Baltic evidence to external aspect

Aspect in Latvian is often described in the same terms as Slavic aspect [2], as it also has perfectivising prefixes (1). These prefixes add telic interpretation to the verb as well as normally change aspect to perfective. Some of them additionally induce lexical meaning change; others, like *no-* in (1b)[1], do not.

(1)   a.   *Katru dienu sūtī-ju   viņam vēstules*
            every day   send-PST him   letters

            'I used to send him letters every day.'

      b.   *Vakar   no-sūtī-ju   viņam vēstuli*
            yesterday PFV-send-PST him   letter

            'I sent him a letter yesterday.'

(1a) is understood as a habitual action in the past, whereas (1b) is an episodic action. Same opposition applies in Russian (2).

(2)   a.   *Každy den' ja sla-l   jemu pis'ma*
            every day I   send-PST him letters

            'I used to send him letters every day.'

      b.   *Včera   ja po-sla-l   jemu pis'mo*
            yesterday I PFV-send-PST him letter

            'I sent him a letter yesterday.'

In Slavic languages all imperfective contexts require imperfective morphology [1]. When carrying present morphology, verbs with perfective prefixes refer to future. Conversely, Latvian allows the so-called perfective present (PP), where verbs with perfective prefixes are used in typical present contexts [2]. Although it is unavailable as progressive (*I am sending him a letter right now* in Latvian is expressed with an imperfective verb), perfective is felicitous in habituals and praesens historicum (3).

(3)   a.   *Varētu   teikt, ka* **ne-ēdu**   *kūciņas, bet tad   es melotu   — gadā vienu,*
            can.COND say   that not-eat.PRS cakes   but then I lie.COND   year one

            varbūt divas kūciņas **ap-ēdu.**
            maybe two   cakes   PFV-eat.PRS

            'I could say that I don't eat cakes, but then I would be lying – I eat one, maybe two cakes per year.'   [2]

      b.   *dzejnieks pārsvītro   visus trīs "Tu" un vietā* **uz-raksta**   *"Es"*
            poet   cross.out.PRS all   three "You" and instead PFV-write.PRS "I"

            '[In the fourth part of the action ...] the poet crosses out all three "You" and writes "I" instead.'   [3]

Overall, PP is available when the culmination of the event is asserted. In progressive, on the contrary, it is outside of the evaluation time, so prefixless form is used.

Still, Slavic languages require imperfective in such contexts. When telic interpretation is needed in present, Russian employs imperfectivising affixes like *-yva-* and *-a-*. Compare (a) with the semantically identical Russian (4).

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[1]This and other Russian examples are constructed as the authors are native speakers of Russian. Latvian examples are elicited, unless stated otherwise.

(4) *na samom dele ja **s-jed-a-ju**   odin-dva v   god.*
     in fact   I   [PFV-eat]-IPFV-PRS one-two per year

'[One could say that I don't eat cakes, but] in fact I eat one-two cakes per year.'

[2] proposes that Latvian verbs are bi-aspectual, but that is problematic [1]. In [1] authors claim that the difference between the Baltic and Slavic system is the degree of grammaticalisation. More precisely, "[in Slavic] the perfective present has basically become a perfective future however in Baltic languages it is not a strict requirement. We are to employ S. Tatevosov's analysis [4] of Russian, which suggests that aspect is external to the verb. The difference between verb-internal and verb-external aspect is (5).

(5) a. [CP ... [F$_{i+1}$P ... [F$_i$P ... [F$_{i-1}$P ... [VP ... [V **PFV** na-pisa]]]]]]   internal
     b. [CP ... [F$_{i+1}$P ... [F$_i$P ... **PFV** [F$_{i-1}$P ... [VP ... [V na-pisa]]]]]]   external

Aspect merges in AspP with a constraint that it should comply with the uppermost "aspectual" affix, such as perfectifising prefix *s-* and imperfectivising suffix *-a-* in (4). We thus propose that Latvian PP, i. e., usage of perfectivised verbs in present, is in fact imperfective, like in such contexts in Slavic languages. The question arises what is the reason for Latvian to allow imperfective aspect to combine with perfectivising prefixes. We have two options: to posit a null imperfectiviser functionally similar to Russian *-yva-*, or to to allow free variation of aspect relative to "aspectual" affixes.

Against the first hypothesis stands the fact that in Russian, *-yva-* is mostly used with lexically saturated prefixes and combines quite unproductively with perfectivisers that do not induce meaning change. In the Russian translation of (3b), bare imperfective is used instead (6).

(6) *... poet ... pish-et   /* na-pis-yva-jet   "Ja"*
     ... poet ... write-PRS / PFV-write-IPFV-PRS "I"

'[In the fourth part of the action ...] the poet crosses out all three "You" and writes "I" instead.'

This would lead us to propose that the Latvian imperfectiviser is not only null, but also unprecedently productive, a poor theoretical choice. We will review the properties of an "aspectless" analysis and problems related to it. We believe that Latvian data, which is similar to Russian except for the availability of aspectual interpretations, is a strong argument towards Tatevosov's external aspect analysis.

References

[1] Holvoet, A., Daugavet, A., & Žeimantienė, V. (2022). The Perfective present in Lithuanian. Baltic Linguistics, 12 (12), 249-293. https://doi.org/10.32798/bl.925 [2] Horiguchi, D. "Some remarks on Latvian aspect". Valoda: nozīme un forma 4:22-32. [3] Saulīte, B. et al. Latvian National Corpora Collection – Korpuss.lv Proceedings of the 13th Language Resources and Evaluation Conference (LREC), 2022, 5123–5129. [4] Tatevosov, S. Comparative syntax and semantics of Slavic. Course at CreteLing 2023.