

The Verb System Used in The Milashevich Method

Dami an Byrne
Antrim Grammar School, UK

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Abstract

The parallelogram used to teach the English verb system through the Milashevich Method at Russian universities is presented and analysed. There are key fundamental flaws in this method. It is presented as a comprehensive system, which can be employed to translate verbs from the L1 into the TL and the reverse. However, the verb system is incomplete and also wrong in parts. The conclusion points to a progression in the methodological development of the method but this process is still incomplete.

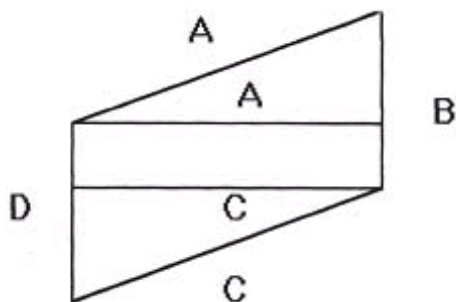
Background

Until recently, there has been no information available on the Milashevich Method in the West and also very little in Russia. It is a method, which has little supporting critical, research and appears to have spread to various parts of Russia and its former republics in a sporadic and often informal manner. Material from the original version of the Milashevich Method for English (emanating from Vladivostock) and its subsequent development and elaboration at a second university, Udmurt State University (hence referred to as UdSU) in Izhevsk, provides the material for analysis and evaluation in this article.

The Milashevich Method was adopted for English teaching within the Law Section of the Faculty of Languages for Specific Purposes at UdSU following Milashevich's visit there. Korneva and Reshetnikova (1994) is UdSU's in-house adaptation and subsequent elaboration of Milashevich (1991). It relies heavily on the latter, going so far as to copy or imitate as closely as possible some of Milashevich's material, including tables of explanation and the parallelogram in Diagram 1 below. However, the Russian practice of not acknowledging a source has created difficulties for researchers trying to evaluate the Russian system of understanding and learning English. Without the sources, it is impossible to trace the origins of these ideas. At the same time, the authors introduce several new ideas, not covered by Milashevich (1991), which extend beyond the basics introduced in the latter.

One of the key concepts behind the method stems from the irregular morphological feature of English verbs compared to the regular pattern in Russian. Milashevich tries to create such a system for Russian learners of English by introducing a parallelogram (see Diagram 1 below) to help the Russian learner master the translation of English verbs. He takes Russian perfective and imperfective verbs and places them in a parallelogram which learners can use as a foundation for working out a good Russian translation of English verb forms and the reverse.

Diagram 1
 Basic Concepts of Milashevich's Parallelogram

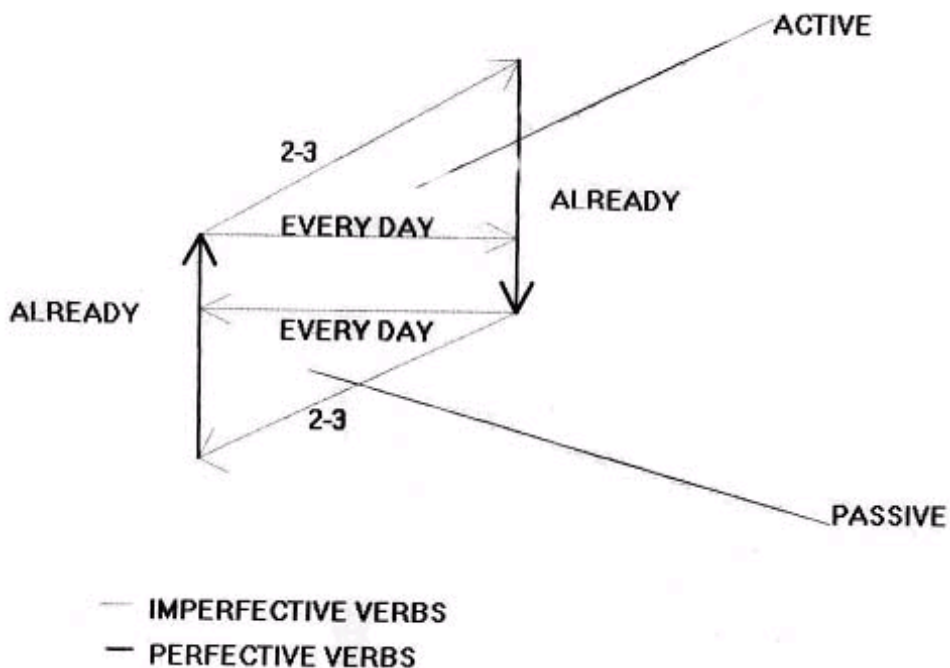


- A= делал = was doing
- B= сделал = did or have done
- C= делалось = was being done
- D= было сделано = was done or has been done

Korneva and Reshetnikova (1994) provides more detailed labelling than that offered originally by Milashevich (1991) in order to make the system more comprehensive. Each of the six lines in the parallelogram shown in Diagram 2 is an arrow, which carries its own name and description:

- (A) Up - a diagonal arrow pointing upwards in the top triangle.
- (B) Down- a diagonal arrow pointing downwards in the bottom triangle.
- (C) Vertical Up- an arrow going straight up in the bottom triangle.
- (D) Vertical Down- an arrow going straight down in the top triangle.
- (E) Left - an arrow going horizontally left in the bottom triangle.
- (F) Right - an arrow going horizontally right in the top triangle.

Diagram 2
 Function of Arrows as Shown in Korneva and Reshetnikova (1994)

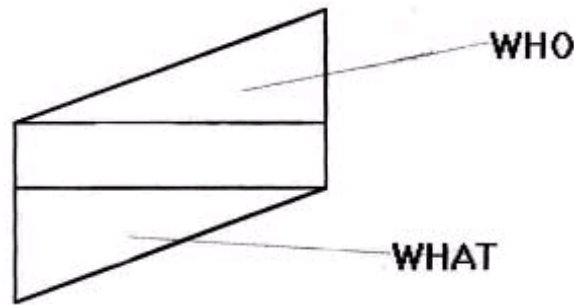


The top triangle in Diagram 2 represents the active voice, the bottom one the passive voice. The vertical arrows match the Russian perfective aspect while the horizontal and diagonal arrows

correspond to the imperfective aspect. Each arrow of the triangle carries a further label to help the learner clarify the difference of usage. The diagonal arrows are labelled with the term '2-3' which implies a habitual action, which is imperfective. The horizontal arrows are labelled 'every day' referring to a repeated action, thus also rendering it imperfective. The vertical arrows carry the label 'already', which implies a completed action, and thus they carry a perfective connotation.

Each arrow carries further specific pieces of information. First, the arrow indicates whether the voice is active or passive and also whether the subject is 'who' or 'what'. The active triangle in Diagram 3 below carries the label 'who', while the passive triangle carries the label 'what'. These two terms refer to the Subject/Verb/Object system whereby the learner can look for these three features of a given sentence in English and once found, he can identify the sentence as an active sentence. In the case of a passive sentence, the learner only finds a subject and verb, where the subject of the passive sentence is the object of the active sentence.

Diagram 3
Active and Passive Triangles of the Parallelogram as Shown in Korneva and Reshetnikova (1994)



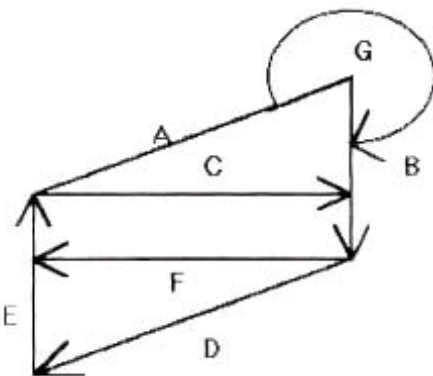
When the verb forms are listed together, the individual English verb forms are located as follows on the arrows of the parallelogram in [Diagram 2](#):

(A) Up	am writing was / were writing shall / will be writing would be writing	Active Present Continuous Active Past Continuous Active Future Continuous Active Future in the Past Continuous
(B) Vertical Down	has written had written shall / will have written would have written	Active Present Perfect Active Past Perfect Active Future Perfect Active Future in the Past Perfect
(C) Right	writes wrote shall / will write would write	Active Present Simple Active Past Simple Active Future Simple Active Future in the Past Simple
(D) Down	is being written was being written	Passive Present Continuous Passive Past Continuous
(E) Vertical Up	has been written had been written	Passive Present Perfect Passive Past Perfect

	shall / will have been written	Passive Future Perfect
	would have been written	Passive Future in the Past Perfect
(F) Left	is written	Passive Present Simple
	was written	Passive Past Simple
	shall / will be written	Passive Future Simple
	would be written	Passive Future in the Past Simple

Although not present in any of the method textbooks, a loop is sometimes added by the UdSU teachers to explain four other verb forms, which do not appear to fit the parallelogram in [Diagram 2](#). This loop is shown in Diagram 4 below:

Diagram 4
Additional Loop added by UdSU Teachers to Explain Additional Verb Forms



The four additional verb forms represented by arrow G are:

(G) has been writing	Active Present Perfect Continuous
had been writing	Active Past Perfect Continuous
shall / will have been writing	Active Future Past Perfect Continuous
would have been writing	Active Future In the Past Perfect Continuous

The method purports that the teaching of the general abstract is the key to greater understanding of the TL. The next step is to learn to apply that newly acquired knowledge. The authors achieve this by creating a model verb of their own. Hence, the non-existent verb 'to ronk' is used in order to show how a system of rules can be applied logically across the parallelogram just as one could do with all regular verbs. Its appearance occurs ahead of the first proper verb in the TL (to ask) and demonstrates the primacy of the interlanguage created by this methodology over the direct usage of the TL. Furthermore, it also emphasises the overriding importance of the use of a general abstract in language learning. Examples of this made-up verb include: I had ronked, would ronk, will be ronked, was ronked, will ronk, would be ronking, will have ronked, should have ronked, were ronked, ronks and will have ronked. Proper English verbs only make their first appearance in the exercises after the appearance of the verb 'to ronk'.

A key weakness in the application of the above parallelogram is that there are many verb forms

missing from the main parallelogram model. Among the verb forms missing from the parallelogram and therefore not dealt with by the Milashevich Method are the following:

- | | | |
|--------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (i) | does write | Active Present
Emphatic |
| (ii) | did write | Active Past
Emphatic |
| (iii) | used to write | Active Past
Continuous |
| (iv) | used to be written | Passive Past
Continuous |
| (v) | would write | Active Past
Continuous |
| (vi) | would be written | Passive Past
Continuous |
| (vii) | is going to write | Active Immediate
Future |
| (viii) | is going to be
written | Passive Immediate
Future |
| (ix) | Oil will not mix with
water | Present Factual |
| (x) | Be that as it may | Subjunctive Present |

Reshetnikova and Korneva (1996) is the second book on the Milashevich by the same authors and shows signs of progress both in terms of methodological development and the selection of TL texts, although it follows basically the same order as its predecessor. In addition to all the above sections, Table 1 below on modal verbs is included.

Table 1: Modal Verbs

Present	Past	Future
Can	Could	Will be able to
May	Might	Will be allowed to
Must	*	*
Be to	*	*
Have to	*	*

Table 1 is incomplete in four ways. There is no mention of (1) 'is able to' or 'was able to', nor even 'shall be able to' and (2) 'is allowed to' or 'was allowed to', nor 'shall be allowed to'. (3) The location of 'might' as the past form of 'may' is incorrect. (4) Nothing has been offered in the past or future of 'must' or 'have to'. Such elementary flaws can and should have been avoided. Their presence merely serves to highlight the gaps in the version of the Milashevich Method, which they have created.

Findings

As this is the most current version of the UdSU variant of the Milashevich Method in print, it is necessary at this point to present the methodological issues, which require comment from a Western perspective. In particular a summative critical analysis of the Milashevich Method is required. The four points listed below fulfil the requirements of this task:

There are four key methodological criticisms, which can be made of the Milashevich Method's approach to teaching the English verb system:

(1) Teachers in the Faculty of Law at UdsU have claimed that students who know little English can, after grasping the Milashevich principles, understand the structure of any English sentence and therefore with the aid of a dictionary work out its meaning. There has been no empirical evidence or qualitative research carried out internally in the FLSP to support these claims. Given the past and current situation at UdsU it has proved impossible for Western researchers to put the methodology to the test. The unsubstantiated claims made by the authors of the UdsU variant are typically made in Russian education but rejected in the West. However, what is evident from classroom observation, is that the process of labelling arrows requires a substantial amount of mental agility. Students seem to be able to grasp the functions of the arrows as an aid to translating into Russian, but the process is painfully slow. On average, over half of the students observed in those classes using Reshetnikova and Korneva (1994) struggled with the labelling and subsequent interlanguage which the teachers insisted on using. Therefore the claims made are not substantiated by observations made in the language classroom.

(2) The Milashevich Method only appeals to the cognitive domain of the learner and not the affective or the psychomotor domains. Even within the cognitive domain, due to the non-interactive nature of the method, there is no learner use of the TL but rather of a restrictive interlanguage. In motivational terms, this can have a negative effect on the uncommitted learner. In theory, the students are in class to learn ESP but in reality they are focusing on minutiae of grammar, which may mean that they fail to understand the reasons for learning.

(3) Milashevich's use of the parallelogram for understanding verb forms in English is similar to the English speaker's approach to learning the Russian system of perfective and imperfective verbs. British grammar books of Russian, for instance, use the descriptions habitual actions (Milashevich's diagonal line) and repeated actions (Milashevich's horizontal line). The key difference occurs in the detail given to a perfective verb in Russian, where the following three criteria must be fulfilled in order to render a verb perfective:

- (i) there must be only one action.
- (ii) the action must take place at one time.
- (ii) the action must be completed.

If these three criteria are not fulfilled, the verb is imperfective. However this degree of specification is not provided in Milashevich's parallelogram. In fact, the supposition in the Milashevich Method is that just as all mathematical formulae are truly applicable in all cases, so too do these linguistic formulae offer an infallible coding system, which when applied, should always give the correct answer. Milashevich (1991) and Reshetnikova and Korneva (1994 and 1996) offer an incomplete approach to the analysis of verbs by using the parallelogram. As the Milashevich parallelogram is not comprehensive, it not only fails to meet the Russian criteria of depth and perfectionism but also it misinforms the learner of the correct usage of TL verb forms. Most noticeably, the verb form 'would write' is not just Active Future in the Past but also carries the second connotation of a repeated action of habit in the past, which equates to the Active Past Continuous. The parallelogram fails to deal with this issue.

(4) Until the later part of all three books, the learner is not confronted with a text but rather with isolated words where the task is to identify the function of word collocations and seemingly nothing more. There is a sudden transition from a kind of 'gibberish' interlanguage to a rather technical one without any clear provision of a staggered transition from the former to the latter. Therefore there are insufficient learning supports to assist in the transition phase.

Conclusion

Evidently, the Milashevich Method is in a state of constant evolution and refinement at UdsU. Consequently, the findings noted in this paper are an interim comment on the development of the

method thus far at UdSU. There is clear evidence of current and past active research in EFL teaching in the Faculty of Law at UdSU. This process is an organic one. However, at present, the Milashevich Method appears to work with most verbs and most tenses but importantly, not with all verbs and not with all tenses. In this sense the methodology is fundamentally flawed. If the remaining outstanding verb forms cannot be made to fit into the parallelogram, the Milashevich Method may have to be confined to the role of a method whose purpose is for tense recognition only (for translation purposes from English to Russian). When one takes into account the level of FLSP students in the UdSU context, it may provide a good general rule for beginners and lower-intermediate learners who require primarily good reading skills but only if it is presented as such. However, the Milashevich Method is definitely not appropriate for intermediate learners and upwards as it teaches an incomplete set of verb forms, which is insufficient for learners at a higher level.

Finally, the Milashevich Method gives the impression that language is an artificial construct, which can be controlled and manipulated to a predictable degree. However, any written or spoken sentence is an organic structure, which is developed in the writer's or speaker's head before or during the act of writing or speaking. This contrast with the Milashevich Method lends support to the view that the latter does not view language as a means to an end (i.e. communication) but as an end in itself, where it conversely manipulates the meaning of the sentence.

About the Author

Damian Byrne, PhD currently teaches French and German at secondary level in Northern Ireland and has taught English as a Foreign Language at tertiary level in Russia and the Czech Republic. He spent three months working for the European Union's TEMPUS project at Udmurt State University in Russia.

Email: dami an.byrne@btinternet.com

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