

Serbo-Croatian suffix *-va* and the illusion of the imperfective specification

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The talk discusses two instances of ambiguity in the domain of morphology of verbs in Serbo-Croatian (S-C) and argues for answers which call for a reconsideration of the standard views of aspect in Slavic languages. I depart from the following two observations:

1. There is a considerable number of pairs or n-tuples of morphological operations in S-C (and in other languages) in which different classes of items are derived using string-identical suffixes (Simonović & Arsenijević 2018). The question emerges whether in all such cases, different, yet homophonous suffixes are used, or there are operations which share one multipurpose suffix.

(1) a.	Denominal Adj	Participle	b.	Secondary imperfective	Loan verb
	brad- <i>at</i>	prod- <i>at</i>		prod-a- <i>va-ti</i>	pres-o- <i>va-ti</i>
	beard-at	sell-at		sell- θ - <i>va-Inf</i>	press- θ - <i>va-Inf</i>
	'bearded'	'sold'		'to sell'	'to calender'

2. With a very small number of exceptions, simple S-C verbs (verbs consisting only of a root and inflection) are imperfective. They can be perfectivized (by a prefix or a perfectivizing suffix), and then imperfectivized again via secondary imperfectivization as in (2) below. The question emerges whether indeed, and if so why, the unmarked forms are imperfective rather than unspecified.

(2) a.	crt-a-ti	b.	pre-crt-a-ti	c.	pre-crt-a- <i>va-ti</i>
	draw- θ - <i>Inf</i>		over-draw- θ - <i>Inf</i>		over-draw- θ - <i>va-Inf</i>
	'to draw'		'to copy.Perf'		'to copy.Impf'

I argue that one of the instances of ambiguity is only apparent, while the other is real. More precisely:

(3) the **multipurpose suffix *-va* is not ambiguous, it is a categorial *v* suffix in all its instances**, and the respective differences in interpretation emerge due to the different nature of the bases to which it attaches, and

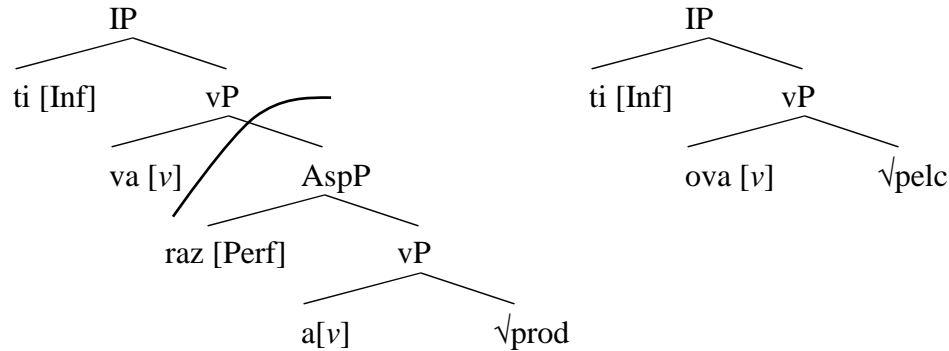
(4) **traditional imperfective verbs are in fact semantically ambiguous between perfective and imperfective interpretations** (contra the long tradition of research on Slavic aspect, see Borik 2002 for an overview) – it is a generalized scalar implicature that imposes an imperfective interpretation on them due to the availability of specialized perfective forms.

The hypothesis in (3) yields a simpler inventory of suffixes, while the one in (4) results in a simpler specification of verbs, as it implies that only perfective verbs are specified for aspect. Considering the verbal suffix *-va* a purely categorial, verbal suffix establishes a full parallel between this item and the default adjectival suffix *-n* – which also occurs on loan adjectives:

(5) a.	primitiv-n-a	b.	salicil-n-a	c.	komunal-n-a
	primitive- <i>n-NomFSg</i>		salicyl- <i>n-NomFSg</i>		comunal- <i>n-NomFSg</i>
	'primitive'		'salicylic'		'comunal'

In all its occurrences, *-va* simply realizes the category *v*. On perfective verbs it introduces a new categorial head, thus overwriting the aspect specification in the lower structure, as schematically given in (6a), while on loan verbs it integrates the verb in the native conjugation system, as in (6b).

(6) a.	raz-prod-a- <i>va-ti</i>	b.	pelc-o- <i>va-ti</i>
	off-sell- θ - <i>va-Inf</i>		pelz- θ - <i>va-Inf</i>
	'to sell out'		'to vaccinate'



The following arguments are discussed to the support of the present view:

Argument 1: while perfective verbs are consistently perfective on all tests (they pass none of the tests indicating imperfectivity, as in (7a, b, c)), traditional imperfective verbs, here reanalyzed as underspecified, are easily coerced and pass tests of perfectivity, as in (7a', b', c').

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| (7) a. *pročit-a-hu
read ^{Prf} -θ-Ipfm | a'. čit-a-h
read ^{lprf} -θ-Aor |
| b. *pročit-a-ju-ći
read ^{Prf} -θ-Pres3Sg-PtzpPres | b'. čit-a-vši
read ^{lprf} -θ-PtzpPast |
| c. *Dok pročita, sedi.
while read.PrfPres3Sg sit. ^{Impf} Pres3Sg | c'. Nakon što čita, posedi.
after Comp read. ^{Impf} Pres3Sg sit. ^{Prf} Pres3Sg |

Argument 2: Borrowed and denominal verbs have been observed to remain biaspectual (fully ambiguous between perfective and imperfective interpretations) for a period of time, until they are fully integrated and start deriving perfectives (Simonović & Samardžić 2013). This is predicted if the integrating suffix simply bears the category *v*.

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|--|--|
| (8) a. lakov-a-hu
paint ^{Prf} -θ-Ipfm | a'. lakov-a-h
paint ^{lprf} -θ-Aor |
| b. lak-u-ju-ći
paint ^{Prf} -θ-Pres3Sg-PtzpPres | b'. lakov-a-vši
paint ^{lprf} -θ-PtzpPast |
| c. Dok lakuje, sedi.
while paint. ^{Prf} Pres3Sg sit. ^{Impf} Pres3Sg | c'. Nakon što lakuje, posedi.
after Comp paint. ^{Impf} Pres3Sg sit. ^{Prf} Pres3Sg |

Argument 3: All S-C verbs which for reasons of different morphological and phonological factors lack a perfective variant – have a biaspectual interpretation, i.e. are ambiguous between the perfective and imperfective interpretation. This is expected if the imperfective bias on traditional imperfectives is due to the elsewhere effect (availability of specialized perfectives).

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| (9) a. večer-a-hu
have_dinner-θ-Ipfm | a'. večer-a-h
have_dinner-θ-Aor |
| b. večer-a-ju-ći
have_dinner-θ-Pres3Sg-PtzpPres | b'. večer-a-vši
have_dinner-θ-PtzpPast |
| c. Dok večera, sedi.
while have_dinner.Pres3Sg sit. ^{Impf} Pres3Sg | c'. Pošto večera, posedi.
after have_dinner.Pres3Sg sit. ^{Prf} Pres3Sg |

I discuss some theoretical consequences of the view of aspect argued for, as well as the question whether the analysis extends to other Slavic languages.