

SLAVIC INCEPTIVE VERBS: ACCOMPLISHMENTS OR ACHIEVEMENTS?*

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Recent research on aspect point to what has become a generally assumed claim, namely, that there are (at least) two types of aspect. Syntactically, one is found within *vP*: *inner* (or *situation*) aspect and the other is found outside/above *vP*: *outer* (or *viewpoint*) aspect. Semantically, inner aspect is concerned with the *telic/atelic* distinction and outer aspect is concerned with the *bounded/unbounded* distinction (Depraetere 1995, Ramchand 2008, Smith 1997, Travis 1994, Verkuyl 1993). In this paper, I argue that while Slavic inceptive verbs are distinct from Slavic completive verbs, this difference pertains to the *vP*-domain. In particular, only completive verbs can be accomplishments or achievements; inceptive verbs are always achievements.

1. Slavic Aspectual System

Slavic languages have two so-called grammatical aspects: imperfective and perfective. The most common way to derive a perfective verb is by the process of prefixation, i.e., by a morphological process, whereby a verbal root combines with an aspectual verbal prefix/preverb, e.g., *pročítat* 'to read_{PERF}'. When the root surfaces without a prefix, we obtain an imperfective verb, e.g., *čítat* 'to read_{IMP}'.¹ Perfective verbs derived by prefixation are often grouped by Slavic linguists into three major classes: *completive*, *inceptive* and *delimitative* verbs, depending on which of event's boundaries a preverb that they contain specifies.

The objective of this study is to determine the morphosyntactic structure of inceptive verbs in comparison to less controversial structure of completive verbs. To do so, let us, first, establish what verbs belong to these two classes.

A class of *inceptive* verbs consists of perfective verbs derived by prefixation with inceptive prefixes, i.e., prefixes that encode the beginning-point of an event: *zapet*_{PERF} 'start to sing', *zarabotat*_{PERF} 'start to work', *uznat*_{PERF} 'come/get to know' *poljubít*_{PERF} 'come to love/fall in love' form a class of *inceptive* verbs. Perfective verbs derived by prefixation with completive prefixes, i.e., prefixes that encode the end-point of an event, e.g., *pročítat*_{PERF} 'to read (until the end)', *vypít*_{PERF} 'to drink (until the end)' form a class of *completive* verbs.

Importantly, completive and inceptive verbs are considered to be aspectually distinct, despite the fact that they both contain a 'perfective' prefix. Thus, while completive verbs encode the final boundary of an event, inceptive verbs encode the initial boundary of an event. This and other distinctions between completive and inceptive verbs prompted some researchers to postulate

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¹ All examples are from Russian.

distinct syntactic structure for these two groups of verbs, whereby completive verbs are analyzed as containing a prefix that occupies the ν P-internal inner aspect projection and inceptive verbs containing a prefix that occupies the ν P-external outer aspect projection (Borik 2002, Svenonius 2004, Ramchand 2004, Romanova 2007). Other researchers, however, maintain that in Slavic languages, all perfective prefixes, being telicity markers, should be analyzed as occupying the inner aspect projection (Schoorlemmer 1995, Borer 2005, Nossalik 2009). In this paper, I present some evidence in favor of the latter view. In particular, I argue that the distinction that we find between completive and inceptive verbs is limited to the ν P-domain.

In the analysis advocated in this paper, both inceptive and completive prefixes are assumed to occupy the inner aspect projection. This is why they are both telicity markers (Nossalik 2008). This being said note that inceptive verbs are, nonetheless, structurally distinct from completive verbs. For one thing, while completive verbs can be either accomplishments or achievements, the inceptive verbs are always achievements (unless coerced). To see why this is so, let us review the main distinctions between achievements and accomplishments.

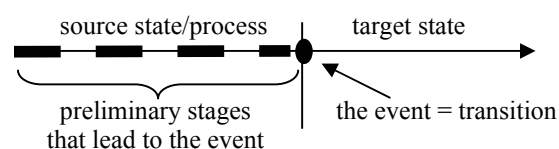
2. Accomplishments vs. Achievements

2.1 Achievements

Achievements are near-instantaneous events that signal a *transition* (i.e., change-of-state) of the *affected* argument (i.e., argument that undergoes a change-of-state) from the source state to the opposite in value target state (Dowty 1979, Pustejovsky 1991, Tenny 1992).

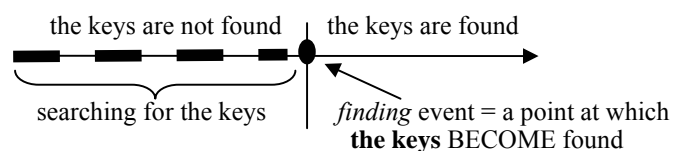
In (1), I provide the temporal schema of completive achievements – achievements that occur at the end of a state/process:

(1) The temporal schema of (completive) achievements:



To demonstrate the temporal schema of achievements with an example, consider the completive achievement *najti* ‘to find_{PERF}’ in (2):

(2) The temporal schema of *Petja našel ključi* ‘Petja found the keys’:



As shown in (2), the *finding* event is simply a transition of the *keys* from not being found to being found. Although the *finding* event generally marks the end of the *searching* event it is not, however, part of this event and can occur quite independently of it. Thus, one can find the keys without searching for them.

Because achievements are merely transitions, they only contain a predicate BECOME in their semantic decomposition analysis (Dowty 1979). Note that BECOME takes the affected argument as its ‘external’ argument and the adjectival phrase that describes the target state of the affected argument as its ‘internal’ argument. In the case of completive achievements, this argument coincides with the sentential object, e.g., *the keys*, as shown in (3). As a result, the target state of this argument is expressed by a passive participle form (PP):

(3) Dowty’s type semantic decomposition analysis:

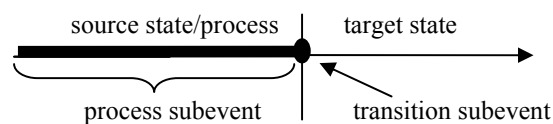
| | | | | |
|-----------|-----------------------|------------|---|--------------|
| Petja | našel | ključi. | = | |
| ‘Petja | found _{PERF} | the keys.’ | = | |
| Ključi | BECAME | najdennymi | | (Petej). |
| ‘The keys | BECAME | found-PP | | (by Petja).’ |

To recap, achievements are simply transitions. The process that leads to the transition encoded by a completive achievement is not part of the achievement’s temporal structure (Rothstein 2004, Travis 2005).

2.2 Accomplishments

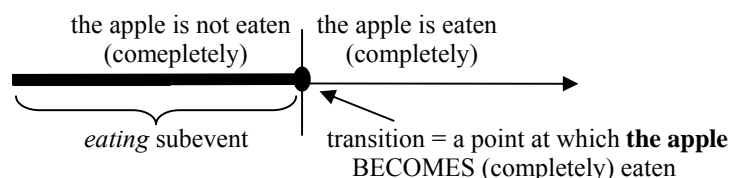
Accomplishments are events that consist of two sub-events: process and transition. In the course of the process, the affected argument undergoes a gradual change that culminates in a transition (Krifka 1989).

(4) The temporal schema of accomplishments:



To demonstrate the temporal schema of accomplishments with an example, consider the accomplishment *s'est* ‘to eat_{PERF}’ in (5):

(5) The temporal schema of *Peter s'el jabloko* ‘Petja ate an/the apple:



As can be seen in (5), the event encoded by the verb *s'el* 'ate_{PERF}' consists of the *eating (of the apple)* process which ends in the change of state of the apple from not being completely eaten to being completely eaten. To put it differently, the *eating* process ends when *the apple* becomes completely eaten.

Since the verb *s'el* 'ate_{PERF}' conveys both the process and transition, it contains the predicate CAUSE (i.e., a predicate that encodes a process subevent) and the predicate BECOME (i.e., a predicate that encodes a transition subevent) in its semantic structure in (6):

(6) Dowty's type semantic decomposition analysis:

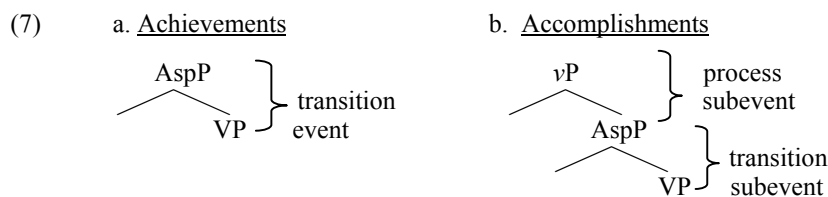
Petja s'el jabloko . =
 'Petja ate_{PERF} a/the apple.' =
 Petja CAUSED jabloko to-BECOME s'edennym.
 'Petja CAUSED a/the apple to-BECOME eaten.

Just like in the case of achievements, in the case of accomplishments, BECOME also takes the affected argument as its 'external' argument and the adjectival phrase that describes the target state of the affected argument as its 'internal' argument. In the case of accomplishments, however, the affected argument always coincides with the surface object.

In sum, accomplishments, unlike achievements, in addition to a transition subevent, contain a process subevent in their semantic structure. This semantic distinction is reflected in their syntactic structure.

2.3 Syntactic distinction: achievements vs. accomplishments

Researchers who adopt a syntactic approach to event structure usually postulate that the process subevent is encoded by a *vP*-projection (or some structural equivalent of it) and the transition subevent is encoded by a *vP*-internal *AspP* (or some structural equivalent of it) (Travis 1994, Slabakova 2001, Borer 2005, Ramchand 2008). Given such a syntactic approach, the achievements consist of a *VP* embedded under an *AspP*, while accomplishments contain an 'extra' *vP* projection, as shown below:



Having looked at the semantic and syntactic distinction between achievements and accomplishments, let us determine which of these two classes of events inceptive verbs belong to.

3. Are inceptive verbs achievements or accomplishments?

In this section, I argue that inceptive verbs are achievements. This claim is based on the temporal schema and the semantic decomposition analysis of inceptive verbs as well as on various diagnostics that classify these verbs as achievements.

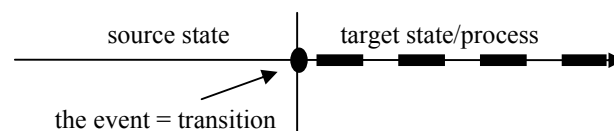
3.1 Temporal schema and semantic analysis of inceptive verbs

Inceptive verbs, just like other achievements, encode near-instantaneous events that signal a transition (change-of-state) of the affected argument from a source state to a target state. They differ, however, from completive achievements in that, instead of signaling a transition **from** a state/process, they signal a transition **into** a state/process:

- (8) a. Petja nashel ključi. The process of *searching of the keys*
 Petja found-COMPL keys. **ENDS** when the keys BECOME found.
 ‘Petja found the keys.’ *searching* event ≠ *finding* event
 (2 independent events)
- b. Petja zapel pesnju. The process of singing a/the
 Petja started-singing-INCEP a/the song. song **BEGINS** when Petja
 ‘Petja started singing a/the song.’ BECOMES singing.
starting-singing event ≠
singing event (2 events)

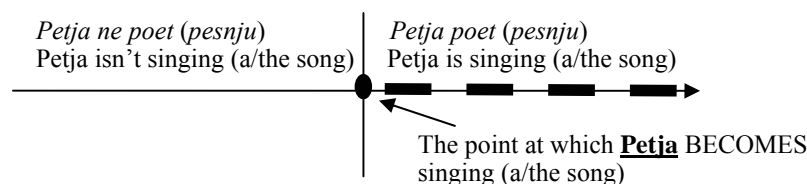
In (9) I provide the temporal schema of inceptive achievements:

- (9) The temporal schema of (inceptive) achievements:



To demonstrate the schema in (9) with an example, consider the inceptive verbs *zapel* ‘start singing_{PERF}’ in (10):

- (10) The temporal schema of *Petja zapel pesnju* ‘Petja started-singing a/the song’:



The important observation related to (10) is that the *singing* event that results from Petja's transition from non-singing to singing is not part of the inceptive event. Because inceptive verb entails this event, this fact is obscured. Yet, as we will see in the next subsection, inceptive verbs, being near-instantaneous, behave on a par with achievements and not accomplishments.

While inceptive verbs are similar to completive achievements, they are, nonetheless, not identical with them. Thus, in inceptive verbs, it is the surface subject and not the surface object that undergoes the change of state. Consequently, it is this argument that functions as the 'external' argument of BECOME in the semantic decomposition analysis in (11) and it is this argument's target state that functions as the 'internal' argument of BECOME, as shown in (11). Interestingly, because the adjectival phrase in inceptive verbs describes the target state of the surface subject and not that of the surface object, these verbs do not form passive participles (PP) but only active participles (AP).

(11) Dowty's type semantic decomposition analysis:

| | | | | |
|--------|---------------------------------|----------|----------------|---|
| Petja | zapel | | (pesnju). | = |
| 'Petja | started-singing _{PERF} | | (a/the sing).' | = |
| Petja | BECAME | pojučim | (pesnju). | |
| 'Petja | BECAME | found-PP | (a/the song).' | |

To recap, the temporal schema and semantic decomposition analysis of inceptive verbs reveals that they are transitions, similarly to completive achievements. However, unlike completive achievements, these verbs always quantify over the surface subject. Let us consider other achievement-like properties of inceptive verbs.

3.2 Achievement diagnostics

There are several properties that inceptive verbs share with achievements but not with accomplishments. In particular, just like other achievements, they have a slow motion reading, are incompatible with frame adverbials, do not form secondary imperfectives and can be intransitive. Let us look at each of these diagnostics in its turn.

i. Slow motion reading

Although achievements are near-instantaneous transitions, they can exceptionally acquire a slow motion reading, if the context permits such a reading:

- (12) a. Petja medlenno spel pesnju. **accomplishment**
 Petja slowly sang_{PERF} song.
 'Petja slowly sang a/the song.'
- b. ?Petja medlenno umer. **achievement**
 Petja slowly die_{PERF}
 'Petja died slowly.'

The sentence in (12b) is grammatical only if the *dying* (of Petja) was not near-instantaneous. Hence, the slow motion reading of achievement requires ‘stretching’ of the transition into a time interval. Unlike achievements, accomplishments can be easily modified by the adverbial *slowly*. In the case of accomplishments, however, this adverbial is perceived as modifying the process subevent. For instance, in (12a) *medlenno* ‘slowly’ modifies the *singing* process.

Now, consider the inceptive verb *zarabotal* ‘started working_{PERF}’ in (13). This verb allows for a slow motion reading, but only because in our world computers take some time to start working.

- (13) Kompjuter ?medlenno zarabotal. **achievement**
 Computer slowly started-working_{PERF}.
 ‘The computer slowly started working.’

The fact that inceptive verbs allow for a slow motion reading, whereby the transition encoded by the verb is extended to an interval, suggests that these verbs are achievements.

ii. Adverbial modification by frame-adverbials

Since achievements lack a process subevent, they sound odd when modified by the frame adverbials of *za* X-time ‘in X-time’ type (unless under a slow motion reading), given that these adverbials presuppose some temporal duration that these verbs, being near-instantaneous, normally lack.²

- (14) a. Petja spel pesnju za 5 minut. **accomplishment**
 Petja sang_{PERF} song in 5 minutes.
 ‘Petja sang a/the song in 5 minutes.’
- b. Petja uznal Mašu ???za 15 minut. **achievement**
 Petja recognized_{PERF} Masha in 15 minutes.
 ‘Petja recognized Masha in 15 minutes.’
- c. Petja zapel pesnju ???za 5 minut. **achievement**
 Petja started-singing_{PERF} song in 5 minutes.
 ‘Petja started singing a/the song in 5 minutes.’

² Importantly, the Russian frame adverbials of the *za*-time type, unlike English *in-X-time* adverbials, cannot modify the preliminary stages of achievements. Thus, while in English we can say *The train will arrive in 10 minutes* meaning that the train will arrive once the 10 minutes interval is over, in Russian we cannot use a *za*-time adverbial in the same context. To modify the preliminary stages of an achievement, one needs to use the adverbial *čerez-X-time*, e.g., *Poezd pribudet čerez/*za 10 minut* ‘The train will arrive in 10 minutes’. This means that *za*-time adverbials, unlike their English counterparts, are unambiguous, in that they can only modify the process subpart of an accomplishment. Whether other Slavic languages distinguish between the two types of frame adverbials still needs to be determined, however.

As we can see in (14), inceptive verbs similarly to other achievements are incompatible with frame adverbials. Only when we ‘stretch’ the transition part of the event into an interval, as in a slow motion reading, do the sentences in (14b) and (14c) improve to some extent.

iii. Formation of secondary imperfectives

In Slavic the present tense form of perfective verbs standardly receives a future tense interpretation. For instance, in (15a), the verb *perečitaet* ‘rereads_{PERF}’ despite its present tense inflection *-et* is interpreted as expressing the future tense. To obtain a present tense ongoing event reading, one needs to add a secondary imperfective suffix *-va* to a perfective form of a verb, as done in (15b):

- (15) a. Petja **perečitaet** knigu.
 Petja rereads_{PERF} book.
 ‘Petja will reread a/the book.’
- b. Petja **perečityvaet** knigu. *accomplishment*
 Petja rereads_{SI} book.
 ‘Petja is rereading a/the book.’
 ‘Petja (habitually) rereads a/the book.’

This being said note that the Slavic suffix *-va*, just as the English progressive suffix *-ing*, can only attach to verbal predicates that contain a process subpart in their temporal structure. Since achievements lack a process subevent they, in contrast to accomplishments, resist the process of secondary imperfectivization in Slavic, just as English achievements resist the process of progressivization (unless coerced) (Rothstein 2004). Consider the data in (16):

- (16) a. Petja **uznajet** Mašu v tolpe.
 Petja recognizes_{PERF} Masha in the crowd.
 ‘Petja will recognize Masha in the crowd.’
- b. Petja ***uznavajet/uznajot** Mašu v tolpe. *achievement*
 Petja recognize_{SI} Masha in the crowd.
 ‘#Petja is recognizing Masha in the crowd.’
 ‘Petja (habitually) recognizes Masha in the crowd.’

In (16), the perfective verb *uznajet* ‘recognizes_{PERF}’ does not form a secondary imperfective by the suffixation with *-va*. Nonetheless, this verb has a secondary imperfective counterpart derived by ablaut, i.e., *uznajot* ‘recognizes_{SI}’. What puts aside this form from the regularly derived secondary imperfective in (15b) is that this grammatical form does not acquire an ongoing event reading as a default. In fact, secondary imperfective forms of achievements, if existing, generally receive a habitual reading. Only achievements that are interpreted as having a slow motion reading which extends ‘duration’ of an achievement to an interval can exceptionally receive a

present tense ongoing event reading. Keeping this property of achievements in mind, let us look at inceptive verbs in (17):

- (17) a. *Kompjuter* **zarobotajet**_{PERF}. *achievement*
 Computer starts-working_{PERF}.
 ‘Petja will start-working.’
- b. **Kompjuter* **zarabatyvajt**. *achievement*
 Computer starts-working_{SI}.
 ‘Computer (habitually) starts-working.’
 ‘*Computer is starting working.’

As demonstrated in (17), the inceptive achievement *zarobotajet* ‘starts-working_{PERF}’ does not form a regularly or irregularly formed secondary imperfective.³ This suggests that this verb and, by extension, other Slavic inceptive verbs, are achievements and not accomplishments.

iv. Transitive vs. intransitive verbs

Achievements, but not accomplishments can be intransitive in Slavic (Filip 1999). This is because achievements can encode the transition of the surface subject, i.e., can quantify over the surface subject rather than the surface object. Accomplishments, on the other hand, always quantify over the surface object, given that their surface subject functions as the ‘external’ argument of the predicate CAUSE and, hence, cannot function as the ‘external’ argument of BECOME (see 6).

For example, the accomplishment verbs *pročitat* ‘to read_{PERF}’ and *s’est* ‘to eat_{PERF}’ in (18) are obligatorily transitive. In contrast, the achievement verbs *umeret* ‘to die_{PERF}’, *priexat* ‘to arrive_{PERF}’, *ujti* ‘to leave_{PERF}’ in (19) are intransitive, as they quantify over the surface subject.

- (18) a. *Petja* **pročital** *(knigi). *accomplishment*
Petja read_{PERF} books.
 ‘Petja read *(the books).’
- b. *Petja* **s’el** *(jabloko). *accomplishment*
Petja eat_{PERF} apple.
 ‘Petja ate *(a/the apple).’
- (19) *Petja* **umer/priexal/ušel**. *achievements*
Petja died_{PERF}/arrived_{PERF}/left_{PERF}.
 ‘Petja died/arrived/left.’

³ The Russian perfective verb *zarobotat* ‘is ambiguous in that it has two distinct meanings: an inceptive one, i.e., ‘to start working_{PERF}’ and a completive one, i.e., ‘to earn_{PERF} (money)’. Technically, this verb does allow for secondary imperfectivization, but only in its completive meaning. Thus, the secondary imperfective verb *zarabatyvat* ‘has one single meaning, i.e., ‘to earn_{SI} (money)’. It is ‘ungrammatical’ in its inceptive use, however.

Because inceptive verbs always quantify over the subject (see section 3.1), they too, just as other achievements, can be intransitive:

- (20) a. Petja **zapel** (pesnju). **achievement**
 Petja started-singing_{PERF} song.
 ‘Petja started singing (a/the song).’
- b. Petja **zabolel/zapljasal**. **achievements**
 Petja became-sick/started-dancing_{PERF}.
 ‘Petja became sick/started dancing.’

Overall all diagnostics that we have seen in this section disclose the achievement-like nature of Slavic inceptive verbs.

4. Conclusion

The morphosyntactic structure of Slavic inceptive verbs has been the subject of continuous debate in the literature. Starting with structuralists, the typical approach to these verbs has been that their morphosyntactic structure is fundamentally different from other perfective verbs, especially from completive perfective verbs. While completive prefixes are analyzed as occupying the *vP*-internal inner aspect projection, inceptive prefixes are believed to occupy the *vP*-external outer aspect projection (Borik 2002, Svenonius 2004, Romanova 2007).

In the present paper, I argue against this view. In the analysis that I propose, both completive and inceptive prefixes occupy the inner aspect projection. As a result, they produce telic predicates. Nonetheless, as I show in the present paper, unlike completive verbs, inceptive verbs are always achievements. Within a syntactic view on aspect, this means that inceptive verbs are simple AspPs or, to put it differently, that they lack a *vP* projection in their structure. This morphosyntactic distinction, however, pertains to the *vP*-domain.

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