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# ***Slavic aspect and (diachronic) corpora – Attempting a survey –***

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**The diachronic study of aspect has remained a stepchild of Slavic aspectology and typology  
as well as in the research on morphosyntax and semantics**

Three main reasons

1. **Technology:** Lack of suitable corpora.
2. **Objective facts of the language(s):** Slavic aspect is a very “bulky” grammatical opposition.
3. **Meta-theory:** Disputes concerning the adequate model of presenting Slavic aspect
  - morphological theory
  - tense-aspect typology
  - lexical semantics
  - lexicography

# 1. Technology

Diachronic corpora of particular Slavic languages have started to appear only very recently; most of them are small; for instance,

RRuDi: <https://www.slawistik.hu-berlin.de/de/member/meyerrol/subjekte/rrudi>

PolDi: <http://westslang.sprachen.hu-berlin.de:8080/annis/poldi>

Korpus XIX wieku: <http://parasolcorpus.org/XIX/#!/>

Korpus fleksji polszczyzny XIX wieku: <http://www.f19.uw.edu.pl/>

With user-friendly interfaces and rich annotation (also of metadata)

- diachronic part of the RNC (<http://www.ruscorpora.ru/>),
- *Korpus Barokowy* of Polish (*KorBa*: [http://korba.edu.pl/query\\_corpus/](http://korba.edu.pl/query_corpus/)).

The PROIEL and TOROT treebanks:

[https://nestor.uit.no/users/sign\\_in](https://nestor.uit.no/users/sign_in)

<https://proiel.github.io/>

- richly annotated, but rather for PoS and syntax (see their Old Church Slavonic and older East Slavic parts).

For the first time, a consistent annotation of aspect pairs has been developed for a Slavic language, namely Polish, in the *DiAsPol250* project (see talk by Marek Łaziński et al.):

<http://www.parasolcorpus.org/Teesthoven/#!/>

## 2. Objective facts of the language(s)

Slavic aspect is a very “unhandy and bulky” grammatical opposition.

Neither the functional distribution of verbs considered pfv. or ipfv., nor even the formal patterns which mark the relation between pfv. and ipfv. stems can be easily retrieved.

The same holds true for issues somehow related to aspect, such as

- the syntactic coding of arguments (e.g., the locative alternation),
- prefix stacking,
- voice-related operations (highly polyfunctional marking),
- the distribution of temporal adverbials.

Problem of tagging the relation between verb stems that are considered synonymous and morphologically related, but functionally different and, thus, to be representatives of aspect pairs (or similar concepts).

See talk by Marek Łaziński et al.

(1a) simplex  $\Rightarrow$  PREFIX+simplex

(1b) prefixed stem  $\Rightarrow$  [prefixed stem]+SUFFIX

$\Downarrow$  reinterpretation: (a) identical lexical concept  
(b) different grammatical distribution

(2a) simplex<sup>IPFV</sup> — prefixed stem<sup>PFV</sup> (e.g., Pol. *gotować* — *u-gotować* ‘cook’)

(2b) prefixed stem<sup>PFV</sup> — [[prefixed stem]+SUFFIX]<sup>IPFV</sup>  
(e.g., Pol. *przekazać* — *przekaz-ywa-ć* ‘convey’)

$\Downarrow$  analogical expansion

(3) + formation of two classes (= ipfv. vs pfv. stems) acquiring increasingly complementary distribution over function sets, regardless of lexical identity of concepts and of derivational pattern:



expansion:

- regardless of [ $\pm$  telic] distinction
- interaction with categories:
  - (a) verbal forms,
  - (b) notional distinctions.

In sum: productive stem-derivation  
+ independence of [ $\pm$  telic] distinction  
+ interaction with other categorial contrasts  
 $\supset$  pragmatic strengthening  
 $\rightarrow$  classes of verb stems with an increasingly complementary distribution over two different function sets

**Gradual appearance of classificatory aspect (PFV : IPFV opposition).**

Wiemer & Seržant 2017;  
Wiemer, Wrzesień-Kwiatkowska & Wyroślak 2020;  
Wiemer (forthcoming)

## Components of a comprehensive theory of stem-derivational (“Slavic-type”) aspect

### I. Form-related component:

- patterns of stem derivation (Russ. *osnovoobrazovanie*, *vidoobrazovanie*), their productivity and entrenchment
- restrictions of such patterns by actionality
- the role of specific prefixes or suffixes

### II. Function-related component:

- conditions (or contexts) of choice between opposite members from the pfv. or the ipfv. class
- interaction with other categorial oppositions or form classes and/or construction types
  - e.g., tense, imperatives, modals, voice / syntactic demotion → restrictions (e.g., no pfv. stems after phasal verbs)
  - default (re)interpretations (PFV+PRS > PFV-FUT in North Slavic)
- relation of particular functional parameters with actionality (incl. [ $\pm$ bounded], [ $\pm$ telic]); compare, for instance, modal functions, prohibitive vs preventive, presupposition management (in connection with tense, modals, directive constructions, etc.)
- relation between actionality and (external) pluractionality (repetition [ $\pm$ limited], [ $\pm$ regular])

### III. Lexicographic component:

- identity
  - of lexical concept
  - of ontological type: identical event (→ ipfv. replaces pfv.)
- replacement conditions between morphologically related stems
  - different strength (resp. predictability)
  - hierarchy of “conflict resolutions” (when different conditions clash)

unification of PFV:IPFV opposition



effective trade-off between decreases and increases of entropy of different parts of the system

As for **form-oriented criteria**, unification should theoretically manifest itself in

- a decrease of the amount of affixes (incl. allomorphs) used productively as means to derive aspect pairs (or: aspect partners, or any comparable notions).
- the elimination of suppletive pairs.
- the elimination of biaspectual stems.
- the consistency of marking phases of atelic process verbs (lexemes); for instance
  - different productivity in marking the ingressive or egressive phase (e.g., Russ. *za-kurit'* 'begin to smoke', *ot-ygrat'* 'finish playing'), or in deriving delimitatives (e.g. Russ. *po-guljat'* 'walk (some while)') in Bulgarian, Russian, Polish, and Czech (cf. Maslov 1984 [1981], Petruxina 2000: §4, Dickey 2005).

Moreover, particular forms of the (extended) verb paradigm can deviate from (or “lag behind”) otherwise clear-cut oppositions in functional behavior, e.g.

- participles, action nouns (vs infinitives)
  - talks by Jana Kocková and by Olena Pčelinceva and Elizaveta Sosnovceva

Counterpart on the side of functions and restrictions in the interaction with other categorial oppositions –

**How reliable (i.e. predictable) are associations between forms and functions?**

For instance, aspect choice

- in different types of repetition (external pluractionality): regular/irregular, in past or nonpast tense.
- in the scope of modals (with/without negation).
- in different non-deictic uses, particularly of nonpast forms (present-future).

From a diachronic point of view, all these “aspects of aspect” have to be investigated in their dynamics.

As in any theory of language change, a diachronic application of a comprehensive theory of (Slavic) aspect has to ask for

- patterns,
- order of occurrence of particular steps in change,

and it has to be capable of dealing with gradience.



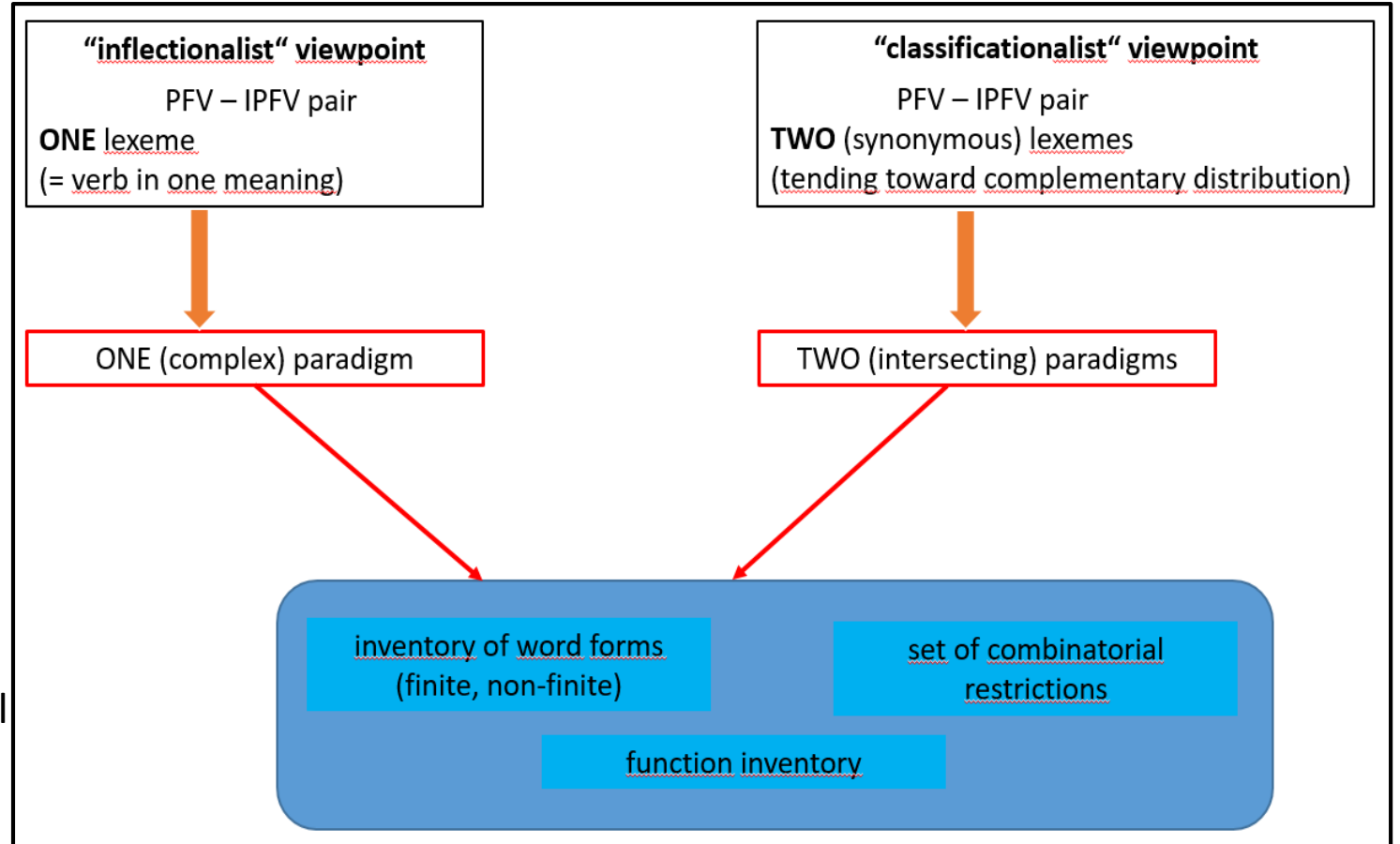
### 3. Meta-theory

Disputes concerning the adequate model of presenting Slavic aspect. Concerned are

- morphological theory,
- tense-aspect typology,
- lexical semantics,
- lexicography.

Basically, the issue boils down to determining the relation between paradigms, lexemes and grammatical forms (entering into constructions).

Aspect pairs as a limiting case of grammatically definable replacements among (potential) lexical synonyms.



**Contrasting views on the grammatical status of aspect pairs**

(Wiemer, forthcoming)

**“inflectionalist” viewpoint**

PFV – IPFV pair

**ONE** lexeme  
(= verb in one meaning)

**“classificationalist” viewpoint**

PFV – IPFV pair

**TWO** (synonymous) lexemes  
(tending toward complementary distribution)

**Contrasting views on the grammatical status of aspect pairs**

ONE (complex) paradigm

TWO (intersecting) paradigms

inventory of word forms  
(finite, non-finite)

set of combinatorial  
restrictions

function inventory

How to account for all this  
in a diachronic perspective?

**Comments:**

- The conception of the PFV:IPFV opposition as a classificatory category practically implies stem derivation as the morphological means by which members of that opposition are created.
- Discussions about *vidoobrazovanie* rarely involve the question of the paradigmatic status of non-finite verb forms.
- If linguists still maintain a distinction between inflection and derivation, the arguments normally concentrate on the degree of regularity in form and on lexicographic identity. Both criteria are “favorable” for secondary imperfectivization of telic stems.

## **Problems – not only from a diachronic perspective, but particularly so:**

- general problems with the inflection—derivation divide (or continuum)
- strict mutual connection ‘lexeme’ (= a word in exactly one meaning) ↔ ‘paradigm’ (= forms of a lexeme)  
→ how to annotate corpora, how to check assumptions about meanings?
- related point: meaning captured (primarily)
  - via introspection and paraphrases, or (rather)
  - via the sum of contexts in which some dedicated unit occurs (probability of collocation) ?

In turn,

are properties of a system (here: derivation of verb stems and their forms; choice of members from the PFV or from the IPFV class), and of its changes over time, to be described

- in terms of type frequency (> productivity), or rather
- in terms of token frequency (> predictability, or reliability, of choice).

Certainly, both kinds of frequency are important.

However, for most of the function-related parameters token frequency is of primary importance.

A comparative view on type and token frequency is highly relevant, among others, for such as issues as

- the explanation of “irregularities” in form;
- an account of productive patterns (not necessarily regular in form), in particular for
  - atelic stems (or: stems in an atelic clausal entourage): delimitatives and other phasal modifications;
  - chains of stem derivation (incl. prefix stacking) leading to stems like

Russ. [*po-* [*do-* [*pere-* [*pis-* ]]] *yva-* ]*t*<sup>PFV</sup> (*diski*) ≈ ‘deal some time with additional re-recording (of disks)’

Many irregularities, but also productive patterns are usually not (and probably cannot be) part of lexicographic stock-taking.

- criticism of a “lexicocentric” approach to aspect and actionality (Tatevosov 2015: 244-251);
- “morphemocentric” approaches also have their shortcomings (Wiemer, forthcoming);
- “stem-centric” treatment of Slavic aspect (Wiemer 2020).

Remarkably, even in a lexicocentric view on aspect, the possibilities of lexicography are acknowledged as limited:

„(...) списка видовых пар русского языка не существует. (...) составление «жесткого» списка видовых пар в русском языке – задача не слишком реалистичная, хотя бы потому, что применение критерия Маслова дает градуальный результат.“

‘There is no list of aspect pairs in Russian. Putting together a „hard“ list of aspect pairs in Russian is not a very realistic task – be it only for the reason that the application of Maslov’s criterion yields a gradable result.’

(Zaliznjak/Mikoëljan 2012: 53).

This caveat be transferred to triplets (“bi-imperfective” and other ones).

#### 4. Where can (diachronic) corpora help? Where are they irreplaceable?

Two basic questions:

1. Which properties of the aspect system (PFV:IPFV opposition) are gradient, and how might they be “measured”?
2. What is it that changes (and obviously has been changing) in and between particular Slavic languages?

Actually, these two questions target the same type of phenomenon, only from a different vantage point.

##### **Pluractionality: two examples**

1. PFV.PRS-forms and suspended propositions
2. PFV and regular repetition

## 1. PFV.PRS-forms and suspended propositions

Even in modern Russian PFV.PRS the future function is only a default. In many contexts, PFV.PRS still marks propositions that are implied, but suspended (and do not refer to specific events posterior to time of utterance).

### 1) conditionals (in apodosis)

- (7) *Прямой, если что-то пообещал, обязательно **выполнит**<sup>PFV</sup>, но вот добиться от него этого обещания нелегко.*  
'He is direct, if he has promised something, he will certainly **do** it, but it is not easy to get this promise from him.'  
(NKRJa; *Naši deti: Podrostki*. 2004)

### 2) arithmetic tasks (in school) > implicit conditionality

- (8) **1831)** **За** 2 ч рабочий изготовил 7 одинаковых деталей. **Сколько** таких же деталей он **изготовит** **за** 8 ч?
- 1832)** Двигаясь с постоянной скоростью, машина **за** 6 ч проехала 380 км. **Сколько** километров она проедет с той же скоростью **за** 18 ч?
- 1833)** На оклейку четырёх одинаковых стен пошло 9 рулонов обоев. **Сколько** рулонов обоев потребуется на оклейку 16 таких стен?
- 1834)** На приготовление девяти одинаковых порций салата пошло 4 пачки майонеза. **Сколько** пачек майонеза пойдёт на приготовление 45 таких порций салата?

#### → residuals

after external pluractionality (repeated action) started taking preference over actionality and [+ bounded]; compare Dickey's (2000) East-West cline.

omnitemporal, but with internal taxis (e.g. in proverbs) > implicit conditionality

- (9) *Что **посеешь**, то и **пожнешь**.*  
'What goes around comes around.'

Compare

(10) *slěpъ že slěpъsa ašte voditъ. oba vъ jěmъ **vъpadeta**<sup>pfv</sup> **se***  
'if a blind man leads a blind man, they both **fall** into a pit.'  
(Codex Zographiensis, Mt XV, 14; Galton 1976: 86)

(11) *koraja podъ drugomъ jamu sam **se** v nju **vъvalitъ**<sup>pfv</sup>*  
'Whoever digs a pit for others **falls** into them himself.'  
(old East Slavic: Novgorodskaja I letopis'; 13th-14th c.)

### on ceremonies and other rituals

(12) ***дaстъ** бохъмитъ комуждо по семи десaтъ женъ красенъ. и **изберетъ** едину красну. и всѣхъ красоту **възложи(т)** на едину. и та **будетъ** ем(у)*  
'Boxmit **gives** everybody seventy beautiful women. and everybody **chooses** one (particularly) beautiful (from them) and **lays** the beauty of all on this single one. and she will **be** his wife'  
(Tale of Bygone Years)

(13) *А въ недѣльнии же день **ставаетъ** патриархъ на утрени и на обѣднѣ и въ Господьскиа праздники, и тогда **благословляетъ** пѣвцовъ съ полатъ; они же, оставльше пѣние, понихронию **кличютъ** и потомъ **начнутъ** пѣние красное и сладкое, аки аггели, и тако **поютъ** до обѣдни; а кончавше утрению и разболокшиса, вышедъ вонъ **возмутъ** у патриарха благословение*  
'On Sundays the patriarch **stands up** at the morning service (...), and then he **blesses** the singers; those, in turn, after they finish singing, **call** the ponixronija and then **start** on beautiful and sweet songs, like angels, and so they **sing** until the midday service; and when they finish the morning service and go out, they **take** the blessing from the patriarch.'  
(Хоженіе Antonija Novgorodca, ms. from 16th c.)

See talk by Ekaterina Mišina.

Obviously, there was no change in the ability of PFV.PRS-forms to mark suspended propositions (which are anyway triggered by the combination of [+bounded] and present tense).

The change consists in the degree with which pfv. verbs can be expected in unlimited (regular or and irregular) repetition or, conversely, an increase in the strength of other factors taking dominance over actionality and [+bounded].



## 2. PFV and regular repetition (external pluractionality) in past and nonpast tense:

(14a) Cz. *Po večeri si vždycky **čtu**<sup>IPFV</sup> / **přečtu**<sup>PFV</sup> noviny.*

(14b) Russ. *Posle užina ja vseгда **čitaju**<sup>IPFV</sup> (\*pročitaju<sup>PFV</sup>) gazetu.*

‘After dinner I always **read** the newspaper.’

(15a) Cz. *Každý rok **dostaly**<sup>PFV</sup> děti od babičky kornout bonbonů.*

(15b) Russ. *Každyj god deti **polučali**<sup>IPFV</sup> (\*polučili<sup>PFV</sup>) ot babuški korobku konfet.*

‘Every year the children **received** a candy cone from grandma.’

Compare Polish from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.:

(16) ***Spracuje**<sup>PFV</sup> się co dzień nad tym Edkiem okropnie.*

‘Every day I **work terribly** on this Edek.’

(St. Żeromski; Śmiech 1971: 45)

Furthermore:

(17) *Zawsze **dostrzegłem**<sup>PFV</sup> tam coś ciekawego, choćby najmniejszego ptaka.*

‘I always **noticed** something interesting there, at least a very small bird.’

(„Kobieta i życie”, 1988)

→ regular or irregular repetition?

These are singular facts or standard examples.

However, how widespread were these uses really in former times, and to which extent have they receded? This is a question about predictability and token frequency, thus – a question which only corpora can help to answer.

**Спасибо за Ваше внимание!**  
**Dziękuję za Państwa uwagę!**  
**Děkuji Vám za pozornost!**  
**Ďakujem za pozornosť!**  
**Дякую за Вашу увагу!**  
**Благодаря за вниманието!**  
**Ви благодарам за вниманието!**  
**Хвала на пажњи!**  
**Hvala za Vašo pozornost!**

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