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Unanchoring in Grammar: Tense, Aspect, Mood

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Introduction

- Consider the following Bulgarian example from Kapkan (forthcoming), "BE perfects and grammaticalization in Bulgarian and Lithuanian: A study based on data from Facebook comments":

Ne	*glasuvax*	*za*	*teb*	*i*	*ne*	*săm*	*sbărkala !!!!*
NEG	vote.AOR.1SG	for	you	and	NEG	be.1SG	be.mistaken.L-FORM.F

'I didn't vote for you and I haven't made a mistake !!!!'

- The author comments on this as follows:

[…] the comment-writer refers twice to the same event of her not voting for the addressee politician by using two different forms in the same sentence: the aorist serves as a statement of fact, while the perfect must be interpreted as a C[urrent]R[elevance] perfect, as the writer presents herself as not-having-been-mistaken on that particular occasion. […] Translated to Lithuanian, this sentence would yield an experiential – the writer would be perceived as saying that she has *never* been mistaken on any occasion, even without any lexical enforcing.

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Unanchoring

- This Bulgarian use of the perfect (not available in the given context in Lithuanian) is an instance of a form normally used for situationally and temporally unanchored events (as in 'I have never voted for you') being used for an event that is actually situationally and temporally anchored ('I didn't vote for you on that occasion').

- This use of the perfect reflects a certain evaluation of a fact rather than the fact itself: the writer evaluates the event from the viewpoint of current relevance, as defining her stance.

- In my talk, I will discuss various 'unanchoring' devices in different domains of grammar – tense, aspect and mood.

- By unanchoring I mean the use of grammatical forms primarily used to denote situationally and temporally unanchored events in contexts where reference is made to anchored events.

Anchored and unanchored predications

- The notion of anchoring has been invoked in the description of clausal complementation, where it has been cited as the defining distinction between 'propositional' and 'state-of-affairs' complements:

    I think you will like my novel.   (propositional – truth-valued)

    I want you to like my novel.   (state-of-affairs – non-truth-valued)

- "propositions evoke concepts construed as having a (situational) referent, whereas S[tates]o[f]A[ffairs] evoke concepts not construed as having a referent" (Kehayov & Boye 2016).

- As can be seen from this examples, infinitives are a classical means of encoding non-anchored embedded predications; but it is also common for subjunctives to occur here:

Lith.	*Noriu,*	*kad*	*tau*	*patiktų*	*mano*	*romanas.*
	want.PRS.1SG	that	you.DAT	please.SBJV.3	my	novel.NOM

    'I want you to like my novel.'

Unanchoring

- Lack of situational anchoring is thus an inherent property of certain clauses in virtue of
  - the semantic features of a clause as reflected in grammatical features of verbal forms e.g., the predication in Lith.

      niekada *nesu* *balsavusi*
      never be.PRS.1SG vote.PPST.ACT.FEM.SG
      'I have never voted'
    is situationally unanchored and this is encoded in the use of the experiential perfect.

  - the semantics of certain higher (complement-taking) predicates regardless of whether this unanchoring is marked in the verbal forms encoding the embedded predications) or not.

      noriu, *kad* *ji* *eitų* *kartų* (Lithuanian; subjunctive marking)
      want.PRS.1SG that she go.SBJV.3 together
      ich *will,* *dass* *sie* *mitkommt* (German; no special marking)
      I want.PRS.1SG that she along.come.PRS.3SG

Unanchoring

- In my talk I will discuss instances where forms normally used for encoding unanchored predications are used for anchored predications which we would expect to be encoded by tense, aspect and mood forms normally associated with anchored predications. So we have different types of situations, of which the last will constitute my specific topic:

  - unanchored predication, marked in the verbal form,

  - unanchored predication not marked in the verbal form,

  - anchored predication marked (for a specific purpose) by a verbal form typically used for unanchored predications.

Aspect

Polish (Internet)

[*I dobrze, że są mandaty, że trzeba się trzymać przepisów,*]

no   ale   że-by-m   ja   dostawał   mandat   za   jazdę
PTC but   that=IRR=1SG   1SG.NOM get[IPFV].LFORM.M.SG   ticket.ACC.SG   for   driving.ACC.SG

31 mph,   gdzie   jest   ograniczenie   do   30 mph,   to   już   przesada.
31 mph,   where   be.PRS.3SG   limit.NOM.SG   to   *30 mph*   that PTC exaggeration.NOM.SG

'[It's a good thing there are fines and one has to stick to the rules,] but me getting fined for driving 31 mph where the speed limit is 30 mph, that's an exaggeration.'

The imperfective form *dostawał* is strange: one could associate it with habituality or iterativity, but this reading is excluded by the singular object *mandat*. This singular shows the unfortunate driver is probably referring to a one-time, situationally anchored event. Viewpoint aspect ('be in the course of getting fined'?) does not warrant the use of an imperfective forms either.

Aspect

- But in Slavic aspectual oppositions do not exclusively serve to encode viewpoint aspect; imperfectives may be use to encode event types as opposed to event tokens (Dahl and Hedin 2000). The event-type use is shown in

Kupował   *pan*   *kiedyś*   *jakieś*   *auto*   (Polish)

buy[IPFV].PST.M.SG[3]   sir.NOM.SG   ever   any.ACC.SG.N CAR.ACC.SG

zza   *oceanu?*

from.over   ocean.GEN.SG

'Did you ever buy a car from over the ocean?

- The meaning is 'was there one or more than one instance of your buying a car from over the ocean. The event-type use is distinct from iterative or habitual use (which would entail the use of a plural object *auta*).

Aspect

- The use of the event-type imperfective is natural, e.g., in questions. But it may extend beyond its proper domain of use, that is, in referring to one-time anchored events. This type-for-token encoding can also be observed on the level of lexical expression. Cf.

  When I met him afterwards, says I, Mr Arnold, why did you do such a thing as to take my horse away?

  (*Cobett's Complete Collection of State Trials* […], Vol. xvi, London 1812, 706, found on Google Books.)

- Type-for-token encoding can be used for evaluative purposes: an event is evaluated on its intrinsic properties, abstracting away from its situational anchoring.

- The intrinsic properties may be
  - intrinsic desirability ('it's a disgrace that…')
  - Intrinsic likelihood ('it is strange that')

Aspect

- Inherent desirability:

To   wstyd,   że-bym   ja   odkrywał   mszę   (Polish, Internet)
it   shame.NOM.SG   that-IRR   I.NOM   discover.LFORM.SG.M   mass.ACC.SG

napisaną   przez   Żeleńskiego   ponad   80   lat   temu.
written.ACC.SG   by   PN.ACC.SG   more.than   80   year.GEN.PL   ago
'It's a disgrace I should have discovered a mass composed by Żeleński 80 years ago.'

- Inherent likelihood:

Dziwne,   że=by=ś   tak   mnie   określał …   (Polish, Int)
strange   that=SBJV=2SG   so   me.ACC   characterize.LFORM
'It's strange you should characterize me like that…'

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Mood

- Let's look once more at the Polish example cited above:

[*I dobrze, że są mandaty, że trzeba się trzymać przepisów,*]

no	*ale*	*że=by=m*	*ja*	*dostawał*	*mandat*	*za*
PTC	but	that=IRR=1SG	1SG.NOM	get[IPFV].LFORM.M.SG	ticket.ACC.SG	for

jazdę	*31 mph,*	*gdzie*	*jest*	*ograniczenie*	*do*	*30 mph,*
driving.ACC.SG	31 mph,	where	be.PRS.3SG	limit.NOM.SG	to	*30 mph*

to	*już*	*przesada*.
that	PTC	exaggeration.NOM.SG

'[It's a good thing there are fines and one has to stick to the rules,] but me getting fined for driving 31 mph where the speed limit is 30 mph, that's an exaggeration.'

- The verb form is not only imperfective, it is also subjunctive (irrealis) (the irrealis marker -*by*- being, in this case, enclitically attached to the complementizer).

Mood

- The distinction between realis (indicative) and irrealis (conditional, subjunctive, optative) moods is usually formulated in terms of reality status, cf. Mithun's (2001) definition [...]:

"The realis portrays situations as actualised, as having occurred or actually occurring, knowable through direct perception. The irrealis portrays situations as purely within the realm of thought, knowable only through imagination."

- This notion has bee criticized by Joan Bybee and others. Bybee argues the function of the irrealis is just the sum of the outcomes of a number of grammaticalization processes. The assumed irrealis meaning is a generalization ex post that is basically epiphenomenal (a Jakobsonian *Gesamtbedeutung*)

- Crucially, the definition does not enable us to predict in which contexts one or the other mood form should be used. Individual languages show different sets of irrealis functions, which is natural as irrealis uses in different contexts are the outcome of convergent but partly separate grammaticalization processes.

- In many cases reality status provides a plausible motivation for irrealis use even though it does not allow us to predict us. E.g. German uses the subjunctive in indirect speech:

Er	*sagt,*	*seine*	*Frau*	*sei*	*abgereist.*
he	says	she	wide	be.SBJV.3SG	departed

  'He says his wife has left.'

  This can be explained (indirect speech → reliance on somebody's utterance → no guarantee of accuracy → diminished reality status) but not predicted: most languages don't have it.

- But there are irrealis (subjunctive) uses defying an explanation in terms of reality status. The main piece of evidence is the Romance uses of subjunctive forms with factive predicates like *it is a pity*:

Italian (from the Internet)

È	*peccato*	*che*	*io*	*di*	*cantonese*	*e*	*mandarino*
be.PRS.3SG	pity	that	1SG	of	Cantonese	and	Mandarin

non	*ne*	*sappia*	*una*	*parola.*
NEG	thereof	know.SUBJ.PRS.1SG	INDEF	word

'It's a pity I don't speak a word of Cantonese or Mandarin.'

The unmarked subjunctive hypothesis

- The facts of Romance have inspired alternative explanations.

- In the functionalist tradition cf. Lunn (1989): the indicative reflects assertability, the subjunctive expresses what is non-assertable. A piece of propositional content may be non-assertable
  - because it is contrary to fact,
  - because it is presupposed.

  Hence the subjunctive in
  - *Non credo che sia già partita* 'I don't think she has already left.'   (contrary to fact)
  - *È peccato che sia già partita*. 'It's a pity she has already left.'   (presupposed)

- Similar accounts have been proposed in the tradition of formal semantics.

The unmarked subjunctive hypothesis

- An implication of the view that indicative expresses assertion whereas the subjunctive expresses whatever is opposed to it is that the indicative becomes the marked member of the mood opposition. This stands in contradition to the traditional view of the indicative as the unmarked (or zero) mood.

- The traditional view is more consistent with common patterns of formal markedness, cf.
    - Lithuanian *suk-a-me* 'we turn' (indicative) : *suk-**tu**-me* 'we (would, should) turn' (subjunctive)
    - Polish *kręc-i-my* 'we turn' (indicative) : *kręcili-**by**-śmy* 'we (would, should) turn' (subjunctive)

- Of course different patterns of formal markedness are attested:
    - Latin *am-a-t* (indicative) *: am-e-t* (subjunctive)
    - Modern Eastern Armenian *kardum em* 'I read, am reading' (present indicative) : *kardam* (subjunctive) – the original present survives as a subjunctive while in its original function it is ousted by a progressive form.

No factive / thematic subjunctive

- The factive/thematic subjunctive (as the cases discussed by Lunn are called) rests on a misunderstanding. In certain factive contexts Romance uses the subjunctive in spite of factivity, not because of it.

- Romance and Slavic differ in their weighting of two divergent constraints. These are:

  - **Constraint I**: in order to refer to a situationally anchored event viewed as real, use the indicative.

  - **Constraint II**: in order to abstract away from the reality status and situational anchoring of an event and to evaluate it on its intrinsic likelihood or desirability, use the subjunctive.

- While in Slavic constraint II occasionally outweighs constraint I, in Romance this happens in a regular way.

Competing constraints

- The Polish examples discussed above show unanchoring use of the irrealis in spite of referring to anchored situations.

- However, when in the same sentence there is an expression strongly associated with factivity (like 'it's a pity'), this blocks the use of the unanchoring subjunctive. The subjunctive then gets a non-factive reading in Polish:

[*I ja chętnie zostałabym w Polsce, aby popilnować demokracji, ale już kupiłam bilety lotnicze*.]

Szkoda,   że-by   się   zmarnowały.
pity   that-IRR   RFL   waste.LFORM.NVIR.PL

'[I would also like to stay in Poland in order to keep an eye on the state of democracy, but I've already bought flight tickets and] it would be a pity if they were wasted.'

- This complement is, of course, also unanchored, but it cannot refer to an anchored event.

- How did the unanchoring subjunctive arise? As shown above, subjunctives are a means of encoding non-anchored 'states-of-affairs', e.g., with desiderative or deontic predicates:

Il	*faut*	*que*	*je*	*vous*	*dise*
it	is.necessary	that	I	you	tell.SBJV.1SG

  'I need to tell you', 'I should tell you'

- How a deontic marker can evolve into a marker of unanchoring is shown by English *should*. The so-called 'emotive' *should* (Jespersen's term) is quite similar in function to the Romance 'factive subjunc*tive*':

'Well,' said the constable, 'it's very strange that you should be wandering about at this hour.' (Robert Tressell, *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists*)

The diachrony of the unanchoring subjunctive

- The modal verb *should* evolves into a marker of certain types of clausal complements, originally in situations of 'harmonic marking':

  You should drink less coffee.

  It is necessary that you should drink less coffee.

- The 'emotive' function of *should* arises when it is carried over to non-harmonic contexts:

  It is strange that you should drink so much coffee.

- Basically the same explanation applies to the Romance subjunctive, though in this case the source is not as clearly visible as with English *should*.

- The fundamental correspondence between Romance and Slavic unanchoring uses of the unanchoring subjunctive (with differences in weighting of constraints) is important evidence for the dual nature of the irrealis: counterfactive and unanchoring.

Conclusions

- Temporal and situational unanchoring associated with evaluation of event tokens on their intrinsic qualities (intrinsic desirability or likelihood) is a grammatical marking phenomenon running through several domains of grammatical semantics.

- The ways in which evaluation of events on their intrinsic properties affects grammatical marking depends on the domain involved:

  – Tense: treatments as time-specific events as non-time-specific events;

  – Aspect: treatment of event tokens as event types;

  – Mood: treatment of propositional complements as state-of-affairs complements.

- The motivation is, however, the same everywhere.