

THE SPECIFIC POSITION OF SLOVENE IN THE SLAVIC VERBAL ASPECT*

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Here at the outset I would like merely to refer to my paper of a year ago and will, therefore, not repeat what I said then, in particular about the so-called praesens effectivum.¹ Nor can I be more explicit about the basis of my aspect theory itself, for which I venture to refer you to my book,² the second on this subject. Rather, I will try to make more explicit why Slovene can be said to occupy indeed a specific position in the application of the Slavic verbal aspect and how this can, I believe, be derived directly from the aspectual evolution of Slavic without enlisting any foreign influence at all. Some elementary observations on aspect are nevertheless indispensable, notably to dispel any idea that I make the slightest attempt to proceed along the lines of the binary morphological oppositions with their privative contrast. My approach does not require, however, any change in terminology, which is in any case conventional; if the category of animacy comprises also a dead body (mrtvec), which is an obvious contradiction in terms, and has nevertheless the usual morphological consequences, there is a very good, though an extra-linguistic, explanation for this, and I cannot see that matters need improvement nor would in fact be improved by the introduction of new terminology. Thus also the terms "perfective" and "imperfective" are quite adequate and leave the interpretation open, whereas the terms "terminative-interminative" pretend to prejudge the issue and imply a--to my mind--inadequate explanation which, moreover, forces a refractory morphological category into the Procrustean bed of the lev--levica, "lion--lioness", type.

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We may assume that, when the ancestors of the Alpine Slavs reached what was to become the homeland of the Slovenes in about the sixth century, they carried a fully developed aspect morphology and semantics with them. By this I naturally do not mean to say that all verbs at present participating in the opposition existed at that time. That is immaterial, for what matters most is precisely the ability constantly to recreate, to generate the existing couples, to modify them for the purpose of greater clarity and to add new couples to them in accordance with a living pattern. To take a concrete example of what I think happened, the verb pasti "to fall" is as such inherited from the parent tongue, because we have Skt. pádyate and other congeners with the same or a related meaning--but without an aspect. That is, it is without this duality admitting certain temporal meanings, excluding some other uses, and so on--briefly without all that grammatical network of meaningful relations which we have come to associate with the Slavic aspect. What had happened to this verb in Slavic?

Nothing much, so far, in its main morphological pattern (infinitive and present tense, etc.). Pasti is in Leskien's class I, with a monosyllabic stem ending in a dental, and this surely did not decide on its eventual perfective (pv.) character in Slavic, for the majority of verbs with which Leskien exemplifies this class³ are imperfective (ipv.), like četo, čisti; vedo, vesti, etc. Not only here in this paper, but generally do I have any suggestions to offer at this stage why the Slavs felt they must have an aspect, whether it was their own idea, fortunately not aided by any language planners, or whether they got the impulse from outside. (If the latter, this must have been a very long time before they got anywhere near the Alps.) However, once they had set their minds on this, it is usually possible to see why they should have made a particular inherited verb follow, in its unextended form, the one aspect rather than the other. For instance, our example at hand obviously lent itself more readily to the pv. aspect, because somehow the event of falling would appear much more often as a rapid, even dangerous one, fraught with unpleasant consequences which place it within a succession of events, and one whose very likely sudden initiation decidedly marks a point along the time axis--anywhere on the time axis. Of course, "falling" can be

pictured as a repeated event or even as a relatively lasting state, say when a fallen angel has to traverse all the universe, but the quick, sudden fall is the more typical, hence pasti became pv., but say vesti "to lead" (without the kind of starting and terminal point so likely with pasti) imperfective. To dwell on the fall itself in disregard of its temporal succession, or to stress its repetition, i.e. identical recurrence, the Slavs extended the root pad- by an inherited verbal suffix -a-, which in Indo-European had had no clearly defined, let alone aspectual function.⁴ When the Slavs attached this -a- to the root pad-, they had an ipv.--and they had an aspect; the ipv. did it, the allegedly unmarked member of the opposition! It is then that pasti, which surely had existed in this form before, became pv., by way of counterpoint, and lost the ability to be used in the actual present, which the new form, clearly marked for a purely grammatical purpose, took over: padajo, later in Slovene padam. A different suffix, to which accentual and vocalic distinctions in the root are often added, completes the morphological characterization that translates a grammatical function, not a modification, of the original verb in the typically derived ipv.

As I mentioned, this must be used in the actual present (overlapping at least partially with the moment of utterance), although to many people, including e.g. the Macedonians and Bulgarians, who have no infinitive, this appears as the starting point of the entire temporal pattern of the verb. This obligatory use for the actual as well as extended and iterative present has nothing to do with any marked-unmarked relationship, but is due to the nature of the present; because the pv. aspect marks succession, which means a succession of changing events in time, and the ipv. means its dialectic counterpart or absence of change (a contradictory, not contrary, relationship for the lovers of logical distinctions)--no change for a second, a year or an eternity. I have dealt with this also before and will now, therefore, deal with the pv. present in some of its uses in Slovene.

Let me recall that the inherited form of the first person singular present tense, say padjo, remained grammatically a present, but its temporal reference shifted. In itself the form could not explicitly refer to past or future at first, but when it was ousted from the "actual"

present, which is, after all, the basic function of the present tense from which I believe the others are derived by extension, such temporal shifts became very significant. However, we must not forget that some transferred uses of the present tense were probably inherited from Indo-European, because practically all attested languages of the family show some. These were taken over by the *ipv.* verbs, regardless of whether an inherited verb was felt to be *ipv.*, like pišem, or one was specially derived to mark an *ipv.*, like pripisujem, which is the much more typical and numerically dominant type. Among these transferred uses there is the present for the future, like "I am leaving to-morrow" in English, in what I call the prospective function. We have this, of course, also in Slovene, e.g. Jutri pišemo slovensko nalogo, and if the Slovene grammar⁵ says that this is "napačno", "ne more rabiti," and should be replaced by "prav": bomo pisali, then this is a piece of pedantry. Actually, the prospective use of the present (in Slavic I mean, of course, the *ipv.*) has probably a good chance of being a language universal which, moreover, invests a special meaning in that it does not really refer to the future event as such, but rather the present resolve concerning it, which is why verbs denoting involuntary actions are as a rule excluded from this function, so that I cannot say Jutri kiham ali bojim se.⁶ In particular, it seems to me that the grammar's prescription to replace Daj, da to, kar sem sklenil, tudi spolnujem by bom spolnjeval is wrong and proceeds from a preconceived idea that the expression of future events has to be morphologically marked--at least by a *pv.* present, but preferably by a bom-form. Incidentally, the reason why the present can do service for the future is not because it is unmarked (as against the *pv.* verb it is in fact usually very much marked by its suffix, etc.), but because of the generally flexible nature of the present, and in the particular instance at hand, the reference to the present resolve, very clear in the last example; this is also why in English we say tomorrow I am leaving rather than I leave, i.e. preferably we use the form specialized for the actual present within which the resolve falls.

So this is nothing specific and may safely be assumed to have existed in Slavic throughout its evolution out of I.-E., just as it will surely continue to exist, the injunctions of worried grammarians notwithstanding.

What rather has to be explained in Slavic including Slovene is the use of the pv. present for the future. Although this is not amenable to strict proof, judging by the older state of affairs preserved in Baltic, Slavic had lost the sigmatic future very likely in connection with its development of an aspectual system that rendered it unnecessary, and precisely the use of the ipv. present in a similar function (very well attested in O.C.S.) may have actually helped in this. To denote an event that was not at present being resolved upon or continued, but would in all likelihood set in, succeed and thus eventually become the present, the Slavs availed themselves of that form of the present tense which through its very aspect renders the idea of change, of becoming, of succession--the pv. Now Slovene is the only South Slavic language to have remained true to this type: Njegov Etymologikon pride konce tega meseca iz tiskarne (from Prešeren's correspondence) against Serbo-Croatian doći će. The reason for this retention of Common Slavic usage can be seen in the fact that Slovene was never part of the Balkan linguistic league (Trubetzkoy's Sprachbund) with its Greco-Romanic patterns, including resort to a volitional expression for the future tense. In my view, following Meillet, but explained in somewhat more detail in my book, the future meaning of the pv. present is not a logical corollary of the aspect, but a possible outcome of other functions of that form which remains in its basic meaning a pv. present with its various applications such as: simple succession, marking a joint, as in Kjer Donava bistri pridruži se Savi, /Od tvoje lepote zaslišal sem davi (Prešeren, "Povodni mož"), or the so-called exemplary function graphically rendering the repeated setting in of an event at various points on the time axis through an example that stands for them all: Mlad umrje, kdor od bogov izbran je (Prešeren); the repetition can be indicated lexically: ... vsakega pritepenega kričača pusté kričati in prváčiti.⁷ Here is a stanza from Stritar's "Dunajski soneti": Temu se grošna v zakon dá meščanka. /Tam onemu je sinekura ljuba; /In tega uda narodnega kluba /Ravnateljja izvoli nova banka. These events have taken place and surely will occur again; the future meaning can be derived from the exemplary and other functions, but not vice versa; "terminativity" is quite beside the point, as we are obviously dealing with an open series. Related is also what I single out, for classificatory purposes, as the "consecutive" function: Človeka smrt požanje (Man is mortal and so) "death reaps man". From here it is a step to the future meaning, but no way leads

from the future to the typical, recurring event of our past experience. The pv. present has taken up its locus on any point at all along the time axis in certain functions, and in the absence of any context indicating such a use, has come to stand for a single future event. The so-called present of coincidence, with which I dealt the last time, can never, of course, really refer to an already ongoing event simultaneous with the utterance. I stress this point so as to avoid misunderstandings; it should clearly be understood as leading in the direction of the future.

That the pv. present in Slovene can also refer to single events in the past (the so-called historical function) as well as in stage observations I have already briefly described in my earlier article. It is able to perform all these functions since, having lost the applicability to the actual present when becoming pv., this morphological present can be placed at a point anywhere on the time axis; if there are no contextual indices to the contrary, it will be taken as referring to the future. (The so-called present of coincidence precisely does have its own contextual indices). In our example človeka smrt požanje the contextual indication barring a narrow future understanding is, for instance, the universal applicability of a proverb. I fail to see how an allegedly unmarked character of the present can account for all these usages, we have here very marked stylistic effects--človeka smrt žanje would be a mere statement of fact and quite colorless.

The pv. present also functions for the future because it has a positive feature enabling it to do so, which is the inherent meaning of succession in time (really a tautology, time is succession). And the ipv. future which, being ipv., should be unmarked according to the fashionable theory, not only is morphologically very much marked, but comes out much more emphatic. Thus, Stritar ends his twenty-third sonnet with this stanza addressed to people lukewarm in their patriotism: Borili se ne boste za deželo?/ Za svojo mater strašijo vas rane?/Naprej, pa naj si sam razbijem čelo! The note of pained disappointment, dwelling on people's refusal to fight for their country, in the first line is unmistakable; the last line passes much more quickly over the act whose result (the next point in the temporal succession) is anticipated.

The bom + l-form continues, as I said before, the Common Slavic future perfect; its function has become more general, but since the specific temporal reference to an event occurring before another event in the future, i.e. with a second point of reference in addition to the first (which is the moment of utterance, of writing etc.) has been lost, this amounts to a poorer semantic content and by this token to an impoverishment of the verbal system as a whole, such as has characterized all Slavic languages except those entering the Sprachbund--Bulgarian and Macedonian, which have kept up, nay enriched their tense systems (but lost the grammatical cases instead). In fact I think this simplification of the temporal network which we witness provides at the same time also the only explanation we have for the time being--albeit only a teleological one. Latin as well as German have a future perfect, like English, and cannot, therefore, be blamed for its disappearance as a tense in Slovene. Apparently the language strove for a reduction in its conjugational system (I deny the assertion that the verbal aspect can take charge of all this), but kept the form of the future perfect, like Polish, which, however, restricted it to the ipv. aspect, and a specific word order at that. Slovene has not done so, in my opinion because it is altogether freer in its use of the pv. aspect, not only in the present tense, where this is very conspicuous, but also in the past tense, where the pv. can be used to refer to repeated events: Nekoč so se mu usule po licih solze or Časih se je kateri (= tovariš) vzdignil, ozrl se... (both from Cankar's Podobe iz sanj). The particular function here is "exemplary", one typical occurrence being rendered more graphically in the pv. aspect, and the recurrence being explicated at the lexical level (nekoč, časih). Slovene shares the ability to use also the pv. past freely for repeated events with Czecho-Slovak, while Russian is especially strict in allowing for this only the ipv. aspect. Slovene thus falls into a geographic pattern lying between North and South; in Serbo-Croatian, the pv. past is likewise possible: Kmet je gledao neveselo preda sebe, pa samo što je kadikada izdahnuo (Dj. Jakšić), where the iterativity similarly finds lexical expression; this usage, however, is less frequent in S.-Cr. All the tense forms, in Slovene and elsewhere, have a basic meaning in each aspect, but the context may act on them like a plus or minus sign preceding mathematical brackets, thus without the temporal adverb the sentence Ta sukinja zavzdihnila časih (Cankar) would be

understood to imply a single occasion instead of standing exemplarily for a whole series.

We are led to believe that Slovene reflects on the whole the Common Slavic position of the aspect rather faithfully, allowance being made for the reduction of tenses. On becoming pv., the present tense of the verbs concerned was naturally ousted from the basic function of the actual present, but concurrently extended its scope in both directions along the time axis considerably. Like the ipv. present before and after this momentous event in the genesis of the present Slavic verbal system, the pv. present could and can be used in Slovene to denote both typical, recurrent events compressed into a single point on the time axis, with a heightened dramatic effect due to the aspect, and single, so-called historical ones lacking the representative character, yet not the stylistic efficacy: vstane i gleda okoli (from Jurčič's "Deseti brat")--the rise is sudden, the look takes its time. From here, chapter headings also take their cue, no doubt an addition to the Common Slavic state of affairs and very much a Slovene peculiarity: Zdaj se zbor razide⁸--in the ipv. they would never have done with it and never reach the next point in the story, but go on breaking up forever. Stage descriptions or instructions were no doubt not given in Slovene when it was a dialect of Common Slavic, but they naturally fell into the mold of the aspectual opposition according as relatively unchanging or quickly changing motions had to be prescribed for each coming performance: Damjan odpre duri, stoji nad stopnicami (from Cankar's "Lepa Vida")--and this although stati can be perfectivized by means of po- and Damjan, after all, really only stood for a while (which is the shade of meaning that this po- confers).

Other uses of the pv. present are more future-oriented, such as the so-called present of coincidence, which is precisely separated from the moment of utterance by what I feel inclined to call a mathematical differential that makes all the difference to the temporal orientation; or the potential function (možnostni dovršnik) illustrated, e.g., by Kdo se najde v tej zmešnjavi, or by the translation of Cankar's German phrase Von der Grammatik kann ich nur soviel schreiben as O slovnici lahko samo zapišem, etc. These are not proper future uses yet, but they paved the way for them when, as is our assumption, Slavic lost the I.-E. (at least part-I.-E.) future tense in -sy-.⁹

However, the pv. present with a future meaning is still very much pv., that is, it reflects the essence of the time axis with its succession of point after point, each "filled", as it were, with a different content. It passes through the event on to the next stage, it cannot dwell on it. For this latter meaning the Slavs originally had no morphologically marked expression in the future tense. Here Slovene has, as I said in my first book,¹⁰ the best of two worlds. Alone of all South Slavic languages (apart from some Kajkavian dialects), it has retained the future function of the pv. present to this day, and has remodeled the old future perfect (bqdq + l-form), which the others (in the South) have kept, as a general future in both aspects. This does in a way recall the North Slavic type *bqdq dčlati, yet differs substantially from it in that it does not represent a calque of German (ich werde tun, originally participle thuent), but an entirely autonomous Slovene readjustment, reducing as it does, though, the range of tenses on North Slavic lines. Now dwelling on a future state (or repetition), in contrast to the passing event in the pv., can be rendered by the morphologically marked ipv. future:

Odrplo bo nebo po sodnem dnevi
 Se 'zvoljenim, svit glor'je nezrečeni,
 Vso srečo bodo vid'li pogubljeni,
 Ki bodo stali tam na strani levi
 (Prešeren).

The heavens will be opened once (and then stay open, but this is only implied), and the sinners will just have to stand and gaze on all the splendor from which they are barred for a little eternity--in the ipv. aspect. The pv. aspect would be preferable for them by far.

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Footnotes

¹"Some Peculiarities of Verbal Aspect in Slovene", Slovene Studies 1/2 (1979), 52-60.

²Herbert Galton, The Main Functions of the Slavic Verbal Aspect (Skopje: Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1976).

³August Leskien, Grammatik der altbulgarischen (altkirchenslavischen) Sprache (Heidelberg: 1919), 232 ff.

⁴F. R. Adrados, Evolución y estructura del verbo indoeuropeo (Madrid: 1963), 327 et passim.

⁵A. Bajec, R. Kolarič, M. Rupel, Slovenska slovnica (Ljubljana: 1971), 237.

⁶Cf. A. V. Bondarko, Vid i vremena ruskogo glagola (Moscow: 1971), 155; V. V. Vinogradov, Russkij jazyk (2nd edition) (Moscow: 1972), 45.

⁷Francè Prešeren, Poezije in pisma (Ljubljana: 1972), referring to some people in Ljubljana.

⁸From the Slovene translation of Homer's *Iliad*, quoted in the Slovenska slovnica, 241; from the latter source also the next unattributed example, 239.

⁹O. Szemérenyi, "L'unité linguistique balto-slave", Études slaves et roumaines I (1948), 159-173; idem, Einführung in die vergleichende Sprachwissenschaft (Darmstadt: 1970), 265 ff.

¹⁰Herbert Galton, Aorist und Aspekt im Slavischen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1962).