The use of perfect marking to express indirect evidential meanings (i.e. knowledge based on inference rather than direct perception) is well established in the typological literature (Comrie, 1976; Bybee et al., 1994; Aikhenvald, 2004), and illustrated here in (2). This talk compares this evidential use of the perfect to counterfactual (CF) uses of past morphosyntax, a link first suggested in Izvorski (1997). We further develop the connection, investigating more generally the interaction between “fake” (repurposed) and “real” temporal morphology.

In the domain of CFs, many authors have proposed that the use of past tense in CFs arises from a semantic commonality: either CF semantics involve literal past tense (Arregui, 2009; Ippolito, 2006, a.o.), or “past” itself is a more general operator with potential application in both temporal and modal domains (Iatridou, 2000; Karawani, 2014; Ritter and Wilschko, 2010, a.o.). This connection suggests a broader research program, whereby the repurposing of temporal semantics can be used to probe the representations of both temporal and modal semantics.

In this context, we propose that perfections and evidentials (like past and CFs) express a single semantic relation of overlap between two arguments, between intervals in the case of the perfect and sets of worlds in the case of evidentials. This similarity, we propose, is what allows perfect morphosyntax to generalize to the expression of evidentiality.

The perfect in all its interpretations has been analyzed in terms of (total or partial) overlap between intervals (e.g. Iatridou et al., 2003). This is especially true of resultative perfections, which express a relation of overlap between a result state and at topic time. This is relevant, because (Dahl, 1985) observes that evidentials typically arise from perfections with resultative construals. Assuming a modal analysis of evidentiality (Matthewson et al., 2007; Fintel and Gillies, 2007, a.o.), we find a parallel relation of overlap: epistemic modals require that the worlds of which a proposition holds (e.g. in (2-b), the worlds in which I have read Anna Karenina) overlap with the set of epistemically accessible worlds (and possibly are a subset of those worlds).

To the extent that viewing the perfect in terms of overlap between intervals clarifies its relationship to evidentials, it receives indirect support—especially valuable given the fact that the semantic analysis of the perfect remains widely disputed.

Our proposal builds on the prior work of Izvorski (1997) and Speas (2010), both of whom argue for semantic connections between perfections and evidentials. In contrast to both, however, we attribute evidential interpretations to the perfect alone, with morphosyntactic present playing no semantic role. This is based on North Azeri (Turkic), where the perfect morpheme used in indirect evidentials is not only independent from tense, but combines with the past morpheme -d even in evidential contexts, as in (1). We further distinguish the perfect and evidential uses of “perfect” morphosyntax on structural grounds: evidence for this again comes from perfect-marked evidentials in North Azeri, which allow “stacking” of both temporal and modal uses of perfect morphosyntax in a single clause, as in (2-a), where -yib and -mis are allomorphs of the perfect suffix. It is this structural difference that gives rise to the semantic differences in the type of arguments related in perfections vs. evidentials. This provides another parallel to CFs, where some (but not all) languages similarly allow stacking of real and fake tense. Perfect evidentials thus introduce a new domain of data into our understanding of “stacking” puzzles, illuminating the ways in which temporal and modal meanings may combine in a single clause.

This general approach strengthens our understanding of the link between temporal and modal meanings, attested across CF and evidential domains: the fact that both CFs and evidentials exhibit “repurposed” morphosyntax suggests that operators may more generally relate either times or worlds. More broadly, this relates to the research program initiated in Ritter
and Wiltschko (2014), proposing that the formal relations encoded in syntax are independent of their substantive content.

(1) məən dúnu anv çaox yat-ər gal-ı-mış-d-ım
   1SG yesterday much sleep-IMPV stay-IMPV-PRF/EVI-PAST-AGR.1SG
   ‘(Apparently) I had been falling asleep a lot yesterday.’ [North Azeri]

(2) a. onlar halvnı ye-yib-mış-lor
   3.PL halva.ACC eat-PERF-PERF-PL
   ‘They have (evidently) eaten the halva.’ [North Azeri]

b. Az sâm bił čel Anna Karenina
   I am been read Anna Karenina
   ‘I apparently have read Anna Karenina.’ [Bulgarian: Izvorski, 1997]

References

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