

## Syntax and the aspectual influence of the noun

Since Verkuyl (1972), we have known that a predicate's (a)telicity can be regulated by the aspectual influence of the noun (AIN), as illustrated in (1).

- (1) a. John ate a slice of pizza in 10 minutes/#for 10 minutes.  
b. John ate pizza #in 10 minutes/for 10 minutes.

There are both syntactic accounts of the AIN (see Borer 1994, 2005, van Hout 1996, 2000, MacDonald 2008, Ritter & Rosen 1998, 2000, Travis 1991, 2000) as well as semantic accounts (see Krifka 1989, 1992, Jackendoff 1996, Piñon 2007, Verkuyl 1972, 1993). In this paper, I discuss an asymmetry in the AIN, which also appears to hold in Slavic languages, where, strictly speaking, there is no aspectual influence of the noun. I discuss how these facts weigh in in favor of syntactic accounts of the AIN over semantic ones.

The predicate in (1a) is marked as infelicitous with the *for*-adverbial, because of the direct object NP. Following Borer (2005), I assume that NPs like *a (slice of) pizza* can give rise to a telic predicate because they possess a particular property; call it [q]. In contrast, NPs like *pizza*, which give rise to atelic predicates, lack this property; they are non-[q]NPs. Now, the standard judgment offered in the literature for the *for*-adverbial, with a [q]NP direct object, is as given in (1a): infelicitous (or ungrammatical). Nevertheless, for over twenty years, it has been noted, often backgrounded in footnotes, that there is a felicitous interpretation available for predicates like (1a) (see Alsina 1999, Jackendoff 1996, Tenny 1987, Verkuyl 1993), and it has only been recently explicitly addressed (see Smollet 2005 and Piñon 2007); the *for*-adverbial is felicitous on an interpretation that some part of the slice of pizza was eaten, i.e. the whole pizza was not finished, a partitive interpretation. To state this differently, [q]NPs do not unambiguously give rise to a telic interpretation of the predicate. This observation takes on more importance in light of the fact that, in contrast to the ambiguous aspectual contribution of [q]NPs, non-[q]NPs unambiguously give rise to an atelic interpretation, as Piñon (2007) notes. There is an asymmetrical aspectual contribution of (non-)[q]NPs to the (a)telicity of the predicate.

Now consider Slavic. First observe that the noun does not exercise aspectual influence over the predicate (see Schoorlemmer 1995, MacDonald 2008), illustrated in (2) by Russian.

- (2) a. *Mary čitala knigu/poèziju \*za čas/v tečeniji časa.*  
Mary read-IMP book/poetry \*in hour/during hour  
“Mary read a/the book/(the) poetry in an hour/for an hour.”  
b. *Mary pročitala knigu/ poèziju za čas/\*v tečeniji časa.*  
Mary read-PERF book/poetry in hour/\*during hour  
“Mary read a/the book/the poetry for an hour.”

The imperfective form of the verb in (2a) is atelic (although not all imperfective forms are atelic, as noted by Borik 2002) and the perfective form of the verb in (2b) is telic (although not all prefixed perfective forms are telic, as noted by Schoorlemmer 1995), independently of whether the direct object is a [q] or non-[q]NP. Strictly speaking, then, Russian lacks the AIN. Nevertheless, it has been widely noted that there is an aspectual influence of the predicate (AIP) on the noun (see Borer 2005, Filip 2000, Krifka 1992) in Slavic. In fact, Borer (2005) (and references therein) explicitly discusses this influence. She observes that with telic predicates like (2b), NP direct objects unambiguously pattern with [q]NPs. In contrast, NP direct objects with atelic predicates like (2a) pattern with either [q]NPs (i.e. *a/the book*) or non-[q]NPs (i.e. *poetry*). I note here that this is an aspectual asymmetry as well, since telic predicates unambiguously give rise to [q]NP interpretations, while atelic predicates give rise to either [q]NP or non-[q]NP interpretations. Combining the aspectual asymmetry from the English AIN with the aspectual asymmetry from the Russian AIP, the resulting picture is the one in (3), illustrated as (il)licit combinations of (a)telic predicates with (non-)[q]NPs.

- (3) a. telic predicate + [q]NP                      b. atelic predicate + [q]NP  
c. \*telic predicate + NP                        d. atelic predicate + NP

Note that the one illicit combination, in (3c), is illicit in both Russian and English, even though in Russian the aspectual influence is from the predicate to the noun, and in English it is from

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the noun to the predicate. It is important to note that this entails that the observed aspectual asymmetries is independent of the directionality of aspectual influence. As we will now see, that the aspectual asymmetry is independent of whether the aspectual influence is from predicate to noun or from noun to predicate is a useful tool for evaluating the adequacy of both syntactic and semantic approaches to the AIN/AIP.

First, Verkuyl (1997, 1993) cannot account for the atelic interpretation in the presence of a [q]NP (his +SQA NPs) given that the verbs in (1) are [+ADD TO]. This is due to his *Plus Principle*, which states that telicity arises in the presence of all “plus” values. Second, generalized Krifkian approaches which assume that the (a)telicity of a verbal predicate as well as the aspectual properties of NPs are both best characterized in the mereological terms of quantizedness and cumulativity, are in the same boat: Krifka (1989, 1992) cannot generate the felicitous (3b), since a [q] (quantized) NP will give rise only to a telic (quantized) predicate. Nevertheless, Piñon (2007) address precisely the situation in (3b) and does so in these mereological terms, but with additional assumptions. He assumes that incremental theme verbs possess a degree argument that must be discharged by one of two degree operators. It is the interaction of these operators with the quantizedness of an NP that allows it to give rise to either a telic (quantized) predicate, as in (3a) or an atelic (cumulative) predicate, as in (3b). Likewise, a cumulative NP only gives rise to an atelic (cumulative) predicate due to its cumulativity. The problem for Piñon is the following: If an atelic (cumulative) predicate is licit with a [q] (quantized) NP as in (3b), there is no immediate reason why a telic (quantized) predicate is not licit with a (cumulative) NP, as in (3c). That is, if cumulative + quantized in (3b) is licit, why isn't quantized + cumulative in (3c)? The reason is that Piñon's account is dependent on the directionality of aspectual influence. However, as noted above, the aspectual asymmetry is independent of the directionality of aspectual influence.

Now, with respect to the syntactic accounts, MacDonald (2008) assumes an Agree relation such that a [q]NP and a non-[q]NP both Agree with an aspectual functional projection giving rise to a telic and atelic predicate respectively. The agree relation is symmetrical; it cannot account for (3b). Borer (2005), assumes that both [q]NPs and non-[q]NPs move to the relevant (aspectual) functional projections. Given that both move, this accounts is also syntactically symmetrical. Nevertheless, Borer 1994 (as well as van Hout 1996, 2000, Ritter & Rosen 1998, 2000) can straightforwardly handle the aspectual asymmetry, independently of the directionality of influence. In her account telic predicates arise as the result of a [q]NP moving to/through the specifier of an Asp-E(vent)M(easure). Atelicity arises in either the absence of this projection or its specifier, regardless of the presence of a [q]NP or a non-[q]NP. Non-[q]NPs never move to/through Spec,Asp-EM, thus (3c) is never generated.

It appears that as current systems stand, syntax is the most adequate component of the grammar to straightforwardly account for the aspectual asymmetry under discussion. Nevertheless, the AIN/AIP is fundamentally an alteration between a telic and an atelic interpretation of the predicate, consequently, semantics play an important role. This has consequence for the relation between the syntactic and semantic components. Concretely, syntax must precede semantics, otherwise, the aspectual asymmetry could only be stipulated to hold in the semantic component, by no immediately apparent principled reason. Assuming that the asymmetry is the result of a syntactic operation and that syntax precedes semantics, providing instructions for it, we can straightforwardly account for the aspectual asymmetry.

**Selected references:** Borer, H. 1994. The projections of arguments. In *Functional projections* E. Benedicto & J. Runner (eds), 19-47. UMass, Amherst: GLSA. van Hout, A. 2000. Projection based on event structure. In *Lexical specification and insertion* P. Coopmans, M. Everaert, & J. Grimshaw (eds), 403-427. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. MacDonald, J. E. 2008. *The syntactic nature of inner aspect: A minimalist perspective* [Linguistik Aktuell/Linguistics Today series] Amsterdam: John Benjamins. Piñon, C. 2007. Aspectual composition with degrees. *Adjectives and Adverbs: Syntax, Semantics, and Discourse*, Louise McNally and Christopher Kennedy (eds.), pp. 183–219. Oxford University Press. Schoorlemmer, M. 1995. Participial passives and aspect in Russian. Ph.D. Dissertation, Utrecht University. Smollet, R. 2005. Quantized direct objects don't delimit after all. *Perspectives on aspect*, ed. by Henk Verkuyl, Henriette de Swart and Angeliëk van Hout, 41-60. Dordrecht: Springer.