

The morphological complexity of Slavic aspect

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The North Slavic languages are characterized by a very simple tense system with three tenses and by a system of verbal aspect which is expressed by several different means (prefixes, suffixes, secondary imperfectivization). Languages without aspect (like German) usually have more tenses, and the same is true for languages where aspect is expressed by inflection (like English and Romance languages).

Bearing in mind the diachronic evolution of Slavic aspect, one could hypothesize that the loss of complex tenses was “compensated” by aspect. If this is true, we should expect the loss of complexity in inflection to be compensated by a higher complexity in word formation.

In my talk I want to propose a method of measuring the complexity of tense and of aspect morphology. This method will be applied to one chapter from the Bible (Book of Jonah) and to random data from web corpora in Russian, Czech, Bulgarian, Slovene, English and German.