

## Combinations of Tense Forms in Serbian Folk Epic Poetry

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**0.0.** I will begin with several sentences about Serbian folk epic poetry for those not familiar with this kind of Serbian literature. Serbian folk epic poetry, as well as folk lyric poetry, is the most important part not only of Serbian oral tradition, but of the whole Serbian literature. Without this kind of poetry the Serbs would be, as Vojislav Đurić says, “without a significant place in world literature, and without the most immediate and best expression of the folk spirit” (Đurić 1969: 7). As a confirmation of its importance and values we can mention the fact that Pushkin and Goethe were impressed by the creative qualities of Serbian folk poetry. It has therefore been studied from different angles and aspects, but no one has showed interest in this particular issue. It should be noted however that the Russian researcher D. N. Medrish (Медриш 1974: 121-142) treated these issues more specifically, considering the verses of the Serbian folk epic poem *The Building of Ravanica*. But before we embark on treating our topic, we should to some extent indicate the problems of studying time in a literary, creative text and its relation to real, objective time in which we live and act.

**0.1.** It should be noted that by the end of the last century (around the 70's and later) there was a real abundance of works<sup>1</sup> investigating the functioning of time (and space as well), primarily in literary texts<sup>2</sup>. The essential thesis which held at the time (and

1 We will mention just the few most interesting works from the Russian language area (Суханова 1970; Егоров 1974; Петров 1974; Гей 1975; Фирсова 1979; Сапаров 1974; Познякова 1980; Шумарова 1980; Яковлева 1991).

2 It is very interesting and very curious that dealing with time in literary texts most researchers with no reserves confuse the present, past and future tenses with atemporal verb categories such as the

does so nowadays too) was the opinion that “time can be expressed in two ways: objectively, i.e. in the way it is in reality, and subjectively, i.e. as individually perceived and expressed. The first time is real, the second is creative” (Tošović 2006: 57). Further on this thesis was elaborated in the sense that those two kinds of time did not overlap. “If they overlapped completely, that would mean that the artist had nothing new to say about the world, and could only repeat it; then again, if the common basis of creative and real parameters disappeared, the issue would turn out to be inessential, to be something unable to exist either in time or space” (Гей 1975: 253). If we start from somewhat different positions, this thesis seems extremely biased and rather untrue. Namely, time has its course that man, for now at least, cannot possibly affect. It is outside man, but man is on the other hand in it. Time does not depend on man, but man is extremely dependent on time. But, to make time somehow closer to himself and more easily comprehensible, within the grammar of his language man gave names to certain periods of time so that, in the Serbian language, we have the following temporal categories: the present time (the present), the past time (the perfect), the long-past time (the pluperfect), the future time (the future). The time designations created in this way enable a man to observe more easily the position of himself and other things in time. The so-called “objective time” glides along one plane in one direction – forward. In creating a work of art by using verbal material (language), the author (artist), in describing a certain event, makes use of different grammatical temporal categories through which he builds a multidimensional temporal complex. Thus the notion called “creative time” does not include the creator’s subjective manner of time perception<sup>3</sup>, but his conscious employment of the available grammatical temporal categories dictated by the creative process. This boils down to creative manipulation, not of objective

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infinitive, the imperative etc. We will mention one such example: “In the following extract the opposite method is used – different verb forms are stated in sequence (present tense – infinitive – past tense – present tense – infinitive – past tense – imperative – infinitive – imperative – infinitive – past tense)” (Tošović 2006: 75).

- 3 “Creative time, as distinct to objective time, is characterised by different ways of subjective perception of time. Man’s feeling of time is, as is well known, extremely subjective. It can be “drawn out”, but it can also “race”. A moment can be “stopped”, while a longer period can “pass in the blink of an eye”. A work of art makes this subjective perception of time one of the forms of depicting reality. However, objective time is included at the same time: at times observing the rules of unity of the time of the plot and readers-spectators in French classic drama, at other times abandoning that unity, stressing differences, introducing narration largely from the subjective aspect of time” (Lihačov 1967 www).

time but of the grammatical temporal categories. It is therefore that in this paper we are dealing with grammatical temporal categories (forms) in a literary text.

1.0. Standard Serbian has 14 verb forms: *the present, the aorist, the perfect, the imperfect, the pluperfect, the future*, imperative, the present participle, the passive adjective, the infinitive, the active adjective, the past participle, future II, the conditional mood – where only the first six express the category of time. According to our research, there are five verbal temporal forms operating in Serbian folk epic poetry: *the present, the perfect, the aorist, the imperfect, the future*, with the exception of *pluperfect*. As regards the use of verbal forms not expressing time, *the infinitive* and *the imperative* are noticeably employed. According to our statistical procedure, considering the total, there are 2,129 verbal temporal forms in 2,609 verse lines.

1.1. Table No. 1 contains the data on the numerical and percentage occurrence of the tense forms present in five Serbian folk epic poems, as well as the proportion of the number of verse lines per poem and the number of used verbal tense forms.

Table 1

<i>Ženidba Dušanova</i> (Dušan's wedding)	
The total number of verse lines in the poem	690
The number of tense forms employed	587 = 85.07%
<i>Nahod Momir</i> (Momir the Foundling)	
The total number of verse lines in the poem	394
The number of tense forms employed	316 = 80.20%
<i>Banović Strahinja</i>	
The total number of verse lines in the poem	810
The number of tense forms employed	665 = 82.10%
<i>Marko Kraljević i Arapin</i> (Marko Kraljević and the Arab)	
The total number of verse lines in the poem	434
The number of tense forms employed	329 = 75.81%
Marko Kraljević i Musa Kesedžija	
The total number of verse lines in the poem	281
The number of tense forms employed	232 = 82.57%
TOTAL	
The total number of verse lines in the poems	2,609
The number of tense forms employed	2,129 = 81.60%

We can notice in this table that in 82 per 100 verse lines there is a verb form signifying time, whereas only 18 verse lines were written without using the tenses. If we added the presence of verbal forms not expressing time, the percentage would be even more marked. We could conclude from this that Serbian folk epic poetry is very rich in tenses. The reason for such a high occurrence of tenses could be easily explained by the fact that each epic poem is based on an event, and "where there is no event, there is no time" (Tošović 2006: 57). However, if we quote the data obtained from research into the same phenomenon in lyric poetry conducted by A. Čišić, where 376 tense forms were found in 502 verse lines, amounting to 74.90% (Čišić 2006: ?), then discovering connections between events and tenses in the aforesaid way becomes pointless. A high percentage of tense forms in the text of epic and lyric poetry could therefore be explained by the manner of conveying the poetic epic and lyric subject matter including a high degree of dynamics.

1.2. Of special interest here is the dominating presence of the present tense<sup>4</sup> in the Serbian language area and in folk epic and lyric poetry. Namely, our research shows that out of the total number (2,129) of the found verb tense forms, 1,260 (or 59.18%) are in the present, whereas all the remaining forms amount to 869 (40.82%) forms. A. Čišić's numerical values for the present and the other encountered tense forms are very close to ours, which is shown by the data obtained from both kinds of poetry, entered into Table 2.

4 Research concerning the Russian folk verse showed that the perfect was the dominant tense (cf. Tošović 2006: 71). According to that the perfect tense should also be in the first place in Serbian folk poetry. However, as demonstrated by our statistics, the present is the most frequent. We come across the same data in the work of D. Medriš, who analysed the Serbian folk epic poem *The Building of Ravanica* (cf. Медриш 1974). Why is that so? We think for several reasons. Firstly, after losing the state and sinking into centuries of slavery, folk epic poetry was for Serbs their only spiritual means which united them and kept them alive. Therefore the present tense forms, signifying the present, namely reality and truth, are the most numerous, as every past carried with it a certain measure of fantasy, haziness, unreality. Thus all the events from the poems, with the dominant use of the present tense, seemed much more real and true. Secondly, through the use of the present tense an illusion is created in the literary work of the real presence of the narrator, which dispels any doubts as to his fictional nature. Thirdly, it is possible that folk epic poets (the gousle players) were actually witnesses of some events, so that they indicated their presence by using the present tense. The present was by analogy transferred to other events not witnessed by the gousle players. Fourthly, apart from its indicative use, the present tense is also often used in Serbian in its relative use as the historical present, especially in works with historical elements. Its dominant presence in Serbian folk epic and lyric poetry is therefore logical.

Table 2

	The present	The perfect	The aorist	The imperfect	The future
Epic poetry	59.18%	19.73%	10.43%	3.24%	7.42%
Lyric poetry	52.80%	27.73%	8.80%	4.27%	6.40%

Namely, in Alma Čišić's material, out of 375 tense forms, the present occurs in 198 cases (or 52.80%), while 177 (or 47.20%) represent other tense forms. The difference of 5.60% to the benefit of the present in folk epic poetry affects the difference of 8.00% to the benefit of the perfect tense in folk lyric poetry. The presence of other tense forms, as it is obvious, is almost identical.

1.3. Before we proceed to analyse tense form combinations in Serbian folk epic poetry, we will introduce Table 3 with the data on the frequency of all the tense forms discovered in the five longest, statistically analysed poems.

Table 3

The present	The perfect	The aorist	The imperfect	The future
<i>Ženidba Dušanova</i> (Tzar Dušan's Wedding)				
357	98	46	31	55
60.82%	16.69%	7.84%	5.28%	9.37%
<i>Nahod Momir</i> (Momir the Foundling)				
196	80	20	0	20
62.03%	25.31%	6.33%	0.00%	6.33%
<i>Banović Strahinja</i>				
376	141	73	32	43
56.54%	21.20%	10.98%	4.81%	6.47%
<i>Marko Kraljević i Arapin</i> (Marko Kraljević and the Arab)				
202	52	40	5	30
61.40%	15.80%	12.16%	1.52%	9.12%
<i>Marko Kraljević i Musa Kesedžija</i>				
129	49	43	1	10
55.60%	21.12%	18.54%	0.43%	4.31%
<b>TOTAL</b>				
1,260	420	222	69	158

TOTAL				
The present	The perfect	The aorist	The imperfect	The future
59.18%	19.73%	10.43%	3.24%	7.42%

We have already mentioned that present tense forms are prominent, and that they practically dominate the verse contexts of Serbian folk epic poetry. In all the poems their presence exceeds 55.00%, and ranges from 55.60% to 62.03%. The present is followed by the perfect tense the presence of which ranges from 15.80% to 25.31%, which is on average two to three times less than the present tense. Generally speaking, these two tenses are present in over two thirds of the cases (over 76.72%), and reach as much as 87.34% in the poem *Nahod Momir* (Momir the Foundling). However, as the past is not only expressed by the perfect, but other tenses as well: the aorist and the imperfect – the past is more present than it seems to be. It covers on average a little over one fourth in all the poems, and in the poem *Marko Kraljević i Arapin* (Marko Kraljević and the Arab) that percentage reaches 38.60%. The third tense form (the future), expressed by the future tense, does not reach 10.00% in any one of the poems. This demonstrates that this tense category was marginally present in Serbian folk epic poetry. It should be pointed out that it has no higher status in folk lyric poetry either (cf. data from Table 2). It seems, generally speaking, that the future for the Serbian people (of whatever confession: Orthodox, Catholic or Islamic) did not at the time look promising. Therefore future forms were used only to express conjectures. This is why future forms range from 4.31% to 9.12%. The obtained data on the presence of the discovered tense forms in the five poems analysed can lead to certain conclusions. The percentage of the present and perfect tense forms in four poems is almost identical: *ženidba Dušanova* (77.51%), *Banović Strahinja* (77.84%), *Marko Kraljević i Arapin* (77.20%), *Marko Kraljević i Musa Kesedžija* (76.72%). This can be accounted for by a certain kind of causality between the two tenses: where the present is prominent, the perfect is less frequent, and vice versa. Situation is similar with the forms of the aorist, imperfect and the future tense. In the same four poems these forms are almost equally distributed: *ženidba Dušanova* (22.49%), *Banović Strahinja* (22.16%), *Marko Kraljević i Arapin* (22.80%), *Marko Kraljević i Musa Kesedžija* (23.28%). Thus, the only poem that does not fit into the above system is *Nahod Momir*. It has a substantially greater presence of both the present and the perfect tenses, amounting to 87.34%. According to that, the presence of the aorist, imperfect and the future tense is reduced to no more than 12.66%. Such a relation of tense forms

in the poem *Nahod Momir* can also be explained by its subject matter, which is unusual for Serbian folk epic poetry.

2.0. As regards tense form combinations in Serbian folk epic poetry, they are affected by various ways of narrating the epic subject matter, as well as the subject matter as such. As the beginning and end are of most importance in almost all creative works, we have analysed 50 poems and inquired into what tense form they begin with, and which ones appear at their ends. Table 4 and Table 5 demonstrate the results of our research.

Table 4

The use of tense forms at the beginnings and ends of 20 poems				
The present	The perfect	The aorist	The imperfect	The future
3*→3	6→6	16→16	14→14	
7→7	18→18	23→23		
13→13	19→19	26→26		
27→27	25→25	28→28		
32→32	39→39	45→45		
36→36		53→53		
37→37				
44→44				

\*Numbers in Table 4 indicate the numbers of the poems taken from the *Anthology of Folk Epic Poems*. The numbers repeated in the appropriate columns indicate that the poem under that number begins and ends with the same verb form.

Table 4 demonstrates that 20 poems (or 40.00%) begin and end with the same tense form. 8 of those (or 16.00%) poems begin and end with the present tense, 6 (or 12.00%) poems begins and ends with the aorist, 5 (or 10.00%) begins and ends with the perfect tense, whereas only 1 (or 2.00%) begins and ends with the imperfect.

Table 5 exhibits the relations of the beginnings and ends in the poems beginning with one, and ending with another verb form.



Table 5

The use of tense forms at the beginnings and ends of 30 poems				
The present	The perfect	The aorist	The imperfect	The future
1→	→1			
	2→	←2		
4←	←4			
5→		→5		
	8→	→8		
10→	→10			
	11→	→11		
12→	→12			
	15←	←15		
17→				→17
21→	→21			
	22→	→22		
29→		→29		
30←		→30		
		31→		→31
33←	←33			
34→	→34			
35→		→35		
	38→	→38		
40→	→40			
41→		→41		
	42→			→42
43←	←43			
46←		←46		
47←	←47			
48→	→48			
49→		→49		



The use of tense forms at the beginnings and ends of 30 poems				
The present	The perfect	The aorist	The imperfect	The future
52→		→52		
54→		→54		
55→	→55			

Table 5 reveals that 30 (or 60.00%) of the 50 poems begin with one, and end with another tense form. As many as 22 poems (or 73.33%) begin or end with a present tense form (poems under nos. 1, 10, 12, 21, 34, 40, 48 and 55 begin with the present, and end with the perfect tense, whereas the poems under nos. 4, 33, 43, 47 begin with the perfect, and end with the present tense, while the poem under no. 17 begins with the present, and ends with the future tense); 7 of them (or 23.33%) begin or end with the perfect tense (poems under nos. 8, 11, 22, 28 begin with the perfect, and end with the aorist, while poems under nos. 2 and 15 begin with the aorist and end with the perfect tense, while the poem under no. 42 begins with the perfect and ends with the future); only 1 poem (or 3.34%), the one under no. 42, begins with the aorist and ends with the future tense<sup>5</sup>.

**2.0.** In the work so far we have statistically presented the use of tense forms in Serbian folk epic poetry in order to illustrate the phenomenon under research in the most accurate way. It will be our task below to investigate all the ways in which tense forms are incorporated into the present epic subject matter. Even though there are several such ways, we will only demonstrate the ones which represent the most standard procedures. The most numerous are the text parts with combinations of two or more time planes. Their combinations are differently realised, depending on the manner of structuring the text of the realized epic situation.

**2.1.** Of the greatest interest are the extracts with two or three time planes combined. Such temporal structures almost always express a certain regularity based on some universal principle reflecting the field of harmony.

- 1) Кулу гради црни Арапине,  
 кулу гради од двадесет тавана,  
 крај сињег мора дебелога.  
 кад је Арап кулу начинио,

5 The poems under nos. 9, 20, 24, 50 and 51 have not been statistically analysed due to their inappropriate verse structure.

ударио стакла у пенцере,  
 простр'о је свилом и кадифом,  
 па је онда кули говорио:  
 „Што ћеш пуста у приморју, куло,  
 кад по тебе нитко шетаг нема?  
 мајке немам, а сестрице немам,  
 а јоште се оженио нисам  
 да по тебе љуба моја шеће;  
 ал' тако ме не родила мајка,  
 већкобила која бедевију,  
 запрочићу у цара Тевојку:  
 јал' ће ми је царе поклонити,  
 јали ће ми на мејдан изићи!“  
 То је Арап кули изрекао,  
 па он одмах ситну књигу пише,  
 те је шаље цару од Стамбола:

(КМИА, 217)

- 2) Одмах пође, у тазбину дође,  
 у тазбину, у била Крушевца,  
 Те одскоро црство постануло;  
 а ви Те га страц Југ Богдане,  
 и ви Те га девет мили шура,  
 соколова девет Југови Та:  
 мила зета једва дочекаше,  
 у наруче зета загрлише,  
 вјерне слуге коња прифатише;  
 зета воде на френџију кулу.  
 Код господе совре засједаше,  
 те господску ријеч бесјећаху;  
 навалише слуге и слушкиње:  
 неко двори, неко вино служи.  
 Што бијаше риштанске господе,  
 поседаше те пијаху вино:

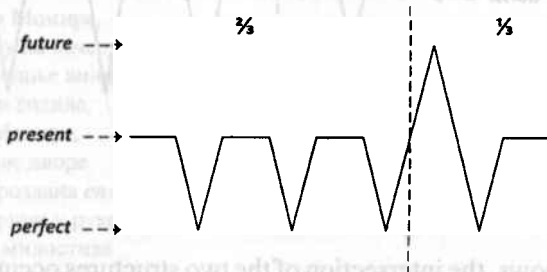
(БС, 137).

- 3) Том се чуди царе господине  
 откуд чедо у гори зеленој:  
 ил' је чедо досадило мајци  
 те је вега оставила мајка,  
 ил' је кума кумче изнијела  
 да цар крсти и да га дарива,  
 ил' су виле чедо подметкуле?  
 Стаја царе летњи дан до подне,

не би л' гди ко чеду *изишао*,  
ал никога *чути* ни *видети*;

(HM, 69).

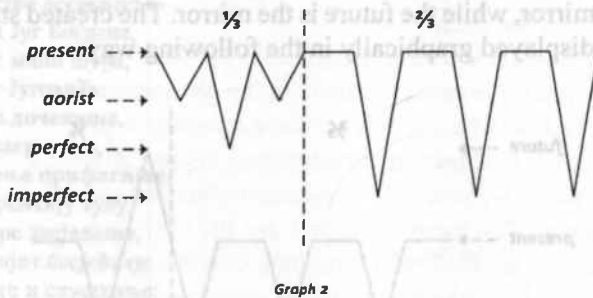
In example (1) time in the quoted extract is realized through a combination of three time planes: *the present, past and future*. The present is realized by the present tense, the past by the perfect tense, the future by the future. The temporal composition has the following form: the present – the perfect – the present – the perfect – the present – the perfect – the future – the perfect – the present (*gradi, gradi – načinio, udario, prostro, govorio – ćeš, nema, nemam, nemam, nisam, šeće – oženio, rodila – zaprosiću, će pokloniti, će iziћи – izrekao – piše, šalje*). The extract begins and ends with the present which in temporal terms makes a rounded off, closed whole. The internal structure is built by alternating two temporal planes: *the present* and *the past*. The past alternates with the present until the third temporal plane – *the future* – appears. From that moment a reverse succession takes place – the present comes after the perfect. This structure resembles an object and its reflection in a mirror. The present plays the role of the object, the perfect the role of the object's reflection in the mirror, while the future is the mirror. The created structure can for convenience be displayed graphically in the following way:



Graph 1

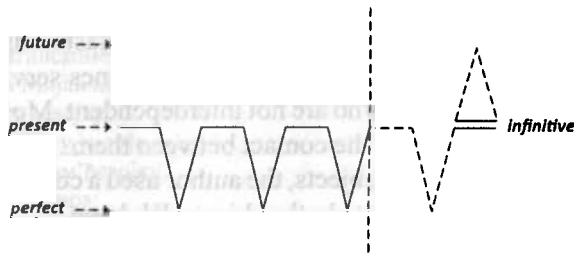
It is not difficult to understand from this graphic illustration to what extent the achieved perfect temporal structure has been created by combining the three time planes: *the past, the present* and *the future*. As we can see the past and the present alternate, and both the time dimensions are projected through the future, but not at a place at random but a place entering the harmony area, as the two parts form the relation  $2/3 : 1/3$ . In example (2) the total time of the quoted extract is realized through two temporal planes: *the past* and *the present*, while the past is realized

through its three time dimensions: *the perfect, the aorist and the imperfect*. The time composition looks as follows: the aorist – the perfect – the aorist – the present – the imperfect – the present – the imperfect – the present – the imperfect (*prođe, dođe – postanulo – viđe, viđe – dočekaše, zagrliše, prifatiše, vode, zasjedaše – be-seđahu – navalíše, dvori, služi – bijaše, posedaše – pijahu*). We can see from this that the extract begins with the present tense and ends with the imperfect. According to that it can be said to be open in the temporal sense. However, its internal structure is somewhat different compared to that from example (1). Namely, here we discover two autonomous structures. The first one incorporates two past tenses – *the aorist and the perfect tense*; it begins and ends with the aorist, which makes it closed. The second one is also built with two tenses, but with *the present and the imperfect*; it begins with the present tense and ends with the imperfect, which makes it open. It becomes clear from reading the extract that those two structures constitute two autonomous parts of the quoted text. This temporal structure can for ease of understanding be represented graphically.



As the graph shows, the intersection of the two structures occurs at the boundary of the area of harmony, as in example (1), the only difference being that here the first structure stands in the ratio  $1/3 : 2/3$  to the second structure. In example (3) the total time of the quoted extract is realized through two time planes: *the past and the present*. The time composition is as follows: the present – the perfect – the present – the perfect – the present – the perfect (*čudi – dosadilo je, ostavila je, iznijela je – krsti, dariva – podmetnule su – staja – izišao*). As distinct from the last two examples, alternating the present with the past creates an open time structure, which appears to reflect the real time flow by alternating the present with the past, and so to infinity where unpredictable future is waiting. That unpredictable future from

the last verse line is realized through infinitive forms (al nikoga *čuti ni videti*) which simulate the future with the enclitic form *će* omitted. That results from the meaning of the last verse line: but he will *neither hear nor see* anyone. This temporal structure can be graphically presented too.



Graph 3

2.2. Rather less present are parts of the text with two time planes, but such that the unfolding of one time plane is interrupted by the other time plane. Such an interruption often occurs in only one place.

- 1) Ја ћу кума Наода Момира,  
 одвешћу га двору на вечеру,  
 износићу трегодишње вино  
 и ракију од седам година;  
 опојићу Наода Момира,  
 однећу га у царева дворе  
 на чардаке гди Гроздана *спава*,  
 метнућу га сестрици у руке,  
 а сестра је свака милостива  
 и на свога брата жалостива,  
 она ће га љепше *пригрлити*.

(НМ, 72)

- 2) Кад су били испод Вучитрна,  
 гледала их два Војиновића,  
 еј□ó пíаíē ēēřāč *говорили*:  
 „Што л’ се ујак на нас *расрдио*,  
 те нас *не шће* звати у сватове?  
 Нетко нас је њему *опаднуо*,  
 с њега жива месо *отпадало!*...“

(ЖД, 53).

In example (1) future forms appear through a long text (*ću, odvešću, iznosiću, opojiću, odeću, metnuću, prigrliti će*), used in the meaning of intention for actions signified by them to be carried out in the future. Such a hypothetical sequence is interrupted at one point with the verb form *spava*, signifying a real state taking place in the present. Thus an epic structure was created with two time planes included: *the future* and *the present*. All the future forms, except the last one, are connected with one subject (with Momir the Foundling's Godfather). The present form refers to the other subject (Momir the Foundling's sister). The last future form is also connected with her. While the future and present time planes served to the author to characterise the two characters who are not interdependent, Momir the Foundling, the object in the text, represents the contact between them. In order to indicate indirect contact between the two subjects, the author used a common element, namely the future tense which belongs to both subjects. We have already pointed out that future tense forms connected with the subject *kum* (godfather) have a hypothetical meaning, the performance of the actions signified by them is directly dependent on the other subject, *Momir the Foundling's sister*. The subject *kum* (the godfather) is almost certain of the realisation of his hypothetical actions, because he does not doubt that the sister will embrace her brother, whereby his intention will be realised. The crucial moment is expressed by the verb *spava* (is sleeping). This state is particularly actualised by relating it to the present, which raises it to the utmost level of importance, because if the act of embracing is not carried out, the intention of the subject *kum* (the godfather) will not be realised. Therefore the author's idea is built around the verb *spava* (is sleeping), so that it is not only essential for the extract in question but for the whole poem. In example (2) there are two time planes in the realised epic structure: *the past* and *the future*. Perfect verb forms follow one another through six verses, only to be interrupted in the fifth verse line with a single future form. The perfect forms signify predicate actions relating to four different characters: (*bili su* they were – the wedding guests – 1; *gledala ih* looked at them; *govorili* spoke – two Vojinović brothers – 2; *rasrdio se* got angry – the uncle – 3; *opadnuo* betrayed – someone; *otpadalo* fell down – from him – 4). Thus, actions of four different characters are integrated within one time plane, namely acts of four different characters have been brought onto the same temporal plane – the past (the perfect). By using another time plane – the future – now a character seems to have performed his two actions in two time intervals: *the perfect* and *the future* – the uncle who got angry (*rasrdio se*) didn't want to invite his two nephews (the two Vojinović brothers) to the wedding (*ne hće zvati*). Thus the epic character *ujak* (the uncle), by taking over the two time intervals, becomes especially important and si-

gnificant in relation to the other epic characters from the quoted text, whereby he is additionally singled out and emphasised.

2.3. There are many examples of parts of text in which one time plane is realised, which is almost exclusively the present. That is understandable as the present, as we have proved statistically, is the dominant tense in Serbian folk epic poetry.

1) **Кад се жени српски цар Стјепане,**  
надалеко **запроси** ђевојку,  
у Леђану, граду латинскоме,  
у латинског краља Мијаила,  
по имену Роксанду ђевојку;  
цар је **проси**, и краљ му је **даје**.  
Цар **испроси** по књигам' ђевојку,  
пак дозива Тодора Везира:  
„Слуго моја Тодоре везире,  
да ми **идеш** бијелу леђану,  
моме тасту, краљу Мијаилу,  
да ми с њиме **свадбу уговориш**“

(ЖД, 51).

2) Под бој, сине, на тефтере **кажу**  
но у цара сто хиљада војске  
некакога царева спахије,  
што **имају** по земљи тимаре  
и што **једу** леба царевога  
и што **јашу** коње од мегдана;  
што не **носе** по много оружја,  
до по једну о појасу сабљу.  
У Турчина, у турскога цара,  
**кажу**, сине, другу војску силну –  
огњевите јаничаре Турке,  
што Једрене држе, кућу билу;  
јаничара, **кажу**, сто хиљада.  
**Кажу**, сине, и **говоре** људи  
у Турчина трећу војску силну –  
некакога Туку и Манцуку,  
а што **хуче**, а што **гдно туче**.  
У Турчина војске свакојакe

(БС, 139)

3) **Потегаше** перне буздоване,  
**стадоше** се њима ударати;  
буздиван' ма пера обломише,



бацаше их у зелену траву,  
од добријех коња одскочише,  
шчепаше се у кости јуначке  
и погнаше по зеленој трави

(МКиМК, 241)

As is evident from all the examples quoted above, present forms have been used in continuity, thus realizing one time plane – *the present*. If we bear in mind that the present, as we have repeatedly pointed out, is the most frequent tense in this kind of poetry, it is understandable that only it can form such epic structures. The use of the present forms in example (1) is motivated by demonstrating the moment of preparation of Tzar Dušan's wedding. The tzar is *getting married*, that is the most important thing. In order to be married, first he must *propose* to the girl, which means that the tzar *proposes* and that her father *gives* the girl, and then the girl is betrothed; after that someone *goes* to *arrange* the wedding. Individual actions from this extract could have also been expressed by some other tense, not exclusively the present. But we think that the present was employed with a view to achieving a stronger actualisation of the epic character's main intention – the marriage. Example (2) illustrates some details in describing three armies. The first army, with the introductory *kažu* (they say), is depicted with the following details: what its soldiers *have*, what they *eat*, what they *ride* and what they *wear*; the second army, again with the introductory *kažu* (they say), what they *hold*; the third army, with a triple introductory repetition of present forms: *kažu, kažu* and *govore* (they say, say and tell), is said to be *beating* and *roaring*. Thus various details and procedures, referring to different epic subjects, are equalised through a uniform use of present forms, being brought onto the same time plane – *the present*. The question is what the purpose of that was. It was probably to show all the diversity and non-uniformity as strength and virtue, and not as weakness and fault. As the last verse line suggests: “*U Turčina vojske svakojake*” (There are diverse armies with the Turks), the power of that army is actually based on its diversity, and due to that it is ready to fulfil any number of tasks, however different they might be. This, on the other hand, provides an alibi, a justification for a possible defeat of the opposite army. In example (3) all the present forms: *potegoše, oblomiše, baciše, odskočiše, ščepaše, pognaše* are linked to two epic subjects, and serve for naming the actions they carry out together. The use of the present tense is intended to make all the actions as obvious as possible, and to create an illusion of the narrator's presence in the event. Even though the three examples manifest a certain autonomy and individuality in their interrelations, there is a pronounced tendency for different subjects and diffe-

rent actions to be equalised by bringing them onto the same time plane – *the present*, whereby all those epic elements have been made especially striking, relevant and significant in this context.

3.0. After the analysis, several general conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, in dealing with the subject of *Combinations of tense forms in Serbian folk epic poetry*, we have excluded from our research all verb forms (moods) which express no temporal dimension, which, in most cases, has not been done by scholars so far. In order to establish correctly and accurately which temporal dimension is the most frequent in this kind of poetry, we have used the statistical method. By means of this method we have obtained the data indicating that *the present* as one of the three temporal dimensions is the most prominent, and that its presence ranges around 60.00%, whereas the remaining two dimensions, *the past* and *the future*, cover around 40.00%. This data is somewhat surprising, as it was to be expected that the past should occupy the first place. This expectation, which was logical, was suggested by studies carried out concerning the Russian folk verse. They showed that perfect forms, namely the temporal dimension of *the past*, were dominant. We have therefore tried to find good reasons for an unexpected dominance of the present tense in Serbian folk epic poetry. We think that these reasons arise from the fact that the folk epic poetry presented to the Serbs a kind of haven for their physical and spiritual survival following the loss of state and freedom which subjected them to several centuries long slavery. Thus the present tense signifying the present time, actually reality and truth, is the most frequent, as every past time carries with it a certain kind of fantasy, unreality. All the events described seemed more real and truthful owing to a dominant use of the present tense. In addition, the use of this tense in a literary work is aimed at creating the illusion of the real presence of the narrator in the event described, whereby the reality of the event as such is confirmed. Apart from that, there is a strong possibility that the folk poets (the gousle players) were actual witnesses of certain events, and marked their presence by using the present tense. The present tense was further conveyed through analogy into other epic poems, where the gousle players did not witness the corresponding event. The dominant presence of the present tense in Serbian folk epic poetry can also be explained by the fact that apart from its indicative use the present tense in the Serbian language is often used in its relative function as the historical present. This aspect certainly contributed to its numerous occurrences in epic poetry. As our main task has been to investigate combinations of tenses in Serbian folk epic poetry, we have again drawn on statistics analysing the beginnings and ends of 50 epic poems. The statistics have shown that 19 of them begin and end with the same tense, and that in

somewhat over a half it is the present tense. The remaining 31 poems begin with one, and end with another tense. When we embarked on our main task, combinations of tenses in Serbian folk epic poetry, we started discovering very interesting phenomena. As all epic poems are rather long, and we have analysed the longest ones, it has not been possible to observe tense combinations throughout the poems, so we observed that aspect in their individual parts. It was especially interesting that in this kind of Serbian poetry time is expressed in three ways: one-dimensionally – by means of *the present tense*; two-dimensionally – by combining *the present* with *the future*, or *the perfect* with *the future tense*; three-dimensionally – by combining *the present*, *the perfect* and *the future tense*. Each of these tense structures has its specific properties which we have described and displayed graphically for ease of understanding. But it is fascinating that in the poems with two or three time planes there is a strict manner regulating their combinations, entering into the domain of harmony. These combinations, as has been shown, imitating the golden section (or asymmetry), make up extremely strong and logical systems, which irresistibly remind us of the universality and perpetuity of alternating time periods.

### Source

*Антологија народних епских песама* I, 1969, Нови Сад – Београд.

### Abbreviations

БС	БановиЋСтрахиња (Banović Strahinja)
ЖД	Женидба Душанова (Tzar Dušan's Wedding)
МКиА	Марко КраљевиЋи Арапин (Marko Kraljević and the Arab)
МКиМК	КраљевиЋМарко и Муса Кесеџија (Kraljević Marko and Musa Kesedžija)
НМ	Наход Момир (Momir the Foundling)

### Literature

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*Combinations of Tense Forms in Serbian Folk Epic Poetry*

In this paper the author is dealing with combinations of tense forms in Serbian folk epic poetry and he statistically proves that the present tense is the predominant tense form in this kind of Serbian folk poetry. He is trying to discover the main reasons for such use of the present tense. As regards combinations of tense forms in Serbian folk epic poetry, they are rather free and depend, primarily, on the manner of presenting the epic content and on the length of the poem, but there is above all a certain regularity resulting in firm systems.

**Keywords:** *tense forms; Serbian folk epic poetry; the present, the perfect, the aorist, the imperfect, the future.*

0.0. According to the subject from the title, our main task in this paper will be to investigate the ways of combining tense forms in folk lyric poetry. The notion of folk lyric poetry will in this case be used for only one kind of folk lyric poem, namely the oriental-style love-song. This kind of folk love song appeared with the advent of the eastern Islamic culture into the Slavic south; predominantly among the Medieval Bosnian population which had accepted the Islam (cf. Buturović and Maglajlić 1998: 210). The oriental-style love-song, as one of the most representative genres of our oral literature, is a reflection of the eastern way of living which required the isolation of women from men. This isolation required a special form of love meeting and love-making with strictly specified places, times and circumstances. During leisure, mostly in between two battles, men used to go hunting, to picnics and meetings with rich food offerings, "where they particularly nourished the oriental-style love-song, a song which could inspire the joy of living, a romantic longing, and an easternly intoned feeling of sorrow for lost youth, or pain for a past or unrequited love" (Buturović and Maglajlić 1998: 211). Even at that time there were professional oriental-style love-song singers. These singers used to compose the texts while they sang, according to a traditional rhythmic pattern, making use of the language and the formulas which belonged to everyday life. But despite that they never stopped recombining, reshaping the current formulas and topics.

As the main subject of this paper are combinations of tense forms in folk lyric poetry, namely the oriental-style love-song, it is logical to devote a certain space to interpretations of tenses used in literary texts. Generally speaking, time can be expressed in two ways: as objective, real time, as in reality, and as subjective, cre-