

ON THE CATEGORY OF ASPECTUALITY IN SLOVAK ROMANI*

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The category of aspectuality reflects a viewpoint of progression or of functionality of verbal action. From the viewpoint of aspectuality, the following features of the Slovak Romani verb are considered essential: duration of action, iterativity, intention, and specification (beginning, end, suddenness, completion, space specification, etc.) of verbal action. All of these features are expressed by different grammatical means, mainly suffixes.

In the ample literature on the theory of parts of speech two basic complexes of problems are discussed. First, the question of semantic definition of a part of speech and second, the question of grammatical categories by which a given part of speech is characterized.

In Slavistics, the solution by Eugen Pauliny (1981) has achieved a positive response. When defining a part of speech, Pauliny speaks about the denomination of phenomena. According to his view, a substantive is a denomination of independently existing phenomenon without expressing duration in time, adjective is a denomination of unIndependently existing phenomenon without expressing duration in time and a verb is a denomination of unIndependently existing phenomenon with expressing duration in time.

As is evident, duration in time is considered to be one of the basic criteria. This criterion is reflected in the grammatical category of tense as well as in the grammatical category of aspect and lexico-semantic category of Aktionsart. In a broader sense, the last two categories, i.e., the category of aspect and the category of Aktionsart, can be included under one concept, i.e., aspectuality, which reflects a viewpoint of progression of action or a viewpoint of functionality (see e.g. Bondarko, 1962).

From the viewpoint of aspectuality the following features of the Slovak Romani verb are considered essential: 1. duration (or progression) of action, 2. iterativity, 3. intention, and 4. determination (specification) of verbal action.

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1. The first feature of aspectuality, i.e., the duration of action is a basic feature of the verb. Every action takes place on a thought time axis as past, present or future with regard to the moment of speech. In language, this fact is reflected in the existence of the system of grammatical tenses which presents a categorial (i.e. grammaticalized) means for location of an action and its duration in a time space.

The duration of action can be unlimited or limited.

If neither beginning nor the end of an action is expressed, we speak about unlimited duration: *denašel* – to run, *kerel* – to do, *phirel* – to walk, *phiravel* – to carry, *daral* – to be afraid, *daravel* – to frighten, etc.

On the other hand, if the verb denotes a limited, completed process, we speak about limited duration of an action. Naturally, there are various means for expressing the limited action in various languages. For instance in Slavonic languages this feature of aspectuality may be expressed by the help of different lexemes (Slovak limited *vziať* or Russian limited *vzjat'* vs. Slovak and Russian unlimited *brať*, Slovak limited *povedať* vs. unlimited *hovoriť*; as in English limited *to tell* vs. unlimited *to speak*) or by the aid of an infix already in the infinitive of a verb (Slovak limited *bodnúť* vs. unlimited *bodať*, Czech limited *kopnout* vs. unlimited *kopat*). In some other languages, for example in Bengali, the opposition limited vs. unlimited duration of an action is expressed only in the finite form of a verb by the aid of specific morphemes: limited *kar-e-chi* (I have done), *kar-e-chilam* (I had done) vs. unlimited *kar-i* (I do), *kar-0-chi* (I am doing), *kar-0-chilam* (I was doing). Similarly in Romani the limited action is also expressed by the finite verb form, i.e. with the aid of the past perfect tense paradigm: *ker-d-om* – I have done, *asa-ň-om* – I have laughed. The limited duration is expressed only in the past tense also due to the fact that limited verbs often express the result of an action, a state achieved by an action.

As this tense expresses not only a past action with regard to the moment of speech but also the limitedness of an action, it is denoted by aspect terminology as the “dokonavý” = “perfective” past tense (and the preterite as the “nedokonavý” = “imperfective” past tense) in Czech works on the Romani language (Hübschmannová 1974, 1976, 1991, Lípa 1963) though aspect does not belong to the category of tense.

2. The next feature of aspectuality, i.e., iterativity is to a large degree analogical to the feature of plurality of substantive. Iterative verbs express the quantitative progression of a verbal action.

In the Romani language, the iterativity of verbal action is formally expressed by the suffixes *-ker-* or *-av-*: *ker-ker-el* – to do repeatedly, *phirav-ker-el* – to carry repeatedly, *čhiv-av-el* – to throw about. With some verbs both iterativity markers can be used. For instance alongside the above mentioned *čhiv-av-el*, *čhiv-ker-el* also occurs in texts. Often these two forms are synonymous or slightly change the meaning of the verb (as Hübschmannová and Bubník also point out, 1997: 140). Sometimes even both suffixes (*-ker-* and *-av-*) occur at the same time: *čhiv-av-ker-el*, perhaps in order to intensify the iterative mean-

ing. In such cases suffix *-av-* usually precedes suffix *-ker-*. We can also find the reduplicated *-ker-* in the same function: *phir-ker-ker-el*.

The reduplication of the iterative suffix is not exceptional phenomenon in the Romani language. It occurs also in some other languages, for instance it is quite common in the Slovak language: *chodil > chodieval, chodievaval* or in the Czech language: *nosil > nosival – nosivával*, but it is less common in Russian.

The process denoted by iterative verbs is often characterized by the inner itemization (*kerkerel, phiravkerel*). Iterative verbs express an action occurring several times, disconnectedly or in different directions. Such action may not be actual in the present tense, as it does not take place in the moment of speech, but can be usual or sporadic (*sikhľuvkerav – I learn all the time, davkerav – I give usually, all the time*).

Sometimes the present forms of iterative verbs may also denote an actual repeated action: *čhivavel – to throw about*.

3. A further feature of the Slovak Romani verb expressed by a grammatical morpheme is that of intention, that is, directionality of an action. Verbs have zero (or negative) intention if an action is not directed towards any object (*denašel – to run*), or positive intention, if an action is oriented (directed) towards an object. Positive intention is either progressive or regressive.

Progressive intention means that an action is oriented to the object of an action and is expressed by the aid of morpheme *-ar-*: *bar-ar-el – to make sb. to be big, to bring up, barv-ar-el – to enrich sb., kal-ar-el – to blacken, but also rovľ-ar-el to make sb. cry, asal-ar-el – to make sb. laugh, etc.*

Regressive intention, that is, orientation (direction) of an action back towards the subject of an action and secondarily also achievement of some result or state is expressed by two means. First, by the aid of reflexive verb: *nandarel pes – to bathe oneself, melarel pes andre – to become dirty*, and second, by the morpheme *-ol* by the aid of which it is expressed that a subject has achieved some state: *melal-ol – become dirty, barval-ol – become rich, kal-ol – become black*. Sometimes both ways of expressing the regressive intention occur with the same verb, e.g., *melarel pes* as well as *melalol*. According to Hübschmannová (1995:38) the reflexive verb is used when the subject of the action causes something to himself on purpose. On the other hand, the forms with the morpheme *-ol* imply a spontaneous or an unwanted action.

4. The last feature of aspectuality of the Slovak Romani verb is the determination or specification of verbal action, that is, expression of its beginning, end, suddenness, completion or a space specification.

The specification of action is expressed by two means. First, by the aid of phrasal verbs, and second, by the help of Slovak prefixes.

Phrasal verb consists of a verb and an adverb, usually an adverb of space: *avri – outside, andre – inside, tele – down, opre/upre – up, pale – back*. Adverbs modify the meaning of the verb with which they form a unit in which various degrees of abstraction from the original meanings of its components can be followed.

In the case of space specification of the progression of an action, both components keep their usual meaning to a large degree: *džal opre – to rise, liter. to*

go up, *avel pale* – to return, liter. to come back, *perel tele* – to fall down, *anel avri* – to carry out, etc.

A greater degree of abstraction can be seen in cases where an adverb loses its space meaning and helps to express, for instance, the completion of action: *chal opre* – to eat up, *labol opre* – to get burnt.

Phrasal verbs in which the meanings of verb and adverb merge form idiomatic meanings with the greatest degree of abstraction from the usual meanings of their components: *kerel opre* – to instigate, *asal andre* – to flirt, *phenel avri* – to disclose, *mardarel andre* – to turn off, to switch off. A natural shift to various abstract meanings coheres with a gradual shift of an adverb to the category of prefixes (written together with a verb): *arifarbinel* – to paint up, *ariavel* – to rise (about sun), etc.

In Slovak Romani, the specification of verbal action is very often expressed with the aid of Slovak prefixes. Many of them are borrowed quite mechanically and have exactly the same meaning as Slovak prefixes in Slovak verbs in the same context as can be seen, for instance, in the texts of fairy tales by Elena Lacková (1992) or in short stories by Ilona Ferková: *podiňa leske a zvičinda* – she handed it over to him and exclaimed, the prefix *po-* in *podiňa* specifies the verb *del* spacially (direction to the object) and *z-* in *zvičinda* expresses the suddenness of the action. Similarly *O rikono chudñas le babenca te odčhivkerel o bara a telo bara vareso zalabilas* – the dog started to draw aside stones by his legs and something flashed up under a stone, where the prefix *od-* in *odčhivkerel* expresses the spatial specification of the action, that is, direction aside from an object, and prefix *za-* in *zalabilas* expresses the suddenness of the action. Similarly, we find some other verbs with Slovak prefixes expressing, for example, the completion of the action, for example, *dochal* – to eat up which occurs alongside the phrasal verb *chal opre*; or expressing the end of the action: *dokerel* – to finish a work, *zasovel* – to fall asleep, etc.

However, it must be said that there are great differences as regards borrowings of Slovak prefixes in regional variants of Slovak Romani and also with different authors. Some of them express various specifications of verbal actions by Slovak prefixes very often while, some others use them much more rarely.

It seems that some Roma even consider the use of Slovak prefixes in Romani to be “impure”. Perhaps the increasing number of Romani books and the development of Romani as a language of literature and the press will lead to attempts to replace Slovak prefixes with other, “more Romani” elements as is happening in the lexicon where an effort to enrich the vocabulary with different neologisms formed on the basis of Romani verbs can be found.

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