

Title: The relationship between tense and aspect in Lower and Upper Sorbian and its implications  
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The proposed paper first considers the number of verb tenses expressing past time (anteriority with respect to the speech event) in literary Upper Sorbian, literary Lower Sorbian, and in the Lower Sorbian dialects: literary Upper Sorbian has four past tenses (preterite, iterative preterite, perfect, and pluperfect), literary Lower Sorbian has three (preterite, perfect, and pluperfect), while the Lower Sorbian dialects have only one past tense (formally identical to the perfect). Given the fact that the Upper and the Lower Sorbian literary languages and their dialects all exhibit verbal aspect as a grammatical category (expressed as an opposition between an imperfective and a perfective aspect), the paper seeks to determine whether differences in the various temporal systems have any bearing on the instantiation of aspectual distinctions.

The paper discusses methodological problems inherent in seeking to answer the question of potential aspectual distinctions. In the process, it sheds light on the still-debated status of written Upper Sorbian and Lower Sorbian as distinct languages or merely as two "literary variants" of a single Sorbian language. Finally, the paper considers the question whether, as a result of German influence combined with its relatively rich inventory of verb tenses, Upper Sorbian in particular displays signs of a transition from an "aspect-prominent" to a "tense-prominent" language.