



Lexicalization of Tense and Aspectual Features in Persian, English and French: A Morpho-Syntactic Argumentation

Mohsen Jannejad¹, Amir Mashhadi¹ and Seyed Hamzeh Mousavi²

¹ Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran

² University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

*E-mail: mousavi.hamzeh@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The present study is an attempt to show how lexicalization operates for tense and aspectual features. Using Persian, English and some French examples, it is argued that tense and aspectual features need to move downward to be lexicalized. To this end, the concept of negative scope together with some other combinations are reflected on to prove that tense and aspectual features get lexicalized by moving downward. From an empirical point of view, this study indicates that in D-structure the negative scope in the aforesaid languages do not have a scope over tense and aspect, while in S-structure the place of negative has a scope over tense and aspect.

Key words: Lexicalization, Tense, Aspect, Negative Scope, Downward movement.

INTRODUCTION

The term “tense”, originating from the Latin translation of the Greek word for “time” (Greek *khronos*, Latin *tempus*), is generally defined as a category used in the grammatical description of verbs referring primarily to the location of an action in time (as distinct from aspect, which primarily marks its duration) (Singh, 1999). Crystal (2003) also defines tense as the way the grammar marks the time at which the action denoted by the verb took place. Jespersen (1924) similarly characterizes tense as the linguistic expression for the natural or notional concept “time” or as “time indications expressed in verbal forms”.

Tense can be generally categorized into two main categories; absolute tense and relative tense. Each category is in turn classified into subclasses such as past tense, present tense and future tense. Relative tense is also classified into subclasses such as relative past (RPT), relative Non-past (NRPT) and relative future (RFT), etc. Taking “tense” as the point of departure, the current study is thus intended to indicate that the future tense “will” in T- position is only a tense feature, which does not have any lexical form and needs to move downward to be lexicalized. By lexicalization in this paper we mean a morpho-syntactic property that turns the unformed aspectual and tense features into lexical forms via the downward movement process.

As far as aspect is concerned, it is taken as a category used in the grammatical description of verbs, which primarily refers to the way the grammar marks the duration of temporal activity denoted by the verb (Crystal, 2003). Katamba (1996) similarly defines aspect as a common inherent verbal category whose function is to highlight the internal temporal description of the predication. Generally, aspect indicates “whether an event, state, process or action that is denoted by a verb is completed or in progress” (Bhandari, 2008). Accordingly, Comrie (1976) maintains that aspect represents “different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation”. He further argues that aspect defines the shape, distribution, or internal organization of the event in time. Therefore, indicating “situation-internal time” is realized in aspect and “situation-external” time is in ‘tense’.

In what earlier abstract structuralism contributes to tense and aspect (e.g. Comrie, 1976; Dahl, 1985), one can distinguish between two types of aspects, i.e., grammatical and lexical aspects. While, in the later contributions within this group, a third type of aspect namely phasal aspect is introduced (Binnick, 1990; Sasse, 1991; Kortmann, 1991). Grammatical aspect is in turn categorized into perfective and imperfective aspects and is mainly distinguished from others by the attachment of various morphemes on verbs. It is a language specific issue whether aspect is realized by an auxiliary or the attachment of a suffix on a verb. Perfective aspect indicates “a complete situation, including its beginning and its end” while imperfective aspect denotes “the internal structure of a situation without any beginning and without any end” (Comrie, 1976). Grammatical aspect also distinguishes between habitual and continuous aspects as sub-units of the imperfective aspect and represents the progressive aspect as a subcategory of the continuous aspect (Comrie, 1976; Dahl 1985, Binnick, 1990; Kortmann 1991). In contrast, lexical aspect denotes “the inherent meaning of some classes of lexical items” (Comrie, 1976). Finally, phasal aspect represents a verb whose meaning unfolds

ORIGINAL ARTICLE
 PII: S232251221400003-3
 Received: 20 Jan 2014
 Accepted: 27 Feb 2014

the temporal perspective on a situation and can refer to the beginning or the end of the situation (Kortmann, 1991).

Turning now to aspect, this paper also aims to show that aspectual features in the aforementioned languages need to move downward to be lexicalized. Radford (2011) places tense and aspect on top of a hierarchical structure and calls them split TP projections suggesting that TP and AspP and NegP are all part of an umbrella term, i.e., TP. He believes that split TP projections can have lexical forms at that place, while this study tries to prove that their positions are just abstract conceptual places and not lexical. Using some syntactic arguments, it is argued that phrases are destined to falling down to lower positions before getting any lexical form.

Here, bearing in mind the mechanism of future tense and place of negative, it is argued that the constructions will be ungrammatical if tense and aspect are lexicalized in the functional phase. To prove this in Persian, first we refer to future tense as what Amberbe et al. (2010) call *complex predicates*. Taleghani (2006) believes that future tense in Persian constructs Serial Verb Construction (SVC). Drawing the diagram for future tense, she places negation in an upper node than tense, which can be rejected based on the fact that future tense cannot be negated and this is because the scope of tense contains the negative and not vice versa.

On the other hand, while tense and aspect are clearly categorized and differentiated from other lexical elements in English and Persian, aspect is not grammatically specified in French (Rowlinson, 2000), and tense is a matter of affix hopping (Carnie, 2012) for instance, unlike English and Persian, future tense in French is conjugated, leading to lexicalization via affix hopping (Rowlinson, 2000).

Some data from Persian, English and French

Here, using Persian, English and French constructions, we are going to show how a downward movement operates. Although the majority of minimalists believe that a downward movement is not possible for the lexical part of tree diagram, there are pieces of evidence that show it is both theoretically and empirically suggested for the functional phase. From an empirical point of view, the researchers indicate that in D-structure the negative scope in the abovementioned languages do not have a scope over tense and aspect, while in S-structure the place of negative has a scope over tense and aspect. At this juncture, this question might arise about how the negative gets a position that has scope over tense and aspect. We will elaborate on this point through the following examples:

Future tense in Persian is made through adding the modal auxiliary “Xastan” and the past verbal stem, as in the following example:

- 1) Man be madrese xaham raft.
I to school will-1st-SG went
I will go to school.

At the same time, future Tense in English is made by the modal auxiliary verb “will” and simple form of the verb as in the following example:

- 2) I will go to school.

In French, the inflected form of the “FUT” feature is used like the following example:

- 3) Je allerais a l'école.
I go-will-1st SG to school
I will go to school.

Accordingly, this paper argues that the features (FUT) needs to move downward and thus fill a place below the functional phase to get their lexical shape as they cannot get lexicalized in the feature position on top.

Data from Persian future tense

Persian has rich morphology and its morphological system includes several different affixes creating different forms or new words. The verbal system is one of the best examples of the richness of the morphology in this language. Persian has both tense and aspect morphemes. In Persian, negative has scope over the verb but its scope does not include tense, as a result, tense has scope over negative particle:

- 4) a) *Neg (FUT (Verb))
b) FUT (Neg (Verb))

To show that negative particle does not have scope over “FUT”, the following example is given:

- 5) Man farda be madrese naxaham raft.
I tomorrow to school Neg-will-1st SG went
I will not go to school tomorrow.

On the one hand, this example shows that negative has scope over verb but its scope does not include “FUT” feature. While, on the other hand, negative has scope over the “FUT” particle in the surface structure. Therefore, the only way to solve this problem is to assume that features need to move downward to be lexicalized. Consequently, “FUT” feature from “T” projects downward, then gets its lexical shape as “xah”, and then, in order to get the inflection, moves to the light verb. The derivation will be like the following:

The tree diagram (Figure 1) shows how downward movement happens from a functional phase into a lexical phase. This means that the concept (FUT) moves into verb position and get lexicalized as a whole verb, here the verb is pertained to time and tense. In the second stage, verb might get a case feature, and this is possible by moving into the light verb position where the verb finds a kind of feature-lexicalized form that is suitable for the place it occupies. Is this happens with regard to English language? The next part provides an answer to this question.

Data from English future tense

In this part, let us see what happens with regard to “will” in English. If we use future tense with the progressive aspect, we will have the following sentence in English:

6) I will be going to school tomorrow.

If we add the negative particle to this construction, its scope would not include both “FUT” and “progressive aspects.” In fact, they remain outside the negative scope.

7)

- a)*Neg (FUT (Progressive (Verb)))
- b) *FUT (Neg (Progressive (Verb)))
- c) FUT (Progressive (Neg (Verb)))

The following two examples can be taken as the evidence for the accuracy of the third construction in (c).

8) I will not be going to school tomorrow.

9) I will not be going to school, but I will be going to university.

In this derivation (Figure 2), ‘will’ is in a position that does not have scope over both progressive aspect and tense. If we suppose that progressive aspect and tense are lexicalized in the positions where they are right now, then the ill-form construction ‘* I will be not going to school’ will arise. To solve this problem, we need to define a downward movement for both tense and aspect. In this fashion, tense moves downward to a verb position and changes into ‘to will’. After that, it moves into the light verb₁ and gets the negative particle, while the progressive aspect moves to the second light verb position and changes into ‘be’. Therefore, this shows that a downward movement is needed in here in order for the constructions to be well-formed.

Data from French future tense

In French, we have inflectional form of future and negative scope does not include “FUT” feature. Consider the followings as examples from French.

10)

- a)* Neg (FUT (Verb))
- b) FUT (Neg (Verb))

11) *Je ne allerais pas a' l'ecole demain.*

I Neg will-1st SG Neg to school tomorrow
I will not go to school tomorrow.

Again in French “FUT” feature moves downward to change into an inflection particle “-ais” to get its lexical shape. This is what this paper and the

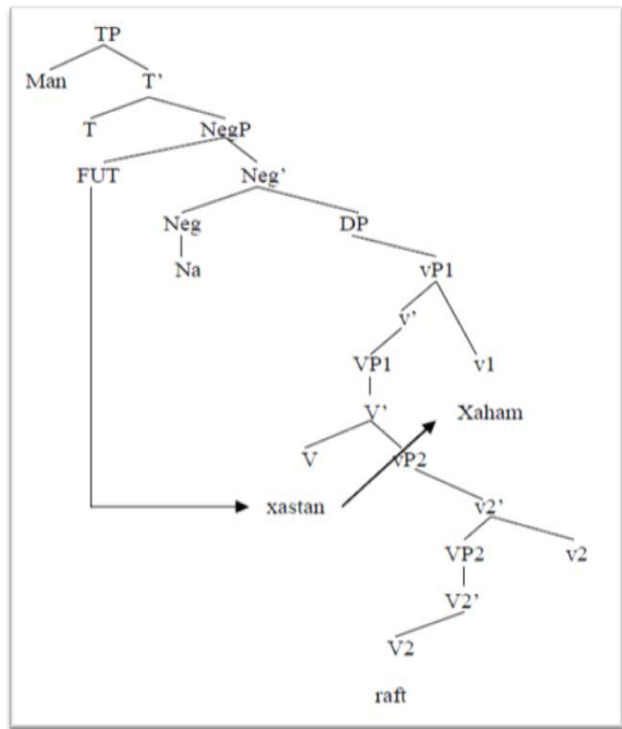


Figure 1. Tree diagram that shows how the downward movement occurs

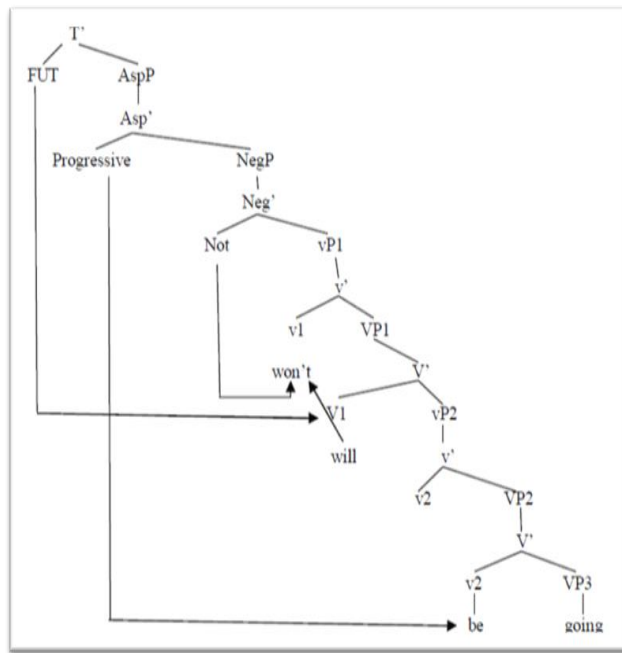


Figure 2. The English future tense and progressive aspect intermixed

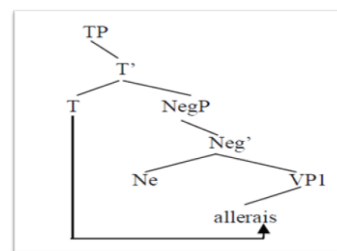


Figure 3. French future tense and affix hopping as a kind of downward movement

minimalist programme have in common; as both believe in affix hopping. The question that remains here is that why affix hopping that is a downward movement is permitted, while other downward movements are not permitted. The answer is that this might have been a way to simplify the matter, but the fact is that without admitting the downward movement for the functional phase, it would be easy to find examples in many languages, especially English which crash such constructions. The downward movement is not a choice, but an obligatory fact about what happens in the mind of speakers, a description of how they chill down the abstract concepts into lexical forms in their minds.

Aspect in Persian and English: downward movement a choice or a necessity

As it is illustrated in (12), progressive aspect in Persian is different from English; however, the lexicalization mechanism is the same.

12) *Dashtam be madrese miraftam.*
 Have-1st SG to school was-going
 I was going to school.

This can be mixed with perfect aspect to have:

13) *Dashte (ast) be madrese mirafte (ast)*
 Have (be) to school was-going (be)
 He has been going to school.

The only way for aspect to be lexicalized is to project downward. Take the following two examples in English:

14) He has been going to school.

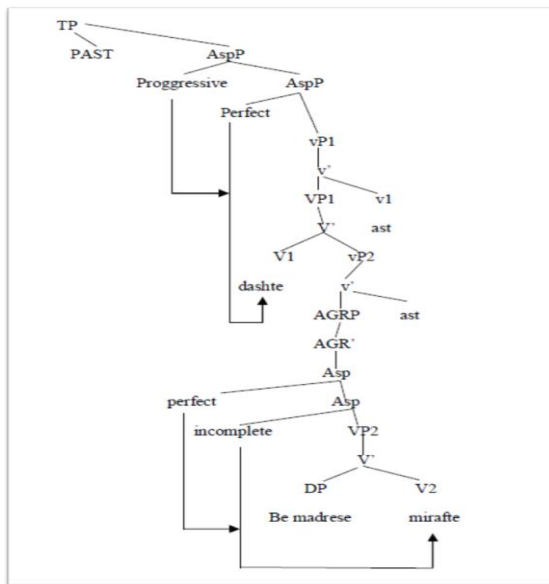


Figure 4. The progressive aspect and the chain downward movement

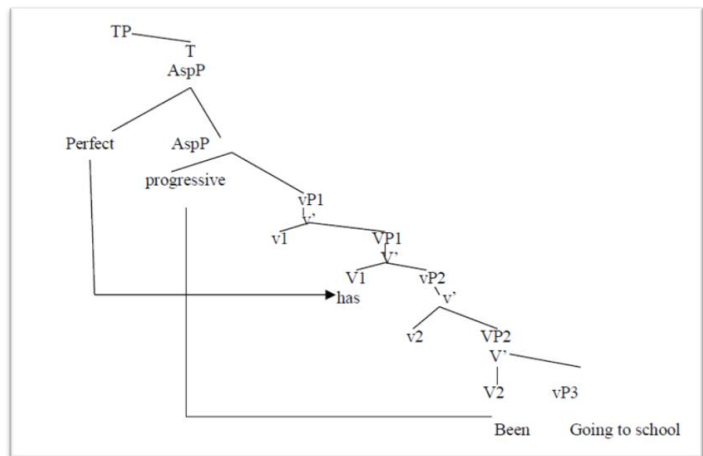


Figure 5. The progressive aspect and the chain downward movements

As it can be observed, downward movement is not an option, but a necessity. It is indeed important not only in producing well-formed sentences, but also in producing a theoretically grounded minimalist programme. From a theoretical point of view, we need downward movement as we need affix hopping which is a kind of downward movement. We know that functional phase is all abstract and cannot have a lexical form. If the forms get frozen before downward movement of functional phase into lower positions, the outcome would be an ungrammatical construction. Theoretically, an abstract position is better to remain abstract and a lexical part better to remain lexical. Metaphorically, abstract concepts can be compared to steam, while their downward movement is like raining which changes steamy concepts into more palpable lexical forms; water. Last stage is a freezing phase which can be compared to ice.

CONCLUSION

Although we have truly resigned to the fact that a downward movement is not possible for the lexical parts of a tree diagram, there are pieces of evidence to show that a downward movement is inevitable for the functional phase. Otherwise, this might lead to ill-formed constructions for the three languages; Persian,

English and French. Accepting downward movement has some theoretical support as well. Though we admit that functional part is not a lexical phase, there are certain ways to lexicalize the functional elements; a downward movement for the functional phase not only improves the recent concept of phases, but also is the theoretical indication of how abstract constructions turn into lexical forms. Besides, it provides evidence for why there should be a position called functional phase.

REFERENCES

- Amberbe M, Baker B, and Harvey M (2010). *Complex predicates; cross-linguistic perspectives on event structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bhandari B (2008). Tense and aspect in MECHE. *Nepalese Linguistics*, 23, 1-14.
- Binnick R J (1990). *Time and the verb*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Carnie A (2012). *Syntax: A generative introduction*. London: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers.
- Comrie B (1976). *Aspect*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal D (2003). *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Dahl Ö (1985). *Tense and aspect systems*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Jespersen O (1924). *The philosophy of grammar*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Katamba F (1996). *Morphology*. London: McMillan Press Ltd.
- Kortmann B (1991). The triad Tense-aspect-Aktionsart: Problems and possible solution. In C. Vetters & W. Vandewegde (eds.). *Belgian Journal of Linguistics* 6, 9–30.
- Radford A (2011). *Analyzing English sentences: a minimalist approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rowlinson W (2000). *French grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sasse H (1991). "Aspect and Aktionsart: reconciliation." In C. Vetters & W. Vandewegde (eds.). *Belgian Journal of Linguistics*, 6, 30-45.
- Singh C Y (1999). Tense and aspect in KUKI-CHIN. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area*, 22(2), 149.
- Taleghani A (2006). *The interaction of modality, aspect and negation in Persian*. Ph.D dissertation. University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona.