

# Reflections on imperfectivity

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*Imperfective Modalities in the Caucasus and Beyond*

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- The following slides accompanied my talk, which concluded the “Imperfective modalities” workshop, and basically relate to two issues:
  - Problems with the notion of imperfectivity, in particular the issue of the relationship between the more specialized concepts which are subsumed under it
  - The role of directionals and other spatial morphemes in tense-aspect systems in the Caucasian area and beyond

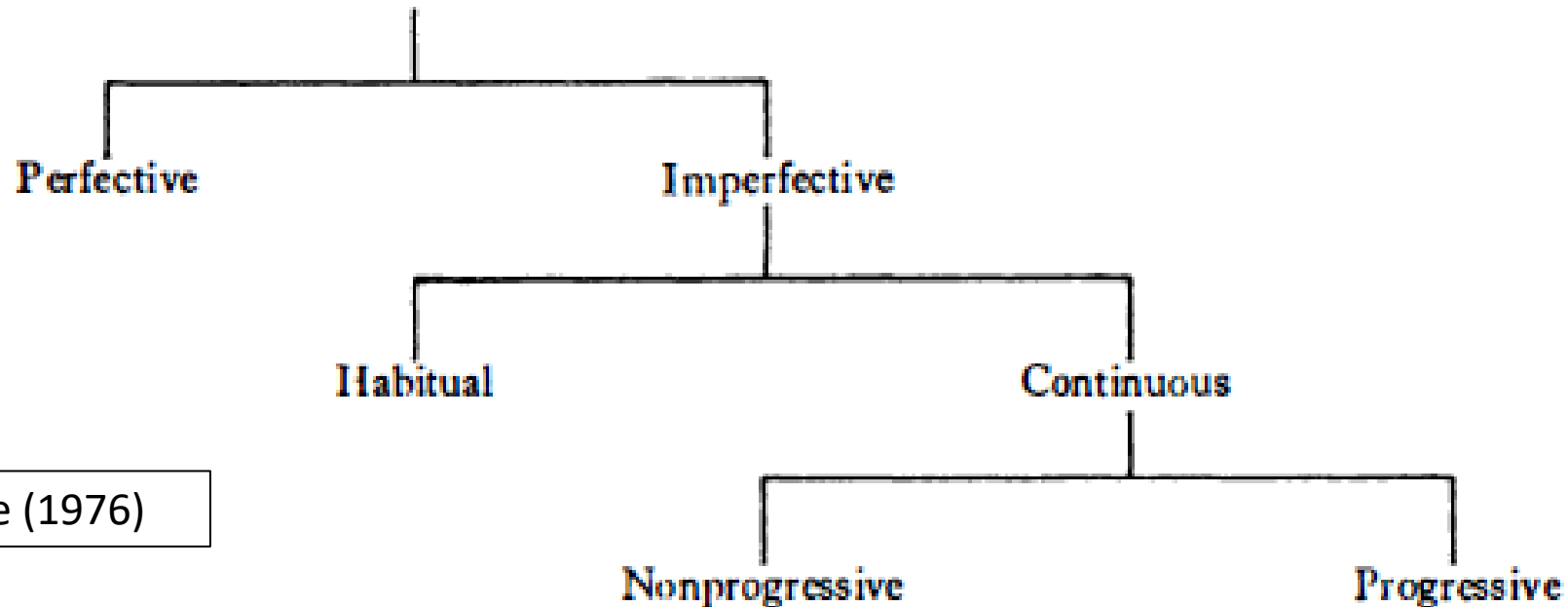
# Ambiguity in the term

- “Imperfective” can be an adjective and a noun
- In both cases, it can denote
  - a **semantic** or **conceptual** property or entity
  - a **grammatical** property or entity
- Which is primary?

- Two logical possibilities:
  - We start out with a concept and start looking for linguistic items that “express”, “denote” or “mark” that concept
  - We find a set of linguistic items and start looking for their “meaning”, “semantics”, or “function”.
- In the latter case, it could well happen that even if the set of items are expressed in a similar way, it will not be possible to find something that unites them from the semantic point of view

# Comrie's classification of aspectual oppositions

*Table 1. Classification of aspectual oppositions*



From Comrie (1976)

# Comrie (1976, 26) on the notion of imperfectivity

In traditional grammars of many languages with a category covering the whole of imperfectivity, the impression is given that the general area of imperfectivity must be subdivided into two quite distinct concepts of habituality and continuousness.<sup>1</sup> Thus one is told that the imperfective form expresses either a habitual situation or a situation viewed in its duration, and the term 'imperfective' is glossed as 'continuous-habitual' (or 'durative-habitual'). This approach, unlike that adopted in the present book, fails to recognise that these various subdivisions do in fact join together to form a single unified concept, as is suggested by the large number of languages that have a single category to express imperfectivity as a whole, irrespective of such subdivisions as habituality and continuousness.

# “A single unified concept”

- Thus, Comrie wants to say that the various meanings expressed by imperfective forms are not there just by accident, they do make up “a single unified concept” of imperfectivity.
- He formulates that concept as follows:
  - “explicit reference to the internal temporal structure of a situation, viewing a situation from within”

# Habituality

- However, concerning the second purported subdivision of imperfectivity that he mentions, habituality, Comrie is not at all explicit on what it means for it to have “explicit reference to the internal temporal structure of a situation”



# The defining feature of habituality

- "The feature that is common to all habituals ... is that they describe a situation which is characteristic of an extended period of time, so extended in fact that the situation referred to is viewed not as an incidental property of the moment but, precisely as one that can be protracted in time." (1976, 27-28)

# Habituality – the odd one out

- There turn out to be a number of ways in which habituality does not fit too well with other types of imperfectivity.

# More often separate than together?

- Number of languages in the 76-language sample of Bybee et al. (1994) where grams of different types within the imperfective domain are found
  - imperfectives 10
  - past imperfectives 11
  - progressives 39
  - habituais 21
  - past habituais 10
  - iteratives 31

# Present – past asymmetry

- While on-going (progressive) and habitual readings not so seldom go together when speaking of the past, they are seldom united together against anything else in the present
- Rather, if there is an aspectual opposition in the present, a progressive tends to be opposed against expressions with habitual and various other meanings
- In fact, this is fairly often described as a perfective:imperfective distinction

# Ossetic: perfective present is habitual

## Past tense

čyzg      dyğdt-a              qug  
girl      milk-pst.3sg              cow

'The girl was milking the cow {when I came}'  
(Devočka doila korovu)

'The girl milked the cow {while it was alive}'  
(Devočka doila korovu)

čyzg      ra-dyğdt-a              qug  
girl      pv-milk-pst.3sg              cow

'The girl milked the cow {and took the milk to  
the kitchen}'

(Devočka podoila korovu)

## Present tense

čyzg      duc-y      qug  
girl      milk-prs.3sg              cow

'The girl is milking the cow {right now}' (Devočka  
doit korovu)

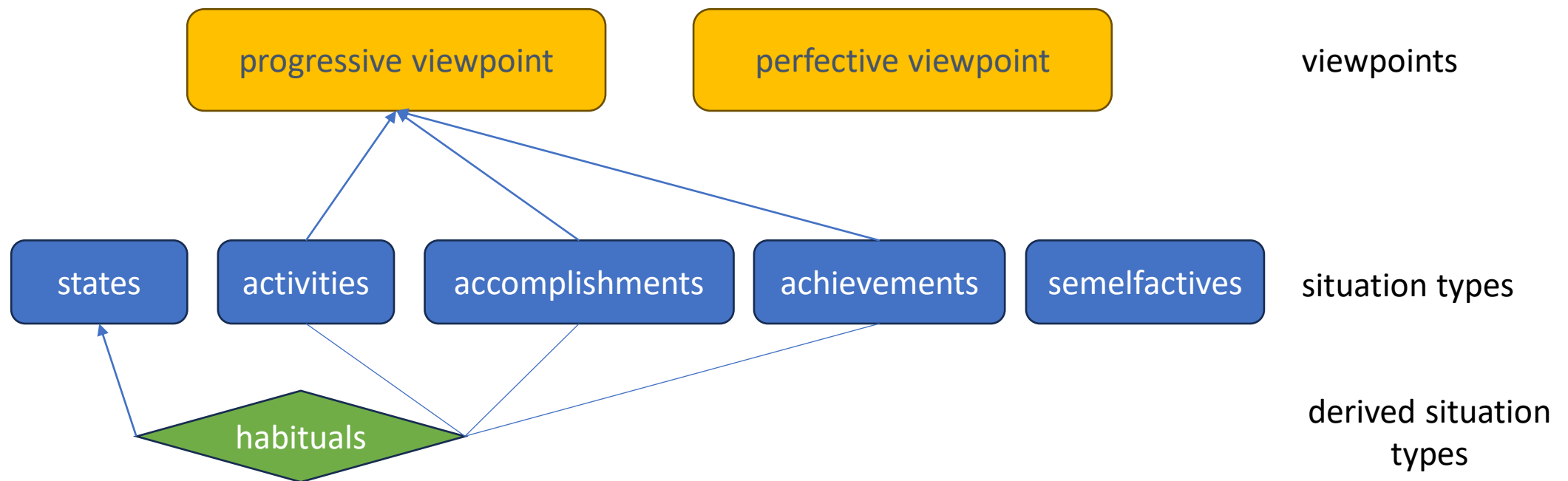
'The girl milks the cow {in the  
evenings}' (Devočka doit korovu)

čyzg      ra-duc-y              qug  
girl      pv-milk-prs.3sg              cow

'The girl milks the cow {in the  
evenings}' (Devočka doit korovu)

# Progressive and habitual: different ontological domains?

According to Carlota Smith (cf. also Lars Johanson),  
progressives denote viewpoints but habituals change  
the situation type to derived states



# The integration of directionals into TAME systems

- The following slides relate to my on-going investigation of the grammaticalization of directionals, more specifically their integration into TAME (tense-aspect-mood-evidentiality+ systems)
- This kind of process usually starts in languages with a closed, relatively small set of directionals, i.e. words/morphemes with meanings such as ‘up’, ‘down’, ‘in’, ‘out’
- In the “canonical” cases, the result of the process is a set of perfective markers the choice between the members of which is lexically determined, i.e. different verbs choose different markers, often without apparent semantic motivation



# A “canonical” set of directionals -- Tangut

		perfective	optative
vertical	‘upward’	<i>ʔja<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>ʔji<sup>2</sup></i>
	‘downward’	<i>nja<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>nji<sup>2</sup></i>
inclusional	‘here, inside’	<i>kji<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>kji<sup>1</sup></i>
	‘there, outside’	<i>wji<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>wji<sup>2</sup></i>
deictic	‘towards the speaker’	<i>dji<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>dji<sup>2</sup></i>
	‘from the speaker’	<i>dja<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>dji<sup>2</sup></i>

## *Directional markers*

### *Perfective markers*

- (1) 𐞗 *ja<sup>2</sup>*
- (2) 𐞘 *nja<sup>1</sup>*
- (3) 𐞙 *kji<sup>1</sup>*
- (4) 𐞚 *wji<sup>2</sup>*
- (5) 𐞛 *dji<sup>2</sup>*
- (6) 𐞜 *dja<sup>2</sup>*
- (7) 𐞝 *rji<sup>2</sup>*

### *Optative markers*

- 𐞖 *ji<sup>1</sup>* upward
- 𐞗 *nji<sup>2</sup>* downward
- 𐞘 *kji<sup>1</sup>* here, inside
- 𐞙 *wji<sup>2</sup>* there, outside
- 𐞚 *dji<sup>2</sup>* towards the speaker
- 𐞛 *dji<sup>2</sup>* away from the speaker
- 𐞜 *rji<sup>2</sup>* (direction not found)



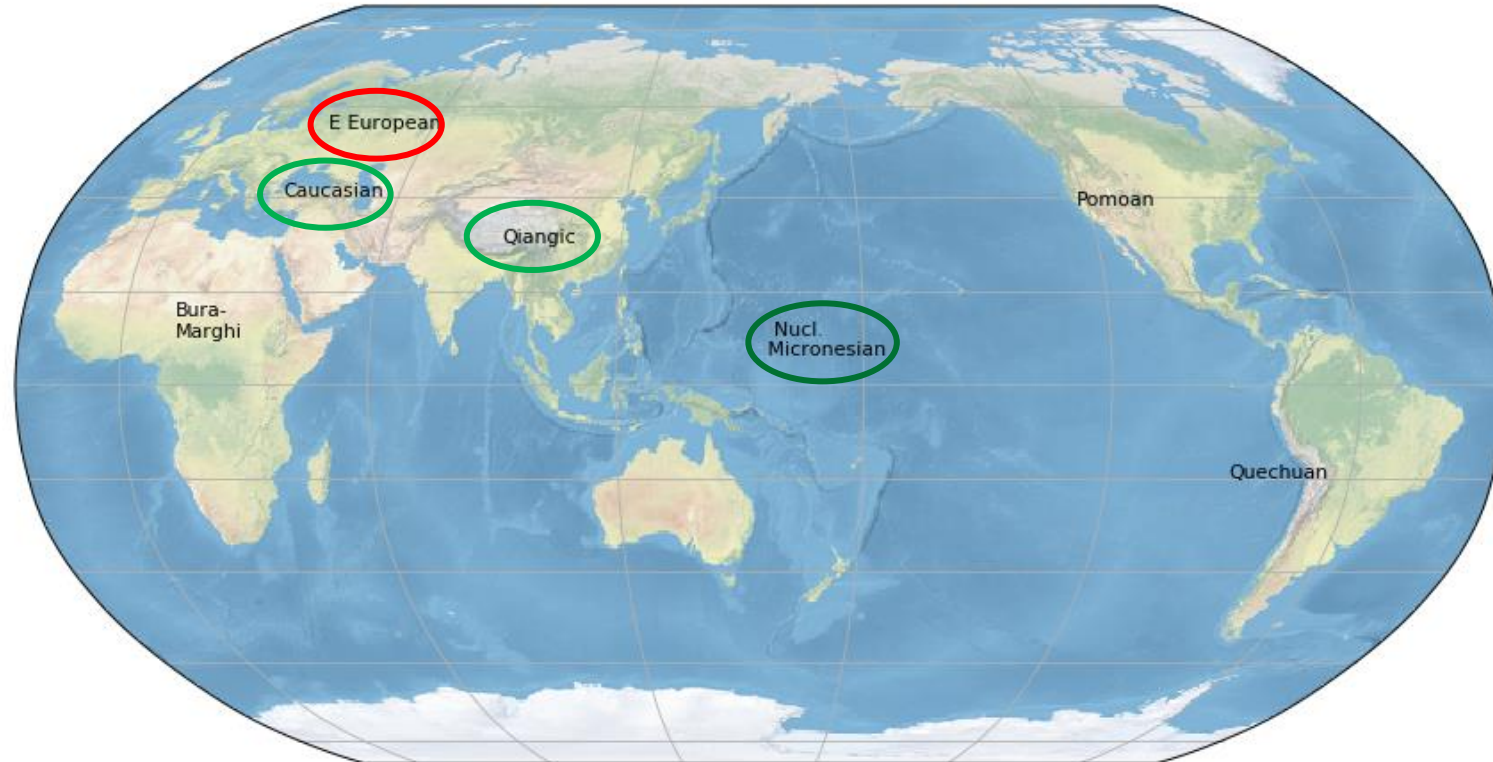


## The integration of directionals into TAME systems

- The integration of directionals into TAME systems has taken place in a number of clusters of languages in different parts of the world
- My study focuses on the three “core clusters” marked by red ovals in the map on the next slide



# The core clusters





## Different kinds of interaction in Qiangic systems

- In Gyalrongic (Sino-Tibetan/Qiangic), non-perfective markers tend to occupy the same slot as directionals, and are sometimes homonymous with them (but are not lexically determined)

*ŋā tascōs te ko-lât-ŋ*  
1SG letter one IMPFV-put<sub>2</sub>-1SG  
[Father to Child] 'I WRITE a letter.' (Please do not disturb me)

*ko* - also directional  
'east/upstream'

*ŋā tascōs te na-lât-ŋ*  
1SG letter one PFV-put<sub>2</sub>-1SG  
'I wrote a letter.'

*na* – lexically  
determined directional  
'down'

Source of examples:  
Lin (2003)



## Related features in languages mentioned in other talks

- Tabasaran (Authier):
  - Aspectual markers are derived from directional preverbs
  - Choice of marker is not lexically determined
  - Instead, there is a unique marker for each gram (perfect, perfective)
  - Complementary distribution of aspectual markers and directionals, still sharing the same slot (parallels: Gilaki, Pashto, Laz)
- Khinalug (Rind-Pawłowski):
  - the role in the TAME system of copulas that mark location relative to the deictic centre



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