a historically-motivated classification (typology) of the early historical Slavic verb

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Abstract:

In the past 30 years or so, the business of reconstructing Proto-Indo-European (PIE) verb morphology has made enormous advances. Yet the results of this research do not seem to be picked up readily by specialists on individual Indo-European branches, Slavic being no exception in that regard. In fact, Slavic studies appear to be lagging behind more than any other branch in reflecting the recent breakthroughs in the reconstruction of PIE grammar.

The lecture assesses a number of existing synchronic descriptions of the Early Historical Slavic (EHS) verbal system. (The label EHS is used as a cover term for the earliest attested varieties of medieval Slavic dialects, namely Old Church Slavonic and Old Russian, but some data will also be adduced from Old Polish and Old Czech as well).

There are two general problems that the current classifications of the EHS verb all share:

1) they do not provide adequate synchronic descriptions (in that they cannot really be used by the student of EHS to generate/predict all the forms of a given verb);

2) the "built-in" diachronic component (historical explanation of verb forms) is out-of-date.

The paper will briefly summarize the history (and the challenges) of the reconstruction of PIE verb morphology and then proceed to propose a new classification of the EHS verb which, the author hopes, satisfies the following criteria:

1. the *diachronic* aspect: a new typology should take into account, and build on, the recent developments in IE studies, while the classes should be "mappable"—to the largest extent possible—onto the known classes/categories of the PIE verb;

2. the *synchronic* aspect: a new typology should adequately and minutely describe the EHS verb system and enable the student of EHS to generate any form of a given verb; in particular, the choice of the aorist form (from the multiple aorist types that EHS possessed) would ideally be predictable from knowing the class that the verb belongs to;

3. the *semantic / functional* aspect: ideally, the breakdown of verbs into classes should be such that each class (or as many classes as possible) have not only a shared *formal feature* (or features), but also a clearly definable shared *function* (or functions).