THE VERBAL ASPECT. HISTORICAL REFERENCE

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In the mentality of many linguists, among them Brugmann and Delbrück, persisted the idea that in the Indo European language did not exist the preoccupation for indicating the tense of the action, of the moment namely, past, present or future, but only the duration, the realization of the action. The person speaking primitive Indo European had in mind only the persistency of the action or only one part of its development: if that part was initial or final, if the action happened once or repeatedly, if it had a limit or a result. The classification of the verbs in durative and momentary, besides the perfective, inchoative, iterative, terminative ones followed from here, encountered frequently in the grammar of the comparatives .

The aspect is a grammatical category of the verb and is distinctive especially for the Slavic languages, more interested not in the period of time in which the process designated by the verb takes place, but in the extent to which the action of the verb is carried through or not that is, followed through, perfected.

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We find circumstantial information in Romanian linguistics, at G. Ivănescu, in the study Le temps, l'aspect et la durée de l'action dans les langues indo-européennes, published in the Mélanges linguistiques volume, publiés a l'occasion du VIIIe Congrès International des Linguistes

à Oslo, du 5 au 9 août 1957, The Publishing House of the Romanian Academy, 1957. He points out that the information he analyses in that specific study have been taken, especially from the book of Eduard Schwyzer, Griechische Grammatik, II, München, 1950.

G. Ivănescu agrees with other linguists to grant Georg Curtius1 the priority to bring up this grammatical category, almost ignored until then. The German linguist got the information from the works of Czech linguists. Furthermore, the first work in which he approaches the matter of the aspect, Griechische Schulgrammatik, appeared at Prague, in 1852. The problem is continued in the study called Das Verbum der griechischen Sprache, the second edition of this, quoted by G. Ivănescu, appeared at Leipzig in 1877. The German linguist found that the differences between durative, momentary and finished actions are reproduced in the Greek language through the themes present, aorist and perfect. Georg Curtius refers to tenses and the nature of tenses, but in the German meaning Zeitstufe, respectively Zeitart. Furthermore, the realities he was referring to were known by the Greek or Latin grammarians but were considered properties of the temporal forms of the verb and, as such, they have not been assigned a special naming. Georg Curtius' skill did not consist in bringing into discussion this matter and, in addition, in naming it.

The whole matter, both under theoretical as well as practical report, got the attention of the neo grammarians, irreducible opponents of Georg Curtius2. The main exponents of this linguistic school were Hermann Osthoff and Karl Brugmann, and the text- program of the new guideline is considered the foreword to the work Morphologische Untersuchungen, I. Teil, published by the two at Leipzig in 1878. The one of them preocuppied by the theory of the aspect was Karl Brugmann, and also in a grammar consecrated to the Greek language, Griechische Grammatik, published in 1885. He rejects the terminology used by Georg Curtius as being inadequate and proposes the appropriate terms and concepts, Art der Handlung and Aktionsart. In addition, he distinguishes the perfektiv and perfektisch aspect types when he distinguishes, under aspectual report, the aorist from the perfect. In the case of the first one, he discerns a punctual action, precisely „eine punktuelle (momentane, perfektive, aoristische) Aktion", and for the second one,

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„eine perfektische Aktion". G. Ivănescu considers that the German linguist misuses the terms perfektiv and perfektisch, because there is no difference in their meaning, both suffixes, -iv and -isch, having the same meaning. As such, they do not define different phenomena, such as Karl Brugmann wanted it to happen3.

Another neo grammarian however, B. Delbrück, in Syntaktische Forschungen, IV, 1879, made a distinction between Aktion and Tempus, leaving them afterwards, in Vergleichende Grammatik der indogermanischen Sprachen, II, Strasbourg, 1897, accepting the term Aktionsart proposed by Brugmann.

The research of the neo grammarians represented an obvious progress underlined by G. Ivănescu in the following manner: „Ces mêmes néogrammairiens rattachèrent l'aspect verbal grec, sanskrit, latin etc. à l'aspect verbal des langues slaves, créant, de la sorte, une théorie unitaire de l'aspect verbal indoeuropéen primitif et de son développement dans les différentes langues indoeuropéennes"4.

In German linguistics were also used the terms: inchoative, terminative, effective, frequentative, causative, etc. in the effort of characterizing more exactly the various hypostases of the verbal action. In this way, linguists like H. Jakobsohn, W. Porzig, E. Koschmieder distinguish between the Aspekt and Aktionsart when operating the aspectual difference between the theme of present and the one of the aorist. Thereby, Eduard Hermann, Objektive und subjektive Aktionsart (1927), considers that the theme of present indicates the action that takes place („l'action qui se dérule"), and the one of the aorist, the action that came to a result („l'action arrivée jusqu'au bout"), aspects named by him kursiv and komplexiv5.

To the same delimitative effort, Eduard Schwyzer (v. supra) considers that the relationship present – aorist from old Greek (language to which all above mentioned linguists prefer to retrospect to) is nothing else than the aspectual opposition in the Slavic languages, for which the grammar of the Slavic languages use the terms imperfectiv and perfectiv. He considers that more appropriate are the terms infektiv and konfektiv.

Omitting the terminological diversity, we can discover that they had in mind two approaches when referring to the form in which the respective opposition is updated. This way, Aktionsart or objektive Aktionsart represents an issue of lexicology, because it is about the lexical meaning of the verb. When speaking about the Aspekt or the subjektive Aktionsart it inverts the perspective of the talking subject which upgrades morphologically, through various temporal forms.

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Concerning the non Slavic linguistics, there was a problem in finding an equivalent for Aktionsart. For the French, a first proposal was the one of J. Brunel, consisting in the phrase ordre du procès6. Regarding the Italian language, Vittore Pisani is credited for using the term azione7.

Regarding these terminological proposals, trying to replace the terms imperfectiv and perfectiv from the grammar of the Slavic languages, G. Ivănescu considers that they had and have few chances of success, thanks to their prestige. At the best, it may be justifiable the use of infectiv instead of imperfectiv.

He goes further and considers that neither Aktionsart, neither ordre du procès are the proper terms,

indicating instead of them the phrase durée de l'action and Aktionsdauer. Furthermore, he also introduces in the equation of the verbal aspect the unic-iterativ opposition, starting from the situation of the Russian language, where by the term odnokratnyj „unique" it is marked the restraint of an iterative action to a single phase of it. This way, if the verb stučat' means„frapper à la porte", stuknut' only represents„frapper une seul fois à la porte"9.

Except for these terminological preoccupations, general linguistics also discussed for a long time about the universal characteristic of the aspect category, especially because for a long period of time the theoretical approaches have been directed almost exclusively towards the old Indo European languages, old Greek, Sanskrit, Latin and primitive Indo European. By ignoring the modern Germanic and Romanic languages it was created the feeling that only the above mentioned old languages own the category of the aspect. In this context, A. Meillet, although admits that Latin owns the infectum-perfectum aspectual opposition, claims that it was not conveyed to the Romanic languages (Linguistique historique et linguistique générale, I, p. 185-186). Hermann Paul had a singular position, in Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte (1880) stating that all languages show at the present, imperfect, aorist, past perfect, future and future perfect both the tense and the aspect10. It persisted, thence, the general impression, except for the English, that the Germanic and Romanic modern languages do not possess the category of the aspect, this being restricted only to the Slavic languages.

In the mentality of many linguists, among them Brugmann and Delbrück, persisted the idea that in the Indo European language did not exist the preoccupation for indicating the tense of the action, of the moment namely, past, present or future, but only the

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duration, the realization of the action. The person speaking primitive Indo European had in mind only the persistency of the action or only one part of its development: if that part was initial or final, if the action happened once or repeatedly, if it had a limit or a result. The classification of the verbs in durative and momentary, besides the perfective, inchoative, iterative, terminative ones followed from here, encountered frequently in the grammar of the comparatives. One of the defenders of this thesis, subsequent to comparatives and neo grammarians, was the French linguist J. Vendryes who, in Le langage, Paris, 1921, concluded that between the tense and the aspect there is an irreducible opposition. A. Meillet (v. supra) has a psychological vision about the nature of the aspect, in the sense that, being practical, is a category of fantastic, of intuitive, linguistic conditions that are characteristic for primitive languages. The tense, alternatively, being abstract, is a category of intellection, specific only for the developed languages. This way, in the development process from primitive to modern languages, the aspect of the action was more and more ignored, leaving space for the category of the tense which created exclusive temporal forms.

At the other end there are other linguists that consider the aspect as being a universal grammatical category. According to H. Paul (v. supra), the problem was resumed by the Polish linguist Jerzy Kuryllowicz, in the work L'apophonie en indo-européen, Wroclaw, 1956. A more ample approach of the matter is due to the French linguist Gustave Guillaume, in two major works, namely Temps et verbe. Théorie des aspects, des modes et des temps, Paris, 1929 and Immanence et transcendence dans la catégorie du verbe. Esquisse d'une théorie psychologique de l'aspect, the latter in the volume Psychologie du langage, Paris, 1933. In both of his works, G. Guillaume supports the tied connection between tense and aspect. The idea was deepened by the Danish linguist L. Hjelmslev in the study called Essai d'une théorie des morphèmes, published in Actes du quatrième Congrès international des linguistes, in which he concludes that tense and aspect represents a single category called aspect.

Regarding the existence of the verbal aspect in the Romanic languages, it was also admitted by one of the important neo grammarians, namely Wilhelm Meyer-Lübke in Grammatik der romanischen Sprachen, III: Romanische Syntax, Leipzig, 1899. But, as well as in the case of H. Paul, his thesis remained isolated in the era. It was resumed later by Fr. Brunot, for French, and argued in the book La pensée de la langue, Paris, 1922, and

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by V. Pisani (v. supra), for Italian, language where the imperfective and the perfective retrieve in the imperfect and perfect simple.

G. Ivănescu sustains the universal character of the verbal aspect. He considers that both the tense and aspect – especially the imperfective, perfective and effective aspects – have always been expressed. Since some languages did not have in the beginning specific forms to reproduce the temporal varieties, they resorted, for their expression, to the verbal aspect, adverbs and complements. He admits, as well as the 19'Th century comparatives, that the primitive Indo European language possessed a verbal system very similar to the old Greek, where certain verbal forms expressed, in the same time, both the aspect and the tense. G. Ivănescu is convinced that the thesis of the preexistence of the aspect over tense is mistaken in the primitive Indo European and that it must be admitted the coexistence of the aspect and tense as means of manifestation even in the primitive phase of Indo European. On the other hand, he determines, „L'existence des langues qui n'expriment point du tout l'aspect verbal, semble improbable"11. For the linguist from Iaşi, there are obvious semantic distinctions and means of manifestation between Aspekt and Aktionsart. Synthesyzing the things, intending to return to them, we will admit, along with G. Ivănescu that the Aspekt contains the characteristics of imperfective, perfective and iterative, meanwhile Aktionsart reproduces the methods of developing an action, precisely inchoative, durative, momentary, terminative etc., lexically expressed. Regarding the Germanic and Romanic

languages, the aspect is marked morphologically, by various forms of the same word, while in the Slavic languages the updates are realized by themes or different words, formed with prefixes or suffixes or by the modification of thematic vowels.

NOTES:

For other details, according to Iorgu Iordan, Lingvistica romanică. Evoluție. Curente. Metode, Editura Academiei Române, Bucharest, 1962, p. 30-31.

Otherwise, Georg Curtius expressed his dissent towards the thesis of the neo grammarians in the work Zur Kritik der neuesten Sprachforschung, Leipzig, 1885. According to Iorgu Iordan, op. cit., p. 21-25 și 30.

Art. cit., p. 45: „il employa des termes identiques (car les deux suffixes -iv et -isch ont en ce cas , la même fonction) pour designer et l'action du parfait et celle de l'aoriste

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(perfektiv et perfektisch), quand il voulait justement montrer ce qui les distingue".Ibidem, p. 24.

G. Ivănescu, art. cit. p. 27-28, specifies that the term kursiv was used before by B. Delbrück in Vergleichende Grammatik..., II (v. supra).

In B. S. L.. XLII, 1946, fasc. 1, p. 43-75, apud G. Ivănescu, art. cit., p. 28.

In Glottologia indoeuropea, Roma, 1943, apud G. Ivănescu, art. cit., p., 28, which also states that, this way, it returned to thr terminology of B. Delbrück before 1885.

Art. cit., p. 44-45: „S'il y avait un changement à faire dans la terminologie existente, nous croyons que la seule à proposer serait la substitution de imperfectiv par infectiv."Art. cit., p. 28-29.

Hermann Paul influenced A. Philippide ultimately, under the report of the general theory, who, in Principii de istoria limbii, Iași, 1894, following closely the German linguist. According also to Iorgu Iordan, op. cit., p. 25-26. Art. cit., p. 33.

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