

Besides aspect: How Shughni narratives get around without (im)perfective marking

Меленченко Максим Глебович
Международная лаборатория языковой
конвергенции, ВШЭ,
maksmerben@gmail.com

Падалка Полина Вячеславовна
Лингвистическая лаборатория по
корпусным технологиям, ВШЭ,
ppadalka0@gmail.com

According to Dahl and Velupillai (2013), approximately 55% of languages (121 out of 222) lack grammatical marking for the perfective/imperfective opposition in verbs. A commonly held view is that languages may compensate for the absence of aspectual marking through the tense system (and vice versa, see e.g. [Bhat 1999]). In our talk, we present data from the Shughni language (< Eastern Iranian), which does not have obligatory marking for the (im)perfective aspectual meanings. Two past tenses (Preterite and Perfect) do not impose aspectual restrictions, and there are many verbs whose Aktionsart properties allow for both durative and punctual reading in past tenses (e.g. *ǰêydow* ‘read’ in Preterite can mean either ‘read = was reading’ [P] or ‘read = finished reading’ [ES]). Although there are several periphrastic aspectual constructions (e.g. progressive), they are infrequent in colloquial speech. The current study explores how Shughni compensates for this lack of (im)perfective marking in narratives, where it is often especially important to keep track of the temporal interrelation of events, and aspect is one of the means to do this [Hopper 1979; Fludernik 2012]. The data analyzed in this study comes from narratives in the HSE Shughni corpus.

Firstly, Shughni has a rich system of clausal coordination conjunctions, which play a role similar to aspect marking in the narrative discourse. The conjunction *xu* marks that events are sequential and often logically (or even causally) connected. Conversely, the conjunction *at* marks simultaneity of actions or lack of strict temporal sequentiality. Use of the conjunction *xu* seems to be functionally similar to the perfective aspect, and use of *at* to imperfective. This is exemplified in (1–2), two excerpts from retellings of the Pear Film in Shughni. Both are told in “historical” Present, but in (1), *xu* marks “movement” of the narrative time between sequential events, while in (2), *at* shows that the two actions were simultaneous. A similar case is described for the Fon language (< Volta-Congo), where imperfective clauses connected by conjunctions *bə* / *bó* are always interpreted as simultaneous and/or not (logically) related events, while perfective clauses are usually understood as sequential (Lefebvre 2004: 125).

- (1) ...[*ǰuv-en di=qati*]=**xu**, [*wam di sabad*]
collect-PRS.3PL him[2]=COM=AND1 her him[2] basket(F)
vo ribi-yen di vilisped=ti]=**xu**, [*yid bād tīzd*].
again put-PRS.3PL him[2] bike=SUP=AND1 s/he[1] then go.PRS.3SG
‘...<they help him>, collect [pears] with him, **and** → put the basket back on the bike, **and** → he leaves’ [Pear Film, N75]
- (2) ...[*Yu zul-di xu-rd bozi kixt*]=**at**,
he small-COMP REFL-DAT game do.PRS.3SG=AND2
[*dāδ yullā-di-yen wi-rd kin-en yordam*]...
they[2] big-COMP-PL him-DAT do-PRS.3PL help
‘...the smaller [child] is playing, **and** the older [ones] are helping him...’
[Pear Film, A99]

Secondly, Shughni narratives often use tense switching to explicitly mark temporal interrelation between the two events. In particular, switches to the Present tense are often employed in stories generally told in Preterite (which can be called the default narrative tense)

to accentuate imperfectivity (and / or duration) of the events. This can be seen in the excerpt (3) taken from the retelling told in the Preterite tense. Here, the speaker switches to Present to explicitly mark that the events are simultaneous. This discursive effect of the present tense is well-known for other languages, too [Fleischmann 1990: 49, 187; Падучева 2010: 289].

- (3) [Yu yal nīt], [čurt δīd]=at,
 he still sit.PRS.3SG thought give.PRS.3SG=AND2
 [dāδ bačgala noz-en]=at...
 they[2] children show_off-PRS.3PL=AND2
 ‘He is still **sitting, thinking**, and those children **are showing off**...’
 [Pear Film, R99]

Thirdly, certain lexemes are used to mark interrelation between the events. The adverb *yal* ‘still’ is frequently employed to highlight a “static” imperfective event (3), and in particular to introduce an event which serves as a background for another perfective event (4). This use extends beyond the usual lexical meaning of ‘still’ and potentially can be treated as grammaticalization or pragmaticalization. In (4), for example, a literal translation of *yal* as English *still* would be unnatural. Similarly, the adverb *bād* ‘then, after’, which is very frequent in Shughni narratives, serves as a marker of sequentiality, and, again, there are cases where the use of its literal translation in English would be strange (5); see also (1).

- (4) ...[yiga yac-ak az-am yat aro], <...>
 other girl-DIM from-there come.PST HEZ
 [tar yak-digar-aĵ yal ti-yen]=atā.
 to one-other-DIR still go-PRS.3PL=AND3
 ‘<So, on the road,> another girl **went**, <on a bike,> they **are riding** towards each other.’ [Pear Film, A99]
- (5) [Az-am naĵtūyd yi cīwin čorik].
 from-there go_out.PST.M.SG INDEF hairy man
 [Yu čorik bād wev-ard lūvĵ]...
 he man then them-DAT say.PF
 ‘A hairy man came out from there. This man said, <Please come into the house>...’ [Hairy man (fairy tale)]

Our study shows that Shughni employs coordination conjunctions, tense switching and grammaticalized adverbs for the discursive functions of organizing the narrative’s timeline, which are often performed by (im)perfective markers in other languages. These results can complement the existing body of research on linguistic phenomena that correlate with aspectual meanings and compensate for the scarcity of aspectual expressions (such as the famous instance of the Partitive case in Finnish [Helasvuo 1996]).

Abbreviations

[2] – medial demonstrative	M – masculine
3 – third person	PF – Perfect
COM – comitative	PL – plural
COMP – comparative	PRS – Present
DAT – dative	PST – Preterite
DIR – directive	REFL – reflexive

F – feminine

SG – singular

HEZ – hesitation marker

SUP – superessive

INDEF – indefinite

References

- Bhat 1999 — Bhat, D.N.S. 1999. *The Prominence of Tense, Aspect and Mood*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Dahl and Velupillai 2013 — Östen Dahl, Viveka Velupillai. 2013. Perfective/Imperfective Aspect. In: Dryer, Matthew S. & Haspelmath, Martin (eds.) *WALS Online* (v2020.4).
- Helasvuo 1996 — Helasvuo, Marja-Liisa. 1996. A Discourse Perspective on the Grammaticization of the Partitive Case in Finnish. *Finnish Journal of Linguistics*, 9.
- Hopper 1979 — Hopper, Paul J. 1979. Some Observations on the Typology of Focus and Aspect in Narrative Language. *Studies in Language* 3(1), 37–64.
- Fleischmann 1990 — Fleischman, Suzanne. 1990. *Tense and Narrativity: From Medieval Performance to Modern Fiction*. London: Routledge.
- Fludernik 2012 — Fludernik, Monika. 2012. Narratology and Literary Linguistics. In R. I. Binnick (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Tense and Aspect* (pp. 75–101). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lefebvre 2004 — Lefebvre, Claire. 2004. Coordinating constructions in Fongbe with reference to Haitian Creole. In Haspelmath M. (ed.) *Coordinating Constructions*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 123–164.
- Падучева 2010 — Падучева, Елена. 2010. *Семантические исследования: семантика времени и вида в русском языке; семантика нарратива*. М.: Языки славянской культуры.