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A diachronic view of the actional/aspectual properties of Russian verbs

(to appear in a collection of papers on tense-aspect matters to be published in Sofia, Bulgaria)

for Mitja Skubic

In questo lavoro viene analizzata l'evoluzione dei verbi russi, con particolare riguardo alle valenze azionali ed aspettuative, ripercorrendone lo sviluppo a partire dal Proto-Slavo. Gli studi specialistici hanno mostrato che in Proto-Slavo l'antica opposizione Indo-Europea fra verbi così detti definiti / indefiniti venne riutilizzata per far rivivere la distinzione fra Aoristo ed Imperfetto. Oltre a ciò, il Proto-Slavo sviluppò un apparato derivazionale, basato su prefissi e suffissi, per marcare la nozione di "limite temporale" ("temporal boundedness"). Lo Slavo Ecclesiastico (o Antico Slavo) sviluppò ulteriormente tale sistema, combinando ortogonalmente l'opposizione aspettuale [\pm perfettivo] con l'opposizione azionale [\pm limitato]. Quest'ultima opposizione, trasmessasi al lessico di tutte le lingue slave, subì poi la pressione della strettamente correlata, ma più vincolante, opposizione [\pm telico]. Come conseguenza, in molte lingue slave settentrionali la distinzione aspettuale fra Aoristo ed Imperfetto divenne progressivamente opaca, creando le premesse per una radicale semplificazione del sistema dei tempi verbali. Il collasso fu verosimilmente provocato dalla frequente convergenza statistica fra telicità e perfettività da un lato, atelicità ed imperfettività dall'altro.

Per effetto di ciò, il meccanismo derivazionale (fondato su prefissi e suffissi) che ha plasmato il lessico di tutte le lingue slave fu reinterpretato in Russo Moderno, e nella maggior parte delle lingue slave settentrionali, nei termini di una nuova categoria sincretica, nella quale i tratti azionali ed aspettuative risultano inestricabilmente intrecciati. In questo contributo, tale nozione viene convenzionalmente indicata come 'aspetto', per distinguerla dalla medesima parola scritta senza virgolette (da intendersi, quest'ultima, in accezione generale, ossia tipologicamente neutra).

Il sistema dello Slavo Ecclesiastico, documentabilmente presente anche in Antico Russo, si è sostanzialmente conservato in Bulgaro e, sia pure in minor misura, in altre

lingue slave meridionali. Quanto invece all'antica distinzione [\pm definito], essa sopravvive residualmente nel limitato gruppo dei verbi di moto russi, opportunamente reinterpretata come moto definito vs. moto indefinito.¹

1 Introduction

This paper presents a diachronic study of the actional and aspectual properties of Russian verbs. The claim put forth is that the category of Actionality was a crucial presence in the verbal system (i.e., overtly marked) from the beginning of Proto-Slavic up to Modern Russian (henceforth **MR**), although in the latter language the actional and aspectual features are strictly intertwined.²

At this point, a terminological clarification is in order. The analysis of the Slavic verbal system often turns out to be unnecessarily complicated due to lack of terminological explicitness, which hinders mutual intelligibility. To overcome this difficulty, this paper will make use of the following convention. First, the term ACTIONALITY will be used for the lexically-oriented verbal categories, in a very similar sense to that proposed by Vendler's seminal work,³ while ASPECT will be used for the inflectional notion of aspect in its typologically neuter (i.e., cross-linguistically general) meaning. Second, and most importantly, PERFECTIVE and IMPERFECTIVE will only be used with reference to aspectual notions in the previously defined neuter meaning, whereas 'PERFECTIVE' vs. 'IMPERFECTIVE' (between simple quotes) will designate the specific opposition implemented in the Slavic verbal lexicon. Following this scheme, 'ASPECT' (between simple quotes) will refer to the relevant grammatical category as manifested in Slavic, with special regard to the situation in Russian and Northern Slavic in general. It is unfortunate that the same words appear in the literature with respect to different objects, but one has to cope with this. Indeed, as this paper will show, this terminological confusion is after all understandable, considering

¹ The final version of this paper was written during a stay of the first author at the Institut für Evolutionäre Anthropologie of the Max Planck Gesellschaft, Leipzig, in April 2010.

² The following abbreviations will be used in this paper: AOR = Aorist, AR = Ancient Russian, BD = Bounded, Blg = Bulgarian, DT = Definite, FUT = Future, GEN = Genitive, IMP = Imperfect, IMPF = imperfective, INDT = Indefinite, MR = Modern Russian, PART = Particle, PF = perfective, PREV = Preverb, SG = Singular, UBD = Unbounded.

³ The term "Aktionsart" is also used in this respect, but it will be avoided here because it is often employed with a different meaning in the Slavicist tradition.

the intricate interplay of actional and aspectual features to be observed in languages such as Russian.

In his analysis of the verbal structure of Slavic languages, Bertinetto (1986; 1997; 2000; 2001) argued that, due to the poverty of the inflectional system of Northern Slavic languages and in particular to their loss of the overt aspectual markers of Ancient Slavonic, the lexical opposition ‘perfective’ vs. ‘imperfective’ had to take on the bulk of the aspect functions, giving rise to a syncretic system whereby actionality and aspect turn out to be strictly intertwined. Indeed, as the last part of this paper will show, the opposition of prefixed vs. simplex verbs in Russian still presents unmistakable evidence of its origin within the category of actionality, although it is now also exploited to convey ‘aspect’ (whereby aspect and actionality merge). The opposition of suffixed vs. non-suffixed verbs should also be viewed in similar terms.

The diachronic perspective, based on data from Ancient Slavonic, offers convincing evidence of this state of affairs. This paper will analyse the parallel evolution of the system of actional markers on the one side, and of the Aorist vs. Imperfect opposition on the other side. The latter was originally present in Ancient Slavonic and was subsequently lost by Russian (as well as by other Northern Slavic languages).

Ancient Slavonic presented, in addition to overt marking of the aspectual distinction perfective / imperfective in the past domain (see the contrast Aorist vs. Imperfect), a fully developed morphological apparatus to mark the contrast telic / atelic (or rather, as will soon become clear, bounded / unbounded), in most cases by means of prefixes underlining the telic character of the predicate. Several Slavicist linguists of the past have indeed pointed out that prefixes were the regular marker of telicity in Ancient Slavonic. The historical reconstruction offered below will rely upon the studies of Maslov (1948, 1959, 1961, 1963), Silina (1978, 1982, 1995), Kuznecov (1959), Černyx (1962), Borkovskij & Kuznecov (1965), Ivanov (1964), Ružička (1957), Mayo (1984), Petrušin (1996), Nørgård-Sørensen (1997), Nefedjev (2004), among others.⁴ In particular, Mayo (1984) provides an exhaustive overview of the development of the Slavic aspectual system from the Indo-European period until the XVI century, with special focus on Russian. The following section will summarize his view, highlighting the relevance of actional features at the different temporal stages.

⁴ See also the opposition definite & indefinite “objective Aktionsarten” vs. perfective & imperfective “subjective aspects” proposed by Hermann (1927/1962: 47) or the opposition Aktionsart vs. aspect suggested by Jacobsen (1926/1962: 39-40); see van Wijk (1929/1962: 242).

2 From Proto-Slavic to Ancient Russian.

Between Proto-Slavic, as rooted in Indo-European, and the earliest surviving Slavonic texts (i.e., the *Povest' Vremennyx Let* (*Tales of Bygone Years*, beginning of the XII cent.), Mayo (1984) singles out the following three stages:

- I) In the oldest stage, the verbs “[...] were differentiated structurally according to whether they expressed a durative or non-durative (momentary) action. Reconstruction of the means by which Indo-European aspectual distinctions were made is possible only to a limited extent, using those few traces of the system which survived into the historical period. Nevertheless, it was precisely in the emergent Slavonic languages (which in general had lost the ancient distinctions of aspect) that one of such means was widespread – the alternation of root vowels. [...] the long vowels were found in those verbs which expressed a lengthy or repeated action – what Borodič (1953, 75) calls “the action as state” – while the short vowels were characteristic of stems denoting a short, concrete action” (p.6).

Van Wijk, Maslov, Ružička, Silina among others refer to the same feature by the opposition “definite vs. indefinite” (alternatively, “determinate vs. indeterminate”).⁵ The typical device by which this Proto-Slavic distinction was made consisted of root-vowel alternations (e.g., [o]/[a], [ɤ]/[i], [e]/[ě], all instantiating a long vs. short contrast). This was the case both in motion verbs, such as *letati* / *leteti* ‘fly’, *nositi* / *nesti* ‘bring’, *voziti* / *vezti* ‘drive’, and in semantically unrelated verbs, such as *badati* / *bosti* ‘butt’, *zidati* / *zdati* ‘create’ etc. The long vowels were to be found in indefinite stems (the first in each pair), while short vowels were to be found in definite stems. Mayo (quoting Borodič 1953) argues that the indefinite verbs expressed a lengthy or repeated event, whereas the definite ones denoted a short, directly identifiable event. This suggests that the grammatical category at stake was actionality.

- II) The second stage consisted of the rise of the category of tense. Of special importance here is the Imperfect vs. Aorist opposition, originally attested in Indo-European but lost by its Slavic branch. The definite vs. indefinite stems yielded the basis, respectively, for the Aorist vs. Present and Imperfect (the last two distinguished by the endings). Later on, however, the Ancient Slavonic Imperfect also began to be formed from definite stems by adding the suffix *-a-*

⁵ For the sake of uniformity, this paper will only make use of the pair “definite / indefinite”.

(Mayo 1984; Borodič 1953; Silina 1982, 1985, 1995). The category at stake here was, needless to say, aspect.

- III) The third and longest stage consisted of the establishment of the opposition ‘perfective’ vs. ‘imperfective’, where a major role was played by prefixes. Mayo shares the view, later on also expressed by Smith (1991) and Borik (2006), that ‘perfective’ prefixes reflected grammatical aspect distinctions, for he suggests (p. 8) that “in Russian ... prefixes gradually began in many instances to lose their original lexical meaning and to acquire, in combination with particular verbs, purely grammatical status as perfectivizers”. In the present authors’ view, however, even in MR the prefixes preserve sizeable traces of their original actional meaning. At any rate, considering that in MR actionality and aspect interact, the category at stake here is ‘aspect’, as defined in section 1.

With reference to the third period of Proto-Slavic, Maslov (1961) – relying upon Stang (1942) – listed several verbal “Aktionsarten” divided into two main categories (non-prefixed vs. prefixed, each with several sub-categories), giving rise to a system of contrasting pairs. Here follows a sample list:

- 1a- STATIVE: *bdeti* ‘keep vigil, watch’, *skrebeti* ‘be reluctant’, *mlčati* ‘keep silence’, *trepeti* ‘bear’, *drežati* ‘tremble’, *bojati sja* ‘fear’, *smerdeti* ‘stink’, *sedeti* ‘sit’, *imeti* ‘have’, *spati* ‘sleep’; (later) *umeti* ‘know how’, *ljubiti* ‘love’;
- 1b- MUTATIVE : *sesti* ‘seat down’, *stati* ‘become’, *s’xnuti* ‘get dry’, *bogateti* ‘get rich’, *gibnuti* ‘perish’, *mrezeti* ‘be disgusting’;
- 1c- EVOLUTIVE: *jesti* ‘eat’, *dati* ‘give’, *vesti* ‘lead’, *plesti* ‘weave’, *pasti* ‘fall down’, *iti* ‘go’, *mleti* ‘be overcome with delight’, *pisati* ‘write’, *zidati* ‘create’, *delati* ‘do’, *imenovati* ‘give names’, *pleniti* ‘take captive’, *živiti* ‘animate’, *raniti* ‘wound’, *buditi* ‘awaken’, *saditi* ‘make sit down’ & so called ‘multiplicatives’ *klati* ‘put’, *brati* ‘take’, *bosti* ‘butt’, *greti* ‘heat’, *kovati* ‘forge’, *česati* ‘scratch’, *peti* ‘sing’, *biti* ‘beat’, *žati* ‘reap’, *kapati* ‘dig’, *mazati* ‘grease’, *rezati* ‘cut’;
- 1d- INDEFINITIVE-FREQUENTATIVE (or INDEFINITIVE-ITERATIVE): *nositi* ‘carry’, *broditi* ‘wander’, *letati* ‘fly’, *begati* ‘run’; *lišati* ‘deprive’, *rešati* ‘decide’, *stupati* ‘tread on’, *končati* ‘finish’, *padati* ‘fall down’, *makati* ‘dip’, *klanjati sja* ‘bow’, *lamati* ‘break’, *valjati* ‘roll’, *vidati* ‘see’, *slyxati* ‘hear’, *minovati* ‘pass by’, *imati* ‘have’, *kupovati* ‘buy’;

- 1e- SEMELFACTIVE: *kosnuti* ‘touch’, *dunut*i ‘blow’, *doxnuti* ‘breathe’, *kliknuti* ‘call’, *minuti* ‘pass by’, *plinuti* ‘spit’, *rinuti sja* ‘dash’, *tlknuti* ‘push’, *tknuti* ‘stick into’, *dreznuti* ‘dare’, *dvignuti* ‘move’, *skočiti* ‘leap up’, *stupiti* ‘tread on’;
- 2a- RESULTATIVE (with prefixes *po-*, *u-*, *s-*; later *iz-*, *vy-*, *ob-*, *za-*): *isklati/zaklati* ‘put’, *izmreti/umreti* ‘dye’, *sberati* ‘collect’, *usnuti* ‘fall asleep’, *ocepeneti* ‘freeze’, *razbogateti* ‘become rich’, *strepeti* ‘bear’;
- 2b- RESULTATIVE-FREQUENTATIVE: *iznositi/vynositi* ‘carry out’, *sostojati sja* ‘take place’, *nadležati* ‘be proper’;
- 2c- INGRESSIVE (with prefixes *vz-*, *za-*, *pro-*): *vzbojati sja* ‘begin to fear’, *vzgremiti* ‘begin to resound’, *zabdeti* ‘begin to watch’, *vzglagolati/proglagolati* ‘begin to talk’, *v(z)zvati* ‘call’, *vsplanjati sja* ‘flash out’;
- 2d- DURATIVE-DELIMITATIVE with the prefix *po-*.

According to Maslov (1961: 468), the morpho-semantic process of verbal prefixation created three major groups, called *terminativa* (telics), *aterminativa* (atelics) and *communia* (neutral). The *terminativa* group included all prefixed *Aktionsarten* (2a, 2b, 2c, 2d) plus (1e); the *aterminativa* only included (1a); the *communia* included (1b, 1c, 1d). The reason why group (1b) was treated as a separate class by Maslov is not obvious. At any rate, according to the present authors the feature distinguishing *terminativa* from the remaining two groups was not telicity proper, but rather the weaker notion of “(TEMPORAL) BOUNDEDNESS” (henceforth simply “boundedness”). Although no attempt will be made here at providing a formal definition of boundedness vis-à-vis telicity, the following characterization should offer an intuitive understanding. A process may be (temporally) bounded by being: (i) telic in the proper sense; (ii) delimited (cf. the class of *po*-prefixed verbs); (iii) non-durative (cf. the classes of ingressesives and *nu*-interfixed punctuals or semelfactives). The predicates in (ii-iii), despite being ostensibly bounded, would fail the most stringent telicity tests. For instance, delimitatives fail the test of compatibility with the temporal adverbial *in X time* (*za X vremena*): cf. **Ivan počital knjigu za dva dnja* as opposed to *Ivan pročitao knjigu za dva dnja*.⁶ Thus, the relationship of the predicates in classes (ii-

⁶ For further details, cf. Lentovskaya (2008). Actually, as Lentovskaya (forthcoming) shows, the structural position of Slavic ingressesives with respect to the notion of telicity is not very sharply defined. Although most of them fail the *za X vremena* test, some of them pass it, at least in a conventionalized meaning (cf. *zapet*’ in the sense of ‘acquiring the ability to sing’; *On zapel za dva mesjaca* ‘He started to sing in two months’). This is not surprising: according to Dini & Bertinetto’s (1995) analysis, the transition between punctuals (atelic) and achievements (telic) is fuzzy and subject to cultural

iii) with the telic verbs of class (i) is merely based on their temporally bounded character. In the present authors' view, boundedness played a major role in shaping the Slavic verbal lexicon.

The characterization of verbs as bounded was mostly obtained by different prefixes, contributing telic, delimitative or non-durative meaning (as the case requires) to simplex stems. In addition, non-durative predicates were also obtained by means of the punctuality-oriented interfix *-nu-*. The same derivation patterns still distinguish 'perfective' vs. 'imperfective' verbs in MR. Compare, for example, the MR verbs corresponding to the Proto-Slavic predecessors quoted as *terminativa* in Maslov's classification. The important point to be retained here is that, in terms of telicity *stricto sensu*, the following is a heterogeneous group, comprising both telic and atelic predicates, although they are all temporally bounded:

- 2a- MR TELIC RESULTATIVES / TRANSFORMATIVES: **poklast'* 'put (dialectal)', *umeret'* 'dye', *sobrat'* 'collect', *usnut'* 'fall asleep', *ocepenet'* 'freeze', *razbogatet'* 'become rich', *sterpet'* 'bear';
- 2b- MR TELIC RESULTATIVES / TRANSFORMATIVES: *vynesti* / *vynosit'* 'carry out', *sostojat'sja* 'take place', *nadležat'* 'be proper';
- 2c- MR ATELIC INGRESSIVES: *zabojat'sja* 'begin to fear (colloquial)', *zagremet'* 'begin to resound', *vozzvat'* 'appeal, call', *vosplamenit'sja* 'flash out' (other quoted verbs fell into disuse);
- 2d- MR ATELIC DELIMITATIVES with the prefix *po-*;
- 1e- MR ATELIC SEMELFACTIVES: *kosnut'sja* 'touch', *dunut'* 'blow', *doxnut'* 'breathe', *kliknut'* 'call', *minut'* 'pass by (obsolete)', *pljunut'* 'spit', *rinut'sja* 'dash', *tolknut'* 'push', *tknut'* 'stick into', *derznut'* 'dare', *dvinut'* 'move', *vskočit'* 'leap up' (*skočit'* 'leap up.rare/obsolete), *stupit'* 'tread on'.

As for *aterminativa* (all statives) and *communia*, they were all unbounded in their basic meaning (although most of them can be temporally bounded in the relevant context, for instance by means of delimiting temporal adverbs). At a later stage, the *communia* verbs also acquired the possibility of being (temporally) bounded by different prefixes, but in the Proto-Slavic period they still expressed the ancient in/definiteness distinction. One can find evidence of this (still relying upon the

conventionalization. For the sake of simplicity, in this paper, ingressives will be uniformly treated as atelic, following their prevailing tendency.

historical data collected by the scholars quoted in § 1) in the several members of the *communia* group restoring their missing definite or indefinite partner. In the following list, the members of each pair should be understood as implementing the old [\pm definite] contrast:

- (1) jesti / jedati ‘eat’, dati / davati ‘give’, vesti / vaditi ‘lead’, pasti / padati ‘fall down’, zidati / zdati ‘create’, brati / birati ‘take’, bosti / badati ‘butt’, biti / bivati ‘beat’, nesti / nositi ‘carry’, leteti / letati ‘fly’, stupiti / stupati ‘tread on’, končiti / končati ‘finish’, lomiti / lamati ‘break’, valiti / valjati ‘roll’, videti / vidati ‘see’, slyšati / slyxati ‘hear’, imeti / imati ‘have’.

Van Wijk (1929) noted that determinacy (= definiteness) was not a closed-class category in Proto-Slavic (as opposed to MR, where it only characterizes motion verbs), since it included verbs belonging to a wide range of semantic classes. He suggested that the shift in the status of in/definiteness (or in/determinacy, as he called it) depended on the development of the MR ‘aspectual’ system. Maslov (1961), however, rejected this hypothesis because it posed problems for his own analysis based on a binary schema. In his opinion, in/definiteness yields three, rather than two values (plus, minus and irrelevant).⁷ Actually, not all verbs quoted in Maslov’s (1961) classification of Proto-Slavic predicates may be characterized according to this feature. Whatever the case, one may suggest after van Wijk (1929), Mayo (1984) and Janda (2007) that the [\pm definite] contrast gave crucial impulse to the formation of the ‘aspectual’ oppositions of Russian (as well as other Slavic languages), since it preserved some vestiges of the ancient Aorist vs. Imperfect contrast well after the collapse of the temporal system in Old Russian. As noted above (see point (II) of Mayo’s reconstruction), the Ancient Slavonic Aorist grew out of the Proto-Slavic definite stems, while the Ancient Slavonic Imperfect found its origin in the Proto-Slavic indefinite stems or, later on, in the definite stems with the suffix *-a-* (i.e. AR *leteti/letati* ‘fly’).⁸

Against this background, the following section will analyze the situation in Ancient Russian.

⁷ See also Janda 2007.

⁸ Cf. Mayo (1984) on Proto-Slavic: “The durative [= indefinite] aspect formed the basis for both present and imperfect, which were distinguished only by their endings; the non-durative [= definite] aspect became the basis for the aorist (p.7)”.

3 Ancient Russian (= AR): A reanalysis

In the Ancient Slavonic language of the XII-XIII centuries, several prefixed and non-prefixed verbs appeared in both Aorist and Imperfect form (along with the analytic Perfect and Pluperfect).

Most scholars dealing with this stage of the language (Silina [1978], Černyx [1962], Borkovskij & Kuznecov [1965] among others) considered prefixed verbs in the Aorist and, respectively, non-prefixed verbs in the Imperfect as the default case, thus explaining the general pressure towards: (a) the loss of the Aorist / Imperfect contrast; (b) the concomitant implementation of the MR ‘perfective / imperfective’ system. It is thus quite understandable that the following text was cited as an example of “the many surprising things, concerning aspect, that one can find in AR written documents, in comparison to a much more regular use of aspectual forms in the MR language” (Borkovskij & Kuznecov 1965: 284):

- (2) ...iz nego zhe ozera (ylmer) potechët volxov i v'techët v ozero velikoje novo...
 from that so.PART lake (Ylmer) PREV-flows Volxov and PREV-flows.into in lake
 great Novo
 ...so, from that (Ylmer) lake Volkhov is flowing, and it is flowing into the great
 Novo lake...

According to MR grammar, the two prefixed (hence, ‘perfective’) verbs in (2) – *potech* (‘flows towards’) and *vtech* (‘flows into’) – could only have future-telic reading, which would obviously be out of place in this example from AR, denoting a present-referring and temporally unbounded process. It is indeed crucial to note that the verbs in (2) were telic. However, in contrast to MR, one finds in the above example – *mutatis mutandis* – the same situation to be observed in English, where *Mary is writing a paper* features a telic verb in an imperfective context, thus denying the implication that the event must necessarily reach its expected conclusion. This, as is well-known, would be inconceivable with the corresponding MR (and more generally, Slavic) ‘perfective’ verbs. One can thus draw an important conclusion: the construction of the system of ‘aspectual’ oppositions in the modern Slavic languages (‘perfective’ / ‘imperfective’) has brought about an enhancement of the telic nature of most prefixed verbs, whose actional inclination in Ancient Slavonic could instead be tempered by inflectional aspect morphology. The ensuing discussion will prove this point.

The analysis of (2) as based on MR grammar relies upon Maslov (1961), who claims that the grammaticalized Russian ‘aspectual’ opposition (‘perfective’ / ‘imperfective’) had already been formed by the end of the Proto-Slavic period, even though by that time it did not yet include the whole verbal lexicon.⁹ The alternative view, held by Van Wijk (1929), Ružička (1957), Bermel (1997), Nørgård-Sørensen (1997) and Mayo (1984) among others, states that the stabilization of the ‘aspectual’ oppositions was only attained during the late XV century (or even one century later, according to Bermel). In particular, Ružička (1957: 309-315), who bases his work on a thorough study of the AR language of *Povest’ Vremennyx Let* (beginning of the XII cent.), advocated that many verbs connected to one another on ‘aspectual’ grounds in MR could still be used at that time in all relevant aspects (Aorist and Imperfect) in both prefixed and non-prefixed form. He thus rejected the so-called “aspectual homonymy” hypothesis for those verbs and claimed that their use depended on strictly semantic features (namely, their actionality).

Unfortunately, written data from the early AR period are too scanty for this type of discussion. One should best analyse data of a later period, from the XIV to the XVI Centuries. During the late Ancient Slavonic stage, the Aorist vs. Imperfect opposition merged with the old verbal opposition [\pm definite]. The features of durativity, pluractionality, distributivity, typical of indefinite verbs, subsumed the semantic values of the Imperfect, while the features of specific, total, unitary action, typical of definite verbs, subsumed the semantic values of the Aorist. This is a clear case of the merging of actional and aspectual notions, thus giving rise to the MR ‘aspect’ system, and it was obviously facilitated by the partial overlap in their semantics, as noted in Bertinetto (2001). In MR, the original contrast based on in/definiteness only survives in motion verbs: in (3), (a) is an indefinite verb denoting motion in two directions or without defined direction, whereas (b) is its definite partner, denoting motion in one direction. Both verbs are temporally unbounded (thus, in MR grammar, ‘imperfective’) and, more specifically, atelic:

- (3) a. *letat’* ‘fly (here and there)’ b. *letet’* ‘fly (in a defined direction)’.

The data from AR show that the category of in/definiteness was present in an important stock of verbs of frequent usage, as illustrated in Table 1. The examples in the right column are simplex MR verbs corresponding to one or the other member of

⁹ See also Petrušin (2002).

the AR pairs in the left column, in most cases preserving the original meaning of the relevant verb.

ANCIENT RUSSIAN	MODERN RUSSIAN
<i>bosti / bodati</i> ‘stab’	<i>bodat</i> ‘butt’
<i>valiti / valjati</i> ‘bring down’	<i>valit</i> ‘bring down’; <i>valjat</i> ‘throw down’
<i>vjazti / vjazati</i> ‘tie’	<i>vjazat</i> ‘tie’
<i>vesiti / vešati</i> ‘hang’	<i>vesit</i> ‘weigh’; <i>vešat</i> ‘hang’
<i>gljadeti / gljadati</i> ‘look’	<i>gljadet</i> ‘look’
<i>drožati / drogati</i> ‘tremble’	<i>drožat</i> ‘tremble’
<i>kroiti / krojati</i> ‘cut’	<i>kroit</i> ‘cut out’
<i>liti / lijati</i> ‘pour’	<i>lit</i> ‘pour’
<i>lomiti / lamati</i> ‘break’	<i>lomit</i> ‘break trough, rush’; <i>lomat</i> ‘break’
<i>meniti / menjati</i> ‘change’	<i>menjat</i> ‘change’
<i>roniti / ronjati</i> ‘drop’	<i>ronjat</i> ‘drop’
<i>saditi / sažati</i> ‘plant; seat’	<i>sažat</i> ‘plant; seat’
<i>skočiti / skakati</i> ‘jump’	<i>skakat</i> ‘jump’
<i>streliti / streljati</i> ‘shoot’	<i>streljat</i> ‘shoot’
<i>tsepiti / tsepljati</i> ‘clutch’	<i>tsepljat</i> ‘clutch’

Table 1.

It should be noted that all such AR verbs had their own prefixed telic cognate, as exemplified in (4):

- | | | |
|-----|--|---|
| (4) | AR | MR |
| | <i>nesti / nositi – vnesti / vnositi</i> | <i>nesti / nosit’ – vnesti / vnosit’</i> |
| | <i>meniti / menjati – zameniti / zamenjati</i> | <i>*menit’ / menjat’ – zamenit’ / zamenjat’</i> |

As mentioned above, in AR the prefixes were regular markers of boundedness. Thus, one and the same verb root gave rise to four types of verb: (i) non-prefixed /

unbounded definite (*nesti; saditi*), (ii) non-prefixed / unbounded indefinite (*nositi; sazhati*), (iii) prefixed / bounded definite (*vnesti, posaditi*), (iv) prefixed / bounded indefinite (*vnositi; posazhati*). Ostensibly, the semantic difference was not ‘aspectual’ in the modern Slavicist sense (cfr. Maslov 1963). In the course of time, however – as already noted – one component of this system (the [\pm definite] opposition) converged with the aspectually-proper contrast perfective / imperfective by virtue of merging with the Aorist / Imperfect distinction. This is demonstrated by various pairs of AR verbs, all based on the contrast *-i-* / *-a-* and consisting of a simplex verb plus its ‘iterative / indefinite’ cognate as in (5), which were reinterpreted in terms of the aspectual distinction Aorist / Imperfect (see Černyx 1962: 272; Maslov 1963):

(5) AR

prositi / prašati ‘ask’

pasti / padati ‘fall down’

roditi / ražati ‘give birth’

čitati / čityvati ‘read’

In addition, the mechanism of suffixation was also exploited in order to derive iterative verbs. Originally *-a-* / *-ja-* was the most productive such device, but it was gradually replaced by the *-iva-* / *-yva-* suffix, which later on established itself as the most productive means to derive ‘imperfective’ verbs (Silina 1978). The resulting system was based on the practically orthogonal combination of actional and aspectual features, as is still by and large the case in Modern Bulgarian.

The MR ‘aspectual’ opposition (in the Slavicist tradition) must have arisen when the distinction between in/definiteness and un/boundedness started to blur. The loss of this distinction caused massive convergence: non-prefixed / unbounded predicates provided the pattern for ‘imperfective’ verbs, while prefixed / bounded predicates yielded the pattern for ‘perfective’ verbs (see Table 2), except that the combination of boundedness and indefiniteness typically produced suffixed verbs (see Table 3). Thus, the in/definite opposition got lost, excepting the MR motion verbs. It is important to stress once more that the notion “un/boundedness” should be kept distinct from “a/telicity”:

	DEFINITE	INDEFINITE
UNBOUNDED	AR <i>letěti</i> – MR <i>letet'</i> IMPF	AR <i>lětati</i> – MR <i>letat'</i> IMPF
BOUNDED	AR <i>priletěti</i> – MR <i>priletet'</i> PF	AR <i>prilětati</i> – MR <i>priletat'</i> IMPF

Table 2.

	DEFINITE	INDEFINITE
UNBOUNDED	AR <i>meniti</i> - * AR <i>saditi</i> - * AR <i>streliti</i> - *	AR <i>menjati</i> – MR <i>menjat'</i> .IMPF AR <i>sažati</i> – MR <i>sažat'</i> .IMPF AR <i>streljati</i> – MR <i>streljat'</i> .IMPF
BOUNDED	AR <i>zameniti</i> – MR <i>zamenit'</i> .PF AR <i>posaditi</i> – MR <i>posadit'</i> .PF AR <i>vystreliti</i> – MR <i>vystrelit'</i> .PF	AR <i>zamenjati</i> – MR <i>zamenjat'</i> .IMPF AR <i>posažati</i> – MR <i>posažat'</i> .IMPF AR <i>vystreljati</i> – MR - *

Table 3.

Further proof of the relevance of actional features in the formation of the MR 'aspectual' system was put forth by Nørgård-Sørensen (1997) in his study of the language of the Novgorod birch-bark letters (XI-XV). The peculiarity of this study lies in the fact that these writings differ radically from other medieval Russian writings in text-functional terms. Unlike most other writings of that time, which were to a large extent influenced by the Church Slavonic norm, the birch-bark letters served the purpose of satisfying everyday communication needs in a less constrained linguistic fashion. According to Nørgård-Sørensen, the birch-bark letters by-and-large reflect the spoken language of the time and witness a stage of AR in which the Ancient Slavonic multi-tense system had been virtually replaced by the MR two-tense system (leaving aside the Future). Any other text, according to this scholar, is less reliable with respect to the evolution of tense and 'aspect' in Russian, since they tended to artificially preserve the Church Slavonic tense system.

The conclusion proposed by Nørgård-Sørensen is that in the AR language of the birch-bark letters:

- i. there was no 'perfective' / 'imperfective' distinction in the MR sense;

- ii. the general function of prefixation was to derive “action” verbs from “activity” verbs (with procedurals, i.e. delimitatives or ingressives, as an infrequent alternative);
- iii. the function of suffixation of both simplex (“activity” or “action”) and prefixed (“action”) verbs was to derive “activity” verbs.

If one assumes that the term “action”, as also used by Durst-Andersen (1992), includes accomplishments and achievements (i.e., telic verbs), while “activity” stands (again using Vendler’s terms) for both states and activities (i.e., atelic verbs), one can conclude that the AR actional classification proposed by Nørgård-Sørensen was by-and-large the same as the one advocated by Brecht (1985) for MR and Radanova-Kuševa (1995) for Modern Bulgarian. Nørgård-Sørensen’s view is illustrated in figure 1 (where the terminology has been accommodated to the Vendlerian tradition) by filling his own schema (p.17) with Russian examples stemming from Brecht (1985):

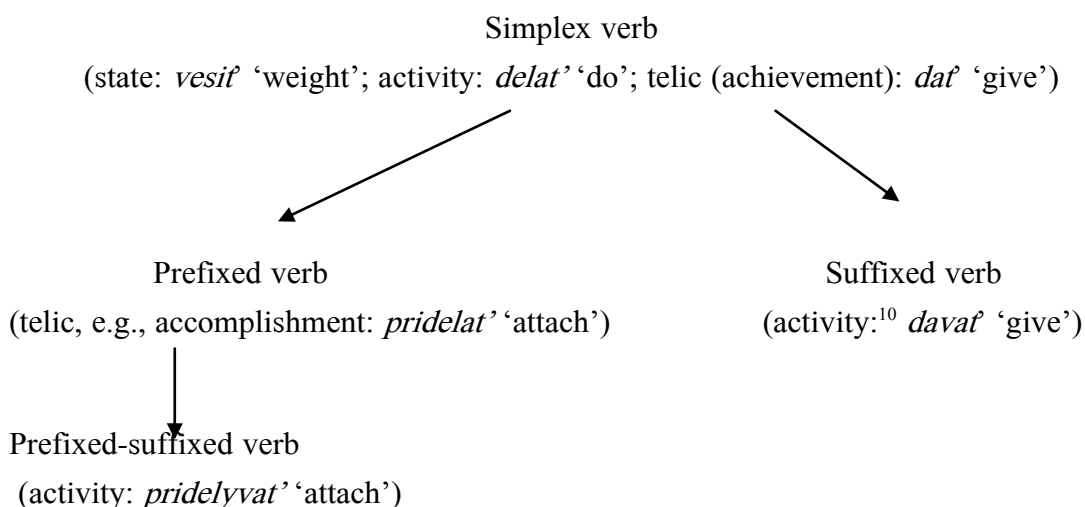


Figure 1.

What remains to be illustrated is the shift from boundedness to telicity, hinted at in this section. This will be the topic of the next section.

¹⁰ More precisely, “punctual-iterative” as suggested in Lentovskaya (2008).

4 Telicity as a hidden factor of change.

As mentioned above, at some point the aspectual opposition perfective vs. imperfective got lost in Russian and in most Northern Slavic languages. It is essential to realize that this change could hardly be explained without referring to the notion of telicity proper, rather than to the somewhat vaguer notion of temporal boundedness that shaped the Proto-Slavic and Ancient Slavonic lexicon. The explanation could go along the following lines.

AR implemented the aspectual opposition perfective vs. imperfective by means of the Aorist / Imperfect contrast, itself a reflex of the previously established in/definiteness category; in addition, AR marked boundedness by means of a convenient set of prefixes. Although not all bounded verbs were telic, most of them were, to the exclusion of delimitatives, ingressives and *nu*-interfixed punctuals. While the bounded atelic verbs presented peculiar features of their own, the numerically preponderant and semantically well-defined class of bounded telic verbs must have exerted a decisive structural pressure. The collapse of the AR aspectual system was presumably brought about by a series of statistically overwhelming convergences, perfectly explainable on semantic grounds. In practice, the loss of the Aorist / Imperfect distinction in MR was most probably caused by the obligatory entailment “telicity → perfectivity”¹¹ and by the frequent convergence of atelicity and imperfectivity (although the latter convergence is by no means compulsory, as the following discussion will prove). As a consequence, the grammatical tense opposition Aorist vs. Imperfect started to lose salience and gradually became obsolete, thus obliterating the only inflectional evidence of the category aspect. Eventually, the collapse of this morphological distinction caused a thorough restructuring of the whole system.

Thus, in the present authors’ view, although the Ancient Slavonic system was morphologically (i.e. derivationally) shaped – by means of prefixation and suffixation – along the lines of the old un/boundedness contrast, the subsequent MR evolution was triggered by the hidden feature [±telic]. Needless to say, the lexicon of all Slavic languages still mirrors the old un/boundedness contrast, which underlies the modern system of ‘aspectual’ verb pairs; however, this apparent paradox can be easily understood as an instance of inertial resistance to change. As a matter of fact, semantic

¹¹ It is important to note, however, that the reverse entailment is not valid, for perfective events may be telic or atelic, depending on the predicate at stake (cf. Bertinetto 2001).

changes, even major ones, do not force the morphological appearance of languages to completely restructure itself. For that matter, even the loss of an automatic phonological process does not force the morphophonological system to restructure itself. As an example, consider the loss of automatic velar palatalization in Romance, which has left behind pervasive traces in the Romance lexicon. By inspecting the lexicon of a Romance language, one might at first sight believe that palatalization is still at work, except that one soon steps into fairly contradictory behaviors, proving its crystallized and residual status. Something similar can be stated with respect to the Slavic verbal lexicon: its outer appearance mirrors the old un/boundedness opposition, but the hidden feature that ultimately motivated the change that took place in the Northern languages (and is presently under way in some Southern ones, like Serbian and Croatian) was the [\pm telic] opposition.

In order to flesh out this suggestion, one should best have a look at the Russian translation of a set of Bulgarian examples quoted in Slabakova (2001). It should be noted that the feature combinations declared for each sentence below refer to possibilities available in Bulgarian rather than in Russian, as the comment below will make clear:

- (6) a. ATELIC + AORIST (= ANCIENT DEFINITE)
 Blg: Pis-ax pismo na mama včera (i trjabva da go doversa dnes)
 write-sg.AOR letter to Mom yesterday and must to it finish today
 MR: Ja včera pisal pis'mo mame (i dolžen zakončit' ego segodnja)
 I yesterday write-sg.UBD letter to Mom and must finish it today
 'I wrote a letter to my Mom yesterday (and I must finish it today)'.
 b. TELIC + AORIST (= ANCIENT DEFINITE)
 Blg: Na-pis-ax pismo na mama včera, (*i trjabva da go doversa dnes)
 pv-write-sg.AOR letter to Mom yesterday and must to it finish today
 MR: Ja včera na-pisal pis'mo mame (*i dolžen zakončit' ego segodnja)
 I yesterday pv-write-sg.BD letter to Mom and must finish it today
 'I wrote a letter to my Mom yesterday (*and I must finish it today)'.
 c. ATELIC + IMPERFECT (= ANCIENT INDEFINITE)
 Blg: Piš-ex pismo na mama včera kogato ti se obad-i.
 write-sg.IMPF letter to Mom yesterday when you call-sg.AOR
 MR: Ja včera pisal pis'mo mame, kogda ty pozvonil.

I yesterday write-sg.UBD letter to Mom when you call-sg.BD

‘Yesterday, when you called, I was writing a letter to my Mom’.

d. TELIC + IMPERFECT (= ANCIENT INDEFINITE)

Blg: štom na-piš-ex pismo na mama, tja se obaždaše.

when prev-write-sg.IMPF letter to Mom she called-sg.IMPF

MR: Každj raz, kogda ja pisal (byvalo napišu / otpisyval¹²) pis’mo
mame, ona mne perezvanivala.

every time when I write-sg.UBD (happened.PREV-write.FUT.BD / PREV-write.sg.UBD)
letter to Mom she to.me call.back.sg.UBD

‘Every time I wrote a letter to my Mom, she called me back’.

Since MR lacks the Aorist / Imperfect distinction, the above translations from Bulgarian cannot possibly implement the feature combinations declared for each sentence and actually implemented in Bulgarian. This has far-reaching consequences. In particular, the combination in (6d) does not involve in MR the use of ‘perfective’ verbs, for in this language such verbs would be incompatible with the habitual reading attached to the given sentence. Actually, even in Bulgarian the combination in (6d) can only obtain a meaningful interpretation in habitual contexts: since ‘perfective’ verbs are telic, they are forcefully incompatible with the progressive reading of the Imperfect; therefore, the only available reading is the habitual one. This may be straightforwardly explained: as has been pointed out (see for instance Bertinetto 1997), habituality is perfectly compatible with the possibly telic character of the iterated sub-events. The hint at telicity in (6d) can indeed be detected in the alternative MR translation by means of the prefixed forms *otpisyval* and *napišu*, despite the detelicization effect caused by the suffix *-yva-* and the auxiliary *byvalo*. Whatever the case, the most frequent MR translation of (6d) involves the “neutral” (‘imperfective’) form *pisal*, which may receive an atelic or telic reading depending on the context. This is also confirmed by (7), where *pisat’* gets an iterative-habitual reading despite the culminative (hence, strictly telically-oriented) adverbial *za X vremja*:

- (7) Každj raz on pisal svoje sočinenije *za položennyj čas*.
Every time he write.sg.UBD his composition in determined hour
Every time he wrote his composition in the agreed hour.

¹² As for this variant of the Russian translation, see Maslov (1959: 158).

In conclusion, with verbs such as those in (6) MR only exhibits the ‘perfective’ verb (*napisat’*) in the combination (6b) [+telic, +perfective], while the ‘imperfective’ form (*pisat’*) is used in all other cases. Example (8) provides a similar sequence of MR examples with the verbs *sažat’/posażat’/posadit’* ‘plant’:

- (8) a. ATELIC + AORIST (= ANCIENT DEFINITE)
 MR: Ja včera sažal (*sadir) rozy (i ne zakončil, a otložil na zavtra)
 I yesterday plant.sg.UBD roses and not finish.sg.BD but left for tomorrow
 ‘I was planting roses yesterday (but I still did not finish it and left it for tomorrow’.
- b. TELIC + AORIST (= ANCIENT DEFINITE)
 MR: Ja včera posadir rozy (*i ne zakončil, a otložil na zavtra)
 I yesterday pv-plant.sg.BD roses and not finish.sg.BD but left for tomorrow
 ‘I planted roses yesterday (*but I still did not finish it and left it for the day after’).
- c. ATELIC + IMPERFECT (= ANCIENT INDEFINITE)
 MR: Ja včera sažal rosy, kogda ty pozvonil.
 I yesterday plant.sg.UBD roses when you call-sg.BD
 ‘Yesterday, when you called, I was planting roses’.
- d. TELIC + IMPERFECT (= ANCIENT INDEFINITE)
 MR: Každyj raz, kogda ja sažal (byvalo posażu/vysažival) rozy,
 kto-to potom vyryval ix.
 every time when I plant-sg.UBD (happened PREV-plant.FUT.BD / PREV-plant.sg.UBD)
 roses,
 someone then tear.sg.UBD it
 ‘Every time I planted roses, someone tore them out later’.

The list in (9) compares the MR forms of example (8) with the corresponding Bulgarian and, respectively, AR forms:¹³

(9)	MR	a	‘imperfective’	<i>sažal</i>
		b	‘perfective’	<i>posadir</i>

¹³ In (9), the Bulgarian derived ‘imperfective’ *nasaždam* is neglected for the sake of simplicity.

	c		‘perfective’	<i>sažal</i>
	d		‘perfective’	<i>sažal (byvalo posažu).</i>
Blg	a	AOR.	‘imperfective’	<i>sadix</i>
	b	AOR.	‘perfective’	<i>nasadix</i>
	c	IMPF.	‘imperfective’	<i>sadjax</i>
	d	IMPF.	‘perfective’	<i>nasadjax</i>
AR	a	DT.	unprefixed	<i>sadil</i>
	b	DT.	prefixed	<i>posadil</i>
	c	INDT.	unprefixed	<i>sažal</i>
	d	INDT.	prefixed	<i>posažal</i> ¹⁴

This is good evidence that in the diachronic evolution of Russian the lexical expression of telicity must have been a major factor in the collapse of the fine system of actional / aspectual distinctions at work in AR (as well as in Bulgarian). The only case where MR overtly expresses telicity is (b), featuring ‘perfective’ verbs. By contrast, Bulgarian may also overtly mark telicity in (d), just like AR. The ‘imperfective’ verbs, on the other hand, are the unmarked member of the MR ‘aspectual’ pairs: in addition to their default atelic meaning, they are compatible with a telic reading in the appropriate contexts. This is a pervasive structural feature with far-reaching consequences, as the following section will show.

5 MR reinterpreted.

One may thus suggest for MR the following view:

- I. Most verb prefixes are telic markers, just as they used to be in AR, while the roots preserve frozen reflexes of the in/definiteness and, subsequently, Aorist / Imperfect opposition. The in/definiteness contrast only survives in MR motion verbs. The exception to this pattern consists of delimitatives (prefixed with *po-*, less frequently with *pro-*), ingressives and *nu*-interfixed punctuals, which together with properly telic verbs made up the Proto-Slavic [+bounded] macro-class (cf. § 2). The latter verbs, as shown by Lentovskaya (2008), are not telic. In this respect, the MR verbal lexicon still reflects an important feature of Proto-Slavic (i.e., verbal prefixes as a marker of boundedness), which makes the telicity category less easily identifiable. Another residual feature consists of the

¹⁴ In this case, *posažal* has no delimitative reading.

fact that, in a number of cases, the originally indefinite non-prefixed (unbounded) stems took over the functions of the definite non-prefixed (bounded) stems that got lost (e.g., *menjat* ‘change’ replaced **menit*), and vice versa in some cases (e.g., *gljadet* ‘look’, definite stem, replaced **gljadat*’, indefinite stem).

- II. Telic verbs (i.e. most ‘perfective’ verbs, to the exclusion of delimitatives, ingressives and *nu*-interfixed punctuals) only occur in [+telic, +perfective] situations.
- III. ‘Perfective’ telic verbs can, however, be detelicized by the *-iva-/-yva-* suffix, which is in addition still capable of conveying iterativity, as in AR (Mayo 1984, Silina 1987).
- IV. All other feature combinations ([+telic, -perfective], [-telic, ±perfective]) are taken care of by the (structurally unmarked) ‘imperfective’ verbs. Thus, in addition to conveying a strictly atelic/imperfective meaning, the latter verbs:

i) Are compatible with telicity in a specific type of imperfective situation, namely in habitual contexts, as shown by (6d), (8d) and (10):

- (10) Každýj večer ja čital pered snom s desjati do dvenadtsati
 every evening I read.UBD before dream from ten to twelve
 ‘Every night I read before sleeping from ten PM to midnight’

ii) Can express telicity and perfectivity in specific contexts, either by pragmatic implicature as in (11), or because of contextual constraints as in (12):

- (11) Ja čital Annu Kareninu Tolstogo.
 I read.UBD Anna Karenina of Tolstoj
 ‘I read Anna Karenina by Tolstoj’.

- (12) V 1877 godu Tolstoj zakančival pisat’ *Annu Kareninu*, roman priobretal svoi
 In 1877 year T. finished.BD write.uBD A. K. novel acquired.BD his
 segodnjašnie očertanija.
 modern characteristics
 In 1877, when Tolstoj finished writing *Anna Karenina*, the novel got his
 modern look.

As shown by (11-12), ‘imperfective’ verbs may convey telicity in the appropriate contexts. This seems to yield an apparent contradiction: lexemes presenting a clear inclination towards atelicity in their default reading may occasionally be interpreted in the opposite way. As Brecht (1985: 29) puts it, in the relevant context “the existence of the goal or end-point is obvious from the whole situation, and the apparently conflicting representation of the situation as atelic produces the deemphasis of this end-point. The result is the Statement-of-Fact reading, focusing on the past experience of a situation rather than on its telic or atelic character”.

This is not a unique case in the domain of tense-aspect semantics. *Mutatis mutandis*, something similar can be found in Romance languages with respect to the so-called ‘narrative’ Imperfect. Contrary to its strictly imperfective nature, the Imperfect may sometimes be used, although in a stylistically marked way, in contexts suggesting an obvious perfective interpretation. The resulting effect is that of a kind of internal view on the event, bringing about a sort of temporal expansion. Using Brecht’s words, one might claim that the ‘narrative’ Imperfect produces the deemphasis of the global perspective attached to perfectivity, inviting the reader to reflect on the internal constitution of the given situation, rather than on its being part of an ordered sequence of events.¹⁵ The following sentence is an illustration:

(13) Nel 1685, nasceva ad Eisenach Johann Sebastian Bach

In 1685, Johann Sebastian Bach was_born.IMP in Eisenach.

In both cases – telic reading of MR ‘imperfective’ verbs, perfective reading of the Romance Imperfect – the language users appear to be able to exploit a mechanism not unlike that of lexical metaphor. Just as lexical metaphor consists of inserting words in a counter-determining context in order to produce unconventional semantic nuances, both phenomena described above – the “actional metaphor” based on the Statement-of-Fact reading of ‘imperfective’ verbs and the “aspectual metaphor” based on the ‘narrative’ Imperfect – generate unconventional semantic nuances out of the attrition with a conflicting context.

It is important to note that the above-described phenomena (just as lexical metaphor) do not bring about a grammar violation, but rather take advantage of its constitutive features. They may be regarded as a kind of pragmatic exploitation of the

¹⁵ It is appropriate to speak of reader rather than hearer in this case, because the ‘narrative’ Imperfect is almost exclusively confined to the written language, and indeed to peculiar stylistic domains.

grammatical potential. Another such example is offered by the conative reading of (once again) ‘imperfective’ verbs in MR. The following example stems from Forsyth (1970: 72):

- (14) Kogda komandir ego polučil, on dolgo *vspominal*,
 when commanding.officer it received.BD he for.a.long.time recalled.UBD
 kto takov podporučik so strannoju familiej “Kiže”
 who [was] such second.lieutenant with strange surname Kizhe
 ‘When the commanding officer received [the order], he tried for a long time to recall who was the second lieutenant with the strange surname “Kizhe”’.

The interpretation of this semantic effect goes along the following lines. Conativity implies the attempt at achieving a certain result, without any guarantee that the intended goal will eventually be reached. Atelicity, in turn, implies that the given event has no intrinsic goal. It is then understandable that the given pragmatic extension has found its way into the grammar of MR. By referring to an intrinsically atelic event, the speaker intends to convey the information that an attempt is made, with no guarantee as to its final result. This example teaches two things: first, it confirms that speakers exploit in a clever way their pragmatic competence; second, it suggests that despite the possible usage of ‘imperfective’ verbs with telic interpretation, the default reading of these predicates is definitely atelic, as one would expect considering their diachronic origin.

The latter point is further endorsed by an interesting set of data put forth by Mehlig (2007):

- (15) a. % Kogda ja vošel, Igor’ pil dve čaški čaja.
 When I came.PF, Igor drank.IMPf two cups tea.GEN
 ‘As I came in, Igor was drinking two cups of tea’.
- b. Kogda ja vošel, Igor’ pil svoi dve čaški čaja.
 When I came_in.PF, Igor drank.IMPf his two cups tea.GEN
 ‘As I came in, Igor was drinking his two cups of tea’.

Sentence (15a) can only have the pragmatically rather implausible meaning that Igor was sipping from two different cups of tea (hence its dubious acceptability for most speakers), but is crucially incompatible with the sequential reading whereby one of the two cups had already been drunk at the focused point. In order to get the latter

reading, one should add the possessive determiner *svoj* as in (15b), which implies sequentiality (one cup after the other). The explanation of the latter effect is that *svoj* suggests, once again by pragmatic implicature, a habitual view ('his customary two cups of tea'). Whatever the case, what strikes the imagination is the absence of the sequential reading in (15a). By contrast, the English translation (or, for that matter, the translation in most languages) allows both readings: non-sequential and sequential. The most likely interpretation of the peculiar constraint to be observed in (15a) relates to the specific actional nature of the 'imperfective' predicate *pit'*. Since such verbs refer by default to atelic events (apart from the possible Statement-of-Fact interpretation in the relevant contexts), in the given context they only allow the (pragmatically implausible) non-sequential reading. This is therefore further proof of the persistence of the [±telic] contrast in MR verbs.

As a matter of fact, the same situation pointed out by Mehlig for MR holds for Bulgarian as well, although this language preserves the inflectional aspect distinctions in their typologically general meaning. It follows, then, that the effect observed in (15a) must be caused by the deep actional meaning (atelicity) of the 'imperfective' predicate employed, quite independently of any possible contribution of inflectional aspect:

- (16) a. % Kogato vljazoh, Igor pieše dve čaški čaj
 When I came_in.PF.AOR, Igor drank.IMPF.IMP two cups tea
- b. Kogato vljazoh, Igor pieše (običajnite) si dve čaški čaj
 When I came_in.PF.AOR, Igor drank.IMPF.IMP as usual his two cups tea

6 Conclusion.

The historical evidence collected in this paper allows the conclusion that actional features played a fundamental role at all stages during the evolution of the verbal system of Russian up to its present stage.

In Proto-Slavic, the originally Indo-European actional opposition between definite and indefinite verbs was re-used to revitalize the (equally Indo-European) old aspectual contrast Aorist / Imperfect. In addition, Proto-Slavic developed a derivational apparatus, based on prefixes and suffixes, to mark the notion of temporal boundedness. Ancient Slavonic further developed a system whereby the aspectual opposition [±perfective] was orthogonally combined with the actional opposition [±bounded]. Although the latter opposition was formally preserved in the lexicon of all

Slavic languages, the strictly related and more constrained feature [\pm telic] exerted a decisive structural pressure. As a consequence, in the Northern Slavic languages the aspectual distinction between Aorist and Imperfect became progressively opaque, so that the whole tense system was radically simplified. This was most likely caused by the statistically frequent convergence of telicity and perfectivity on the one side, and atelicity and imperfectivity on the other side. As a result, the derivational mechanism (based on prefixes and suffixes) that had shaped the verbal lexicon of all Slavic languages, was reinterpreted in MR and in most Northern Slavic languages in terms of the syncretic ‘aspectual’ divide ‘perfective’ / ‘imperfective’, whereby actional and aspectual features are inextricably intertwined. By contrast, the Ancient Slavonic and AR fully developed system of actional and aspectual oppositions, still survives by-and-large in Bulgarian and, to a more limited extent, in other South-Slavic languages. As for the old in/definiteness distinction, it is residually preserved in the limited set of MR motion verbs, in the reformulated interpretation of definite vs. indefinite motion.

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