on the other side. Because perfective and imperfective verbs are on the opposite sides of the dimension, it is justified to refer to it as the 'aspect dimension'. My assumption that anaspectual verbs do not express aspect at all, is supported by the correspondence analysis: on the aspect dimension, the group of anaspectual verbs occupies an intermediate position, in between the perfective and imperfective groups. A more comprehensive analysis, including the other groups, shows that there are groups that are very similar to the perfective or imperfective groups with regard to their grammatical profile (e.g. prefixed verbs of motion), while other groups are closer to the anaspectual verbs on the aspect dimension (e.g. unprefixed determinate verbs of motion).

Even though the statistical analysis supports the categorization, it does not reveal anything about the reason why the profiles differ, or whether these differences are reflected in actual usage. That is why in the following chapters I concentrate on a semantic analysis of individual examples.

In Chapter 8 I discuss the functions of verbal aspect in Old Church Slavonic, based on a semantic analysis of examples from the core groups. I demonstrate that perfective, imperfective and anaspectual verbs not only have different grammatical profiles, but also different functional profiles. One of the clearest examples is the future: a Greek future form is generally translated by a perfective present and almost never by an imperfective present. Anaspectual verbs do not participate in this division of functions: they occur less frequently as a translation of a Greek future compared to perfective verbs, but

much more often than imperfective verbs. This does not make them perfective, though. They share other functions with imperfective verbs, functions in which perfective verbs do not occur, like the actual present. Anaspectual verbs thus turn out to not only be compatible with all verb forms in principle, they also occur in almost all functions, while perfective and imperfective verbs show a division of functions. But what is the shared characteristic of anaspectual verbs that is responsible for all these differences with regard to perfective and imperfective verbs?

A closer analysis of the anaspectual verbs shows that they share one important lexical characteristic: they are not inherently terminative. In other words: they do not automatically express an inherent boundary to an event. This sets them apart from perfective and imperfective verbs, which in my analysis are terminative by definition. Moreover, anaspectual verbs have no intrinsic interaction with the terminus, unlike perfective and imperfective verbs. This, again, sets them apart from both perfective and imperfective verbs. Perfective verbs always express the attainment of an inherent boundary, a change of situation. Imperfective verbs, which in my analysis are terminative just as the perfective verbs, are used to defocus the inherent boundary and explicitly express that there is no change of situation. Anaspectual verbs do not carry this additional load. This means that when they occur in a terminative predicate, both interpretations are possible: they can express both a change in situation, but also an unchanging situation. This flexibility can also explain the general compatibility of anaspectual verbs with all verb forms.

Chapter 9 contains a semantic analysis of examples from the groups of verbs that, based on their morphological make-up, are not part of the core groups in the aspect system. An important conclusion in this chapter is that the perfective-imperfective opposition also occurs outside the core groups, something that the correspondence analysis in Chapter 7 already indicated. Thus, we can now include more groups of verbs into the categories perfective, imperfective and anaspectual, based on their grammatical profile and semantic characteristics, resulting in a more comprehensive overview of the aspect system in Old Church Slavonic.

Finally, in Chapter 10, I treat a deviating group of verbs that could not be included in the general analysis in Chapters 7, 8 and 9. It concerns verbs with two present tense stems and only one aorist/infinitive stem. On the basis of the results of a case study concerning this group of verbs, I also discuss the possible role of the imperfect in the development of the perfective-imperfective opposition. The development of secondary imperfectives (a Slavic innovation) can possibly be connected, both morphologically and semantically, to the imperfect (which is a Slavic innovation as well). This

would solve one piece of the puzzle surrounding the development of verbal aspect in Slavic.

Chapter 11 contains the conclusions. The main conclusion is that the aspect system in Old Church Slavonic consists of three groups: perfective, imperfective and anaspectual. It is a fully fledged and elaborate verbal aspect system in which the opposition between perfective and imperfective revolves around terminative verbs, just as in modern Slavic languages. With my analysis I have not only demonstrated that there is a large group of verbs in Old Church Slavonic that do not express aspect, but, because I do not regard these verbs as imperfective, the profile of imperfective verb becomes very clear as well. For example, we now know that the imperfective aorist in Old Church Slavonic is really a very rare form, while aorists of anaspectual verbs are rather common.

Another important conclusion is that the combination of methods, viz. morphological categorization, statistical analysis and semantic analysis, turns out to be a good approach to determining the aspect of verbs in Old Church Slavonic. My hypothesis that the morphology of the verb is the best indicator of its aspect is proven true, as the morphological categorization is, for the largest part, supported by the statistical and semantic analysis. Furthermore, the combination of methods ensures a system of checks and balances, in which a number of uncertainties that remain after the morphological analysis are solved by the subsequent statistical analysis and the semantic analysis of individual examples. This results in a refinement of the categorization between and within groups, as well as in a better understanding of why some verb forms and functions are more compatible with a certain aspect.

Finally, within the typology of Slavic verbal aspect, Old Church Slavonic is relatively closer to the Western group (e.g. Czech) than to the Eastern group (e.g. Russian). It is, however, still unclear how rare the situation with the anaspectual verbs in Old Church Slavonic is. As far as I know, there is no study that treats the possible existence of a similar group of anaspectual verbs in other Slavic languages. Given the size of the group and the meaning of the existence of this group for the understanding of verbal aspect in Old Church Slavonic, it would be interesting to study this in modern Slavic languages as well.