

РОЗДІЛ І. ТЕОРІЯ МОВИ

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ПРО СИСТЕМАТИЧНЕ ВИКРИВЛЕННЯ РОЗУМІННЯ АСПЕКТУ В СХІДНІЙ ТА ЗАХІДНІЙ ТРАДИЦІЯХ, ЯКЕ ЗБИВАЄ АСПЕКТОЛОГІЮ З ПРАВИЛЬНОГО ШЛЯХУ

Аспект як граматична категорія більше не становить таємниці, однак сучасна аспектологія залишається переповненою концептуальними викривленнями та помилковими інтерпретаціями як дієслівного, так і композиційного аспекту. Аспектологія потребує радикальної реформи, аби позбутися радянських, пострадянських і російських політичних галюцинацій та догматизму, які заводять у хибний напрям не лише слов'янське й українське мовознавство, а подекуди й західних дослідників, які не мають належних інструментів для критичного осмислення російської лінгвістики – тієї, що росіянами подається як «безаналогова», подібно до «російської душі» чи «російського світу». Ідея «незмінної унікальності» всього російського була безапеляційно перенесена і в мовознавство, набуваючи основи різко вираженої системної відсутності в радянській лінгвістиці досліджень із застосуванням сучасних теоретичних підходів у проблемних сферах, зокрема: композиційного аспекту, біаспектуальності, взаємодії артикля й аспекту, взаємозв'язку відмінка й аспекту, номінальної детермінації, включно зі складними механізмами експлікації в слов'янських мовах, де відсутні артиклі означеності/неозначеності, специфічності/неспецифічності, родовості/неродовості. Радянське, пострадянське та російське мовознавство справили шкідливий вплив на слов'янське, а особливо на українське мовознавство, внаслідок чого аспектологія зазнала серйозних втрат. Але хибні інтерпретації аспекту, особливо композиційного, також істотно поширені у світовій лінгвістичній спільноті та можуть бути побічним продуктом деформованого розвитку аспектології на Сході. У статті здійснений критичний аналіз хибних інтерпретацій аспекту, як дієслівного, так і композиційного – незалежно від їхнього географічного походження, з метою викриття основних хибних уявлень і тлумачень, щоб прокласти шлях до радикальної реформи аспектології.

Ключові слова: аспектологія, теорія композиційного аспекту, композиційний аспект, дієслівний аспект, біаспектуальність, радянські та пострадянські хибні уявлення про аспект.

ON THE SYSTEMATIC MISCONCEPTUALIZATION OF ASPECT EAST AND WEST LEADING ASPECTOLOGY ASTRAY

Aspect is no longer a mystery but aspectology abounds in misconceptualizations and wrong attempts at explanations of both verbal aspect and compositional aspect. Aspectology needs a radical reform to get rid of Soviet, post-Soviet and Russian political hallucinations and dogmatism which lead not only Slavic and Ukrainian research astray but sometimes even misguide Western researchers lacking the ability to assess critically Russian linguistics – the latter thought by Russians to be “analogue-free” like the “Russian soul” and the “Russian world”. The understanding of everything Russian as “invariably unique” was tacitly transferred to linguistics and underlies the drastic systematic absence in Soviet linguistics of research using modern theoretical frameworks

in problem spheres such as (inter alia): compositional aspect, biaspectuality, article-aspect interplay, case-aspect interplay, nominal determination, including the complex mechanisms of explication in Slavic languages with no articles of definiteness and indefiniteness, specificity and non-specificity, genericity and non-genericity. Soviet, post-Soviet and Russian linguistics have exercised a detrimental impact on Slavic and especially Ukrainian linguistics, whereby aspectology has suffered severely. But wrong interpretations of aspect, especially compositional aspect, are also abundant among the world linguistic community – and these may be by-products of the thwarted development of aspectology in the East. The paper deals on an equal footing with deviant interpretations of aspect – whether verbal or compositional, whether from the East or the West, and aims at exposing the major misconceptualizations and wrong interpretations, in order to clear the way for a radical reform in aspectology.

Keywords: aspectology, theory of compositional aspect, compositional aspect, verbal aspect, biaspectuality, Soviet and post-Soviet misconceptions of aspect.

1. Introduction: on verbal aspect and compositional aspect, and the different misconceptions surrounding them. In a recent review of a major book on aspectology (Verkuyl 2022) I argued that aspect is no longer a mystery but aspectology needs a reform (Kabakčiev 2023a). Today there continue to exist misconceptions about aspect in both the East and the West, two political entities formerly distinguished but aspiring to merge at present. The misconceptions underlie the necessity for carrying out a reform after the demise of the myth that aspect is a mystery. Deeply rooted in Soviet and post-Soviet linguistics, the misconceptions – old but some still widespread, are interpreted by many researchers to be a deterring factor for the development of Slavic and Ukrainian linguistics.¹ The reason is that in Soviet linguistics, due to “ideological reasons” conjured up by feeble-minded political functionaries, many research domains were not studied through modern theoretical frameworks after the advent of Chomskyan linguistics – simply because they were “a product of the West, of the enemy” (on language and linguistics as political weapons, see Kabakčiev 2024). As a result, these scientific domains, having nothing to do with the hallucinations of communism and communists, remained in the post-Soviet mental space either totally ignored or inadequately and insufficiently studied.

As a prime example of Soviet, post-Soviet and Russian dogmatism and backwardness, the universal category of aspect was regarded as residing in verbs only and is even still understood so, to the very present day, by some researchers – mainly in the East but also sometimes in the West (see also below). For most of the linguistic community in today’s world, however, aspect is either verbal or compositional, the latter represented in languages like English and the other Germanic languages, and also in the Romance languages. In both groups of languages there is no aspect in lexical verbs but aspect exists, effectuated through a very complex mechanism of interaction between sentence components (Kabakčiev 2025). Compositional aspect, the universal phenomenon discovered by Verkuyl (1972), was recognized a long time ago as existing in non-Indo-European languages too – such as Finnish (see Heinämäki 1984). But the

¹ These misconceptions heavily prevailed in Soviet and Russian linguistics and some of them remain to the present day. They regard aspect as something found in verbs only – and there is, simply, nothing else that can be considered aspect. Aspect across languages is of two types: verbal, as in the Slavic languages (among others), and compositional, as in the Germanic and Romance languages (among others). See below for further differences in the different approaches to aspect in Soviet, Russian, and Slavic linguistics, on the one hand, and Western linguistics, on the other.

compositional aspect theory was not so advanced at that time to be able to handle it correctly.

Two years ago I started investigating Ukrainian aspectological literature with a colleague for preparing an article on biaspectuality in Ukrainian through a compositional-aspect approach. Among the publications we found, some offered interesting analyses (Ginzburg 2009; Sokolova 2016; 2020a; 2020b; Pchelintseva 2022). But most of them relied heavily or even exclusively on outdated Soviet and Russian aspectological models that have nothing to say about the difference between verbal and compositional aspect and verbal-aspect and compositional-aspect languages. We were surprised and saddened to establish that prior to our publication (Bakardzhieva-Morikang & Kabakčiev 2024) compositional aspect was practically a *terra incognita* in Ukrainian aspectology.² Thus we realized why in the editorial process our submission was described by a reviewer as “an ambitious work that presents the withdrawal from the Soviet tradition in Ukrainian linguistics, casting light on phenomena that were neglected in Slavic linguistics.” This assertion may seem somewhat strange against the circumstance that analyses of biaspectuality based on the theory of compositional aspect were made four decades ago on Slavic data, Bulgarian (Kabakčiev 1984: 649). Perhaps the focus on Bulgarian then could be attributed to the special place of this language within the group of Slavic languages and the presence in it of a definite article – unlike in the rest. But the fact remains that the phenomenon of biaspectuality in Ukrainian had not been studied in compositional-aspect terms with verbs aspectually not disambiguated in sentences and contexts.

A particular reason why biaspectuality was understudied or entirely neglected in Soviet and post-Soviet linguistics is that a large number of important linguistic subspheres apart from biaspectuality were *totally ignored*, among them nominal determination with the article-aspect interplay and the case-aspect interplay, the mechanisms of explication in Slavic languages with no articles of definiteness and indefiniteness, specificity and non-specificity, genericity and non-genericity. As part of the misunderstanding of aspect in Soviet and post-Soviet linguistics, it was *never conceptualized as residing at the level of the sentence and dependent on values of NP referents*. It was analyzed only and solely via the grammatical and semantic characteristics of verbs – and due to the oppressive influence of Soviet, post-Soviet and Russian linguistics on Ukrainian linguistics and aspectology, the above-mentioned spheres remained *undeveloped or underdeveloped* in the Ukrainian grammatical tradition.³

Let us check this assertion about the sidestepping of linguistic subspheres in one Russian grammar and some Ukrainian: Russian Grammar I/II (1980), Vykhovanets' (1993), Bezpoyasko et al. (1993), Plyushch (2010), Pavliuk (2010). The concept of genericity and the term *generic* in the first four are *simply absent*, while in all Western European languages *genericity* is a major concept for both theoretical and applied linguistics – without which numerous phenomena in the grammar of any language

² With minor exceptions, rare brand-new publications following modern theoretical frameworks.

³ The same is valid for the tradition of investigating almost all the other Slavic languages – they were also under the Soviet “scientific” dictatorship – with the exception of the Slavic languages in the former Yugoslavia and the Czech and Slovak languages for a short time prior to the Prague Spring.

would be doomed to remain unfathomable. Only Pavliuk's contrastive grammar of English and Ukrainian discusses genericity, peripherally (Pavliuk 2010: 149). Note, however, that although the Bulgarian analogue of the first four grammars above appeared in 1983, i.e., at roughly the same time or earlier, it registers genericity as a major linguistic notion (Bulgarian grammar 1983: 117, 129, 141–143). What is more, although it appeared in the communist period, it points to transformational-generative grammar (Chomskyan linguistics) as a major approach. Indeed, this is done condescendingly, in line with Soviet linguistics with the enforced dogmas and bans in it, imposed also on Bulgarian linguistics. Of course, the Bulgarian grammar continues the Soviet line with assertions about generativists who “do not understand that traditional grammar is actually generative” and that traditional grammar is also aimed at “establishing rules for correct language” (Bulgarian grammar 1983: 7). It is worth noting here that genericity has been analyzed recently in some detail, along with compositional aspect, in a Ukrainian publication on English and Bulgarian data (Kabakčiev 2023b).

2. Compositional aspect. This extremely significant universal language phenomenon was discovered a whopping 54 years ago by the Dutch logician and linguist Henk Verkuyl on data from English and Dutch (Verkuyl's mother tongue) in his 1971 Utrecht dissertation, published the following year (Verkuyl 1972). The discovery was soon recognized as a major breakthrough in linguistics – of course, only in the West (Friedrich 1974; Schopf 1974: 56–58; Zydariß 1976: 54; Heinämäki 1974/1978: 10; Dowty 1979: 3–64; Markkanen 1979: 54–57; Carlson 1981; Mourelatos 1981; Kabakčiev 1984). The finder of the phenomenon gradually developed his theoretical framework in many articles and in his second book (Verkuyl 1993). Later, five decades after the discovery of compositional aspect, the event was commemorated in a special symposium held in Amsterdam in 2021, attended by a large aspectological audience, and Cambridge University published Verkuyl's third major monograph on compositional aspect in which he sophisticated his theory further (see review, Kabakčiev 2023a). But, as frequently happens with scientific discoveries, the significance of Verkuyl's work in cross-language terms and its gigantic heuristic power remained *not fully understood*. Many aspects of the compositional aspect theory in its initial version were misconceptualized by the linguistic community: various fallacies occurred, some of them remaining to the present day. On a livelier note, aspectology continues its positive development: compositional aspect was recently described through modern theoretical approaches on data from other Indo-European languages – Albanian (Haxhillari 2024), and even non-Indo-European ones, Turkish (see Kutsarova 2025).

But whatever the meanderings of the theory of compositional aspect in Western aspectology, *in Soviet linguistics it received no attention for decades*. Later, after the collapse of communism and thanks to the increasing number of Russian researchers who went to work in the West, the theory of compositional aspect became more familiar to Russian and Slavic aspectologists. But their analyses continued to suffer from misconceptions, mostly related to the inability of investigators to draw the correct distinction between aspect at the VP level and the sentence level – deemed absolutely necessary by the finder of compositional aspect himself (Verkuyl 1999, vii).

2.1. What exactly is compositional aspect? This language phenomenon has been discussed in hundreds of publications – due to its fundamental, cross-language and universal nature. But many of the publications offer inaccurate or misleading descriptions of it. Some of the major inaccuracies and mistakes are analyzed below, in Section 4, *The incremental-theme trend*.

The nucleus of Verkuyl's theoretical model of compositional aspect boils down to two aspect schemata, perfective and imperfective respectively, described in Verkuyl (1993; 2022). The two schemata are exemplified in sentences such as (1) and (2), Verkuyl's own:

- (1) a. The bomb exploded [perfective]
 b. Greetje walked from the Mint to the Dam [perfective]
 c. Den Uyl gave the Labor badge to a congress-goer [perfective]
- (2) a. Bombs_{LEAK} exploded everywhere in town [imperfective]
 b. Policemen_{LEAK} walked from the Mint to the Dam [imperfective]
 c. Greetje spoke_{LEAK} from the Mint to the Dam [imperfective]
 d. Den Uyl gave the Labor badge to congress-goers_{LEAK} [imperfective]
 e. Den Uyl gave Labor badges_{LEAK} to congress-goers_{LEAK} [imperfective]

The sentences in (1) are perfective because they contain expressions effectuating boundedness – or “specified quantity of X” (Verkuyl's term) plus a telic verb. Conversely, (2) are imperfective sentences because each of them contains the so-called Verkuyl's leak (or leaks – i.e., expressions that are non-bounded instead of bounded): *bombs* instead of *the bomb*, *spoke*, a non-telic verb instead of the telic *walked* [from X to Y], *policemen* instead of *Greetje*, *congress-goers* instead of *the congress-goer*, *Labor badges* instead of *the Labor badge*. For more detail on the two aspect schemata, see Verkuyl (1993) and Kabakčiev (2019; 2023a).

2.2. Compositional aspect in its instantiation as an article-aspect interplay.

On the one hand, the phenomenon of the article-aspect interplay can be said to be an unsolved mystery in English grammars – for the time being. Why a mystery? Because although the phenomenon is without doubt a fundamental fact of English grammar, *it has never been present in any comprehensive or academic grammar book of English*, as well as in the literature on English language teaching. What is more, *it has never even been discussed*, with certain exceptions (two specialized grammars – Declerck 2006; Kabakčiev 2017) and in publications by authors following Kabakčiev's theoretical framework (Bulatović 2013; 2020; 2022; Dimitrova 2021; Dimitrova & Kabakčiev 2021; Shabashvili & Kabakčiev 2021; Bakardzhieva-Morikang & Kabakčiev 2024; Haxhillari 2024; Kutsarova 2025). On the other hand, the explanation of the article-aspect interplay is a good example of how an extremely intricate scientific phenomenon – here related to language structure, can be elucidated in a concise and convincing fashion using only four very short sentences (see below).

It is absolutely clear that Modern English features a fundamental language-internal structural regularity bringing together some grammatical entities that at first sight appear to have nothing in common: **articles** (*the*, *a*, zero article) and **aspect**, and the phenomenon is very appropriately called article-aspect interplay. Based on

Verkuyl's two aspect schemata, it has been demonstrated in Kabakčiev (2019; 2023c) by some sets of examples, usually consisting of sentences that appear to be simple in structural and semantic terms. In (3), the setting is a park in which there are kids and cats, and kids feed cats – individually or collectively:

- (3) a. The kid fed the cat [perfective]
- b. The kid fed cats_{SLEAK} [imperfective]
- c. Kids_{SLEAK} fed the cat [imperfective]
- d. Kids_{SLEAK} fed cats_{SLEAK} [imperfective]

The sentences in (3) do not deviate from Verkuyl's model of compositional aspect with its two aspect schemata, the perfective and the imperfective one. What these sentences contribute to the better understanding of compositional aspect is the representation of the idea of the article-aspect interplay *on uniform examples*. Of course, many other sets of similar simple (at first sight) sentences can be constructed, in which both the object NP referent and the subject NP referent take part in the explication of boundedness and non-boundedness,⁴ decisively contributing to perfectivity or imperfectivity, respectively, through the article-aspect interplay:

- (4) a. An opera diva will sing the Marseillaise [perfective]
- b. An opera diva will sing national anthems_{SLEAK} [imperfective]
- c. Opera divas_{SLEAK} will sing the Marseillaise [imperfective]
- d. Opera divas_{SLEAK} will sing national anthems_{SLEAK} [imperfective]

As already indicated, Verkuyl explains these regularities – but not on sentences such as (3) and (4) with uniform patterns. His explanations are based on sentences *without* uniform patterns like (1) and (2).

2.3. On the vicissitudes in the development of the compositional aspect theory. Compositional aspect was initially regarded as a variant of verbal aspect, and the latter was considered as if present in Slavic languages only. Until the early 1970s, the study of aspect was exclusively restricted to the study of verbal aspect in the Slavic languages, and was primarily focused on Russian, a language spoken in the USSR, a federation with a large Russian-speaking population. Another two major Slavic languages were spoken in the USSR: Ukrainian and Belarusian, the three languages together roughly constituting 300 million Slavic speakers, to which another 100 million speakers of Polish, Czech, Slovak, Slovene, Bulgarian, Serbian, Croatian etc. can be added. With 400 million Slavic speakers, aspect was considered by the majority of linguists then, whatever their theoretical leanings and backgrounds, as a phenomenon exclusively present in the Slavic languages, and Russian itself was perceived as “the representative Slavic language”.

3. Two emblematic but wrong statements on Slavic and “Russian” aspect, the first one made before the discovery of compositional aspect. Added to the widely held conviction in those times about aspect as a purely Slavic phenomenon must be two statements in linguistics concerning aspect particularly in Russian made a long

⁴ With the difference that in Verkuyl's theoretical framework boundedness and non-boundedness are atemporal features whereas in my model they are temporal.

time ago, in 1957 and 1974, respectively, by two reputable authors. These statements are well-known and emblematic but both are flawed – each in its own way.

3.1. The first statement on verbal aspect. It is Roman Jakobson's (1957), and it asserts that verbal aspect is a category *per se* that has nothing to do with participants in situations (Vendlerian situations, see Vendler 1957). This is a completely wrong thesis, an utterly defective description of verbal aspect (see below). Furthermore, it is misleading: see it refuted first in Kabakčiev (1984: 670) and later in Kabakčiev (2000: 172). But the especially deplorable circumstance at present is that the wrong assertion remains unchallenged by the aspectological community. From today's vantage point, its falsity is understandable as it reflects the state of the art in the middle of the 20th century in general linguistics – as well as in Slavic and Soviet (USSR) linguistics. What is *not understandable* is that, bypassing the exception just mentioned, in Slavic, Soviet (USSR) and Russian (post-Soviet) aspectology it *was never subjected to any criticism or doubt whatsoever, not even to a debate*,⁵ as though the refutation of a completely wrong definition of aspect never even occurred, and despite the fact that the refutation was published in prestigious publishing venues. If the disproof of an emblematic statement concerning a major language phenomenon is wrong, this poses an unconditional obligation on the linguistic community to expose the defects of the refutation. Four decades after the refutation it remains completely ignored by the aspectological community, for no specific reason – apart from the serious suspicion that the community lacks the capacity to deal with the matter.

Why is verbal aspect *not* a category *per se* that has nothing to do with participants in Vendlerian (Vendler 1957) situations? This is crystal clear from the analysis of the two sets of sentences above. For perfectivity to be effectuated in a sentence, it must have: (i) a bounded (through an article, some other determiner, quantifier, etc.) subject-NP referent; (ii) a bounded object-NP referent; (iii) a telic verb (see Verkuyl 1993). Imperfectivity, in its turn, is triggered by the Verkuylian notion of leak (one leak or more than one): a non-bounded subject- or (and) object-NP referent through a zero article or a non-telic verb (no matter whether the subject- and/or object-NP referent(s) is/are bounded or not. See also below (in 6.1) why Jakobson's assertion is wrong.

3.2. The second statement on verbal aspect. It is again emblematic, and highly problematic at the same time. It belongs to Issatschenko (1974: 141), and is the following: "Russian aspects are often considered to be awe-inspiring and mystical categories to be treated only by the initiated, i.e. by the native speaker". At its face value and on a first hearing, understood as referring to a widely held public belief, the statement may even appear correct. However, apart from being witty, it is also controversial, and was obviously meant by the author as ironic too. Issatschenko was trying to ask his readership in the 1970s – two decades after the birth of Chomskyan linguistics, a pertinent question that can be re-phrased thus: "How can it be that a grammatical category in a certain language may turn out to be subject to comprehension only and solely by native speakers of that language?" In 1974, when Issatschenko made this statement or, rather, asked this question, the phenomenon of compositional aspect had just been discovered and the theory based on it was then in its infant stage.

⁵ To the best knowledge of the author here.

4. The incremental-theme trend, a completely wrong way to explain perfectivity, yet popular to the present day. As pointed out in detail in Kabakčiev (2019: 212–218), misunderstanding of compositional aspect is especially rampant in numerous publications belonging to the so-called incremental-theme trend (Krifka 1989; 1992; 1998; Filip 2000; 2017; Padučeva 2004; MacDonald 2012; Tatevosov 2015; Czardybon and Fleischhauer 2014; Fleischhauer and Czardybon 2016; Martin et al. 2020, to quote but a few). See also some recent publications discussed below: Lessa & Salgado (2019), Karagjosova (2024), Dickey (2024). These two groups of papers represent an insignificant part of the enormous bulk of publications that either make no distinction between compositional and verbal aspect or fail to conceptualize the hallmark of the compositional aspect theory, namely, that *it is the sentence that is the domain of compositional aspect, not the VP*.

The advocates of the incremental-theme approach argue that in sentences such as *The child ate the apple* or *The child drank the milk* etc. “spatially bounded entities” such as *the apple* and *the milk* perform a miraculous jump from a physical feature in the referent of the NP into a temporal one, which is then transferred onto the referent of the verb. See this fairy-tale metamorphosis perfectly formulated by Padučeva (2004: 50): “the boundedness of a situation in time arises on account of the boundedness of the incremental object in space”. Phrased otherwise, when entities such as *the apple* and *the milk* are consumed to the end, their spatial, physical feature boundedness, marked by the article (vs the zero article), is mapped onto the V-referent and *the spatial feature miraculously turns into a temporal one*: boundedness in time with an achieved telos, perfectivity. It is worth noting that the advocates of the opposite approach, the one ascribing temporal, not spatial, features to NP referents, are much fewer in number. Among them, apart from Kabakčiev (1984; 2000; 2019; 2023a; 2023b), are Vounchev (2007), Dimitrova (2021), Shabashvili (see Shabashvili & Kabakčiev 2021), Bakardzhieva-Morikang (see Bakardzhieva-Morikang & Kabakčiev (2024), Haxhillari (2024), Kutsarova (2025). The latter two works mark serious progress in the cross-language understanding of aspect, providing proof, based on analyses by experienced linguists and simultaneously native speakers of the languages under study, that Albanian and Turkish, previously never analyzed in terms of the compositional aspect theory, definitely belong to the group of compositional-aspect languages.

What is the reason for the defect of the incremental-theme approach? It is that aspect is a sentence-level phenomenon. Somewhat paradoxically, the assertion of the advocates of the wrong incremental-theme approach that the verb-phrase domain displays aspectual properties is true. Phrases like *ate the apple* and *drank the milk* are, indeed, perfective – countering the imperfectivity of phrases like *ate apples* and *drank milk*. However, as explained exhaustively in Kabakčiev (2019: 212–218), the aspectual properties of phrases like *ate the apple* and *drank the milk* **are not necessarily and automatically transferred to the sentences** that they are parts of. Consider the following examples:

- (5) a. The beach-goer drank a glass of beer
- b. At noon the beach-goer drank a glass of beer in the seaside taverna
- c. At noon beach-goers drank a glass of beer in the seaside taverna, their wives and children stayed behind to swim

Sentence (5a) is perfective, falling into Verkuyl's perfective schema with a temporally bounded subject referent, a temporally bounded object referent and a telic verb – see Verkuyl's (1993) aspectual schemata and Kabakčiev's (1984; 2000; 2019; 2023a: 252) version of the compositional aspect theory, where in the latter the referents of situation-participants are temporal, kinetic entities, unlike in traditional grammatical descriptions with their illogical and simplistic notions of nouns referring to spatial, physical entities. Thus the reason for the perfectivity of (5a) and (5b) is not that *a glass of beer* is a quantified expression and that *drank* is a telic verb! The reason is different. It can be found at the level of the sentence, and it is that the subject *the beach-goer* is also a quantified expression. Sentence (5b) is here expanded with two adverbial phrases but it is again perfective as the adverbials do not counter the perfectivity – and actually support it. Sentence (5c) is, however, imperfective, although its nucleus, *drank a beer in the seaside taverna nearby*, is the same, and is perfective. Why is sentence (5c) imperfective then? Because, first, the adverbial *at noon* is capable of pointing to an indefinitely iterative (imperfective) situation also, not only to a one-off completed, perfective event. And, second, which is especially important, the new subject *beach-goers* stands for an entity which is a kinetic **non-bounded** object, in contrast to the kinetic **bounded** object *the beach-goer* in (5a). In other words, *beach-goers* and *a glass of beer* are not what traditional grammar wants us to believe: “two physical objects, each of which may comprise separate objects”. No! Here *beach-goers* and *a glass of beer* are **kinetic objects, re-occurring**: beach-goer after beach-goer, after beach-goer, and not a group of beach-goers sitting in the seaside taverna simultaneously, at the same time (see Kabakčiev 2025: 25).

5. The theory of the markers of boundedness on verbs and nouns across languages. Two and a half decades ago, a sweeping generalization was made (Kabakčiev 2000: 156):

languages display an inverse relationship between markers of boundedness in verbs and nouns. When a certain language lacks markers of boundedness in the verbs, they are present in nouns; and vice versa, when a language lacks markers of boundedness in nouns, they are present in verbs.

This inverse cross-language regularity was corroborated by a very important discovery, again made precisely at the turn of the millennium, by Leiss' (2000). Leiss explains how and why in Proto-Germanic the demise of perfectivity was accompanied by the rise of a definite article – not in a single Proto-Germanic language but in three: Old Icelandic, Gothic, Old High German. The birth of a definite article in these ancient languages was followed by the subsequent gradual rise of an indefinite article in the rest of the Germanic languages. The thesis of the inverse relationship of markers of boundedness in verbs and nouns was first endorsed as a significant generalization by Lindstedt (1986), later corroborated by Abraham and Leiss (2012: 326), Bulatović (2013; 2020; 2022) and Dimitrova (2021). It can also be illustrated on data from languages that are structurally different and genealogically unrelated: (i) Georgian, a non-Indo-European verbal-aspect language with no articles (see Shabashvili & Kabakčiev 2021); (ii) Albanian, an Indo-European compositional-aspect language

featuring articles with obviously a regular pattern of a definite and an indefinite article and a zero article (see Haxhillari 2024); (iii) Turkish, a non-Indo-European compositional-aspect language in which definiteness (and hence boundedness) can be grammatically encoded in the direct object and is otherwise explicated at the sentence level in subjects, indirect objects and adverbials through some very complex mechanisms (see Kutsarova 2025).

Never seriously challenged on data from any natural language, the thesis about the article-aspect interplay at the sentence level involving an explanation of the temporal values of NP referents in their interaction with aspect marked on the verb (Kabakčiev 1984; 2000; 2023a) was first confirmed by Vounchev (2007) on Greek and Bulgarian data, later by Dimitrova (2021) again on Greek data, by Shabashvili (Shabashvili & Kabakčiev 2021) on Georgian data, Bakardzhieva-Morikang (Bakardzhieva-Morikang & Kabakčiev 2024) on Ukrainian, Haxhillari (2024) on Albanian, Kutsarova (2025) on Turkish.

6. Some examples of recent misconceptions in aspectology. Below are several misconceptions concerning verbal aspect in Slavic languages and compositional aspect in English.

6.1. Misconceptions about Slavic aspect. Misconceptions about aspect that regularly appear in East European aspectology are frequently “exported” to the Western aspectological community from Soviet, post-Soviet and Russian writings or are directly developed in the West. Dickey (2024) claims to explain “Russian aspect” – which ought to mean verbal aspect, in cognitive terms,⁶ in a paper containing no assumption about aspect as something universal, although aspect as a cross-language and universal phenomenon was explained long ago, also in cognitive terms (Kabakčiev 2000). Dickey not only fails to interpret aspect as universal, there is not a word of mention in his paper about what aspect in cross-language terms is – i.e., outside Russian or the Slavic languages in general. In today’s understanding, aspect is universal, represented by two archetypes: verbal aspect, compositional aspect. Aspect was interpreted as universal innumerable times long ago, beginning with Vendler (1957) and Verkuyl (1972).

Dickey’s paper contains a number of fallacies beginning with the treatment of Russian as some “special Slavic language”, and that it is precisely the Russian aspectual opposition that is explainable “by cognitive approaches”. Discussed are three: the author’s, Langacker’s (2008), Janda’s (2004). The latter is described as portraying “the Russian opposition” between perfectivity and imperfectivity through two metaphors: “discrete solid object”, “fluid substance”. While these do appear to match the perfective-imperfective distinction and the boundedness vs non-boundedness contrast in perfective and imperfective verbs as lexical entries, some of Janda’s theses about aspect are plainly wrong, e.g. that: (i) in some languages (French)

⁶ It is inadmissible to label Slavic aspect (or, actually, verbal aspect) “Russian”. If this were admissible, verbal aspect could also be called “Ukrainian”, or better still, “Montenegrin” – and, in line with Issatschenko’s reasoning, “Montenegrin aspect” would be understandable by several hundred people only, native speakers of Montenegrin.

Russian aspect is expressed in “restricted contexts”, e.g., the past tense (Janda 2007); (ii) Russian biaspectual verbs are never ambiguous in context (Janda 2008: 181). The first one is a fallacy, recently debunked (Kabakčiev 2025), the second one is a misguided simplification.

As shown on data from Bulgarian (Kabakčiev 1984), Russian (Kabakčiev 2021a) and Ukrainian (Bakardzhieva-Morikang & Kabakčiev 2024), biaspectual verbs are *very often ambiguous in context* and for this reason capable of playing a significant role in aspectological analyses. Biaspectuality can be employed to unveil the essence of compositional aspect, the second aspectual archetype (the first one being verbal aspect). Just like aspect in general and verbal aspect in particular, biaspectuality is, of course, neither Russian, nor Slavic. It is universal, found in many (maybe even all) verbal-aspect languages, and is typically not disambiguated in context. See it – disambiguated or not, on Bulgarian data (Kabakčiev 1984: 649), Russian (Kabakčiev 2021a: 9–13), Greek (Dimitrova & Kabakčiev 2021: 187–194), Greek, Bulgarian and Georgian (Dimitrova et al. 2025; Shanidze 1980). The precise parameters of biaspectuality can be revealed by cross-language research, not by nitpicking into “Russian aspect”. The idea that Russian is “a special Slavic language” and aspect “a Russian phenomenon” is a political fabrication of Soviet linguistics, forged to amplify the grandiose myth that all things Russian are very special, beginning with the notions “Russian world” and “Russian soul”. Originating in Soviet times, the aspect myth grew into a widespread one and has been in circulation for decades in Soviet, Russian and Slavic linguistics in general, and sometimes even among the world’s linguistic community.

The mythical statement about “Russian aspect” as special and unique was recently analyzed (Bakardzhieva-Morikang & Kabakčiev 2024) and shattered into pieces. “Russian aspects” are not what Issatschenko (1974) labeled “mystical categories to be treated by the native speaker”. “Russian aspect” is *verbal aspect like any other* – in any Slavic or other language. The Russian perfective-imperfective contrast is not different in its general characteristics from the perfective-imperfective contrast in the other Slavic languages – like, for example, Bulgarian or Serbian (Kabakčiev 2021a; 2021b), or Ukrainian (Bakardzhieva-Morikang & Kabakčiev (2024) – or any other. Its general features are not different in Greek too, see Vounchev (2007), Dimitrova (2021), Dimitrova & Kabakčiev (2021), as well as in Georgian, see Shabashvili & Kabakčiev (2021), Dimitrova et al. (2025) or in numerous other languages – genealogically related or not (e.g., Lithuanian, Chinese).

Underlying the myth about aspect as a unique Russian phenomenon is Jakobson’s (1957) definition of aspect as a category per se that has nothing to do with participants in Vendlerian situations. Highly acclaimed for decades, this is a totally wrong definition! Exactly on the contrary, when languages feature no perfective-imperfective contrast in verbs, the aspect value in a sentence does not manifest itself formally (grammatically) in the verb but is the result of a very complex interplay between sentence components, especially NPs (Kabakčiev 1984; 2000; 2021a; 2025; Bakardzhieva-Morikang & Kabakčiev 2024). As for the verb in such languages, being aspectually ambivalent in the sentence, it has an impact on the effectuation of aspect,

but this role is minor. The mapping mechanism of transferring boundedness and non-boundedness from NP referents onto verb referents in compositional-aspect languages was first described in Kabakčiev (1984), later sophisticated in Kabakčiev (2000) – and the current status of this theoretical framework, partially based on Verkuyl's (1972; 1993; 2022), can be found in some recent papers (e.g., Kabakčiev 2023a; 2025).

In verbal-aspect languages, conversely, the aspect of the verb in a sentence maps the temporal values of boundedness and non-boundedness onto referents of situation-participant NPs, as shown in Kabakčiev (1984; 2000; 2023a) on Slavic data, including Russian. The regularity consists in an extremely complex V-NP-V interplay, first corroborated by Vounchev (2007: 86–87) on data from Greek and Bulgarian, later by Dimitrova (2021) on Greek, Shabashvili on Georgian (in Shabashvili & Kabakčiev 2021), Bakardzhieva-Morikang (in Bakardzhieva-Morikang & Kabakčiev 2024) on Ukrainian, Haxhillari (2024) on Albanian, Kutsarova (2025) on Turkish. Among these languages, it is not only Ukrainian that is a verbal-aspect language, Greek and Georgian are also. They are not Slavic but *feature verbal aspect par excellence*, along with all the Slavic languages.

The other misconception, of a technical nature, is that the perfective-imperfective contrast in verbs in what is infelicitously called Russian aspect is “encoded not only for tensed but also for untensed categories, including the infinitive, subjunctive and imperative” (Dickey 2024: 1). This means that the contrast is not encoded in non-verbal-aspect languages for untensed categories, in particular infinitive, subjunctive, imperative. This insistence has recently been shown to be completely wrong for Romance languages, see Kabakčiev (2025). For English it is again completely wrong, compare examples (6) – imperfective ones, and (7) – perfective. Each sentence contains either an infinitive or a subjunctive, or an imperative:

- (6) a. I want to drink beer [imperfective]
 b. I insist that I drink beer [imperfective]
 c. Drink beer, John! [imperfective]
- (7) a. I want to drink a beer [perfective]
 b. I insist that I drink a beer [perfective]
 c. Drink a beer, John! [perfective]

The regularity was revealed a long time ago by Vendler (1957) through his “time schemata” and was explained further, at the sentence level, by Verkuyl (1972). Later, four decades back from now, it was shown that not only is a sentence such as English (8a) perfective, its Russian correspondence (8b) is a mirror image of (8a), see Kabakčiev (1984: 644–645):

- (8) a. The boy threw a stone
 b. Mal'chik brosil kamen'
 ‘The boy threw a stone’

As already explained there, perfectivity in any language, whatever the formal means of its expression, “is performed by a temporally bounded agent [and] affects or effects temporally bounded objects”, on the one hand. On the other, sentences such as (8a) in

English and (8b) in Russian are very far from peripheral or exotic. They represent a supergigantic semantico-syntactic schema – valid for millions (literally) of similar sentences. Hence, ultimately, definitively, aspect is:

an all-pervading and perpetual process of mapping temporal features between different elements of the sentence, mainly NPs and verbs – and it does not matter whether aspect is verbal or compositional (Kabakčiev 2023a: 267–268).

In today's aspectology **there is not a shade of a doubt** that English sentences such as (1), (3a), (4a) and (5a,b) are perfective, while sentences such as (2), (3b,c,d), (4b,c,d), (5c) are imperfective. But exactly how are perfectivity in the former and imperfectivity in the latter realized? In Verkuyl's model this is effectuated through his two aspect shemata (Verkuyl 1993), a phenomenon that he calls "feature algebra" (Verkuyl 1993, 73). However, in my theoretical framework (Kabakčiev 1984; 2000) – based on Verkuyl's but differing from it in certain respects, the phenomenon of mapping temporal values (boundedness and non-boundedness) from NP referents onto the verb referent or vice versa is introduced as a universal aspect mechanism, valid for all languages. If mapping temporal values between NP referents and the verb referent in a sentence did not exist as a structural language phenomenon, aspectology would never be able to explain why the imperfective English sentences above are imperfective and why the perfective ones are perfective. In other words, it is not that "Russian aspect" is some special, unique phenomenon. Aspect is a universal phenomenon present in all languages, albeit in different disguises. The relevant English sentences, e.g., (5c), are imperfective because the temporal non-boundedness of an NP referent (*beach-goers*) is mapped onto the referent of the verb *drank*, and *drank* is thus coerced into non-boundedness and imperfectivity. Conversely, sentences such as (5a) are perfective because the temporal boundedness of the referent of the NP *a beer* is mapped onto the referent of *drank* – and *drank* is coerced into boundedness and perfectivity with a reached telos (for further detail, see Kabakčiev 2019: 208–212).

Thus the logical question now must be: how is it possible for referents of NPs such as *a beer* and *beer* and *a beach-goer* and *beach-goers* to be called bounded or non-bounded **temporally**? This is because *a beer*, *beer*, *a beach-goer* and *beach-goers* are **not** what traditional grammar with its utterly simplistic and illogical concepts wants to have us believe: physical objects. No! *A beer* and *beer*, *a beach-goer* and *beach-goers* are **not** "physical objects". Physical objects belong to the world outside the human brain, the material world. *A beer* and *beer* here do not belong to the material world. They belong to the world and means of communication between people and to man's cognitive machinery. They are temporal, kinetic entities belonging to language, a product of the collective human brain – which is non-physical. *A beer* and *beer* and *a beach-goer* and *beach-goers* have extensions in time that are equal to the temporal extension of the relevant verb referent they are associated with. In (5a,b) *a beer* is not "an object made of glass and full of liquid". It is a temporal, kinetic entity, bounded and existing from the moment the agent starts taking the first sip until the moment the last drop of beer is swallowed. Analogously, *beer* in (5c) is again not "some material

substance”. It is a temporal, kinetic entity, non-bounded, with an unknown starting point in time and an unknown end-point, whose extension corresponds to the extension in time of the referent of the verb *drank*. For detail on the temporal values of NP referents that are otherwise (in traditional grammar) labeled “physical and spatial entities”, see Kabakčiev (1984; 2000: 123–151; 2019: 208–212; 2023b).

To sum up, some publications in aspectology are trying to make the linguistic community believe, while actually misleading it, that Russian, along with the other Slavic languages, has some very special, even unique aspectual system capable of encoding the perfective-imperfective contrast in structures that are “untensed”, among which the infinitive, the subjunctive and the imperative. The underlying tenet is that other languages, without perfective verbs, cannot encode this contrast in untensed structures. As already shown here and in other publications explaining compositional aspect in languages like English, if these “aspectless languages” had been incapable of realizing the contrast in infinitival, subjunctive, imperative and other more specific semantico-semantic structures, no book written in a Slavic language, featuring perfective and imperfective values in verbs in the infinitival, subjunctive or imperative domain, could ever be translated into a non-verbal-aspect language. Of course, such translations *have been carried out successfully, with no fail, for centuries*. Therefore, it remains for the linguistic community to show that a consensus is desperately needed concerning the way aspect is effectuated in non-verbal-aspect languages and that such a consensus can be reached.

6.2. On some current misconceptions about aspect in English. Recent years have been relatively rich in publications about aspect in English. Two decades after the appearance of the only monograph so far on compositional aspect specifically in English (Kabakčiev 2000), a paper by Lessa & Salgado (2019: 11) employs Comrie’s (1976) model of aspect – which was adequate and revealing when it appeared decades ago but is now obsolete due to the fact that it takes no account of the theory of compositional aspect – because compositional aspect had just been discovered then. The paper offers a review on how certain English grammar books interpret aspect and reaches the unsurprising conclusion that none of these books mention perfectivity or imperfectivity. This is a shame in view of the significance of the English language in both scientific and practical terms,⁷ but it is also understandable against the background of decades of faulty reasoning and explanations that the indefinite past verb form in English (*played*) is “simple aspect”, while the perfect (*has played*) is “perfect aspect”. Meanwhile it is worth noting that some relatively recent English grammars actually started to admit that perfectivity and imperfectivity in English exist (see Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 118–125; Fenn 2010). But the authors of these grammars fail to explain where this aspectual contrast suddenly sprang from – to appear all of a sudden in the grammatical descriptions of English.

In contrast to the authors above (Lessa & Salgado 2019), two revolutionary papers, again from recent years, by Bulatović (2020; 2022) deliver exceptionally harsh, yet fully convincing criticism on the system of English language teaching worldwide

⁷ In my understanding as author.

and on English grammars, exposing a huge defect in both in the sphere of aspect and in what is standardly known as nominal determination (Bulatović 2022: 500–501):

the articles a and the have a key role in the signaling of [+boundedness], ... the zero article has a key role in the signaling of [-boundedness]; [CA regularities] have not made their way into research on article use by ESL learners; [CA] is not described in grammars of English, not mentioned in English coursebooks, and not taught in schools and colleges.

Another recent misinterpretation of aspect as a language-specific and a universal phenomenon on Bulgarian data has just appeared: Karagjosova (2024). Aspect across languages is verbal or compositional (Kabakčiev 2000: 3–6; 2019; 2023a), whereby compositional-aspect languages can also feature verbal aspect grammatically (as a rule imperfective, see, e.g., Kutsarova 2025 on Turkish). Conversely, verbal-aspect languages can feature compositional aspect, typically with the use of biaspectual verbs (Kabakčiev 1984; 2021a). Karagjosova's paper treats Bulgarian aspect as only verbal, a phenomenon indeed vividly represented in the Slavic languages, including (and especially) Bulgarian with the existence in it of both Slavic verbal aspect and the hybrid aspecto-temporal aorist-imperfect distinction. The problem is that while the author interprets English aspect as compositional, she discovers it only at the VP level, just like the adherents to the so-called incremental theme approach, see its defects explained above and in Kabakčiev (2019). As argued by the finder of compositional aspect himself (Verkuyl 1972; 1993; 2022), **compositional aspect is interpretable at the level of the sentence, not at the VP level**. Karagjosova's paper thus enters the category of publications offering deviant interpretations of Bulgarian aspect (see similar publications in Kabakčiev 2023c), in a Slavic language otherwise interesting because it differs from the other Slavic tongues in the grammatical structure of the verb.

Karagjosova's paper makes parallels with aspect in compositional-aspect languages but suffers from insufficient understanding of compositional aspect. The definite and the indefinite article, being the two most important and prevalent determiners, function across languages as markers of temporal boundedness – but the author has nothing to say about this. The regularity has been common knowledge for a long time on data from English and many other languages, see Verkuyl (1972; 1993), Kabakčiev (1984; 2000), Lindstedt (1986), Bulatović (2013; 2020; 2022), Leiss (2000) on three Proto-Germanic languages, Vounchev (2007) on Greek and Bulgarian, Abraham & Leiss (2012), on Greek see also Dimitrova & Kabakčiev (2021), on English vis-à-vis Georgian see Shabashvili & Kabakčiev (2021), see also recent publications on Albanian (Haxhillari 2024) and Turkish (Kutsarova 2025).

The article-aspect interplay has been instrumental in providing a definitive answer to the general and extremely significant theoretical issue why certain languages – all the Slavic ones (except Bulgarian), Georgian, Chinese, etc., and from the diachronic point of view Old English and the Proto-Germanic languages, feature perfective verbs and no articles. Conversely, other languages – Modern Germanic, Modern Romance, Albanian, Finnish, etc., lack perfective aspect in verbs and for this reason they feature

either a regular pattern of articles (*a, the*, zero) or a case system effectuating the contrast between boundedness and non-boundedness in NPs. The literature on Finnish is abundant, among the first publications of this kind see Heinämäki (1974/1978; 1984). On Albanian determiners, including articles and their functions for aspect, see Haxhillari's (2024) recent paper. For a highly intriguing example of a non-Indo-European compositional-aspect language, Turkish, see Kutsarova (2025) – a description of compositional aspect in Turkish which demonstrates for the first time the complexity of the mechanisms for effectuating aspect at the level of the sentence through the employment of various grammatical devices: the transnumeral, the accusative case, word order, functional sentence perspective – or combinations thereof.

7. Conclusion. Aspect is no longer a mystery for theoretical linguistics but aspectology is very far from a status of freedom from misconceptualizations and fallacies in the analyses of aspect – whether verbal or compositional. Even Verkuyl's epochal discovery of the phenomenon that led to the creation of the theory of compositional aspect, a linguistic tool with a gigantic prognostic power, remains misunderstood in an enormous number of publications on aspect today in both East and West. The East still suffers from the historic oppressive influence of Soviet and post-Soviet linguistics – burdened by the past hallucinations and idiocies of communism, including tacit or express bans on the use of the theoretical frameworks of “the imperialist enemy”. How can a politically unbiased aspectologist explain the *complete silence* in Soviet and post-Soviet linguistics on compositional aspect after it was discovered and made public in the world outside the Iron Curtain – as early as 1972? At present there are no such hindrances in the predominantly democratic Eastern Europe. But the keeping of mouths tightly shut for decades has taken its heavy toll on today's aspectology. Linguistics in countries like Ukraine and Bulgaria has a long way to go to be able to bring aspectology on a par with the real achievements in this important sphere.

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ON THE SYSTEMATIC MISCONCEPTUALIZATION OF ASPECT EAST AND WEST LEADING ASPECTOLOGY ASTRAY

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Abstract

Background: Despite decades of research, the grammatical category of aspect remains one of the most misinterpreted in both Eastern and Western linguistic traditions. In particular, Soviet and post-Soviet linguistics have perpetuated dogmatic views that overly associate aspect with verb morphology, often neglecting sentence-level mechanisms and the universal nature of aspect. Conversely, Western theories, though more open to modern frameworks, have introduced other misconceptions, such as the incremental-theme model.

Purpose: This paper aims to critically reassess prevailing misconceptions about verbal and compositional aspect, identify the consequences of Soviet dogmatism and Western oversimplifications, and advocate for a radical reform of aspectology based on compositional principles.

Results: The study demonstrates that aspect is not a purely verbal category but a universal sentence-level phenomenon shaped by interactions between nominal and verbal components. It introduces the concept of article-aspect interplay and argues that many traditional grammars and ESL teaching methods fail to reflect this interaction.

Discussion: The paper argues that a conceptual shift is needed in both Eastern and Western linguistics. It highlights how political ideologies have hindered theoretical development in the East, while theoretical fragmentation and superficial treatments have obstructed deeper insights in the West. Through extensive cross-linguistic evidence, the paper encourages a move away from outdated models and toward a unified understanding of aspect.

Keywords: aspectology, theory of compositional aspect, compositional aspect, verbal aspect, biaspectuality, Soviet and post-Soviet misconceptions of aspect.

Vitae

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