Aspectual oppositions in Bulgarian, Albanian, and Turkish

Victor A. Friedman (Chapel Hill, North Carolina)

As a Slavic member of the Balkan Sprachbund, Bulgarian has been the subject of numerous comparative studies both with other Slavic languages and with other languages of the Balkans. The Bulgarian verbal system in particular has been the focus of cross-linguistic comparison. In the context of Slavic linguistics, aspect has received the most scholarly attention primarily in comparisons with Russian, Polish, and Czech (see Dejanova 1966; Ivančević 1971; Flier, Timberlake 1985). In the context of Balkan linguistics, however, it has been the category expressing the speaker's attitude toward the information conveyed by the verb or toward the source of that information - be it labeled mood, status, evidential, or something else - which has constituted the focus of comparison, primarily with Turkish (the Bulgarian indefinite past and the Turkish imperfect anterior, both of which have Slavic counterparts in the Albanian and certain cases of the Bulgarian imperfect past; see Friedman 1978; 1980; 1981; Gerdzikov 1984). To be sure, work has been done on Balkan aspect on the one hand and Slavic expressions of speaker-attitude on the other (e.g., Feuillet 1981; Fiedler 1970; 1977; Koshmieder 1953; Kucarov 1978). Such works are by far the less common, however. Having addressed the problem of admissibility in Bulgarian compared with Albanian and Turkish in an earlier work (Friedman 1982). I shall examine here the problem of comparing the grammatical expression of verbal aspect in the same three languages.

At first glance, it can be seen that Bulgarian differs from both Albanian and Turkish by its use of what Aronson (1981) calls superordinate aspect, i.e., Bulgarian has the supraparadigmatic opposition perfective/imperfective, which is lacking in the other two languages. Aside from this difference, all three languages possess an imperfect distinction of the type which Aronson (1981) terms subordinate aspect, i.e., they all have two past tense paradigms distinguished only by aspect. Although numerous other past tense forms occur in each of these languages, for the purpose of focussing on the category of subordinate aspect as clearly as possible consideration will be limited to the simple perfective forms of Bulgarian (мная o xoopеето o пос тнее времени) and their most common Turkish and Albanian equivalents, viz. the Turkish past tenses in -di and -ydu (the mazzı şuhuți and hikayei hal of classical Ottoman grammar) and the synthetic pasts called e kryera e thjeshtë and e pakryera in Albanian (for literature on the correspondence of these paradigms to their Bulgarian counterparts Glăbov 1949, p. 229-270; Kacori 1972, p. 49, 54; Kalezēv, Ejubo 1975, p. 92, 113).

Leaving to one side modal and nonliteral uses, which nonetheless sometimes display striking similarities, examination of the standard grammars of these three languages reveals that the subordinate aspectual distinction under consideration is defined in virtually identical terms. Thus, for example, the Bulgarian aorist is defined as denoting an action: (1) which was performed or accomplished in a definite, concrete moment or period and stopped before the moment of speech (Stojanov 1983, p. 314); (2) which is past, stated as a fact, without indication of its relation to the present moment and without viewing it in the course of its development (Maslov 1956, p. 234); (3) comprehended in the entire continuation of its duration from the point of view of the moment of speaking (without the intervention of another point of reference). It likewise denotes an action directly witnessed by the speaker (Andrejić 1978, p. 190, §250) The Albanian aorist is defined as having a basic meaning of indicating an action completed at a definite time in the past (Buchholz. Fiedler 1987, p. 127-28; Domi 1976, p. 266; Newmark. Prifti. Hubbard 1982, p. 69). The Turkish aorist (d-past) is defined as denoting an action: (1) which took place at a definite time in the past and which the speaker knows about from his own personal observation (Underhill 1976, p. 48); (2) which is single, known with certainty by the speaker, and completely finished by the moment of speech (corresponding to the Russian perfective past) (Kononov 1956, p. 231); (3) which is past and witnessed/personal known (Ergin 1972, p. 298).

The following definitions are standard for the imperfect in Bulgarian: (1) A past action presented as unfinished at the moment which serves as the point of reference (Andrejić 1978, p. 194, §255); (2) An action contemporaneous with a past moment of orientation (Stojanov 1983, p. 327); (3) The form presenting a past action at the moment of its occurrence as an on-going process without indicating the time of its termination or its relation to the present moment (Maslov 1956, p. 235): (4) Actions which are contemporaneous and subordinate to the major successive narrative events. It may also denote independent but repeated actions in the past (Scotton 1984, p. 322-23). The definitions for Albanian are the following: (1) The imperfect indicates an action in the course of its development at a definite moment in the past without saying anything about its beginning or end (Domi 1976, p. 264-5); (2) It indicates the reality of an action over a period of time in the past (Newmark, Prifti, Hubbard 1982, p. 68); (3) The imperfect indicates an event in the course of the past which is characterized by imperfective aspect (Demiraj 1986, p. 713). Turkish definitions are all of the following type: A past action action (-yor) transferred to the plane of the past, i.e., an unfinished action taking place at a definite time in the past (equivalent to the Russian imperfective past referring to a definite moment) (Ergin 1972, p. 321-322; Kononov 1956, p. 238; Underhill 1976, p. 185-186).

These definitions and the fact of linguistic contact in the Balkans lead to the expectation of a considerable degree of isomorphism in usage, and many if not most examples confirm these expectations. Of interest here, however, are those examples in which this overlap does not occur. i.e. where a lack of the expected
correspondence indicates a difference in the semantic boundaries of the respective aorists and imperfects. In comparing translations into these languages the number of non-isomorphic correspondences is sufficient to warrant examination in the hopes of better understanding the meaning of aorist and imperfect in each language. The sources for this article were Bulgarian, Albanian, and Turkish translations each made directly from the Russian short story Suda čeločeva The Fate of [a] Man by Mikhail Sholokhov. As each Russian verb has only a single past tense with the superordinate aspectual distinction perfective/imperfective — the complexity of influence from the source language on the target language is greatly reduced, and any non-correspondences among forms in the translations are likely to be motivated by differences in the aorist/imperfect opposition.

Given the three languages each with the two aspectually distinguished tense forms that are being compared, there are six possible patterns of non-correspondence (I = imperfect, A = aorist):

- I II III IV V VI
- Bulgarian I I I A A A
- Albanian A I A A I I
- Turkish A I I I I I

Each of these possibilities does occur at least once in this text of about 10,000 words. The overwhelming majority of non-correspondences, however, follow pattern IV, a significant number follow pattern I, and the remaining patterns all occur too rarely to permit the drawing of meaningful conclusions (VI and V three times each, II twice, and III once). Thus of the six possible non-correspondences, the most frequent are those where either Turkish (IV) or Bulgarian (I) has an imperfect where the other two languages have aorists.

Some of the most typical examples from the corpus are given below, followed by commentary on their significance. Table I summarizes the presentation of languages is Bulgarian—Albanian—Russian—English. The numerals after each of the first four sentences refer to the page numbers in the respective works, all of which are listed in the bibliography under Sholokhov. The English translations are my own. I have ignored minor discrepancies in literal meaning.

### Type IV

1. Togda ots... (14) — Atěherė i ūna... (83) — Ben artik arakad... (14) — Tug... (597) Then I stopped... (57)

2. Uprvede dostupu... (22) — Ešir diš... (22) — Htba... (24) — Ešte... (24) — Danc... (24)

3. N... (28) — Chvě... (28) — A little bit and put... (28) — Ser... (622)

4. H... (49) — D... (595)

5. N... (48) — P... (555)

6. O... (12) — U... (15) — Bir... (15) — P... (15) — Son... (15) — T... (15)
Bibliography


Kapust 1943: Е. Капуст. Българският наречен език: книга за преподаватели на български език на другите езици в света. София, 1943.


Sourcées:


