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ASPECT AND PERFORMATIVITY IN SORBIAN

1. Aspect in Sorbian

> Les langues slaves distinguent régulièrement deux aspects du verbe: le perfectif représente l'action dans sa totalité, comme un point, en dehors de tout l'avenir; l'imperfectif la montre en train de se faire, et sur la ligne du temps.
>
> (Ferdinand de Saussure)

"Sorbian" is not a single language, it is a group within the Western Slavonic Languages, today represented by Upper Sorbian (in Saxony) and Lower Sorbian (in Brandenburg), which are not any closer related than Czech and Slovak and mutually intelligible to a lesser degree than those. Therefore, we will try and draw our conclusions for Upper and Lower Sorbian independently.

In order to investigate the interaction of aspect and performativity, a quick survey on aspect in Sorbian is inevitable: The question of aspect in Upper Sorbian has always been a question of purism and the discussions trace back to the mid–19th century, to a time when the term aspect had not yet been coined.

The first person to raise the issue of aspect was Smoler (1859) (although back then, the term wasn't yet in use); however, he was mainly concerned about verbal morphology and claimed that analytical future tense forms of a perfective verb are to be avoided because they are a German influence:

[...] hdyž jedyn do serbskich knihi [sic!] z prjedawšeho časa pohladuje, dha ryčespytnika na kóždej stronje wopačnosć zetkuje, kotraž wohidniša być njemóže. Naši prjedawši spisowarjo mjenujcy ani najmjeńšeho zdaća nimaja, kak so přichodny čas serbskeho słowjesa twori. Woni skłonjuja serbske słowjeso po zakonjach němskeje ryče, a duž přełožuja woni we swojich pismach němsku sadu: *ich werde heraus treten* ze słowami: *ja budu wustupić* (město: *wustupju*) [...] a žadyn sebi njemysli, zo na tajke wašnje cyle wopaki čini (Smoler 1859: 7).

In his eagerness to purify the Upper Sorbian language he completely overlooks that there are synthetic future tense forms in Upper Sorbian, but that these are limited to a cer-

tain group of imperfective verbs (almost exclusively movement verbs) and accepts analytical future forms for them. "[...] zo ma so prajić: ja póńdu, ja ponjesu (ich werde gehen, ich werde tragen), ja powjezu (ich werde fahren), nic pak: ja budu hić, njesć, wjesć [sic!], hač runje by też tole też gramatiscy prawje było" (Smoler 1859: 7–8) .

He then links future tense morphology to preterite morphology to provide some help to the reader who is unsure how the "correct" forms should sound; this help, however, is very doubtful, because Sorbian speakers are usually very unsure about the preterite forms – even Smoler is no exception and gets some of his own examples wrong, since both *nakupować* and *rozdawać* are imperfective: "ja nakupowach, ty nakupowa [sic!] (ich kaufte ein, du kauftest ein), fut.: nakupuju, ich werde einkaufen; ja rozdawach, ty rozdawa [sic!] (ich vertheilte, du vertheiltest), fut.: rozdawam" (Smoler 1859: 14).

This only shows that Smoler's suggestions aren't based on his superior command of Upper Sorbian, but on his linguistic competence based on other Slavonic languages. While this sounds like it shouldn't be more than a funny footnote in the history of Sorbian purism, it has had strong influence on Sorbian grammar for over a hundred years, condemning forms in school which are completely normal and unmarked in both the older literature and the vernacular, thus possibly resulting in destabilising the language.

Ščerba (1915) couldn't make head nor tail of the examples he found for aspect use in the dialect of Bad Muskau/Mužakow; aspect there was so different from what he knew from Russian. Therefore, he came to the conclusion that aspect does not exist in Sorbian: "Mne kažetsja, čto perfektivnosť v tom smysle, kak my ee sebe predstavljaem v russkom jazyke, vovse ne suščestvuet v mužakovskom" (Ščerba 1915: 121).

Lötzsch (1956) came to the same conclusions in his diploma thesis and states that German influence is the culprit (because at that time aspect was believed to be protoslavic at least, if not even baltoslavic):

Osobenno sil'no vlijanie nemeckogo jazyka skazyvaetsja v sisteme verchnelužickogo glagola. Možno, ne preuveličivaja, govorit' o korennych izmenenijach v ėtoj oblasti. Delo v tom, čto kategorija vida, podčinjajuščaja sebe v drugich slavjanskich jazykach vsju morfologiju glagola, v verchnelužickom jazyke, po vsej verojatnosti, voobšče otsutstvuet, kak ona ne svojstvenna i nemeckomu jazyku (Lötzsch 1956: 49).

In the eyes of the Sorbian purist of the 19th-century tradition, all these assertions must cast a shadow on the efforts to preserve the Sorbian languages since they show that Sorbian is under German influence in a domain deemed to be genuinely Slavic (which is why school grammars were especially keen on pointing out these "gross errors"). Luckily Michalk (1959: 214ff.) came to their aid with some data from Sorbian dialects, as did Faßke in his PhD on the dialect of Wětošow/Vetschau (Faßke 1964: 134ff.; cf. Werner 2003: 55):

Das imperfektive Verb bewahrt seine Relevanz gegenüber seinem perfektiven Korrelat in Positionen, in denen, es sich ausdrücklich um ein vom zeitlichen Verlauf nicht abstrahiertes, nicht als Ganzheit aufgefasstes Ereignis handelt (d. i. konkretes Präsens, Gleichzeitigkeit, nach phasenbetonenden Verben). [...] Das perfektive Verb wiederum ist nicht mit seinem imperfektiven Korrelat vertauschbar, wenn es sich ausdrücklich um die Darstellung der Handlung als ganzes, vom zeitlichen Verlauf abstrahiertes Ereignis handelt.

For the contemporary literary language (which Faßke defines to start with Ćišinski), Faßke states that aspect in Upper Sorbian is a grammatical category with a marked perfec-

tive and an unmarked imperfective aspect[1]. While the imperfective aspect can always be used there are, according to Faßke (1981: 180f.) certain contexts in which the perfective aspect cannot:

Imperfekte Verben stehen obligatorisch:

a) bei aktueller Gegenwart. Der Sprecher nennte Tatbestände, die im Moment der Rede, zur Sprechzeit, aktuell sind und sich im Verlauf befinden. [...]
b) bei (totaler oder partieller) Gleichzeitigkeit mehrerer Handlungen. [...]
c) nach Phasenverben. [...]
d) zum Ausdruck konkreter und bestimmter, zur Betrachtzeit ablaufender Handlungen. [However, the examples given are not acts, but rather states. EW]
e) zur Bezeichnung einer zeitlich unbestimmten, nicht konkreten Handlung als Ausdruck einer dauernden Fähigkeit oder Möglichkeit. [This is obviously wrong as PF verbs for generic acts or possibilities like in *Čłowjek stajnje přiwuknje* are quite common.]
f) zum Ausdruck der Erfolglosigkeit der Handlung [...].

These are the classical contexts, and most of them have been challenged by Chatterjee (1988) who, however, does not include Sorbian. This has been done by us (Werner 2003), and we came to the result that aspect in Upper Sorbian is not a grammatical category as in, say, Russian where the imperfective and perfective forms together are *one* verb, but rather a lexical category like noun gender. The approach is somewhat similar to Lehmann 1993, and we think our results of Werner still hold:

[...] die Aspektopposition im Obersorbischen, soweit der Begriff anwendbar ist, ist anderer Natur als in anderen slavischen Sprachen, denn die in anderen Sprachen üblichen Restriktionen für die Verwendung des perfektiven Aspekts, insbesondere das Auftreten mit Phasenverben, treffen für das Obersorbische, wie gesehen [...], nicht zu, die Aspektopposition ist somit eher lexikalischer als grammatischer Natur. Dies ist jedoch kaum auf einen Aspektverlust im Obersorbischen unter deutschem Einfluss zurückzuführen, da hierzu nachgewiesen werden müsste, dass das Obersorbische einmal eine Aspektopposition besessen hat. Wenn man jedoch davon ausgeht, dass die Aspektoppositionen, die man aus den anderen slavischen Sprachen kennt, einzelsprachlich ausgebildet wurden, zeigt das Obersorbische eher einen alten, in urslavische und vorurslavische Zeit zurückreichenden Zustand, der Parallelen im Altrussischen und im den slavischen Sprachen nahe verwandten Litauischen aufweist, also reichhaltige Aktionalität ohne grammatischen Verbalaspekt (Werner 2003: 253).

The newest work on aspect in Sorbian is Brankačk (2008). However, her work is mainly based on a small (and not necessarily representative) part of the 1728 Bible, which as a translation hardly reflects natural language as has already been shown by Lindseth for the 1896 Bible (Lindseth 1997a, Lindseth 1997b, Werner 2012). In the tradition of 19th century purism Brankačkec attaches aspect to analytical future tense: "Nejvýraznější rozdíl od ruštiny je, že v ls. [lužickosrbských, EW] dialektech mohou všechna slovesa tvořit analytické futurum." (Brankačkec 2009: 59) which is just plain wrong since there are verbs in Upper Sorbian which cannot have analytic future (as mentioned above) but these are exclusively imperfective. Such claims, together with an approach which does not honor the

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[1] "Die perfektiven Verbformen sind innerhalb der Kategorie des Aspekts merkmalhaft" (Faßke 1981: 178).

principle *consecutio e silentio non licet*, even in cases when contrary evidence is there (and well known to her as a native speaker) but simply does not happen to be present in the material she is looking at: "K lexikalizovaným slovesům [...] můžeme zařadit především *wumrěć,* protože simplex *mrěć* se v korpusu nevyskytuje." (Brankačkec 2009: 62) are apt to shatter all confidence in her results the reader might have.

Finally, Scholze (2008) applies Breu's ILA-theory (Breu 2000) to a larger amount of data from the Upper Sorbian vernacular. While her PhD has the merit of being the first comprehensive work on the Upper Sorbian vernacular (based on the Catholic dialect of which no larger monographs exist), she unfortunately completely ignores Werner (2003) as well as Bermel (1994) and largely transfers the Russian system to Upper Sorbian. I did not find any examples with performative verbs in her data.

2. Performativity in Sorbian

We would like to point out here that there is no such thing as a performative *verb*; rather, some verbs can be used in a performative *context,* in a perfomative *utterance* (cf. Austin 1985: 5). Performative utterances are confined to 1. pers. pres., so the performativity is already signalised by the context. Therefore, we would expect aspect to behave as follows:

1) One aspect form becomes canonical in these contexts, the other one will be a signal for non-performativity.
2) The non-markedness of aspect here would imply usage of the non-marked aspect counterpart which would, according to all Sorbian grammars, be the **imperfective** aspect. This would also to be expected according to Faßke (1981: 220).
3) Since a performative utterance creates new reality, the expected aspect would be the one which signalised a change of state, which would be the **perfective** aspect.

Obviously we cannot have both 2) and 3) if 1) holds. Another possibility is that aspect will become irrelevant in these contexts, and finally, if aspect is not a grammatical category as I suggest in Werner (2003), the choice of the performative verb is not expected to depend on it at all (but maybe on something different). Therefore, it is necessary to analyse data from the Upper Sorbian Text Corpus.

Possible candidates for performative utterances are[2]: *křćić* 'to baptise', *podać so* (vern. *horje dać*) 'to resign', *přeć* 'to wish', *přeprosyć* 'to invite', *přisahać* 'to swear', *přiznać* 'to concede', *mjenować* 'to name', *so sadźić* 'to bet', *slubić* 'to promise', *strowić* 'to greet', *witać* 'to greet', *wobkrućić* 'to confirm', *wobstać na něčim* 'to insist on', *wozjewić* 'to declare', *wuprajić* 'to express (feelings etc.)', *zakazać* 'to forbid', *zasudźić* 'to condemn'. Koschmieder (1929) licenses the use of perfective verbs in these contexts for several Slavic languages.

According to Faßke (1981: 183), in these cases the unsuffixed verb is the preferred one in Upper Sorbian, regardless of aspect. Also verbs which are used "zum Ausdruck von

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[2] The examples marked (USTC) are taken from the Upper Sorbian Text corpus, which is hosted at the Sorbian Institute in Bautzen/Budyšin (http://www.serbski-institut.de). The other examples are provoked.

Vorgängen, deren Abschluß unmittelbar vor dem Moment der Rede liegt" (Faßke 1981), like *zetkać* 'to meet' or *zhonić* 'to learn (come to know)', *přepodać* 'to hand over' fall into this category. We will look at them as well.

> křćić 'to baptise': *Ja drje was křću z wodu na pokutu* (USTC, non-performative)
> podać so (vern. *horje dać*) 'to resign': *Ja so podam!* 'I give up!'
> přeć 'to wish': *přeju 290x* vs. *popřeju 22x* vs. *wupřeju 1x* (USTC)
> přeprosyć 'to invite' *přeprošuju 17x*, *přeprošu 8x* (USTC); Lower Sorbian prefers the pf *přepšosyś*
> přisahać 'to swear' *přisaham 17, wopřisaham 2x* (to implore)
> přiznać (so) 'to admit'
> mjenować 'to name'
> namjetować 'to suggest' is ip only; in Lower Sorbian, *naraźiś* pf is used, not the ipf *naraźowaś*
> so sadźić 'to bet'
> slubić 'to promise'
> strowić 'to greet' (also in the passive voice: *budź strowjeny*)
> witać 'to greet'
> wobkrućić 'to confirm'
> wobstać na něčim 'to insist on' (German calque, ipf)
> wozjewić 'to declare'
> wuprajić 'to express (feelings etc.)'
> zakazać 'to forbid' (jenož pf)
> zasudźić 'to condemn': *Ně, ja jeho njezasudźu.* (USTC) *Ja to njezasudźu.* (USTC) *Wobžarujemy a zasudźimy to.* (USTC) vs. *Wě, zo rasowu teoriju Hitlera zasudźujemy.* (USTC, non-performative)

Imperfective verbs are used exclusively in *prošu će* 'I ask you' and *ja so ći dźakuju* 'I thank you'. Similar words in older texts are usually imperfective, too, like *ja će wobnutnosćam* or *ja će naprošuju* (both meaning 'I implore you' in the Swětlik manuscript from 1688–1707).

According to the corpus data, Faßke's (1981) contention that the unsuffixed verb be the preferred one, must be considerably refined. First, all the verbs are usually suffixed and the number of suffixes, especially from a synchronic point of view, does not necessarily differ: LSo *pšepšosyjom* 'I invite' (pf) obviously has the same number of affixes as the ipf *pšepšosujom*, the same is true for USo *wobkrućimy* vs. *wobkrućamy* 'we confirm', and so on. If we do not count -*owa*- in the verbs ending in -*ować*/-*owaś* as two suffixes (and there are only historical arguments to do so) we find hardly any evidence in the number of suffixes.

A better approach to performativity for Sorbian can be found in Lehmann (1992) (although he only writes about Russian, not Sorbian) and Werner (2003). Lehmann states that each verb is either more naturally imperfective or perfective due to and depending on the nature of its semantics. In this way, a verb like *to sleep* would "normally" be imperfective while a verb like *to find* would be perfective which holds perfectly fine for Sorbian. But since performativity denotes a change in state we would rather expect perfective verbs. In Werner (2003) accordingly I regard aspect in Upper Sorbian as a lexico-grammatical cate-

gory; aspect and aktionsart are a continuum caused by verbal affixation which is modular to a rather high degree. If this is true, performativity situations will prefer a minimally affixed verb. *Minimally affixed* means here either with a minimum number of affixes or with affixes which are phonologically less pronounced (e.g. fewer syllables). In this sense *kupić* would be minimally affixed, *kupować* not.

If we take another look at the list of verbs we can see that this hypothesis holds for most verbs; the main exception, USo *přeprošować* 'to invite' is easily explained as Czech influence. Other examples are hypercorrect, and the authors of the text have readily admitted that they would have used the other aspect in normal speech, but felt compelled to use what they were told at school was the "correct" aspect form.

So we can safely say in Sorbian, performative verbs strongly tend to be morphologically least marked (least affixed or having the least prominent affixes). Exceptions, mostly due to Czech influence, are more widespread in Upper Sorbian than in Lower Sorbian which is to be expected because of the stronger cultural connections of Upper Sorbian and Czech compared to Lower Sorbian and Czech.

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Summary

In all Upper and Lower Sorbian grammars, aspect is a grammatical category, regarded a typical "Slavic" trait in spite of the fact that since Bermel 1994, aspect can be safely said to have evolved separately in the individual Slavic languages. The character of aspect in Sorbian, especially in Upper Sorbian, is highly disputable (and has been disputed since the beginning of the 20th century (cf. Werner 2003).

An exception to one of the rules of Slavic aspect (namely that something happening at the time of talking must be expressed by means of an imperfective verb) are the so-called *perfomative verbs*. This acceptance and the term *Aktverben* go back to Koschmieder 1929 but have never been thoroughly verified for individual verbs in the Sorbian languages. In this paper, the author makes an attempt at shedding some light on the aspect usage of performative verbs in Upper Sorbian.

Keywords: aspect, performance, Sorbian