

# Aspect and prefixation in Old Church Slavonic and Greek

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The aspectual systems of the Slavic languages have undergone several remakes from the inherited Indo-European system. In this paper we examine one of the most characteristic stages of this evolution, the grammaticalization of prefixes as expressions of aspect, using evidence from the PROIEL corpus, which contains the text of the Codex Marianus with morphological and syntactic annotations as well as precise word alignments with a Greek NT text.

We take the PIE system to have been similar to the Ancient Greek system, which is still intact in New Testament Greek. This system was based on the opposition between a perfective and an imperfective verbal stem. Each stem could be inflected, leading to aspectual oppositions running through the entire verbal system, including the past tense, infinitives, subjunctives and optatives; but there is no present from the perfective stem, and the future and the perfect are separate stems outside the aspectual system. In pre-historic Slavic this was replaced by an inflectional imperfective past in *-axŭ*, giving a system where the imperfective/perfective opposition only existed in the past.

In OCS we already see the re-emergence of a system based on stems, superimposed on the inflectional system. In this system, aspect is expressed in lexical verb pairs (by prexation and suxation), in the style of modern Slavic language. But scholars have disagreed on how developed the OCS verb pair system is and how it relates to inflectional aspect:

Several scholars, such as Borodič (1953), claim that there was no aspect pair system until well into the Old Russian period, and hence the system was not established yet in OCS. Several recent scholars see the affixation system in OCS as an expression of Aktionsart, not aspect (Łazarczyk, 2010). Other scholars, notably Dostál (1954), claim that OCS had a fully-fledged verb pair system, while e.g. Amse-De Jong (1974) argues that the aspect pair system was established, but that there was also a group of neutral verbs that did not participate in it. The authors' view on the role of the affixation/aspect pair system naturally influences their view on the meaning of the aorist and imperfect, present and past participles in the inflectional system.

As a first observation, notice that the aorist/imperfect distinction correlates highly with the tense/aspect form in the Greek original. Using logistic regression, we can fit a simple model which predicts the choice of form in Slavic (looking only at the subset of data which is either aorist or imperfect) based on the Greek. The model basically predicts that a Greek imperfect will be rendered by a Slavic imperfect whereas any other Greek form will be rendered by an aorist. This is correct in 95.5% of the cases:

(1)		Sl. aorist	Sl. imperfect
	Gk. imperfect	2.2%	15.4%
	Gk. other	80.1%	2.3%

From this we can infer that the imperfect/aorist distinction in Slavic is likely to express aspect just like the Greek forms do.

This raises the question of how the emerging grammaticalization of preverbs fit into the picture. We observe a strong correlation between inflectional aspect and affixation:

(2)	affixation	aorist	imperfect
	none	1099	213
	prefix	1300	6
	suffix	788	1367
	both	1518	447

Notice in particular that prefixed verbs (without a suffix) are extremely unlikely to occur in the imperfect. Based on this, we argue that prefixation has been grammaticalized as markers of perfectivity. However, this

grammaticalization is not complete in that the prefixes also retain the meaning of telicity which is the origin of the grammaticalization procedure, so that the perfective aspect of atelic events (later expressed through prefixation with *po*) must be expressed with the simple aorist. Still, the grammaticalization is complete enough to give clear examples of pair verbs, as shown in Figure 1.

All in all, this suggests a picture of early Slavic aspect similar to that expressed by Meillet (1902), but discredited by later research, whereby the co-existing old and new systems express very similar meanings.

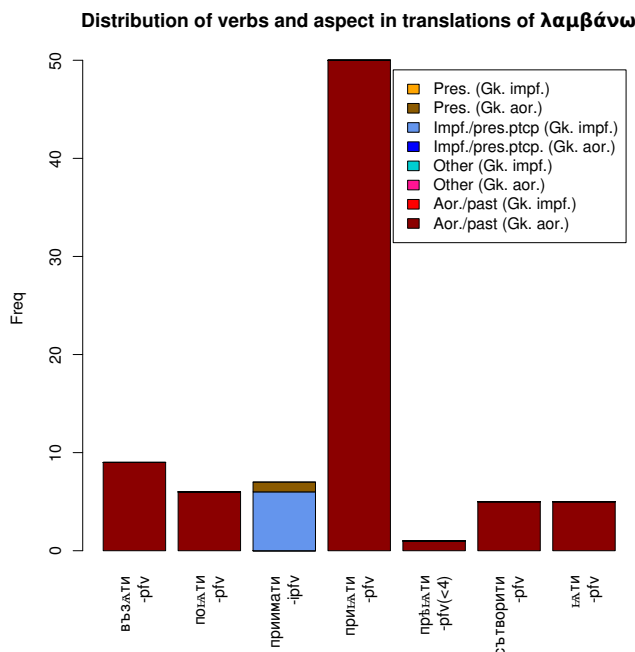


Figure 1: Translations of *lambanō*

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