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GRAMMATICAL ASPECT IN BULGARIAN AND ENGLISH: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

This article is part of a larger study on the acquisition of English aspect by instructed Bulgarian adult learners. Before analysing the acquisition of this complex category, it is necessary to analyse its characteristic features and find similarities and differences, which could facilitate or hamper Bulgarian L2 learners in the process of acquisition.

The article compares and analyses the grammatical aspect in the two languages, pointing out the main difference: while in Bulgarian verbs are paired with respect to this grammatical aspectual opposition – for each imperfective base verb form, there is a corresponding perfective one, formed by derivation, in English this opposition is mostly expressed through tenses. Having in mind that Bulgarian language lacks tenses such as Present Progressive or Present Perfect, it is interesting to see how the opposition perfectivity/imperfectivity, expressed in English by means of these tenses, is achieved in Bulgarian.

Keywords: aspect; grammatical aspect in Bulgarian and English; perfectivity/imperfectivity

1. Time, Tense, and Aspect

Time is a fundamental category of human cognition (Klein 1994a) and as such it has been encoded by human languages through a variety of means. The most common devices, regularly used to encode time, include tense, aspect, and temporal adverbials.

In language, tense is a category that signifies temporal deixis, that is, it "relates the time of the situation referred to, to some other time, usually to the moment of speaking" (Comrie 1976: 1–2). In other words, tense serves to locate the event to the moment of speech, using it as a temporal 'anchor'.

Aspect, on the other hand, is non-deictic; it is not concerned with relating a situation with some other time. It rather characterises "the different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation" (Comrie 1976: 3). While tense is ordering events on a time line, situating them in reference to other events, aspect reflects the speaker's internal perspective on a situation.

Aspect is divided into two distinct linguistic categories: grammatical aspect, called also 'viewpoint aspect' (Smith 1983); and lexical aspect. Grammatical aspect

is not concerned with the external temporal points of reference of a situation but rather with its internal temporal constituency. It is expressed through morphological markers, explicitly marked by linguistic devices, such as auxiliaries or inflections. Thus, the aspectual distinction between the perfective and the imperfective aspect in Romance languages, for instance, is realised through the inflectional morphology of the *passé composé* and the *imparfait* in French; the *preterite* and the *imperfect* in Spanish; the *passato prossimo* and the *imperfetto* in Italian, respectively (Bardovi-Harlig 2000: 96). While the perfective forms encode the view of a situation or event as a whole and as completed, the imperfective past forms encode explicit reference to the internal temporal structure of a situation, without definite or bounded temporal boundaries; "viewing a situation from within" (Comrie 1976: 24). According to Comrie, the characteristics of the imperfective in all languages tend to be habituality and continuousness or durativity.

The Germanic languages, however, lack the morphological distinction of preterite and imperfect, found in Romance languages (Comrie 1976, Dietrich 1995, Klein 1995, Smith 1997, Collins 1999). In Germanic languages, such as English, German, Dutch, and Swedish, the tense-aspect categories existing include *past, perfect*, and *pluperfect*. English exhibits contrast in all these tense-aspect categories like the other German languages, but it also marks grammatical aspect in the opposition between the *progressive* and the *simple*, unlike German or Dutch (Bardovi-Harlig 2000).

2. Bulgarian Grammatical Aspect: Present Reference

Unlike other Slavic languages, which are synthetic and inflected for cases, Bulgarian is an analytical language. It does not have cases, except for a few remnants of pronoun cases from Old Bulgarian, which are nowadays treated as archaic. Instead, it has a system of prepositions and post-positioned definite articles. Bulgarian verb system is quite complex with the verbs being inflected for person, number, and in certain cases, for gender. It has two types of voice, active and passive (*deyatelen* and *stradatelen zalog*); nine tenses and three conjugations (*sprezhenia*). As far as grammatical (viewpoint) aspect is concerned, Bulgarian verbs have both perfective and imperfective grammatical aspect and Bulgarian verbs are paired with respect to this grammatical aspectual opposition: for each imperfective base verb form, there is a corresponding perfective one, formed by derivation (by adding a prefix, very rarely a suffix; and by stem changes).

As Bulgarian lacks infinitive, the base verb form is considered to be the first person singular form in Present Simple Tense. The opposition of grammatical aspect is marked by a verb stem change and addition of affixes. Compare the following pairs of verbs:

Perfective		**Imperfective**	
1) *предло**жа***	*pred**lozha** (offer)*	*предла**гам***	*pred**lagam** (offer)*
*изло**жа***	*iz**lozha** (expose)*	*изла**гам***	*iz**lagam** (expose)*
*сло**жа***	*s**lozha** (put)*	*сла**гам***	*s**lagam** (put)*
*възло**жа***	*vaz**loza** (assign)*	*възла**гам***	*vaz**lagam** (assign)*
2) *отго**воря***	*ot**govorya** (answer)*	*отго**варям***	*ot**govaryam** (answer)*
*изго**воря***	*iz**govorya** (utter)*	*изго**варям***	*iz**govaryam** (utter)*
*прего**воря***	*pre**govorya** (revise)*	*прего**варям***	*pre**govaryam** (revise)*
*дого**воря***	*do**govorya** contract)*	*дого**варям***	*do**govaryam** (contract)*
3) *ка**жа***	***ka**zha* (say)*	***ка**звам***	***ka**zvam* (say)*
*на**ка**жа*	*na**kazha** (punish)*	*на**ка**звам*	*na**kazvam** (punish)*
*предс**ка**жа*	*preds**kazha** (predict)*	*предс**ка**звам*	*preds**kazvam** (predict)*
*до**ка**жа*	*do**kazha** (prove)*	*до**ка**звам*	*do**kazvam** (prove)*

What is more, the pairs of verbs have a different conjugation. The conjugation of a verb depends on the final vowel of the verb in third person singular, present simple tense: verbs of first conjugation end in -*e*; of second – in –*u (-i)*, and from third conjugation – in -*a, я (-a, -ya)*. The perfective verbs from group (1) and (2) are of second conjugation, while the imperfective ones are of third conjugation. The perfective verbs from group (3) are of first conjugation whereas the imperfective correspondents are of third conjugation. It can be observed that all the imperfective forms are of third conjugation, while the perfective ones are either of the first or second conjugation. This can be interpreted as a proof that Bulgarian has a very strict system for marking perfectivity/imperfectivity through a change in the stem and adding prefixes. Tenses, on the other hand, are marked through an inflection in the very final position of the verb form.

Another interesting fact is that Bulgarian verb forms are lexically productive. For instance, when a perfective verb form originated from an imperfective one through adding a prefix (very rarely, a suffix), it can produce a secondary imperfective verb form, which in its turn, might or might not produce a secondary perfective form. For instance:

Imperfective	*/*	*Perfective*	*/*	*Secondary Imperfective*	*/*	*Secondary Perfective*
мажа (mazha)		***на**мажа (**na**mazha)*		*намаз**вам** (namaz**vam**)*	*(spread)*	*донамазвам*
пиша (pisha)		***на**пиша (**na**pisha)*		*напис**вам** (napi**svam**)*	*(write)*	*пренапиша*
чета (cheta)		***про**чета (**pro**cheta)*		*прочит**ам** (proch**itam**)*	*(read)*	*препрочитам*

The meaning of the secondary perfective verbs, though, differs from the meaning of the perfective ones, usually expressing a final finishing touch of the activity, as in *донамазвам;* do the activity again or anew, as in *препрочитам* (re-read) and *пренапиша* (re-write anew).

The first three groups of verb forms from the examples above (the imperfective, perfective and the secondary imperfective) are expressed in English by one and the same verb form. In order to mark perfectivity/imperfectivity in English, an appropriate verb tense should be chosen. In Bulgarian, on the other hand, perfectivity/ imperfectivity is encoded in the verb form itself. Compare the following examples:

(1) *Чета книга*.
    Read-I book.

Чета (cheta) is an imperfective verb form, expressing an uncompleted action, action in progress. The equivalent translation in English would be: I *am reading* a book. The imperfectivity is marked by the Present Progressive Tense.

(2) *Когато чета книга, ми се приспива*.
    When   read-I book, me myself feel sleepy/feel like sleeping.

In this sentence, the same imperfective verb *чета* expresses a habitual, repetitive action and this meaning is supported by the adverb *when*. The best English equivalent would be: When(ever) I *read* a book, I feel sleepy/like sleeping. The habituality of the action is expressed in English by the choice of the Present Simple Tense and supported by the adverb *when(ever)*.

(3) *Когато прочета книгата, ще ти я върна*.
    When   read-I   the book, will to you it return-I.

Прочета (procheta) is a perfective verb, denoting a completed, finished action. In English this would be: When I *finish reading* the book, I'll return it to you. The perfectivity is expressed by a combination of the phase verb *finish*, which clearly denotes the end-point of an activity and the verb *read*, marked with an *-ing* ending, typical for denoting continuity.

To sum up, the examples above demonstrate that in Bulgarian the opposition perfectivity vs. imperfectivity/habituality is denoted through the choice of a perfective vs. imperfective verb form. What is more, Bulgarian does not have Present Progressive Tense; it only has Present Tense (сегашно време). In English, this opposition is denoted by the choice of a different verb tense: Present Progressive for imperfect, uncompleted activities/activities in progress; and Present Simple for habitual/repetitive activities. Example (3) poses an interesting case as it demonstrates that in order to denote perfectivity, neither Present Simple, even less Present Progressive

can do the job. Therefore, a different language means is involved – a combination of the phase verb *finish* (clearly denoting the end-point of an activity) and an *-ing* form of the verb denoting the activity, which in itself denotes action in progress.

Slabakova (2003) also confirms that Slavic languages differ from English with respect to the semantics of the present tense. Having investigated the linguistic properties related to grammatical aspect, she concludes that English differs from Germanic, Romance, and Slavic languages with respect to the semantics of the present tense. English Present simple can express a present habit but cannot denote an ongoing event. Furthermore, the English bare infinitive can denote not only the processual part of an event but can also include the completion of this event, as in: *I saw Mary cross the street* (completion entailed) vs. *I saw Mary crossing the street* (no completion entailed).

Slabakova concludes that English verbal morphology is impoverished, giving examples with lexical roots such as *dress* and *play* which can be verbs or nouns. She consents with Giorgi and Pianesi's (1997) claim that English verbs are "naked" forms able to express several verbal values, including the bare infinitive, the first and second-person singular, and the first- second- and third-person plural. Following the arguments of Giorgi and Pianesi (1997), Slabakova claims that "English eventive verbs acquire categorial features by being associated with the aspectual marker [+PERFECTIVE]" (2003: 46–47), in order to be distinguished from the English nominals. As for Bulgarian verbs, she claims that this is not necessary, as they are inflected for person and number and so, are easily recognisable. Therefore, "Bulgarian verbs are not associated with [+PERF] feature" (2003: 47). Based on this grammatical aspect contrast between English and Bulgarian and the claim that the [+PERF] feature of English bare verbs is absent in Bulgarian grammar, Slabakova tried to explain various interpretive differences between the two languages, formulating the Bottleneck Hypothesis (Slabakova 2008), which claims that "inflectional morphemes and their formal features present the most formidable challenge to learners" (ibid: 23) (see also Popova 2006, Manova 2007, Gerasymova 2009).

Although this claim holds truth about the Bulgarian equivalent of bare infinitives (they do not entail completion of events), it seems that a vital fact about the morphology of the Bulgarian verbs has been neglected here, as perfectivity/imperfectivity (*vid na glagola*) is considered to be a typical verbal characteristic feature, as well as tense, person, and number, for which every verb in Bulgarian is marked (Gerdzhikov 2003, Kutsarov 2007, Nitsolova 2008).

3. Comparison with English Grammatical Aspect with Present Reference

Considering how English expresses perfectivity with present reference, the Present Perfect Tense comes in place. However, Present Perfect is often described as referring to "past with present relevance" or "past involving the present" (Leech 2004). There are two distinct ways in which Present Perfect relates a past event to the present: (a) it may involve a time period lasting up to the present; and (b) it may have results persisting at the present time. Leech (2004) observed four different

senses of the Present Perfect, one of them reported to occur with *stat*e *verbs* and three with *event verbs*.

The first 'sense' of the Present perfect, to use Leech's term, denotes *state up to the present*. It occurs with state verbs and the present involvement means that the state extends over a period lasting up to the present moment.

(4) *We've lived in London since 2002*. (London is where we are living now)
(5) *This house has been empty for ages*. (It is still empty)

This 'state' use of the Present Perfect is almost compulsory to be denoted by an adverbial of duration.

With 'event verbs' the Present Perfect may refer to some indefinite happening in the past. This is the so-called *indefinite past*.

(6) *Have you been to Australia?*
(7) *I've seen the film.*
(8) *They've studied medicine.*

Indefiniteness in this case might refer to the fact that the number of events is not specified – it may be one or more than one. The number of events might be mentioned adverbially, e.g. *I've been to Australia twice*. However, the other thing which is indefinite is when this event happened. If the exact time of happening is specified, though, Present Perfect becomes irrelevant. Simple Past should be used instead, e.g. *I went to Australia last year*. The meaning of indefiniteness can be treated as a lifetime experience where the exact moment of the event happening is not important.

Habit in a period, leading up to the present is the third 'sense' of Present Perfect, classified by Leech. The habitual or iterative use of the Present Perfect with 'event verbs' is illustrated by examples, such as:

(9) *Miss Philips has sung in this choir for twenty years.*
(10) *I have always walked to work.*

Habit, as it is understood here, is a state consisting of repeated events. It closely resembles the first 'sense' but it might as well continue in the future. An adverbial of duration is usually required. If such an adverbial is not present, the examples might turn into 'indefinite past' cases.

The final 'sense' of Present Perfect is *resultative past*. The Present Perfect is used in reference to a past event to imply that the result of this event is still operative at the present time. This meaning is clearest with 'transitional event verbs' (Leech 2004).

(11) *Ann has arrived.* (She is here now.)
(12) *Someone has broken the window.* (It is broken now.)

The resultative meaning does not need support from adverbials.

Having in mind that Bulgarian language lacks tenses such as Present Progressive or Present Perfect, it is interesting to see how the opposition perfectivity/imperfectivity, expressed in English by means of these tenses, is realised in Bulgarian.

When the meaning of the verb is imperfective (i.e. it expresses an activity in progress) and has a present reference (i.e. it is in progress now, at the moment), in English this is mapped to the Present Progressive Tense. In Bulgarian, which only has one Present Tense, this is realised through the use of an imperfective verb form, as in example (1) above. However, an imperfective verb form is also used to express states up to the present or habits in a period leading up to the present, normally realised in English by the Present Perfect Tense, as in the examples (4), (5), and (9) above. Compare:

(4) *Живеем в Лондон от 2002.*
    Live-we in London from 2002.
(5) *Къщата е празна от много време.*
    House-the is empty from a long time.
(9) *Г-жа Филипс пее в този хор от 20 години.*
    Mrs Philips   sings in this choir from 20 years.

On the other hand, to express indefinite past or resultative past (realised in English by the Present Perfect), Bulgarian makes use of pure past overt verb morphology – it uses Past Indefinite Tense (минало неопределено време), which has a perfective meaning of something done, achieved, accomplished in the past but not attached to any specific time in the past. It is either not known or not important. The important thing is the result of the activity (Nitsolova 2008). Compare:

(6) *Бил ли си в Австралия?*
    Been-you in Australia?
(7) *Гледал съм филма.*
    Seen-I am film-the.
(11) *Ан пристигна.*
    Ann arrived.
(12) *Някой е счупил прозореца.*
    Someone is broken window-the.

It strikes that there is a great similarity in the meaning and the verb morphology of the indefinite and resultative past in English and the Bulgarian Past Indefinite. The only difference is that in Bulgarian the auxiliary verb is 'be', not 'have'.

In conclusion, unlike English, Bulgarian relies on pairs of verbs to express the opposition perfectivity/imperfectivity with present reference. English, in contrast, relies on verb morphology and the use of specific verb tenses. However, although

the two languages use different means to express perfectivity/imperfectivity, the meaning mapped onto the verbs seems identical.

4. Grammatical Aspect: Past Reference

Past tense verb morphology related to grammatical and lexical aspect is much better studied and a substantial amount of research has now been gathered about the use of past tense morphology in a variety of languages: Bickerton (1981), Andersen (1993), Andersen and Shirai (1994), Bardovi-Harlig (1992, 2000), Bayley (1994), Bardovi-Harlig and Bergstrom (1996), Salaberry (1999, 2000), Bhat (1999), Slabakova and Montroul (2000, 2002), Salaberry and Shirai (2002), etc. It is believed that the use of verbal morphology by second language learners may be indicative of developmental stages of acquisition. For instance, Andersen and Shirai (1994) argue that the lexical aspectual values of verbal endings are associated with specific stages of development of past tense morphology across languages.

4.1. Past Tense-Aspect Morphology in English

Bardovi-Harlig (2000) has extensively researched the tense-aspect morphology related to past in English. She has found the following oppositions of grammatical aspect related to the past in English:

a. The contrast between the *simple past* (*walked*) and the *past progressive* (*was/were walking*).

This contrast is one of grammatical aspect, as seen by Leech (2004), Comrie (1985), Dahl (1985), Smith (1983, 1997). Binnick (1991: 284) identifies four theories of the progressive which include durative aspect, action in progress or progress; incompletion, and progressive of the frame. Most of the accounts combine more than one feature of the progressive. Leech (2004: 28), for instance, identifies three features of the progressive: duration, limited duration, and incompletion. Bybee and Dahl (1989) describe the progressive as a situation in progress at reference time, and Shirai and Andersen (1995) also identify 'action in progress' as the prototype of the progressive category, proposing the features [–TELIC] (not completed) and [+DURATIVE] for the progressive. Comrie (1985) identifies the core features of the progressive universally as a combination of continuous meaning and non-stativity. Both Comrie (1985) and Dahl (1985) agree that the English progressive has a meaning that extends beyond the progressive in other languages. Comrie classifies the progressive as a type of imperfect that does not fundamentally include habituality (compared to the Romance imperfect, which strongly implies habituality), although Leech (2004) showed that habitual interpretations of the progressive are possible.

b. The contrast between the *simple past* (*walked*) and the *present perfect* (*has/have walked*).

The present perfect in English has inspired many semantic analyses, the most common interpretation being that it expresses 'current relevance' (McCoard 1978, Inoue 1979). Comrie (1976: 52) has formulated this current relevance as "the continuous relevance of a past situation". The meaning of the present perfect can actually be broken down into its past and present components. Leech (2004) has identi-

fied two present (state up to the present, habit in a period leading up to the present) and two past meanings (indefinite past, resultative past). Suh (1992): 84) suggests that the present perfect and the simple past share the feature [+ANTERIOR], but differ on the feature [CURRENT RELEVANCE], with the present perfect having the feature [+CURRENT RELEVANCE] and the simple past [– CURRENT RELEVANCE].

The semantics of the present perfect also determines the adverbials with which it may or may not occur. It never occurs with time adverbials which indicate a specific time in the past, whereas the simple past does. The point of view involved in the choice of the present perfect or the simple past is particularly evident where both allow the same adverbial *for*. For instance, in the examples:

(13) *I have studied English for six years.*
(14) *I studied English for six years.*

Following Inoue (1979), the present perfect in (13) suggests that it is possible for the speaker to re-engage in the activity, while in (14) this is not the case.

c. The contrast between the *pluperfect* (past perfect – *had walked*) and the *simple past* (*walked*).

The pluperfect, also called the past-in-the-past, is described by Comrie (1985: 65) as having a "reference point in the past and the situation in question is located prior to that reference point". With the pluperfect, the reference point is before the time of speaking and the situation or event is before the reference moment. All events or situations that can be encoded by the pluperfect, can also be encoded by the simple past. However, pluperfect is necessary for the purposes of expressing a chronological order. A sequence of events reported in the simple past is normally understood to be in chronological order. However, if the events are not presented in chronological order, "the pluperfect is an ideal mechanism for indicating this" (Comrie 1985: 67).

4.2. Past Tense-Aspect Morphology in Bulgarian

In Bulgarian, the main oppositions in terms of grammatical aspect related to the past are: *past aorist* (*minalo svarsheno vreme*) vs. *past progressive* (*minalo nesvarsheno vreme)* and *past aorist* (*minalo svarsheno vreme*) vs. *pluperfect* (*minalo predvaritelno vreme*). There is a third opposition: *past aorist* vs. *the past indefinite* (*minalo neopredeleno vreme*), similar to the English opposition between the simple past and the present perfect, the only difference being that in Bulgarian the past indefinite has no current or present reference. It only refers to an activity/event which happened in the past but has no specifically identified time of occurrence.

As for the meaning of the past tense-aspect morphology in Bulgarian, an interesting fact to observe is that the pairs of verbs (perfective ↔ imperfective), as well as some of the secondary imperfective verbs, can all have a separate form in the past aorist.

(15) *Вчера четох една книга.*
    Yesterday read-I a book.
    I read a book yesterday (but did not necessarily finish it).

The verb form *четох* (*chetoh*) is imperfect in nature (in its base form) and although it is in the past aorist tense, it still denotes an uncompleted action.

(16) *Вчера прочетох една книга.*
    Yesterday read-I a book.
    The proper English translation would be: I started and finished reading a book yesterday.

The verb *прочетох (prochetoh)* is perfective in nature (in its base form) and therefore, it always expresses a completed, accomplished action.

However, it is worth noting that a verb which is perfective in nature (and normally has a prefix do denote perfectivity) cannot be used in past progressive. Only imperfect verbs can be used in past progressive.

(17) *Четях една книга, когато ми се обади.*
    Was reading-I a book when me yourself called-you.
    I was reading a book when you called me.
(18) **Прочитах книга, когато ми се обади.*

In (18) *прочитах* (*prochitah*) is perfective by nature and does not make sense when used in past progressive; it is grammatically incorrect. However, if a secondary imperfective verb, formed from this perfective one, is used, then it makes perfect sense in view of the fact that secondary perfective verbs normally express a repeated activity – something is being done again.

(19) *Препрочитах една книга, когато ми се обади.*
    Was re-reading-I a book when me yourself called-you.
    I was re-reading a book when you called me.

As for the pluperfect (preceding past activity) in Bulgarian, it can only take perfective verb forms to denote a completed, accomplished activity or event which happened before another past activity or event.

(20) *Бях прочел книгата, когато ми се обади.*
    Was read- I book-the, when me yourself called-you.
    I had read the book when you called me.

An imperfective verb form cannot be used in the pluperfect.

To sum up, in Bulgarian, the grammatical aspect seems to be completely separated from tense. The nature of the verb – perfective, imperfective or secondary imperfective, encodes the meaning expressed – whether it is in progress, finished/ accomplished, or being repeated. However, there are certain rules imposed on the verb forms: perfective verbs cannot be used in past progressive; imperfective verbs cannot be used in pluperfect. There are also a few exceptions: imperfective verbs can be used in past aorist to denote that an activity was not necessarily finished; and secondary imperfective verbs can be used in pluperfect to denote an iterative activity, which was repeated.

In comparison with the past morphology oppositions in English, there are obvious similarities in the oppositions: simple past (past aorist) vs. past progressive and simple past (past aorist) vs. pluperfect. The opposition: simple past vs. present perfect in English finds partial correspondence in the Bulgarian opposition: past aorist vs. past indefinite, in the cases of present perfect denoting indefinite or resultative past. Bulgarian past indefinite has no reference to the present.

5. Conclusions

In both languages, English and Bulgarian, temporality is expressed morphologically (through tense marking), lexically (through time adverbials), and syntactically (through periphrastic tenses). As already demonstrated, both languages show aspectual opposition between perfective and imperfective grammatical aspect. Perfective aspect views a situation in its entirety with its endpoints. This is best expressed with simple past in English and past aorist in Bulgarian. The main imperfective viewpoint in both languages is the progressive. The progressive mainly occurs with dynamic verbs but not with stative verbs. Whereas imperfectivity is generally considered to include both habituality and continuousness, the English progressive is defined essentially by continuousness (Bardovi-Harlig 2000). The progressive has been described as a situation in progress at reference time (Bybee and Dahl 1989) and as 'action-in-progress' by Shirai and Andersen (1995) who describe the prototypical progressive as [–TELIC] (not completed) and [+DURATIVE]. The Bulgarian progressive (*minalo nesvarsheno vreme*) shares the same semantic features.

A major difference observed is that while the opposition between the non-progressive and progressive aspect can be found with all tenses in English, in Bulgarian this opposition can only be found with past reference. Another difference is that in English, the imperfective/habitual meaning in the past is considered to be expressed by simple past (Ayoun and Salaberry 2008: 561), whereas in Bulgarian the past progressive (*minalo nesvarsheno vreme*, also called 'past imperfect' by some Bulgarian linguists) contains the semantic characteristics of durativity, repetition (iteration) and habituality (Gerdzhikov 2003, Kutsarov 2007, Nitsolova 2008). In this respect, Bulgarian resembles Romance languages, in which the imperfective past tense (imparfait, imperfect, imperfetto) has the same semantic characteristics: unfinished, iterative and habitual.

Following Ayoun and Salaberry's (2008) graphical expression of the aspectual distinctions in French and English, a similar graphical expression of the aspectual distinctions in Bulgarian can be produced for the sake of comparison:
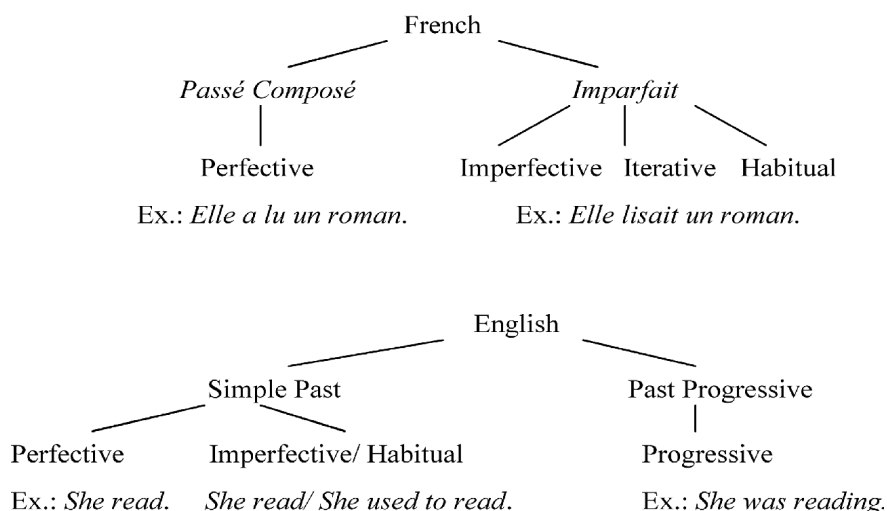
French

Passé Composé   *Imparfait*

Perfective   Imperfective Iterative Habitual

Ex.: *Elle a lu un roman.*   Ex.: *Elle lisait un roman.*

English

Simple Past   Past Progressive

Perfective   Imperfective/ Habitual   Progressive

Ex.: *She read.*   *She read/ She used to read.*   Ex.: *She was reading.*

Figure 1. *Aspectual distinctions in French and English*
(Ayoun and Salaberry 2008: 561)

When compared to the Bulgarian aspectual distinctions, presented in Figure 2 below, it can clearly be noticed that the Bulgarian Past Progressive demonstrates close semantic similarities to the Romance Imparfait. The Bulgarian Past Aorist does not share the habitual meaning of Simple Past in English.

Following that, some predictions about the initial stage of L2 acquisition of the English past morphology will include preference of the past progressive for expressing habitual and iterative activities instead of simple past, due to L1 influence. L2 Bulgarian learners will also definitely experience frustration in using the Present perfect to express habits up to the present moment or resultative events. For the former, they would rather choose simple present and for the latter – simple past, instead (see Klein 1993, 1994b).
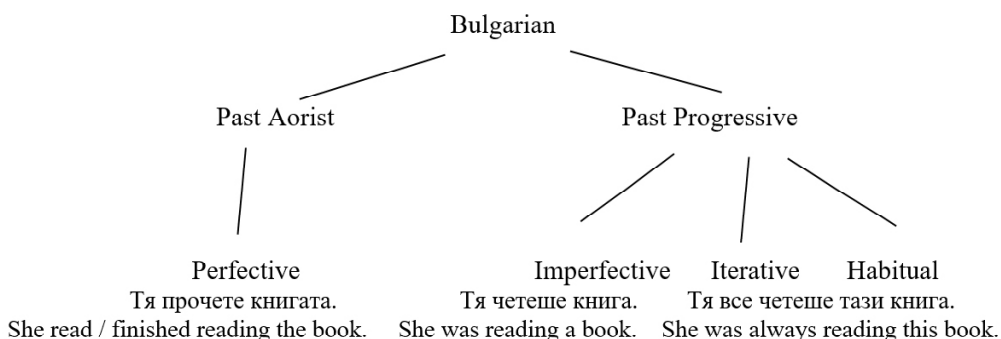
Bulgarian

Past Aorist   Past Progressive

Perfective   Imperfective   Iterative   Habitual
Тя прочете книгата.   Тя четеше книга.   Тя все четеше тази книга.
She read / finished reading the book.   She was reading a book.   She was always reading this book.

Figure 2. *Aspectual distinctions in Bulgarian*

136

This would be due to the influence of the L1 grammatical aspectual system, which, as demonstrated above, is slightly different from the English one. Due to certain similarities between the aspectual systems of English and Bulgarian, L2 learners should not experience any difficulties in marking correctly the perfective meaning of simple past, the progressive (durative) meaning of dynamic verbs in past progressive or the indefinite past meaning of predicates in the present perfect, even at very early stages of learning.

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