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## **SPEAKER GHOSTING IN BULGARIAN REVISITED: ON THE SCOPE OF THE PHENOMENON AND THE IRREPLACEABILITY OF PERFECTS WITH RENARRATIVES**

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## **ОТНОВО ЗА НЕЛЕГИТИМНИЯ ГОВОРЕЩ В БЪЛГАРСКИЯ ЕЗИК: ЗА ОБХВАТА НА ЯВЛЕНИЕТО И НЕЗАМЕНЯЕМОСТТА НА ПЕРФЕКТТЕ С РЕНАРАТИВИ**

Apart from residing in renarratives proper predominantly, renarration as a semantic and grammatical value can be found in Bulgarian present perfect verb forms too. When a Bulgarian native speaker faces a choice between a present perfect and a preterit renarrative, the former is often replaceable by a renarrative. However, there are cases in which replaceability of perfects with renarratives is impossible. The reasons for this are analyzed and explained; a larger scope of the speaker ghosting phenomenon is revealed. The study facilitates some significant generalizations: (i) grammatical entities (categories, grammemes) arise due to structural dependences; (ii) as the perfect has no semantic content of its own and exercises structural functions, Slavic languages that appear not to feature perfects can actually be said to have perfects – under the guise of preterits.

**Keywords:** *aurist/imperfect; perfect; preterit; renarrative; (non-)cancelable; (non-)witnessed; dubitative.*

Освен че предимно присъства в същинските ренаративи, преизказването като семантична и граматическа стойност може да се открие и в българските глаголни форми за сегашен перфект. Когато носител на българския език като роден трябва да избира между сегашен перфект и претеритен ренаратив, сегашният перфект често бива заменян от ренаратив. Налице са обаче случаи, при които заменяемостта на перфекти с ренаративи е невъзможна. Причините за това се анализират и обясняват; разкрива се по-голям обхват на феномена нелегитимен говорещ (speaker ghosting). Изследването подхранва някои значими обобщения: (i) граматическите единици (категории, грамемии) възникват поради структурни зависимости; (ii) тъй като перфектът няма собствено семантично съдържание и изпълнява структурни функции, за славянските езици, които на пръв поглед нямат перфекти, може да се каже, че всъщност имат перфекти – под булото на претерити.

**Ключови думи:** *аорист/имперфект, перфект, претерит, ренаратив, (не-)канцелируемост, (не-)свидетелственост, дубитативност.*

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## Introduction. On the present perfect and the preterit renarrative in Bulgarian

As is common knowledge, Modern Bulgarian has a large number of very intriguing features in the TAM (tense-aspect-mood) domain that, to make things even more complicated, are intertwined in a complex manner. Two grammatical entities, the present perfect and the preterit renarrative, will be dealt with from the point of view of their semantics, use and (non-)grammaticality in certain sentence schemata. The Bulgarian present perfect is formed from the *sam* ‘be’ auxiliary plus a past active *-l* participle, see (1c) below, and is similar in its behavior to the corresponding English form.<sup>1</sup> However, it effectuates additional grammatical features, some of which will be explored here. English will be employed as a metalanguage and a language for comparison in structural terms. As for Bulgarian preterit renarratives, they are formed by adding *-l* (plus gender and number formants) to aorists – *pristigna*<sub>Aor</sub> ‘arrived’ > *pristignala*<sub>PretRenar</sub> ‘arrived’ as in (1b) below, or imperfects, as in *Mia pristigashe*<sub>Imperfect</sub> ‘Mia was arriving/arrived habitually’ > *Mia pristigala*<sub>PretRenar</sub> ‘Mia was arriving/arrived habitually’. I call these preterit renarratives or renarratives proper to distinguish them better from present perfects because the latter are also capable of effectuating renarration, see (1c). Preterit renarratives could also be regarded as obtained by dropping the auxiliary from the present perfect, cf. (1c)>(1b):

- (1) a. *Mia pristigna*<sub>Aor</sub>  
       ‘Mia arrived’  
       b. *Mia pristignala*<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
       ‘Mia arrived’  
       c. *Mia e pristignala*<sub>PresPerfect</sub>  
       ‘Mia has arrived’

There is a conviction among Bulgarianists today that in Bulgarian there exist grammatical entities called renarrative aorists, renarrative imperfects, inferential aorists and inferential imperfects. I need to emphasize again, after an analysis made in Kabakčiev (2022a: 35), that I reject these notions as *defective*, they are oxymorons. Why? Because Bulgarian aorists and imperfects encode witnessing, a grammaticalized value. Conversely, renarratives and inferentials are non-witnessed by virtue of their nature and despite the various controversial treatments they have been afforded in Bulgarianist writings. For example, Gerdzhikov, who otherwise offered many valuable descriptions of the Bulgarian TAM domain, had it initially that both imperfects (*hodeshe*<sub>Imperfect</sub> ‘walked habitually/was walking’) and forms with the *sam* ‘be’ auxiliary and imperfect participles (*e hodel* ‘walked habitually/was walking’) effectuate non-renarration (Gerdzhikov 1977: 20–21). Some years later, the author’s view changed altogether. This time he stated that it is most convenient for forms with imperfect participles like *chetyal e* ‘(has) read habitually’ to be identified as renarratives (Gerdzhikov 1984: 12).

Within the theoretical model employed here, renarratives proper like *hodel* and forms with *sam* auxiliary and imperfect participles like *e hodel* encode renarration, the latter less typically, while the imperfect *hodeshe* is indeed non-renarrated. The insistence, prevalent in Bulgarianist studies, that forms with imperfect participles like *e hodel* are not perfects but inferentials is also rejected in the present model. Imperfect participles take part in the formation of the Bulgarian present perfect (Kabakčiev 2022a: 34); in Kabakčiev (2023) it is shown precisely how this is achieved through the compositional aspect mechanism. If verb forms that were previously aorists or imperfects are turned into inferentials and are then labeled aorist or imperfect inferentials, this means that they encode *simultaneously* witnessing and non-witnessing. But as this is simply impossible, better notions must be launched. I propose “preterit renarrative” for renarratives proper – whether aorist-based (*rabotil* ‘worked’) or imperfect-based (*rabotel* ‘worked’). If it is absolutely necessary for a preterit renarrative to be specified as aorist- or imper-

<sup>1</sup> Present perfects in Bulgarian combine with past tense adverbials, unlike in English. Otherwise, Bulgarian perfects generally behave in a similar way to English perfects.



fect-based, this can always be done and is generally not difficult.<sup>2</sup> But the labels should be aorist-based renarrative and imperfect-based renarrative, not the illogical, misleading and wrong renarrative aorist and renarrative imperfect. As an additional note, given that Bulgarianists recognize perfects as homonymous with inferentials (e.g., *e pristignal* ‘has arrived’ can be a present perfect or an inferential aorist), it begs the question why there has never been a suggestion to maintain the existence of perfect aorists and perfect imperfects (*e pristigal* ‘has arrived habitually’).<sup>3</sup>

Although present perfects across languages nominally encode presentness through the tense value of the auxiliary (*be/have*) in periphrastic perfects,<sup>4</sup> the situations portrayed are unquestionably in the past.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, Bulgarian third-person preterit renarratives, as in (1b) above (this one is aorist-based), can be regarded as closely related to present perfects in their semantics, behavior and formal similarity. Both carry the value “renarrated” – though for the latter it is less typical, and this crystal-clear fact is rarely pointed out in the literature (it is in GSBKE 1983: 356-357; Kutsarov 1985: 125-126; Tarpomanova 2014: 38, 56). Additional proof of the overall similarity between preterit renarratives and present perfects is the fact that there are no first- and second-person (sg.&pl.) renarratives in Bulgarian, cf. the non-grammaticality of (2a) below. If renarration of a Vendlerian situation (Vendler 1957) in a first- or second-person utterance must be effected, can this be done with a renarrative proper? No. It can only be done with a present perfect – (2b). The intended proposition is the same but the perfect replaces the renarrative, simultaneously maintaining the renarration and repairing the non-grammaticality in (2a).<sup>6</sup> Note finally that the Bulgarian TAM system, being extremely complex, requires knowledge of the specificities of aorists, imperfects, perfects, renarratives: their formation, semantics, functions.

- (2) a. \*Az/ti pristignal<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
       ‘I/you arrived’  
       b. Az sam/Ti si pristignal<sub>PresPerfect</sub>  
       ‘I have/You have arrived’

Recall now that in (1b) above the preterit renarrative is obtained from an aorist. The Bulgarian grammatical tradition has it that aorists and imperfects are indicative witnessed forms – but this can be considered a descriptive defect. If preterits encode a particular grammatical category and in this case it is a modal one, it ought to have its own forms of witnessed mood. But a problem would arise if aorists and imperfects were to be labeled “witnessed mood” – the indicative mood would then be an empty slot, because there are neither non-witnessed aorists and imperfects, nor aorists and imperfects neutral to witnessing.<sup>7</sup> As pointed out above, another “technical problem” is that preterit renarratives could be regarded as obtained by dropping the auxiliary from the relevant perfect form, as in (1c)>(1b). But it would be difficult to prove that this is the exact mechanism of formation, so the other formation variant appears more plausible.

This paper is a continuation of research on the intriguing phenomenon of speaker ghosting in Bulgarian, described for the first time in Kabakčiev (2018), which has to do with some structural functions of the present perfect and the preterit renarrative. As argued subsequently (Kabakčiev 2020; 2022a;

<sup>2</sup> Some minor difficulty may only occur when a participle is homonymous between aorist and imperfect: *obichal* ‘loved’, *patuval* ‘traveled’, etc.

<sup>3</sup> To the best of my knowledge.

<sup>4</sup> There are synthetic perfects too – Latin, Georgian, etc., but these are not discussed here.

<sup>5</sup> In Bulgarianist studies, present perfects are held to signify past events and simultaneously their “present result” or “current relevance”. But the idea that “result” or “current relevance” may underly the *raison d’être* of the perfect is considered here flawed and misleading.

<sup>6</sup> The sentence with a present perfect effecting renarration (2b) means that the speaker is telling the hearer that someone said that the speaker or hearer arrived. This happens if, for example, the hearer is blind or has arrived at a place but does not realize that this is the final destination – and the speaker is telling him/her “you have arrived”. Of course, the perfect here can also be effecting inference.

<sup>7</sup> It is not this paper’s aim to solve this problem.

2022b), the *raison d'être* of the present perfect across languages is not the expression of current relevance or resultativeness – a thesis held in the majority of publications worldwide (Bybee et al 1994; Comrie 1985; Dahl 1985; Fenn 1987; McCoard 1978, among others); the present perfect performs structural functions. One such function in Bulgarian involves the requirement for the second part of the *X said that* [content of *that*] semantico-syntactic schema to contain the major feature cancelability (Kabakčiev 2018; 2019 – after Grice 1975/1989). This feature can be effectuated directly, grammatically, as in Bulgarian, or indirectly, i.e., signaled (explicated), as in languages like English (probably also in Greek, see Kabakčiev 2022b: 399).

### An analysis of Bulgarian aorists, renarratives and perfects

A native speaker of Bulgarian can easily imagine himself in the following real-world setting, a context in linguistic terms, as the speaker in (3) below, having expected a parcel delivery to a courier office. The courier has sent him a message reporting the delivery. The speaker can now report this circumstance to his wife, the hearer, in several ways – that are theoretically or practically possible. Here are three of these ways:

- (3) a. \*Uvedomyavat<sub>Pres</sub>/Uvedomiha<sub>Aor</sub> me, che pratkata pristigna<sub>Aor</sub>  
 ‘They are informing me/informed me that the parcel arrived’  
 b. Uvedomyavat<sub>Pres</sub>/Uvedomiha<sub>Aor</sub> me, che pratkata pristignala<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
 ‘They are informing me/informed me that the parcel arrived’  
 c. Uvedomyavat<sub>Pres</sub>/Uvedomiha<sub>Aor</sub> me, che pratkata e pristignala<sub>PresPerfect</sub>  
 ‘They are informing me/informed me that the parcel has arrived’

Sentence (3a), with an aorist in the dependent clause, will normally *not* be used by a native speaker, as it is judged incorrect. But there is something puzzling here. On the one hand, native speakers recognize the non-grammaticality. On the other, they cannot explain the reasons for it even after long and tenacious attempts (explained in detail why in Kabakčiev 2018; 2019). Both ordinary native speakers, i.e., with no background in linguistics, and Bulgarianists fail to see why sentences such as (3a) are non-grammatical. It is not because they are not smart enough; understanding this kind of non-grammaticality is an extremely complex logical operation that must be done by the hearer, preferably a linguist, in addition to the standard intuition-based language interpretation.<sup>8</sup> Note that after speaker ghosting was discovered and described in Kabakčiev (2018), it was immediately also found (by Bulatović 2018) to exist in Montenegrin – a closely related language indeed but different in many grammatical respects. This proves the cross-language and, generally speaking, universal nature of the phenomenon.

The reason for the non-grammaticality of (3a) and similar sentences is the speaker ghosting phenomenon (Bg. *nelegitimnen govoresht* ‘illegitimate speaker’). The data it was found on is the *X said that* [content of *that*] semantico-syntactic schema. The schema and the non-grammaticality of sentences like (3a) were *not* previously unknown in Bulgarian linguistics (Ivančev 1976: 356; Lindstedt 1985: 90; Nitsolova 2008: 284) but the reasons behind the non-grammaticality remained a puzzle until Kabakčiev (2018). The schema contains *verba dicendi*, verbs of speaking. The prototypical verb of speaking is *ka-zha* ‘say’. There are other such verbs, not too many, e.g., *zayavya* ‘state’, *uvedomya* ‘inform’, *obyavya* ‘announce’, *saobshtya* ‘communicate’.

Consider now the following details concerning the Bulgarian sentences (3). Sentence (3a) with the aorist *pristigna* ‘arrived’ means that the speaker witnessed the arrival of the parcel. But this non-grammatical sentence needs an analysis why it is incorrect. The analysis is provided in Kabakčiev (2018; 2019). Sentence (3b) with the preterit renarrative *pristignala* ‘arrived’ means that someone told the speaker about the arrival of the parcel. The verb form can be regarded as obtained by dropping the auxiliary from the perfect form – but this is just a conjecture. As for sentence (3c) with the present perfect *e*

<sup>8</sup> The very intriguing thing is that while both ordinary native speakers and linguists immediately intuit the non-grammaticality, they are absolutely unable to explain it (Kabakčiev 2019).



*pristignala* ‘has arrived’, it generates several possible interpretations, among which: (a) to the extent that the meaning of the perfect is thought to be related to current relevance and/or resultativeness (Marovska 2005; Kutsarov 2007: 249–303; Dimitrova 2020; Hristov 2020), the speaker has expected the parcel; (b) to the extent that the perfect is associated with cancelable content (Kabakčiev 2019; 2020; 2022b), the speaker suspects that the parcel might fail to arrive; (c) due to the impact of the value cancelable of the perfect, sentence (3c) also implicates that the parcel may have arrived or not – though the possibility for it to have arrived is deemed higher; (d) the value cancelable is also related to the non-witnessed value of the perfect,<sup>9</sup> see it explained in Kabakčiev (2022b), and given that the speaker did not witness the arrival of the parcel (proved by the non-use of a witnessed form), the arrival of the parcel is subject to doubt.

Note furthermore that the sentence with the renarrative (3b) and the one with the perfect (3c) are interchangeable and this leads to an assumption that they ought to be interchangeable in other contexts too. The assumption is amplified by the renarrative meaning that the present perfect carries, a value considered in Kabakčiev (2020) to be a major one – not minor or peripheral, despite its lower weight vis-à-vis the inferential value. Strangely, the renarrative value of the present perfect is crystal-clear to the native speaker but in the literature, as already pointed out, it is only sporadically recognized.

The initial stimulus for this research came from certain Bulgarian sentences or types of sentences extracted from the Internet, such as (4b) below. Some of them, e.g., (4a), are non-grammatical. In order to become grammatical, (4a) must undergo a change from (4a) to (4b):

- (4) a. \*Kogato uvedomili<sub>PretRenar</sub> Dali, che go izgonili<sub>PretRenar</sub> ot Dvizhenieto na syurrealistite, toy kazal<sub>PretRenar</sub> “Le surréalisme, c’est moi!”  
 ‘When they informed Dali that they expelled him from the Surrealist Movement, he said “Le surréalisme, c’est moi!”’
- b. Kogato uvedomili<sub>PretRenar</sub> Dali, che sa go izgonili<sub>PresPerfect</sub> ot Druzhestvoto na syurrealistite, toy kazal<sub>PretRenar</sub> “Le surréalisme, c’est moi!”  
 (lit.) ‘When they informed Dali that they have expelled him from the Surrealist Movement, he said “Le surréalisme, c’est moi!”’

Note that the non-grammatical (4a) is different from (3b) in that (3b) also contains a *verbum dicendi* but is grammatical.<sup>10</sup> Why is (4a) non-grammatical? Why is (4b) correct, unlike (4a)? The reason(s) for the lack of interchangeability between preterit renarrative and present perfect here calls for an explanation. There is also a problem in that some native speakers of Bulgarian would tend to believe that (4a) is actually either *not* incorrect or, if it is deviant, it is only slightly so. The deviance is considered “technical”, due to an inadvertently dropped auxiliary *sa* ‘are’. Hence, while interpreting such sentences – something that takes a split second and especially when they are produced in oral speech, the tiny missing auxiliary is quickly added. However, as will soon become clear, sentence (3a) must actually be judged as non-grammatical for other reasons, semantic.

Let us now consider the English sentence (5a), with a verb in the preterit (simple/indefinite past). In (5b) it is changed into a present perfect. Then (5a) and (5b) are counterposed to their Bulgarian translation equivalents (5c)–(5d). These four sentences portray the Vendlerian accomplishment situation, in a real-world setting that is easily recognizable, the arrival of a train. These four sentences in two languages are understandable to everybody, even in their details:

<sup>9</sup> It is worth recalling an old assertion (Aikhenvald 2004: 112–114) that the present perfect across languages has the so-called by her “distinct nonfirsthand nuance” – where nonfirsthand means “non-witnessed”. The assertion was made long ago but was not developed further.

<sup>10</sup> As argued also below, sentence (4a) could have an interpretation which is grammatical. On its face value – if Dali is truly expelled and informed about this, the sentence is deviant. But if, in a peripheral reading, Dali is not expelled but is misleadingly informed that he was expelled, the sentence is correct. This reading is possible because of the dubitability, hence cancelability, observed in the renarrative *izgonili* ‘expelled’. In contrast, *sa go izgonili* ‘have expelled him’, with a present perfect, is cancelable but not dubitable. See also below.



- (5) a. The train arrived<sub>Preterit</sub>  
 b. The train has arrived<sub>PresPerfect</sub>  
 c. Vlakat pristigna<sub>Aor</sub>  
 d. Vlakat e pristignal<sub>PresPerfect</sub>

Note that, as already indicated and explained above and elsewhere (Kabakčiev 2018; 2019), while an English sentence such as (6a) below is correct, a Bulgarian sentence such as (6b), that ought to be the perfect translation equivalent of (6a), is non-grammatical:

- (6) a. Somebody said that the train arrived  
 b. \*Nyakoy kaza<sub>Aor</sub>, che vlakat pristigna<sub>Aor</sub>  
 ‘Somebody said that the train arrived’

As already shown, non-grammaticality is standardly eliminated by the use of a preterit renarrative (7a) or a present perfect (7b):

- (7) a. Nyakoy kaza<sub>Aor</sub>, che vlakat pristignal<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
 ‘Somebody said that the train arrived’  
 b. Nyakoy kaza<sub>Aor</sub>, che vlakat e pristignal<sub>PresPerfect</sub>  
 (lit.) ‘Somebody said that the train has arrived’<sup>11</sup>

Compare (6b) and (7) also to the three sentences in (3) above. The reasons for this non-grammaticality remained unclear until Kabakčiev (2018). But even after the reasons were pinpointed, the view that non-grammaticality is simply due to the *verba dicendi* remains prevalent in Bulgarianist studies, and the reasons for the non-grammaticality are even ignored, whether intentionally or not. A recent paper dealing with sentences with *verba dicendi* (Tarpomanova & Aleksova 2022) sidesteps the speaker ghosting phenomenon in Kabakčiev (2018; 2019) with the accompanying analysis of non-grammaticality, and does not propose any novel explanation of the use of *verba dicendi* in the semantico-syntactic schema in question.

Not only is the view that non-grammaticality is simply due to *verba dicendi* wrong, the speaker ghosting phenomenon actually goes **way beyond the use of *verba dicendi***! Consider (8) below. These sentences are non-grammatical but they contain either **other** verbs (not *verba dicendi*) or **do not contain any non-copula verb**, cf. (8e), or **do not contain any verb at all**, see (8f):

- (8) a. \*Razbiram<sub>Pres</sub>/\*Chuvam<sub>Pres</sub>, che vlakat pristigna<sub>Aor</sub>  
 ‘I understand/hear that the train arrived’  
 b. \*Okazva se<sub>Pres</sub>/\*Stava<sub>Pres</sub> yasno, che vlakat pristigna<sub>Aor</sub>  
 ‘It turns out/It becomes clear that the train arrived’  
 c. \*Znae se<sub>Pres</sub>/\*Ne se znae<sub>Pres</sub> dali vlakat pristigna<sub>Aor</sub>  
 ‘It is known/It is not known whether the train arrived’  
 d. \*Predpolaga se<sub>Pres</sub>/\*Smyata se<sub>Pres</sub>, che vlakat pristigna<sub>Aor</sub>  
 ‘It is supposed/considered that the train arrived’  
 e. \*Sigurno e<sub>Pres</sub>/\*Ne e<sub>Pres</sub> sigurno, che vlakat pristigna<sub>Aor</sub>  
 ‘It is certain/It is not certain that the train arrived’  
 f. \*Spored prokuraturata/pravitelstvoto vlakat pristigna<sub>Aor</sub>  
 ‘According to the prosecutor’s office/the government, the train arrived’

Indeed, some of the verbs, e.g. *razbiram* ‘understand’ and *chuvam* ‘hear’ in (8a), implicate the prior use of a *verbum dicendi*, by virtue of their semantic nature as lexical items. For somebody to un-

<sup>11</sup> English sentences such as *Somebody said that the train has arrived* are usually felt to be non-grammatical due to the violation of the SOT rule (Kabakčiev 2018), an issue not discussed here.



derstand, hear or learn something, it must first be communicated to them. But note that the other verbs in (8) do not implicate any prior use of a *verbum dicendi*. The status quo present in phrases like *znae se* ‘it is known’, *okaza se* ‘it turned out’, *stana yasno* ‘it became clear’, *sigurno e* ‘it is certain’ can be described as acquired knowledge – and knowledge is acquired in various ways, not only from hearing somebody say something. Note also that in (8f) prosecutors cannot be thought to have witnessed the arrival of the train and, in principle, an indictment cannot be thought of as truthful. An indictment either *corresponds* to reality *or not*, even by virtue of its semantic nature as a lexical item. Similarly, an announcement by a government that the train arrived also represents cancelable content and, in principle, either corresponds to reality or not. The preposition itself (*spored* ‘according to’) also adds to the uncertainty of the proposition and hence the cancelability. Thus any phrase of the *according to X* type – in any natural language – will be expected to force uncertainty and cancelability onto the meaning of the following VP.

To sum up, the sentences in (8) exemplify speaker ghosting: not only are there simultaneously two speakers in each of them, the speakers contradict each other – something inadmissible in language communication (Kabakčiev 2018; 2019). But, most importantly, note that, despite their non-grammaticality, most of the sentences in (8) do not contain *verba dicendi*, hence they do not belong to the *X said that* schema. This confirms the validity of a recent conjecture (Kabakčiev 2022b: 392) that speaker ghosting can by no means be regarded as a phenomenon present solely in sentences such as (3a) or (6b) and falling into the *X said that* schema. Other types of clauses and phrases in schemata similar to *X said that* but not containing *verba dicendi* also require cancelable content in the dependent clause. Thus, laid out as a generalization,

*the Bulgarian speaker ghosting phenomenon not only has a high prevalence in actual speech, its prevalence is higher or even much higher than the one with verba dicendi.*

### A new finding: speaker ghosting in sentences with renarratives

The example in (4a) showed that speaker ghosting can occur in sentences with *verba dicendi* in the main clause and a renarrative in the dependent one, making the relevant sentence non-grammatical. Let us shorten the two long and clumsy examples (4) into (9) – to make them more pliable:

- (9) a. \*Uvedomili<sub>PretRenar</sub> Dali, che go izgonili<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
 ‘They informed Dali that they expelled him’  
 b. Uvedomili<sub>PretRenar</sub> Dali, che sa go izgonili<sub>PresPerfect</sub>  
 (lit.) ‘They informed Dali that they have expelled him’

Serious questions arise. Why is (9a) non-grammatical? Exactly how does the renarrative in (9a) trigger non-grammaticality? Exactly how does the perfect in (9b) repair the non-grammaticality?

Speaker ghosting here consists in the following. The verb form *izgonili* ‘expelled’ is cancelable and this is perfectly clear to the native speaker as it is frequently found in sentences like (10):

- (10) a. Kazaha<sub>Aor</sub> mu, che go izgonili<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
 ‘They told him that they expelled him’  
 b. Kazali<sub>PretRenar</sub> mu, che go izgonili<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
 ‘They told him that they expelled him’

These sentences mean: “they told him that they expelled him – but his discharge is subject to doubt, or even untrue”. This is because *izgonili* ‘expelled’ can either be said to belong to the paradigm of dubitable mood forms – or, at least, the value dubitable can be assigned to this verb form, otherwise considered renarrative.<sup>12</sup> And when something is dubitable, it is cancelable by virtue of its nature: it is

<sup>12</sup> Some Bulgarianists insist that the verb form *izgonili* ‘expelled’ is not “a dubitative” (Bg. *dubitativ*) because it does not contain the special marker of dubitability *bil* ‘was’. There is, however, no doubt that the verb form *izgonili* – indeed nominally a renarrative, also effectuates the value dubitable.

either true or not true. But note that cancelability here is not a lexical value as in *indictment* above, it is a value grammaticalized in the verb.

Let us now change the sentences in (8) with aorist verb forms in the *that*-clause to (11), whereby the aorist forms are replaced by preterit renarratives:

- (11)
- a. Razbiram<sub>Pres</sub>/Chuvam<sub>Pres</sub>, che vlakat pristignal<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
'I understand/hear that the train arrived'
  - b. Okazva se<sub>Pres</sub>/Stava<sub>Pres</sub> yasno, che vlakat pristignal<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
'It turns out/It becomes clear that the train arrived'
  - c. \*Znae se<sub>Pres</sub>/\*Ne se znae<sub>Pres</sub> dali vlakat pristignal<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
'It is known/It is not known whether the train arrived'
  - d. \*Predpolaga se<sub>Pres</sub>/\*Smyata se<sub>Pres</sub>, che vlakat pristignal<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
'It is supposed/considered that the train arrived'
  - e. \*Sigurno e<sub>Pres</sub>/\*Ne e<sub>Pres</sub> sigurno, che vlakat pristignal<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
'It is certain/It is not certain that the train arrived'
  - f. \*Spored prokuraturata/pravitelstvoto vlakat pristignal<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
'According to the prosecutor's office/the government, the train arrived'

Most of the sentences in (11) are non-grammatical but the first two are good. Serious questions arise again as to the reasons for non-grammaticality. The analysis in Kabakčiev (2018; 2019), where the speaker ghosting phenomenon is described, cannot help to provide an answer. The insertion of a present perfect form instead of a preterit renarrative eliminates the non-grammaticality:

- (12)
- a. Razbiram<sub>Pres</sub>/Chuvam<sub>Pres</sub>, che vlakat e pristignal<sub>PresPerfect</sub>  
'I understand/hear that the train has arrived'
  - b. Okazva se<sub>Pres</sub>/Stava<sub>Pres</sub> yasno, che vlakat e pristignal<sub>PresPerfect</sub>  
'It turns out/It becomes clear that the train has arrived'
  - c. Znae se<sub>Pres</sub>/Ne se znae<sub>Pres</sub> dali vlakat e pristignal<sub>PresPerfect</sub>  
'It is known/It is not known whether the train has arrived'
  - d. Predpolaga se<sub>Pres</sub>/Smyata se<sub>Pres</sub>, che vlakat e pristignal<sub>PresPerfect</sub>  
'It is supposed/considered that the train has arrived'
  - e. Sigurno e<sub>Pres</sub>/Ne e<sub>Pres</sub> sigurno, che vlakat e pristignal<sub>PresPerfect</sub>  
'It is certain/It is not certain that the train has arrived'
  - f. Spored prokuraturata/pravitelstvoto vlakat e pristignal<sub>PresPerfect</sub>  
'According to the prosecutor's office/the government, the train has arrived'

Thus the comparison between (11) and (12) clearly shows that in many cases preterit renarratives must be replaced by present perfects in order for the sentences previously containing renarratives to become grammatical.

To analyze in further detail the difference between (8) and (11) and why some sentences in (11) are non-grammatical while others are not, let us return to the differences between sentences in the *X said that* schema with three different forms in the dependent clause: aorist, preterit renarrative, present perfect. There is another complicating circumstance, the homonymy between present perfects and inferentials. There is no reason – formal or semantic, to tell apart present perfects from inferentials. Both are *sam + -l* forms. Phrased otherwise, perfects can be regarded as equally capable of effectuating their own semantics (if they have one – let us call it perfectness, whatever this may mean) and inference. Furthermore, although this is rarely noted in the literature (as mentioned above), present perfects are also capable of effecting renarration. Indeed, renarration is mainly realized through renarratives proper, as in (4a), (9a), etc., but the values perfectness (hypothesized to exist), inference and renarration are **realized systematically** in *sam + l-* forms and, as argued in Kabakčiev (2022b), the present perfect is furthermore capable of effectuating the value non-witnessed, in third-person forms **always**. What is more, effectuating the value





non-witnessed in present perfects occurs not only in Bulgarian but also across languages – intrinsically, not by default (Kabakčiev 2022b).<sup>13</sup> The difference between English and Bulgarian is that the English present perfect only *signals* non-witnessing, whereas in Bulgarian it does *not* signal it, it *directly signifies it* – systematically, and in third-person forms always, with no exception whatsoever. In other words, non-witnessing in present perfects in Bulgarian is grammaticalized (Kabakčiev 2022a).<sup>14</sup>

In order to understand the phenomenon better, let us consider the following sentences representative for the *X said that* schema:

- (13) a. \*Ed kaza<sub>Aor</sub>, che Mia pristigna<sub>Aor</sub>  
‘Ed said that Mia arrived’  
b. Ed kaza<sub>Aor</sub>, che Mia pristignala<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
‘Ed said that Mia arrived’  
c. Ed kaza<sub>Aor</sub>, che Mia e pristignala<sub>PresPerfect</sub>  
(lit.) ‘Ed said that Mia has arrived’

Sentence (13a) features non-grammaticality, which stems from the presence of two speakers, one of whom a ghost (fake/illegitimate) speaker (Kabakčiev 2018; 2019). Why is (13b) correct? Because the main clause requires that the verb form in the dependent clause is cancelable – and *it is* cancelable. The main clause contains a speaker who witnessed Ed’s saying something in the past. The renarrative *pristignala* signifies Mia’s arrival and it is precisely indicated who said that Mia arrived. It was Ed. For all these reasons the sentence is correct. But why is sentence (13c) correct? It is because the present perfect, being a cancelable form, meets the requirement in the main clause for the upcoming clause to contain a cancelable form – one that is either true or not true. The content of something asserted/said here, with a cancelable verb form, cannot be only true – as was previously the case with the witnessed form *pristigna* ‘arrived’ in (13a), hence sentence (13c) is good.

As already mentioned, the view that non-grammaticality in sentences like (13a) is simply due to the use of *verba dicendi*, as conjectured in Tarpomanova & Aleksova (2022) – with no explanation of the non-grammaticality itself, is incorrect. The speaker ghosting phenomenon is *much larger* than the range of use of *verba dicendi*! As demonstrated in (8), there are sentences not falling into the *X said that* schema that are non-grammatical and contain different verbs – verbs different from *verba dicendi*, or do not contain non-copulative verbs, or do not contain any verb in the first part of the schema at all. But let us now analyze the sentences in (14), in which the main clauses contain the verb *vidya* ‘see’ instead of *kazha* ‘say’. Here the distribution of grammaticality and non-grammaticality is different from (13). The sentence with the aorist *pristigna* is correct, while the sentence with the renarrative *pristignala* is bad:

- (14) a. Ed vidya<sub>Aor</sub>, che Mia pristigna<sub>Aor</sub>  
‘Ed saw that Mia arrived’  
b. \*Ed vidya<sub>Aor</sub>, che Mia pristignala<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
‘Ed saw that Mia arrived’  
c. Ed vidya<sub>Aor</sub>, che Mia e pristignala<sub>PresPerfect</sub>  
(lit.) ‘Ed saw that Mia has arrived’

Why is (14a) correct? It is because, unlike in (13a), there are no two speakers contradicting each other. There is a single speaker who witnessed Ed see something in the past. What did Ed see? He saw that Mia arrived, whereby both Ed and the speaker witnessed Mia’s arrival, hence no contradiction. But now sentence (14b) with the renarrative is non-grammatical. Why? Because there is a speaker in the main clause who ought to have witnessed that Ed saw Mia’s arrival in the past but there is also an asser-

<sup>13</sup> In contrast, the English preterit (indefinite/simple past) signals the value witnessed by default, whereby “value by default” means that this value can change under the impact of context.

<sup>14</sup> “In third-person forms” actually means in general, because third-person forms are much more common and important than first- and second-person forms.

tion about Mia's arrival in the dependent clause through a renarrative: somebody said that Mia arrived. It begs the question: who said that Mia arrived? This question remains without an answer. *Ed vidya* means that Ed saw something. But did Ed see Mia arriving? No. In (14b) the renarrative means that somebody saw Mia's arrival – but this somebody is not Ed, and it is not known who it is. Had it been Ed, the sentence would have been (14a). Thus it is clear that there is a second speaker in (14b), as previously in (13a), and that one of the two speakers is a ghost speaker. As for (14c), this sentence is correct. There is no requirement in the main clause for the dependent clause to contain a cancelable form – and the fact that the dependent clause contains such a form does not lead to a deviance.

To continue the analysis, let us now use the verb *znaya* 'know' – in the preterit (it is an imperfect verb form):

- (15) a. Ed *znaeshe*<sub>Imperfect</sub>, che Mia *pristigna*<sub>Aor</sub>  
 'Ed knew that Mia arrived'  
 b. \*Ed *znaeshe*<sub>Imperfect</sub>, che Mia *pristignala*<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
 'Ed knew that Mia arrived'  
 c. Ed *znaeshe*<sub>Imperfect</sub>, che Mia e *pristignala*<sub>PresPerfect</sub>  
 (lit.) 'Ed knew that Mia has arrived'  
 d. Ed *znae*<sub>Pres</sub>, che Ivan e *kazal*<sub>PresPerfect</sub>, che Mia *pristignala*<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
 'Ed knows that Ivan said that Mia arrived'

(15a) is correct. There is no ghost speaker. The speaker is only one, knowing that Ed knew about Mia's arrival and having witnessed her arrival. But (15b) is non-grammatical. Why? Because the *that* part contains a renarrative indicating that someone reported Mia's arrival. Who reported Mia's arrival? This person is missing. The sentence provides no indication who reported Mia's arrival. Instead, it refers to a cancelable assertion in the *that* clause, made by an unknown person, while the renarrative very clearly requires a person to refer to, and, of course, the speaker in the main clause and in the dependent clause ought to be the same person/entity. They are not. Hence, there is speaker ghosting in (15b): the speaker producing *znaeshe* is different from the speaker producing *pristignala*. If we change (15b) to obtain (15d), this sentence is now correct. The requirement for the renarrative to indicate a person who reported Mia's arrival is fulfilled: it is Ivan who reported Mia's arrival. Compare (13b), where *pristignala* unmistakably indicates Ed as the source of the assertion about Mia's arrival, hence this sentence is also correct.

But now some very interesting questions arise again. Why is the renarrative in (14b) and (15b) not compatible with the verbs *vidya* 'saw' and *znaeshe* 'knew'? Why does the renarrative require that there must be someone who reported Mia's arrival, while the perfect, as in (15c), does not require this? Why, due to a single-sound (single-letter/phoneme) auxiliary, one sentence is good, another bad? How do these two verb forms, *e pristignala* and *pristignala*, so similar, differ so much and trigger such a huge difference – especially given that they do not do this with some other verbs?

The conclusion to make is that the renarrative has a narrowly specialized meaning: to report somebody's assertion, and it also requires obligatorily that the author/source of the assertion is clear. The present perfect, conversely, and despite its unquestionable capacity to retell like the renarrative, does not require such an identification of the source of the content retold. All this means that in sentences with renarratives and with no identification of the source of the content retold there will again be speaker ghosting – but in a sense different from the one observed in (3a), (6b), (8a), (13a). *Ed znaeshe* 'Ed knew' and *Ed vidya* 'Ed saw' obligatorily require the *that* clause **to contain a clear, non-contradictory fact**. For example, if Ed knows or knew that Mia truly arrived (a non-contradictory fact), such a sentence is correct, see (15a). But Ed cannot, as it were, *know* or *see* that Mia **either arrived or did not arrive**. A cancelable assertion represented by a renarrative such as *pristignala* is not a fact, much less so a clear, non-contradictory one; (14b) and (15b) contain cancelable renarrated assertions in the *that* clause, not facts. Obviously this is why (14b) and (15b) are non-grammatical.



Lastly and importantly in connection with this analysis, present perfects do not seem to implicate dubitativity. However, preterit renarratives definitely feature it as a value – and dubitativity is cancelable content by virtue of its nature. If someone said/asserted something, this something is invariably subject to doubt. Therefore, (14b) and (15b) are bad sentences also because they contain dubitable forms in the *that* clause. Dubitable forms do not signify facts, they effectuate cancelable content. But the verbs in the main clauses in (14b) and (15b) require the upcoming clauses to contain a straightforward fact with no contradiction, *not* cancelable-content forms.

### Concluding remarks on the perfect-renarrative irreplaceability; some cross-language generalizations

The analysis and conclusions above trigger some further intriguing questions, among which the following. Why are Bulgarian TAM verb forms so many and so difficult to interpret, even for native speakers? Why do all the other Slavic languages feature, conversely, poor aspecto-temporal paradigms? The analysis made here facilitates the formulation of some broad answers to these and similar questions. The presence of certain TAM verb forms in Bulgarian generates an abundance of other TAM forms because of the complex interplay of not only intertwining but often conflicting requirements in the main clause and the dependent clause in the *X said that* [content of *that*] schema and in similar semantico-syntactic schemata. One requirement may be fulfilled, producing a certain TAM form. For example, the renarrative successfully counters the non-grammaticality in (3b), (7a), (13b). But then another requirement appears, which produces another TAM form, e.g., the present perfect in (14c) – to counter the dubitativity in (14b), and so on. And thus the number of TAM forms increases.

It has currently been argued by Symeonidis (2020) that there must be some clearly identifiable principles underlying economy and complexity in language – but, unfortunately, this field is new and underdeveloped and it is difficult for the time being to pinpoint a connection between a particular principle and a particular dependence of the types discussed here. Another thesis related to most of the content of this paper is that the perfect possesses no immanent semantics necessary for human communication through natural language. It only has functional features and interdependencies in language structure (Kabakčiev 2020; 2022a; 2022b). To corroborate this thesis, let us construct a Russian sentence with a *verbum dicendi* in the main clause (16a) and provide its two English translation correspondences:<sup>15</sup>

- (16) a. Ed govorit<sub>Present</sub>, chto Mia priehala<sub>Pret</sub>  
 b. Ed says that Mia arrived  
 c. Ed says that Mia has arrived

Can it be maintained that the overall meaning of Russian (16a) fully corresponds to (16b) and (16c) in English? Yes. Russian (16a) with the preterit form can be said to be adequately and fully interpretable through English (16b) and (16c) with a preterit and a perfect form, respectively. Now, again to avoid the English SOT problem, let us turn the verb in the main clause in (16a) into the past tense in Russian, (17a), and use not English but Bulgarian as a metalanguage:

- (17) a. Ed skazal<sub>Pret</sub>, chto Mia priehala<sub>Pret</sub>  
 b. Ed kaza<sub>Aor</sub>, che Mia pristignala<sub>PretRenar</sub>  
 ‘Ed said that Mia arrived’ [renarrated]  
 c. Ed kaza<sub>Aor</sub>, che Mia e pristignala<sub>PresPerfect</sub>  
 (lit.) ‘Ed said that Mia has arrived’ [renarrated]

Let us reason. Is the present perfect in languages like English, Bulgarian and other languages with perfects needed as a vehicle for expressing semantic content? *No*. The *raison d’être* of the present perfect

<sup>15</sup> In order to avoid the SOT problem in English (the metalanguage), the verb used here is in the present tense.

is to execute structural functions. Hence, judging from the Russian examples (16a) and (17a), the Slavic languages without perfects can actually be said *to have perfects* – disguised as preterits. These preterits serve the transfer of the content (whatever exactly this content is) of the present perfect in languages like English or Bulgarian into the Slavic languages without perfects. It is as plain and simple as that.

To sum up, as for the abundance of TAM forms in Bulgarian, this clearly rests on the complexity of requirements for certain parts of the sentence to conform to other parts of the sentence – as shown above in the analysis of certain types of sentences and sentence schemata. In languages with few TAM verb forms there are few such requirements – and in certain cases there might even be none. Finally, apart from the purely theoretical significance of the phenomena explored, the issue of perfect-renarrative irreplaceability in Bulgarian has implications in at least two spheres of applied linguistics: (a) for teaching Bulgarian to native and foreign learners, at all levels of language acquisition; (b) for the way the Bulgarian TAM system ought to be represented in Bulgarian grammars – again for all levels of learners' language acquisition, not only for academic grammars.

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