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Genis, R.

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René Genis

Comparing Verbal Aspect in Slavic and Gothic¹

After Streitberg (1891: esp. 82 ff) had first suggested that Gothic had verbal aspect, he remained unopposed for some 25 odd years and the impact of his writings can be felt to this day. The phenomenon he describes – he speaks of ‘perfective und imperfective Actions-art’ – can be seen as showing a great likeness to certain linguistic features in (modern) Slavic languages.² Consequently, Gothic aspect has often been linked to Slavic aspect, but comparisons of the two have not been made recently. As insights have progressed quite considerably in this field, I will attempt to make such a comparison with respect to the nature and development of verbal aspect as a grammatical category.

It is generally accepted that Slavic verbal aspect is a fairly late innovation and not an Indo-European inheritance (a.o. Růžička 1962: 18, Szemerényi 1987: 11 refers to other authors). Its genesis might go back to before the fifth century AD (Szemerényi 1987: 12 citing a publication by Hartmann n.v.). Gothic is interesting for the slavist researcher as it has clearly been in contact with Slavic languages in a period from which Slavic language sources are entirely lacking; the first Slavic texts of any substance dating from a good 500 years after the language of the remaining Gothic material. Aspect in Gothic, if indeed there is any, must also be an innovation and it seems to have come about in largely the same general period

¹ I am grateful to A.A. Barentsen for his scrutinisation of this text.

² Agrell (1908) is the first one to separate *Aspekt* and *Aktionsart*, followed by a.o. Van Wijk (1928).

and geographic area. Could there be a parallel and could Gothic show us a stage of aspectual development that might shed light on that of proto-Slavic?

In order to approach this matter, we need to compare aspect and its development as we encounter it in Slavic and Gothic. For this, we also need to address the question of whether there was grammaticalised verbal aspect in Gothic, especially as this has often been questioned and, indeed, denied. The first opposition to Streitberg's Gothic aspect came from two slavist authors, Beer (1915-1921, 1918) and Mirowicz (1935), who basically and flatly concluded that there is no such thing as verbal aspect in Gothic. Since then, quite a few authors have commented on the matter, taking either position with similar fervour, often adding interesting arguments.³ Lloyd's (1979) impressive work seems almost to have put an end to the matter and he maintains that Gothic aspect is quite different from that of Slavic (1979: 145). When Szemerényi (1987) then argued that there is always a lexical discrepancy in the aspectual oppositions Lloyd posits, Lloyd (1990: 130) simply retorted that 'the evidence for Gothic aspect is overwhelming' and in his monograph he presents a 'unified theory of aspect, actional types and verbal velocity', which 'possesses internal logic and is not at variance with observed facts in various indo-European languages' (1979: 322). As far as the present author is concerned though, the matter is not entirely resolved: a lot, if not everything, depends on one's definition of aspect and its status and formal expression in individual languages. A comparison may help us on the way to determine what verbal aspect in Gothic entailed, if indeed there was any, but a full treatment of these matters cannot be achieved in the limited space available here and the following points should be appreciated as mere thoughts on the morphology and the historical development of verbal aspect in Slavic and Gothic and, as will become apparent, especially the role of verbal prefixes. First though, we will have to turn to the basics.

1. PREMISES

Our purpose here is to compare Slavic and Gothic aspect and I shall begin with Slavic as a model. It is not easy to give a straightforward definition of

³ An extensive bibliography is listed by West (1981).

aspect and the interrelationship with tense (time) complicates matters. However, for our purposes here it suffices to list certain characteristics.

In essence, Slavic aspect is about the point of observation from which an event is viewed (reported). It is a binary category with the values perfective and imperfective.⁴ A major part is played by the semantic component TERMINATIVITY, an inherent part of the (lexical) meaning of a given predicate.⁵ Its various manifestations are always connected to the presence of the notion of situational change introducing boundaries to a given event.⁶ The pf predicate views a T event in its TOTALITY, including the boundaries connected to that event, and so: ‘from without’. This means that pf predicates are always T. IpF aspect refers to the (on-going) process or repetition, (habit) of an event viewed ‘from within’.⁷ There is always a notion of constancy and for T predicates this means that the boundaries to the event are backgrounded. Events without situational change and the boundaries that that entails, are aT and can only be expressed by ipF verbs in Slavic.

Perfectivity in all Slavic languages is, then, characterised by the features terminativity and totality. The aspectual systems of the individual Slavic languages, however, show differences and the languages have been classed as belonging to an ‘eastern’ type and a ‘western’ type (Dickey 2000). In the languages belonging to the eastern type, perfectivity is conditioned by a further feature, alternatively called SEQUENTIAL CONNECTION (Barentsen 1998) or TEMPORAL DEFINITENESS (Dickey 2000). This is noted in passing and the present author has not (yet) found this to have any immediate bearing on the matter at hand.

In spite of the fact that the formal distinction of the two aspects is quite complex – I will come to that later – it is safe to say that, in Slavic,

⁴ Hence pf and ipf.

⁵ As I have argued in Genis (2008: 91 ff.), the term *telicity*, often employed in the context of Slavic verbal aspect, is confusing as its strict definition would exclude certain types of perfective verbs (eg. the so-called delimitatives). I prefer to speak of *terminativity*, to which I should add that I use it in the ‘wider’ sense, such as posited by Barentsen (1995).

⁶ Hence T = terminative and aT = aterminative. For an extensive treatment, see Barentsen (1995) and Genis (2008: 69 ff.).

⁷ Intended here is so-called ‘open’ or ‘unbounded’ repetition.

verbal lexemes are either pf or ipf, with only very few bi-aspectual verbs. As the aspectual dichotomy in Slavic languages is so complete and systemic – it governs each and every verbal utterance and every verbal form – its grammatical nature is quite undisputed. It remains to be seen whether this, or something similar, can be said to have been the case in Gothic.

In aspect, as in other grammatical oppositions such as number, the forms that express the opposing values of the category semantically differ in nothing from each other than the values of the category. Polish *kupić_p* and *kupować_i* ‘buy’ are thus only opposed as far as aspect is concerned: there is no further lexical-semantic distinction and they are a true ASPECTUAL PAIR.⁸ This can be compared to the difference between English *shirt* and *shirts* with respect to the values of the binary category number, which need to be expressed in every single utterance employing such nouns, although this opposition is usually expressed paradigmatically. The morphology of Slavic aspect is far less clear-cut, which will become apparent in the following paragraph.

2. THE MORPHOLOGY OF ASPECT⁹

Slavic aspectual morphology constitutes a rather complex system and the various oppositions largely stem from the different developmental stages discussed in §3. The following table shows the types of aspectual pairs we find in Polish, which here represents the Slavic languages; this is easily done as these languages all have the same types of morphological oppositions. For Gothic, aspectual oppositions are placed in line with their possible morphologic equivalents in Slavic.¹⁰

⁸ I have added subscript _p and _i for perfective and imperfective aspect of Slavic verbs.

⁹ This brief survey is based on Schuyt (1990) for Slavic and Streitberg (1891, 1981) and Lloyd (1979) for Gothic.

¹⁰ In the table - denotes the absence of a form, whilst Ø indicates an impossible form.

class	Morphological type	Polish (modern Slavic)		Gothic	
		if	pf	“if”	“pF” ¹¹
1a	suffixal	<i>przepisywać</i>	<i>przepisać</i>	-	-
1b		<i>rzucać</i>	<i>rzucić</i>	-	-
2	-a- : -ną-	<i>machać</i>	<i>machnąć</i>	-	-
3	suppletive	<i>brać</i>	<i>wziąć</i>	-	-
4	bi-aspectual	<i>każać</i>		?	
5a	pf tantum	-	<i>rzec, lec</i>	-	<i>finþan, niman</i>
5b		-	<i>popisać</i>	-	<i>?ussathvan</i>
6a	prefixal	<i>писаć</i> (T) <i>badać</i> (T)	<i>napisać</i> <i>z badać</i>	<i>meljan</i> (T?) <i>swiltan</i> (T)	<i>gameljan</i> <i>gaswiltan</i>
6b	ipf tantum	<i>писаć</i> (aT) <i>żyć</i>	∅	<i>meljan</i> (aT?) <i>liban</i>	∅

The table shows that aspect morphology in these languages is quite different, with Slavic (Polish) being rather more elaborate than Gothic. The following is a discussion of the individual classes.

Class 1 consists of verb pairs in which the ipf members, often termed SECONDARY IMPERFECTIVES, are derived from the pf members by means of suffixation. Class 1a is here exemplified by *przepisać*_p : *przepisywać*_i ‘rewrite/copy’, prefixed and therefore explicitly T verbs (see §3). Class 1b are T pairs with rare simple perfectives, e.g. *rzucić*_p : *rzucać*_i ‘throw’. The opposing members of class 1 pairs usually belong to different flectional types, but there is no question of any lexical-semantic divergence between them and these verbs are clear, ‘pure’ aspectual pairs. It is important to point out that the verbs of class 1a have prefixes that have their full lexical meaning in both the aspects. This is the reason why, for Slavic, we cannot speak of prefixes as the markers of perfectivity.

¹¹ The aspects are put in “” quotes for Gothic as, at this stage, I would still like to leave it an open issue whether or not there was aspect in Gothic.

Class 2 represents the group of multiplicative imperfectives opposed to semelfactive perfectives. *Machai* means ‘wave’, prototypically a series of continuous action units of which *machnai*_p, with suffix *-na-*, indicates a single unit ‘to give a single wave’. Schuyt (1990: 265 ff.) mentions the difference of opinion as to the development of the morphology of this class, but that need not concern us here, as there appears to be no equivalent in Gothic.

Class 3 verbs have ‘partners’ in a morphologically suppletive opposition such as *brai*: *wziqai*_p ‘take, grab’. Only very few verbs pairs belong to this class. For a remark about the historical process that may have led to the pairing of such otherwise, formally unrelated verbs, see §3. However, that matter goes beyond our present purposes as class 3 verbs are altogether lacking in Gothic.

Class 4 are the Slavic bi-aspectuals. Real examples of Slavic origin such as *kažai*_p ‘(give an) order’ are very rare indeed.¹² One could argue that these verbs are only bi-aspectual because they function in languages whose great majority of verbs belong to either one of the aspects. We might also say that they have escaped aspectualisation, and so could equally be called aspectually neutral. I have not (yet) found any Gothic verb that could be classed as a bi-aspectual.

Class 5 are the perfectiva tantum. Class 5a are simple verbs *rzec* ‘say’ and *lec* ‘lie down’, which are probably the only Polish examples and they are antiquated.¹³ Streitberg’s (1891: 132 ff., 1910, 1981: 42) class of simple perfectives are achievements.¹⁴ Lloyd (1979: 124, 162) calls them ‘punctuals’ and they are always very clearly T.¹⁵ The difficulty with these verbs,

¹² Kudlińska (1988) describes the process by which most loan verbs into Polish are adapted to aspect. They start out as bi-aspectuals but form prefixed perfectives with the simple verb falling into the imperfective slot.

¹³ One could argue that both of these verbs are aspectually opposed by verbs such as resp. *mónić* ‘say’ and *kłaść się* ‘lie down’. This is not the way they are usually treated by Polish grammars and dictionaries, which is probably also due to their specific usage and meaning etc. I will leave that matter for what it is.

¹⁴ The terms *state*, *activity*, *accomplishment* and *achievement* are used after Vendler (1967).

¹⁵ In Genis (2008: 79) these are called ‘non-processual transformative’ following Barentsen (1995: 9).

in Slavic languages also, is the fact that they cannot be used in the actual present as they denote an instantaneous leap from one state into another, without any process or activity. Also, there is simply no formal aspectual opposition for these predicates in Gothic, and the prefixes in the compounds they form always have a clear lexical semantic function. Examples of Gothic class 5 verbs may be *finþan* ‘find’ and *niman* ‘take’.¹⁶ Slavic achievements equivalent to the Gothic ones, have usually formed aspectual pairs, whose ipf member is typically employed to express iterativity. As these are not perfectiva tantum they appear in other classes.

Class 5b are pf Aktionsart compounds that have no ipf counterpart. The example *popisać* ‘write (a little)’ is of the delimitative Aktionsart, which is pf only.¹⁷ A possible Gothic Aktionsart compound that Streitberg (1910) classes as ingressive perfective, is *ussaiþvan* ‘to start to (be able to) see’. I have not been able to ascertain the exclusively pf nature of all Streitberg’s supposedly pf compounds, nor whether these are opposed by simple ‘ipf’ verbs expressing the same Aktionsart, which is possible with some Slavic verbs, such as ingressive *rozumiéć* : *zrozumiéć* ‘come to understanding’ (cf. §4).

More complex oppositions are found in class 6. I am convinced that clarity in these oppositions can only be achieved if one sticks quite strictly to the definition of aspectual pairs such as I gave in §1. Class 6b, then, consists of aT states such as Polish *żyć* ‘live’ which are always ipf. Gothic *liban* ‘live’ is given as an equivalent.¹⁸ Class 6b are activities such as *pisać* ‘write’, which needs some further clarification and in example (1) we see aT *pisać*.

- (1) *Piszę do dwóch gazet.*
 I_write-IPF to two newspapers
 ‘I write for two newspapers.’

¹⁶ Lloyd (1976: 165 and 265) rejects Streitberg’s ‘perfektive Simplizien’ *frapþjan* ‘think, recognise’, *gaumþjan* ‘notice’ and *qjþan* ‘say’ as such.

¹⁷ Please note that not all Slavic Aktionsarten are restricted to perfectivity.

¹⁸ Streitberg (e.g. 1981: 42) is quite explicit about the ipf nature of these verbs. I have not found this kind of verb in any T predicate and so I have followed Streitberg as aT verbs can only be ipf.

However, *pisać* of class 6a should be understood as the T predicate such as we find in:

- (2) *Długo pisałem tę książkę, a wreszcie napisałem.*
 long I_wrote-IPF that book, and finally I_wrote-PF.
 'I have been writing that book for a long time and finally I finished
 (writing) [it].'

Only such clearly T predicates, (activities turned accomplishments) have a pf equivalent and these are grouped into class 6a.¹⁹ In most Slavic languages the bulk of simple verbs have a T usage and an aT usage. Only the T meaning is opposed by a compound pf verb with a so-called 'empty' prefix (préverbe vide), whose lexical (spatial) meaning is 'neutralised' for this use as in *pisać* : *napisać*_p, or which has specialised for perfectivising purposes as is the case with *z-* in *badać* : *zbadac*_p 'to perform an investigation'. As becomes apparent from the table, the only real, aspectual-pair-like oppositions in Gothic are found in class 6a, here represented by the examples *meljan* : *gameljan* 'write' and *swiltan* : *gaswiltan* 'die'. The inclusion of the Gothic oppositions is on the basis of Streitberg and Lloyd as well as other publications. They can only be provisional at this point as the T use of the Gothic simple verbs first needs to be established. These verb-pairs and prefixes will be discussed a little further in §3 and §4.

The table shows the aspectual division of Gothic verbs as they are implied by Streitberg and to a lesser degree also Lloyd. It could be argued, though, that most Gothic compounds would properly fall into class 5b, rather than as aspectual partners for imperfectives of class 6a. And so, the crux of the matter lies in determining whether Gothic 6a "pP" verbs are aspectual partners or that they stand alone, in which latter case the need to talk of aspect in Gothic disappears, at least, if we stick to the premise of pure aspectual oppositions formulated in §1. Alternatively, of course, we would have to decide whether there are other reasons to still speak of aspect in Gothic. First though, in our quest to discover parallels between aspect in Slavic and Gothic, we need to look at its development in Slavic and hold the state Gothic appears to have been in against this.

¹⁹ For an extensive discussion of this type of aspectual opposition in Polish, see Genis (2008: 170 ff.).

3. STAGES IN THE FORMATION OF THE SLAVIC ASPECTUAL SYSTEM

The question of how the aspectual system of Slavic developed and indeed came about has been the subject of some debate. On the basis of recent publications, most notably that of Dickey (2005) in addition to especially Forsyth (1972) and also Maslov (1959b), I would like to posit the following stages of development.

- I. Pre-aspect
Verbal prefixes have their 'original' lexical meaning, which includes predicational terminativity.
- II. Proto-aspect
On the basis of the intensified use of prefixes, Aktionsarten develop and the prefixes slowly begin to displace the grammatical means of expressing terminativity (i.e. the aorist).
- III. Developing aspect
Iterative / intraterminal forms for clearly T predicates develop through the application of Indo-European inherited suffix *-ā-*.
- IV. Expanding aspect
Other verbs comply with the new grammatical system: most simple verbs 'take on' imperfectivity, prefixed verbs consequently oppose simple ones aspectually and are pf. In most languages a particular prefix 'specialises' in the expression of pf aspect per se.
- V. Fully-fledged aspect
By stage V aspect is fully developed as a grammatical category and most verbal lexemes comply. But at which point in the earlier stages does the grammatical category appear? It is clear that it was a rather lengthy process, as the following brief discussion of the suggested stages may elucidate.

The question whether there had been a previous, Indo-European aspectual system does not actually have any bearing on the present discussion and I shall therefore leave stage I for what it is.²⁰ It should, however,

²⁰ Szemerényi (1987: 10 ff.), referring to other authors, concludes that there was

be mentioned that at this stage, verbal prefixes were probably used in their lexical meaning (spatial or metaphorically spatial) only.

The lexical meaning of a prefix always suggests two phases with a situational change between them and therefore it naturally induces, or at least explicates, terminativity in a verbal predicate.²¹ It does so, in fact, quite explicitly, and, once prefixation was used systematically as a means for the expression of predicational terminativity, this could be a reason for the decline, and, in northern Slavic, eventual disappearance, of the inherited preterite system with aorist (for bounded predicates) and imperfect. In stage II, the use of prefixes became more and more systemised and led to the emergence of Aktionsarten, expressed by prefixes. These are often highly abstracted versions of the original lexical (spatial) meaning of prefixes, something their growing use to express predicational terminativity may have led to. According to Forsyth (1972: 503), the predilection for these Aktionsarten ‘resulted in the spread of a generalised meaning of ‘totality of the action’, differing from, but overlapping with the Aktionsarten’. Here then, we have the two features of pf aspect: terminativity and totality. Of course, we should not forget that Aktionsarten, for all their systemic qualities, also in modern Slavic, are not grammatical but constitute lexical meaning.²²

no Indo-European aspectual system. To date, a number of suggestions as to the cause of the genesis and rise of Slavic verbal aspect have been made and the demise of an aspectual system in Indo-European is one of these (cf. a.o. Lloyd 1979: 84). Galton (1997: 73 ff.) suggests that aspect arose through linguistic contact with a non-Indo-European people and their language. Van Wijk (1929) mentions the distinction determined – undetermined, such as we still find in Slavic so-called verbs of motion, as the starting point for aspectual developments. Although rejected by others (a.o. Maslov 1959b: 560 ff., Růžička 1962: 22 ff.), this approach was recently adopted and developed somewhat further by Janda (2008).

²¹ See Genis (2008: 103 ff.) for a discussion of prefix meaning and predicational terminativity.

²² Maslov (1959a: 76) mentions that the highly systemised semantic nature of Aktionsarten (and the prefixes that express them) put them on the ‘threshold of grammar’. Interestingly, Gerasymova (2010) speaks of the emergence of Aktionsarten as ‘the first step towards aspect’. Treatments such as that of Lloyd (1976), seem to make them part of aspect on the grammatical level.

Several slavist aspectologists have the genesis of aspect as a grammatical category concur with the development of explicitly iterative / intra-terminal forms for clearly T predicates. For this purpose Slavic applied the inherited Indo-European suffix *-ā-* (a.o. Maslov 1959b: 568, Růžička 1962: 22, Galton 1976: 293, 1997: 71 ff.). I have placed this development under stage III. It is true that, from that moment on, at least for certain categories of verbs, there was a distinct formal opposition. Aspectual pairs thus formed, our class 1 verbs, comply strictly to the premise that there is no lexical-semantic distinction between the aspectual partners. The development of so-called secondary imperfectives (class 1a) is dated to before the dawn of the Slavic writing culture; it is already in place in the earliest sources, although such verbs appear to a much lesser extent than is the case in modern Slavic. There are significant differences in this respect between the various Slavic tongues even nowadays, with Bulgarian probably having the highest incidence of secondary imperfectives. At this stage, though, the aspectual system was not yet completely grammaticalised, as quite a few verbs did not partake in the opposition (most notably the simple verbs).

The developments of stage III meant that the grammaticalised aspectual system was becoming more and more clear and this ‘triggered’ the developments of stage IV, when remaining verbs started falling into one of the dialectic slots pf or ipf (Galton 1976: 293). As T events are viewed most naturally in their completion ‘from without’ as opposed to on-going (durative) aT events, the T verbs ‘naturally’ fell into the pf slot and the aT into the ipf slot. Prefixed verbs are explicitly T and so, certainly in the beginning, the opposition was very much that of prefixed compounds in the T/pf group and simple verbs in the aT/ipf group.²³ This said, it was probably a while before all simple verbs had become aspectually settled (Forsyth 1972: 504). It is worth noting in this respect, that only very few simple perfectives seem to exist in any of the Slavic languages, all of which have clear inherent terminativity in their basic

²³ Vaillant (1946) discusses deprefixation (*dépréverbation*), which may be a further possible means by which ipf partners were formed to pf compounds. Here, for reasons of space, I will not go into this process and restrict myself to the general lines of development.

meaning.²⁴ The ever increasing presence of aspectual meaning in Slavic must have led to the pairing of semantically closely related suppletive verbs such as those of class 3: *wziąć* : *brać* ‘take’ (Maslov 1959b: 568).

As a further, necessary means to facilitate verbs appertaining to either one of the aspects, prefixes were utilised to mark perfectivity per se of certain predicates: the so-called ‘empty’ prefixes of class 6a compounds. In these, the inherent lexical meaning of the prefix is neutralised, often as a result of semantic reduplication. This is a process that is still very much productive in Slavic languages, where it takes place for instance when loan words are adapted to the aspectual system. A clear example from Polish is the relatively recently formed aspectual pair *eksportować* ‘export’ : *wyeksportować* ‘out-export’. All prefixes can potentially occur as ‘empty’ prefix, but some do so more often than others.²⁵

Dickey (2005) describes what must be the final step in the process: the rise of prefixes, whose main function is no longer lexical, but purely grammatical, as they specialise in marking perfectivity only and are mostly used devoid of any true lexical meaning, such as *z-* in *badać* : *zbadać* ‘perform an investigation’ of class 6a. It is probable, then, that only at this stage many simple verbs first entered into a formally expressed pure aspectual opposition. This development occurred after the break-up of Slavic, and the preferred prefixes differ, with languages appertaining to the western aspectual type taking *s-*/*z-* as the most specialised ‘empty’ prefix, and *po-* cropping up mostly in the languages of the eastern aspectual type. Polish is positioned in between and has both (2005: 31 ff.).²⁶ Even in Polish,

²⁴ In Polish for instance, there are only about twelve such verbs almost all of which have derived ipf counterparts: *chnąć* : *chnąć* ‘grab’, *dawać* : *dawać* ‘give’, *kupić* : *kupować* ‘buy’, *leżeć* / *legnąć* : *leżeć* ‘lie down’, *paść* (*padną*) : *padać* ‘fall down’, *puścić* : *puszczać* ‘let pass’, *rzec* : *rzec* ‘say’, *rzucić* : *rzucić* ‘throw (away)’, *siąść* : *siadać* ‘sit down’, *skoczyć* : *skakać* ‘jump’, *stać się* : *stawać się* ‘take place’, *wrócić* : *wracać* ‘return’ (Genis 2008: 101). All these have a distinctly T meaning, which may have caused them to be appreciated as perfectives in stage IV of the development of aspect (or perhaps somewhat earlier).

²⁵ For a description of these mechanisms in Polish, see Genis (2008: 176 ff.). On the frequency of prefixes as ‘empty’ prefix, see Genis (2008: 182).

²⁶ Please also note that not all Slavic languages developed specialised ‘empty’ prefixes. Croatian and Serbian did not.

though, *s-/z-* is the more frequent (Genis 2008: 182) and Agrell (1908: 85) mentions it as the primary Polish ‘empty’ prefix. For Old Czech the final stage of this development is dated to the beginning of the sixteenth century, while Polish probably followed somewhat later (Dickey 2005: 25).

Please note, that as the opposition became grammaticalised, it was not simply about aterminativity vs. terminativity, but about imperfectivity (including aT as well as T predicates) vs. perfectivity (T predicates only). The development of secondary imperfectives was not aimed at de-terminativising them, but rather to facilitate viewing T events ‘from within’ (cf. §1). The development of ‘empty’ prefixes allowed the explicit viewing ‘from outside’ of T events that had until then been expressed by simple, and therefore, as yet, aspectually unmarked verbs.

For Gothic it is impossible to devise a similar set of developmental stages; the remaining texts dating from too narrow a period in time to allow any sensible diachronic study. I would like to point out that, on morphological grounds, only verb class 6a shows aspect-like oppositions for Gothic and that its “pf” set contains prefixed verbs only. We have, by now, also seen the importance of prefixes for the development of Slavic verbal aspect, and although the mere presence of classes 1-3 makes Slavic look very different, one might think that Gothic may be closer than expected as, according to Forsyth (1972: 500), most Russian pf events are rendered through prefixed compounds and most ipf by simple verbs. Still, in Slavic, verb class 6a oppositions with ‘empty’ prefixes are not the only aspectual opposition, and the fact that they are in Gothic, must be highly significant. It is time to turn to the ‘empty’ prefixes.

4. ‘EMPTY’ PREFIXES

As, during the development of Slavic grammaticalised aspect, prefixed verbs fell into the pf slot on account of the explicitly T meaning of their prefix, we may say that perfectivity was an effect of lexical terminativity. Prefixation remained, and still is, a productive process in Slavic and, once the aspectual system had sufficiently developed, every newly formed prefixed compound belonged to the pf set, hence the term ‘perfectivising prefix’. In cases where the resulting compound is the ‘pure’ pf partner of a

simple ipf verb, we speak of an ‘empty’ prefix (cf. §3).²⁷ When attached to a simple verb that is neutral as to terminativity (i.e. it can be used terminatively as well as aterminatively), the ‘empty’ prefix explicates the lexical-semantic component terminativity, the prerequisite for perfectivity. Even when semantic reduplication obscures the lexical (spatial) meaning (cf. §3), the prefix’s terminativity is still there and so, these prefixes are never truly ‘empty’.

This mechanism was in place before the development of specialised ‘empty’ prefixes (cf. §3, Dickey 2005: 31 ff.). Precisely because by this time (during stage IV) aspect was a grammaticalised category, the innate marking of that category co-facilitated the development of the specialised ‘empty’ prefixes. However, it must have been the T quality of prefixes and especially the functioning of non-specialised ‘empty’ prefixes that was the model for the later specialised ‘empty’ prefixes. Perhaps the more abstract Aktionsart function of prefixes had also played a role in detaching them from their lexical (spatial) meaning. Summing up, we can say that specialised ‘empty’ prefixes are devoid of lexical meaning other than terminativity. Their prototypical function is to mark terminativity, the prerequisite of perfectivity. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that specialised ‘empty’ prefixes are only attached to simple ipf verbs. The following schema sums up the three types of prefix (usage).

	Lexical meaning other than terminativity	Neutralisation through semantic reduplication	Terminativity
Prefix	[+]	[-]	[+]
‘Empty’ prefix	[+]	[+]	[+]
Specialised ‘empty’ prefix	[-]	[+]	[+]

Gothic prefix *ga-* is special amongst the Gothic verbal prefixes. Streitberg (a.o. 1891: 176, 1981: 39) describes it as being ‘colourless’ and he assigns properties to it, akin to those of the Slavic specialised ‘empty’ pre-

²⁷ The term ‘empty’ prefix is somewhat misleading as it gives the impression that such a prefix is devoid of any lexical meaning, which it is not. As it has become firmly established in Slavic terminology I shall keep using it (cf. Genis (2008: 176 ff.).

fixes.²⁸ Maslov (1959a: 78 ff.), in turn, argues that this colourlessness, should not be seen as meaning ‘devoid of lexical meaning, and only marking grammaticalised pf aspect’, but rather as ‘devoid of lexical meaning other than (highlighted) terminativity’. Many later authors have also explained the functioning of *ga-* in terms of aspect (a.o. Lloyd 1979, Josephson 1976, West 1981). Others have rejected these findings and classed the oppositions as lexical (a.o. Mirowicz 1935, Szemerényi 1987) and denied the existence of aspect in Gothic. Maslov (1959a) considered terminativity as a means to interpret Gothic *ga-* compounds, concluding that the prefix is lexically ‘empty’, but still marks terminativity. If, like Maslov, one does not consider Gothic an aspect language, the perfectivising effect is absent, but the terminativising function is clearly there.

Spatial limitations prevent an extensive treatment of this matter and so, I will restrict myself to a few examples only (covering Vendler’s (1967) states, activities, accomplishments and achievements) and present some of the difficulties encountered. The first of these are two passages with the verbs *sitan* ‘sit’ : *gasitan* ‘sit down’.

- (3) *blinda sum̃s sat faur wig du aibtron.*
 blind some sat at way by beg.
 ‘a certain blind man sat by the way side begging.’ [Lk 18: 35]²⁹

²⁸ Interestingly, the etymology of this prefix takes us back to Proto-Indo-European **kom-* ‘beside, near, by, with’ (cf. Latin *co(m)-/cum* ‘with’, Vedic *kam*, Hittite *-kan*), which in turn is related, if not cognate, to Proto-Slavic **sb-/sbn-* ‘(together) with’ (cf. Greek *sun-/sin*, Sanskrit *sam*, Hittite *san/sam*). This matter is extensively dealt with by Josephson (1976: 173 ff.). It is striking that such similar meanings lie at the basis of the prefixes that developed into ‘empty’ prefixes, although things are slightly more complex in Slavic languages, where cognates of Proto-Slavic **sb-/sbn-* ‘coalesced’ with cognates of Proto-Slavic **jbsz-* (cf. Greek *eks-*, Latin *ex-* from Proto-Indo-European **egʰs*) ‘outside’, to form the single, mostly ‘empty’ prefix *s-/sz-*. For the latter process, see Dickey (2005). It seems that the phonologic merger of the two Slavic prefixes allowed their respective semantics to become necessarily vague and so facilitate it ending up as marker of perfectivity per se. To all accounts and as far as I am aware, Gothic *ga-* never merged with any other prefix and its original meaning ‘with’ nevertheless allowed it to be used as ‘empty’ prefix.

²⁹ All English Bible translations are from KJV (see references below).

- (4) *usiddja þan ana fairguni Iesus jab jainar gasat miþ siþonjam seinaim.*
 out-went then unto mountain Jesus and there sat-down with disciples
 His.
 ‘And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his
 disciples.’ [Jn 6: 3]

Lloyd (1979: 277) and Streitberg (1910: 121) interpret an aspectual opposition between these verbs, with *gasitan* explicitly mentioned as pf. *Sitan* ‘sit’ is a state and therefore aT. The derivation *gasitan* ‘sit down’, with ‘empty’ prefix *ga-*, is easily interpreted as adding terminativity (and nothing else) to that state, which then becomes ingressive.³⁰ As a pair, clearly these are in violation of our premise worded in §1 and, unsurprisingly, Polish ‘sit’ is rendered by the ipf verb *siedzieć* (also in Lk 18: 35), whilst ‘sit down’ has the aspectual pair *siadać* : *siaść*. This shows that the opposition ‘sit’ : ‘sit down’ does not constitute an aspectual pair in Polish. As is often the case in Slavic, the effect of the addition of lexical terminativity to a state is ingressivity and in Gothic this also seems to be the case, although not with Lloyd’s (1979: 287) statals such as *nitān* ‘know’, which is on a par with Polish class 6b aterminatives such as *rozumieć* ‘understand’, but which is never used as class 6a T *rozumieć* : *zrozumieć* ‘come to understanding’. In the remaining texts, Gothic simple verb *sitan* is never used iteratively or otherwise in the ingressive meaning ‘sit down’, which rather makes me think that, for this kind of opposition, the status of aspectual pair remains inconclusive at best.

It might be more enlightening to consider a clearly T simple verb such as *swiltan* ‘die’ with its derivative *gaswiltan* ‘die’.³¹

³⁰ This rather brings to mind the process of making the uncountable substance *coffee* countable by adding a numeral: *two coffees*. The latter means ‘cup of coffee’ and may actually be seen to constitute a different lexeme.

³¹ Streitberg (1910: 135): *swiltan* ‘im sterben liegen’, *ga-swiltan* ‘sterben’ (Perfektiv). Also, West (1981: 335) mentions this pair as ‘a clear example of an aspectual opposition’ but his definition of the opposition pf : ipf seems to correspond to merely T : aT, which does not suffice for Slavic and seems insufficient for Gothic.

- (5) *unte dauhtar ainobo was imma swe wintrive twalibe, jab so swalt.*
 because daughter one was him-D, about winters-G twelve-G, and that died.
 ‘For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying.’ [Lk 8: 42]
- (6) *ip̃ Peilatus sildaleikida ei is juþan gaswalt; ...*
 But Pilate marvelled that he already died, ...
 ‘And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead, ...’ [Mc 15: 44]

Unfortunately, this is the only attestation of *swiltan*, but it already shows that ‘die’ in Gothic is an accomplishment rather than an achievement as in English (cf. Comrie 1976: 47). Polish rather sides with Gothic for this predicate, as may be surmised from (7):

- (7) *Jan umierał jakiś czas, ale w końcu nie umarł.*
 John died-IPF some time, but in end not died-PF.
 ‘It looked like John was dying for a while, but in the end he didn’t.’

As the Gothic base verb of (5) is already T, the addition of *ga-* could be motivated aspectually and the simple verb of (5) and the compound in (6) would then be equal to that of the ipf and pf of the verbs in (7). Clearly, *gaswalt* of (6) views the predicate in its totality whilst *swalt* of (5) takes up a position close enough for the boundaries of the predicate to be backgrounded. The Gothic pair would belong to our verb class 6a, the Polish pair falls in class 1a, but this morphological difference does not seem to have any bearing on the aspectual meaning.

A possible candidate for Gothic class 6a/6b is *meljan : gameljan* ‘write’. Lloyd’s (1979: 248) meanings for this verb pair are ‘engage in the activity of writing’, aT in my reckoning and an activity, and ‘produce a particular piece of writing’, which would be T and an accomplishment. This seems to be on a par with Polish class 6b *pisać* for the aT meaning and T class 6a *pisać : napisać*. Analysis of the Gothic is slightly hampered by the circumstance that, although these are frequent verbs, clear examples are quite rare. The only readily usable past tense example of the simplex is:

- (8) *apþan jabai melida, ni in þis anamahþjandins ... ak̃ du gabairhtjan usdaudein unsara þoei faur izwis habam niþra izwis in andvairþja gudis.*
 But when I_wrote, not in his offence ... but for revealing concern ours that for you we_have for you in face God-G.

‘Wherefore, though I wrote [a letter] unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, ..., but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you. [2 Cor 7: 12]

Melida is a translation of the Greek first person aorist active indicative singular ἔγραψα, which would have made a pf verb the translator’s more obvious choice, and indeed, the usual Polish translation has *napisatem_p* in this fragment. However, as Lloyd (1979: 250) points out, the Gothic version can be interpreted, in the context of the earlier verses, as background for the actual predication in this verse: making the Corinthians aware of God’s concern. The translation of the Gothic would then be ‘as I was writing to you, I didn’t do so ...’, which is supported by the fact that the Gothic (and the Greek) do not mention *a letter* such as was added in English. As such, ipf aspect is not out of order and we might have an aT predicate here. All occurrences of *meljan* could easily be ipf but none are clearly T. However, (9) could very well be:

- (9) *þata þus melja, wenjands qiman at þus sprauto; ...*
 These you-D I_write, hoping come to you soon ...
 ‘These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly; ...’
 [1 Tim 3: 14]

The compound *gameljan*, on the other hand, can always be interpreted to be T.

- (10) *gamelida izwis ana þizai aipistaulein: ni blandaip izwis boram, ...*
 I_wrote you-D moreover this letter: not mix you fornicators, ...
 ‘I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators, ...’
 [1 Cor 5: 9]

So far in my researches, the pair *meljan* : *gameljan* comes closest to belonging to verb class 6a/6b. Again though, there is too little data to be conclusive.

At this point I would have liked to include an example of a clear achievement expressed by a simple verb. However, there are none in Gothic that form compounds with the ‘empty’ prefix *ga-*, necessary for a discussion along the lines of the above examples. A full treatment of the issues at hand would also have to go into the specifics of special verb classes, such as sentential verbs, verbs of motion etc. Spatial constraints prevent me from going into these matters here.

5. CLOSING REMARKS

The last cannot at present be said about Gothic verbal aspect. I am convinced that the only way to establish conclusively the presence and nature of Gothic verbal aspect is to scrutinise all predicates with respect to their terminativity. For many verbal lexemes the available material will not suffice to come to any clear conclusion but comparing all T simple verbs with *ga*-compound derivatives might make inroads possible.

The signs are that Gothic developed, or was developing, a grammaticalised aspectual system. It never formed clear pair-like oppositions such as the class 1 verbs of Slavic, leaving the prefixes, often with their Aktionsart or even clear lexical (spatial) meanings, as the only markers of possible pf aspect in oppositions of the type of our verb class 6a/6b. In other classes I have not (yet) been able to detect aspect. Amongst 6a/6b verbs, though, it is not impossible to perceive aspectual tendencies, even of a Slavic kind such as was discussed in §4. For Slavic we presume that the simple verbs remained non-aspectual until quite late in the development of grammatical aspect. Gothic corresponds to that. A difference between the two is, though, that Gothic already seems to have had a (specialised) ‘empty’ prefix, something that did not occur in Slavic until the final stages of development, as Dickey (2005) convincingly argued.

Could Gothic, then, show a stage of development that might have been similar to a phase of proto-Slavic? As aspect started to develop in Slavic in our stage II, it must also have started with a morphological system without secondary imperfectives, as these only came about later in stage III. The Aktionsart nature of prefix usage could have developed in the same way in Slavic and Gothic, much as Forsyth (1972) and Gerasy-mova (2010) already mention. Gothic never reached stage III and so remained without secondary imperfectives. The Gothic ‘empty’ prefix may have developed where Slavic might not (yet) have had one in this stage of development. ‘Empty’ *ga-* is devoid of lexical meaning but still provides the semantic element terminativity and so, in compound verbs of class 6a we either have the first glimpse of aspectual expression or an otherwise enhanced terminativity, the function of which still needs to be explained. Perhaps though, as a new grammatical category comes about, similar morphological means may be employed to express it in different languages, even at different stages.

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