'Weak' grammatical aspect: At the interface of aspect and event structure

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Analytic perfect configurations in aspectual languages overtly mark grammatical aspect on a form that additionally bears a morpheme conveying perfect properties (e.g. Bulgarian *postroil* 'built', where the suffix expresses perfect properties and the prefix marks perfective aspect). Given insights gained from work on the Extended-Now Theory or Perfect Time Span (see McCoard 1978, Vlach 1993, Rothstein 2008), the presence of both of these ingredients falls out naturally: one of the two establishes a relevant time span, Topic Time (TT), ranging from some prior interval up to Utterance Time (TU) (cf. Rothstein 2008: 2) and the other is called for in order to unequivocally relate TT to the Time of the Situation (TSit). This straightforwardly accounts for the properties of Slavic languages like Bulgarian and Slovenian (see Iatridou et al. 2001, Pancheva 2003). However, this raises the question of what effect the *absence* of overt aspectual marking has on the properties of perfect constructions in the non-aspectual languages of Germanic, e.g. English and German. These may not add perfective or imperfective aspectual markers to perfect participial forms, but instead are contingent on the properties of their verbal base as well as contextual factors. In fact, the present paper argues that the constitutive past (or passive) participles in Germanic are fundamentally different from their (perfect) participial counterparts in Slavic in the sense that they do not (just) overtly establish a perfect time span. Rather, they do convey aspectual properties, but some that are strongly contingent on the event structure of the underlying predicate they are derived from: participles forming BE-perfect configurations in languages exhibiting auxiliary alternation are perfective, whereas their counterparts in HAVE-perfects in such languages are not. This is highly reminiscent of 'neutral' aspectual morphology in Slavic, which only expresses imperfective aspect on the basis of predicates with particular aktionsart-properties. Emphasizing on these correlations elicits novel insights into the interface between inner (or lexical) and outer (or grammatical) aspect.

The formation of the periphrastic perfect in Slavic is quite straightforward in the sense that all of the relevant ingredients are properly spelled out with the help of a designated head. In fact, as the Bulgarian examples in (1) show (see Pancheva 2003: 296; Iatridou et al. 2001: 209f.), the relevant ingredients are (i) tense as expressed by the auxiliary BE, (ii) a Perfect Time Span (PTS) as expressed by a suffix attached to the stem, and (iii) grammatical aspect as expressed by a prefix (perfective) or suffix (imperfective) attached to the root.

(1) a. Ivan e   postroil   pjasâčna(ta) kula.
      Ivan be   build.PRF.PFV   sand(-the)   castle
      'Ivan has built the sandcastle.'
  b. Ivan e   strojal   pjasâčna kula.
      Ivan be   build.PRF.IPFV sand   castle
      'Ivan has been building the sandcastle.'

These ingredients may be located in the functional head T and two aspectual heads, one of which establishes a perfect time span, say Asp_{PTS}, and one that bears perfective or imperfective properties, say Asp_{PFV} and Asp_{IPFV}. However, with respect to the latter, there is one additional possibility, namely Asp_{NEUT}, as in (2) (see Pancheva 2003: 296).

(2)   Ivan e   stroil   pjasâčna kula.
        Ivan be   build.PRF.NEUT sand   castle
        'Ivan has been building the sandcastle.'

What is interesting about this is the fact that this neutral aspectual marker elicits an imperfective reading, but may only combine with predicates that denote activities or accomplishments in perfect configurations (cf. Iatridou et al. 2001: 210). Unlike Asp_{PFV} and Asp_{IPFV}, Asp_{NEUT} is thus contingent on a fourth ingredient: (iv) event structure (or lexical aspect) as encoded by the v/V-domain. This raises two questions, namely (a) what is the aspectual impetus of Asp_{NEUT} (given the principle of Full Interpretation, FI), and (b) how does Asp_{NEUT} interact with v/V. With respect to the former, it is clear that what is expressed is imperfective aspect, but it is not at all clear why this kind of aspect is substantially restricted, an issue that is closely tied to the one in (b). Similar questions arguably arise in languages that lack overt aspectual markers in expressing the periphrastic perfect, which allows for an insightful correlation.

Germanic languages like English and German form their perfect periphrases with the help of a participial marker, but crucially do not allow for the overt morphological marking of the distinction between perfect and imperfective aspect in these configurations. In fact, there is only the combination of an auxiliary inflecting for finite tense, i.e. ingredient (i), and a PTS encoded somewhere above the

verbal domain (cf. Iatridou et al. 2001: 212) by Asp$_{PTS}$, i.e. ingredient (ii). All the more fine-grained distinctions, e.g. concerning whether a resultative/experiential or a universal perfect is conveyed, are indirectly derived from event structure and adverbial modification, as observable in (3).

(3)   a.   John has (always) loved Mary.
         b.   John hat Marie (schon   immer) geliebt.
            John has Mary PARTICLE   always loved
            'John has (always) loved Mary.'

This might be taken to suggest that there is a fundamental parametric contrast between Slavic and Germanic, namely that ingredient (iii) is missing altogether in the latter. However, both diachronic as well as synchronic arguments rather suggest that the aspectual head is present (and morphologically expressed by the participial marker), but 'neutral' in a sense reminiscent of what we have seen to hold for Slavic. In fact, it is argued that the participial marker of Germanic is an aspectual head which renders those predicates perfective that denote a simple change of state (thus lacking a CAUSE). All others, on the other hand, are grammatically imperfective, but nevertheless allow for a perfect interpretation due to the interaction of a PTS, which needs to be introduced independently, and event structure. The former is crucially not encoded by the past participle, but rather by the perfect auxiliary HAVE. This, as a side effect, accounts for why passive and perfect(ive) participles have the same shape: they are syntacticosemantically identical, where all the relevant distinctions are externally imposed by the auxiliary (cf. Ackema 1999, Ackema & Marelj 2012, Breul & Wegner 2017). Amongst the diachronic evidence in favour of these claims is that the past participles employed in perfect periphrases historically derive from deverbal resultative adjectives which were crucially contingent on the absence of a v$_{CAUSE}$ and the presence of a change of state. Synchronically, passive and perfect participles are in complementary distribution in contexts without HAVE, as we can see in languages exhibiting auxiliary alternation: perfective participles derived from unaccusatives take the semantically vacuous auxiliary BE (*Feli ist angekommen* 'Feli has arrived.'), whereas imperfective participles may only be introduced in passive configurations unless the perfect auxiliary HAVE, introducing a PTS, steps in.

Comparing the two kinds of 'neutral' aspectual morphology, what is striking is that both are weak in the sense of being strongly contingent on the event structure of the underlying predicate. In fact, in both cases most of the relevant properties seem to be straightforwardly derived from event structure, which is basically 'recycled' so as to be used for the expression of grammatical aspect. However, the two cases at hand – Asp$_{NEUT-IPFV}$ and Asp$_{NEUT-PFV}$ – differ substantially in terms of the precise aspectual contribution that is derived from the underlying event structure: while Slavic exponents combine with durative predicates and derive imperfective properties, Germanic ones combine with (simple) changes of state and derive perfective properties. This may be grasped in terms of parametric variation concerning the selectional properties of the aspectual head: while Asp$_{NEUT-IPFV}$ in Slavic selects for an atelic v$_{CAUSE}$, Asp$_{NEUT-PFV}$ in Germanic is bound to take a change-of-state V$_{BECOME}$, where the aspectual head may crucially not take scope over BECOME once v intervenes. Furthermore, whereas the combination of neutral aspect with non-dynamic or non-durative predicates is barred in perfect formation in Slavic (cf. Iatridou et al. 2001: 233), the independence of the ingredient introducing the PTS (HAVE) allows past participles in Germanic to be employed in non-perfect contexts such as the passive. An approach along these lines thus provides answers to questions (a) and (b), where the interaction of the aspectual marker with the event structural domain takes centre stage and possible restrictions stem from the presence or absence of a PTS and whether the aspectual contribution is compatible with the aktionsart at hand.

In conclusion, the present paper provides new insights into the role of weak or 'neutral' aspectual markers that are crucially contingent on the properties of the embedded predicates and primarily open the floodgates for grammatically exploiting lexical aspect. The structural analysis that is taken to be constitutive is taken to be shared by Slavic and Germanic, namely the aspectual spine of a clausal structure featuring (i) T, (ii) Asp$_{PTS}$, (iii) Asp$_{IPFV/PFV/NEUT}$, (iv) v/V. However, substantial contrasts ensue with respect to which element encodes ingredients (ii) and (iii), where Bulgarian and Slovenian employ a designated morpheme for each, while English and German encode (ii) with the help of a perfect auxiliary and (iii), namely Asp$_{NEUT}$ with the help of the participial morpheme.

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