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Progressives, pluractionals and the domains of aspect

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Abstract

The Romance languages are rich in monoclausal verbal constructions traditionally classified as « aspectual periphrases ». Those consisting of the locative copula or a motion verb with the gerund of the « main predicator » are frequently treated as expressions of progressive aspect. The aim of this paper is twofold. It will be shown that periphrases with motion verbs belong to the realm of « lower » aspect, whereas those containing STARE are genuine expressions of the progressive as a « higher », time-relational aspect. On the other hand, I will claim that periphrases with motion verbs can be analysed as pluractional operators on VPs along the lines recently proposed by Van Geenhoven (2003, 2004) for V operators. Their scope interactions with participants differ, however, crucially from those of adverbs with similar meanings.

1 Background assumptions

1.1 Eventuality modification and time-relational aspect

The conceptual necessity of distinguishing among temporal location, aspect and the *Aktionsart* of eventuality descriptions expressed by a verb and its arguments is nowadays generally accepted. It goes hand in hand with the idea of a compositional order, in which aspect first operates on eventuality descriptions with a given temporal profile (corresponding to some version of the Vendlerian classes), and the resulting configurations are then directly or indirectly temporally located with respect to Utterance Time (Utt-T). This compositional order can be syntactically implemented in different fashions, which nonetheless share the general configuration given in (1):

(1) [Temporal Location [Aspect [Eventuality Description]]]

The intermediate position occupied by Aspect in this general configuration correlates with a dual possibility for conceptualizing the category. Approaches emphasizing the impact of aspect on eventuality descriptions have given rise to a family of theories according to which aspect modifies or otherwise determines the temporal structure of an eventuality. Approaches emphasizing what aspect and temporal location have in common give rise to theories in which aspect is modeled as a secondary, non-deictic temporal relation.

The first conception has been dominant in the formal semantics tradition (Kamp & Reyle 1993, Krifka 1998, de Swart 1998 among many others), as well as in some syntactic approaches (see Cinque 1998 and the wealth of recent literature on event structure, for instance Tenny & Pustejovsky 2000). The second conception does not actually deny the existence of aspect *qua* eventuality modification, but pleads for a distinction between this range of phenomena and aspect in a narrow sense. In accordance with Carlota Smith's original proposal in her „two-component“ approach (Smith 1991), Klein (1995) views aspect in a narrow sense as a relation between an eventuality (or rather, its temporal trace, EvT) and a distinguished “interval of visibility” (AssT for „assertion time“). It is this distinguished interval of visibility (and not EvT itself) that is then subject to temporal location. Whereas time-relational aspect (Asp_{TR}) is necessarily present in a clause, in as far as it mediates the relation between EvT and UttT, and thus ensures the possibility of temporal location, aspect *qua* eventuality modification (Asp_{EM}) is optional

and recursive. The distinction between both types of aspect leads to a refined version of the above configuration as given in (2):

- (2) [Temporal Location [Asp_{TR} [[[Asp_{EM} *) Eventuality Description]]]]

Note that the configuration in (2) is meant to illustrate the semantic order of composition. It has very little to say as to the internal syntactic structure of eventuality descriptions derived by means of eventuality modification and, in particular, it should not be read as asserting that eventuality modification uniformly corresponds to the presence of a recursive syntactic head Asp_{EM}. The reason is that eventuality modification can be expressed by a wide array of apparently different constructions, such as verb-particle constructions (3a), “aspectualizers” (3b), light-verb constructions (3c), differences in argument structure or in argument realization (3d, 3e), etc.

- (3) a. Peter ate up the apples.
 b. Peter went on eating the apples.
 c. Peter gave a shout.
 S d. Pedro se comió las manzanas. ‘Pedro ate up the apples’
 Pedro REFL eatSP the apples
 G e. Peter hat an einem Roman geschrieben. ‘Peter has/had been writing a novel’
 Peter has at a novel written.

All the above undoubtedly contribute to specifying the temporal structure of a basic situation, rendering it unambiguously telic (3a, 3d), atelic (3e), semelfactive (3c) or intransformativ (3b). Nonetheless, it is far from clear that they warrant a uniform syntactic analysis.

By contrast, I will assume that Asp_{TR} corresponds to a syntactic position in the clause. In this I follow a recent proposal by Demirdache & Uribe-Etxeberria (2002) for the syntactic representation of temporal information. In their model, Temporal Location and Aspect are functional heads expressing the topological relations BEFORE (<), AFTER (>) and IN (C) between two “temporal arguments”. The lower functional head, ASP, establishes a relation between AssT and EvT; the higher functional head, T, establishes a relation between UtT and AssT.

The relation established by ASP does not directly affect the temporal structure of the eventuality description. In ordering the “interval of visibility”, AssT, with regard to EvT, ASP determines which temporal sectors of the eventuality are available for deictic temporal location and for temporal ordering with regard to other times (such as those provided by temporal adverbials and by other eventualities in the discourse). ASP is thus the syntactic expression of Smith’s “viewpoint” or Klein’s “time-relational” aspect.

1.2 Two types of aspectual periphrases

By comparison with the heterogeneity of the constructions in (3), Romance aspectual periphrases look at first sight quite homogeneous. They uniformly differ from typical biclausal constructions containing an embedded or adjunct non-finite clause on several accounts : (a) the whole construction inherits the argument structure and selectional restrictions of the non-finite verb ; (b) the anaphorization patterns for the non-finite verb and its arguments crucially differ from those of propositional (CP) anaphora ; (c) they typically show restructuring effects. All this suggests that periphrases involve a monoclausal structure built around a single full lexical predicate, the main predicator (cf. Cinque 1998).

However, a closer look at the combinatorial behavior of aspectual periphrases reveals the existence of two distinct classes. A small group of periphrases necessarily precede the others, if they can combine at all among themselves they are rigidly ordered, they can combine with almost all types of eventualities, but they cannot appear in all tenses. By contrast, the bulk of periphrases can freely combine among themselves, allowing for alternative orderings, they are not subject to any sort of tense restrictions, but they exhibit quite specific selectional restrictions as to the types of eventualities they can combine with.

In previous work (Laca 2002, 2004a, 2004b), I have argued for an analysis according to which periphrases distribute over two levels of structure : the small group of linearly « external » periphrases realize the aspectual head ASP ; the bulk of linearly « internal », freely ordered periphrases involve recursion at the VP-level, and express aspectual operators in the sense of De Swart (1998). Not only linear order, but also tense restrictions and selectional restrictions patterns fall out from this analysis. Crucially, the semantics of the first group of periphrases can be described by the ordering relations between AssT and EvT proposed by Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria (2002), whereas that of the second group correspond to derived eventuality descriptions with specific temporal structures which, furthermore, can also be found among lexical verbs.

2 Progressives versus pseudo-progressives

STARE+Gerund periphrases are flanked in Italian and the Ibero-Romance languages by periphrases formed with verbs of motion (cf. French *aller (en) grandissant*, of very restricted productivity). Only Spanish and Portuguese distinguish a construction with a verb of non-oriented motion (*andar* ‘walk’) from one with a verb of oriented motion (*ir* ‘go’). Due to the lexical conflation of both verbs, Catalan and Italian have a single construction (with *anar/andare*) for the two meanings distinguished in Spanish and Portuguese (cf. Laca 1995, Espunya 1998, Squartini 1998 for detailed descriptions). The semantics of pseudoprogessives is therefore more perspicuous in Spanish and Portuguese.

Although *ir*+Ger. and *andar*+Ger. in Spanish are occasionally treated on a par with *estar*+Ger. as expressions of « progressive aspect », a closer look at their distribution shows that the former pattern like lower aspect (eventuality modification) periphrases, while the latter exhibits the main characteristics of a higher, time-relational aspect. As regards linear position, *ir*+Ger. and *andar*+Ger., but not *estar*+Ger., can be preceded by eventuality modification periphrases :

- (4) a. El avión empezaba a *estar / ir perdiendo altura.
 The plane beganIMPF to *L-be / go losing height
 ,The plane was beginning to lose altitude gradually’
- b. Volvió a *estar / andar diciendo mentiras.
 ReturnedSP to *L-be / walk telling lies
 ,S/he started telling lies again’

As to selectional restrictions, *estar*+Ger. can combine with practically all types of eventualities, most notably with achievements (with or without coercion effects), with states and with habituais. By contrast, *ir*+Ger. and *andar*+Ger. are subject to more specific selectional restrictions, which follow partially complementary patterns. Thus, *ir*+Ger. does not easily combine with activities, whereas *andar*+Ger. does. Conversely, *andar*+Ger. cannot combine with degree achievements, whereas *ir*+Ger. shows a particular affinity with them.

- (5) a. María #iba / andaba trabajando.
 María wentIMPF / walkedIMPF working
 ‘Maria was working’
- b. El río iba / ?? andaba creciendo.
 The river wentIMPF /walkedIMPF growing
 ‘The river was rising more and more / ??on and off’

As to tense restrictions, *ir*+Ger. and *andar*+Ger. can appear in all tenses, including the simple (perfective) past. It is true that this also holds for Ibero-Romance *estar*+Ger., by contrast with Italian *stare*+Ger., which is not possible in the perfective past or in compound tenses. However, I have tried to show elsewhere (Laca, to appear) that, when combined with the simple (perfective) past, *estar*+Ger. loses some

of the properties of higher aspect periphrases, thus suggesting that in this case it is located at the lower aspect level (see also Squartini 1998). In fact, syncretisms between time relational aspect and eventuality modification also have to be assumed for Spanish/Catalan *acabar de*+Inf. and Spanish/Portuguese *ir (a)*+Inf. They are to be expected in the light of the grammaticalization processes at stake, which are hypothesized to involve the rise of temporal information from lower to higher levels in the clause.

The semantics of *estar*+Ger. as a higher aspect periphrasis is very close to that of the English progressive. It can accurately be described along the lines of Smith (1991), as a relation between AssT and EvT such that AssT is properly included in EvT. The fact that neither the initial nor the final boundary of EvT belong to AssT can account for most of the meaning effects associated with the Romance progressive. By contrast, as will be seen presently, no ordering relation between AssT and EvT can capture the semantics of *ir*+Ger. and *andar*+Ger., which contribute temporal structures similar to those exhibited by some lexical verbs, *ir*+Ger. displaying analogies with degree achievements such as *lengthen*, and *andar*+Ger. displaying analogies with frequentatives such as *nibble*.

3 *Ir*+Ger. and *andar*+Ger. as pluractionals

Traditional in the morphological description of some West African and North American languages, the notion of pluractionality has recently been extended to the semantics of some verbal prefixes in the Slavic languages (Filip & Carlson 2001) and to the overall treatment of atelicity (Van Geenhoven 2004). Pluractionals are characterized as markers that „attach to the verb to indicate a multiplicity of actions, whether involving multiple participants, times or locations“ (Lasersohn 1995: 240).

Ir+Ger. and *andar*+Ger. exhibit one of the hallmarks of pluractionality, that of requiring a mapping between (sub)events and non-overlapping parts of the running time of the « big » event. This can be shown by their incompatibility with adverbial expressions asserting non-divisibility of the event-time, like *de un tirón* :

- (6) a. María leyó La Guerra y la Paz de un tirón.
 María read_{SP} The War and the Peace of a pull.
 ‚María read *War and Peace* in one sitting’
- b. María fué / anda leyendo La Guerra y la Paz (*de un tirón).
 María went_{SP} / walks reading The War and the Peace (*of a pull).
 ‚María gradually read / is reading *War and Peace* (*in one sitting)’

Like typical pluractionals, *ir*+Ger. and *andar*+Ger. display complex distributive dependencies with arguments and locations and in some cases require plural arguments. In the case of *ir*+Ger., a plural argument can contribute to the establishment of a scale, as in (7a). In fact, *ir*+Ger. behaves as an **incremental** pluractional, in as far as it expresses a monotonic mapping between successive times and successive positions on some scale, such that, as times progresses, larger portions of the scale are covered. In the case of *andar*+Ger., a plural argument allows for discriminating subevents involving different participants (7b). This is only one of the possible interpretations of *andar*+Ger., a **frequentative** pluractional which can also involve the serial repetition of a complete event (as in ‘tell a joke over and over again’) or subevents associated to temporal gaps in the development of a single event (as in ‘tell something ‘in instalments’, on and off’) :

- (7) a. ??Pedro fue / Los invitados fueron saludando al dueño de casa.
 Pedro went_{SP}/ The guests went_{SP} greeting to-the owner of house
 ‘??Pedro / The guests successively greeted the host’
- b. Juan le anda contando un chiste ??a María / a los estudiantes.
 Juan her/them-walks telling a joke to María / to the students.

„Juan is telling Mary / the students a joke“

Pluractionality is held to be intimately associated with atelicity (Van Geenhoven 2003, 2004), and in fact, our frequentative pluractional displays all the properties of atelic eventuality descriptions : (a) it combines with measure adverbials, but not with time-span adverbials (*for X time* vs **in X time*) ; (b) it licenses valid inferences from imperfective to perfective tenses (*andar-IMPF V* → *andar-SP V*) ; (c) as is normally the case with atelic structures derived from basic telic situations, it conveys a strong implicature of non-completion when in a perfective tense (*anduvo escribiendo un libro* strongly suggests that the book never came into existence). By contrast, the incremental pluractional displays quirky behavior with regard to the telic/atelic distinction. This quirkiness is strongly reminiscent of that characterizing degree achievements, on the one hand (Hay, Kennedy & Levin 1999), and the Slavic prefixes *na-* and *po-*, which are good candidates for pluractional markers, on the other (Filip & Carlson 2001).

4 A semantics for pluractionals : distributive dependencies and scope

Van Geenhoven (2003, 2004) has recently proposed a treatment of pluractional markers in West Greenlandic based on the definition of verb operators which would do for verbs something analogous to what Link’s star does for nouns. The intended effects of one of these operators, the **crystal star**, closely correspond to the temporal structure contributed by *andar*+Ger. As for *ir*+Ger., an operator which I will dub **plus star**, crucially involving a monotone function from the set of times into some linearly ordered set, seems to be able to capture its incremental nature and the varied specific forms the latter can take. However, the complex interactions of *andar*+Ger. and *ir*+Ger. with participants cannot be entirely accounted for in Van Geenhoven’s framework, which presupposes that star operators are operators on verbs. This seems to capture correctly the semantics of the West Greenlandic markers, and possibly that of the « silent » operators accounting for some meaning effects arising with *for*-adverbials. But Romance pluractionals behave differently.

In a nutshell, the facts are as follows : the frequentative pluractional operator contributed by *andar*+Ger. cannot « multiply » participants, i.e., it cannot take scope over cardinalized indefinites. But on the other hand, it can « look into » the structure of a plural participant, provided that this plural participant is a bare plural, a definite plural, or a universally quantified argument. Thus, (8a) requires that a single friend get several phone calls, but *FREQ-V* does not have to be true of any of the singularities composing *friends*, (*all his friends*, *each of his friends*, it suffices that *V* is true of these singularities. In (8b-d), *FREQ* can take scope over the verb+argument combination.

- (8) a. Juan anda llamando por teléfono a un amigo.
Juan walks calling by phone to a friend
‘Juan is phoning a friend (repeatedly)’
- b. Juan anda llamando amigos por teléfono.
Juan walks calling friends by phone
‘Juan is phoning friends’
- c. Juan anda llamando por teléfono a (todos) sus amigos.
Juan walks calling by phone to (all) his friends
‘Juan is phoning (all) his friends’
- d. Juan anda llamando por teléfono a cada uno de sus amigos.
Juan walks calling by phone to each one of his friends
‘Juan is phoning every one of his friends’

The facts in (8a) and (8b) are predicted by Van Geenhoven’s account, which builds on incorporation and cumulativity. A crystal star on verbs can take both the event time and an argument in its stride provided

(a) that the argument, being incorporated, is necessarily subject to all operators on V ; (b) that the argument is « distributable » (cumulative), and thus preserves the cumulativity required of the crystal star. Both indefinites and bare plurals can be incorporated, but only bare plurals can preserve cumulativity. However, neither definites nor universally quantified arguments are good candidates for incorporation, so the account fails to apply to (8c-d). But definites and universally quantified NPs are cumulative (though not strictly cumulative). In the case of the Romance pluractional, cumulativity is necessary for the frequentative to scope over a participant, but incorporation is not. The solution to this puzzle is straightforward. In fact, there is no reason to assume that *andar*+Ger. is a V operator : everything seems to indicate that, syntactically, it should get the full VP as an argument. Now, a crystal star operating on VPs will automatically have the V+argument combination in its scope, thus making the mechanism of incorporation unnecessary. But it will only be able to take those arguments in its stride that are « distributable » and thus preserve cumulativity.

A parallel analysis can be developed for the interactions of *ir*+Ger. with participants, which follow roughly the same pattern. But the facts are complicated in this case by the sensitiveness of the incremental to the distinction between perfective and imperfective tenses.

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