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Aktionsarten and the PIE verbal roots

Aktionsarten are classes of verbal meanings, distinguished on the basis of such features as duration, telicity and stativity/activity. Apart from Hofmann's observations (1970) on the correlations of the Aktionsarten and the different formations of aorist and present stems in PIE, this important concept of lexical semantics has been rather neglected in Indo-European linguistics. Using a modern classification of Aktionsarten based on the work of Zeno Vendler (Vendler 1967, Van Valin 2005) and the reconstruction of verbal stems presented by LIV, this paper will explore the correlations between the basic Aktionsarten of reconstructed PIE roots and the way particular verbal stems are formed. For example, it can be shown that intransitive change-of-state verbal roots overwhelmingly form underived thematic presents (*sweyd-e 'get sweaty' (Ved. *svedate*), *lewk-e 'become light' (Ved. *rócate*); activity verbal roots such as *tek^w- 'run' (Skr. *tákti*), *h₁ed- 'eat' (Skr. *ádmi*), or *g^{wh}en- 'strike' (Skr. *hánti*), tend to form underived athematic presents. Likewise, there appear to be no stative verbs for which underived thematic present inflexion is reconstructed; rather, verbal roots with inherently stative meaning usually form athematic presents (and perfects). Those underived thematic presents for which LIV assumes a stative meaning are all limited to only one or two IE dialects, e.g. *b^herw- 'boil' (only Italo-Celtic), *dek's- 'be useful' (only Vedic), *swel- 'burn' (only Baltic and Germanic). The presentation will be limited only to those cases where the attribution of verbal roots to Aktionsarten is unambiguous (i.e. where the Aktionsarten of their reflexes in the attested languages exactly agree), but several methodological problems with the reconstruction of Aktionsarten will be discussed.

REFERENCES

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