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On the Evolution of Russian Verbal Categories

Perhaps one of the main features of all natural languages is the constant change that their system undergoes. This change or evolution can be characterized by two parallel processes: On the one hand, new elements perpetually penetrate into the system, while, on the other hand, old elements tend to disappear. As regards the grammatical categories of a language they are also in a constant change both on a formal and on a semantic level (Ярцева 1952: 79, Labov 1994).

Before examining the evolution of Russian verbal categories it might be valuable to deal with the notion of grammatical categories in general. There are numerous understandings of this notion in linguistics. In Revzina's view (Ревзина 1973: 5) grammatical categories are closely related to the paradigms of language (i.e. to the parts of speech theory), as they play an important role in the formation of the semantics and the grammatical features of words belonging to the same part of speech. She draws a distinction between simple categories, that can be associated with one part of speech (aspect, voice, tense with only the verb) only, and supercategories, which may belong to different parts of speech (person, gender, number). Each grammatical category has a unique semantics and formal expression. As regards their meaning, it reflects relations or features. According to Plungjan (Плунгян 2000: 112) the number and composition of the grammatical categories varies from language to language. They build up a conceptual pattern that the speaker can use when expressing his thoughts. Only mutually exclusive grammatical meanings can build up a grammatical category.

Bondarko (Бондарко 1978: 72) differentiates between abstract, conceptual categories and semantic functions. Conceptual categories (e.g. imperative, possessive, resultative, causative) denote the features and relations by linking them to language. Semantic functions can be perceived as the actual linguistic interpretations of conceptual categories. Conceptual categories exist on the level of thinking and language, while semantic functions are their realizations on the concrete level of speech.

Bondarko and Bulanin (Бондарко–Буланин 1987: 4) claim that grammatical categories can be characterized by the unity of semantic content and the system of grammatical forms for its expression.

Linguists more or less agree concerning the set of verbal categories. Vinogradov (Виноградов 1954), Kuryłowicz (1964), Plungjan (Плунгян 2000) perceive voice, tense, aspect, mood and person to be the grammatical categories of

the verb. The category of number is treated together with person as they are expressed by the same endings.

Jakobson's (1961) approach somewhat differs as for the classification of verbal categories he takes into account the relation between the members of a speech act (message, code, speech, narrated matter, speech event, participants of the speech event and that of the narrated event). Thus, he defines the following verbal categories: number, gender, person, status, aspect, tense, voice, taxis and evidential.

Pete's view (1995: 9) is also exceptional as he considers person, number, tense, mood, voice, aspect and transitivity/intransitivity to be the grammatical categories characterizing the verb.

The aim of the present paper is to highlight upon the evolution of the verbal categories of contemporary Russian. For the presentation of this development I will examine the set of existing categories at the main stages of the evolution of Russian: in the Indo-European protolanguage, in Common Slavic, in old Russian and in modern Russian. For the discussion of this topic I will take Bondarko's differentiation of conceptual categories and semantic functions as a basis. I will start my investigation with the categories of number and person, which are shared by other parts of speech as well. Then I will turn to purely verbal categories: mood, voice, tense, aspect and valence. The last four will be dealt with together, since there is an intersection in their semantics and development. To the set of verbal categories I include valence as well, although it is primarily perceived as a syntactic and semantic notion. I consider it as a key feature of the verb. In order to function as the predicate, the main organizer of the sentence, the verb requires the appearance of certain elements in its environment. In certain languages this abstract category gains a morphological expression as well (e.g. the relation between transitivity/intransitivity in Hungarian). The above mentioned set of verbal categories are universally present in all languages on a conceptual level, only, their linguistic realization may vary. In the organization of my paper focus will be put on the development of the individual categories.

There is a controversy among linguists whether categories denoting the agreement of the verb with its arguments can be perceived as belonging to the verb. Kuryłowicz (1964) considers them as syntactical categories, as they express the syntactical subordination of the verb to the subject. Number denotes whether the member of the speech act is an individual or a collective. For the expression of the locutors of the speech act a differentiation between singular, dual and plural is used. In the protolanguage the use of three numbers was attested. This system was taken by Common Slavic as well. However, in Old Russian the trichotomy is transferred to a twofold opposition, by the 13th century the dual disappears. This system survived in modern Russian as well.

Mood is one of the verbal semantic zones. It carries information, on the one hand, about the relation of the speaker to the situation, and, on the other, about the

status of the situation in relation to reality. Thus, there is a differentiation between evaluative and unreal moods (Плунгян 2000: 191). In the Indo-European language four moods were reconstructed: indicative, subjunctive, optative, imperative. Linguists take different stands as regards Common Slavic. According to Kuznecov (Кузнецов 1959) three moods can be differentiated: indicative, imperative and conjunctive. Dombrowszky (Dombrowszky–Péter 1961) argues that Common Slavic made use of four moods: indicative, optative, imperative, and the conditional, which was a new formation, while according to H. Tóth (1999) existence of the indicative, imperative and conditional can be attested. Old Russian develops further the Common Slavic system. Černyh (Черных 1954) distinguishes three voices in Old Russian: indicative, imperative, and conjunctive, while according to H. Tóth (Bihari – H. Tóth 1976) three mood formations can be reconstructed: the indicative, the imperative and the conditional. In modern Russian, according to Bondarko (Бондарко–Буланин 1987: 120), Pete (1995: 93) and Novikov (Новиков 2001: 516) three moods can be differentiated: indicative, optative, imperative.

Voice expresses communicative and pragmatic information, the relation of speaker to the situation. It is a rather controversial concept as it is not only a verbal category, but affects the whole sentence (e.g. passivization). Moreover, it is difficult to determine the semantics of voice, as, according to certain linguists, it does not have a meaning at all, and its only function lies in the alternation of the syntactic structure of the sentence. However, this view seems to be mistaken, as languages do not preserve semantically empty categories. All in all, voice is a morphological, syntactic and pragmatic category.

Kuryłowicz (1964), Tegyeç–Vekerdy (1991) and Szemerényi (1999) on the basis of reconstructed endings distinguish two voices in the Indo-European language: the active and the middle. It is difficult to grasp the full meaning of these voices, there are a number of interpretations. Szemerényi (1999: 253) supposes that the middle was used predominantly for the expression of bodily functions and with verbs of feeling. According to Brugmann (1904) the middle denoted actions, processes or states which have their scene essentially in the subject and within the scope of the subject, in which the subject is wholly and solely interested. Benveniste (1966) supposes that the „middle expresses that a process is taking place with regard to, or is affecting, happening to, a person or thing” (cited by Szemerényi 1999: 253). In Common Slavic the differentiation between the medial and the active ceased to exist. In Kuryłowicz’s (1964) view a twofold, transitive/intransitive and active/passive opposition is responsible for this course of development. The rise of the passive is due to the grammaticalization of the intransitive-passive verbs (i.e. their change from derivative to inflectional forms). The middle voice is the development of the etymological intransitive value. The active/middle contrast is a semantic, while the active/passive is a syntactic one. The enclitic form with *-se* (originally reflexive pronoun) was used with verbs which had only medial endings. This reflexive form ac-

quired a passive meaning with verbs of action. Thus, a new opposition between active/passive was created. This system further developed in Old Russian. In modern Russian, according to Novikov (Новиков 2001: 528), Bondarko–Bulanin (Бондарко–Буланин 1987: 150) two voices can be distinguished: active and passive, while Pete (1995: 112) differentiates between active, passive, reflexive, mutually-reflexive, medial, causative and subjectless voices.

The categories of aspect and tense are used for the characterization of the temporal constituency of the situation. Tense is a deictic category, which locates situations with reference to the present moment (absolute tense) or with reference to another situation (relative time reference). However, it does not contain information concerning the rise of the situation. This meaning is dealt with by the category of aspect, which is concerned with the internal constituency of the situation (Comrie 1976).

Aspect is perhaps the most controversial category of Slavic linguistics. There are two groups of linguists concerning its evaluation: one group understands only the perfect/imperfect opposition under this term (Miklosich 1926, Шахматов 1941, Виноградов 1947), while others include all aspects of the verbal action to this category, which actually corresponds to the notion of Aktionsart (Ломоносов 1755, Таппе 1819, Bondarko 1995). Aspect and Aktionsart are closely related concepts, since they both refer to the internal structure of the situation. Aspect is treated as a syntactic and semantic category, while Aktionsart is a purely semantic one. Linguists disagree concerning the prevalence of the three categories: according to Brugmann (1904) tense developed last, while in Schelesniker's view (1959) Aktionsart is the most ancient of the three.

The opinion of linguists differs concerning the origins of Slavic aspect as well. Buslaev (Буслаев 1959), Miklosich (1926), Meillet (Мейе 1951) suppose that it originated from the protolanguage, while others (Kuryłowicz 1964, Szemerényi 1999) evaluate it as a uniquely Slavic category. We may agree that aspect was discovered in almost all Indo-European languages and thus postulated for the protolanguage, as their common source. However, Slavic aspect differs from that of other Indo-European languages, as the distinction between the two aspects is realized by morphological means, whereas in other languages it is expressed by different tenses of the same verb. Moreover, in Slavic aspect in most cases is realized by verb-pairs.

In the Indo-European language Szemerényi (1999: 230) supposes the existence of three to six tenses: present, aorist, perfect, imperfect, future and pluperfect. The variation in the number of reconstructed tenses is due to the interrelation of this category with aspect. According to Dombrowszky (Dombrowszky–Péter 1961) the protolanguage knew only simple forms of tense, that were distributed to three stems: stem of present tense, stem of aorist, stem of imperfect. These stems did not actually express temporal relations, rather they acquired a kind of aspectual meaning. This system of tenses was destroyed in Common Slavic.

Ivanov (Иванов 1964), Mayo (1985), Kuznetsov (Кузнецов 2002) share the view that three stages may be traced in the development of the categories of tense and aspect. They suppose that in the Indo-European stage there were distinctions of aspect but not that of tense. The differentiation of aspect was not on the same basis as in modern Russian: verbs were differentiated structurally according to whether they expressed durative or momentary action. Aspectual differences were conveyed by vowel alternations, markers of verbal classes.

The second stage in the development of the tense-aspect system was the establishment of the category of tense. This stage was completed only after the break of the Indo-European unity. Tense was formed on the basis of existing aspectual categories through the transformation of aspect markers. The durative aspect formed the basis for the present and the imperfect tenses, the momentary stem for the aorist. This development did not proceed uniformly in all languages. The Slavic imperfect was an innovation, which was originally associated with the durative stems, it was formed from the non-durative ones. In this way the original lexical opposition between durative/momentary stems began to give way to a grammatical one, the formation of the imperfect from the non-durative verbs attached durative meaning to a non-durative stem. This interaction of temporal and aspectual meaning provided the stimulus for the development of the modern aspectual system. Temporal oppositions formally were expressed by analytic or simple forms. Common Slavic made use of two sets of verbal endings: primary and secondary endings, which expressed the differentiation between past and present. Later, the contamination of the two sets of endings gave rise to the appearance of a new set of endings

The third stage in the development of Slavic aspect was the establishment of the opposition between the perfective and imperfective. Prefixes played an important role in that. They lost their lexical meaning and acquired a grammatical one, became used as perfectivizers. The complex system of tenses and the new opposition coexisted together. Certain tenses became associated with a particular aspect.

Old Russian inherited the Common Slavic system of tenses: it knew forms of thematic present, aorist, imperfect, perfect, pluperfect, and two types of analytic future. Later, the simplification of the tense system took place. The imperfect disappeared in the 12th century, the pluperfect in the 13th century, and by the 14th century the aorist also ceased to exist. The forms of perfect became the only means for the expression of the past tense. Semantically the perfect differed both from the imperfect, which denoted a long lasting activity in the past, and from the aorist, which was used for the statement of facts in the past. It was originally used for the expression of a resultative action. Later, it took over the meanings of the imperfect and aorist. Besides the semantic differences a formal factor played a crucial role in the prevalence of the perfect. Aorist was formed mainly from perfective stems, and the imperfect from imperfective stems, while the perfect could be formulated from both. Future tenses underwent a simplification as well. Synthetic future forms were formu-

lated from perfective verbs. As regards the two analytic forms owing to the polysemy of the futurum primum from the 14th century a new form of future (*буду* + infinitive) developed and spread (X. Тор – Хоргоши 1994: 172).

Valence is used to denote the constructional pattern associated with the verb. As the verb cannot function as the organizer of a sentence without its arguments structure, I consider valence to be a universal verbal category. Grammatical categories gain expression on the level of representation. As valence is traditionally considered to be a syntactical and semantic notion, linguists did not pay attention to its morphological realizations on the verb. However, there have been attempts to connect the notions of transitivity and valence (Lamiroy–Swiggers 1992). In agglutinating languages the transitive/intransitive value of the verb gains morphological expression. Thus, I propose valence to be accepted as a grammatical category of the verb. Of course, in Slavic languages valence is not expressed morphologically, but it shows alternations on a diachronic level. Changes in valence cannot be associated with the whole system of a language. Such alternations affect rather the semantics of an individual verb, as changes in the valence structure are due to changes in meaning. Works dealing with valence alternations on a diachronic level have appeared in German and Hungarian linguistics (Greule 1973, Ágel 1988, Forgács 1996), but in Russian this problem is yet to be investigated.

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