

# THE ASPECTUAL FUNCTION OF INCEPTIVE MORPHEMES

Larissa Nossalik  
McGill University

The aspectual function of inceptive morphemes has been the subject of continuous debate in the literature. Starting with structuralists, the typical approach to these morphemes has been that they are fundamentally different from other aspectual morphemes, especially from completive morphemes (Vinogradov 1972, Borik 2002, Svenonius 2004, Ramchand 2004, Romanova 2006, among others). In the present paper, I argue against this view.

## 1. Slavic aspectual system

Slavic languages have two so-called grammatical aspects: imperfective and perfective. The most common way to derive a perfective verb is by the process of prefixation, i.e., by a morphological process, whereby a verbal root combines with an aspectual verbal prefix/preverb, e.g., *pročítat'* 'to read-PERF'. When the root surfaces without a prefix, we obtain an imperfective verb, e.g., *čítat'* 'to read-IMP'.<sup>1</sup>

Perfective verbs derived by prefixation are often grouped by Slavic linguists into three major groups, depending on the type of prefixes involved:

- (i) completive verbs – verbs derived by prefixation with completive prefixes, i.e., prefixes that encode the end-point of an event, e.g., *pročítat'*-PERF 'to read (until the end)', *vypít'*-PERF 'to drink (until the end)';
- (ii) inceptive verbs - verbs derived by prefixation with inceptive prefixes, i.e., prefixes that encode the beginning-point of an event: *zapat'*-PERF 'start to sing', *zasmejat'sja*-PERF 'start to laugh', *uznat'*-PERF 'come/get to know', *poljubít'*-PERF 'come to love/fall in love';
- (iii) delimitative verbs – verbs derived by prefixation with delimitative prefixes, i.e., prefixes that encode both the beginning and end-points of an event, e.g., *pospat'*-PERF 'to sleep for a while'; *prospat'*-PERF 2 *dnja* 'to sleep for 2 days'; *poplakat'*-PERF 'to cry for a while'; *proplakat'*-PERF *nedelju* 'to cry for a week'.

This paper is dedicated to the analysis of Slavic inceptive verbs, as compared to Slavic completive verbs.

While both inceptive and completive prefixes are indisputably morphological markers of perfectivity, their 'aspectual functions' seem to be different. For one thing, they encode different boundaries of events, with completive prefixes encoding the final boundary and inceptive prefixes encoding the initial boundary. The question is whether this 'aspectual distinction' is also a syntactic one. This question is especially imperative in the

---

<sup>1</sup> All examples are from Russian.

theoretical system that postulates two distinct syntactic projections which can host various aspectual morphemes. Let me briefly discuss such a system.

## 2. Two types of aspect

Recent studies in the domain of aspect point to what has become a generally assumed claim, namely, that there are (at least) two types of aspect. Syntactically, one is found within vP: the *inner* (or *situation*) aspect and the other is found outside/above vP: the *outer* (or *viewpoint*) aspect. Semantically, the inner aspect is concerned with the inherent/natural/potential endpoints (boundaries or limits) of events: the *telic/atelic* distinction. The outer aspect, on the other hand, is concerned with the actual endpoint of events in that it signals whether or not the inherent end-point supplied by the verb's situation aspect has been reached: the *bounded/unbounded* distinction (Comrie 1976; Dahl 1985; Dowty 1979; Filip 1999; Krifka 1998; Pustejovsky 1991; Tenny 1992, Verkuyl 1993, Travis 1994, Slabakova 2001).

It is a well-established fact that Slavic completive morphemes are telicity markers (Borik 2002, Slabakova 2005, Filip 2005). Thus, verbs that carry a completive morpheme, as opposed to their prefixless counterparts, are telic. Not only are they telic by definition, but they also behave as telic under various telicity diagnostics. Moreover, a Dowty's-like (1979) decompositional analysis reveals that they contain a 'telic' predicate in their semantic structure. Telicity of prefixed completive verbs, together with atelicity of their corresponding prefixless verbs, indicates that Slavic completive morphemes are morphological markers of telicity. Provided that telicity is encoded by inner aspect, this means that completive verbs occupy the inner aspect projection.

The research question that we will be preoccupied with in this paper is what syntactic position Slavic inceptive prefixes occupy. Specifically, is it true that they occupy the outer rather than inner aspect projection, as claimed by Borik (2002), Svenonius (2004) and Romanova (2006)?

Before we can verify this claim, we need to establish what evidence would force one to conclude that Slavic inceptive verbs occupy the inner or the outer aspect projection. Technically, only if inceptive morphemes are telicity markers can they be associated with the inner aspect projection. Otherwise, they must be associated with the outer aspect projection. This means that to answer the research question, we must determine whether Slavic inceptive morphemes are telicity markers. To put differently, we must verify whether Slavic inceptive verbs, similarly to Slavic completive verbs, are telic, as opposed to their prefixless (i.e. imperfective) counterparts. And this is exactly what the rest of this paper is concerned with.

In order to establish telicity status of Slavic inceptive verbs, as well as their prefixless counterparts, we will subject them to various telicity definitions and then to various telicity diagnostics. Next, we will determine their semantic structure and compare it to the 'telic' structure of completive verbs.

## 3. Telicity definitions

The term 'telicity' was coined to describe events containing an inherent/natural/potential end/culmination point or *telos* (from Ancient Greek)

in their semantic structure. The events that lack such a point came to be known as *atelic* (Comrie 1976, Smith 1997). Thus, while *building-the-house* is a telic event, since it contains the potential culmination point at which the house comes into existence, *building-houses* is atelic, since it lacks such a point, assuming that at least hypothetically one can *build-houses* indefinitely.

If we consider Slavic inceptive verbs, we can immediately see that they do not satisfy the ‘classic’ definition of telicity which relies on the presence of an end-point in an event’s structure, given that they specify an initial and not a final boundary. So, if one is to adopt this definition of telicity, then he/she would be forced to conclude that Russian inceptive prefixes are not telicity markers.

However, defining telicity in terms of having a potential end-point raises many questions. The immediate concern that we have to address is that the events that we deal with in our world do not go on indefinitely, but rather have an actual or arbitrary end-point. The problem is: how do we formally distinguish between a potential, actual and arbitrary end-point? Moreover, this definition fails to properly identify telic predicates that encode a change-of-state that does not coincide with the event’s final boundary, e.g., *ate more than enough meat*, *filled the room with smoke*, *grew tall* (see Borer 2005 for details).

To overcome these problems, Krifka (1992, 1998) proposes an algebraically defined notions of quantization:

- (1) A predicate P is **quantized** iff:  
 $\forall x, y [[P(x) \wedge P(y) \rightarrow \neg y < x]$

In words: whenever P applies to x and y, y cannot be a proper part of x.

Krifka’s definition classifies Slavic inceptive predicates as quantized. Take for instance the event encoded by the inceptive predicate *zarabotat* ‘to start-working-PERF’. This event is quantized, provided that any part of the event of *started-working* is not in itself a *started-working* event. To put it differently, only the entire event and not its parts can be encoded by the predicate *zarabotat*. Given Krifka’s assumption that quantization implies telicity, the fact that Slavic inceptive verbs are quantized implies that they are telic.

Importantly, inceptive verbs’ imperfective counterparts are non-quantized. Thus, *rabotat* ‘be-working-IMP’ is non-quantized, given that parts of this event are also *working* events. In fact, parts of this event, as well as the event itself, can be described using *rabotat*.

In an attempt to account for the cases that are problematic for Krifka, Borer (2005) weakens his definition of *quantization* into that of *quantity*:

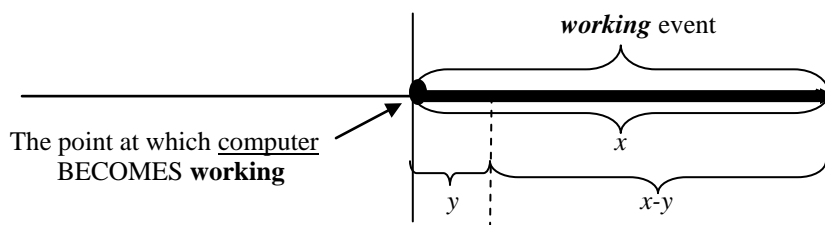
- (2) P is **quantity** iff it is divisive.

P is *divisive* iff  $\forall x [P(x) \rightarrow \exists y (P(y) \wedge y < x)] \wedge \forall x, y [P(x) \wedge P(y) \wedge y < x \rightarrow P(x-y)]$

In words: P is divisive iff it contains a subpart y which, when subtracted from the subpart x, gives rise to a proper part of x, which does not have the property P.

To demonstrate that Borer's (2005) definition of quantity also classifies Slavic inceptive verbs as telic, consider the temporal schema of an inceptive event:

(3) Temporal schema of *komputer zarabotal* 'computer started working':



As can be seen from (3), the inceptive verb *zarabotal* is quantity, for if we subtract the subpart  $y$  from  $x$ , we obtain the subpart  $x-y$  which does not have the same properties as *zarabotal*, as it lacks the initial-point. In fact, the  $x-y$  subevent cannot be described as *zarabotal*, but only as *rabotal* 'was-working'. Given that in the case of verbal predicates quantity is just another term for telicity, Borer's definition identifies Slavic inceptive verbs as telic.

Note that the imperfective variant of *zarabotal*, i.e., *rabotal* 'be-working-IMP' is atelic. This is because subtracting any part from an unbounded *working* event leaves us with a subpart that is also an unbounded *working* event.

In sum, according to algebraic definitions of telicity, namely Krifka's (1992, 1998) definition of quantization as well as Borer's (2005) definition of quantity, Slavic inceptive verbs are telic, while their prefixless imperfective counterparts are atelic. The telic status of inceptive verbs as opposed to their prefixless counterparts implies that Slavic inceptive prefixes are telicity markers. Given the controversial status of the traditional definition of telicity, one should abstain from applying this definition to Slavic inceptive verbs.

If Slavic inceptive verbs are telic, then not only telicity definitions but also standard telicity diagnostics should classify them as telic. Let us see whether this is so.

#### 4. Slavic inceptive verbs under telicity diagnostics

Based on Russian data, Borik (2002) claims that the standard telicity diagnostics do not uniformly classify inceptive verbs as telic. In this section we will verify whether her claim is true, subjecting inceptive verbs to three telicity diagnostics: Adverbial modification, Homogeneity and Conjunction diagnostics.

#### 4.1 Adverbial modification diagnostic

This is one of the most widely used telicity diagnostics, which maintains that telic predicates can only be modified by frame adverbials of the *in X-time* type, whereas atelic predicates can only be modified by durative adverbials of the *for X-time* type:

- (4) a. Peter ran for an hour/\*in an hour. *atelic*  
 b. Peter ran a mile \*for an hour/ in an hour *telic*

Let us apply this diagnostic to Slavic inceptive verbs and their imperfective counterparts:

- (5) a. Kompjuter rabotal 15 minut/\*za 15 minut. *atelic*  
 Computer worked-IMP 15 minutes /\*in 15 minutes.  
 ‘The computer was working for 15 minutes /\*in 15 minutes.’  
 b. Kompjuter zarabotal \*15 minut/za 15 minut. *telic*  
 Computer za-worked-PERF \*15 minutes /in 15 minutes.  
 ‘The computer started to work \*for 15 minutes /in 15 minutes.’  
 Lit: ‘It took 15 minutes for the computer to start working.’

According to the Adverbial modification diagnostics, the inceptive verb *zarabotal* is telic, as it can only be modified by the frame adverbial *za 15 minut*. The imperfective verbs *rabotal*, on the other hand, being only compatible with the durative adverbial *15 minut*, is atelic. Hence, the Adverbial modification diagnostic classifies Slavic inceptive verbs as telic, as opposed to their imperfective correspondents.

#### 5.2 Homogeneity diagnostic

This telicity diagnostic states that if a homogenous (atelic) event holds true for a given temporal interval, it will also hold true for any subinterval of this interval. This behaviour of atelic events is contrasted with the behaviour of telic events, where the mentioned entailment relation is disrupted:

- (6) a. Peter ran for 1 hour. → Peter ran for ½ hour. *atelic*  
 b. Peter ran a mile in 1 hour. -/→ Peter ran a mile in ½ hour. *telic*

In (6a) *run* encodes an atelic event, as the sentence *Peter ran for 1 hour* asserts that he ran for ½ hour. On the contrary, in (6b) *run a mile* encodes a telic event, as the sentence *Peter ran a mile in 1 hour* does not entail that he did so in ½ hour.

Let us see how the Homogeneity diagnostic classifies Slavic inceptive verbs and their imperfective correspondents:

- (7) a. Kompjuter rabotal 15 minut. → Kompjuter rabotal 10 minut.  
 ‘The computer was-working 15 minutes.’ → ‘The computer was-working 10 minutes.’ *atelic*

- b. Kompjuter **zarabotal** za 15 minut. -/→ Kompjuter **zarabotal** za 10 minut.  
 ‘The computer started to work in 15 minutes.’ -/→ ‘The computer started to work in 10 minutes.’  
**telic**

According to the Homogeneity diagnostic, Slavic inceptive verbs, unlike their prefixless counterparts are telic.

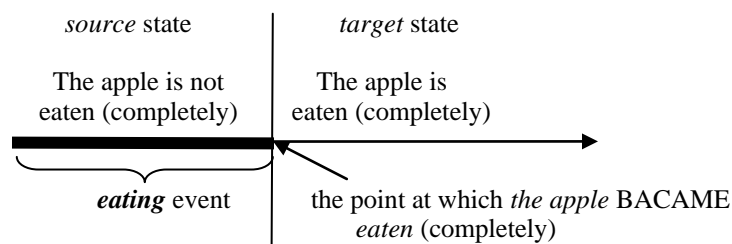
### 5.3 Conjunction diagnostic

This diagnostic states that only atelic verbs allow for continuation of the event that they describe:

- (8) a. Peter ran and is still running. **atelic**  
 b. \*Peter ate the apple and is still eating it. **telic**

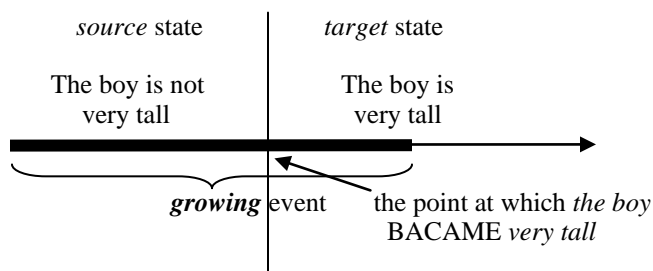
The rationale behind the Conjunction diagnostic relies on the well-reported observation that only telic events entail completion and, thus, cannot continue beyond the completion point. For example, *Peter ate the apple* entails that he ate the apple completely/entirely/up until the end and that he stopped the process of eating when he ate the last piece of that apple. After *the apple* became *eaten*, the event of *eating* (that particular apple) can no longer continue. This is graphically demonstrated by the temporal schema below:

- (9) Temporal schema of *ate the apple*:



Unfortunately, not all telic verbs entail completion. Take, for example, the telic event *the boy grew very tall*. As can be seen from (10), the process of *boy's growing* may continue even after the boy reached a point in his growing where he would be considered to be very tall:

- (10) Temporal schema of *the boy grew very tall*:



What cannot continue beyond the point at which the change-of-state occurs in both (9) and (10) is the source state, i.e., an initial state of the Incremental Theme argument, namely the apple's state of *being-not-eaten (completely)* and the boy's state of *being-not-very-tall*. To put it differently, once the argument undergoing a change-of-state, being *the apple* or *the boy*, achieves this change, there is no way that its source state could continue. Continuation of this state would lead to a contradiction, implying that the change of state was not reached, while the original event entails that it was.<sup>2</sup>

To avoid problems with non-completive telic verbs, instead of having the continuation of the event in the second conjunct of the Conjunction diagnostic, one should explicitly use the continuation of the source state. The more natural way to obtain the continuation of the source state is to negate the change-of-state subevent.

- (11) a. \*Peter ate the apple but he did not manage to finish eating it. **telic**  
 Meaning: ... but the apple is still not eaten (completely). - *the source state*.
- b. \*The boy grew very tall but he did not manage to become very tall. **telic**  
 Meaning: ... but he is still not very tall - *the source state*.

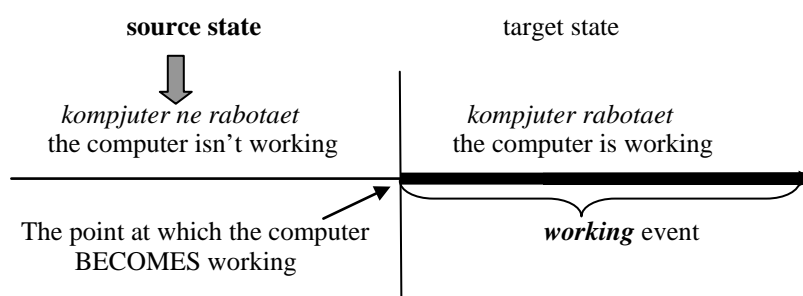
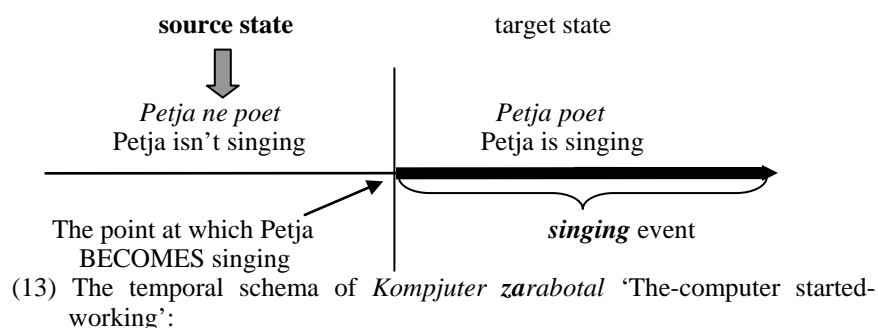
The sentences in (11) are contradictory, since the first conjunct, being telic, entails a change-of-state, while the second conjunct denies it. Note that the second conjunct entails the continuation of the source state.

Unlike telic events, atelic events do not encode a change-of-state, and, hence, do not have a source state that we could use to test for the possibility of continuation.

Nonetheless, we can still use the valid part of what is left of the Conjunction diagnostics. Let us apply this 'altered' Conjunction diagnostic to Slavic inceptive verbs. To get a better grasp of what is the source state of inceptive verbs under investigation, I provide their temporal schemas below:

- (12) The temporal schema of *Petja zapel* 'Petja started-singing':

<sup>2</sup> When it comes to completive verbs, the original diagnostic in (8b) in its own way implies continuation of the source state. Thus, claiming that Peter continues to eat the apple after apple was eaten amounts to saying that the apple has not reached the change-of-state and remains not eaten (completely).



The source state of the inceptive verb *zapet* 'to start-singing' in (12) is Petja's state of non-singing. The source state of the inceptive verb *zarabotal* 'to start-working' in (13) is the computer's state of non-working. The continuation of these states entails that the change of state that these inceptive verbs encode did not occur. In particular, for the data in (12), it means that Petja is still not singing and for the data in (13), it means that the computer is still not working. Such 'exclusion' of the change-of-state part of the event is at odds with the meaning of *zapet* and *zarabotal*, both of which contain a 'change-of-state' in their structure. This is why the sentences containing a continuation of the source state of *zapet* and *zarabotal* are contradictory:

- (14) a. \*10 minut nazad Petja **zapel**, no vsjo eš'o **telic**  
 \*10 minutes ago Petja za-singed-PERF but still  
 prodolžает **ne** pet'.<sup>3</sup>  
 continues not to-sing.  
 '10 minutes ago, Petja started singing, but he is still not singing.'
- b. \*10 minut nazad kompjuter **zarabotal**, no vsjo eš'o **telic**  
 \*10 minutes ago computer za-worked-PERF but still  
 prodolžает **ne** rabotat'.  
 continues not to-work.

<sup>3</sup> Given that the source state of inceptive verbs is negative, we have to add a negation while testing the continuation of the source state.



‘10 minutes ago, the computer started to work, but it is still not working.’

The ungrammaticality of the sentences in (14) suggests that Slavic inceptive verbs are telic. Hence, the modified version of the Conjunction diagnostic – the one that can detect any type of telic event – classifies Slavic inceptive verbs as telic. Unfortunately, it cannot be used to test atelic events.

Concluding this section we can state that, contrary to Borik (2002), telicity diagnostics uniformly classify Slavic inceptive verbs as telic, and their corresponding imperfectives as atelic. This classification confirms the claim that Slavic inceptive preverbs are morphological markers of telicity.

So far we have used the standard telicity definitions and diagnostics to determine the telicity status of Slavic inceptive verbs. Next, we will semantically ‘decompose’ these verbs, using Dowty’s (1979) insights. We then will compare the semantic structure of Slavic inceptive verbs with that of Slavic completive verbs and conclude that, despite their differences, both of these groups of verbs encode telic events.

## 5. A comparative semantic analysis of inceptive and completive verbs

Before we investigate the semantic structure of Slavic inceptive verbs as compared to Slavic completive verbs, we need to review some details of Dowty’s analysis.

### 5.1 Dowty’s (1979) analysis of verbal predicates

Dowty (1979), following tradition of generative semanticists, developed an elaborated semantic analysis of aspectual verbal classes. Specifically, he proposed to decompose verbal predicate into semantic ‘bits’ using the predicate DO, CAUSE and BECOME:

- (15) a. State:  $V_n(a_1 \dots a_n)$   
 e.g., *The linen is white* = [white (linen)]
- b. Activity: DO [ $a_n, V_n(a_1 \dots a_n)$ ]  
 e.g., *John swims* = DO [John, swim (John)]
- c. Achievement: BECOME [ $V_n(a_1 \dots a_n)$ ]  
 e.g., *The linen whitened* = BECOME [white (linen)]
- d. Accomplishment: DO [ $a_1, V_n(a_1 \dots a_n)$ ] CAUSE [BECOME [ $V_n(a_1 \dots a_n)$ ]]  
 e.g., *John whiten the linen* = DO [John, whiten (John, linen)] CAUSE [BECOME [white (linen)]]

According to Dowty, dynamic predicates such as activities and accomplishments contain the predicate DO in their structure. Similarly, telic predicates such as achievements and accomplishments contain the predicate BECOME in their structure. Importantly, BECOME encodes the change-of-state

or, using Pustejovsky's (1991) term, *transition* part of telic events. For example, in (15c) and (15d), BECOME signals that in the course of the event *the linen* underwent a change-of-state from its 'source' state of being *non-white* to its 'target' state of being *white*. Note that BECOME appears together with the adjectival phrase, i.e., *white*, which describes the target state of the argument that undergoes the change, i.e., *the linen*. Following Dowty (1991), I will refer to this 'affected' argument as to the Incremental Theme argument.

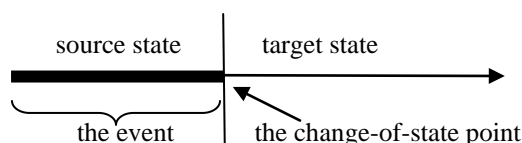
To recap, a telic predicate contain three components in its structure: (1) the predicate BECOME, as a predicate that encodes a change-of-state, (2) the Incremental Theme argument, as an argument that undergoes the change-of-state and (3) the adjectival phrase, as a phrase which specifies the target state of the Incremental Theme, i.e., the state that the Incremental Theme has 'reached' as a result of the change-of-state. All three of these components reflect the fact that telic predicates, as opposed to atelic ones, encode a change-of-state/transition subevent (Pustejovsky 1991).

Having reviewed Dowty's (1979) analysis, let us turn to Slavic prefixed perfective verbs under investigation, starting with completive verbs, as these verbs are standardly assumed to contain the 'telic' predicate BECOME in their structure.

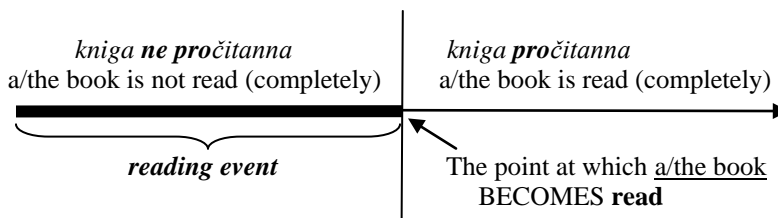
## 5.2 Semantic analysis of completive verbs

In order to better understand the decompositional analysis of Slavic completive verbs, let us look at their temporal schema in (16), with some examples in (17) and (18):

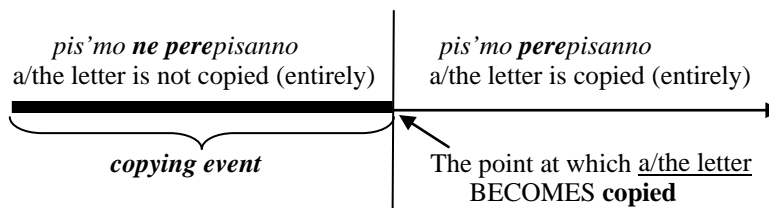
(16) The temporal schema of completive verbs:



(17) The temporal schema of *Petja pročitao knjigu* 'Petja read a/the book (completely)':



- (18) The temporal schema of *Petja perepisal pis'mo* ‘Petja copied a/the letter (entirely)’:



As can be seen from the temporal schemas in (17)-(18), Slavic completive verbs contain a change-of-state in their structure. The events encoded by completive verbs end when the affected object undergoes a change-of-state. For instance, the event of *reading* in (17) is over exactly when the object *kniga* ‘a/the book’ becomes read entirely.

In a Dowty-like system, the fact that completive verbs contain a change-of-state means that in their structure they contain the predicate BECOME together with the adjectival phrase that describes the affected object’s ‘target’ state:

- (19) Semantic decomposition of the completive verbs in (17) and (18):<sup>4</sup>

a. Petja **pročital** knigu = Petja CAUSED knigu  
 Petja read-PERF a/the book = Petja CAUSED a/the book

to-BECOME **pročitannoj.**  
 to-BECOME read-PPP.

b. Petja **perepisal** pis'mo = Petja CAUSED pis'mo  
 Petja copied-PERF a/the book = Petja CAUSED a/the book

to-BECOME **perepisannym.**  
 to-BECOME copied-PPP.<sup>5</sup>

The semantic analysis of the completive verbs in (19) reveals that these verbs are telic, as they contain the predicate BECOME in their semantic structure. This finding, together with the fact that the prefixless counterparts of these verbs, i.e., the activity verbs *čital* ‘read-IMP’ and *pisal* ‘wrote-IMP’, cannot be paraphrased using BECOME, suggests that Slavic completive

<sup>4</sup> Following recent developments in decompositional semantics (Hale and Keyser 1993, Harley 1995, Arad 1998, Travis 1994, 2005, Ramchand 2006), I take the predicate CAUSE rather than Dowty’s (1979) predicate DO to encode dynamicity of telic events. Since this adjustment has no consequence for the analysis of inceptive morphemes advocated in this paper, I will not dwell on it.

<sup>5</sup> The PPP stands for ‘past passive participle’, while PAP stands for ‘past active participle’.

prefixes are telicity markers and, as such, should be syntactically associated with the inner aspect projection.

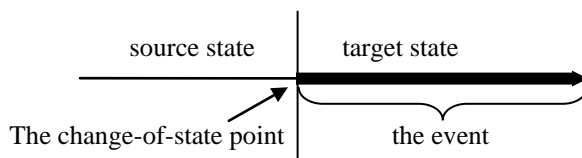
Importantly, when it comes to completive verbs, it is their surface object that is the argument that undergoes the change-of-state. Moreover, because in the case of completive verbs the adjectival phrase specifies the target state of the surface object, it is encoded by a passive participle.

In the next subsection, we will see that the verbs containing an inceptive morpheme can also be paraphrased using the predicate BECOME, suggesting that Slavic inceptive morphemes, similarly to Slavic completive morphemes are telicity markers.

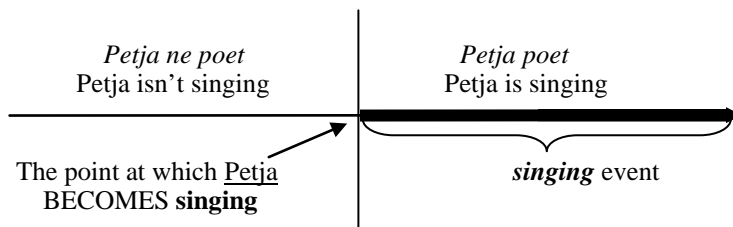
### 5.3 Semantic analysis of inceptive verbs

Just like in the case of Slavic completive verbs, let me begin the decompositional analysis of Slavic inceptive verbs by presenting their temporal schema, along with some specific examples:

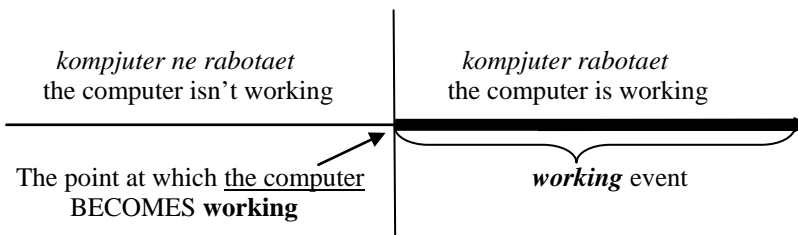
(20) The temporal schema of inceptive verbs:



(21) The temporal schema of *Petja zapel pesnju* ‘Petja started-singing a/the song’:



(22) The temporal schema of *Kompjuter zarabotal* ‘The-computer started-working’:



If we compare the temporal schemas of completive and inceptive verbs, we will see that the most evident difference between these two groups of verbs is that while completive verbs encode events that end with a change-of-state, inceptive verbs encode events that begin with a change-of-state. In other words, they encode a change-of-state that occurs at the beginning rather than at the end of an event. In addition, while in the case of completive verbs it is the surface object that undergoes the change of state (17)-(18), in the case of inceptive verbs it is the surface subject that does so (21)-(22).

Despite these differences, Slavic inceptive verbs, just like Slavic completive verbs, do contain a change-of-state in their temporal structure. For example, the *singing* event in (21) begins exactly when the subject *Petja* undergoes a change-of-state from *non-singing* to *singing*.

Because Slavic inceptive verbs contain an explicit change-of-state in their structure, they must be analysed as containing the operator BECOME that encodes this change-of-state. Moreover, since it is their surface subject that undergoes the change, the adjectival phrase must describe the target state of the surface subject and not that of the surface object, using the active rather than the passive participle.<sup>6</sup> This is exactly how Slavic inceptive verbs can be paraphrased:

(23) Semantic decomposition of the inceptive verbs in (21) and (22):

- a. Petja **zapel** pesnju = Petja CAUSED Petja  
 Petja started-singing-PERF a/the song = Petja CAUSED Petja

to-BECOME pojuč'im (pesnju).  
 To-BECOME singing (a/the song)-PAP.

- b. Komputer **zarabotal** = Komputer BECAME  
 Computer started-working-PERF = The-computer BECAME

rabotajuš'im.  
 working-PAP.

The semantic analysis of Slavic inceptive verbs in (23) reveals that these verbs are telic, as they contain the predicate BECOME in their semantic structure. Importantly, because their prefixless counterparts, i.e., the activity verbs *pet'* 'sing-IMP' and *rabotat'* 'work-IMP', do not encode any change-of-state, they cannot be paraphrased using BECOME, revealing their atelic nature.<sup>7</sup> This telicity contrast between prefixed inceptive verbs and their prefixless

<sup>6</sup> This explains why in Russian completive verbs, but not inceptive verbs, can form passive participles: *spetaja*-COMP *pesnja* 'song that has been sang (completely)' vs. *\*zapedaja*-INC *pesnja* 'song that has been started-singing'.

<sup>7</sup> Contra to Smith (1997), I believe that the beginning point of activity verbs is not part of their structure but rather comes from world knowledge, given that in our world every event has a starting point. Because activity verbs lack an explicit change-of-state, they cannot be paraphrased using BECOME.

correspondents suggests that Slavic inceptive morphemes, just like Slavic completive morphemes, are telicity markers.

## 6. Conclusion

In the present paper, we have determined that Slavic inceptive verbs, just like Slavic completive verbs are telic, given that they have various properties of telic predicates. For one thing, Slavic inceptive verbs are telic by definition, once we adopt an algebraic definition of telicity like that of Krifka's (1992, 1998) definition of quantization or Borer's (2005) definition of quantity. Not only are they defined as telic, but they also exhibit 'telic' behaviour when subjected to standard telicity diagnostics. Finally, the semantic decompositional analysis of inceptive verbs reveals that they contain the 'telic' predicate BECOME in their structure.

The telic value of verbs containing inceptive prefixes, as opposed to the atelic value of corresponding prefixless verbs, indicates that Slavic inceptive prefixes are morphological markers of telicity. As telicity markers they must occupy the inner aspect projection, since this is the projection where telicity is computed (Verkyul 1993, Borer 2005).

This means that Slavic inceptive and completive morphemes not only have the same aspectual function, i.e., they both mark telicity, but also occupy the same aspectual position, i.e., the inner aspect position. In other words, Slavic inceptive morphemes are 'aspectually' the same as Slavic completive morphemes, contra the claim advocated in Vinogradov (1972), Borik (2002), Svenonius (2004), Ramchand (2004), and Romanova (2006).

## References

- Borer, Hagit. 2005. *Structuring sense*. v. 1. *In name only* -- v. 2. *The normal course of events*. Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press
- Borik, Olga. 2002. Aspect and Reference time. Doctoral Dissertation, Utrecht University.
- Comrie, Bernard. 1976. *Aspect: an introduction to the study of verbal aspect*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dahl, Östen. 1985. *Tense and aspect systems*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Dowty, David. 1979. Word Meaning and Montague Grammar. The Semantics of Verbs and Times. In *Generative Semantics and in Montague.s PTQ*. Dordrecht: Reidel.
- Dowty, David. 1991. Thematic Proto-roles and Argument Selection. *Language* 67.3: 547-619.
- Filip, Hana. 1999. *Aspect, Eventuality Types, and Noun Phrase Semantics*. New York: Garland Publishing. Outstanding dissertations in linguistics.
- Filip, Hana. 2005. The telicity parameter revised. In *Semantics and Linguistic Theory (SALT) XIV*. Ithaca: CLC Publications, Department of Linguistics, Cornell University.
- Krifka, Manfred 1992. Thematic Relations as Links between Nominal Reference and Temporal Constitution. In *Lexical Matters*, eds. I. Sag and A. Szabolsci, 29-55, CSLI Publications, Stanford, CA.
- Krifka, Manfred. 1998. The Origins of telicity. In *Events and grammar*, ed. S. Rothstein, 197-235. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

- Pustejovsky, James. 1991. The syntax of event structure. *Cognition* 41: 47-81.
- Ramchand, Gillian Catriona. 2004. Time and the event: the semantics of Russian prefixes. In *Special issue on Slavic prefixes*, ed. Peter Svenonius, Nordlyd 32.2: 323-361, CASTL, Tromsø. <http://www.ub.uit.no/munin/nordlyd/>
- Romanova, Eugenia. 2006. Constructing perfectivity in Russian. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Tromsø.
- Slabakova, Roumyana. 2001. *Telicity in Second Language*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Slabakova, Roumyana. 2005. What is so difficult about telicity marking in L2 Russian? In *Language and Cognition* 8(1): 63-77.
- Smith, Carlotta S. 1997. *The parameter of aspect*. Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Svenonius, Peter. 2004. Slavic prefixes inside and outside VP. In *Special issue on Slavic prefixes*, ed. Peter Svenonius, Nordlyd 32.2: 205-253, CASTL, Tomsø. [http://www.ub.uit.no/munin/nordlyd.](http://www.ub.uit.no/munin/nordlyd/)
- Tenny, Carol. 1992. The Aspectual Interface Hypothesis. In *Lexical Matters*. eds. I. Sag and A. Szabolcsi, 1-27, CSLI Publications, Stanford, CA.
- Travis, Lisa. 1994. Event Phrase and a Theory of Functional Categories. In *Proceedings of 1994 Annual Conference of the Canadian Linguistics Association*. Toronto Working Papers in Linguistics.
- Verkuyl, Henk. 1993. *A theory of aspectuality: the interaction between temporal and atemporal structure*. Cambridge University Press.
- Vinogradov, V.V. 1972. *Russlij jazyk* (Russian language). Moscow. Vysshaja shkola.