

Temporal mobility and imperfective forms

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Imperfective Modalities in the Caucasus and Beyond

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What is temporal mobility?

- Discussed originally in [Плунгян 2006], [Plungian 2018], drawing upon data from Modern Eastern Armenian
- A later attempt to use TM as a general parameter for a typology of verbal systems with *temporally mobile* and *temporally stable* forms in various proportions (mainly, on Dardic and Iranian data)
- In fact, TM is primarily about compatibility of tense markers with other “inherent” verbal categories (as aspect and mood)
 - part of a well-known and amply discussed problem, usually, referred to as “interaction of (verbal) grammatical categories” (cf. Kuryłowicz 1964, Bybee & Dahl 1989, Храковский 1990, 1996, Thieroff 1994, Aikhenvald & Dixon 1998/2011, Bhat 1999, Frajzyngier & Shay 2003, Malchukov 2011, 2019, to name but a few)

What is temporal mobility?

- A category G is **T-mobile** if it allows present and past opposition: both G:PRS and G:PST do exist (each of the two forms can also be called temporally mobile)
- Thus, in English, Continuous, Perfect or Prospective are T-mobile, because they all display both past and present forms, as *is / was moving, has / had moved* or *is / was going to move*
 - NB! this is rather a formal property: only the presence of tense **markers** is checked, while the semantic interpretation of what is formally “present” or “past” can differ considerably
 - In this vein, English “Simple” series is also T-mobile, though the opposition between *moves / moved* is less straightforward, and so is the “Consecutive” series (*will / would move*)

What is temporal mobility?

- Accordingly, a category (or a form) is **T-stable**, if it does not allow tense opposition, i.e.,
 - (i) either can be marked only for past or for present
 - (ii) or cannot be marked for tense at all
- In English, an example of T-stability can be found in Past Habitual construction *used to* + Inf.: here, only past marking is observed, a corresponding present form is impossible
- Thus, we are left with a (seemingly) simple, but interesting and non-trivial typology of verbal categories & verbal systems which can be assessed with respect to their degree of “tensedness” / compatibility with the tense markers

Temporal mobility and aspect: preliminary observations

- In many “aspect-prominent” (Bhat 1999) languages, aspectual categories prove to be temporally mobile: both past and present interpretation is available for the majority of aspectual grams
- However, some important asymmetries can be observed
- Promising linguistic areas:
 - East and South Caucasus, including (but not limited to) Lezgic, (Kipchak & Oghuz) Turkic, (West) Iranian and Armenian
 - Hindukush-Karakorum, including Dardic, Burushaski, Indo-Aryan and (East) Iranian

A general example: Pashto (based on Грюнберг 1987)

- The main peculiarity of Pashto is that aspect and modality are independent and compatible; both series can be T-mobile
- Aspectual opposition of (broad) imperfectivity / perfectivity is obtained by stem alternations; perfective stem is normally derived from imperfective one; the perfect series is built upon a participle with a tensed auxiliary
- Modal forms are obtained by a special “irreal operator” – a phrasal enclitic *bə*
- Tense is manifested through different sets of SPMs or periphrastically; sometimes, a special past stem is needed
- Thus, each verbal form (but one!) can be (i) perfective, imperfective or resultative, (ii) real or irreal, and (iii) present or past

Pashto verbal system: a scheme

- Pf. present: **subjunctive**
 - Pf. past: **aurist**
 - Ipf. present: **present**
 - Ipf. past: **imperfect**
 - Res. present: **perfect**
 - Res. past: **past perfect**
- Pf. irreal present: **perfective future**
 - Pf. irreal past: **past habitual**
 - Ipf. irreal present: **imperfective future**
 - Ipf. irreal past: **Hab-Irr**
 - Res. irreal present: **eventual**
 - Res. irreal past: **counterfactual**

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Pashto verbal system

- The only T-stable category in Pashto is the counterfactual (Grjunberg's “условно-желательное наклонение”) used in both parts of the conditional construction
- It consists of an invariable form of the so-called “potential participle”, with an optional clitic *bə*
- Morphologically, the counterfactual is clearly marginal, and it does not display neither tense, nor mood mobility
- Beyond that, perfective, resultative and imperfective series (with their irreal correlates) are all T-mobile

Imperfectivity and TM

- Imperfective forms include
 - (i) “narrow imperfectives”, i.e., progressive or progressive / durative;
 - (ii) “broad imperfectives”: the same + habitual extensions (as in Romance, Greek, Slavic or Armenian)
 - NB: dedicated habituais (as in English, Irish or Turkish) can also be part of imperfective domain (being semantically stative), but can differ from typical imperfectives in formal and distributional properties
- Defined in this way, imperfective appears to be **one of the most frequent** T-mobile category cross-linguistically (alongside with perfect/resultative)

Imperfectivity and TM

- The reason is obvious: semantically, present tends to the imperfective construal (all presents are imperfective by default; otherwise, the “present perfective paradox” applies, see Malchukov 2009, De Wit 2017 et al.)
- (Imperfective) present is easily transferrable to the past: imperfective past is just a “retrospectivized” present, with no further modifications
- Often, this is mirrored by the formal structure: the imperfective past is obtained from the present by adding past tense markers (or substituting present tense markers with the past ones), as in English *is / was moving*, Armenian *šaržvum ē / ēr*, or Lezgian *fizva / fizvaj*

Imperfectivity and TM

- Thus, semantically (and very often formally) imperfect can be seen as a “retrospectivized” present (where topic time is shifted backward and becomes prior to the TU)
- In our terms, temporal mobility of imperfective forms is semantically natural: imperfective as aspectual category equally well applies both to present and past (if it has temporal reference at all)
- This property did not pass unnoticed in the previous literature: cf. Kuryłowicz 1964’s idea about diachronic “temporalization” of purely aspectual systems (like those found in Semitic) through splitting imperfective forms into present and past ones; in Indo-European, it was obtained with the help of augment and secondary personal endings
- In a more general way, it is discussed in Bybee & Dahl 1989, where the imperfective split along tenses is considered as one of the main step towards a full-fledged TA-system

Imperfectivity and TM

- However, the relations between (imperfective) present and imperfective past are not always symmetric – or, in our terms, not all imperfective forms are necessary T-mobile
- Important exceptions can be provided by “young progressives”: since progressive tends to describe an **ongoing** and **observable** situation, early stages of grammaticalization of progressive are often reluctant to the past uses (which seem to appear on later stages)
- Thus, in some varieties of Kurmanji a weakly grammaticalized form of present progressive (with the phrasal or postverbal enclitic *-we* or *-e*) cannot have a past counterpart [Бакаев 1973]

Progressive and Habitual

- When Hab is not part of imperfective cluster, we have typically a T-mobile Prog and a T-stable Hab (which can be either present or non-tensed)
- Cf. the case of **Gawri** (Kohistanic < East Dardic; Baart 1999)
- T-mobile series:
 - **Present progressive / Imperfect** (can have both Prog and Hab meanings): V:DUR-T
 - **Present / Past perfect**: V:PF-T
- T-stable series:
 - **Habitual**: V:DUR, without tense marking
 - **Aorist**: V:PF, without tense marking
 - **Irrealis** [eventual, counterfactual]: V:IRR, without tense (and aspect) marking

To conclude

- Temporal mobility [of a category G] presupposes a free compatibility of G with both past and present
- **Imperfective / progressive / durative** seem all to be practically ideal candidates for T-mobile categories (because present is by default imperfective)
- However, exceptions do occur
- Early-stage progressives can be T-stable (with only a present reference)
- Dedicated habituais tend to be T-stable (with a present reference or non-tensed at all)

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Thank you for your attention