

# Telicity, boundedness and secondary imperfective verbs in Bulgarian

Elena Karagjosova  
FU Berlin

The paper presents an account of secondary imperfective verbs (SI) in Bulgarian and their role within the Bulgarian aspectual system. I argue that Bulgarian SIs express a two-way aspectual distinction, marking the inner aspect/Aktionsart value [telic] on the one hand and the outer/Viewpoint aspect value [unbounded] on the other. In expressing this aspectual value combination, SIs compensate for restrictions imposed on the telicity expressing prefixed perfective verbs which are banned in regular unbounded contexts in the present, present perfect and the renarrative (as well as in negative imperatives).

Traditionally, secondary imperfectivization in Bulgarian, i.e. the process of deriving imperfective verb forms from prefixed perfective verbs by means of the suffix *-va* (and some other, less frequent suffixes), has been viewed as belonging to the domain of outer/Viewpoint aspect. An alternative view is that SI-suffixes in Bulgarian are markers of inner aspect/Aktionsart. Thus Lazarczyk (2008) analyses Bulgarian SIs as atelisizers that compose with telic predicates to return atelic ones. Her analysis relies on the assumption that in Bulgarian, verb forms are overtly marked for inner aspect/Aktionsart in terms of the imperfective-perfective distinction, as well as for outer/Viewpoint aspect in the past tense (Imperfect vs. Aorist), the two layers of aspect producing four forms for the indicative past tense: (simplex) imperfective Imperfect, (simplex) imperfective Aorist, (prefixed) perfective Aorist and SI Imperfect. Lazarczyk takes the fact that the combination of prefixed perfective verbs with Imperfect Viewpoint aspect is somewhat marginal as it can only be used in non-factual (habitual, subjunctive) contexts as evidence for an alleged semantic incompatibility between telicity and the Imperfect Viewpoint morphology and argues that the role of secondary imperfectivization in Bulgarian is to provide a form that resolves this incompatibility: in order to be able to combine with the Imperfect morphology (in the indicative), perfective verbs must undergo the process of secondary imperfectivization where the SI-suffixes mark the Aktionsart atelicity thus overriding the telicity-prefix of the original perfective verb (cf. also Nitsolova 2008 where the aspect of a verb is determined by the last affix attached to the root).

While I share Lazarczyk's assumptions about the aspectual nature of the perfective-imperfective and Aorist-Imperfect distinctions, I believe the evidence for characterizing SIs as atelisizers is rather weak. I argue instead that SIs in Bulgarian pose a problem similar to what Dowty (1977) called the "imperfective paradox" in English, illustrated by *John was drawing a circle.*, where the progressive seems to run against the endpoint-interpretation that the telic predicate induces. I adopt Depraetere's (1995) view that in order to adequately account for the effect of the progressive (and the Imperfect aspect in Bulgarian for that matter) on telic predicates, one needs to distinguish between two aspectual notions that have been often conflated in work on aspect: (a)telicity and

(un)boundedness. “(A)telicity has to do with whether or not a situation is described as having an inherent or intended endpoint; (un)boundedness relates to whether or not a situation is described as having reached a temporal boundary” (ibid.: 2–3). In English sentences with telic predicates under the progressive aspect, a situation which has an inherent or intended endpoint is described as not having reached this endpoint and hence as not having a temporal boundary. Depraetere suggests the following twofold distinction: (i) +inherent/intended endpoint: (a) +endpoint reached, +temporal boundary (b) –endpoint reached, –temporal boundary and (ii) –inherent/intended endpoint (a) +temporal boundary, (b) –temporal boundary. Similarly, in the SI-clause (1), a potentially telic situation is presented as not having reached its natural/intended endpoint yet but as being in the process of reaching it. The clause is still telic: attempting to deny its telicity leads to an incoherent continuation. For comparison, the perfective (Aorist) verb form in (2) behaves the same way, whereas the simplex imperfective form in (3) is compatible with such a continuation in the Imperfect (as well as in the Aorist; in addition, the perfective Imperfect form *izmieše* which is only used in subjunctive and habitual contexts, expresses in subjunctive contexts telicity as well; in habitual contexts, the separate cases are telic, even though the habit as such is not). At the same time, while both the SI- (1) and the simplex imperfective Imperfect (3) clauses are unbounded, the perfective Aorist one is bounded.

- (1) Kogato vljasoh, Ivan **izmivaše** edna činija. #No taka i ne ja izmi.  
 When entered-*IP*, Ivan **wash-SI.IPF** a dish. #But so too not it wash.  
 ‘When I entered, Ivan was about to finish washing a dish. But he didn’t manage to wash it.’  
**+telic, –bounded**
- (2) Kogato vljasoh, Ivan **izmi** edna činija. #No taka i ne ja izmi.  
 When entered, Ivan **wash-perf.AOR** a dish. #But so too not it wash.  
 ‘When I entered, Ivan washed a dish. But he didn’t manage to wash it.’  
**+telic, +bounded**
- (3) Kogato vljasoh, Ivan **mieše** edna činija. No taka i ne ja izmi.  
 When entered, Ivan **wash-imp.IPF** a dish. But so too not it wash.  
 ‘When I entered, Ivan was washing a dish. But he didn’t manage to wash it.’  
**–telic, –bounded**

I suggest that while SIs mark the inner aspectual value [telic] by virtue of their aspectual prefixes, they at the same time express the Imperfective Viewpoint aspectual value [unbounded] by virtue of the SI-suffixes, assuming the aspectual architecture in Pancheva (2003) where Viewpoint Aspect is composed of an Asp head which may get the semantic values [bounded] for the Aorist and [unbounded] for the Imperfect and which embeds a vP with a particular Aktionsart. This analysis is corroborated by the fact that (prefixed) perfective verbs in Bulgarian are banned in unbounded contexts, as in the present indicative in (4), their use being restricted to modal contexts (cf. also Kuehnast 2008). In order to express the combination Imperfective Viewpoint aspect and telicity in these contexts, a SI must be used. Similarly, Imperfect participles of (prefixed) perfective verbs are not allowed in the present perfect and the (non-habitual) renarrative (in contrast to Aorist participles), cf. (5). Again, a participle based on the SI-stem must be used instead in these contexts to express unbounded telicity.

- (4) Ivan \*izmie/izmiva edna činija.  
 Ivan wash-*perf.PRES/SI.PRES* a dish.  
 ‘Ivan washes a dish.’
- (5) Ivan (e) \*izmiel/izmival edna činija, kogato Petar vljazal.  
 Ivan (is) wash-*perf.IPF.part/SI.part* a dish, when Petar entered.  
 ‘Ivan was washing a dish when Peter entered.’

References: **Depraetere, I. (1995)** On the necessity of distinguishing between (un)boundedness and (a)telicity. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 18: 1–19. **Dowty, D. R. (1977)** Towards a Semantic Analysis of Verb Aspect and the English ‘Imperfective Progressive’. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 1: 45–77. **Kuehnast, M. (2008)**. Aspectual coercion in Bulgarian negative imperatives. In W. Abraham & E. Leiss (eds.), *Modality-Aspect Interfaces*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 175–196. **Łazarczyk, A. (2008)** Secondary imperfective as an atelizer. In M. Curtis & A. Smirnova (eds.), *Issues in Slavic Syntax and Semantics*. Cambridge, 54–77. **Nitsolova, R. (2008)** *Bulgarian Grammar*. Sofia University Press. **Pancheva, R (2003)** The aspectual makeup of Perfect participles and the interpretations of the Perfect. In A. Alexiadou et al. (eds.), *Perfect Explorations*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 277–306.