

Detangling the Serbo-Croatian «gerund»

Serbo-Croatian has two types of verbal adverbs: the present (*Deca su se zabavljala igrajući se u blatu* ‘Children were having fun playing in the mud’) and the past (*Darko Stanić je spasio utakmicu odbranivši kazneni udarac* ‘Darko Stanić saved the game by defending the penalty kick’). Both forms temporally depend on the tense of the matrix clause predicate, share the semantic subject with the matrix clause and can indicate cause, manner, time or condition. However, as verbal adverbs, they cannot independently form a clause due to the lack of inflection. The difference between the present and the past form lies in the verbal aspect. Traditionally, SC grammars illustrate the present verbal adverb as having imperfective aspect and expressing simultaneity of actions in the present, perfect and future, whereas the past verbal adverb has perfective aspect and expresses anteriority. However, certain examples show an overlapping of the present and the past adverb when expressing simultaneity:

1) *Prošao je kraj nas ne primetivši nas /*
passed.3sg aux next us not notice.prfv.adv us

2) *Prošao je kraj nas ne primećujući nas*
passed.3sg aux next us not notice.impfv.adv us
‘He passed us without noticing us (he passed us by without noticing us)’

According to Milas (2007), such examples are not be considered exceptional, as past verbal adverbs are used in 48,25% of cases from his literary corpus to communicate simultaneity.

Unfortunately, very few articles provide hardly any information on this category. What we know is that the Slavic verbal adverb is the result of a “crystallization” or lack of inflection of the participle (Manolessou 2005). Furthermore, the present verbal adverb developed from the nominative singular of the present active participle and took the adverbial function, whereas the past verbal adverb developed from the preterite active participle (Gabrić-Bagarić 1995).

In this talk, I will try to provide a complete picture of the verbal adverbs in Serbo-Croatian, by claiming the following:

- i) this grammatical category is a gerund, which developed from the participle, by mainly maintaining the adverbial function;
- ii) assuming Hajdić (1998), who worked on Macedonian, I argue that the verbal adverb can form an embedded clause by always remaining a “second degree” predicate, as it can be transformed into a finite subordinate clause (ex. 3-4);

3) *Naslutivši prevaru, odbio je ponudu za investiciju.*
sense.prfv.adv fraud turned down aux offer for investment
‘Sensing fraud, he turned down the offer for investment’

4) *Pošto je naslutio prevaru, odbio je ponudu za investiciju.*
since aux sensed fraud turned down aux offer for investment
‘Since he sensed fraud, he turned down the offer for investment’

iii) I assume that the structure of verbal adverbials is that of a bare GP, adjoined to the main clause VP, as for the Russian adverbial participles (Babby & Franks, 1998);

iv) cases of clashes between the present and the past verbal adverbs when expressing simultaneity are only possible when asserting past and future actions, but not the present ones (ex. 5-6).

5) *Prolazi kraj nas ne primećujući nas.*
pass next us not notice.impfv.adv us
'He is passing us by without noticing us'

6) ??*Prolazi kraj nas ne primetivši nas.*
pass next us not notice.pfv.adv us

Selected references

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