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On the study of verbal aspect system
in Old Russian and Old Church Slavonic

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Two opposite views

1. The ancient state of the category of aspect in Old Russian and Old Church Slavonic = the state in modern Russian (A. Vajan 1948, Ju. Maslov 1951, G. Khaburgaev 1997).

2. Late provenance for aspect in Russian – not earlier than XIV century (Bermel 1997, Norgard-Sorensen 1997).

Grammatical criteria + semantic criteria

Perfective verbs   **Imperfective verbs**

aorist <——> imperfect

(active) past participle <——> (active) present participle

'future'   present forms   'present'

collocation with *nachati*

Table I – The ideal situation

	aorist	past participle	imperfect	present participle
perfective	+	+	–	–
imperfective	–/(+)	–	+	+
biaspectual	+	+	+	+

Table II – The real situation in texts

	aorist	past participle	imperfect	present participle
perfective	+	+	–/(+)	–/(+)
imperfective	–/(+)	–/(+)	+	+
biaspectual	+	+	+	+

Table III

	aorist	past participle	imperfect	present participle	present forms 'future'	present forms 'present'	collocation with *nachati*
perfective verbs	+	+	–/(+)	–/(+)	+	–/(+)	–
imperfective verbs	–/(+)	–/(+)	+	+	–	+/+	+
biaspectual verbs	+	+	+	+	+	+	–/+

Imperfects of perfective verbs

Old Russian (RNC): ≈100 000 verb forms

perfective imperfects – 189

Old Church Slavonic: ≈50 000 verb forms

perfective imperfects – 13

– iterative/repetitive/habitual context:

(1) ӓште же сѫсълоучаӓше не и̇мѣти ѥ̈моу ничьсоже дати ѥ̈моу. то котыгѫ сьвлѣкъ съ себе **дадѣаше** ништоу̇о̇умоу (Suprasliensis);
чк҃ъ слѣпъ. прѣхождааше тварь. ѥмьже **сѧ оу̇тъкнѣаше**. кланѣаше сѧ ѥмоу б҃а не могы обрѣсті. (Sb. Klotz);

– with negation 'futile expectation':

(2) и въшедъ исъ въ црк҃ъ. начатъ и̇згонити продаѭштѧ̈. ι коупоуѭщѧѧ в цркве. ι дъскы трѫжъникъ. ι сѣдалишта продаѭштихъ голѫби испроврѫже. ι **не дадѣаше** никомоу̇же мимонести съсѫдъ сквозѣ ц҃рквъ (Mar.=Zogr., Mark 11:15–16)
и̇ възвративъ сѧ и̇ ставъ на въстокъ. прилежно молитвѫ богови приношаӓше. многоу же часоу минѫвъшоу. и̇ ношти оу҃же прѣполовѫши сѧ. **не прѣстанѣӓше** тлъкѫшті и̇ великомъ гласомъ въпиѭшти. помилоу̇и мѧ рабе бж҃ии (Suprasliensis)

Present participles (active) of perfective verbs

– **function of preceding:**

(3)   и тако изиидаше манастыра . <u>возма</u> малъ коврижекъ (PVL: Hypatian)

‘and then left the monastery, taking with him but a few loaves of bread’

– **context with negation 'futile expectation':**

(4) и поидоша к Черниговꙋ. И Черниговцѣ затвориша оу градѣ. Ѡлегъ же
и Борисъ [не] башета в Черниговѣ. Чернѣговцемь же <u>не ѿворꙗщимсꙗ</u>.
приступиша ко градꙋ. (PVL: Hypatian) –

‘They arrived before Chernigov, but the inhabitants barricaded themselves
within the city. Oleg and Boris were not there. Since the citizens of Chernigov
would not open the gates, the brethren attacked the city.’

Present forms

– **iterative/repeted/habitual context:**

(5) всакъ бо чл҃вкъ аще <u>оукуси(т҃)</u> сладка . послѣди горести не приимаеть (PVL: Laur.)

‘Every man, after tasting something sweet, is afterward unwilling to accept that which is bitter’

– **contexts with modality:**

(6) а руска землѧ далече . а печенѣзи с нами ратьны . а кто ны <u>поможеть</u> (PVL: Laur.)
‘Rus' is far away, and the Pechenegs are hostile to us. So who can help us?’

– **contexts with negation 'futile expectation':**

(7) не преимаи же оученьꙗ ѿ Латꙑнъ · ихъже оученье разъвращено · влѣзъше бо въ цр҃квъ · <u>не поклонѧтсѧ</u> иконамъ · (PVL: Laur.)
‘Do not accept the teachings of the Latins, whose instruction is vicious. For when they enter the church, they do not kneel before the images’

Aoris and active past participles of imperfective verbs

Statives: with adverbial determinatives
(limiting the duration of the action):

(8) от … до …, всю ꙁимоу, лѣто цѣло/ѡдино, дълго,
·в̅· дн̅и и ночи/не(д̅)/м(с̅)ца/лѣ(т), до ꙗковлꙗ дн̅і, по вся дьни,
ѿ г(ж̅)н(к̅)а дн̅и · до великаго говѣниꙗ, малъ ча(с̅), дондеже… etc.

    from… to…, for whole winter, for one year, for long time,
    for 2 days/nights/weeks/months/years, until … day, every day,
    for short time, untill… etc.

***Old Russian* –**

Russian National Corpus (RNC)
historical subcorpus:
http://www.ruscorpora.ru

***Old Church Slavonic* –**

Tromsø Old Church Slavonic Treebank (TOROT):
https://nestor.uit.no/

Biaspectual verbs

	RNC		TOROT		RNC		TOROT		present forms	present forms	collocation with *nachati*
	aor	p.p.	aor	p.p	imp.	pres.p.	imp.	pres.p.	'future'	'present'	
vesti (vedu)	34	2	46	4	4	12	8	10	+	+	−
slyshati	93	436	103	193	3	39	16	60	+	+	+
razumeti	39	43	65	39	2	10	3	8	+	+	+

Perfective verbs

	RNC		TOROT		RNC		TOROT		present forms	present forms	colloc. with *nachati*
	aor	p.p.	aor	p.p.	imp.	pres.p.	imp	pr.p.	'future'	'present'	
sъtvoriti	460	117	114	15	**1**	**1** preceding	–	–	+	+	–
otъpustiti	91	3	24	7	–	–	–	–	+	+	–
pustiti	371	37	24	8	**5** negative	**4** negative	–	–	+	+	–
dati	328	47	171	28	**18** negative	**19** negative	**4** neg iter	**1**	+	+	–
poiti	772	18	119	4	**3** iterative	**4** 3 preced. 1 negative	–	–	+	+	–

Imperfective verbs

	RNC		TOROT		RNC		TOROT		present forms	present forms	collocation with *nachati*
	aor	p.p.	aor	p.p	imp	pr.p.	imp	pr.p	'future'	'present'	
sъbirati	–	–	–	–	7	11	8	16	–	+	+ 6
posylati	2	–	–	–	9	9	4	3	–	+	+ 16
otъpuschati	–	–	–	–	4	2	3	–	–	+	+ 4
puschati	1?	–	–	–	24	28	1	7	–	+	+ 6
dajati	1	1	–	–	33	62	26	14	–	+	+ 12
vъprashati	12	2	9	3	6	6	56	7	–	3	15	+ 17

(9) снъ нача оцю ѿвѣщати. о вьсемь семь ѥже мѧ **въпрашаѥши** н

є вѣдѣ ничьсоже (Life of Nicola) –

'And the son began answering to his father: "I know nothing about everything you are asking" '

Imerfective verbs – statives

	RNC		TOROT		RNC		TOROT		present forms	present forms	collocation with *nachati*
	aor	p.p.	aor	p.p	imp	pr.p.	imp	pr.p	'future'	'present'	
lezhati	7 adv	3 (2 adv)	3	—	27	58	17	58	—	+	—
sedeti	14 (13 adv)	13	1 adv	—	35	106	29	86	—	+	—
stojati	87 (75 adv + 12?)	23 (15 adv + 8?)	2?	1 adv	105	144	36	91	—	+	—
hoteti	77	4	21	4	120	511	93	135	—	+	—

Conclusions

- All criteria that can be used for determination of verbal aspect are insufficient on its own,

however

- combinatorial method allows the researcher to discover which aspect a verb had in Old Russian or Old Church Slavonic (or to state its biaspectuality) in most cases,
- a proper understanding of linguistic categories as 'Aspect' and 'Tense' can be attained only on the basis of a thorough and detailed study of the uses of the relevant forms in various contexts, it is important to study texts of different genres as well;
- According to their aspectual behavior, all verbs in Old Russian and Old Church Slavonic could be classified into five groups: perfective, imperfective, biaspectual (among beaspectual some verbs can be mostly perfective or mostly imperfective).