LET'S TALK ABOUT TENSE AND RECONSIDER SOME TRADITIONAL LABELS

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SAŽETAK

In this talk, I will consider the category of Tense and Aspect in terms of their semantic role in deriving temporal interpretation in a language, as well as regarding their representation in syntax. In that respect, investigating Serbian seems particularly convenient − it is an aspectually rich language, and, traditionally, a number of verbal forms are classified as tenses in the language. What I will argue, however, is that there are actually no tenses in Serbian, based on their semantic distribution. I will also argue that, syntactically, there is no category of Tense in the language. Can we actually motivate such claims?

 I will first show that there are differences in the aspectual distribution of so-called aspectual tenses, Aorist and Imperfectum in Serbian and Bulgarian, and argue that these are captured under the parametric approach to the presence/absence of TP, i.e. TP is absent in languages that lack overt temporal morphology − TP must be realized by overt temporal morphology. Given that I classify Serbian as a no-TP language, I will show that what is traditionally taken as temporal morphology in Serbian is actually only agreement and aspectual morphology. Regarding the interpretation, I argue that, in the absence of TP, temporal interpretation can still be derived with the aspectual and modal component. Moreover, under a no-TP analysis, we can account for a range of non-standard (non-deictic) interpretations of periphrastic past, Aorist and future forms in Serbian, which are otherwise puzzling under the analysis which posits Tense in the language. Finally, on the basis of semantic distribution of forms in Slavic and Romance languages, I will argue that traditional classifications of verbal forms cross-linguistically are often misleading and should be re-examined.