TEASING APART TELICITY AND GRAMMATICAL ASPECT

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In accordance with a number of researchers in the field (e.g. Smith (1991/97), Verkuyl (2003)), I will assume that aspectual-temporal information obtained at lower levels is not obscured by other such information obtained at higher levels. Rather, a compositional approach to aspectuality at higher levels is pursued as the meaning gets more complex with different possible meaning effects due to different layers of meaning that in a way get ‘piled on top of each other’. Although it is widely acknowledged that Aspect and telicity are two different notions (e.g. Glasbey (1998), Borik (2002)), there have been some suggestions for defining Aspect in terms of telicity (e.g. Verkuyl (1972)). This strategy is especially prominent for Slavic (e.g. Filip (1993/99) or van Hout (2003)) due to a dynamic interaction of both categories. Nevertheless, it is crucial for a compositional approach to define Slavic Aspects in a way that is not influenced by certain telicity effects, which is a problem for many theories on this topic (e.g. Filip (1993/99) or Borik (2002)).

By taking telicity as a strictly semantic notion, be it in terms of quantizedness (Filip) or subinterval property (Borik), eventualities described by verbs, predicates, and even complex sentences are classified as telic or atelic at one point or another. In this way, telicity turns out to be equivalent to the notion of ‘boundedness’ that can be applied to various language levels as well. Both concepts are too vague and not very useful in a compositional approach to aspectuality in general. I will assume instead that (a)telicity is a structural property and an instance of inner aspectuality and thus a property of VPs, only. The particular telicity property of a predicate remains stable throughout the derivation and the eventuality type can be unbounded and bounded at higher levels by different means, belonging to the realm of outer aspectuality, which also includes grammatical Aspects.

There is evidence for a structural as well as semantic asymmetry in the pattern of Slavic prefixes. Di Sciullo & Slabakova (forthcoming) address this problem and state that only internal prefixes may change the telicity of the event denoted by the verbal projection they are part of. For Bulgarian they claim that internal aspectual features are part of the \( v \) projection whereas external aspectual features are part of the Tense projection. This is supported by certain properties of Bulgarian prefixes:

1. An external prefix must precede an internal one, whereas the reverse order is ungrammatical.
2. External prefixes do not alter the “Aktionsart” of the verb, while internal prefixes do so, since they signal telicity.
3. When more than one prefix occurs on a given stem, it is only one of them that supplies the endpoint of the event, the others offer additional meanings similar to adverbial modification.

A similar distinction between two groups of Slavic prefixes (lexical vs. superlexical) is also found in Svenonius (forthcoming) and Romanova (forthcoming) for Russian, and Miličević (2003) for Serbo-Croatian. The conclusion of these three authors is different from the one drawn in this paper, though. I will claim that in Slavic languages, internal prefixes that apply to verbs (i.e. lexical items) and participate in their argument structure grammaticalize telicity rather than Aspect, whereas only external prefixes belong to the realm of outer aspectuality, applying higher in the tree to (telic or atelic) predicates (VPs) without changing the telicity property of the predicate they apply to.

First, I will show that the three properties mentioned above also hold for Russian and Czech prefixes. This can be illustrated by means of the highly productive external prefix \( po- \) supplying the meaning ‘a bit’ and attaching to atelic or telic predicates without changing their telicity value. In Russian, the external prefix \( po- \) marks Perfectivity on atelic VPs or otherwise temporally unbounded eventuality descriptions (delimitative Aktionsart). It gets a temporal interpretation only (‘for a while’):

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\begin{align*}
\text{On } po-sidel. & \rightarrow \text{‘He sat / was sitting (for a while).’} \\
\text{On } po-ležal. & \rightarrow \text{‘He lay / was lying (for a while).’ (Russian)}
\end{align*}
\]

A piece of supporting evidence for the claim that the VP remains atelic can be seen in the interaction with temporal adverbials, since such Perfective verbs are only compatible with durational adverbials but not with

\footnote{At this point, I can only give an informal definition for telic predicate types as denoting some point of change.}
frame adverbials (2), whereas it is the other way round with verbs containing internal prefixes marking telicity (3):

(2) On popisal dva časa / *za dva časa. (Russian)
    he-NOM PO-write-PAST two hours in two hours
    ‘He was writing for two hours / *in two hours.’

(3) On napisal pis’mo *dva časa / za dva časa. (Russian)
    he-NOM PF-write-PAST letter two hours in two hours
    ‘He wrote a / the (whole) letter for two hours / in two hours.’

The claim that such external prefixes attach at a higher level to the whole VP without changing its telicity value is further supported by the fact that they cannot occur as infinitival subjects. In the dictionaries, one does not find independent lexical entries of these verbs and infinitives are always dependent on some other verbal form, e.g. Nado pogovorit’ s nim. – ‘It is necessary to (have a) talk with him.’ Russian po- thus functions as a temporal delimiter, comparable to for-adverbials, and provides the interpretation of temporal boundedness at sentence and discourse level. The verb becomes Perfective but the VP itself stays atelic, since there is no additional change in argument structure and no telicity effect.

In Czech, on the other hand, the external prefix po- hardly ever conveys a temporal but rather a spatial interpretation (cf. Filip (forthcoming)). In most cases, it is combined with Perfective telic verbs and functions like a weak quantifier, e.g.:

(4) Pak holička po-odstoupila [...] (Kundera, Žert) (Czech)
    then hairdresser-NOM PO-PF-from-step-PAST
    ‘Then the hairdresser stepped aside a little.’

This spatial meaning cannot be rendered by the Russian cognate but an additional lexical item čut’ – ‘a bit’ is used instead:

(5) Potom parikmaxerša otošla čut’ [...] (Russian)
    then hairdresser-NOM PF-from-go-PAST bit

In general, Russian external prefixes mark temporal boundaries, only, whereas in Czech, these boundaries primarily get a spatial interpretation. Russian and Czech and presumably other Slavic languages differ primarily with respect to the usage of external prefixes. The usage of internal prefixes and thus the marking of telicity on the verb is more or less identical in both languages. I will take this as supporting the claim about the asymmetry of Slavic prefixes.2

In addition to marking telicity on a simple verb, most Slavic internal (or lexical) prefixes derive new lexical items, often accompanied by a change in argument structure. From these new lexical items Slavic languages regularly derive secondary Imperfectives by means of suffixes, mainly, which never change the argument structure or the lexical meaning of the base verb but only its Aspect. Hence, secondary Imperfectives should be considered telic as well, since they contain internal prefixes. They still imply a natural point of change, the existence of which is stripped off by the suffix.3 In this case the suffix explicitly marks that the natural point of change of the eventuality type described by the prefixed verb has not been reached in the actual case.4

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2 As to Di Sciullo & Slabakova’s first point, the Russian po-vy-daval ‘gave out for a while’ and the Czech po-od-stoupil ‘stepped aside a bit’ are used instead of the ungrammatical *vy-po-daval and *od-po-stoupil.

3 A similar effect of the combination of telicity and Imperfectivity arises when the English Progressive is combined with a telic VP (cf. Moens & Steedman (1988)). Its semantic effect is not exactly the same, though, because English has an overt marking of Imperfectivity but neither of telicity nor Perfectivity.

4 This can give rise to different interpretations, e.g. a process meaning: it has not been reached yet, or any meaning of repetition: the whole macro-event (process of the macro-event) has not come to an end, but its micro-events might have reached their particular points of change.
Finally, it has been noted that the quantizedness property of the internal argument (in the sense of Krifka (1992)) is not in all cases decisive for the predicate being telic. Ramchand (forthcoming), for example, convincingly argues that this is only the case with one class of verbs, namely verbs of creation and consumption which combine with incremental theme arguments (undergoers). Such observations, which stand in sharp contrast to theories simply deducing the telicity value of a predicate from the properties of the internal argument (e.g. Verkuyl), seem to be reflected in the morphological processes found with Slavic verbs and the forming of aspectual pairs: Typically we find aspectual pairs with so-called empty prefixes precisely where the quantizedness properties of the internal argument is decisive for the telicity value of the VP. The whole VP is either telic when combined with a quantized incremental theme argument or atelic in combination with a cumulative incremental theme argument, resulting in a homomorphic mapping from the domain of objects to the domain of events (cf. Krifka (1992)). This is in accordance with Filip (1993/99) for Czech and Di Sciullo & Slabakova (forthcoming) for Bulgarian. Telic verbs, on the other hand, i.e. those with internal prefixes, form aspectual pairs with secondary Imperfectives. Finally, atelic verbs stay imperfectiva tantum but can be perfectivized by external prefixes deriving what is traditionally known as Perfective Aktionsart verbs. Hence, Slavic verbs can be divided into strictly atelic verbs, strictly telic verbs and verbs that can give rise to either a telic or an atelic interpretation.

The observations made so far have impact on the question of markedness of Aspect. Traditionally, it is claimed that the Slavic Imperfective Aspect is (semantically) unmarked with respect to the Perfective Aspect and that both constitute a privative or even subordinative opposition (see also Borik (2002), Klimonow (2000)). It has also been noted that this is not always in accordance with the morphological marking so that in some cases the morphological marking is claimed to be contra-iconic (e.g. Klimonow). Bohnemeyer & Swift (forthcoming) address the issue of Aspect and markedness from a quite different angle than what is usually done in the Slavistic tradition. They define grammatical Aspect as viewpoint aspect and constitute a telicity bias in viewpoint selection with some languages, where there are marked Imperfective Aspect and unmarked Perfective Aspect for telic predicates but just the opposite distribution for atelic predicates (e.g. Russian, Yukatek Maya). Such a telicity bias is also found in Early Child Language: In English, for example, there is a preference for using the *ing*-form with atelic predicates, and the *ed*-form with telic ones. This bias is directly reflected in Russian Aspect marking which depends on the telicity of the predicate.\(^5\)

To account for the morphological differences between Imperfective simple verbs and secondary Imperfectives and with the distinction between telicity and Aspect worked out so far, I conclude that the Imperfective Aspect is not unmarked per se, but that there are different levels of morphological markedness, resulting in different kinds of semantic markedness.\(^6\) In particular, there is a privative opposition of unmarked atelicity vs. marked telicity interacting with the equipollent opposition Imperfectivity vs. Perfectivity.\(^7\)

REFERENCES


\(^5\) Slavic atelic predicates are unmarked for Imperfectivity and marked for Perfectivity by prefixes on the verb, whereas telic ones are unmarked for Perfectivity and marked for Imperfectivity (so-called secondary Imperfectives) by verbal suffixes (productive), less often vowel alternation (not productive).

\(^6\) Empirical research (Gehrke (2002)) shows that this is reflected in the usage of Czech and Russian aspectual affixes. It also shows that grammatical aspect cannot be relegated to one particular level, but fulfils different functions at different levels. In Russian, temporal boundedness at sentence level can be marked by perfectivizing prefixes on atelic predicates, whereas temporal unboundedness at discourse level (habituality) is marked by imperfectivizing suffixes. In Czech, on the other hand, Aspect does not operate on these higher levels in such a way and temporal (un)boundedness is generally marked by other lexical means or contextually induced.

\(^7\) Each affix has some specific meaning effect, which is not necessarily grammatical aspect alone. If there were only one imperfective and one perfective meaning each and every affix were used solely to express just one out of these two meanings, one would not expect to find verbs with more than one affix at a time (as in some of the given examples). Thus, at least some of them clearly must have a different purpose if they can co-occur.


