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LESSON 100

GRAMMAR
VOCABULARY
PRACTICE
ANSWER KEY

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GRAMMAR

THE PERFECTIVE AND IMPERFECTIVE VERBS IN SERBIAN

Today we are going to learn about *the perfective and imperfective verbs* in Serbian.

Serbian language distinguishes between *verbs that express an action in a single instance with a clear sense of closure* (these are the *perfective verbs*) and verbs that *express an action as a general fact, a frequently repeated instance or an action in progress* (these are the *imperfective verbs*).

Let's look at the verb pair *kupiti* and *kupovati*. They both mean *to buy*, and in the Serbian dictionary you will find them listed under *to buy*, but they don't carry the exact same meaning, and every Serbian native speaker knows the difference. In this lesson you will learn the difference, too.

In the sentence *Ja sam kupio kuću* (*I bought a house*), *the perfective verb kupiti* (*to buy*), refers to *a single action* of purchase which is *already complete*.

And in the sentence: *Ja sam kupovao kuću jako dugo* (*I was buying a house for a very long time*), *the imperfective verb kupovati* (*to buy*) refers to the idea of a repeated action of purchasing. In this sentence, *this action happens to be in the past but we do not see the completion of the action* because, in English, the translation of the sentence would imply *I was trying to buy a house for a while*, meaning that the action of trying to buy the house *was not complete*. The verb *kupovati* is used here *to express a general idea of a purchasing action that was occurring for some time in the past*.

The both verb aspects (*perfective and imperfective*) are used freely in *the past and future tense*. In the *present tense* is where you need to keep an eye on the perfective verbs. *Perfective verbs* by their nature refer to *an action that has been completed and finished*, so therefore this action by default *isn't possible to continue in the present tense*. But Serbian language has a way of making this possible.

Let's look at some examples of our verb pair *kupiti/kupovati* used in the **present tense**.

In the sentence *Ja kupujem hranu sada. (I am buying food now)*. The **imperfective verb kupovati** is used to express **an action that is in progress and the focus is on its' duration**. For example, *At this very moment I am buying food and I don't know how long this will take*. What the speaker is putting the focus on is the **progress** of the action and not the completion. This is why **the imperfective verb kupovati** is used here, because the action is incomplete.

But in the sentence *Hoćeš li da kupim hranu I tebi? (Do you want me to buy food for you too?)* The **perfective verb kupiti (to buy)** is used to put the focus on a **single action and its' completion**. We are talking about buying the food one time and the action is over. This is what the speaker's focus is on, so we can use the **perfective verb kupiti** here, since the intent is to make a purchase and be done with it. Note that we have used the perfective verb *kupiti* in this sentence after another verb *hteti (to want)*, and the **conjunction DA**. This is a safe way to use perfective verbs in the present tense. For example, *Ja hoću da kupim hranu (I want to buy food)*. Or *Ja idem da kupim hranu sada (I am going to buy food now)*. Again, we can use the perfective verb *kupiti* here because our focus is on **completing the action** of buying and not on the uncertainty of the duration of time that will be required.

The verb *jesti (to eat)* is **an imperfective verb** and its' **perfective** pair is the verb *pojesti (which also means to eat)*. The prefix **po-** is added to the verb *jesti*, and this is how the **perfective verb pojesti** is created.

Example: Sinoć smo jeli tortu - We were eating cake last night

In this sentence **the imperfective verb jesti** is used to refer to a **repeated action of eating**. The focus is on the **duration** of the action. The speaker is referring to the general idea of eating.

Example: Sinoć smo pojeli tortu We ate the cake last night

The **perfective verb** *pojesti* is used to refer to **a single finished action**. The speakers' focus is on the completion of the act of eating. Also, the verb *pojesti* tells us, the cake is all eaten up, it's gone, there is no more cake, meaning *We have finished eating the cake*.

A little tip for learning **perfective** verbs in Serbian: it helps to use the word **finish** with a perfective verb. For example:

*to finish eating – **pojesti** vs. to eat – **jesti**;*

*to finish writing – **napisati** vs. to write – **pisati**,*

*finish doing – **uraditi** vs. doing – **raditi**,*

*finish learning/studying – **naučiti** vs. to study or learn – **učiti**.*

*Example: On je **pisao** ovu knjigu godinama - He was writing this book for years*

The focus is on the **process and duration of the action**. And the clue here is *for years*, which is *godinama* in Serbian. The context of the sentence will sometimes help guide you in the right direction. We need to use **imperfective** verb aspect *pisati*. *On je **pisao** ovu knjigu godinama*.

Verbs			
Perfective (completion)		Imperfective (duration)	
Serbian	English	Serbian	English
kupiti	to buy	kupovati	to buy
pojesti	to eat	jesti	to eat
uraditi	to do	raditi	to do
napisati	to write	pisati	to write

naučiti	to learn	učiti	to learn
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Example: Ona je uradila domaći - She has finished doing her homework

We need to use **perfective** verb aspect *uraditi* because this action is finished. *Ona je uradila domaći*. The focus is on the completion of the action here. And the clue is the phrase *finish doing*, meaning she completed her homework.

Example: On uči srpski već 5 godina - He has been studying Serbian for 5 years now.

The **imperfective** verb *učiti* (*to study or to learn*) refers to an action that started a long time ago in the past (for example 5 years ago) and still *continues* today. We see *progression and duration of the action* of learning here, so we know that we need to use an **imperfective** verb in this sentence, since there is no indication of completion of the action of studying. It's continuous. Notice that the Serbian sentence *On uči srpski već 5 godina*, and the verb *učiti* is in the **present tense**, even though we are expressing an action that has started in the past and continues into the present. This construction in Serbian, an imperfective verb with the adverb *već* (which means *already* or *for*, referring to a period of time) corresponds to the English **progressive present perfect**. For example, *He has been studying Serbian for 5 years now*.

Perfective verbs indicate the **completion** of an action.

Imperfective verbs refer to a **continuous** action (duration).

VOCABULARY

THE VERBS

<i>Serbian</i>	<i>English</i>	Verbal Aspect
kupiti	<i>to buy</i>	<i>perfective</i>
kupovati	<i>to buy</i>	<i>imperfective</i>
pojesti	<i>to eat</i>	<i>perfective</i>
jesti	<i>to eat</i>	<i>imperfective</i>
napisati	<i>to write</i>	<i>perfective</i>
pisati	<i>to write</i>	<i>imperfective</i>
uraditi	<i>to do</i>	<i>perfective</i>
raditi	<i>to do, to work</i>	<i>imperfective</i>
naučiti	<i>to learn</i>	<i>perfective</i>
učiti	<i>to learn, to study</i>	<i>imperfective</i>
pročitati	<i>to read</i>	<i>perfective</i>
čitati	<i>to read</i>	<i>imperfective</i>
popiti	<i>to drink</i>	<i>perfective</i>
piti	<i>to drink</i>	<i>imperfective</i>
doći	<i>to come</i>	<i>perfective</i>
dolaziti	<i>to come</i>	<i>imperfective</i>
pozvati	<i>to call</i>	<i>perfective</i>
zvati	<i>to call</i>	<i>imperfective</i>
stići	<i>to arrive</i>	<i>perfective</i>
stizati	<i>to arrive</i>	<i>imperfective</i>
zakašniti	<i>to be late</i>	<i>perfective</i>
kašniti	<i>to be late</i>	<i>imperfective</i>
ustati	<i>to get up, to wake up</i>	<i>perfective</i>
ustajati	<i>to get up, to wake up</i>	<i>imperfective</i>

VOCABULARY

<i>Serbian</i>	<i>English</i>
kuća	<i>house</i>
dom	<i>home</i>
hrana	<i>food</i>
sada	<i>now</i>
sinoć	<i>last night</i>
torta	<i>cake</i>
knjiga	<i>book</i>
godina	<i>year</i>
godinama	<i>for years</i>
domaći	<i>homework</i>
srpski	<i>Serbian</i>
već	<i>already</i>
jako dugo	<i>(for) a very long time</i>

PRACTICE

SENTENCES

#	<i>Serbian</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Vocabulary</i>
1.	Ja sam kupio kuću	I bought a house	kuća – house
2.	Ja sam kupovao kuću jako dugo	I was buying a house for a very long time	jako dugo – a very long time
3.	Ja kupujem hranu sada	I am buying food now	hrana – food
4.	Hoćeš li da kupim hranu i tebi?	Do you want me to buy food for you, too?	
5.	Ja hoću da kupim hranu	I want to buy food	
6.	Ja idem da kupim hranu sada	I am going to buy food now	
7.	Sinoć smo jeli tortu	We were eating cake last night	torta – cake

#	Serbian	English	Vocabulary
7.	Sinoć smo pojeli tortu	We ate the cake last night	sinoć – last night
8.	On je pisao ovu knjigu godinama	He was writing this book for years	godinama – for years
9.	Ona je uradila domaći	She has finished doing her homework	domaći – homework
10.	On uči srpski već 5 godina	He has been studying Serbian for 5 years now	već – for, already

EXERCISE #1

Write the correct imperfective verbs and translate them into English:

#	Perfective verbs	Imperfective verbs	English
1.	pozvati	zvati	to call (example)
2.	uraditi		
3.	kupiti		
4.	pojesti		
5.	popiti		

EXERCISE #2

Write the correct aspect of the following verbs, put them in the appropriate columns, and translate them into English:

PISATI, NAUČITI, PROČITATI, STIZATI, ZAKASNITI, JESTI, ZVATI, DOLAZITI, STIĆI, USTATI

#	Serbian Perfective	English	Serbian Imperfective	English
1.	naučiti (example)	to learn or to study		
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

EXERCISE #3

Use the correct aspect of the following verbs and fill in the blanks:

#	Serbian	Verbs	English
1.	Ja <u>čitam</u> već dva dana (<i>example</i>)	čitam/pročitam	I have been reading for two days now
2.	Ona je _____ knjigu	kupovala/kupila	She bought a book
3.	Mi _____ imejl sada	pišemo/napišemo	We are writing an email now
4.	Ja _____ čaj svako jutro	pijem/popijem	I drink tea every morning
5.	On _____ u restoranu	radi/uradi	He works at a restaurant
6.	Jutros sam _____ u 8 sati	ustao/ustajao	I woke up at 8 o'clock this morning
7.	Ja _____ u 8 sati svako jutro	ustao/ustajem	I get up at 8 o'clock every morning

ANSWER KEY

EXERCISE #1

(The answer is underlined and in bold)

Write the correct imperfective verbs and translate them into English:

#	perfective verbs	imperfective verbs	English
1.	pozvati	zvati	to call (<i>example</i>)
2.	uraditi	<u>raditi</u>	<u>to do; to work</u>
3.	kupiti	<u>kupovati</u>	<u>to buy</u>
4.	pojesti	<u>jesti</u>	<u>to eat</u>
5.	popiti	<u>piti</u>	<u>to drink</u>

EXERCISE #2

(The answer is underlined and in bold)

Write the correct aspect of the following verbs, put them in the appropriate columns, and translate them into English:

PISATI, NAUČITI, PROČITATI, STIZATI, ZAKASNITI, JESTI, ZVATI, DOLAZITI, STIĆI, USTATI

#	Serbian Perfective	English	Serbian Imperfective	English
1.	naučiti (<i>example</i>)	to learn or to study	pisati	to write
2.	pročitati	to read	stizati	to arrive
3.	zakasniti	to be late	jesti	to eat
4.	stići	to arrive	zvati	to call
5.	ustati	to get up	dolaziti	to come

EXERCISE #3

(The answer is underlined and in bold)

Use the correct aspect of the following verbs and fill in the blanks:

#	Serbian	Verbs	English
1.	Ja čitam već dva dana (<i>example</i>)	čitam /pročitam	I have been reading for two days now
2.	Ona je kupila knjigu	kupovala/ kupila	She bought a book
3.	Mi pišemo imejl sada	pišemo /napišemo	We are writing an email now
4.	Ja pijem čaj svako jutro	pijem /popijem	I drink tea every morning
5.	On radi u restoranu	radi /uradi	He works at a restaurant
6.	Jutros sam ustao u 8 sati	ustao /ustajao	I got up at 8 o'clock this morning.
7.	Ja ustajem u 8 sati svako jutro	ustao/ ustajem	I get up at 8 o'clock every morning

Great job!