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Оригинални научни рад

JAN IVAR BJØRNFLATEN\*

University of Oslo

Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages

## REFLECTIONS ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE OLD EAST SLAVIC<sup>1</sup> VERBAL SYSTEM

This contribution treats the overall issue of the transformation of the system of past tenses that occurred in the development of Old East Slavic to modern Russian. The divergent opinions concerning the relative as well as the absolute chronology of these changes are discussed briefly. It is argued that the actual recordings of imperfects and aorist in large numbers of texts make it reasonable to assume that the transformation is observable in late mediaeval texts. The attention is directed towards the development of the perfect in terms of the *l*-participle. It is focused on how the *l*-participle loses its meaning of current relevance and how it replaces the aorist. In this way several steps in the transformation of the past tenses can be observed, allowing for a detailed interpretation of how this radical change in the history of the Russian language proceeded.

*Key words:* Russian historical grammar, morphological change, past tenses, aorist and imperfect, perfect, current relevance, *l*-participle.

Some of the major changes in the Russian language, as it developed from Old East Slavic to the modern language, concern the verbal system. The verbal system underwent a drastic transformation that above all involved the past tenses and the emergence of the category of aspect. A majority of the Slavic languages underwent similar and closely related changes. In many Slavic languages, the original past tenses disappeared and were replaced by an erstwhile perfect. This structural transformation in several Slavic languages seems to be part of a larger context, as a number of other European languages underwent similar changes. In large parts of the German language area, the perfect turned into a single

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\* j.i.bjornflaten@ilos.uio.no

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the term ‘Old East Slavic’ will be used in lieu of the traditional term ‘Old Russian,’ i.e. *drevnerusskij*.

past tense and the original past tense was lost. In the Romance languages French and Italian, there are varieties in which one of two past tenses were replaced by a one-time perfect. All of these changes took place across a large linguistic area in Europe, and the general pattern is that a perfect acquired a new past time reference and replaced, completely or partially, the original past tenses. These comparable changes occurred in a number of contiguous languages, irrespective of genetic affiliation and makes it possible to define a European linguistic area. Within this linguistic area, the modifications of the tense system ran parallel to a number of other changes, which in recent years have made it possible to interpret common features and changes in European languages<sup>2</sup> within a broader framework. Notwithstanding the similar and comparable developments that can be understood as shared characteristics of a linguistic area, the changes themselves have to be investigated within the context of each single language. In this article,<sup>3</sup> an investigation of the transformation of the past tenses in Russian will be undertaken, leaving out data from other Slavic languages, while at the same time keeping in mind that many of the changes that occurred in Russian correspond closely to the changes that took place in other Slavic languages, transformations that were partially reflected even in a broader European context.<sup>4</sup>

As a brief introduction, a few basic facts will have to be recapitulated. For Old East Slavic, a system of past tenses<sup>5</sup> that more or less correspond to the system used in Old Church Slavic must be posited. Altogether, four past tenses can be identified: the synthetic tenses of aorist and imperfect, and the analytic tenses of perfect and pluperfect. For all of these tenses, complete paradigms for all three persons in all three numbers are illustrated in Table 1.

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<sup>2</sup> For a further discussion of the changes dealt with and the term 'European linguistic area' with further references, see HEINE, KUTEVA (2006: 36–48).

<sup>3</sup> This article is a revised and extended version of a paper presented November 16, 2012, at the 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the Association for Slavic, East European & Eurasian Studies in New Orleans.

<sup>4</sup> A concise presentation of relevant data pertaining to past tense loss in a European context, including Slavic, can be found in BREU (1994: 56–58).

<sup>5</sup> A condensed exposition of the original Old East Slavic verbal system is found in IVANOV (1982: 25–34).

Table 1: Past Tenses in Old Church Slavic.

|     | Aorist           | Imperfect         | Perfect             | Pluperfect             |
|-----|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 1sg | <i>viděchъ</i>   | <i>viděachъ</i>   | <i>jesmъ vidělъ</i> | <i>běachъ vidělъ</i>   |
| 2sg | <i>vidě</i>      | <i>viděaše</i>    | <i>jesi vidělъ</i>  | <i>běaše vidělъ</i>    |
| 3sg | <i>vidě</i>      | <i>viděaše</i>    | <i>jestъ vidělъ</i> | <i>běaše vidělъ</i>    |
| 1du | <i>viděchově</i> | <i>viděachově</i> | <i>jesvě viděla</i> | <i>běachově viděla</i> |
| 2du | <i>viděsta</i>   | <i>viděašeta</i>  | <i>jesta viděla</i> | <i>běašeta viděla</i>  |
| 3du | <i>viděste</i>   | <i>viděašete</i>  | <i>jeste viděla</i> | <i>běašete viděla</i>  |
| 1pl | <i>viděchomъ</i> | <i>viděachomъ</i> | <i>jesmъ viděli</i> | <i>běachomъ viděli</i> |
| 2pl | <i>viděste</i>   | <i>viděašete</i>  | <i>jeste viděli</i> | <i>běašete viděli</i>  |
| 3pl | <i>viděšę</i>    | <i>viděachę</i>   | <i>sęť viděli</i>   | <i>běachę viděli</i>   |

The most widely used past tense was the aorist. The second most used tense was the imperfect. The perfect was, however, far less used and can even be characterized as a rare tense in Old Church Slavic and in Old East Slavic. This is even more the case with regard to the pluperfect.<sup>6</sup>

In Russian and several other Slavic languages,<sup>7</sup> the past synthetic tenses aorist and imperfect have been replaced by one single tense that is a simplified perfect tense based on the *l*-participle as shown in Table 2. The main query focuses on how aorist forms like *pridoša* was replaced by *prišli* and imperfect forms like *idjachu* were replaced by *šli*. This simplification process can be illustrated in following way.

<sup>6</sup> The same could be said about the future perfect (Ivanov 1982: 32), i.e. *a kto budetъ načalъ*. Since this is not a past tense, it will not be discussed any further here.

<sup>7</sup> Similar and closely related changes have occurred in all the East Slavic languages. In the West Slavic languages, the original synthetic past tenses have been preserved only in Upper and Lower Sorbian, despite observations of their loss in Lower Sorbian and some dialects of northern Upper Sorbian. The aorist and imperfect are best preserved in South Slavic. In Bulgarian and Macedonian, these tenses have been preserved fully intact. Serbian and Croatian have kept the synthetic past tenses to a lesser degree, while in Slovenian they are only found as remnants in some dialects, e.g. in Resian in northeastern Italy (BENACCHIO 2002: 34–35, LENCEK 1982: 115).

Table 2: Simplification of past tenses in Russian

| (Aorist             | Imperfect)      | Replaced by | New Past Tense    |
|---------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|
| <i>ja pridoch</i>   | <i>idjach</i>   | }           | <i>prišel/šel</i> |
| <i>ty pride</i>     | <i>idjaše</i>   |             | <i>prišel/šel</i> |
| <i>on pride</i>     | <i>idjaše</i>   |             | <i>prišel/šel</i> |
| <i>my pridochom</i> | <i>idjachom</i> |             | <i>rišli/šli</i>  |
| <i>vy pridoste</i>  | <i>idjašete</i> |             | <i>prišli/šli</i> |
| <i>oni pridoša</i>  | <i>idjachu</i>  |             | <i>prišli/šli</i> |

The following observations can be made while considering these changes: The erstwhile four preterit tenses that declined in accordance with a verbal morphology – i.e. in person and number – were replaced by a single participle, the *l*-participle, which as a nominal declined in accordance to a nominal morphology – i.e. in gender and number. Consequently, Russian has developed a somewhat odd typological finite past tense that is not declined for person.

The emergence of the verbal category of aspect coincided to some extent with the transformation and simplification of the past tenses since fairly simultaneously with these changes, the category of aspect expanded from a lexically encoded category to a morphologically expressed category as well. There is, apparently, no reason to believe that the expansion of the category of aspect caused the transformation of the past tenses (MASLOV 1984: 255), since no direct link between these two sets of changes can be established. In addition, Bulgarian and Macedonian developed the category of aspect just as pervasively as Russian and other Slavic languages, while preserving fully intact the synthetic past tenses aorist and imperfect. The emergence of the morphologically expressed category of aspect in Russian will therefore not be dealt with explicitly here.

The aim of this article is to observe how the transformation of the past tenses took place. The present analysis is therefore above all an empirical study aiming at tracing as detailed as possible how the past tenses were replaced by the nominally declined *l*-participle, as observed in a set of texts from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In selecting texts from these two centuries, a certain position on the question about the chronology of the transformation of the past tenses has been adopted. It should nonetheless be made clear that opinions on this question differ vastly. Without delving into the research history of

the subject, it seems reasonable to mention the two main sets of opinion. The first maintains that the actual occurrences of all four past tenses in the earliest texts prove that these tenses have been a part of Old East Slavic. This means that the transformation of the past tense system must have taken place during the historical recorded period, since all four past tenses are widely documented in large numbers of Old East Slavic texts. If this assumption is correct, it implies, at least theoretically, that the transformation of the verbal system in some way or other should be observable in extant texts. This point of view was put forward by Russian scholars in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. KARSKIJ (1929: 24–25) considers the four past tenses genuine features of Old East Slavic at the time of the composition of the *Primary Chronicle* in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century. A similar assumption about Old Russian<sup>8</sup> formed the basis for van Schooneveld's well-known study of the finite preterit system in Old Russian. In his work, van Schooneveld (1959: 19) refers to the definitions of the aorist given by KARSKIJ (1929) and ISTRINA (1923)<sup>9</sup>. The aorist is defined as denoting an action taking place once in a limited, homogeneous interval of time in the past with no reference to durativeness or non-durativeness: the aorist is the main narrative tense. The imperfect signals an action taking place in the past with some duration and possible repetition, very often denoting a background for another action in the past (VAN SCHOONEVELD 1959: 34–36).

The second point of view is that an original situation with four past tenses did not exist in the Old East Slavic vernacular. Sobolevskij (1907) noted that the imperfect seldom occurs in early legal texts. And since legal texts were considered to reflect the Old East Slavic vernacular to a higher degree than other texts, the conclusion has been that the imperfect – even at a very early stage – had vanished from the spoken language. According to SOBOLEVSKIJ (1907: 234), the imperfect must have disappeared from the spoken language before the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Later scholars have claimed that the restricted use of the aorist in various types of charters, *gramoty*, and above all in the birch bark letters, suggests that the aorist cannot have been a part of the Old East Slavic even in its earliest stages (USPENSKIJ 1987: 144).<sup>10</sup> The imperfect and aorist, consequently,

<sup>8</sup> 'Old Russian' is used by van Schooneveld as equivalent to 'Old East Slavic'.

<sup>9</sup> This work of Istrina (1923) has not been available to me.

<sup>10</sup> Zaliznjak, on the basis of the birch bark letters, adopted a somewhat less radical point of view, claiming that the aorist was eliminated from Old East Slavic no later than during the 12<sup>th</sup> century, being preserved passively in Novgorod until the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Zaliznjak 2004: 173–174).

must already have been lost, or must have been in the process of being eliminated and replaced by the perfect *l*-participle in the earliest texts. The actual recordings in a large number of texts up until the 17<sup>th</sup> century are deemed to be due to Church Slavic influence or belonging to the Church Slavic register. In this way, the aorist and the imperfect are claimed to be part of the Church Slavic variety while their replacement by the *l*-participle were expressions of the Russian vernacular. It is evident that this interpretation fits excellently with the conception of *diglossia* in Rus and later in Muscovy, since the high and low varieties can be neatly distinguished by two different sets of past tenses, considered to be in complementary distribution. The more far-reaching consequence of this position is that it renders research of extant texts more or less irrelevant as the observable data are more or less stripped of significance, since they are claimed to be upheld solely by tradition and not linked to, or related to, the vernacular or the native grammar of the scribes.<sup>11</sup> This point of view has met with considerable opposition. Many scholars have refused to accept the two-language situation in Rus. The distribution of the past tenses has not been linked to the existence of two distinct languages or varieties, but to the *character* of the texts themselves. The restricted use of the aorist and the imperfect in legal texts and different types of *gramoty* can be ascribed to the non-narrative character of this kind of texts. In pure narrative texts dealing with complex past events, the whole set of past tenses is used. According to Lunt (1988/1989: 300),<sup>12</sup> the original past tense system persisted until the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. So, if a late dating of the transformation of the past tense system is assumed, the observed variations in the texts are not due to a situation where one variety forced out another, but rather to changes in the language of the scribes. Klenin (1993) demonstrated convincingly that this was the case in the development of the perfects, the *l*-participle, throughout the Laurentian Manuscript (1377), where ‘a gradual change across the whole text may reflect, albeit indirectly, a gradual implementation of an historical change’ (KLENIN 1993: 332)<sup>13</sup>. This paper

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed discussion of this and related issues, see Živov (1995).

<sup>12</sup> Lunt’s conclusion, with its polemic twist, goes like this: ‘It seems to me wrong-headed – even perverse – to claim that the early Russian authors were using a foreign system of verbal categories [...] it is more natural to accept that the narratives were written by East Slavs in their own language [...] The old verbal system was not lost by other Slavs until well after 1300: why assume, in face of copious and eloquent evidence, that a new system evolved in Rus’ before 1200, let alone 1050?’ (Lunt 1988/1989: 301).

<sup>13</sup> See Timberlake (1995: 36) for a related opinion.

will therefore claim that the massive occurrences of aorists and imperfects during centuries, for almost half a millennium, in thousands of texts, hardly can be attributed merely to the observance of bookish rules. For instance, when the main manuscript of the First Pskovian Chronicle, *Tichanovskij spisok*, almost exclusively uses aorist as the narrative tense, it is hard to believe that this was entirely due to the simple observance of bookish convention.

Table 3<sup>14</sup>

| Pskovskaja pervaja lětopisʹ: <i>Tichanovskij spisok</i> 1470 |      |        |
|--|------|--------|
| Occurrences of word-forms in the past tense: 2016            |      |        |
| Aorist   | 1702 | 88,42% |
| <i>l</i> -participle   | 177  | 8,77%  |
| Imperfect  | 137  | 6,79%  |

In addition to these considerations, evidence seems to support the assumption that the aorist to some extent was a productive morphological category, as possibly proved by aorist forms like *potčesja* in the Laurentian Chronicle *sub anno* 1015: the slaughter of Boris and Gleb, *na poli potčesja konь vь rvě*, ‘his horse stumbled in a ditch on the plain’ (CROSS 1930: 216). This suppletive simple aorist was formed from the verb *potьknuti* by means of a *nu*-drop and the first palatalization, cf. *\*potk-e* rendering the recorded form *potčesja*<sup>15</sup> and testifying to the productivity of the aorist.

The main claim of this article is therefore that the transformation of the past tense system in Russian took place well after the earliest recordings of East Slavic in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The transformation of the past tense system should therefore be expected to be observable in texts produced during the first half millennium of written culture in the East Slavic and Russian lands. It will also be claimed that relatively later texts can provide valuable data as they seem to contain patterns of language usage preserved from earlier manuscripts and their protographs.

<sup>14</sup> This table is based on the findings of Slettnes (2012).

<sup>15</sup> Aorist forms of this kind are not unique. Otten (1973: 235–236) lists several aorist forms of the same type, cf. *umolče* < *\*umolk-e* < *umolknuti*.

When exploring the transformation of the past tenses in East Slavic and Russian texts, the crucial issue in the process is the replacement of the past tenses of aorist and imperfect by the *l*-participle, which formed the basis for the perfect tense. While there is considerable disagreement about the absolute chronology of the disappearance of the imperfect and aorist, the relative chronology remains uncontroversial. The imperfect clearly disappeared earlier than the aorist. There is reason to assume that the imperfect was substituted by the *l*-participle well before the *l*-participle replaced the aorist. Consequently, the *l*-participle must have taken over for the imperfect well before the composition of the texts investigated below. Granted that this is the case, the investigation of the transformation of the past tense in texts from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries turns out to be a question of how the aorist was replaced by the *l*-participle. In order to do that, we should take a closer look at the aorist and the *l*-participle. The aorist was, as mentioned above, the main past tense in Old Church Slavic as well as in Old East Slavic and in more recent texts. The aorist was used “to present a happening in the past in the simplest possible way” (VAN SCHOONEVELD 1959: 20). The aorist was the narrative tense *per se* in that sense. It located events in the past with no regard to duration or repetition.

So, in order to explore how the perfect, the *l*-participle, came to replace the aorist, we need to consider the nature of the perfect and how it must be supposed to have differed from the aorist. As already mentioned, the perfect seems originally to have been a rather rare verbal form (IVANOV 1982: 92). Consequently, it seems appropriate to ask how this rare, infrequent form came to replace the most frequent of all past tense forms. How did this rare perfect become the single past tense form in Russian? The perfect must necessarily have undergone an extensive fundamental semantic expansion in order to acquire a meaning synonymous or nearly synonymous with the aorist in order to be able to replace it and become the single past tense form. The most conspicuous morphological change in the perfect is the loss of the copula *byt’*. The loss of the copula is obviously linked to the evolution of the meaning of the perfect. The presence or absence of the copula is instrumental to the transformation of the erstwhile non-finite nominal *l*-participle into a finite verb form. Further, the loss of the copula can be considered as a process of synthetization of the perfect (Maslov 1984: 253). With regard to the Slavic languages, the synthetization of the perfect, or some degree of it, has taken place in all the languages that have lost the synthetic past tenses aorist and imperfect. In contrast, Bulgarian and Macedonian have pre-



served the analytic perfect and the synthetic past tenses aorist and imperfect. The process leading from a non-finite *l*-participle with copula to a finite *l*-participle without copula seems to have lasted for a number of centuries after the earliest recordings of Old East Slavic. Initially, the copula was present, and it was apparently omitted only when an expressed subject was at hand. At a later period, vacillation in the use of the copula cannot be linked to the presence or absence of an expressed subject, but must be linked to changes in the meaning of the *l*-participle. As a point of departure, however, I will not distinguish between perfects with or without copula, considering that the meaning of the perfect is expressed by the *l*-participle with as well as without copula.<sup>16</sup>

A closer look at the perfect is therefore called for. The first point to emphasize is that the perfect – in contrast to the aorist – is a complex tense, since an understanding of the perfect has to take into account that the perfect involves two temporal planes, the past and the present. The aorist, on the other hand, involves just one temporal plane, the past. The perfect encodes an action or event in the past that has relevance to the present. The perfect is thus detached from other events located in the past only and is therefore non-narrative since the perfect denotes current relevance of a past event. Current relevance, can, however, mean different things. While the meaning of the perfect proper just indicates the continuing present relevance of a past situation (COMRIE 1976: 52), current relevance can be resultative in the sense that ‘a state exists as a result of a past action’ (LINDSTEDT 2000: 327). This distinction of the perfect’s meaning as resultative and perfect proper illustrates that the perfect can shade into several meanings, making up a set of meanings. In Old East Slavic texts, the perfect has been assumed to have had or to have acquired – in addition to its perfect and resultative meaning – also a backgrounding meaning. The perfect makes up a frame within which other events have taken place. This backgrounding meaning could have developed in Old East Slavic as a consequence of the replacement of the imperfect by the *l*-participle, since one of the basic features of the meaning of the imperfect was that of accompanying another fact or action (van SCHOONEVELD 1959: 34).<sup>17</sup> This backgrounding meaning might

<sup>16</sup> These are considerations that are valid independently of the chronology that might be assigned to the disappearance of the aorist.

<sup>17</sup> This meaning of the imperfect was originally formulated by Havránek (1939: 227), who considers that the aorist was an unmarked past tense as opposed to the marked past tense of the imperfect: “Cette marque complémentaire de l’imparfait doit être cherché dans ce qu’il exprime un fait, une action accompagnant un autre fait ou une

also be related to an experimental meaning of the perfect that had developed from the meaning of current relevance (LINDSTEDT 2000: 369). Comrie and Lindstedt define experimental meaning as “a given situation [that] has held at least once during some time in the past leading up to the present” and which typically occurs in questions and negative constructions (COMRIE 1976: 58, LINDSTEDT 2000: 369). This paper will focus on the following two meanings of the perfect: the resultative/perfective and the backgrounding/experimental.

If the perfect originally or at some point had these two meanings, it means that the perfect also must have developed a third narrative meaning in order to be able to replace the aorist. I have therefore explored the interplay between the aorist and the *l*-participle through an investigative perusal of the text of the famous *Zadonščina*: ‘The Tale of the Battle Beyond Don,’ which took place in 1380. This is a relatively short text preserved in 5 manuscripts, representing two versions, one short version and one extended version. The oldest manuscript, No. 1, is the short version, while No. 2 is based on a fragment of the extended version. The remaining three manuscripts all are versions of the extended version. The present investigation takes into account the oldest manuscript, No. 1, from 1476; No. 3 from 1550; and the most recent, No. 5, dating from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Table 4).

Table 4

| ‘The Tale of the Battle Beyond Don’: <i>Zadonščina</i> – the manuscripts <sup>18</sup> :  |
|---|
| 1. <i>Kirillo-Belozerskij spisok</i> , (short version), 1476  |
| 2. <i>Spisok istoričeskogo muzeja 1</i> , fragment of extended version, turn of 15 <sup>th</sup> and 16 <sup>th</sup> centuries |
| 3. <i>Spisok istoričeskogo muzeja 2</i> , extended version, end of 16 <sup>th</sup> , beginning of 17 <sup>th</sup> century.    |
| 4. <i>Undol’skij spisok</i> , extended version, mid 17 <sup>th</sup> century  |
| 5. <i>Sinodal’nyj spisok</i> , extended version, second half of 17 <sup>th</sup> century, with Belorussian features             |

autre action.” The replacement of imperfects with this meaning by *l*-participles was also adumbrated by Kleinin (1995: 87) and is obviously an issue that deserves more detailed study.

<sup>18</sup> All references to the manuscripts of *Zadonščina* are based on the edition prepared by Adrianova-Peretc 1947 and Adrianova-Peretc 1948. Further analysis and research on the manuscript tradition of *Zadonščina* is found in Frček (1948), Jakobson & Worth (1963) and Vaillant (1967).

Table 5

| <i>Zadonščina: Kirillo-Belozerskij spisok, (short version) 1476</i> |    |        |
|---|----|--------|
| Occurrences of word-forms in the past tense: 37                     |    |        |
| Aorist  | 21 | 56,75% |
| <i>l</i> -participle  | 11 | 29,72% |
| Imperfect   | 3  | 8,10%  |
| Conditional   | 2  | 5,04%  |

In Table 5, the results of the investigation of the past tenses in the oldest manuscript of *Zadonščina* are presented. The main past tense used is the aorist with almost 60 % of all past-tense occurrences. Below, all 11 extant *l*-forms will be analyzed according to the following meanings:

Table 6:

**Meanings of the perfects/*l*-participles:**

- a) Conditional
- b) Resultative/perfective
- c) Backgrounding/experimental
- d) Narrative

**Conditional:**

- (7,1) *Slavii ptica, čto by esi vyščekotal sia dva brata*  
‘O, nightingale, bird of summer, if only you [...] could glorify with your song the two brothers...’ (Jakobson & Worth 1963: 57)<sup>19</sup>
- (7.2) *lučši by esmja sami na svoi meči naverglisja*  
‘Il vaudrait mieux pour nous nous jeter nous-mêmes sur nos épées (Vaillant: 1967: 26)  
‘It would have been better for us if we had thrown ourselves on our swords’ (JIB)

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<sup>19</sup> Some of the translations are taken from Jakobson & Worth (1963). Since their aim is to present a reconstructed protograph for the extant manuscripts of *Zadonščina*, the actual recorded text does not always coincide with the reconstructed one. Translations from Jakobson & Worth (1963) are therefore used only in cases when their reconstructed text is identical with the extant text. In some cases, Vaillant’s translations to French are adduced. In all other cases, the author’s own translations have been adduced and annotated JIB.

**Resultative/perfective:**

- (7.3) *‘Togdy aki orli slětošasja so vseja polunoščnyja strany. To ti ne orli slětošasja, sьčchalisja vsě knjazi ruskysja k velikomu knjazju Dimitriju Ivanoviču na posobь, arkuči takь’*  
 ‘Then like eagles flew from all of the northern land. But not eagles flew, all Russian princes have gathered to help Dimitriji Ivanovič, speaking thus:’(JIB) (resultative –the princes are here now)
- (7.4) *Gnězdo esmja byli edino knjazja velikago Ivana Danil*  
 ‘We have been one breed of Grand Prince Ivan Danil’ (JIB) (resultative: we still are)
- (7.5) *Dosjudy esmja byli, brate, nikudy izobiženy*  
 ‘So far we have not been offended’ (JIB)(resultative: we still are not)
- (7.6) *Done, Done, bystrii Done, prošel esi zemlju poloveckuju*  
 ‘Don, Don, swift river, you have cut through the Polovtsian land’ (JIB), (clearly resultative, underlined by present tense copula)  
*‘Don, Don, Don rapide, tu as traversé la terre des Polovtses’*(Vaillant 1967: 26)
- (7.7) *probil esi berezi charaužnyja.*  
 ‘you have broken the iron riverbanks’ (JIB), (resultative)

**Backgrounding/experimental:**

- (7.8) *zaneže ich bylo mužestvo i želanie za zemlju Russьkiju i věru*  
 ‘pour la vaillance qu’ils ont eue et leur passion pour la terre russe (Vaillant 1967: 23)  
 ‘for which has been their courage and passion for the Russian land and the Christian faith’ (JIB)
- (7.9) *Zemlja esi ruskaja kak esi byla za carem za solomon*  
 ‘The Russian land you are, as you have been since the time of Czar Salomon’ (JIB) (Backgrounding/experimental)
- (7.10) *‘to ti byli ne serye volci’*  
 ‘but they were not grey wolves’ (JIB)

**Narrative:**

- (7.11) *Ni odina mati čada izostala,*  
 ‘Many a mother/not one mother lost their offspring’ (JIB)
- (7.12) *i ženy boljarskysja mužei svoich i ospodarev ostali, glagoljušče k sebě:*  
 ‘and the wives of the boyars left behind their husbands and lords, saying to themselves:’ (JIB)
- (7.13) *Oni bo vznjalisja kak sokoli so zemli ruskysja na polja polovetcija*  
 ‘Car eux se sont élevés comme des faucons de la terre russe...’ (VAILLANT 1967: 24)  
 ‘For they ascended like falcons from the Russian land to the plains of the Polovtsians’ (JIB)

In the *Kirillo-Belozerskij* manuscript, only three cases can be found in which an *l*-participle has acquired a narrative meaning and replaced an aorist. The remaining cases show that the non-narrative meaning of the *l*-participles is still intact in the large majority of the recorded cases.

Table 7

| <i>Zadonščina: Kirillo-Belozerskij spisok, (short version) 1476</i> |   |        |
|---|---|--------|
| Occurrences of perfects/ <i>l</i> -participles: 16                  |   |        |
| Non-narrative/resultative   | 8 | 38,46% |
| Narrative   | 3 | 23,07% |
| Backgrounding   | 3 | 23,07% |
| Conditional   | 2 | 15,38% |

We now move on to the younger, extended versions of *Zadonščina*.

Table 8

| <i>Zadonščina: Spisok istoričeskogo muzeja 1, (extended version) 1550</i> |    |        |
|---|----|--------|
| Occurrences of word-forms in the past tense: 108                          |    |        |
| Aorist  | 53 | 49,07% |
| <i>l</i> -participle  | 47 | 43,51% |
| Imperfect   | 7  | 6,48%  |
| Conditional   | 1  | 0,92%  |

The manuscript from the historical museum contains the longest of the extended versions of this tale. The number of past-tense occurrences is consequently much larger, altogether 108 of which a little less than half – 47 – are *l*-participles. The *l*-participles were analyzed according to the same meanings as above.

- a) Resultative/perfective
- b) Backgrounding/experimental
- c) Conditional
- d) Narrative

Let us first consider a typical narrative use of the aorist and of the *l*-participles, then go on to the non-narrative/resultative use of them, and finally look into possible instances of backgrounding uses of this verb form.

In (9.1) a string of past events succeed each other, encoded by aorist. In (9.2) a similar string of past events is encoded by *l*-participles.

#### **Narrative aorist:**

- (9.1) *‘Dmitrej Ivanovič i brat ego knjazь Vladimer Ondrěevič...poostriša serdca svoja mužestvom i napolnišas ratnago ducha i ustaviša sebe chramnyja polьky v russkoj zemli i pomjanuša praděda svoego...’*  
 ‘Dmitrij Ivanovič and his brother Vladimer Ondrěevič...tested their minds with firmness, sharpened their hearts with manliness and were filled with martial spirit and drew up their battalions in the Russian land, recalling their grandfathers...’ (Jakobson&Worth 1963: 56)

#### **Narrative *l*-participle:**

- (9.2) *sovolě i krečety za Don perevezlis i načchali rustii synove na silnuju ratь tatarьskoju, udarišas kopi charaužničьnymi o dospechy tatarьskuja, vьzgremlě meči bulatnyja* (all prefixed)  
 ‘...the falcons moved to the other side of Don and the sons of Rus’ attacked the strong army of the Tatars, with lances of iron the Tatars’ armor were hit, swords of steel sounded’ (JIB).

#### **Non-narrative *l*-participle:**

- (9.3) *Done, Done, bystraja reka priryla esi gory kamennyja, tečeši v zemlju poveckuju*  
 ‘Don, Don, swift river, you have cut through the stone mountains, you flow into the Polovtsian land’ (Jakobson& Worth 1963: 61); (clearly resultative, underlined by present tense verb)
- (9.4) *Čemu esi u nas muží naši zalelějala v zemlju poloveckuju*  
 ‘Why did you lure our husbands to the land of the Polovtsians’ (JIB), (and they are still there)
- (9.5) *Položili este golovy za ruskuju zemlju i za věru chřěstьjanьskuju*  
 ‘You have laid (down your) heads for the Russian land and the Christian faith’ (JIB) (resultative)

#### **Backgrounding/experimental:**

- (9.6) *Otpalo mužьstvo ich i pěnie ich*  
 ‘faded their courage and their song’ (JIB)
- (9.7) *Iz utra bilis do poludьni v subotu na rožestvo svjatii bogorodicy*  
 ‘They fought from morning to midday the Saturday of the birth of the Holy God’s mother’ (JIB)

- (9.8) *.knjaz...pobedil i povorotil...knjazi padoša...trupi polja nasejaša, a kroviju pro-tekli rěky*  
 ‘the prince vanquished and turned... the princes fell... bodies sowed the fields... rivers flew like blood’ (JIB)<sup>20</sup>

Table 9

| <i>Zadonščina: Spisok istoričeskogo muzeja 2, (extended version) 1550</i> |    |        |
|---|----|--------|
| Occurrences of perfects/ <i>l</i> -participles: 49                        |    |        |
| Non-narrative/resultative   | 12 | 24,48% |
| Narrative   | 23 | 46,97% |
| Backgrounding   | 11 | 22,44% |
| Pluperfect/Conditional  | 3  | 6,11%  |

The investigation of the behavior of the *l*-participles in the historical museum manuscript shows that roughly half of the *l*-participles recorded are used in a narrative sense. Manuscript No. 3 shows a considerable increase in the use of *l*-participles in the narrative sense compared to that of the manuscript No. 1, which is generally considered to be close to the original version of the *Tale*. The significant number of *l*-participles with a backgrounding sense seems, nevertheless, to have become more stable, probably reflective of the use of the *l*-participle at the time of the composition of the very first text of the *Tale*. This also concurs with observations of the *l*-participle made in other Old East Slavic texts.

The *Sinodal’nyj spisok* is the youngest of the five manuscripts of the *Tale*, and has clearly West-Russian or even Belorussian features. As can be seen from the table, approximately one half of the recorded past tenses are *l*-participles.

Table 10

| <i>Zadonščina: Sinodal’nyj spisok, (extended version) 17th century</i> |    |        |
|--|----|--------|
| Occurrences of word-forms in the past tense: 91                        |    |        |
| Aorist   | 41 | 45,05% |
| <i>l</i> -participle   | 45 | 49,45% |
| Imperfect  | 5  | 5,49%  |

<sup>20</sup> In the *Undol’skij spisok*, which has not been discussed here, the *l*-participle without a prefix has a clear backgrounding meaning; while all these things were happening, ‘Don flew with blood three days’: *a Don tri dni kroviju tekla*.

The 45 perfects can be further subdivided into:

**Narrative perfects/ I-participles:**

- (11.1) *Govoril* knjaz Dmitrej Ivanovič bratu svoemu  
‘Dmitrej Ivanovič said to his brother’ (JIB)
- (11.2) *Togda* knjaz Dmitrij *zaplakal* garko i reče:  
‘Then prince Dmitrij burst into bitter tears and said’ (JIB)
- (11.3) ...*vzjal* meč svoj v pravuju ruku i pomolisja bogu  
‘...took his sword in the right hand and prayed to God’ (JIB)
- (11.4) *Togda* gusi *vozgagatali* i lebedi *vozpleskali* krilami svoimi.  
(Nr. 3: *vozgagataša, vozplekaša*)  
‘Then the geese began to cackle and the swans to slash with their wings’ (JAKOBSON & WORTH 1963: 58)
- (11.5) *i mnogija* ordy *pogibli* i glavy svoi *poterali*  
‘and many from the Horde perished and lost their heads’ (JIB)
- (11.6) *vosplakali* knegini i bojarini izbiennyh mužej  
‘princesses and bojarinas burst into tears for their killed husbands’ (JIB)
- (11.7) *položyli* golovy svoja ot svjatyja božyja cerkvi  
‘laid down their heads for God’s holy church’ (JIB)

**Non-narrative resultative perfects:**

- (11.8) *paganyi* Mamaj *prišel* i voevodstvo *privel*  
‘the heathen Mamaj has come and brought his commanders’ (JIB)
- (11.9) *Done, Done, bystraja reka* *proryla est* kamenъja gory i *tečešy* v zemlju Poloveckuju  
‘Don, Don, swift river! You have cut through the stone mountains, you flow into the Polovcian land’ (Jakobson & Worth 1963: 61)
- (11.10) *Moskva, Moskva, bystraja reka, čemu esi zolelēeli* mužej našichъ ot nasъ v zemlju Poloveckuju  
‘Moskva, Moskva, swift river! Why did you cradle our husbands away from us into the Polovcian land?’ (Jakobson & Worth 1963: 61)

**Backgrounding/experimental:**

- (11.12) *I bilisja* iz utra do poludnja v sobotu na rožestvo svjatyja bogorodica  
‘They fought from morning to midday the Saturday of the birth of the Holy God’s mother’ (JIB)
- (11.13) *Uže nam solnce* *pomerklo* vo slavnom grade Moskve.  
‘and the sun had already grown dark for us in the glorious city of Moscow’ (JIB)
- (11.13) *šibla slava k morju i k Varnovičom i k železnym vratom*  
‘Fame has struck... across the sea... toward the Iron Gates and Ornač...’ (JAKOBSON & WORTH 1963: 60)



The basic fact about the *Sinodal'nyj* manuscript is that it shows what had to be expected: a clear increase in the number of narrative *l*-participles. It should also be noted that these narrative *l*-participles are prefixed to a much larger extent than is the case in the other, older manuscripts, e.g., *porazilsja*, *izmolvil*, *vyechal*, *vozkripeli*, *zaplakal*, *vzjal*, *po-gibli*, *poterali*, *pribili*, *vozruli*, *vozgrimeli*. In several cases, we see how a narrative aorist in No. 3 is replaced by a prefixed narrative *l*-participle in No. 5, cf. *vosgogotaša* vs. *vosgogotali*, *vspleskaša* vs. *vspleskali*, *plakašas* vs. *vsplakali*. This may indicate that prefixation was one possible mechanism that caused a non-narrative *l*-participle to turn into a narrative one.

Table 11

| <i>Zadonščina: Sinodal'nyj spisok, 17<sup>th</sup> century</i> |    |        |
|--|----|--------|
| Occurrences of perfects/ <i>l</i> -participles: 43             |    |        |
| Non-narrative/resultative                                      | 13 | 30,23% |
| Narrative  | 26 | 60,46% |
| Backgrounding  | 4  | 9,30%  |

This paper has discussed the replacement of the synthetic past tenses aorist and imperfect by the *l*-participle, which originally served as the basis for the Slavic perfect. In the replacement process, several evolutionary steps have been discerned. The first step, apparently, was the substitution of the imperfect by the *l*-participle, giving rise to the backgrounding meaning of the *l*-participle. The major part of the paper has, however, dealt with the replacement of the aorist. The attention has been on the mutation of the non-narrative perfect into a narrative past tense; and how the perfect's basic meaning of current relevance was lost. I think that at least two evolutionary steps can be observed. First of all, the present tense copula used to link the verbal action denoted by the *l*-participle to the present. The loss of the copula diminished this link to the present and weakened the current relevance of the action expressed by the *l*-participle. This may be the reason why – in cases in which a clear perfect meaning is intended – the copula has been preserved in all three manuscripts along with a present tense verb that underlines the *l*-participle's meaning of current relevance. In other cases in which the aorist has been replaced by an *l*-participle – as seen in the most recent manuscript – the replacement is made by prefixed *l*-participles. The prefixation can

undoubtedly be understood as a morphological expression of the perfect aspect. However, we should keep in mind – granted that we exclude the conception of empty prefixes – that prefixation involves both modification and specification of the semantics of a verb. The specification added by the prefixes to the verb implies that the meaning of current relevance is further weakened and eventually lost. In these cases, the one-time non-narrative *l*-participle has been turned into a narrative past tense, able to substitute for the aorist. In this way, discernible patterns of the behavior of the past tenses can hopefully be established and sought identified like those in the texts investigated here. And if discernible patterns of behavior of the different tenses – above all the aorist and the perfect in terms of the *l*-participle – are identified, this may lend credence to the assumption that the transformation of the past tenses was the result of the grammar of the those who composed these texts and not of a mere observance of bookish rules. It could thus be possible to argue for and support the view that the transformation of the past tense system occurred in historical times well after the first recordings of East Slavic. This point of view also implies that later texts contain valuable data which have to be taken into due account in order to understand how the original and complex system of past tenses in Russian were transformed into an utterly simple one, based exclusively on one morphological form, the *l*-participle.

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## Резюме

Јан Ивар Бјернфлатен

### МЫСЛИ О ПРЕОБРАЗОВАНИИ ДРЕВНЕВОСТОЧНОСЛАВЯНСКОЙ ГЛАГОЛЬНОЙ СИСТЕМЫ.

В статье обсуждается вопрос о преобразовании форм прошедшего времени в истории русского языка. Оцениваются вкратце противоположные мнения как об относительной, так и об абсолютной хронологии этих изменений. В статье придерживаемся, однако, того мнения, что массовые фиксации имперфектов и аористов даже в поздних текстах свидетельствуют о том, что данное преобразование произошло сравнительно поздно и что его можно интерпретировать на основе того материала, который предоставляют тексты позднего средневековья. Внимание обращается далее на развитие перфекта и *л*-причастия. В центре внимания стоит потеря *л*-причастием своего основного значения текущей релевантности (*current relevance*). Устанавливаются разные степени в процессе преобразования форм прошедшего времени. Это постепенное преобразование прошедшего времени способствует подробному толкованию обсуждаемого радикального изменения в истории русского языка.

*Ключевые слова:* историческая грамматика русского языка, морфологическое изменение, прошедшее время, аорист и имперфект, перфект, текущая релевантность, *л*-причастие.