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# ASPECTUAL PAIRS AND THE VERB'S SEMANTICS

*Bożena Cetnarowska, Jadwiga Stawnicka*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present paper is to highlight the role of the lexical meaning of verbs for their ability to enter into the relationships of aspectual partnership. Before indicating which verbs have aspectual partners and which do not form aspectual pairs (hence they belong to the categories of *perfectiva tantum* and *imperfectiva tantum*), a classification of verbs will be carried out on the basis of their properties relevant to their aspectual behaviour.

Considerable attention has been given so far to the importance of the lexical verb meaning in the literature on the subject. Our intention will be to indicate one of the possible solutions, a compromise solution in our opinion, which aims at reconciling the multiplicity and variety of approaches towards the identification of aspectual pairs.

## 2. CLASSIFICATIONS OF SITUATIONS DENOTED BY VERBS

In the literature on the category of aspect in Slavonic languages it is noted that, before describing the verb's ability to enter into the relationship of aspectual partnership, one should offer a classification of situations denoted by verbs<sup>1</sup>. The

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<sup>1</sup> Due to space limitations, in this paper it is not possible to give a survey of all the most important classifications of situations denoted by verbs (which were introduced in the literature on the subject). A selection of such typologies will be presented here.

approach which links the semantics of verbal aspect with the semantics of verbs was initiated in the aspectual literature by J.S. Maslov, with his 1948 article *Вид и лексическое значение глагола* (МАСЛОВ, 1948). This approach is developed further in Russian Slavonic studies by M.Ja. Glovinskaja (ГЛОВИНСКАЯ, 1982, 2001), who describes several types of aspectual oppositions. One cannot underestimate the significant contribution made to the studies of aspectual oppositions by A. WIERZBIŃSKA (1967), A. BOGUSŁAWSKI (1963, 1977, 2003), C. PIERNIKARSKI (1969, 1975), F. ANTINUCCI and L. GEBERT (1977). A semantic classification of verbs is postulated by Czech researchers (F. DANEŠ, Z. HLAVSA, 1987). It is also discussed at length by E. Padučeva in her articles published over the past several years (ПАДУЧЕВА, 1990, 1996, 1998). An earlier semantic typology of verbs can be found in the work by T. Bulygina (БУЛЫГИНА, 1982), who based her proposal on the classification outlined in Z. VENDLER (1957).

Vendler's aspectual classification of verbs has played a significant role in Slavonic studies, although it requires modifications before it can be applied to account for the Slavonic data<sup>2</sup>. Z. VENDLER (1957: 143—160, 1967: 69—12) identifies four classes of verbs: **states** (static situations), e.g. *know, love, hate*, **activities** (dynamic situations), e.g. *run, walk, swim, cry*, **accomplishments** (processes, situations which unfold towards their inherent endpoint), e.g. *paint a picture, write a novel, build a house* and **achievements** (momentary dynamic situations), e.g. *find, win the race*. Z. Vendler divides verbs into types on the basis of two criteria. He tests whether a given verb can be employed in the continuous form and whether it is compatible with adverbial expressions of the type *in two hours*. States do not occur in the progressive and are not compatible with time-frame adverbials such as *in two hours* (cf. *I know John; \*I am knowing John; \*I knew John in two hours*). Activities can occur in the continuous form (*I am pushing a cart*) but are not felicitous with *in X time* adverbials (*\*I pushed a cart in two hours*). Accomplishments can occur in the progressive (*I am writing a letter*) and with time-frame adverbials (*I wrote a letter in two hours*). Achievements do not occur in the continuous form (*\*I am finding the treasure*) but are felicitous with expressions such as *in two hours* (*I found the treasure in two hours*)<sup>3</sup>.

An attempt at adapting Vendler's aspectual classification to the Russian material was made by H.R. MEHLIG (1981: 95—151). He distinguishes between

<sup>2</sup> Attempts to adapt Vendler's classification to Slavonic languages are illustrated by, among others, T.V. BULYGINA (1982), H.R. MEHLIG (1981), E.A. PADUČEVA (1985), C. SMITH (1991), and the works by Guiraud-Weber. A modification of Vendler's verb typology to account for Polish aspectual opposition is proposed by R. Laskowski.

<sup>3</sup> Z. Vendler does not identify the class of semelfactives, in contrast to C. SMITH, who distinguishes semelfactive verbs (such as *knock, flap, flash*) in her 1992 monograph *The Parameter of Aspect*, in addition to delimitative verbs and the so-called parametric situations. D. DOWTY (1979) employs the term *degree achievements* to refer to parametric verbs.

states (*знать* 'to know'), activities (*бежать* 'to run'), accomplishments (*писать/написать* 'to write'), and achievements (*находить/найти* 'to find'). He points out that the progressive form is available for verbs identified as activities or accomplishments. Although there are no continuous tenses in Russian, Mehlig finds parallel verb forms. Time-frame adverbials *за два часа* 'in two hours' are compatible with verbs subsumed under accomplishments and achievements. Imperfective Russian verbs of the achievement type are given noncurrent interpretation, hence they do not denote durative situations, e.g. \**Он находит ключ* ('He is finding a key'). Taking into account verbs' ability to form aspectual pairs, H.R. Mehlig observes that accomplishments and achievements have aspectual partners. In contrast, activities and states belong to the group of *imperfectiva tantum*, although imperfective verbs of the activity type can be made perfective by means of the so-called kinds of action (*Aktionsarten*). However, no characterization is provided for *perfectiva tantum* in Mehlig's analysis.

In *Russian grammar*, edited by N. Ju. Švedova (ШВЕДОВА (ред.) 1982), the verb typology is based on the identification of the semantic category of boundedness/terminativity (*предельность*). In a terminative pair, the perfective verb implies that the delimitative endpoint has been reached whereas the imperfective verb denotes an attempt at reaching the endpoint. Nonterminative verbs do not participate in the aspectual opposition. However, the action denoted by the verb can be bounded "from the outside", or some temporal constraints can be imposed on it. This may involve marking the initiation of the action (*занять* 'to begin singing'), reaching the end of the action (*отговорить* 'to stop, to finish speaking'), placing boundaries at both ends of the action (*полежать* 'to lie down (for some time)'), or singling out one act (*стукнуть* 'to give a knock'). The property of terminativity (or lack of terminativity) refers to the verb base and it determines its inclusion into one of three classes: imperfective verbs of the *imperfectiva tantum* group, verbs forming aspectual pairs and verbs identified as *perfectiva tantum*.

The classification of verbs in E. PADUČEVA (1985) is based on the following criteria: stativity/dynamicity, durativity (i.e. extension over time)/lack of durativity, control over the situation by the agent/lack of control, temporal construal of the given state of affairs/atemporal construal of the state of affairs. The criterion of stativity/dynamicity is the most important in the above-mentioned hierarchy and it determines the division of verbs into two categories: stative verbs and dynamic verbs. Stative verbs can be split into two groups: atemporal states (*вещать* 'hold, contain') and temporal ones (*болеть* 'to be sick'). This split is based on the verbs' combinatorial properties, namely compatibility or lack of compatibility with time adverbials which limit the temporal extension of a given state of affairs. The features of controllability/noncontrollability and extension over time/lack of extension over time are not relevant for stative verbs. When the property of extension over time/lack of

extension over time is taken into account, dynamic verbs can be divided into unbounded (nonterminative) durative dynamic verbs (i.e. activity verbs) and dynamic verbs which exhibit some limitations on their duration. Unbounded durative dynamic verbs can denote either situations controlled by the agent (*гулять* ‘walk’) or noncontrolled states of affairs (*кипеть* ‘to boil’). The group of bounded dynamic verbs (i.e. with some temporal limitation imposed on the situation) contains verbs denoting actions focused on their result (*найти* ‘to find something’, *лишиться* ‘to lose someone, something’) as well as verbs denoting actions in which no emphasis is laid on the result (*открыть* ‘to open’, *растаять* ‘to melt’).

A. ZALIZNJAK and A.D. ŠMELEV (2000) classify verbs according to their aspectual properties and base their classification on Vendler’s taxonomy. They include into the class of accomplishments those aspectual pairs whose imperfective member denotes a terminative process and the perfective member refers to an event which has come about through the process (*строить дом* — *построить дом* ‘to build a house, to be in the process of building a house’ (impf) — ‘to build a house (pf)’). The group of achievements subsumes momentary verbs (*прийти* — *приходить* ‘to arrive’ — ‘to be arriving’). The classes of states and activities belong to *imperfectiva tantum*. Verbs classified as *imperfectiva tantum* denote relations, i.e. parameters of physical objects (*весить* ‘to weigh, to have a particular weight’), spatial configuration (*находиться где-то* ‘to be located somewhere’, *границить* ‘to adjoin something, to border on something’), relations between objects and events (*состоять из чего* ‘to consist of something’, *отличаться* ‘to differ, to be different from something’), permanent situations (including occupations, e.g. *учительствовать* ‘to be a teacher’ and permanent states, e.g. *любить* ‘to love’, *верить в справедливость* ‘to believe in justice’), temporary (stage-level) states (*волноваться* ‘to worry, to irritate’, *сомневаться* ‘to doubt in something’) and nonterminative processes (*гулять* ‘to walk’, *разговаривать* ‘to talk’).

R. LASKOWSKI (1996: 39—48, 1998: 153ff) postulates a semantic classification of verbs which is based on four types of oppositions: the development of the situation in time (i.e. the situation is either stative or dynamic), the endpoint of the situation (the situation either results in a new state or does not lead to the appearance of any state), the manner in which the resulting state is achieved (i.e. the change is momentary or has the nature of an ongoing process), presence or lack of the subject’s control over the development of the situation. Taking the above-mentioned four opposition types into account, R. Laskowski identifies seven major verb groups. One of those groups are **state verbs** which describe, for instance, physical states (*спать* ‘to sleep’, *стоять* ‘to stand’, *голодать* ‘to be hungry’), emotions (*бояться* ‘to be afraid’, *радоваться* ‘to feel happy’), or permanent relations (*весить* ‘to weigh’, *стоить* ‘to cost’, *отличаться* ‘to differ’). Laskowski recognizes then a class of **eventive verbs** denoting atelic pro-

cesses, i.e. dynamic atelic situations which lack active involvement of the subject participant, e.g. nonintentional movement (*drżeć* 'to tremble', *chwiać się* 'to rock'), production of sounds (*skrzypieć* 'to creak', *trzeszczeć* 'to crack'), or natural phenomena (*wiać* (o wietrze) 'to blow', *padać* (o śniegu) 'to snow'). There are also **activity verbs** denoting atelic intentional situations which are controlled by the subject, e.g. verbs of movement (*jechać* 'to drive, to ride', *tańczyć* 'to dance'), verbs of speaking (*mówić* 'to talk', *kłamać* 'to lie'), verbs of perception (*słyszeć* 'to hear', *widzieć* 'to see'), or occupation verbs (*rzządzić* 'to rule', *handlować* 'to trade'). Furthermore, **processual verbs** denote independent processes which take place without any control by the subject (*rosnąć/wyrosnąć* 'to grow (impf/pf)', *psuć się/zepsuć się* 'to break down (impf/pf)'), whereas **action verbs** describe telic situations with the active involvement of the subject, e.g. verbs of creation and destruction (*budować* 'to build', *burzyć* 'to demolish'). Finally, Laskowski's classification includes the classes of verbs denoting **happenings**, i.e. sudden nonintentional and non-controlled changes (*zgubić* 'to lose', *ocknąć się* 'to become awake'), and verbs denoting **acts**, i.e. sudden intentional changes (*zadzwoić* 'to call', *pokazać* 'to show').

Verbs denoting states, events and activities belong to the group of *imperfectiva tantum* whereas verbs denoting happenings and acts are *perfectiva tantum*. Only processual verbs (referring to telic durative noncontrolled situations) and verbs denoting actions (i.e. telic durative controlled situations) form aspectual pairs whose members do not differ in their lexical meaning (LASKOWSKI, 1998: 167).

### 3. CLASSIFICATION OF VERBS ACCORDING TO THEIR PROPERTIES RELEVANT TO THEIR ASPECTUAL BEHAVIOUR

In order to classify verbs according to their properties relevant to their aspectual behaviour, it is necessary to distinguish between an aspectual pair in the strict sense (aspectual pair *sensu stricto*) and an aspectual pair in the wider sense (aspectual pair *sensu largo*). It is also indispensable to note the heterogeneity of the classes of verbs referred to as *perfectiva tantum* and *imperfectiva tantum*.

A binary division is proposed here based on the presence or lack of the following properties of verbs: **stativity**, **durativity**, **homogeneity**, **existence of a process leading up to a change**.



processes, i.e. processes which lead up to a change, though not in an automatic manner (*решать уравнение — решить уравнение* 'to solve an equation (impf)' — 'to solve an equation (impf)')<sup>5</sup>. In the so-called parametric aspectual pair, such as *повышаться (о ценах) — повыситься* '(about prices) to rise (impf/pf)', the imperfective verb denotes a process of changes (i.e. a change in the intensity of a feature) while the perfective verb refers to the ascertainment of the fact of change at the moment when it is being observed. Within an iterative pair (*встречать — встретит* 'to meet (impf/pf)'), differences between aspectual partners refer to the single-time occurrence vs. multiple occurrence<sup>6</sup>. When the status of an aspectual pair is determined, it is necessary to take into consideration, on the one hand, prototypical phenomena and, on the other hand, peripheral phenomena. Verbs denoting physical states or psychological, emotional, volitional and intellectual ones are characterized by the possibility of the occurrence of initial modifications (*болеть — заболеть* 'to be ill' — 'to fall ill', *любить — полюбить* 'to love' — 'to come to love'). This group encompasses also perception verbs (*видеть — увидеть* 'to see' — 'to notice', *слышать — услышать* 'to hear (impf/pf)'), as well as verbs denoting spatial location which are characterized by the possibility of the occurrence of temporal modifications (*лежать — полежать некоторое время* 'to lie' — 'to lie for some time').

There exists an interesting approach formulated by Russian researchers which makes use of the notion of the field structure in the interpretation of aspectual pairs (ПЕТРУХИНА, 2000). The central position is occupied by terminative aspectual pairs (suffixal pairs such as *записать — записывать* 'to write down (impf/pf)' and prefixal pairs of the type *писать — написать* 'to write (impf/pf)'), between which are located correlations of verb triplets such as *жечь — сжечь — сжигать* 'to burn (impf)' — 'to burn (pf)' — 'to burn (SI)'. Further from the centre are placed the so-called perfective pairs of the type *видеть — увидеть* 'to see' — 'to notice'<sup>7</sup>, in which the perfective verb

<sup>5</sup> Such pairs are referred to as 'попытка — успех' in Russian aspectology, e.g. *доказывать — доказать, сдавать экзамен — сдать экзамен* (ЗАЛИЗНЯК, ШМЕЛЕВ, 2000: 57).

<sup>6</sup> Several approaches can be distinguished in contemporary views concerning recognition of aspectual pairs. Aspectual pairs whose members are identical in meaning include such pairs in which aspect is marked by a suffix, e.g. *zapisywać — zapisać*. In this view, verbs such as *pisać list — napisać list* do not constitute aspectual pairs (ИСАЧЕНКО, 1960). In the Polish language (GRZEGORCZYKOWA, LASKOWSKI, WRÓBEL (eds.), 1984) imperfectivization by means of suffixes is generally regarded as a purely aspectual process. In another view (BOGUSŁAWSKI, 1963), not only suffixes, as in *zapisywać — zapisać* (-ува: -а) but also prefixes, as in *pisać — napisać* (Ø: na-) serve as aspectual markers. Not included here into aspectual pairs are the so-called manner-of-action prefixes, which form derivatives from perfective verb bases and which have only lexical functions, e.g. *dokupić*. We can also distinguish the aspectual pair in the strict sense (e.g. *pisać — napisać*) and the aspectual pair in the wider sense, e.g. *siedzieć — posiedzieć* (СОСКІЕВИЧ, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> In Russian aspectology, verb pairs such as *видеть — увидеть, слышать — услышать, чувствовать — почувствовать, волноваться — взволноваться* are included among the

denotes an instantaneous change while the imperfective partner refers to the state resulting from such a change<sup>8</sup>. The periphery is occupied by pairs such as *сидеть* — *посидеть* ‘to sit’ — ‘to sit for some time’, i.e. the morphologically simplex verb and the delimitative derivative.

Furthermore, Russian researchers postulate yet other types of aspectual oppositions. These include, for instance, semelfactive pairs whose members denote a multiple event (process) and a single event, e.g. *стучать* — *стукнуть* ‘to knock’ — ‘to give a knock’, ingressive pairs (denoting a process and its inception, e.g. *бежать* — *побежать* ‘to run’ — ‘to start running’), or anticipational pairs (consisting of verbs denoting a description of the state of affairs at a given moment preceding the event and verbs referring to the event itself, e.g. *опаздывать* — *опоздать* ‘to be running late’ — ‘to be late’) (ЗАЛИЗНЯК, ШМЕЛЕВ, 2000: 61).

The classes of *imperfectiva tantum* and *perfectiva tantum* are not homogeneous. The group of *perfectiva tantum* subsumes absolute *perfectiva tantum*, which do not constitute members of terminative or iterative aspectual pairs and which do not serve as bases for derived imperfectives (*рухнуть* ‘collapse, fall down’, *очутиться* ‘wake up’). It contains also two types of relative *perfectiva tantum*. Some of them do not enter into aspectual pairhood relation of the terminative or iterative type but give rise to aspectual derivatives (*посидеть* ‘to sit for some time’, *загнустить* ‘to start longing for sth’). Others exhibit the potential of deriving verbs and can occur in aspectual pairs of the iterative type, but not in terminative aspectual pairs (*найти* ‘to find’, *замечать* ‘to notice’)<sup>9</sup>.

The group of *imperfectiva tantum* comprises absolute *imperfectiva tantum* and relative *imperfectiva tantum*. Absolute *imperfectiva tantum* do not act as bases for perfective verbs and are not found in terminative aspectual pairs (*граничить* ‘to border’, *стоить* ‘to cost’, *принадлежать* ‘belong to’). Relative *imperfectiva tantum*, in turn, are not encountered in terminative aspectual pairs but can undergo morphological aspectual derivation (*любить* ‘to love’, *работать* ‘to work’, *згустить* ‘to feel sad’).

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so-called perfective pairs (*перфектная видовая пара*) (ПАДУЧЕВА, 1996: 94ff; ЗАЛИЗНЯК, ШМЕЛЕВ, 2000: 57). However, the status of pairs such as *видеть* — *увидеть* has not been determined yet. Various points of view on this matter are presented by M. Ja. Głowinskaja (ГЛОВИНСКАЯ, 2001: 118—119).

<sup>8</sup> In *Gramatyka języka polskiego* (GRZEGORCZYKOWA, ŁASKOWSKI and WRÓBEL (eds.), 1984: 476) aspectual pairs such as *poznać* — *znać* are not referred to as perfective pairs (see also PIERNIKARSKI, 1969: 145, 147).

<sup>9</sup> This division of *perfectiva tantum* is taken from ŁAZIŃSKI (1995: 1—6).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The following article has outlined one of the possible solutions to the controversial issue of how to identify aspectual pairs and unpaired verbs, i.e. classes of *imperfectiva tantum* and *perfectiva tantum*. The border between verbs which enter into aspectual pairs and verbs which are aspectually defective may be shifted, depending on the particular concept of the aspectual pair. This leads to the widening of the scope of one group and the narrowing of the scope of another group. We have employed here the notions of an aspectual pair in the strict sense (aspectual pair *sensu stricto*) and an aspectual pair in the wider sense (aspectual pair *sensu largo*). A distinction has been adopted between groups of *perfectiva tantum* and *imperfectiva tantum* in the wider sense and in the narrow sense.

Changes in the criteria of aspectual partnership result in shifting the border between aspectual partners and verbs classified as *perfectiva* or *imperfectiva tantum*. For instance, if one adopts the semantic criterion, members of a terminative pair (*строить* — *построить дом* 'to build a house (impf/pf)') are treated as aspectual partners. When the wider sense of the aspectual pair is adopted and the so-called Maslov's criterion<sup>10</sup> is recognized, aspectual partnership subsumes also iterative pairs. The class of *perfectiva tantum* is not homogeneous, either. It includes absolute *perfectiva tantum*, which do not have aspectual partners in terminative or iterative aspectual pairs and which cannot derive imperfective verbs (*рухнуть* 'collapse, fall down', *очутиться* 'wake up'), as well as relative *perfectiva tantum*, which can act as bases for morphological aspectual derivation. Relative *perfectiva tantum* cannot occur in terminative aspectual pairs, though some of them are possible in iterative pairs (*найти* 'to find', *замечать* 'to notice'), while others lack iterative aspectual partners (*посидеть* 'to sit for some time', *загрезнуть* 'to start longing for sth')<sup>11</sup>. The scope of *imperfectiva tantum* subsumes *imperfectiva tantum* recognized on the basis of their incompatibility with terminative aspectual pairs and the impossibility of morphological aspectual derivation. It also comprises *imperfectiva tantum* identified due to their nonoccurrence in terminative pairs, which, however, exhibit the possibility of morphological aspectual derivation.

<sup>10</sup> This refers to the possibility of using imperfective verbs in the function of *praesens historicum*.

<sup>11</sup> See ŁAZIŃSKI (1995: 1—6) for types of *perfectiva tantum*.

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