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Genis, R.M.

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## ‘EMPTY’ PREFIXES IN SLAVIC AND GOTHIC : ASPECT AND TERMINATIVITY

Both Slavic languages and Gothic have prefixes displaying a ‘faded’ lexical meaning. In Slavic languages these so-called ‘empty’ prefixes appear in the compound perfective partners of aspectual pairs with imperfective verbs in simplex form without prefix. Although the core function of prefixes is to convey a lexical-terminative meaning, here, they are interpreted as the markers of perfectivity. In Gothic, there is no clear evidence for the kind of viewpoint aspect we encounter in Slavic, which raises the question as to the function of these prefixes. In my contribution I propose that Gothic empty prefixes are not so very empty and convey the semantic feature terminativity, which essentially is similar to what happens in Slavic languages. In a few instances one might even detect an aspectual opposition akin to that of Slavic, but in the absence of the explicit and rather extensive morphological systems we see there, Gothic viewpoint aspect may at best be called rudimentary or perhaps in *statu nascendi*. The present author, however, maintains an interpretation in terms of terminativity only.

1. There is a long tradition of likening the alleged verbal aspect we find in the scant remnants of the Gothic language to that of Slavic languages. Streitberg (1891: esp. 82 ff.; 1910) is an early proponent of this and it is maintained to this day, mostly in Germanistic studies (e.g. Lloyd 1979; Bucsko 2008 etc.). Opposition has been offered by authors with a more profound knowledge of Slavic languages (a.o. Beer 1915-1919, 1918; Mirowicz 1935; Maslov 1959; Makovskij 2011). In an earlier paper I have provided a summary of the various positions (Genis 2012b: 59, 60). In that same paper I follow Dickey (2005: esp. 32 ff.) and argue that the Slavic grammatical aspectual opposition really came into being as the language(s) started forming secondary imperfective verbs, which caused a chain reaction of verbs (verb meanings) of varying morphological make-up falling into perfective or imperfective slots constituting the binary opposition. As the kind of aspect that comes with secondary imperfectivization is entirely lacking in Gothic, this raises the need to get a sharper picture of the way ‘empty’ prefixes function in that language. Moreover, could one maintain that Gothic does indeed have Slavic-style aspect (in the making) and are there perhaps other parallels one might draw for insights into the development of Slavic aspect?

In spite of all the differences of opinion, there seems to be general agreement about the fact that Slavic verbal aspect is an innovation rather than Indo-European inheritance (cf. 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.), which is the time in which there must have been extensive contact with Gothic as is evidenced by the considerable number of loanwords in Proto-Slavic, some of which belong to the core vocabulary of very basic day-to-day concepts (Pronk-Tiethoff 2013: 83, 84). One might, then, consider the possibility of language contact lying at the basis of the genesis of Slavic verbal aspect, which antedates the earliest written records. This fact also warrants a look into this single commonality: empty prefixes and their functioning. In section 2 I shall first briefly present the basic derivational functions of prefixes in both Slavic and Gothic after which I proceed with the grammatical functioning of Slavic verbal prefixes and some essentials of the Slavic aspectual opposition. Then, in section 3, I shall endeavour to compare the various functions found for Slavic prefixes with those we encounter in Gothic. My concluding remarks are in section 4.

2. Verbal prefixation in Indo-European languages is essentially a semantically motivated process. Its purpose is generally not grammatical but purely lexical-derivational. Both Germanic and Slavic are languages with substantial collections of such prefixes, whose meanings are essentially spatial and correspond to that of the cognate prepositions. Their core meaning is most easily discerned when they are combined with verbs of motion or displacement, such as in the following table for Gothic.

Table 1. Gothic prefixal derivation

<i>gaggan</i> 'go'-		
<i>af-gaggan</i>	[OFF-go]	'go away, leave'

<i>afar-gaggan</i>	[AFTER-go]	'follow'
<i>ana-gaggan</i>	[TOWARDS-go]	'come'
<i>at-gaggan</i>	[AT-go]	'go/come towards'
<i>faur-gaggan</i>	[FOR-go]	'pass by'
<i>ga-gaggan</i>	[TOGETHER-go]	'come together, assemble'
<i>inn-gaggan</i>	[IN-go]	'go/come in'
<i>mip-gaggan</i>	[WITH-go]	'go/come along'
<i>pairh-gaggan</i>	[THROUGH-go]	'go/come through'
<i>ufar-gaggan</i>	[OVER-go]	'transgress, go beyond'
<i>us-gaggan</i>	[OUT-go]	'go/come out'
<i>wipra-gaggan</i>	[AGAINST-go]	'go/come to meet'

A similar table for the Slavic from the oldest sources (based on Cejtin 1994) is as follows.<sup>1</sup>

Table 2. Slavic prefixal derivation

<i>iti</i>		'go'
<i>do-iti</i>	[TOWARDS-go]	'go/come to (until)'
<i>iz-iti</i>	[OUT-go]	'go/come out'
<i>na-iti</i>	[ON-go]	'go/come unto, towards, against etc.'
<i>ob-iti</i>	[AROUND-go]	'go round, circle'
<i>ot-iti</i>	[FROM-go]	'go/come away from'
<i>po-iti</i>	['ALONG'-go] <sup>2</sup>	'go away, a while'
<i>prě-iti</i>	[OVER-go]	'go/come over'
<i>pri-[i]ti</i>	[NEAR-go]	'come'
<i>pro-iti</i>	[THROUGH-go]	'go/come through'
<i>raz-iti</i>	[SPREAD-go]	'disperse'
<i>sъn-iti (se)</i>	[TOGETHER-go]	'converge'
<i>vъn-iti</i>	[IN-go]	'go/come in'
<i>za-iti</i>	[BEHIND-go]	'go/come behind, set (sun)'

2.1 The core function of verbal prefixes is, then, lexical-derivational and prefixes share a semantic feature which is also usually present in the Slavic verbal compound. This feature is TERMINATIVITY and, with very few exceptions indeed, compound verbs are terminative.<sup>3</sup> In short: in prefixed compounds terminativity is a semantic feature connected with the underlying spatial meaning of prefixes, which always present a situation that consists of at least two phases and so, effectively a situational change.<sup>4 5</sup> This may be exemplified by Polish *Ania wjechała<sub>p</sub> do ogrodu* 'Ania IN-drove into the garden' where IN-drove implies that the starting situation was 'OUT' (cf. Genis 2008: 103-114).<sup>6</sup> In this case the situational change is that from 'OUT' to 'IN'.

2.2 Turning to prefixes' aspectual function in Slavic I first need to mention that the grammatical aspect in Slavic languages is viewpoint aspect, such as described by Smith (1991: 200 ff.) and,

<sup>1</sup> The complex prefix *vъ-z-* as seen in *vъz-iti* 'go up' is left out of this list. The earliest sources lack attestations of prefixes *vy-* 'out of', *pod-* 'under' and *nad-* 'over, above' with the verb *-iti*.

<sup>2</sup> Please note that the meaning of prefix *po-* and its corresponding preposition *po* is very diverse and indeed complex, already in Proto-Slavic. Here there is no need to go into details.

<sup>3</sup> Limitations of space urge me to condense this matter here and so I refer to Genis (2008: 91-100) for an extensive discussion of the term terminativity and a comparison with the near synonym telicity, which latter term is used in several different ways, rendering it less precise where Slavic requires the more exact notion. Cf. footnote 7.

<sup>4</sup> This is a rather condensed account of this important issue. Suffice it here to add simply that Barentsen (1995) has three phases and for considerations of space, the reference to his paper is all that I can offer here.

<sup>5</sup> Terminativity as such is not restricted to prefixed verbs but unprefixed ones are relatively rare.

<sup>6</sup> Please note the subscript indexes for the aspect of Slavic verbs: i = imperfective, p = perfective. Please also note that from this point onward Polish is used in this contribution to exemplify modern Slavic languages.

importantly, it is restricted to terminative predicates.<sup>7</sup> The perfective aspect denotes that the TOTALITY of the verbal predicate is viewed, This view is lacking in the imperfective situation although it is still (lexically!) terminative.<sup>8</sup> Now, not all prefixed perfective verbs of the Slavic languages are opposed by a prefixed secondary imperfective. Indeed, in Slavic languages quite a few of them have a simplex imperfective partner. An example of such an aspectual pair is *napisać<sub>p</sub>* ‘ON-write’ : *pisać<sub>i</sub>* ‘Ø-write’. Compare the following Polish examples.

- (1) a. *Na-pisał*                      *nowy poemat.*  
 T;PFV-he.wrote              new poem<sup>9</sup>  
 ‘He has written/wrote a new poem.’  
 b. *Ø-pisał*                              *nowy poemat.*  
 IPFV-he.wrote                      new poem  
 ‘He was writing/wrote a new poem.’

On the grammatical semantic level as well as the lexical semantic level this constitutes a regular aspectual opposition, and *napisać<sub>p</sub>* : *pisać<sub>i</sub>* is a sound, pure aspectual pair. A clearly terminative predicate such as in (1)ab may be rendered in both aspects and the imperfective situation does not need to be marked for terminativity (by the prefix) as this feature is clear from the context, in this case the quantifiability of the direct object. This may be termed PREDICATIONAL TERMINATIVITY. However, the imperfective simplex *pisać<sub>i</sub>* occurs in non-terminative predicates as well, and these can never be rendered in the perfective aspect, cf.:

- (2) a. *\*Na-pisał*                      *poezję.*  
 T;PFV -he.wrote              poetry  
 ‘He has written/wrote poetry.’  
 b. *Ø-pisał*                              *poezję.*  
 IPFV-he.wrote                      poetry  
 ‘He was writing/wrote poetry.’

In this example the unquantifiable object *poezję* ‘poetry’ causes this predicate to be non-terminative and this is just one of many kinds of non-terminative predication. There is quite a bit more that can be said about this phenomenon and about these examples (cf. Genis 2008: 115-127; 2012a: 178-181), but, as dictated by limitations of space, suffice it here to simply state that the imperfective simplex partner in this kind of aspectual pair has a terminative use (usually transitive) in which it is aspectually opposed by a prefixed compound perfective verb, as well as a non-terminative use, which cannot be rendered other than with the imperfective verb and a grammatical aspectual opposition is lacking as it always is for non-terminative predicates.<sup>10</sup>

Now, the terminatively used simplex *pisać<sub>i</sub>* does not actually provide a lexical semantic notion other than that of its perfective compound *napisać<sub>p</sub>* and so, we might say, the prefix *na-* does not actually mark any distinct lexical meaning, other than the general feature terminativity, which is present in any prefixal meaning, such as is reflected in the glosses for (2)ab. Hence the term ‘empty’ prefix. In Slavic languages any verbal prefix may potentially appear as empty prefix, but

<sup>7</sup> And so, Vendler’s (1967) achievements and accomplishments are terminative and verbs denoting such meaning types usually appear as aspectual pairs in Slavic languages. Vendler’s states and activities do not enter the Slavic aspectual opposition and are usually imperfective only. For Slavic there are a few further meaning types - notably delimitativity and perdurativity as well as semelfactivity - that need to be gathered under the term terminativity but that are not usually understood as telic; terminativity is the wider notion. Cf. also Barentsen (1995).

<sup>8</sup> In certain modern Slavic languages there is a further condition for the use of perfectivity as opposed to imperfectivity and this is called SEQUENTIAL CONNECTION (Barentsen 1998) or TEMPORAL DEFINITENESS (Dickey 2000). For the present purposes I have found no reason to go into that matter here.

<sup>9</sup> In (1)a and (2)a I have glossed the prefix *na-* with faded lexical meaning as T;PFV, which is intended to indicate that on the lexical level it conveys terminativity whilst on the grammatical perfectivity. In the Gothic examples below there is T only, for which cf. note 14.

<sup>10</sup> It is a matter of - perhaps unfortunate - tradition that non-terminative verbs are still called imperfective although they are not opposed by perfective verbs in pure aspectual pairs.

some do so more than others and there are several explanations for which prefix comes to be used as empty prefix in a particular aspectual pair but the choice of many prefixes is rather unclear.<sup>11</sup> I shall refer to this kind of pure aspectual pair as COMPOUND-SIMPLEX PAIRS.

2.3 Dickey (2005: 55) points out that in Slavic languages certain prefixes have specialized in being ‘empty’: they have their own lexical meaning which comes out in specific compounds and contexts, but most often they crop up as empty prefix.<sup>12</sup>

3. We have already seen, cf. Table 1, that Gothic prefixes have a clear lexical meaning. It remains to be seen whether or not Gothic prefixes have aspectual consequences like those in Slavic. In the Gothic dictionaries (o.a. Streitberg 1910; Lehmann 1986) there are many prefixed and a few simple verbs labelled “rein perfektiv”. The following, then, are two examples (in fact from one and the same compound sentence) that present predicates with a verb pair involving the verb *hauhjan* ‘exalt’, in a simplex form in (3)a and as a prefixed compound in (3)b that Streitberg judges to be perfective.<sup>13</sup>

- (3) a. *unte hvazuh saei hauheip sik silba, ga-hnauwjada,*  
 for everyone that exalts him- self, T-is.abased  
 ‘For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased ...’
- b. [...] *jah saei hnaiweip sik silban, us-hauhjada.*  
 ... and that humbles him- self T-is.exalted<sup>14</sup>  
 ‘... and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.’ [Lk 14:11]

The verb pair *hauhjan : us-hauhjan* ‘exalt’ seems reminiscent of a Slavic compound-simplex aspectual pair and, interestingly, the corresponding verse in Polish has imperfective and perfective aspect in exactly the corresponding places.<sup>15</sup> This example may illustrate the point Streitberg (1920: 39) is making when he states that in Gothic only prefixed compounds may be perfective and that this perfectivity comes out all the more clearly the more the lexical meaning (“sinnliche Bedeutung”) of the prefix is faded (“verblaßt”). The original meaning ‘OUT’ of the prefix *us-* is indeed quite obscure in this example, as it is in other examples, also when the verb forms are temporal. Prefix *us-* is listed several times as a component of perfective compounds and so are the following: *af-*, *ana-*, *at-*, *bi-*, *fra-*, *ga-*, *in-*, *uf-*. Streitberg (1920: 39) writes that the most faded of all prepositions, *ga-*, is the best means to perfectivize. Example (4) shows an opposition of *ga-melida : melida* ‘write’ that reminds us of Slavic examples (1)ab and (2)b respectively and although I had to resort to other verb forms than there, (4)a is clearly terminative on account of the prefix, (4)b may be interpreted as having predicational terminativity and (4)c is then non-terminative.

- (4) a. *ga-melida izwis ana þizai aipistaulein: ni*  
 T-I.wrote you.DAT;PL in this epistle not  
*blandaiþ izwis horam,*  
 you.mingle.OPT;PL you.ACC;PL fornicators.DAT  
 ‘I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators.’ [1 Cor 5:9]
- b. [...] *nim þus bokos jah melei ahtautehund.*  
 ... take.IMP.2 your book and write.IMP.2 fourscore

<sup>11</sup> For some statistics, see Genis (2008: 182-185) for Polish and Janda & Lyashevskaya (2013 : 219) for Russian.

<sup>12</sup> For Russian that prefix is *po-* whilst for Czech it is *s/z-* (and cognates). Polish holds the middle ground and divides this function almost equally between *s/z-* (and cognates) and *po-* with a slight preponderance for the former. South-Slavic languages generally lack a specialized empty prefix.

<sup>13</sup> In fact, Streitberg (1910: 55) indicates the compound *us-hauhjan* to be “perfektiv zu *hauhjan*”, which is very explicit labelling indeed.

<sup>14</sup> Please note the use of the occasional abbreviation T in the gloss to this example, which stands for ‘terminativity’. As aspect in Gothic is at best disputed and likely not like that of Slavic, it seems better to avoid the marking PFV ‘perfective’. Cf. note 9.

<sup>15</sup> Viz. *Każdy bowiem, kto się wywyższa, będzie poniżony, a kto się poniża, będzie wywyższony*.

- c.           ‘[... he said ...], Take thy bill, and write fourscore [measures of wheat].’ [Lk 16:7b]  
*aþþan jabai melida, ni in þis anamahtjandins, [...]*  
 but CNJ I.wrote, not for these wrong-doers, ...  
 ‘Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the  
 wrong ...’ [2 Cor 7: 12]

In a parallel to Slavist parlance we might call *ga-* the Gothic specialized empty prefix: like Slavic empty prefixes, it is used devoid of most of its lexical meaning such as in (4). Also like Slavic, (5) demonstrates that it may also occur with its full lexical meaning intact, and in this example it comfortably functions as a direct translation of Greek *συν-ήχθη* ‘TOGETHER-they.came’.

- (5) [...] *þatei ufta ga-iddja Iesus jainar miþ siponjam seinaim.*  
 ... that often together-they.came Jesus there with disciples his.  
 ‘... for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples.’ [Jn 18:2b]

In (6), though, the parallel with Slavic is less obvious.

- (6) a. [...] *blinda sums sat faur wig du aihtron.*  
 ... blind.man some sat by way to beg  
 ‘... a certain blind man sat by the way side begging’ [Lk 18:35b]  
 b. [...] *jah jainar ga-sat miþ siponjam seinaim.*  
 ... and there T-sat with disciples his  
 ‘... and there he sat [down] with his disciples.’ [Jn 6:3]<sup>16</sup>  
 c. [...] *niu frumist gasitands rahneiþ [...]*  
 ... does.not first sitting.down.PRSP you.count ...  
 ‘[For which of you...], sitteth not down first, and counteth [the cost ...]’ [Lk 14:28]

In (6)a the simplex verb *sitan* ‘sit’ has a clearly non-terminative (state) meaning such as are exempted from the grammatical aspectual opposition of Slavic (cf. 2.2). Gothic *ga-sitan* of (6)b is terminative (accomplishment) with an ingressive reading. These two verbs, then, do not share exactly the same lexical meaning.<sup>17</sup> On the basis of this example, and there are a few more, we may conclude that the Gothic opposition between compounds and simplex verbs is about terminativity only, rather than Slavic-like aspect. Again the discussion here is - for reasons of space - somewhat brief and, in fact, Slavic simplex aspectual partners may also be used in terminative predicates with unbounded repetition. There are to my knowledge no attestations of such a use of *sitan* or indeed of any Gothic simplex. Example (6)c shows though, that the compound may occur in contexts of repetition, which is rather unlike Slavic with a perfective verb. Note also that in this single example I found in the extant Gothic remains, there is a present participle.

The non-terminative vs. terminative opposition we see in *sitan* : *ga-sitan* also exists in verb pairs with other prefixes than *ga-*, which then might be seen to be devoid of (most) of their lexical meaning, and *þaursjan* ‘be thirsty’ vs. *af-þaursjan* ‘get thirsty’ may serve here as one example.

The next example (7) is of the clearly terminative simplex *swiltan* ‘die’, which may, in spite of already being terminative, be opposed by a compound with faded *ga-*.

- (7) a. [...] *dauhtar [...], jah so swalt.*  
 ... daughter ..., and that was.dying  
 ‘... daughter ... and she lay a-dying.’ [Lk 8:42a]  
 b. [...] *imma [...], qiþandans þatei dauhtar þeina ga-swalt [...]*

<sup>16</sup> On the face of it, the Gothic prefix in this context might be seen to preserve the original meaning ‘together’. It is however a translation of the Greek verb *κάθημαι* ‘to sit down’.

<sup>17</sup> There are in Slavic languages two different lexical items to render these respective situations and (6)a would be translated into Polish using *siedzieć*<sub>i</sub> ‘sit’ (non-terminative and so imperfectivum tantum). The terminative meaning of (6)b is, quite as expected, provided for by an aspectual pair, in this case (*u*)*siąść*<sub>p</sub> : *siadać*<sub>i</sub> ‘sit down’.

... he ..., saying that daughter your T-died ...  
 ‘... which said, Thy daughter is dead...’ [Mk 5:35]

As argued in Genis (2012b: 74, 75) this example shows an instance of the closest Gothic actually comes to a Slavic-like aspectual opposition: here both simplex form and compound are terminative and the prefix seems to be devoid of any clear lexical meaning. One might argue that the prefix adds the sense of (highlighted) terminativity. In fact, in Polish the corresponding aspectual pair would be *u-mrzeć<sub>p</sub>* : *u-mierać<sub>i</sub>* (in earlier Polish we have simplex *mrzeć<sub>i</sub>* as imperfective partner) ‘die’. The English rendition *lay a-dying* is particularly explicit and apt for *swalt* - the translator clearly refers to an ongoing situation in which the terminativity is part of the lexical meaning of the verb but totality is not (yet) reached - as would be the case for the Polish translation *umierała<sub>i</sub>*.

4. I would like to begin my concluding remarks with noting that the opposition between partners of Gothic verb pairs of simplex and compound in which the latter sports a prefix might be classed as grammatical but that it cannot be about the same kind of all-encompassing viewpoint aspect such as we have in Slavic with its perfective and imperfective verbs and grammatical meaning. In Slavic languages that grammatical opposition is restricted to (lexically) terminative verbs and predicates. The Gothic examples above rather point at an opposition of durativity (incl. non-terminativity) vs. terminativity. The latter phenomenon is also present in Slavic in oppositions between simplex verbs and compounds, but there we tend to refer to that in terms of lexical derivation.<sup>18</sup> Although the systematic functioning of these faded prefix meanings in Gothic could be seen to point at a grammatical opposition, the semantic matter is not Slavic-like. Then again, example (7), on account of the inherent terminativity of the meaning of *swiltan* ‘die’, is reminiscent of what we see in Slavic. The possible similarity of Gothic example (4)abc to Slavic (1)ab and (2)b may, in terms of predicational terminativity, also come close to Slavic as does in this respect the verb pair *hauhjan* : *us-hauhjan* ‘exalt’ of (3)ab. In my view example (6)ab demonstrates most clearly the actual function of Gothic specialized faded prefix *ga-* and it is to do with terminativity and, ultimately, still a lexical derivation, here with ingressive meaning. The prefix turns otherwise non-terminative *sitan* ‘sit’ into terminative *ga-sitan* ‘sit down’. The kind of repetition we see in (6)c in Slavic would typically require an imperfective verb. If we take that lexical derivational function as a starting point, the compounds in (4)a and (7)b may be interpreted as highlighted terminativity as opposed to the already terminative predicates with the simplex base verbs.

Be all that as it may, as further aspect morphology is lacking in Gothic, there are no means there to express aspect such as we see it with especially the secondary imperfective verbs in Slavic. Hence, the systematic all encompassing Slavic grammatical viewpoint aspect is also absent. This cues in with the view expressed by Dickey (2005) that the true grammatical opposition of Slavic started only with the appearance on the scene of secondary imperfective verbs and only in the next phase did simplex verbs and compounds fall in their respective aspectual slots, then also establishing compound-simplex aspectual pairs.

Finally we may speculate that, as prefixes with faded meanings existed in Gothic, they may also have been there in the Slavic from before written records, the Slavic from before the genesis of its typical grammatical viewpoint aspect. There may already have been prefixes specializing in this role, such as *ga-* in Gothic. Such a state of affairs may have facilitated verbs forming Slavic style aspectual pairs once the time for that had come.

#### Abbreviations

2 – second person; ACC – accusative; CNJ – conjunction; DAT – dative; IMP – imperative; IPFV – imperfective; PFV – perfective; PL – plural; PRESP – present participle; T – terminative.

<sup>18</sup> Maslov (1959: 76) puts it like this: “The category terminative / aterminative is the highest abstraction in the area of Aktionsart, an abstraction which, in some ways even expands beyond the scope of the lexical categories of verbs and sort of stands ‘on the threshold’ of grammar. In this sense, we may call it an ‘aspect formational’ category [my translation].” On account of the spatial restrictions to this contribution I regrettably may not expand the discussion at hand any further and take Aktionsart into account, other than through this quote.

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