

# From formants to discourse: reflections on aspectual composition in Polish

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This talk will revolve around the issue of aspectual composition in Polish. Our starting point will be the view that aspectual composition has to begin at the verbal level - and in case of compound verbs at the level where the base verb combines with a formant (be it a prefix or a suffix). I defended this — controversial — view in my thesis: Młynarczyk (2004). But although the word-formational level is essential for composition of aspect in Polish, splitting verbs apart from formants is only the very first step on a long road.

In this talk I will argue that if the approach that I defended in my dissertation is to be of much use, it needs to be integrated within a larger framework: one that encompasses higher levels of composition up to the discourse level. That said, it needs to be enriched and reformulated so that it *can* form an integral part of such an architecture. As the data from Polish to be presented in this talk will show, aspectual meanings of base and composite verbs cannot be ultimately studied in isolation (as context-invariant meanings); instead, they need to be attuned to predication and eventually evaluated from the perspective of their contribution to discourse.

Contextual effects of the aspectual distinctions Polish verbs make will therefore be an important theme in this talk. By 'context' I mostly refer to the local linguistic context of a sentence (at times we will need to consider discourse context, and perhaps sporadically extra-linguistic information). The argument here will consist of two parts. First I will concentrate on the interaction between verbs and their arguments, and second, I will touch upon the issue of adverbial modification.

As to the first part of the argument, I will discuss how the choice of a formant influences the interpretation of the internal (and sometimes also external) argument, but also, how the choice of an object can force the verb (compound or basic) to be interpreted in a certain way. We will see that the semantic effects of different verb-argument combinations can range from subtle meaning shifts in resulting predication to different sorts of coercion. By and large, I will argue that the interpretational mechanisms that are at work in Polish when different aspectual formants are applied to a verb could be very similar in spirit to those studied extensively in lexical semantics, notably in Asher (2011). In that sense they are not peculiar to Slavic aspect markers, and viewing them as

a mysterious exclusivity of Slavic aspectual system does not seem productive.

So my discussion of the interaction between Polish verbs and their direct objects will set my ideas apart from the ideas to be found in the most well-known literature on this topic (literature inspired by Verkuyl (1972) and Krifka (1989)). Incidentally, I will point out that the pioneering contribution of Wierzbicka (1967) that had formed the primary inspiration source for these approaches has been misinterpreted. I will suggest that her observations regarding the interaction between verbs and objects in Polish — when regarded in their totality — can be naturally linked to observations that have been the topic of much recent research in lexical semantics (again, notably Asher, among others). In general, my impression is that research on Slavic aspect is somewhat isolated and relatively untouched by the progress that has recently been made in lexical and discourse semantics. Now that we know so much more about coercions, underspecification and compositionality/computation in general (notably due to several works by Asher, Kamp, van Lambalgen and Hamm), time has come to apply these insights to the field of Slavic aspect.

In a way, this talk is a retrospective look at what I argued for in my thesis and a trial to interpret it in the light of new developments in linguistics. My talk will not present a ready analysis of any issue, since much time and teamwork would be needed to develop it. I will informally share my idea's on aspect and point to directions of research which I am convinced are worth exploring.

## References

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