

# The Representation of Aspect

## Addendum: Summary of Slavic Discussion

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In the last class we discussed many different possible approaches to Slavic aspect. A few different lines of analysis came up, and as we did not have time to summarize them very clearly, I thought it might be helpful to have them written down, albeit informally.

Several of the ideas presented here were suggested by specific individuals, whose names I have forgotten. If you read these notes and notice that you suggested one of the ideas, either in class or after class to me directly, please let me know and I will add a note with your name.

If you have any questions about what's written here, or if you notice any gaps/errors, I would be happy to talk about it through the week, or later by email.

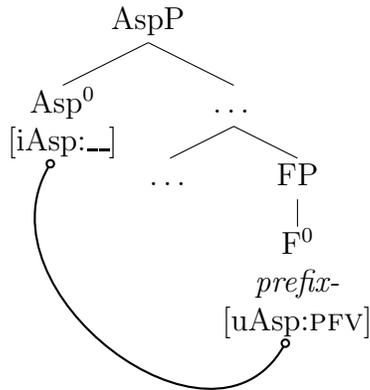
**Disclaimer:** These notes are partial and incomplete, and may be incomprehensible to anyone who was not in the relevant class at EGG. (They may also be incomprehensible to everyone who was in the relevant class at EGG, in which case I apologize.)

**The core puzzle:** how do lexical/argument structure prefixes determine viewpoint aspect?

**First approach: the perfectivizing prefixes.** In line with approaches earlier in the week, we could say that prefixes have some kind of uninterpretable feature (uF) that needs to be checked by a higher interpretable feature (iF) on  $\text{Asp}^0$ . (The same feature can occur on idiosyncratically perfective bare roots.)

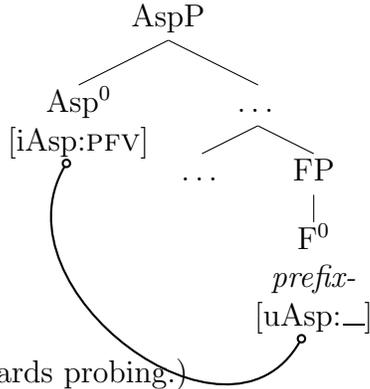
This feature could be thought of as **bound** or **perfective** or **definite**. In these notes I will write this feature as PFV, but recall that we may want the *same* feature to directly be interpreted in terms of telicity in at least some contexts.

1. They could have a **valued but uninterpretable** aspect feature ( $[\text{uAsp:PFV}]$ ) (Pesetsky and Torrego, 2007). This would be checked by a **unvalued but interpretable** feature on  $\text{Asp}^0$  ( $[\text{iAsp:--}]$ ).



2. Alternatively, the feature could simply be an uninterpretable and unvalued aspect feature ([uAsp:–]), that needs to be checked and valued by an interpretable and valued aspect feature. The only such feature that exists in Russian is an interpretable and valued **perfective** feature.

The fact that prefixes always require perfectivity arises just because Russian only specifies perfective features – the imperfective is the absence of features.



(Note: this requires upwards probing.)

Either option says (essentially): in relevant Slavic languages, **imperfective** results from the **absence** of aspectual features on Asp<sup>0</sup>.

Crucially, we say that there is a set of syntactic objects (the prefixes)—including some very low heads that interact with argument structure and lexical meaning (the lexical prefixes)—that are **arbitrarily** specified for aspectual features. These features need to be interpreted in a higher position, and so they Agree (/are inherited/etc.) with Asp<sup>0</sup>.

This arbitrary specification of features is what it means to say that aspect/telicity has been grammaticized in these languages.

Okay, so **what about the secondary imperfective?**

**Second approach: the secondary imperfective.** If Asp<sup>0</sup> receives an imperfective interpretation in the **absence** of a specified inflectional feature (i.e. the *absence* of [PFV] yields an imperfective interpretation), then how can the imperfective morpheme *-yva* be a realization of Asp<sup>0</sup>?

What does it mean to “reimperfectivize” something in this kind of framework?

Several different analytical possibilities:

1. Asp<sup>0</sup> has three possible feature specifications:

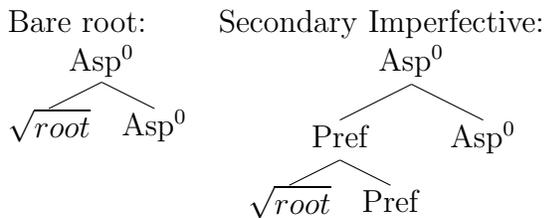
- [PFV]: necessary to check features on lower prefixes.
- [IMPF]: realized as *-yva*
- *no feature*: interpreted as imperfective.

**Question:** this suggests that a trivalent representation results in a bivalent interpretation, which is a very odd proposal.

2. Asp<sup>0</sup> is indeed specified as [PFV] or as nothing.

The **feature content** of the imperfective is indeed uniform (never any feature there).

**If** we were to assume that all prefixes occur *above* V<sup>0</sup> (contra Svenonius, 2005), then head movement might create the following two complex heads, which will be the input to the morphological component:



Then you could say that Asp<sup>0</sup> is realized as  $\emptyset$  **only** when it is structurally adjacent to the root itself.

**Question:** can we really get the second structure from head movement? Requires that no other heads end up in the complex Asp<sup>0</sup> head—what about *v*<sup>0</sup>/Voice<sup>0</sup>, etc.? Even if we reject Svenonius’s structure for lexical prefixes (below the verb root), they probably aren’t all projected *immediately* below Asp<sup>0</sup>, which is what this proposal would require.

3. The secondary imperfective is poorly named. It’s really an **iterative** aspect. Asp<sup>0</sup> has two possible values: [PFV] or not specified for any features, and then right above it there is another head, call it Iter<sup>0</sup>, and this is where *-yva* belongs.

(Presumably this means that Asp<sup>0</sup> itself is still specified as [PFV], as a result of lower prefixes. What does it mean to say that this iterative aspect is built on perfective viewpoint?)

**Question:** How do we explain the fact that only perfectivized verbs (ones with prefixes) can be iterated? Why is there no **coercion** of the type seen when you put states or achievements into the progressive?

**Note:** This might be a possible/correct approach for some Slavic languages, but not for others. Variation in the interpretation of the secondary imperfective?

This is more or less where the discussion in class ended, for reasons of time.

**The puzzle we are left with:** The interaction with bare roots makes it look like the **perfective** is featurally specified, while the imperfective is “default”—but the in-

teraction of the secondary imperfective makes more sense if the **imperfective** is featurally specified.

This same apparent paradox arises if we consider the interaction of auxiliaries with perfective and imperfective forms: If we think that the presence of auxiliary BE diagnoses the presence of specified syntactic features (Bjorkman, 2011), then we find a paradox between the imperfective and the perfective.

- (1) Passive: BE with *perfective*
- a. Kniga chitaetsja.  
book read-PASS  
“(The) book was read.” (imperfective)
  - b. Kniga byla prochitana.  
book be.PAST.PFV.F PFV-read-PASS  
“(The) book was read.” (perfective)
- (2) Future: BE with *imperfective*
- a. Ja budu chitat’ knigu.  
I be.PRES.PFV read(impf) book  
“I will read (the) book.” (imperfective)
  - b. Ja prochitaju.  
I read-PFV book.  
“I will read (the) book.” (perfective)

- With the passive, it seems like **perfective** predicates interact interestingly (perfectives look more complex) — though the “reflexive”-ish *sja* is not straightforwardly just a passive. In other words, (1a) and (1b) might not be a very good minimal pair.
- In the interaction with the future, it seems like **imperfective** predicates interact interestingly (imperfectives look more complex).

Note that the imperfective future presents another compositional puzzle: what syntactically are you adding to the imperfective to get the compound future? A second layer of Aspect+Tense? A second clause? Would be nice if we could just put a [FUTURE] feature in  $T^0$ , but that loses the observation that the perfective future is morphologically present.

### In summary:

- To talk about the way that  $\text{Asp}^0$  ‘inherits’ its value from prefixes and the root, to explain the determinate (i.e. non-coerceable) interaction between prefixes and viewpoint aspect, we want to talk about the distribution of **features**.

Either the presence of prefixes introduces an (uninterpretable?) perfective/bounded feature, or the absence of features allows an imperfective feature to persist.

- But we seem to back into a puzzle: the prefix system makes it look like it should be **bounded** (telic/perfective) features that are syntactically specified.
- But the existence of an overt imperfective morpheme that can override prefix perfectivity makes it look like we need a specified **unbounded** (atelic/imperfective)

feature as well.

- We discussed various paths towards resolving this paradox, but this is the crux of why Slavic aspect is such a puzzling system, at least when we think about it in terms of feature specification ( $\sim$ “markedness”)

## References

- Bjorkman, Bronwyn M. 2011. BE-ing Default: the Morphosyntax of Auxiliaries. Doctoral Dissertation, MIT.
- Pesetsky, David, and Esther Torrego. 2007. The syntax of valuation and the interpretability of features. In *Phrasal and clausal architecture: Syntactic derivation and interpretation. In honor of Joseph E. Emonds*, ed. S. Karimi, V. Samiian, and W. Wilkins, 262–294. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Svenonius, Peter. 2005. Slavic prefixes inside and outside vp. *Nordlyd* 32.