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Particles and Prefixes in English and Serbian

Summary

The paper attempts to, by means of contrastive analysis, prove that particles belonging to phrasal verbs in English are in their linguistic essence equivalent to Serbian perfective verbal prefixes. This hypothesis has been backed up by a brief study based on 40 translation equivalents, which has shown that phrasal verb particles in English and perfective prefixes in Serbian are both markers of telic aktionsart on the lexical level of the verb. Also, the particles and the prefixes alike affect the 'aspectual use' of verbs in their respective languages: while the particles in English do not block their use with the progressive, the prefixes in Serbian block their use with imperfective aspect. Both semantically and grammatically, the appropriate solution for translating the English progressive of phrasal verbs into Serbian is *modal aorist* of Serbian perfective verbs. On the lexical and grammatical level alike, Serbian and English seem to have a convergent relationship, hence there exists a contrast between Serbian and English; the analyzed language elements are also similar with respect to distribution and equivalent with respect to meaning.

Key words: contrastive analysis, aspect, aktionsart, telicity, modal aorist

Členice in predpone v angleškem in srbskem jeziku

Povzetek

Članek, poskuša dokazati, da so v angleškem jeziku v svoji jezikovni osnovi členice v fraznih glagolih enakovredne dovršnim glagolskim predponam v srbskem jeziku. To hipotezo podpira študija, ki temelji na analizi 40 prevodnih ustreznice, in ki je dokazala, da so na leksikalni ravni glagola tako členice v angleških fraznih glagolih kakor tudi dovršne predpone v srbskem jeziku označevalke teličnega aktionsarta. Tako členice kot tudi predpone vplivajo na "vidsko rabo" glagolov v enem in drugem jeziku: medtem ko v angleščini členice ne preprečujejo rabe glagolov v opisnih oblikah (angl. *progressive forms*), pa v srbskem jeziku predpone preprečujejo rabo glagolov v nedovršenem glagolskem vidu. Tako s semantičnega kot slovničnega vidika se angleške opisne oblike fraznih glagolov najbolj ustrezno prevajajo v srbski jezik z modalnim aoristom srbskih dovršnih glagolov. Kaže, da sta angleški in srbski jezik na leksikalni in slovnični ravni v konvergentnem odnosu in zato različna. Analizirani jezikovni elementi so si s stališča distribucije podobni in ustrezni po pomenu.

Ključne besede: kontrastivna analiza, glagolski vid, aktionsart, teličnost, modalni aorist

Particles and Prefixes in English and Serbian

1. Introduction

The discussion of the semantic and syntactic nature of phrasal verbs in English has been a prominent one in both traditional and more recent research concerning verbal typologies and aspect studies in English. This issue has troubled various language philosophers and linguists, yet to this day many of the questions posited remain only partially answered. Part of the problem lies in the fact that the approach to the very term *PHRASAL VERB* is not a uniform one. Moreover, a closely related issue of *ASPECT* has not yet been defined as a universal category. Instead, it is treated as a grammatical phenomenon which is language specific and in that respect internally variably consistent and systematic (cf. Anastasijević 1968; Bauer 1991; Benson 1989; Bolinger 1971; Brinton 1988; Comrie 1976; Palmer 1988; Riđanović 1976).

The aim of this paper is to provide a contrastive analysis of two potentially related phenomena belonging to two different languages: English and Serbian. The analysis presented attempts at checking the hypothesis which suggests that particles belonging to English phrasal verbs are in their linguistic essence equivalent to Serbian perfective verbal prefixes. A brief study was hence conducted, based on forty different English phrasal verbs and their Serbian translation equivalents. The verbs were chosen according to their particles, which are termed as the most representative either in terms of aspect / aktionsart marking (cf. Brinton 1985; Bolinger 1971; Palmer 1988), or in terms of their frequent occurrence in English ‘verb plus particle’ combinations (cf. Anastasijević 1968).

2. Relevant research

Grammarians have been concerned primarily with grammatical category of aspect, whereas philosophers of language and semanticists have been interested in verb semantics – typologies of *AKTIONSART*. Traditionally, aspect is one of the verb categories in English, and it is linked with the notion of completion. However, the aspectual meaning of particles such as *up*, *down*, *off*, *out*, or *away* is (as will be shown below) better understood as an *aktionsart* meaning, namely, that of expressing the goal or endpoint of a situation.

Slavic languages have well-developed formal markers of aspect. In Russian, the distinction between perfective and imperfective aspect is marked by derivational morphology, whereas aktionsart is a matter of inherent verbal meaning. This means that while ‘aspect’ is without any doubt a grammatical category ‘*aktionsart*’ is of a primarily lexical or semantic nature.

The perfective prefix added to verbs in Serbian has both grammatical and lexical function. Grammatically, it marks perfective aspect, and lexically it creates a new verb from the simple, unprefixing verb form. Most Slavic languages (Serbian included) have formally neatly marked

aspectual systems, where there are pairs of perfective and imperfective verbs, differentiated only by the prefix. For example:

piti – popiti

ići – otići

tražiti – potražiti

pevati – otpevati

jesti – pojesti (Stanojčić-Popović 1994, 56)

Aspect is a grammatical verbal category in Serbian; it denotes completeness of an action or state denoted by the verb. In terms of aspect, there are basically three verb groups in Serbian:

- 1) *Imperfective* (incomplete) such as ‘kuckati’, ‘sumnjati’, ‘jesti’, which are further classified into *durative* and *iterative*
- 2) *Perfective* (complete) such as ‘doći’, ‘upitati se’, ‘iskoristiti’, ‘potražiti’ which are further classified into
 - a) *ingressive*
 - b) *effective*
 - c) *terminative*
 - d) *indefinitely complete*
- 3) A class of verbs which can be either perfective or imperfective, depending on the context, such as ‘čuti’, ‘videti’, ‘ručati’ and so on. Both aspects are denoted by the same lexeme. (Stanojčić-Popović, 1994, 97–8)

In many cases however, the specific meaning of a perfective verb is determined by the prefix: ‘zaigrati’ = ‘to start dancing’, ‘progovoriti’ = ‘to start talking’, ‘doraditi’ = ‘to finish working’ (cf. Stanojčić-Popović 1994, 374–97). Therefore, it can be concluded that prefixes often determine both the perfective type and one of its subtypes of a verb they are added to. Verbal aspect in Serbian is in most cases related to the lexical base of the verb (that is why there are perfective-imperfective pairs). In this respect, Serbian is similar to Russian. Yet verbs with dual aspect mark both grammatical aspects by the same verb lexeme, which makes Serbian more similar to some non-Slavic languages, such as French, German or English. This also means that, on the lexical level at least, prefixes in Serbian function as *aktionsart* markers as well. Namely, the prefix determines whether the action denoted by the verb has a clearly marked starting or ending point (e.g. ‘zapisati’, ‘doorati’), whether it is repetitive and so on. The prefix therefore, if added to the base verb may (and most often does) alter its semantics.

In English, phrasal verbs can freely occur with verbal periphrases which focus on the beginning, middle, and ending phases of a given situation. They are also compatible with the imperfective (progressive), perfective (simple past), and perfect aspects. All of this, according to Laurel Brinton (1988, 168–9), suggests that verbal particles in English do NOT mark perfective aspect, as was traditionally assumed. The particles actually, typically express a telic notion, which means that they can add the concept of a goal or an endpoint to durative situations which otherwise may not necessarily have a defined endpoint. An atelic imperfective implies its perfective, but a telic imperfective does not – namely :

If one was *eating*, one *has eaten*.

BUT

If one was *finishing up* (and was interrupted), one has NOT *finished up*.

In other words, the particles may alter *aktionsart* of the given situation, and are therefore taken to be markers of *telic aktionsart* rather than perfective aspect. For example, a telic particle will convert an activity into an accomplishment.

- a) *The children are eating up the candy.*
- b) *The management decided to close down the plant.*
- c) *The lights are fading out.*
- d) *You should shut off the electricity.*
- e) *Have you thought through the problem?*
- f) *We have read over the documents.*
- g) *She is throwing away her money.* (Brinton 1988, 169)

All of the English examples above are given in the progressive form, to once again stress the fact that verbs with particles in English *are* in fact compatible with the progressive, and that the particle therefore is not a mere marker of perfective aspect. Moreover, Brinton states that particles do not seem to co-occur with state verbs. They may sometimes occur with *be* or *have* or some other typically stative verbs, but only if they are used with a non-stative meaning, or when the particles refer to a resultant condition, which is another good reason to use the verbs in progressive here.

- a) *I'll be right up.*
- b) *Please hear me out.*
- c) *I had some friends over.* (Ibid., 173)

From the discussion above, it shall be concluded that there exists at least one important similarity between phrasal verb particles in English and perfective verb prefixes in Serbian: on the lexical level, both mark *aktionsart*, and are therefore 'semantic' or 'lexical' rather than 'grammatical aspectual' markers. They definitely affect the meaning of the verb they are added to, as well as the 'internal structure' of the action denoted by that verb. In what follows we will examine some translation equivalents, both lexical and sentential, in more detail. The lexical pairs were adopted from the relevant bilingual and monolingual dictionaries, whereas the sentential pairs were established by the author of the paper in the course of research.

3. Progressive aspect and the notion of telicity

3.1 Translation equivalents: the lexical level

Both perfective prefixes in Serbian and phrasal verb particles in English form new lexemes when added to the base form of the verb. For example:

English:

wake (to cease to sleep) – **wake up** (to become conscious again after being asleep)

burn (to cause to undergo combustion) – **burn down** (to completely destroy by fire)
wear (to carry or have on the person as covering) – **wear out** (to use something so much that it becomes thin or weak and unable to be used)
write (to form letters or words on a surface such as paper) – **write off** (to decide that something is unimportant, useless or unlikely to be successful and that it is not worth further consideration)
break (to cause to separate into pieces suddenly and violently) – **break away** (to stop being part of a group) (Sinclair 1990)

Serbian:

buditi – *probuditi, razbuditi (se)*
 paliti – *spaliti, upaliti, zapaliti*
 nositi – *iznositi*
 pisati – *napisati, ispisati, otpisati*
 lomiti – *sломiti, izlomiti, polomiti* (Benson 1986; Stanojčić-Popović 1994)

In English, these newly formed verbs may be just semantically modified if compared to the original verb or may have a completely new meaning. In either case, particles act as markers of telic *aktionsart*, assigning either a goal or some kind of an ending point to the action denoted by the verb ('the viewing of an action as complete'). (Brinton 1988, 52)

In Serbian, however, the situation with prefixed verb forms is somewhat different. The prefixes are primarily markers of perfective aspect. Prefixed verb forms are normally not idiomatic; rather, they specify something about the course or the internal structure of an action denoted by the verb: its completeness. Still, the situation is not that simple. There is something in Serbian that closely resembles *aktionsart* in English: the so called 'semantic character' or 'shape' ('značenjski lik') of the verb (Stanojčić-Popović, 1994, 383–4). Namely, the prefix will determine not only that the action is to be viewed as complete but will have further impact on that completeness. It will depend on the prefix whether the action is ingressive, effective, terminative or indefinitely complete. It seems then, that in Serbian, as well as in English, prefixes do mark a telic situation on the lexical level.

Further proof for this claim can be found in the fact that all of the English phrasal verbs which were included in the corpus for this research do in fact have their Serbian prefixed translation equivalents on the lexical level.

e.g.

look up – pogledati
calm down – umiriti
call out – dozivati
slice off – odseći
walk away – otići (Benson 1986)

The rest of the verbs are given in the Appendix A.

3.2 Translation equivalents: contrasts of context

Moving up from the lexicon towards syntax, the situation becomes progressively more complicated. Once we are in the realm of context, many factors influence translation from one language to another, often with the most surprising outcomes.

Let us take a look at the following pairs of sentences.

1.
 - a) English: They have *burnt down* the house.
 - b) Serbian: Oni su *spalili* kuću.

 - c) English: His hair has *fallen out*.
 - d) Serbian: *Opala* mu je kosa.

 - e) English: He's *sent* them *away* just now.
 - f) Serbian: Upravo ih je *poslao*.

As we can see from the examples in 1(a-f), if we start off with English sentences in the Present Perfect, their translations into Serbian come out as expected: English phrasal verbs are directly translated by Serbian perfective verb forms. Furthermore, the actions expressed by those verbs are well-transferred from the source language into the target language: their meanings are the same. In all cases the actions denoted by the respective verbs are finished, complete. They are also resultative: in 1(a, b) 'there is no longer a house in that place'; in 1(c,d) 'the person in question is hairless' and in 1(e, f) 'they are on their way, and will soon arrive'. The present perfect in English does in fact denote such actions, and when it also bears the notion of result and/or completeness, it is generally translated by the Serbian past tense (PERFEKAT).

Yet if we choose the progressive as a starting point in English, the situation changes significantly. It was already pointed out that phrasal verb particles in English *ARE* compatible with the progressive. Also, English phrasal verb particles mark telic situations. Therefore, it is possible to say in English:

2.
 - a) They are *burning down* the house.However, a possible Serbian translation of the sentence in 2a would be
 - b) Oni *spaljuju* kućuand not as we would expect
 - c) *Oni *spale* kuću.

One reason for this lies in the fact that Serbian prefixed verbs do not have the ability to denote real present in Serbian; they can only denote 'historic present' (as a narrative tense). However, it was already established that, on the lexical, level both English particles and Serbian prefixes mark telic situations in terms of *aktionsart* – in terms of aspect it seems that English allows telic particles with progressive aspect, but Serbian does not allow 'telic prefixes' with imperfective aspect. Still, this does not complete the analysis.

Let us look at the following Serbian verb triples:

paliti – spaliti – spaljivati

pevati – raspevati – raspevavati

tražiti – istražiti – istraživati

pisati – ispisati – ispisivati

zvati – dozvati – dozivati (Stanojčić-Popović 1994, 58)

Namely, apart from the ability to (with the biggest number of verbs) form perfective - imperfective pairs, Serbian also has a possible third member which can be adjoined to these pairs. These are verbs which are not truly perfective, but bear the notion of 'secondary perfectivity'. These verbs are also prefixed, but the actions they denote are essentially *continuing* or *iterative*, rather than *COMPLETED*. Their telicity, is therefore highly context dependent, and is usually made explicit by a nominal object. Also, the goal appears to be broken into phases of achieving/ completing. These verbs can and do denote present actions in Serbian, but not all Serbian verbs are capable of forming these triples.

*buditi – probuditi – *probuđivati*

*jesti – pojesti – *pojedati*

*cediti – iscediti – *iscedivati*

*nervirati – iznervirati – *iznerviravati* (Stanojčić-Popović 1994, 60)

For this reason, the translational solution which involves secondary perfectivity (as it is proposed in the Serbian example 2b above) will not be adopted as the most plausible final proposal.

Let us now turn to the following:

3.

- a) They are *burning down* the house.
- b) Oni *spališe* kucu.

- c) He is *eating up* all the food in the house.
- d) On *pojede* svu hranu iz kuće.

- e) They are *wringing out* the wet cloths.
- f) Oni *iscediše* mokre stolnjake.

- g) This one is *killing* all the germs *off*.
- h) Ovo *uništi* sve bacile.

- i) They are *driving away* with the cargo.
- j) *Odvezoše* se sa teretom.

The English examples in 3 (a-i) were chosen (cf. Brinton 1985, 27) to be representative of the whole corpus consisting of 40 phrasal verbs analyzed (Appendix A) – all five relevant particles are there. In Serbian translations 3 (b-j), the expected prefixed perfective verbs are

present. However, Serbian sentences contain no present verb forms in terms of tense; the tense used here is called *MODAL AORIST* in Serbian. *AORIST* in Serbian is a rather archaic tense and is often replaced, in spoken language especially, with past tense verb forms. It is meant to generally denote an action which was completed closely prior to the moment of speaking (similar to English Present Perfect), or at the moment of speaking. For example:

- a) Serbian: *Sad je baš sretah na stepenicama.*
English: *I have just met her on the stairs.*
- b) Serbian: *Evo, prođoše pored prozora vaši drugovi.*
English: *Your friends have just passed by the window.*
- c) Serbian: *Do ovog časa čitah ovi zanimljivu knjigu.*
English: *I have just stopped reading this intriguing book.*

MODAL AORIST is somewhat different: it denotes the attitude of the speaker towards an action which is still not completed. It has three basic attitude notions:

- a) confidence that the action will be completed
Serbian: *Bežite izgibosmo!*
English: *We are going to die!*
- b) intention to complete the action
Serbian: *Ja odoh u školu.*
English: *I'm off to school.*
- c) 'attitude of condition'
Serbian: *Ako pođoh, nagledah se jada, ak' ne pođoh, neću vidjet drage.* (Stanojčić-Popović 1994, 384)
English: *Should I leave, I will suffer, should I stay, I will not see my darling.*

In most cases, these kinds of use of *MODAL AORIST* are compatible with the adverbial 'sad' (English 'now').

Looking back at the examples in 3, it seems that those Serbian translation equivalents are acceptable. What is more, although *AORIST* is almost obsolete in Serbian, *MODAL AORIST* is still actively used, especially with the meaning which seems to be the one needed here. Namely 3a,b views the action of 'burning down' which has not yet been completed as complete – the sentence does in fact show that somebody has started an action with the intention to finish it – yet the action is in progress, therefore not finished at the moment of speaking. This matches the use of *MODAL AORIST* presented in attitude notion b: 'intention to complete the action'. The examples in 3g,h, on the other hand, seem more like attitude notion a: 'confidence that the action will be completed', since 'this' in 3g,h probably refers to something non-human, so there is no possibility of intention of the agent, only confidence on the part of the speaker.

What can be concluded from the discussion above is that although telic particles do not block progressive aspect in English, Serbian perfective prefixes block Serbian imperfective aspect. However, it is possible to translate English progressive with Serbian *MODAL AORIST* with basically no change in meaning. It is important to point out that all of the English sentences in *FILTER* (Appendix B) can be translated with *MODAL AORIST* of Serbian prefixed perfective verbs, but not all of them can be translated with the present tense of secondary perfective prefixed verbs.

3.3 Translation equivalents: more about the particle meanings

The semantic mechanism which shifts literal meanings of phrasal verbs into semi-transparent or completely idiomatic meanings is an issue which has not yet been settled. Nevertheless, linguists do agree in the conclusion that such shifts exist, and that the boundaries between these shades or levels of meanings are not clear-cut. The corpus of phrasal verbs used in this study is not vast enough for drawing final conclusions, yet the hypothesis is that particles are crucial in these shifts. The way the particle semantically modifies the base verb is probably the key to these semantic patterns. How (if in any way) the possible explanation might affect Serbian translations remains a question for further research.

4. Conclusion

This paper attempted to prove that phrasal verbs in English are linguistically equivalent to perfective verbs in Serbian. Both phrasal verb particles in English and perfective prefixes in Serbian are markers of telic *aktionsart* on the lexical level of the verb. Furthermore, the particles and the prefixes alike affect 'aspectual use' of verbs in their respective languages: while the particles in English do not block their use with the progressive, the prefixes in Serbian block their use with imperfective aspect. It was also shown that both semantically and grammatically, the most adequate way of translating the English progressive of phrasal verbs into Serbian is by *MODAL AORIST* of Serbian perfective verbs. Such translation equivalents are equal in meaning.

The question posed for further research is whether literal – non literal meanings of particles belonging to phrasal verbs in English can explain general shifts from literal to idiomatic meanings of phrasal verbs as a whole, and further, whether such an explanation would somehow alter this proposal for the way of translating English phrasal verbs into Serbian.

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Appendix A

CORPUS

(40 phrasal verbs with frequent particles:
UP, DOWN, OUT, OFF, AWAY)

UP

1. wake up – probuditi (se)
2. roll up – podvrnuti, zavrnuti
3. eat up – pojesti
4. pick up – podići, 'pokupiti'
5. grow up – odrasti
6. hold up – podići, izdržati
7. look up – pogledati, potražiti
8. speed up – ubrzati
9. make up – izmisliti
10. clean up – počistiti

DOWN

11. burn down – spaliti
12. calm down – smiriti, umiriti
13. turn down – odbiti
14. come down – sleteti (avion)
15. tone down – ublažiti
16. write down – zapisati

OUT

17. call out – dozivati
18. wring out – ocediti, iznuditi
(informacije)
19. put out – ugasiti (vatru)
20. wear out – iznositi
21. die out – nestati
22. spell out – objasniti
23. print out – odštampati
24. fall out – opasti, posvađati se
25. push out – izgurati

OFF

26. tick off – označiti, iznervirati
27. shave off – obrijati
28. come off – otpasti
29. slice off – odseći
30. write off – otpisati
31. buy off – potkupiti
32. kill off – uništiti

AWAY

33. send away – poslati
34. walk away – otići
35. step away – odstupiti, odmaći (se)
36. put away – odložiti (odeću)
37. write away – otpisati
38. sign away – odustai (potpisom)
39. drive away – odvesti
40. break away – odvojiti (se)

(Serbian translations taken from Benson
1986)

Appendix B

FILTER

(40 English phrasal verbs used in the progressive)

UP

1. He is waking up way too soon!
2. They are rolling up their sleeves – they're definitely getting started.
3. He is eating up all the food in the house.
4. It's 12.00 o'clock already. Who is picking them up from school?
5. All of them are growing up in safety.
6. How are you holding up? / The students are holding up their hands.
7. He is just looking up the requested information.
8. They are speeding up the rail service.
9. My younger sister is making it all up!
10. They are cleaning up after last night.

DOWN

11. They are burning down the house.
12. She is calming down her young son with some candy.
13. Why are you turning down my proposal?
14. The plane is coming down as we speak. / I think I'm coming down with something.
15. She is toning down some of the brighter shades.
16. Why are you not writing this down?

OUT

17. Who is calling out his name?
18. They are wringing out the wet cloths. / They are wringing the information out of him in the interrogation room.
19. They are putting out the fire.
20. My shoes are wearing out.
21. Those little shops are dying out.
22. The teacher is spelling out the exam instructions to a class of students.
23. They are printing out the hard copy of it.
24. His hair is falling out.
25. The workers are pushing out all of the old furniture.

OFF

26. I'm ticking off the sentences as I read each one. / You are ticking me off with that attitude of yours.
27. He is shaving his beard off.
28. A huge piece of it is coming off as we speak.
29. She is slicing off a big piece of cake for him.
30. He is writing all of that off.
31. He is buying off the police officer in charge.
32. This one is killing all the germs off.

AWAY

33. She is sending them away right now.
34. They are walking away into the field.
35. He is stepping away from the desk.
36. He is putting his clothes away.
37. She is writing away to the company, sending them more details.
38. He is signing away his right to inherit that land.
39. They are driving away with the cargo.
40. She is breaking away from the group of girls.