Truncated perfect in Serbian - a marker of distance?

Anastasia Meermann (LMU München)

Bulgarian and Serbian share a perfect form, which is inherited from the Common Slavic and is construed by the active past participle (l-Forms) and the present tense form of the auxiliary 'to be'. In Bulgarian several meanings can be conveyed by these forms. They can express the classical resultative meaning of perfect or of an indefinite past. In narrative contexts they carry an evidential connotation of distance of the speaker from the propositional content of the utterance. Moreover, in narrative contexts in Bulgarian the perfect form can omit its auxiliary in the third person, which indicates a shift of perspectives from the narrator to another perspective (Sonnenhauser, 2012). Aside from the perfect forms, Bulgarian and Macedonian use aorist and imperfect to express confirmativity of the propositional content by the speaker (Friedman, 2004).

In Serbian the perfect forms have in most instances replaced the aorist and the imperfect and function as a generalised past form. Thus, the use of aorist and imperfect is highly marked and indicates a reported event as witnessed by the speaker (Belyavski-Frank, 1991). There are some cases of auxiliary loss within the perfect forms in Serbian as well.

Mikkelsen (1983) construes the difference between the forms with and without Auxiliary as merely stilistic. He argues that the truncated perfect, i.e. l-Forms without Auxiliary, had expressed nonconfirmativity as it was opposed to the aorist and the imperfect, which both expressed confirmativity. But by the marginalisation of the aorist and the imperfect this opposition as well as the function of the truncated perfect have been lost. Yet, Mikkelsen does not define the period, in which this change took place.

The following objections have to be made against this reasoning: First, the Aorist is still used in Serbian, though not as frequently as in Bulgarian. Second, the ability of encoding nonconfirmativity by the truncated forms is due to the loss of the present tense auxiliary, which means the loss of the anchoring with the time of uttarance and hence with the speaker (Mikkelsen 1983). That is the same function Sonnenhauser (2012) assumes for the loss of auxiliary in Bulgarian independently to the opposition of the l-Forms to aorist or imperfect. Thus, the function of the truncated forms in Serbian is not obligatorily bound to the use of aorist and imperfect. Friedman (2004) argues that in some linguistic systems the nonconfirmative meanings can be grammaticalized without the confirmative meanings but not *vice versa*, e.g. in Albanian. Third, there is no reason why the truncated forms have been retained in the Serbian linguistic system if there is no difference between the forms with and without auxiliary. And finally, it remains unclear, what the "stilistic" difference between the truncated and the entire forms is.

There is some evidence that the truncated perfect occurs in evidential contexts but also in emotional contexts, where it can express surprise, irony, indignation and suchlike. Besides, it seems to have the function of text structuring as it occurs at the beginning of new narrative units and in background events.

It seems to be worth the analysis of the truncated perfect in Serbian in terms of 'distance' based on the conception of Dancyngier & Vandelanotte (2009) as has been suggested by Fielder (1996) and Sonnenhauser (2013) for different nuances conveyed by l-forms without auxiliary in Bulgarian.

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