

Inflection without exponence

This paper will discuss the morphology of aspect in Slavic, and in particular in Bulgarian – one of the languages where aspect is most grammaticalised.

There are compelling reasons to think of aspect in Bulgarian as a grammatical and inflectional category. All verbs in the language belong to one of two aspects (perfective or imperfective) and every perfective verb has an imperfective counterpart. The expression of aspect is obligatory (i.e. a speaker cannot choose to leave aspect unexpressed) and there are certain grammatical contexts where only one of the two aspects is allowed.

However, the morphological exponents of aspect are heterogeneous. Imperfective verbs are derived from perfective ones via the addition of the suffix (-*va-*) or one of its allomorphs.

Below are some examples of perfective/imperfective pairs:

PERFECTIVE	IMPERFECTIVE	
<i>razkaža</i>	<i>razkaz-va-m</i>	'tell'
<i>dam</i>	<i>da-va-m</i>	'give'
<i>stana</i>	<i>sta-va-m</i>	'stand'

Prefixation, however, also has relevance for the aspect of the verb. A verb that is derived from another via prefixation is most often perfective, for example:

IMPERFECTIVE		PREFIXED PERFECTIVE	
<i>razkaz-va-m</i>	'tell'	<i>za-razkaz-va-m</i>	'start telling'
<i>sta-va-m</i>	'stand up'	<i>na-sta-va-me</i>	'(we all) stand up'

The processes of imperfectivization (the addition of the suffix -*va-*) or one of its allomorphs and prefixation (with concomitant perfectivization) appear to be able to feed into each other, as becomes clear from the examples above.

One effect of this is that even though prefixation seems to be associated with perfectivization and suffixation with -*va-* seems to be associated with imperfectivization, the presence of a prefix or an imperfectivising suffix cannot be thought of as a reliable indicator of the aspect of a verb. Maslov (1963) notes that there are many verbs where both a perfectivising prefix and an imperfectivising suffix are present, and some of those verbs are imperfective, whereas others are perfective.

The facts outlined above suggest that though we might wish to define aspect in Bulgarian (this can be different for other Slavic languages) as an inflectional category similar to tense or number, the morphology of aspect can present problems for some models. The paper explores in particular the problems that will be encountered in a realizational theory like Paradigm Function Morphology (Stump 2001).

Rather than conclude that the model cannot handle the data, however, the paper argues that the morphology of aspect can be accommodated through the introduction in the account of morphomic stems.

Additional evidence for the need for such stems is found in some nominalisations, where the use of an 'imperfective' stem (i.e. stem derived with the addition of the suffix -*va-* or one of its allomorphs) is not linked to the presence (or absence) of the (morphosemantic) feature of aspect.

References:

- Maslov Ju. S. (1963) *Morfologija glagol'nogo vida v sovremennom bolgarskom literaturnom jazyke*. Moskva-Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR.
- Stump, G. (2001) *Paradigm Function Morphology. A Theory of Inflectional Form*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.