Aspect in Slavic and Hungarian: A corpus-based approach
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Background. Slavic languages feature an aspectual system as grammatical category of the verb, which at the same time involves derivational processes. Various works of different theoretical orientation have tried to account for this aspect type (e.g. Lehmann 2009, 2010, Wiemer 2008, Filip 2012, Biskup & Zybatow 2015), involving derivational prefixes and suffixes: simple verbs are imperfective, and can be perfectivized by a prefix. This prefix, however, does not only change the aspectual value of the verb, but can affect its lexical meaning. A derived prefixed verb can in turn form an imperfective partner by adding a suffix. Verbal particles in Hungarian have been argued to function as perfectivizers similar to Slavic prefixes (e.g. Soltész 1959, Pinón 1995, Kiefer 2006, É. Kiss 2006, Ladányi 2015). However, an empirical study of the latter does not seem to be available yet.

Aim of the study. Using a parallel corpus of Russian, Czech, and Hungarian, this study aims at shedding more light to the questions of (i) the existence of an aspectual system in Hungarian equivalent to Slavic, and (ii) the degree of variation between West and East Slavic (cf. Dickey 2000) from a quantitative perspective. A parallel corpus ensures that the verb forms analyzed in the three languages refer to the same situation, i.e. their semantics is controlled for. This is crucial, since actional features of the verb (its "Aktionsart"), which can depend on the context, interact with the choice of aspectual values and their compatibility with the verb.

Methodology. The study is based on a parallel corpus of Russian, Czech, and Hungarian from the ParTy corpus (Levshina Forthc.). In order to compare the aspect marking in the three languages, verbs denoting lexically equivalent concepts were chosen according to actional properties. Since perfectivization and imperfectivization also affect the actional property of the verb, an aspect-sensitive actional classification (cf. Breu 1994, 2000) similar to the "standard" Vendlerian system has been chosen for this study. The actional classes considered are: (i) relative-statatives, (ii) inchoative-statatives, (iii) activities, (iv) gradual-terminatives (similar to accomplishments), and (v) total-terminatives (similar to achievements). The context (adverbs, contextual interpretation, argument structure) can change the actional class for some lexemes. Thus, after extracting the sentences featuring the verbs in question, the actional class was determined for each token within its context. The parallel corpus is important here, since it is the only way to control for equivalent contexts of the tokens in the three languages, which is necessary to make aspect marking comparable. As for the two Slavic languages, it has been noted for each token whether it is a perfective or imperfective form, whereas for Hungarian, the presence or absence of the verbal particle has been considered. Also other verbal categories (tense, mood, finiteness) have been annotated. Since argument structure and definiteness of the participants can influence the choice of a verbal particle in Hungarian, this has been annotated for all tokens as well. This way, the inner-Slavic variation between Czech and Russian (type correlation and type frequencies with respect to certain contexts, other properties of the verb, actional class) and the correlation of the presence of the verbal particle in Hungarian with aspectual values in Slavic are tested.

Hypotheses and expected results. (i) Dickey 2000 discusses the parameters of variation in the aspect choice in Slavic. This study is expected to support those results, e.g. a different behaviour of dependent infinitives, or repeated actions. However, these differences are expected to be minor, so that the application of perfectives and imperfectives in Russian and Czech is expected to be correlated (as in (1) and (2)). (ii) Since in Hungarian no secondary imperfectivization is available and since the choice of the preverb is more intertwined with other factors (e.g. applicative marking, lexical specification of the verbal stem), it is expected to differ more from both Czech and Russian in its application of the verbal particle (as in example (1)). (iii) However, as aspectual values can be expressed by the absence or presence of the particle to a certain extent, in those cases where East and West Slavic show different strategies of aspectual marking, Hungarian should rather pattern with Czech than with Russian due to their geographical closeness.

Concluding remarks. Using a parallel corpus, this study investigates the status of aspect in Hungarian with respect to West (Czech) and East (Russian) Slavic. It provides new empirical insights to an ongoing theoretical question and helps filling the gap of parallel corpora in typological research.
Examples

(1) Example for talk:
   a. *ja po-govorju s nimi.*  
      I PFV-talk.1SG with them  
      ‘I will talk to them.’  
      (Russian)
   b. *Můžu s nimi pro-mluvit.*  
      be.able.1SG with them PFV-talk.INF  
      ‘I can talk to them.’  
      (Czech)
   c. *Hadd beszéljek velük!*  
      let talk.CONJ.1SG with.3PL  
      ‘Let me talk to them.’  
      (Hungarian)

(2) Example for change:
   a. *odnoj bezumno prostoj ideej, kotoraja iz-menila vsë.*  
      one.INSTR really simple.INSTR idea.INSTR which pfv-change.3SG everything.  
      ‘With a really simple idea, which changed everything.’  
      (Russian)
   b. *Prostá myšlenka, která všechno z-mění.*  
      simple thought which everything pfv-change.3SG  
      ‘A simple thought, which would change everything.’  
      (Czech)
   c. *És attól az egyetlen, makacs gondolattól, minden meg-változott.*  
      and that.from the single silly thought.from everything pfv-change.3SG  
      ‘And from that single silly thought, everything changed.’  
      (Hungarian)

References