

Preverbal Nominals and Telicity in Persian Complex Predicates

Since Vendler's (1967) seminal work on verbal aspectual classes, it has often been argued that verb phrase aspect is not determined in the lexicon but rather compositionally by taking into account the interaction between the verb and other syntactic elements such as arguments and adjuncts. Research on verbal aspect has shown that the presence of a Goal or quantitatively determinate Theme can modify the aspectual class by delimiting the event denoted by the verb phrase, resulting in a *bounded* or *telic* aspect (cf. Tenny 1992). Harley (1999) extends this notion of compositionality to the internal structure of the denominal verbs in English and argues that the boundedness of the incorporating noun affects the telicity of the verb. Applying this argument to Persian and providing evidence from locatum verbs, Folli, Harley and Karimi (2005) propose that the preverbal nominal is the sole determiner of telicity in the complex predicate construction in which it appears. I will show, however, that verbs of instrument in this language do not support this conclusion. I argue instead that the aspectual properties of these complex predicates point to a more complex structural analysis, whereby the syntactic relation between the preverbal nominal and the light verb should be considered in determining the telicity of complex predicates.

Harley (1999) investigates the aspectual properties of locatum verbs in English and argues that the boundedness information specified on the noun head which is incorporated in denominal verbs affects the aspectual interpretation of the verb. Hence, if the incorporating noun is bounded, the event described by the verb is inherently telic (1a); but if the noun is unbounded, verbal aspect can be either telic or atelic (1b). This contrast can also be seen in locatum verbs in Persian shown in (2). In verbs of instrument, however, the boundedness of the preverbal nouns such as *jaru* 'broom' or *shune* 'comb' does not affect the telicity of the complex predicate as shown in (3). This behavior counters the claim by Folli, Harley and Karimi (2005) that the preverbal noun determines the telicity of the complex predicate in Persian, and constitutes clear evidence that the structure of locatum verbs and verbs of instrument is more complex than proposed by these authors. Another piece of evidence supporting the need for distinct structures in these two instances of *zædæn* verbs comes from the modification possibilities of preverbs. The presence of number implicature on the bounded nominal in the locatum verb in (4a) is not felicitous. But it is acceptable on the bounded noun of a verb of instrument (4b), where it is interpreted as modifying the whole event (i.e., there was an event of sweeping before leaving the house).

In determining verb phrase aspect, Goals and quantitatively determinate Themes delimit the event denoted by the verb phrase, whereas instruments do not. A similar effect seems to be present at the level of complex predicates in Persian. The fact that the boundedness of the preverbal noun affects the telicity of the resulting locatum verbs but not of the instrumental verbs reflects the differing syntactic status of the nominal elements in each case. The proposed underlying structures are shown in (5) where the Instrument is occupying an adjoined or adverbial position. If the syntactic position of the instrument verbs' preverbal nouns is different from the structural position of the locatum verbs' preverbs, the effect of the nominal on the telicity of the complex predicate should be the effect we would expect from a verb phrase argument in the corresponding position.

This proposal provides support for the notion of syntactic decomposition of verbs, and argues for a compositional construal of telicity in complex predicates that considers the syntactic relation of the preverbal noun and the light verb element, and does not simply determine verbal aspect from the inherent properties of the preverbal noun.

- (1) a. Mary *saddled* the horse in 5 minutes / #for 5 minutes.
 b. Jill *ainted* the wall in an hour / for an hour.
- (2) a. Lale dær ærze ye saæt / #saætha æsb-o æfsar=zæd
 Laleh in an hour / hours horse-OM harness=hit.PAST.3SG
 'Laleh harnessed the horse in an hour / #for hours.'
- b. Lale dær ærze ye saæt / saætha zæn-jir-e dochærxæ-ro roghæn=zæd
 Laleh in an hour / hours chain-EZ bicycle-OM oil=hit.PAST.3SG
 'Laleh oiled the bicycle chain in an hour / for hours.'
- (3) a. Lale dær ærze ye saæt / saætha khanæ-ro jaru=zæd
 Laleh in an hour / hours house-OM broom=hit.PAST.3SG
 'Laleh swept the house in an hour / for hours.'
- b. Lale dær ærze ye saæt / saætha mu-ha-sh-o shune=zæd
 Laleh in an hour / hours hair-PL-CLIT.3SG-OM comb=hit.PAST.3SG
 'Laleh combed her hair in an hour / for hours.'
- (4) a. *?Lale æsb-o ye æfsar zæd o rah=oftadim
 Laleh horse-OM one harness hit.PAST.3SG and way=fell.PAST.1PL
 '*?Laleh gave the horse a harness and we took off.'
- b. mæn bayæd khunæ-ro ye jæru be-zæn-æm bæd mi-am
 I must house-OM one broom SUB- hit-PR.1SG then DUR- come. 1SG
 'I have to give the house a sweep first then I'll come.'
- (5) a. Locatum: [x CAUSE [y BE with *oil*]
 b. Instrument: [x DO y [BY-MEANS-OF *broom*]

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