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## BOOK REVIEW

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### THE RUSSIAN VERBAL ASPECT AND TENSE (MEANING AND USAGE)

Author: A.V. Bondarko

Publisher: Education Publishing House, 1971

### THE RUSSIAN VERBAL CATEGORY OF ASPECTUALITY

Author: M.A. Sheliakin

Publisher: URSS Publishing House, 2008

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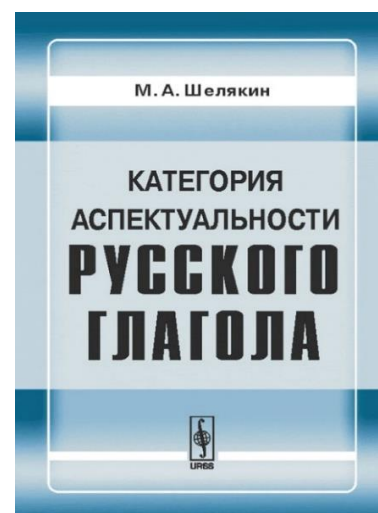
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#### 1. Introduction

The books under review are both about the functional-semantic features of Russian verb category of aspect. The first book is *The Russian Verbal Aspect and Tense (Meaning and Usage)* by A.V. Bondarko (1971). The second one is *The Russian Verbal Category of Aspectuality* by M.A. Sheliakin (2008). As will be seen, in his *The Russian Verbal Category of Aspectuality* M.A. Sheliakin based himself on the classification of aspectual values as proposed by A.V. Bondarko (1971). Therefore, in what follows, we will examine Bondarko's book first.



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## 2. The Russian Verbal Aspect and Tense (Meaning and Usage)

*The Russian Verbal Aspect and Tense (Meaning and Usage)* is 239 pages long. The book was published in 1971. It includes four chapters. Chapter 1 is concerned with the semantic features, describing aspectual meanings, and the semantic potential of the aspectual forms. This is also an interesting chapter to read. In this chapter, the author introduces basic theoretical concepts. The concepts discussed include aspectual opposition, general (invariant) verbal meaning and particular aspectual meanings. The author presents an aspectual opposition where the perfective aspect expresses the feature “new situation arising”, while the imperfective does not (p.19). As mentioned by the author, “the invariant meaning of perfective and imperfective verbs is more abstract than any particular contextual meaning. The last ones are the more specific variants of general meanings which occur in given contexts” (p. 21).

Following R. Jakobson (Jakobson, 1932), Bondarko states that perfective constitutes the marked member of the aspectual opposition, imperfective - unmarked. Bondarko assumed that the asymmetry of the aspectual opposition helps to explain the greater semantic scope of the imperfective aspect in comparison with the perfective. I find Bondarko’s point of view similar to Forsyth’s opinion. According to Forsyth, a logical conclusion to be drawn from the explanation of the aspect system in terms of a privative opposition is that, since positive aspectuality is expressed only in perfective verb forms, the imperfective is, in a sense, 'non-aspectual'. This means that the meaning of a perfective form includes, as one of its elements, the expression of aspect, while an imperfective form carries no such element of meaning (Forsyth, 1970, p. 48)”.

Bondarko proposes in the second part of chapter 1 the classification of particular aspectual meanings. Thus, perfective aspect has only one basic meaning – the meaning of completed action perceived in its unity, e.g. “Вдруг кругом появились тучи” (‘Suddenly clouds appeared all around’) (p. 32). Imperfective aspect has a greater number of semantic variants. Bondarko lists 4 meanings of imperfective forms. In the first meaning – actual-processual meaning, the imperfective aspect denotes the action that is in progress, e.g. “Шар медленно поднимался” (‘The balloon was ascending slowly.’) (p. 35). In the second meaning, the imperfective aspect expresses repeated action. The third meaning is general-factual, e.g. “Он говорил мне об этом вчера” (‘He told me about this yesterday’). Here, the imperfective aspect presents the action in a way that it could have taken place in reality. In the fourth meaning of imperfective aspect the action is described as atemporal, it happens a lot or all the time, e.g. “Земля вращается вокруг Солнца” (‘The Earth rotates around the Sun’) (p. 41). The detailed analysis of the particular aspectual meanings and the examples given by the author in the chapter provides highly useful guidelines for the reader in similar research.

From important remarks in chapter 1, A.V. Bondarko devotes the whole chapter 2 to describing the use of aspectual forms. In particular, the 2 aspects are combined with the 3 tenses, so that the 5 specific verb forms: past imperfective, past perfective, present imperfective, future imperfective and future perfective are created (pp. 50-116). Bondarko comes to the conclusion that in speech communication the aspectual values are not separated from temporal values. The author states, “The interaction between aspect and tense is reflected in the so-called aspecturo-temporal forms (видо-временные формы)” (p. 121).

Chapters 3, 4 are, as intended by the author, an addition to chapter 2, thus for the most part of these chapters the author exemplifies the aspectual use in the past, present and future tense. The figurative use of tenses are discussed in detail in chapter 3. Chapter 4 is concerned

with the present time that allows only imperfective aspect to be used. Some contexts of neutralization, in which the choice of aspect is not categorical, are analyzed in this chapter.

### 3. The Russian Verbal Category of Aspectuality

*The Russian Verbal Category of Aspectuality* was published in 2008. This book represents a revised and supplemented version of the monograph “*The Russian Verbal Categories of Aspect and Procedurals: Theoretical Basis*” by M.A. Sheliakin (1983). What really captures my attention is the way the author combines aspectual meanings into groups when classifying them.

The book is organized into 8 chapters. The first chapter provides some introductory information about the functional and semantic field of aspectuality in Russian. The concepts of grammatical, lexical, semantic and contextual aspects are also described in detail in this chapter.

Chapter 2 is very interesting to read. Sheliakin affirms that he gets influence from Bondarko, by whom particular aspectual meanings are regarded as the specific variants of invariant aspectual meanings (Bondarko, 1971, p. 21). What makes Sheliakin’s classification specific is the way he chooses to distribute particular aspectual meanings into different groups.

Thus, all the meanings that are expressed by perfective verbs belong to the group of telicity, by imperfective verbs – the group of atelicity. In the group of telicity we can see the meaning of a total event summed up with reference to a single specific juncture (p. 38). Besides the author assumes 3 other meanings: potential, summative, result. This is what distinguishes Sheliakin’s classification from the one proposed by Bondarko. The author of *The Russian Verbal Aspect and Tense (Meaning and Usage)* states that perfective aspect has only one basic meaning (p. 41), but in Sheliakin’s classification there are 4 particular perfective meanings that diversely describe the completed action or state. Sheliakin also notices that 3 meanings of potential, repetition and result are contextually or online construed. A third meaning of the perfective aspect is mentioned by Sheliakin because of its apparent overlap with the imperfective ‘repeated action’ vs. ‘summative’. The perfective is used to present a repeated action as a single event. In their case the use of the perfective ‘summative’ requires a limited extent of time to have passed between each repetition in order to present them as one unit (p. 51).

The group of atelicity includes two subgroups: the so-called aspectual meanings and aspectually neutralized meanings (p. 52). In the first subgroup there are 3 significant meanings – actual-processual, atemporal, repetition. Each of them has 3 varieties. The second subgroup includes the general-factual meaning and its 3 varieties. What distinguishes these two subgroups is the fact that the meanings in the first subgroup are based on a partial implication of perfective-aspect features, while in the second subgroup which includes the general-factual meaning, the imperfective aspect is neutral with respect to the semantic features of the perfective aspect: it denotes the occurrence of the event without reference to its completion or consequent results (p. 56).

As the Sheliakin’s classification shows, all the aspectual meanings mentioned by Bondarko reappear in Sheliakin’s categorization. In addition to these meanings the author of *The Russian Verbal Category of Aspectuality* reveals the varieties of these main values that require contextual elements to be realized. Thus, imperfective verbs, occurring with adverbs such as ‘часто’ (‘often’), ‘обычно’ (‘usually’), ‘долго’ (‘for a long time’), ‘весь день’ (‘all

day'), express repetition or duration (p. 61). The inactual meaning – a variety of general-factual meaning is identified in this example thanks to the adverb 'раньше' ('in the past'), which communicated that the action took place in the past: "Раньше он работал в университете" ('He used to work at the university') (p. 63).

The whole of chapter 3 introduces the patterns of forming aspectual pairs: prefixation, suffixation. This chapter also discusses the factors influencing the formation of aspectual pairs. Special attention is paid to the biaspectual verbs – a kind of a covert aspectual pair.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the concept of procedurals (способ действия) which is also named aktionsart (Forsyth, 1970, p. 20). Sheliakin based himself on the research of A.A. Zaliznjak and A.D. Smelev (Zaliznjak & Smelev, 2000). In this chapter he proposes inceptive – procedurals denoting start of event, e.g. 'зашуметь' ('begin to make noise') (p. 113), delimitative – procedurals denoting an event that goes on for a limited period of time, e.g. 'погулять' ('play for a little while') (p. 115), perdurative – procedurals denoting an event that goes on for a longer period of time, e.g. 'проживать' ('live for some number of years') (p. 118), accumulative – procedurals denoting 'accumulation of result', e.g. 'напивать' ('drink in large quantities') (p. 120) and terminative – procedurals denoting termination of event, e.g. 'отговорить' ('talk somebody out of something/ doing something') (p. 123). It is noticeable that Sheliakin always describes the semantic of procedurals in connection with aspects. The category of procedurals is broadened by Sheliakin to include both imperfective and perfective verbs.

Chapter 5 deals with the correlation of aspect and the past, present and future tense. Here Sheliakin, as influenced by Bondarko, cites Russian as having aspectuo-temporal forms in addition to pure aspectual forms (pp. 135-167). In sections 4 to 9 of this chapter the operation of imperfective and perfective are examined in all forms of the verb including the imperative, infinitive, participles and gerunds, and their usage is amply illustrated by examples that can be found on pages 170, 182, 198, 205, 218, 225.

Chapter 6 attempts to describe how aspectuo-temporal forms perform a syntactic function. In the last chapters 7 and 8 Sheliakin concludes the book with the major points, emphasizing the importance of the sentences and contexts for bringing to light the true character of the aspectual opposition.

The appendices contain algorithms for using aspectual forms in the indicative, imperative, subjunctive, participles and gerunds.

Overall, it can be seen that *The Russian Verbal Aspect and Tense (Meaning and Usage)* lays theoretical foundations for the development of *The Russian Verbal Category of Aspectuality*. From the review above, we can see that the two books share some similarities and differences as follows:

The focus of *The Russian Verbal Aspect and Tense (Meaning and Usage)* is the close relationship between aspectual and temporal meanings, while the focus of *The Russian Verbal Category of Aspectuality* is the deep interrelation of aspect with many other grammatical categories such as tense, mood and case, not only with tense.

The two authors describe almost the same aspectual meanings, but the hierarchical relationship between these meanings is characterized differently in their works.

## 4. Evaluation

### 4.1. Contribution

Aspect is an important grammatical category of Russian verbs, so the study and identification of the invariant and contextual aspectual meanings is always considered as an urgent problem. Together with Forsyth, Rassudova and Maslov, Bondarko makes contributions to Russian aspectology. Following him, such Russian scholars as M.A. Sheliakin, E.V. Petrukhina, X. Schlegel, M.Y. Glovinskaya, E.V. Paducheva, Anna A. Zaliznyak and A.D. Shmelev, etc., provide clear, reasonable explanations for the various uses of aspect with particular grammatical forms in these works.

The author of *The Russian Verbal Aspect and Tense (Meaning and Usage)* successfully presents a comprehensive description of Russian verbs from the point of view of semantic aspect, illustrates profusely aspectual usage in a deep connection with temporal usage. He makes a contribution to the theoretical study of aspect as a grammatical category in Russian. Bondarko's approach is synchronic, based solely on Russian materials, so that the foreign readers can easily gain knowledge of complicated Russian verbal aspect.

*The Russian Verbal Aspect and Tense (Meaning and Usage)* by Bondarko is a useful scholarly reference for teachers, students and researchers of linguistics, especially those who are concerned about functional-semantic features of grammatical category of aspect. The book provides readers with a better understanding of the relation between grammar, meaning and context. It also provides the reader with key concepts that form Russian verbal aspect and tense.

*The Russian Verbal Category of Aspectuality* is a reader-friendly reference book. It is useful and practical to those who want to explore in-depth into Russian grammar from functional-semantic approach. With the easy-to-read writing style, Sheliakin walks the readers from abstract to concrete exemplification, and what is appreciated is the well-written concluding remarks of each chapter, enabling readers to round up his discussion in the chapter. The author's method of rendering the abstract concepts is also a commendable point of the book.

I find Sheliakin's book more interesting and illuminating. This is because it gives us a broader understanding of aspect in the Russian language which will be of practical interest to students of Russian, and also contribute to the theoretical study of aspect as a grammatical category. The book provides better understanding not only of theoretical aspect, but also of its usage in speech communication. Sheliakin gave a special place in his work to aspectual contexts which can be considered a useful tool for translating aspectual meanings into a language of a different typological system such as Vietnamese.

### 4.2. Critique

Analysis of the set of concepts regarding various meanings of aspectual forms the Russian language from Bondarko up to the modern researchers such as Sheliakin speaks of a long history in the recognition of this verbal category. In Bondarko's book aspect cannot be presented separately without tense. Only in studies conducted over the past decades of such researchers as Zaliznyak and Smeliev, Paducheva, Petrukhina, aspectuo-temporal relations began to be considered from a different point of view.

According to the above-mentioned aspectologists, aspect and tense are two independent categories with their own specifics, on the one hand, and as dialectically

interconnected, on the other. Thus, the proposed by Bondarko aspectuo-temporal meanings are considered by modern aspectologists as purely aspectual meanings. Zaliznjak and Smelev state: “All meanings that can be expressed by imperfective verb ONLY in the present tense are meanings of aspectuo-temporal form” (Zaliznjak & Smelev, 2000, p. 27). The authors’ opinions on aspectuo-temporal meanings are supported by most of the modern aspectologists.

Sheliakin, being a representative of the younger generation of aspectologists, however, does not support the modern understanding of aspectuo-temporal forms, but follows the interpretation of these meanings assumed by Bondarko.

It cannot be emphasized enough that *The Russian Verbal Aspect and Tense (Meaning and Usage)* and *The Russian Verbal Category of Aspectuality* are not for beginners. In these books, the authors present abstract concepts and complicated semantics components of aspectual meanings that only researchers and advanced students with a sophisticated knowledge of the language can study the nuances effectively.

## 5. Application of the Books

These books are, as mentioned above, highly recommended to those who work in the field of aspectology and functional-semantic research. They have successfully depicted the semantic features of one of the most important grammatical categories - the category of verbal aspect. Every chapter of both of the books is useful to my investigation into, especially chapters 2, 3 of the former and chapters 2, 4, 5, 6 of the latter. They can be invaluable scholarly references for researchers and classroom teachers as well.

Aspect has always been one of the features of Russian grammar that Vietnamese-speaking students find particularly difficult, since Vietnamese language does not have tense and only marks aspect lexically and optionally (Cao Xuan Hao, 1998). Understanding of Russian verbal aspects involves not only the inventory of particular aspectual meanings but also a knowledge of the corresponding types of aspectual context. The last one will find an accurate interpretation in the Vietnamese language. Therefore, they can facilitate the task of transferring the contextual meanings of the Russian verb into Vietnamese.

Therefore, these books can also be a highly recommended reading for those Vietnamese researchers and students of Russian and Slavic languages who are interested in the study of grammatical category, the presence of which in the Vietnamese language is questionable.

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