Coercion of Bounded Aspect as Syntactic Feature Agreement
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Variation Data—Coercion of Bounded Aspect: Across languages, the perfect tends to require bounded viewpoint and/or situation aspects (see Smith (1991) for the two-tiered system of viewpoint and situation aspect). First, not all languages allow a Universal (U-)Perfect reading; languages like Niuean (Polynesian) only have an Existential (E-)perfect ((1); Matthewson 2013). Under Iatridou et al’s (2001) analysis, this means the perfect can combine with perfective but not imperfective viewpoint aspect in these languages. Second, in some languages the perfect coerces a telic reading of predicates that are not otherwise telic. For example, in Niuean (Matthewson 2013) and Saisiyat (Formosan; personal fieldwork), states can get an inchoative (change-of-state) reading in the perfect; in fact, this is the only reading that individual-level states can get (2-3). In Saisiyat, many predicates only get a completive reading in the perfect, not in the perfective, suggesting that their telicity is optional in general but enforced with the perfect (4-5). Since perfective viewpoint and telic situation are both bounded aspects, the generalization is that the perfect can force bounded readings of the aspectual material below it in some languages but not others.

Variation Proposal—Syntactic Feature Agreement: I propose that the requirement of bounded readings by the perfect in certain languages is due not to different semantics of the perfect in these languages, but to different parameters for agreement with the syntactic feature [+bounded] ([+bd]) across aspectual heads. While the semantics of the perfect can always conceivably combine with unbounded viewpoint and situation aspect heads, and do so freely in some languages, the [+bd] feature on the perfect head can require a lower head to bear an agreeing [+bd] feature.

I build upon Iatridou et al.’s (2001) analysis of the perfect involving the Perfect Time Span (PTS), a time interval with the reference time as its right boundary. Viewpoint aspect relates the PTS with the situation time: the situation time may occur completely within the PTS (perfective), yielding an E-perfect, or it may extended beyond the boundaries of the PTS (imperfective), yielding a U-perfect. I add two claims to Iatridou et al.’s account: first, the perfect adds to the syntax both the PTS, as a time argument (ZeitP; Zagona 1990), and a perfect head (Perf0) that puts the PTS in a right-edge relation with the reference time point tREF, which is in turn related to the utterance time tUTT by the Tense head. Second, telicity can be implemented by a syntactic head (e.g., Kratzer 2003), rather than exclusively by a quantized object (Krifka 1989); I identify this head with the vP-internal Asp head in Travis (2010), which I label Sit0. The perfect construction has the syntactic structure in (6).

I propose that the Perf0 head can force the lower aspectual heads View0 (viewpoint) and Sit0 to agree in the [+bd] feature, as in (6). The feature [+bd] is syntactic, not semantic, but it derives its value from the semantic content of a syntactic head. Heads can be [+bd] in (at least) two ways: by adding or aligning a boundary point to the edge of a time interval, or by placing a lower time interval fully within the boundaries of a higher time interval. Perfective but not imperfective viewpoint aspect is [+bd] by the second criterion, while telic situation aspect and the perfect head are [+bd] by the first criterion. I claim that in some languages, Perf0, which is [+bd], can compel the lower heads View0 and Sit0 to have [+bd] values, e.g., to be perfective and telic, respectively. If a language requires View0 to agree in [bd] value with Perf0, then only an E-perfect, not a U-perfect, is possible (1). If a language requires Sit0 to agree in [bd] value with Perf0, then only telic predicates can combine with the perfect; this coerces states and activities into inchoatives (2-3) and gives completive readings (4) that are otherwise absent (5). Languages can vary both as to whether the different heads must agree in [bd] value or can disagree, and as to which heads, View0 or Sit0 or both, must agree with Perf0; I posit that these variations are syntactically parameterized.
Examples:

1. Niuean: No U-Perfect:
   *Kua gagao agaia a Tom tali mai ia Tesema
   PERF sick still ABS Tom since DIR1 ABS December
   ‘Tom has been sick since December.’ (Matthewson 2013)

2. Niuean Inchoative Perfect:
   Kua lalahi e tau tama haau
   PERF big.PL ABS PL child your
   ‘Your kids have grown/they’re bigger’ (NOT ‘Your children are big’) (Matthewson 2013)

3. Saisiyat Inchoative Perfect:
   Ataw ‘ayaeh ila
   Ataw sick PERF
   ‘Ataw has fallen sick.’ (personal fieldwork)

4. Saisiyat Perfect: Completive Reading
   Ataw r<om>ae’oe: ila ka pinobaeh. #Okay il-‘amet-i:
   Ataw <AF>drink PERF KA wine not drink-finish-DEP
   ‘Ataw has drunk up the wine. #It is not finished.’ (personal fieldwork)

5. Saisiyat Perfective: No Completive Reading
   Ataw ina r<om>ae’oe: ka pinobaeh. Okay il-‘amet-i:
   Ataw PFV <AF>drink KA wine not drink-finish-DEP
   ‘Ataw drank the wine. It is not finished.’ (personal fieldwork)

6. [TP tUTT Tense [PerfP tREF Perf0[+bd] [viewP PTS View0[+bd] tSIT [vP ... Sit0[+bd] ... ]]]

PERF = Perfect; PFV = Perfective; ABS = Absolutive; AF = Actor Focus; DEP = dependent mood

References:


