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ASPECTUALITY IN HINDI: THE TWO PAIRS OF ASPECTS

0. Aspectuality in Hindi in general can be classified into two pairs of aspects:

1. Imperfective and perfective aspect
2. Complete and incomplete aspect

The Imperfective and perfective aspects are represented by a simple (imperfective; *ānā* “come”) versus a compound verb (perfective; *ā jānā* “come”). This Slavic language type aspect pair can also be reflected in the tenses too. The imperfect (*ātā hai/thā* etc. “come/used to come”) and continuous (*ā rahā hai/thā* etc. “is/was coming”) tenses represent imperfective aspect only, and the perfect (*āyā hai/thā* etc. – “have/had come”) and indefinite (*āyā/āegā* etc. “came/will come”) tenses are contextual and on the scale of imperfective and perfective, they can be either. This way of expressing the aspect is not unfamiliar to English.

The term “complete aspect” is more often called as *perfect aspect*. It refers to a state that is a result of some previous action, an action whose results are still lasting at a mentioned time. I prefer to use the term *complete* to avoid the confusion created by similar terms *perfective* and *perfect*. The terms “complete” and “incomplete” are motivated by the terms used by H. R. Robins *complete* and *incomplete aspect*. The term “incomplete” is used in a broad sense and is divided into sub-aspects: progressive (*ā rahā thā*), iterative (*ātā thā*), indefinite (*āyā*). This classification leads to a threefold opposition to the complete aspect.

The concept of aspectuality and its types will be studied in comparison with Russian which has a formal category of the perfective and imperfective aspect and with English, too, which has the complete aspect embedded in its tense structure.

With the cross language analyses of the two aspect types we can see their mutual relationship, compatibility and disagreement. Both types of aspects i.e. aspectuality as a whole, need to be studied as an internal element of the verb itself and at the same time as a capability of the verb when put into the framework of the tenses; only then their fine comprehension would be feasible.

1. Imperfective and perfective aspect

In earlier works on the aspectual pair of the imperfective and perfective aspect high emphasis was put on the completedness of an action to distinguish between the imperfective and perfective aspect; perfective as a completed action and imperfective as an unfinished one.

Later analyses made the distinction very precise: “A very frequent characterisation of perfectivity is that it indicates a completed action. One should note that the word at issue in the definition is ‘completed’, not ‘complete’: despite of formal similarity between the two words, there is an important semantic distinction which turns out to be crucial in discussing aspect. The perfective does indeed denote a complete situation with beginning, middle and end” (Comrie 1978: 18).

Similar is the view of Ridjanovic: “Major feature of the opposition between perfective and imperfective verbs is not the completion versus the incompletion of the action designated by the verb, but rather the indivisibility versus the divisibility of the temporal dimension associated with the action” (Ridjanovic 1976: 83).

Hindi does not have a formal category of the imperfective and perfective aspect as it is in Slavic languages, but it does have tools to express this aspectual opposition. The most common reflection of the Slavic language type of aspect in Hindi is simple versus compound verbs; *khānā* (“eat”, Rus. *есть*) versus *khā jānā* (Rus. *съестъ*). The aspectual semantics of the simple and compound verbs has been studied extensively by Pořízka, Hook, Nespital, Kostić and others, although the concept is termed differently by linguists. Pořízka and Nespital used “verbal expression”, Kostić used “verb syntagmata”, but Hook’s term “compound verb” is being very commonly used to refer to such verb combinations.

The term “compound verbs” is used in a very broad sense which includes all types of combinations of the two or more verbs, such as:

khātā rahnā “keep eating (continuative)”

khātā jānā “go on eating (progressive)”

khāyā karnā “eat often (frequentative)”

Although they do not belong to the imperfective-perfective pair of aspect, but they are not aspectually completely insensitive; on the contrary, they are always imperfective.

The concept of “compound verbs” also includes in itself:

khā saknā “can eat (potential)”

khā pānā “to be able to eat (abilitive)”

khānā cāhnā “to want to eat”

khāne denā “to let (someone) eat (permissive)”

Such compounded verbs have a modal function, and they are aspectually neutral.

The compound verbs “determinatives”, as I call them, are in the real sense able to form the imperfective-perfective pair with the simple verbs; *khā jānā* (Rus. *съестъ*) versus *khānā* (“eat”, Rus. *есть*). Russian Hindi scholars (Dimshits, Ul-

itsiferov and Goryunov) used the term “intensives” for verbs capable of making a perfective counterpart to simple imperfective verbs.

1.1. *Determinatives*

The Determinatives are formed with a combination of two verbs written separately, the first verb (the root verb) takes the root of the verb and carries the lexical meaning (content of the verb) of the determinative, and the second verb has mainly a morphological role which at the same time modifies the overall meaning of the determinative while giving nuances of perfectivity and sometimes other additional nuances too. I call the second verb “modifier”, although different linguists used different terms such as “vector verb”, “operator”, “explicator” etc.

khā (root) *jānā* (modifier) vs. *khānā*

The simple verb *khānā* represents the imperfective aspect and its counterpart determinative *khā jānā* the perfective.

In the opposition of the imperfective vs. perfective aspect, the perfective is the marked category and the imperfective is unmarked. Keeping in mind the unmarkedness of simple verbs, Pořízka (1978: 161) reasons: “Simple verbs are neutral, unmarked of verbal aspect. They do not have the perfective or any other aspectual meaning, but at the same time they do not throw it away and can show them in some contexts.”

A similar reasoning is used to explain the imperfective aspect in the Czech language (Slavic languages in general) by Kopečný (1962: 11): “Imperfective verbs must simply be defined, if a precise definition is to be given, grammatically only, as verbs unmarked with regard to the perfectiveness being able to be used after verbs denoting phase and after the verb *budu*¹ (in periphrastic future). This non-semantic, formal feature is the most reliable criterion of the aspect”. Kopečný (1962: 12) further explains the unmarkedness of imperfectivity in verbs as the imperfectivity should not be defined as an opposite concept to the perfectivity and for imperfective verbs a parallel definition should not be taken such as imperfective verbs express the imperfectivity. An imperfective verb is an unmarked category i.e. unmarked of the perfectivity and imperfectivity. Imperfective verbs do not lose the capacity of expressing perfectivity.

A similar view on Slavic languages in general is expressed by Comrie: “the Perfective always has a perfective meaning, whereas the Imperfective may or may not have imperfective meaning” (Comrie 1978: 112)

In the same lines it is possible to say that the determinative is marked with perfectivity whereas simple verbs are not marked with imperfectivity. In other words, simple verbs are by themselves neither imperfective nor perfective, they do not hold any kind of aspectual tag.

¹ The compound future tense in Czech is made with the auxiliary verb “být” and the infinitive of imperfective verb.

Pořízka (2000: 136): “Unmodified verbs (simple verbs), however, did not lose their capacity of expressing perfectiveness of an action themselves, too, in certain cases, they do express it.”

Another feature of the determinative, which crosses the so-called obvious borders of perfective aspect, is its capacity to express iterative actions. Although such a use of the determinative is rare, semantically and syntactically it does exist. Some contexts and situations ask for such a use:

usko sāre kām kal tak karne hain par abhī tak kuch nahīn kiyā “He needs to do all these things by tomorrow, but he hasn’t done anything.”

cintā mat karo jab zarūrat hotī hai to vah sab kuch kar letā hai “Don’t worry, when needed he *does* everything.”

In determination of perfectivity of an action the context plays a very important role, in fact according to Silic, a Croatist/slavist, the context is one of the three parameters in the study of aspectuality in the Croatian language along with the verbal aspect and Aktionsart.

Different Slavic languages deal with such contexts differently. Croatian along with other south Slavic languages; Serbian, Bosnian etc, uses the same morphological structure (the present tense form of the perfective verb) as Hindi to express a perfective but an iterative action. On the other hand, Russian with its strict semantics of a conjugated perfective verb, future tense, is limited to express this meaning only with the present form of an imperfective verb.

1.2. Tenses

The fourfold distribution of tenses in Hindi, indefinite, imperfect, continuous and perfect, finds some common grounds with the pair of imperfective and perfective aspects. In the framework of the imperfective and perfective aspect the tense distribution plays a very crucial role. At some occasions the tenses themselves fall in the category of a particular aspect and otherwise the contextual use of the tenses defines the aspect involved in the action. The imperfect and continuous tense distinctly express the imperfective aspect.

1.2.1. Imperfect Tense

The imperfect tense in Hindi expresses an iterative action. The iterativity of an action fundamentally falls into the category of the imperfective aspect.

ātā hai / ātā thā – “comes/used to come”, express a repetitive action which is one of the main features of the imperfective aspect.

To express an iterative action in the Slavic linguistic background, all the Slavic languages use the same tools; the imperfective form of the verb in the corresponding temporal value. English on the other hand does not have any specific tool to express iterativity; for the present tense it uses an indefinite/simple form (goes) and for the past tense, depending on the situation, it uses different tools; sometimes an indefinite/simple past (went) or sometimes a phrasal construction (used to go).

1.2.2. *Continuous*

The continuous tense expresses an action in progress. The situation with the continuous tenses is crystal clear. Under no circumstances can a continuous action be expressed with the perfective tense. The continuous tense is aspectually so clearly defined as imperfective that this semantic phenomenon can be expressed morphologically too.

A forced sentence, a continuous with a determinative (perfective) is not possible:

**vah khā le rahā hai*

Since Slavic languages do not distinguish morphologically the imperfect and the continuous, the present form of perfective aspect can express only a contextually bound iterative action, if it represents the present tense at all.

1.2.3 *Perfect and Indefinite tense*

The situation is lucid, when it comes to continuous, all the continuous actions belong to imperfective. With the imperfect tenses the situation is relatively lucid, in a context-free environment the imperfect tenses belong to imperfective aspect but when an iterative action is surrounded by a bigger iterative action and its completeness is realised every time it happens, the action inside behaves like a perfective one.

The situation is completely dependent on the context for the choice of the imperfective or perfective aspect in the case of perfect and indefinite tenses, that is why in my opinion the perfect and indefinite tenses should be kept out of the opposition of the imperfective and perfective aspect and should be treated as insensitive to the any aspect.

I have taken both of the tenses, perfective and indefinite, together to analyze them in the framework of the imperfective and perfective aspect because their behaviour is similar when it comes to the imperfective and perfective aspect. Their distinction is a matter of other aspects; the complete and incomplete aspect.

A simple sentence like *vah skūl gaya* “he went to school” is completely insensitive to any of the aspect, imperfective or perfective.

With the additional information this action can belong to any of the aspect:

āj vah jaldī uṭhkar skūl gayā “Having got up early in the morning today he went to school. (perfective)” and *vah sārā sāl skūl gayā par kuch nahīm sīkhā* “He went to school all year long but did not learn anything. (imperfective)”

In these two examples instead of the verbal form *gayā* “went”, the adverb *āj* “today” and the adverbial phrase *sārā sāl* “all year long” are the indicators, better to say, makers of the perfective and imperfective aspect.

The table gives an overall distribution of tenses into the scale of perfectivity and imperfectivity.

	Contextual		Imperfective	
	Indefinite	Perfect	Imperfect	Continuous
Present ¹	<i>hai</i>	<i>āyā hai</i>	<i>ātā hai</i>	<i>ā rahā hai</i>
Past	<i>āyā</i>	<i>āyā thā</i>	<i>ātā thā</i>	<i>ā rahā thā</i>
Future ²	<i>āegā</i>	<i>āyā hogā</i>	– ³	<i>ā rahā hogā</i>
Presumptive	<i>hogā</i>	<i>āyā hohā</i>	<i>ātā hotā</i>	<i>ā rahā hogā</i>
Conditional	<i>ātā</i>	<i>āyā hotā</i>	<i>ātā hotā</i>	<i>ā rahā hotā</i>
Subjunctive	<i>āe</i>	<i>āyā ho</i>	<i>ātā ho</i>	<i>ā rahā ho</i>

¹ Only the verb *honā* “be” can have present indefinite and presumptive indefinite forms. Other verbs do not have these forms.

² The perfect and continuous future tenses have the same forms as presumptive perfect and continuous respectively. The semantic difference is contextual only.

³ Although it is possible to imagine a future imperfective tense, the form there never serves the possible semantics it is always presumptive.

2. Complete and Incomplete aspects

The Complete aspect refers to a state created by a previous action. In English the complete aspect is expressed by perfect tenses, the; present, past and future perfect tenses, and because of that, the aspect is called the as perfect aspect. One should keep in mind that the perfect and perfective have almost nothing in common. Similar terminology simply creates confusion and that is’s why I prefer the term “complete”.

As I mentioned before in the introduction heading (0.), the terms “complete” and “incomplete” are motivated by the terms used by H. R. Robins *complete* and *incomplete aspect*. However Robins used the term *incomplete* only for progressive aspect and he kept other types of non- complete tense such as aorist (*āyā*) and future (*āegā*) out of *complete-incomplete* definition. I would use the term “incomplete” in a broader sense and divide it into sub-aspects.; progressive (*ā rahā thā*), iterative (*ātā thā*) and, indefinite (*āyā*). This classification leads to a threefold opposition to the complete aspect.

To analyse the complete aspect, three points of time are significant: the point of speech (S), the point of the event (E) and most importantly the point of reference time (R) (Reichenbach’s term, see Reichenbach 1947: 288). The speech time is usually the present moment in relation to which an event becomes present, past or future. The event time is the moment when the action happens, and finally the reference time, which makes the tense belong to the complete or incomplete aspect, is the moment, to which the action refers.

2.1. Complete Aspect

The simple definition of the Complete Aspect in terms of the time points would be: if the event time precedes the reference time, the aspect is complete.

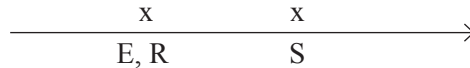
The difference between the sentences a) *vah skūl gayā hai* “he has gone to school” and b) *vah skūl gayā* “he went to school” is of aspectual nature that too of complete versus incomplete. The first sentence (a) belongs to the present tense even though the event E took place in the past but the reference of the event is in the present, i.e. R is in the present, which is expressed by the present form of the auxiliary. On the contrary the later sentence (b) does not mention any reference of the present time; rather, it drops any reference to the present by dropping the auxiliary.

The graphic depiction of these two sentences in a time line clearly states the difference (direction of the time is left to right, x is the time point).

a)



b)



In a) the reference point is in the present along with the speech time, which makes the tense present perfect and aspect complete.

In b) the reference point is in the past along with the event time, which makes the tense past and aspect incomplete.

This difference can be explained even more clearly if the specific verb *baiṭhnā* “sit”, because of its nature, is taken. The word *baiṭhnā* in Hindi does not express a state but an action, the stative element of the verb is expressed only with the help of aspect through the perfect tense.

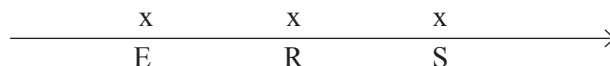
vah baiṭhā hai “he is sitting” vs. *vah baiṭhā* “he sat”

The first sentence, which is obviously in the present tense, as and can be clearly seen in its English translation, indicates the past action (to be more precise, process) of “sitting” and the present state of “sitting” together. A forced translation into English to express all the elements of the sentence would produce the information “he has sat and still sitting”. On the other hand, the second sentence is just a past event.

The complete aspect in the past tense is expressed by the past perfect tense:

vah skūl gayā thā “He had gone to the school”.

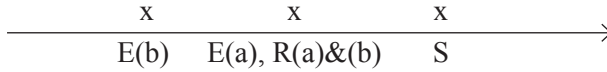
In this situation there are two time points in the past and their order in a time line is very important. Both E and R are in the past but as in the case of any complete aspect the E precedes the R. The time point R might be expressed by additional information in a form of another sentence or just a hidden context but it certainly exists, and that makes the aspect complete.



With the little expanded context the situation will be clear:

jab main ghar pahuncā vah skūl gayā thā “When I arrived home, he had gone to the school.”

Here there are two past actions “arrived (a)” and “had gone (b)”, (b) took place before (a), the R of (b) is with R of (a) at the same time point in the past. The complete aspect expresses that he went to the school and was in the school at the time of my arrival.



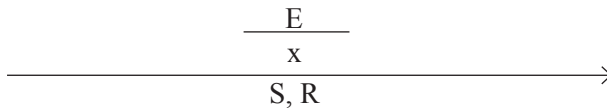
2.2. Incomplete Aspect

The placement of the reference time in relation to the event time is the key element to distinguish the complete aspect from the incomplete one. If the reference time comes after the event time the aspect is complete, and if the reference time comes before or at the same point of time the aspect will be Incomplete.

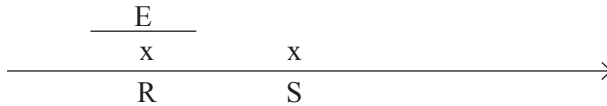
In Hindi the incomplete aspect can further be divided into three sub -aspects; progressive, iterative and indefinite.

2.2.1. Progressive Sub-Aspect

The Progressive Sub-Aspect is represented by continuous tenses, which express action in continuation at a given time. According to the three parameters of Reichenbach, the point of the event is in fact the extension of the event, which covers a certain stretch of time. The graphic depiction of the sentence *vah skūl jā rahā hai* “He is going to school” would be:



And in the past tense the R and the E would move to the past.



2.2.2. Iterative Sub-Aspect

The Iterative Sub-Aspect in Hindi is represented by imperfect tenses. The imperfect tenses express repetitive actions at a given time. An action, which takes place, whenever there is a possibility of the action to take place belongs to the imperfect tense;

vah skūl jātā hai “He goes to school. “

Reichenbach’s event for this situation is for many instances.



Such a tense is very often called as all time present.

English does not have a corresponding tense to express this meaning; for the Hindi present imperfect tense, English simply uses the present indefinite, but when it comes to the past tense the situation gets complicated. Since the past imperfect tense expresses a repetitive action in the past;

vah skūl jātā thā

The English past indefinite expresses an aorist meaning; English lacks morphological tense tools to express such an action, although in some contexts the past indefinite does have capability to express that action. In a context insensitive to the environment the best possible translation into English would be with the help of the phrasal verb *he used to go to school*.



2.2.3. Indefinite Sub-Aspect

It would be unusual to call an aspect indefinite, but after the concrete nature of the two incomplete sub-aspects, the progressive and iterative sub-aspects and for that matter the complete aspect as well, a just simple past action or event (expressing preterite) can not be called with any other term rather than “indefinite” which expresses the real indefiniteness of the action or the event. The Indefinite Sub-Aspect expresses a general factual meaning.

vah skūl gayā. “He went to the school.”

- *vah skūl jāegā* “He will go to the school”

On the scale of the three parameters S, E and R the well- defined rule applies to express the incompleteness of the aspect; either R and E are at the same time point or R precedes the E.

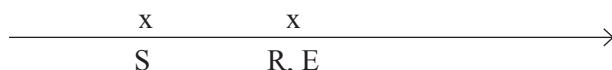
The aorist type tense (*vah skūl gayā* - He went to the school.) represents the Indefinite sub-aspect; this has already been analysed above in juxtaposition with the complete aspect. When R and E are at the same point of time in the past and R does not belong to any time point after E, the aspect is indefinite. The semantics of the aspect expresses simply a general factual event in the past. And because of its indefinite nature it can be considered as an unmarked member of the whole aspect system.

Comrie, although not entirely the indefinite aspect, but does consider Aorist (as Simple Past in English) as an unmarked member of the Aorist/Imperfect opposition in Romance and Slavonic languages. In south Slavonic languages the Imperfekt (Imperfect) represents either an iterative or a progressive action in the past, both clearly marked. The same parallel can be pulled in Hindi to prove the unmarkedness of the indefinite and the markedness of the iterative and progressive aspect.

The indefinite aspect in the future (*vah skūl jāegā* “He will go to the school.”), as per rule, expresses a general factual meaning in the future, where R is otherwise irrelevant except the fact that it can not be preceded by E. The placement of R opens two possibilities; R with S in present (*abhī skūl jāegā* “He will go to the school now.”)



and R with E in future (*kal vah skūl jāegā* “He will go to the school tomorrow.”)



In both of the cases the semantics of the sentences remains retains a general factual meaning and expresses Indefiniteness i.e. an unmarked member of the four-fold opposition.

The other marked aspects in future are rarely used unless the strong context asks for such a use. The pragmatics of the future tense ascertains the less frequent, almost negligible use of marked aspects in the future tense. Since the same forms are used to express the presumptive mood in Hindi, all marked aspects tend to give a presumptive meaning. The unmarked member, i.e. the indefinite aspect (future indefinite), is the most common use of the future tense.

Another interesting fact about the indefinite aspect in Hindi is that in the present tense the indefinite aspect is restricted to the verb *honā* (“to be”). The other verbs do not have morphological tools to express indefiniteness in the present. The concreteness of the complete aspect and two incomplete aspects.; progressive and iterative, cover almost all possible types of actions or states, in other words all types of actions or states fall under one of the three actions. “After habitual, completed and continuative actions being already expressed by the definite forms, there is not much left unexpressed” (Kumar Bhatt 2007: 41). That could be the reason that other verbs do not have the present indefinite form.

But there are situations where none of the three aspects can depict the real semantics of the action and that mostly happens with the modal verb:

mujhe yah kām do, main ise kar saktā hūm “Give me this job, I can do it.”

Indefiniteness of this action in this present tense sentence can be proved by eliminating all three possibilities; the sentence does not depict a complete, pro-

gressive or iterative aspect. It simply expresses the general fact. The morphological tool taken here to express the general truth is the imperfect tense.

“It (imperfect present tense) expresses a characteristic feature or a general truth” (Pořízka 1972: 110)

The present indefinite in English in fact along with the general factual meaning also covers the iterative nature of the action since English does not have morphological tools to convey an iterative action. That way an iterative action stays as an unmarked feature of the aspectuality in English, on the contrary it is the morphologically marked one in Hindi.

The table gives overall idea of the complete-incomplete pair of aspect in Hindi:

	Complete	Incomplete		
		Progressive	Iterative	Indefinite
Present	<i>āyā hai</i>	<i>ā rahā hai</i>	<i>ātā hai</i>	<i>hai</i>
Past	<i>āyā thā</i>	<i>ā rahā thā</i>	<i>ātā thā</i>	<i>āyā</i>
Future	<i>āyā hogā⁴</i>	<i>ā rahā hogā⁵</i>	–	<i>āegā</i>
Presumptive	<i>āyā hohā</i>	<i>ā rahā hogā</i>	<i>ātā hotā</i>	<i>hogā</i>
Conditional	<i>āyā hotā</i>	<i>ā rahā hotā</i>	<i>ātā hotā</i>	<i>ātā</i>
Subjunctive	<i>āyā ho</i>	<i>ā rahā ho</i>	<i>ātā ho</i>	<i>āe</i>

⁴ Highly context based use

⁵ Highly context based use

Since aspects vary depending on their types, the types should be studied independently of each other and also in relation to each other, and common grounds should be analysed by themselves, but not taken as a merging point of types of aspect.

The imperfective/perfective and incomplete/complete aspects are two morphological and semantic categories in a verbal system and Hindi belongs to the group of languages which have both pairs of aspects. Russian, unlike Hindi, does not have morphological means to express the incomplete/complete pair of aspect and on the other hand English, unlike Hindi, does not have morphological means to express the imperfective/perfective pair of aspect. The feature of having two pairs of aspect can also be seen in South Slavonic languages (Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, Macedonian, Bulgarian), too.

The semantic opposition of the imperfective/perfective aspect in Hindi is realised with the derivation of determinatives. Although unlike in Slavic languages, the determinative are not considered standard dictionary forms², but they do have an infinitive form. The determinatives in Hindi and perfective verbs in Slavic languages are external elements as far as the tense system is concerned. English on the other hand can express the semantics of the imperfective/perfective opposition up to some extent with the tense system, in fact the morphological tools of English are good only to express the imperfective aspect (continuous and perfect

² Although determinatives are not standard dictionary forms, their functions and usage have been collected and published in a dictionary form by Nespital.

continuous tenses) but not the perfective one, and the perfective aspect is semantically expressed only with the help of the context. The tense system in Hindi can also express some degree of sensitivity to the imperfective/perfective opposition in a similar fashion as in English, the imperfect and continuous tenses realise the imperfective aspect and the indefinite and perfect tenses depending on the context can express both aspects.

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ASPEKTOVOST V HINDŠTINĚ

V příspěvku se analyzuje aspektovost v hindštině s využitím dvou aspektových opozic: 1. dvojice nedokonavého (imperfektivního) a dokonavého (perfektivního) aspektu a 2. dvojice úplného (kompletního) a neúplného (inkompletního) aspektu. Pro přesné pochopení aspektového systému hindštiny je třeba oba páry rozlišovat a k oběma párům přistupovat zvlášť.

Nedokonavý a dokonavý aspekt jsou tvořeny jednoduchým (imperfektivum: *ānā*) nebo naopak složeným kmenem (perfektivum: *ā jānā*).

Úplný aspekt je často označován jako „perfect aspect“. Vztahuje ke stavu, který je výsledkem předchozí akce, jejíž důsledky stále trvají. Užíváme raději termínu *úplný*, abychom se vyhnuli zmatení s termínem dokonavého (perfektivního) aspektu. Neúplný aspekt v širším pojetí označuje několik podaspektů: progresivní (*ā rahā thā*), iterativní (*ātā thā*), neukončený (*āyā*).

Při analýze obou aspektových typů můžeme vidět jejich vzájemný vztah, kompatibilitu a rozdíly. Oba typy aspektu, tj. aspektovosti jako takové, musí být studovány jak jako samotná povaha slovesa, tak jako schopnost slovesa fungovat v rámci časového systému, neboť jen tak může být celý systém správně pochopen.

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