The Representation of Aspect

3: Telicity and Boundedness

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1 The syntactic representation of telicity

- Is telicity represented in the syntax? Can atelicity be represented?

“[... ] while there may be well-formedness conditions associated with telicity (quantity DP, etc.), there should not be any which are associated with atelicity. Rather, we expect to find distinct well-formedness conditions associated with various structures which, by virtue of lacking the structure in (1), are atelic, but which are otherwise distinct.”  
(Borer, 2005, chapter 5)

- Clarke (2013) argues that telicity is not represented in the Japanese verb system (framed as Borer’s Asp[^1] being entirely absent).

The presence/absence of quantized DPs (i.e. with and without classifiers) does not impact compatibility with time-frame adverbials:

(1) a. Bill-wa ip-pun-de pan/ringo-o tame-ta.
   *Bill ate bread/apple in one minute.  (Yoshida 2008, p. 422)
   
   b. Bill-wa ip-pun-de ringo hito-itsu-o tame-ta.
   *Bill ate an apple in one minute.  (Clarke 2013, p. 135)

- We’ve seen some evidence that for other contrasts (viewpoint aspect, stativity) different languages might make different choices about which pole to specify.

- Is there similar evidence concerning telicity?

2 Interesting Test Case: Finnish

- Finnish a very well known alternation between accusative and partitive direct objects.

- Much the same pattern of accusative/partitive alternations occurs in Estonian, though it is less often discussed directly (Craioveanu, 2014).

(2) Finnish (Craioveanu, 2014, p. 13)
   a. Luin kirjaa tunnissa.
      read 1sg book ACC hour INESS
      “I read the book in an hour.”
   b. Luin kirjaa tunnissa.
      read 1sg book PART hour INESS
      “I read the book for an hour.”

(3) a. Luin kirja tunnin (ajan).
   read 1sg book ACC hour GEN time GEN
   “I read the book for an hour.”
   b. Luin kirja tunnin (ajan).
   read 1sg book ACC hour GEN time GEN
   “I read the book in an hour.”

(4) Finnish (Kiparsky, 1998, (1))
   a. Ammu-i-n karhu-a / kah-ta karhu-a / karhu-j-a
      shoot-PAST-1SG bear-PART / two-PART bear-PART / bear-PL-PART
      “I shot at the (a) bear / at (the) two bears / at (the) bears.”
   b. Ammu-i-n karhu-n / kales karhu-a / karhu-t
      shoot-PAST-1SG bear-ACC / two-ACC bear-PART / bear-PL-ACC
      “I shot the (a) bear / two bears / the bears”

- Standard generalization: accusative objects occur when the predicate is telic, partitive objects otherwise (Kratzer, 2004, Borer, 2005, among many others).

- Several other factors also condition the distribution of accusative/partitive, however. The examples I discuss are drawn from Craioveanu (2014), but the Finnish facts (including viewpoint and negation) are discussed elsewhere, most accessibly in print by Kiparsky (1998).

Viewpoint Aspect

- Partitive case also appears when the clause is imperfective, as diagnosed by a simultaneous interpretation when modified by a when-clause:

(5) Finnish (Craioveanu, 2014)
   a. Kun Pekka saapui, Outi söi omenaa.
      When Pekka arrive-PAST.3SG Outi eat-PAST.3SG apple-PART
      “When Pekka arrived, Outi was eating an apple.”
   b. Kun Pekka saapui, Outi söi omenan.
      When Pekka arrive-PAST.3SG Outi eat-PAST.3SG apple-ACC
      “When Pekka arrived, Outi ate an apple.”

(6) Estonian (Craioveanu, 2014)
   a. Kui Priit saabub, Õie söi õuna.¹
      When Priit arrived.3SG Õie eat.3SG apple-PART
      “When Priit arrived, Õie was eating an apple.”
   b. Kui Priit saabub, Õie söi õuna.
      When Priit arrived.3SG Õie eat.3SG apple-ACC
      “When Priit arrived, Õie was eating an apple.”

¹The mid-line dot is used by Craioveanu to indicate contrastive length that doesn’t appear in Estonian orthography.
Interestingly: this applies even in the present tense. Perfective viewpoint is incompatible with present tense \(\rightarrow\) accusative case results in a future interpretation (as verbal perfective marking does in Russian).

(7) Finnish
   a. Syö'n omenaa.
      eat.1SG apple.PART
      “I am eating a / the apple.” OR “I will eat some of a / the apple.”
      b. Syö'n omenan.
         eat.1SG apple.ACC
         “I will eat a/the apple.”

(8) Estonian
   a. Söön ˜o u·na.
      sleep.1SG week.ACC
      “I slept for a week.”
   b. Söön ˜o unna.
      sleep.1SG week.ACC
      “I will sleep for a week.”
   c. Hirveä ˜o n kyllä amputut.
      moose.PART.3SG indeed shoot.PTCP
      “It wasn’t the moose that I shot.” [spoken Finnish]
   d. Hirveä ei ammuttu.
      moose.PART.3SG shoot.PASS.PTCP
      “The moose wasn’t shot.”

Aside on Statives
   • According to Craioveanu, in Estonian stative verbs never occur with accusative case (they may take partitive or one of the other locative cases).
   • In Finnish, by contrast, a subset of stative verbs can occur with accusative objects (except in contexts outlined above):
     
     | English | Finnish |
     |--------|--------|
     | hear   | kuulla |
     | see    | nähdä |
     | own    | omstaan |
     | contain, include | sisältää |
     | hold   | pitää |
     | cross, span | ylttää |
     | weigh  | painaa |
     | know (fact) | tietää |
     | know (person) | tuntaa |
     | remember | muistaa |
     | believe | haluta, tahloa |

   • Even with these verbs, personal pronouns apparently require/strongly prefer partitive case, or involve slightly shifted interpretations.

(11) Finnish (Craioveanu, 2014, p. 27)
   a. Ymmärrän kysymyksen.
      understand.1SG question.ACC
      “I understand the question.”
   b. Ymmärrän sinua.
      understand.1SG 2SG.PART
      “I understand you. [i.e., as a person]”

Towards an Analysis
   • The distribution of object case is as follows:
     
     **Accusative**: occurs when the predicate is telic, the viewpoint aspect is perfective, and the clause is affirmative.
     **Partitive**: occurs elsewhere.
   • If partitive is default, should we specify the contexts in which accusative occurs?
   • Or should we say that accusative is default, but very easily disrupted by partitive assignment?
Option 1:
- Partitive case is default.
- Accusative case (marking telicity + perfectivity + positive) is licensed additively: requires a relationship with multiple higher projections. If any one relationship is disrupted, default partitive surfaces.

(12) TP

Option 2:
- Accusative case is default.
- But if any higher projection has a particular feature (call it “unbounded”), partitive case is assigned and overwrites accusative.

(Tree on next page)
- Puzzle: can we really say that these different meanings are the same feature?
- Krifka (1992): Unified semantics of partitive case in Finnish. Imperfective/progressive and quantitatively indeterminate nominals are both unbounded, one of events and one of individuals.

In the morphosyntax, we don’t want to think of this as the semantics of partitive case itself. Instead: partitive case reflects a single feature distributed across.
- Extending the same claim to negation? More difficult.

Questions for discussion:
- Does this predict that every language should treat negation/imperfective/perfective together?
- Is there a potential problem in having bounded and unbounded heads in the same tree? Cf. Clarke on [+AT] and [-AT].
References


