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The concept of Completivity¹ (Perfectivity) in Croatian verbal tenses: Perfect vs. Non-Perfect Tenses

The concept of *completivity* (*perfectivity*) is very significant in defining the verbal tenses in Croatian. Its introduction into the temporal system helps in defining the structure of the verbal system and also helps in better understanding of verbal paradigms individually and in relation with each other. Completivity and non-completivity, i. e. perfectivity and non-perfectivity can be defined with the help of two points of time in relation with each other: the event time and the reference time. If the event time is prior to the reference time, the action is perfect; on the other hand, if the reference time is at the same point with event time or sometimes prior to event time, the action is non-perfect. This concept is not new to the Croatian linguists, Musić, Katičić and others in their works have dealt with this problem.

In Croatian language all the perfect tenses are formed with the preterit participle and the auxiliary *biti* »be«. The term *preterit participle*, as it is mentioned in »Hrvatska gramatika«², is not the adequate one for the participle be-

1 The problem of inadequate terminology has inconvenienced all the linguists, who have worked in the area of verbal aspect. The term perfective and imperfective (Cro. *svršeni* and *nesvršeni*) denotes the concept of verbal aspect, typical of Slavic languages, but it has nothing to do with the temporal meaning of the perfect and the imperfect tenses. Here the term *completivity* (The Croatian translation is *gotovost*, which helps in avoiding the confusion raised by the term *perfectivity*) is used to express the perfective nature of all the perfect tenses and the participle. The term *perfectivity* is used in the brackets to explain the real meaning of the term *completivity*. The term *perfectivity* denoting the perfect tenses meets the real purpose of this paper and will be used in this article instead of *completivity*. The reader should always bear in mind the fact that the term *perfectivity* here means the nature of perfect tenses or participle, not the verbal aspect.

The terms *complete* (*completive*) and *incomplete aspects* is also used by R. H. Robins in defining the aspects in Greek in »A Short History of linguistics«. By *complete* he means the perfect, but *incomplete* is taken for the continuous only, not the aorist pp. 36, 64.

cause of the functions it has in the formation of the verbal tenses. The participle shows the perfective nature of an action, which has nothing to do with any tense, present, past or future. It can show the present perfect, past perfect or future perfect in combination with auxiliary *biti*, which, as a matter of fact, expresses proper verbal tense, not the participle. Musić³, while justifying the inadequacy of the term, says that the verbal adjective with the endings –лъ (o) –la –lo itself does not mean anything past, therefore, it is not preterit participle. The term, which is used in lots of grammar books⁴, is *active verbal adjective*. The correctness of the term *active verbal adjective* lies in the fact that unlike *preterit participle* it does not express any tense, it is a neutral expression towards any tense. Another term *active*⁵ perfect participle is also very accurate because of the same reasons mentioned above and it gives an additional semantic explanation about the perfective nature of the participle. This is the term that will be used mostly in the article without the adjective *active*.

The perfective nature of the Croatian perfect participle can be illustrated very well in comparison with English perfect participle⁶. As in case of English perfect participle the verbal tenses denoting perfect tenses are formed with the help of auxiliary *have* and the perfect participle; same is the case with Croatian, where the auxiliary is *biti*. The semantic role of the perfect participle and the role of the tenses formed with the perfect participle are the same in both languages. The only difference is the diathesis of the participles i. e. the Croatian perfect participle is active and the English participle is passive by nature. That is the reason why the auxiliaries are different in English (*have*) and Croatian (*biti*, *be*).

The English perfect participle *written* and the Croatian perfect participle *napisao / la / lo* have the same function in formation of the tenses. Both of them, in combination with the corresponding auxiliaries, form the perfect tenses.

Language	Auxiliary	Perfect Participle
English	have	written
Croatian	biti	napisao ⁷

Present Perfect tense:

He has written.

On je napisao.

Past Perfect tense:

He had written.

On je bio napisao.

2 Aktivni particip preterita II, Hrvatska gramatika, Barić, Lončarić and others. Školska knjiga, Zagreb, pp. 634.

3 Musić, August pp. 30.

4 Gramatika hrvatskog jezika, Težak–Babić, Zagreb 1992, Sintaksa hrvatskoga književnog jezika, Katičić, Zagreb 1991, Gramatika, Maretić, Zagreb 1931 and others.

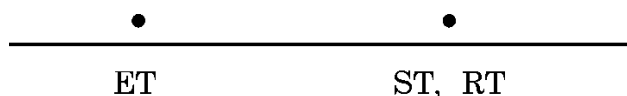
5 It is important to say that here the article deals only with the active perfect participle. The Croatian language has passive perfect participle too. But in this article mostly the term *perfect participle* will be used, without mentioning the activeness of the participle.

6 The formal term in English is *past participle*, which is not correct, *perfect participle* would be the better choice.

The *perfekt* in Croatian is considered to be one of the past tenses by almost all the grammar books. Such an assertion is not exactly correct. The main semantic function of the *perfekt* is to express present perfect action not a past one. The *perfekt* is formed with the perfect participle and auxiliary *biti*, which is in present. As it is explained earlier, the perfect participle is not capable of denoting any tense, present, past or future, only the auxiliary has the ability to make the action present, past or future. In case of the *perfekt* the participle expresses perfective action and the auxiliary makes the tense present, therefore the action denoted by the *perfekt* is not the past one, rather the present perfect tense.

To explain the whole situation in graphics, three points of time are important: *speech time* (ST), *event time* (ET) and *reference time* (RT)⁸. The speech time is the moment when the sentence has been spoken, it is usually the present time. The event time is when the event takes place. The reference time is where the result of a prior action or event stays. The event time is the point *when* the action takes place and the reference time is the point *to which* the action is related. The reference time makes the tense perfect or non-perfect. It is the point of time with which the event stays in live contact in perfect tenses. The perfect tenses can be described as a results left or a state formed by some prior action. The perfectivity and non-perfectivity of a tense depend on the mutual relationship between the event time and the reference time.

The *perfekt* is represented in the following diagram:



–*Gledaj onoga koji je sjeo pokraj predsjednika.*

–*Look at him, who is sitting (lit. has sat) near the president.*

The verbal tense in Croatian is the *perfekt*, which shows the present state.

The event time is somewhere in the past. The speech time is the present moment and, most importantly, the reference time lies on the same point of time with speech time, which is present. The reference time makes the tense present.

Musić⁹, explaining the semantics of the *perfekt*, affirms that it is incorrect to say that the *perfekt* expresses past. The meaning of the combination (the perfect participle and the auxiliary *biti* in present) as a past tense is not the primary function, but the secondary one. He further says, the *perfekt* (*vladao sam* and *obladao sam*) hardly differs from the *prezent* (*vladam* and *obladam*). Mare-

7 Masculine singular

8 These are the Reichenbach's terms, H Elements of Symbolic Logic, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969. These Reichenbach's terms has been taken from Cochrane, Nancy, pp. 142-164.

tić¹⁰ also observes the relation of the *perfekt* with the present tense and calls them past–present events (*prošlosadašnji događaji*). He further differentiates the *perfekt* from the *aorist* and the *imperfekt*, expressing the incapability of the past tenses (*aorist* and *imperfekt*) to replace the *perfekt* in past–present events. Katičić¹¹ explains the function of the *perfekt* is to express present perfect tense (*gotova sadašnjost*¹²). In a similar way like Maretić, he explains the function of the *perfekt*. He says, »the *perfekt* differs from the *imperfekt* and the *aorist* in its specific tense meaning, which is to express a past event in a live contact with the present.«¹³

The meaning of the *perfekt* in terms of present tense is evident to all the linguists. They have taken the meaning as secondary and used different terms for it. For example, Florschütz¹⁴ used the term *present perfect* or *logical perfect* (*perfekt prezentski* or *logički*). In another grammar book¹⁵ for high schools (Brabec, Hraste and Živković) the term *present perfect* or *past–present tense* (*prezentni perfekt* or *prošlo–sadašnje vrijeme*) has been used.

The non–perfect present in Croatian is expressed by the *prezent*. Graphically, the *prezent* is represented as follows.

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ET, RT, ST

–*Gledaj onoga koji sjedi pokraj predsjednika.*
–*Look at him, who is sitting near the president.*

The event, speech and reference time all fall in the same moment, which is present. There is basically no difference between the sentence with the *perfekt* and the sentence with the *prezent*. Both of them show the same present state, but the *prezent* shows simply the present state. On the other hand the *perfekt* shows the same present state as the result of a past event.

The *prezent* belongs to the category of the verbal tenses, which are not marked by the perfectivity. The unmarked category contains all non–perfect tenses, because in the Croatian verbal system the perfect is the only marked category, unlike in English, where along with the perfect, the continuous is also a marked category.

9 Musić, August pp. 31.

10 Maretić, Tomo; pp. 628.

11 Katičić, Radoslav pp. 50.

12 Katičić uses the term *gotova sadašnjost* in Croatian, the literal translation of it into English would be perfected or perfectivised present, semantically it means present perfect.

13 Katičić², Radoslav; pp. 208

14 Florschütz, Josip; pp. 225.

15 Brabec, Ivan; Hraste, Mate; Živković, Sreten; pp. 189.

The non-perfect past tenses are expressed by the *imperfekt* and the *aorist*, depending on the verbal aspect of the verb, imperfective and perfective¹⁶, respectively. The main function of the *imperfekt* and the *aorist* is to denote unmarked past events.

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ET, RT

●

ST

–*Dodoh, vidjeh, pobijedih.*

–*I came, I saw, I conquered.*

It is a classical example of past tense expressed by the *aorist*. The action is past and it has nothing to do with present. The speech time is the present moment. The event time is the past moment and the reference time stays in the past with the event time, which makes the tense past.

In their secondary functions the *imperfekt* and the *aorist* can express present as well as future, but such usage is highly embellished by stylish nature of writing. Most of the grammar books are not very concrete in defining the *imperfekt* and the *aorist*, but they all do agree with the fact that the main function of the *imperfekt* and the *aorist* is to express a past action or event. The real nature of the events or the actions expressed by the *imperfekt* and the *aorist* can be understood only in relation with the perfect tense, since it expresses non-perfect tense (unmarked) in past.

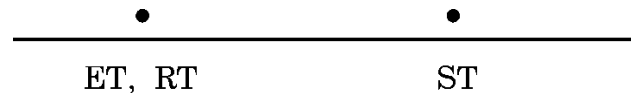
In the contemporary Croatian the use of the *imperfekt* and the *aorist* has become restrained only to the literary texts. Their use has been almost completely diminished in everyday oral communication, except in some phrases like *odoh, rekoh* etc. The *imperfekt* and the *aorist* in everyday communication are being replaced by the *perfekt* with corresponding verbal aspect in its secondary function – the *imperfekt* by the imperfective and the *aorist* by the perfective verbal aspect.

Apart of the main function, that is to express the present perfect tense, the *perfekt* has a secondary function too, that is to express the past tense, precisely the function of the preterit tenses. Unlike in the main function, where the *perfekt* cannot be replaced by any of the past tenses, the *aorist* or the *imperfekt* or by the historical present, the *perfekt* in the secondary function can be replaced by all of the above mentioned non-perfect tenses.

The semantics of the *perfekt* in its secondary function appears only when the *perfekt* loses its perfectivity. In such case, morphologically, the *perfekt* remains the present perfect tense, but semantically it becomes a past tense.

¹⁶ Here the terms *imperfective* and *perfective* have nothing in common with imperfect and perfect tenses. These are the widely accepted English translations for two verbal aspects typical of Slavic languages. The Slavic terms for the imperfective and perfective aspect are *nesvršeni* and *svršeni vid*.

When the perfectivity of the *perfekt* gets neutralised, it loses its live contact with the present and only the event remains, which occurred in the past. Therefore the verbal tense also becomes the past as the event itself is past. In such case it can be replaced by the *imperfekt* and the *aojist*. That's why graphically the *perfekt* with neutralised perfectivity does not differ from the *imperfekt* or *aojist*.



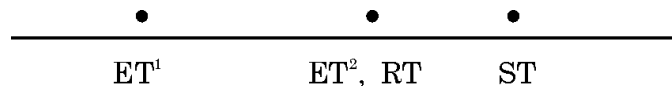
The same above mentioned *aojist* sentence could be expressed with the *perfekt* (with neutralised perfectivity) without changing any semantics of the sentence:

–Došao sam, vidio sam, pobijedio sam.

The stylistic value of the sentence has been erased by the *perfekt*.

The past perfect tense in Croatian is expressed by the *pluskvamperfekt* (*pluperfect*). The *pluskvamperfekt* is formed with the perfect participle and the auxiliary *biti* and again perfect participle has nothing to do with the formation of the tense; it is the auxiliary that defines the tense, which is past in this case. The auxiliary *biti* in the past tense takes the form either of the *imperfekt* or the *perfekt*. One must keep in mind the fact that the *perfekt* in the role of auxiliary is neutralised in its perfectivity, hence shows the past tense, as does the *imperfekt*, so they can replace each other.

The event or action expressed by the *pluskvamperfekt* in the meaning of past perfect is parallel or equal to the event or action expressed by the *perfekt* in the meaning of present perfect. The only difference is that the *pluskvamperfekt* tense takes place in past and the *perfekt* tense in present. The *pluskvamperfekt* expresses the event occurred or the action took place prior to the past and keeps the live contact with the past. To define this situation, another parameter can be added, which helps in understanding the temporal value of the *pluskvamperfekt* – second event time (ET²). The second event helps in explaining the *pluskvamperfekt*, because in relation to the second event the main event becomes past or perfect. The graphic model is as follows:



–Jučer sam šetao po šumi, tamo su bila pala neka drva.

–Yesterday I was walking in the woods, some trees had fallen there.

The speech time as usual is present and the event time is in past. The reference time is also in past, but the reference time coincides with the time of

the second event (ET²), which is later than the main event time (ET), which makes the *pluskvamperfekt* a perfect tense in past.

The perfectivity of the *pluskvamperfekt* can also be neutralised, as it happens with the *perfekt*. When the perfectivity of the *pluskvamperfekt* gets neutralised, it loses its live contact with the past (ET²) and only the event stays that also occurred in the past (ET¹), but it is not the same past. It is prior to the other past action.



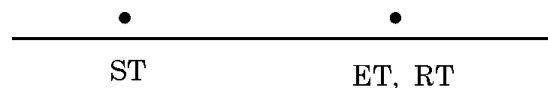
–*Taj dan sam ga bio sreo prvi put u životu.*
 –*The other day for the first time in my life I had met him.*

Here, unlike the above situation, the reference time stays with the main event time (ET¹) because of neutralised perfectivity. The main event becomes the past event, but not the same as in case of the *imperfekt* and the *aorist*. It is past to another past event (ET²).

That is the reason why the *pluskvamperfekt* is not an independent tense, it always needs a past event or action, according to which it is perfect tense (marked) or tense denoting an action prior to past event (unmarked).

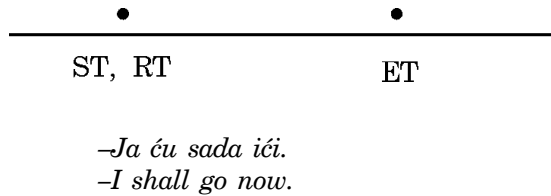
In Croatian the *pluskvamperfekt* denoting past perfect tense is formed mainly with perfective verbal aspect, but rarely it is formed with the imperfective aspect too. On the other hand, the *pluskvamperfekt*, denoting event which occurred before another past event (non perfect past tense; pluperfect), is formed only with the verbs of perfective aspect.

The non-perfect future tense in Croatian is expressed with the *futur I*, a member of unmarked category. With non-perfect future there can be two possibilities: first, when the reference time and the event time are at one point somewhere in the future after the speech time.



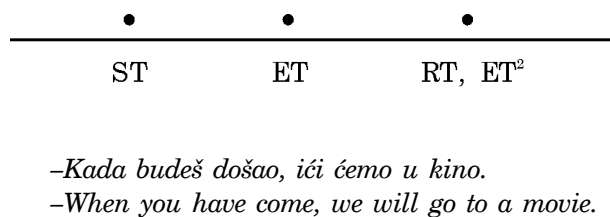
–*Ja ću sutra ići.*
 –*I shall go tomorrow.*

In the second case, when the reference time remains at present moment with the speech time and event time is somewhere in the future.



The future perfect tenses in Croatian are expressed with the *futur II* and the *futur III*¹⁷.

The *futur II* is formed with the perfect participle and the auxiliary *biti* in perfective present tense. It denotes a perfect future action or event, which is past or prior to another future event (E^2). It can be called *pre-future perfect tense*. Maretić¹⁸ has observed clearly the perfectivity of the *futur II* and for such event and action used the term *II perfekt*. The *futur II* is not an independent tense as well. The event depends on another future event, which occurs after the main event. The main event is in live contact with the second event. The results of the main event lie at the time of the second event. As in the *pluskvamperfekt*, the reference time lies at the same point of time where the second event falls. But, unlike in the *pluskvamperfekt*, this whole situation happens in future, which is shown by the position of the speech time before the event and reference time. The situation in graphics is as follows:



The *futur III* is formed with the perfect participle and the auxiliary *biti* in the *futur I*. It denotes the future perfect action or event. Maretić¹⁹ uses the term *preterit-perfekt* (*preteritoperfekt*) for such events. Later on in the third edition of the same book the term has been changed into *preterit-future* (*preteritofutur*). His observation of the perfectivity of the *futur III* is evident in his choice of the term *preteritoperfekt*, later on the *perfekt* is replaced by *futur* just to make sure the term represents the future tense.

¹⁷ The Future III is usually excluded from the grammar books, but its place in the verbal tense system is very important. Its role will be explained later in the article.

¹⁸ Maretić, Tomo. Pp. 631.

¹⁹ Maretić², Tomo, Gramatika i stilistika hrvatskoga ili srpskoga književnog jezika, Naklada jugoslavenskog nakladnog D. D., »Obnova«, Zagreb 1931 (original 1899), pp. 554

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ST

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ET

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RT, ET²

–*Dok donesem mlijeko, dijete će već biti zaspalo.*

–*By the time I get the milk, the child will have fallen asleep.*

Basically the graphic explanation of the *futur III* does not differ from *futur II*, but the *futur II* is an event which took place before the second event and these two events are in live contact, which makes it dependent and pre-future perfect tense. On the other hand, the *futur III* is an independent tense. It does need a context to make it perfect, but the context does not make it pre-future perfect tense, but simply the future perfect tense.

The *futur III* is very rare in Croatian and excluded from the school textbooks. It is used in the texts decorated with highly stylish nature of writing. The future perfect tense is expressed usually by the present perfect. The way how the non-perfect present is used to express the non-perfect future tense, i. e. the *prezent* replaces the *futur I*: *Sljedeći mjesec idem u Indiju*, in place of *Sljedeći mjesec ću ići u Indiju*, same way the present perfect is used to replace the future perfect, i. e. the *perfekt* replaces the *futur III* npr. *Ako ne stigne plaća sljedeći tjedan, nastradao sam* in place of *ako ne stigne plaća sljedeći tjedan, bit ću nastradao*.

The *futur III* is commonly replaced by the *futur I* as well, but more precise way of expressing *futur III* is by paraphrasing it. Nancy Cochrane²⁰ says about the problems of translation of English future perfect (her exemple: *when he comes, I will have done it.*) into Croatian:

»Finding translational equivalents to the future perfect is somewhat more of a problem. Some speakers accept the following equivalent of the future perfect in the sentence:

–*Kad on dođe, ja ću već učiniti/završiti.*

However, other speakers claim that is only marginally acceptable and very difficult to process. For them, the temporal relationship indicated by the English future perfect can only be rendered by paraphrases such as:

a) *Kad on dođe, to će već biti gotovo.*

b) *Kad on dođe, to će već biti završeno.*«

It is interesting to see that in the first proposed translation the perfectivity is completely lost, and an attempt to compensate it with an additional adverb *već* (already) has been made. In the second proposed translation (a and b), especially in (b), the sentence has been paraphrased into passive and the passive perfect participle has been used. In Croatian language the passive perfect participle very rarely loses its perfectivity. This way the perfectivity has been kept intact. Only the *futur III* is capable of keeping the perfectivity without changing the voice; that is making it passive.

–*Kad on dođe, ja ću biti učinio.*

20 Cochrane, Nancy pp. 155.

The perfect tenses are those where the event time is always prior to reference time and the non-perfect tenses are those where the event time and the reference time are at the same point, or reference time is before event time.

The whole structure of the Croatian verbal system with perfectivity as a factor for defining the system can be put into the table:

	Non-perfect tense	Perfect tense
Present	<i>Prezent</i>	<i>Perfekt</i>
Past	<i>Imperfekt / Aorist / Perfekt*</i>	<i>Pluskvamperfekt</i>
	<i>Pluskvamperfekt*</i>	
Future	<i>Futur I</i>	<i>Futur II, Futur III</i>

**Perfekt* and *Pluskvamperfekt* with neutralised perfectivity

The arrows show the shift of the semantics by the neutralisation of perfectivity.

The concept of perfectivity is nothing new in Croatian language. Almost all the linguists have observed it, especially its presence in the *perfekt*. The grammatical category of tenses becomes complete only if the perfectivity is included in defining the verbal tenses. For better understanding of verbal tenses and their relation with each other the perfectivity is imperative. The perfectivity is not limited to the category of tenses, it also has its place in all the grammatical moods: conditional, optative and imperative.

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*Pojam gotovosti u glagolskim vremenima hrvatskog jezika:
gotova i negotova vremena*

Pojam gotovosti veoma je važan u određivanju glagolskih vremena u hrvatskome. Uvođenje gotovosti u temporalni sustav pomaže u strukturiranju glagolsko–vremenskog sustava i u boljem razumijevanju glagolskih paradigama pojedinačno i u međusobnim odnosima. Gotovost ili negotovost neke radnje određuju se međusobnim odnosom dviju točaka na vremenskoj crti: vremena zbivanja i vremena odnošenja. Ako je vrijeme zbivanja prije vremena odnošenja, radi se o gotovom vremenu, a ako su vrijeme zbivanja i vrijeme odnošenja u istoj točki vremena ili je ponekad vrijeme odnošenja prije vremena radnje, riječ je o negotovom vremenu. Pojam gotovosti nije novost za hrvatske lingviste, Musić, Katičić i drugi u svojim su se radovima bavili tim problemom.

Key words: completivity (linguistics), verbal tenses, Croatian
Ključne riječi: gotovost (lingvistika), glagolska vremena, hrvatski jezik