Project description – BOF DOCPRO4 – University of Antwerp – Department of Linguistics

A semantic typology of present-tense constructions
Advisor: Astrid De Wit

1. State of the art

The default function of a present-tense construction would appear to be locating situations at the time of speaking. Thus, the Dutch and French simple present tenses can straightforwardly be used to report ongoing present-time events, as is illustrated for French in (1):

(1) *Là,   maintenant, je   regarde   un   film.*
   now   now   1SG   watch.PRS.1SG INDF.SG.M movie
   'Right now, I'm watching a movie.'

Yet it has been observed that, in various languages, the present tense turns out to do anything but evoke the time of speaking when it combines with event verbs. English is a case in point: the simple present can be used to report present-time states (2), but not present-time events (3) (barring a few exceptional contexts, such as performative utterances or play-by-play reports accompanying sports broadcasting):

(2) *I adore cats.*
(3) **I try to read a book, so please leave the lights on.*

If the simple present does combine with dynamic verbs, the default interpretation is a habitual one:

(4) *I try to play tennis three times per week.*

Cross-linguistic data demonstrate that English is not an isolated case. In Russian, for instance, the present tense can combine with imperfective verbs, which report unbounded situations, to refer to the present (5), but with perfective verbs, which convey a bounded perspective, a future reading arises (6) (see, among others, Malchukov 2009):

(5) *On   ø-znaet.*
   he   IPFV-know.PRS.3SG
   'He knows.'

(6) *On   u-znaet.*
   he   PFV-know.PRS.3SG
   'He will find out.'

In other languages, such as the Surinamese creole language Sranan, speakers assign a historical-present, past or perfect interpretation to zero-marked dynamic verbs (7), whereas with stative verbs, this zero marker yields present-time reference (8) (De Wit & Brisard 2014):

(7) *Di   a   karta   Ø   fadon,   dan mi   Ø   si   en*
   when   DEF.SG   card   PRS   fall   then 1SG PRS see   POSS.3SG

   futu.
   foot

   'When the card fell, then I saw his feet.'

(8) | *Ala* | *sma* | *Ø* | *sabi* | | *now* | *pe* | | *den* | *e* | *kari* | *Micromarkt*. |
| all | person | PRS | know | | now | where | | 3PL | IPFV | call | Micromarkt |

'All people now know the place they call Micromarkt.'

These interactions, in which, depending on the aspectual profile of the designated situation, a present tense is used to report habitual, past or future situations, rather than present-time situations has been referred to as the "present perfective paradox" (Malchukov 2009; De Wit 2017). De Wit (2017) identifies three strategies that languages can develop as a way of resolving this paradox:

1) The 'retrospective strategy': the construction that is used as a present tense with stative/imperfective situations is given a past interpretation, while maintaining some (possibly highly bleached) connection to the present. This strategy has been attested in (Atlantic) creole languages, such as Sranan, the Bantu language Lingala, the Niger-Congo languages Igbo and Yoruba and the Sino-Tibetan language Meitei.

2) The 'prospective strategy': the construction that is used as a present tense with stative/imperfective situations is given a future interpretation. This strategy occurs in North-Slavic languages, the Dravidian language Kannada, and Japanese. Again, a weak sense of present-time relevance is retained.

3) The 'structural strategy': the construction that is used as a present tense with stative/imperfective situations is given a general-validity (habitual or generic) interpretation. Besides English, other languages in which this strategy appears to be used are South-Slavic languages.

Apart from assigning a non-present interpretation to a present-tense construction, another way in which languages can resolve the present perfective paradox is by using a type-shifting construction (Michaelis 2004). Imperfectivizing type-shifting constructions are constructions that can shift perfective, bounded situations into imperfective, unbounded situations; examples are the English progressive (9), the English present perfect in continuative contexts (10), or the Sranan imperfective-habitual marker *e* (11). As the following illustrations show, such imperfectivizing type-shifting constructions enable present-time reference with originally bounded situations:

(9) *I am trying to read a book so please leave the lights on*.

(10) *I've lived in Colorado since 2009*.

(11) | *Nownow* | *yu* | *e* | *teki* | *en* | | *kba* | *nownow?* |
| now | 2SG | IPFV | take | 3SG.OBJ | | finish | now |

'Are you already taping right now?' (Winford 2000: 422)

De Wit (2017) analyzes the manifestation of the present perfective paradox and the two types of solutions to the paradox (assigning a non-present interpretation and imperfectivization through type-shifting) in English, French, Sranan and Slavic. Due to the limitations of this set of languages, a number of pivotal questions remained unanswered:

(i) Why does a language resort to one certain strategy (retrospective, prospective, or structural) rather than another? Are there any cross-linguistic tendencies in this respect (i.e., is one strategy more commonly attested than another one)? Are there any factors (e.g., language contact or diachronic phenomena) that systematically determine the strategy chosen? Some authors (e.g. Welmers 1973: 346-347; Smith & Erbaugh 2005: 716-717) have suggested that the retrospective strategy is the most common, default strategy, since a past-time interpretation of bounded situations is cognitively most plausible, yet this proposal has never been subjected to proper cross-linguistic analysis.

(ii) Similarly, many questions remain regarding the type-shifting strategies employed across languages. Ebert (1995) demonstrates that there are languages in which a single construction can express both perfect and progressive readings at the same time. Could this progressive-perfect ambiguity be a result of the fact that both aspectual constructions can function as imperfectivizers resolving the present perfective paradox? More generally, why does a language select a specific imperfectivizing

construction, rather than another one? And again, is there a default imperfectivizer in a cross-linguistic sample of languages?

(iii) Example (1) illustrates that, in contrast to the other languages in the sample, French does not bar the use of the present tense for present-time reference. This suggests that the French present tense (as well as its Dutch analogue, for that matter) can take on an inherently imperfective value. Similar observations can be made for some other Romance and Germanic languages, but there are no data for non-European languages. Whether or not French and Dutch are cross-linguistically exceptional in this respect therefore remains unclear. Put differently, we do not know how typologically common it is for a present-tense construction to be used for anything but present-time reference.

(iv) The original data set only took into account the basic lexical distinction between stative and dynamic verbs (or imperfective and perfective verbs for Slavic). Yet preliminary data from other languages indicate that a more fine-grained lexical-aspect distinction might be warranted. For example, in their study of Mandarin Chinese, Smith & Erbaugh (2005) demonstrate that, in the absence of contextual cues, zero-marked atelic verbs (which refer to situations that do not have an inherent endpoint) normally refer to present-time situations, whereas the default interpretation of zero-marked telic verbs (designating events with an inherent endpoint) is past. In other words, the parameter [± telicity] turns out to be more relevant for Mandarin Chinese than the parameter [± dynamicity]. In the same vein, data from the Kwa language Tuwuli (Harley 2008) and the Atlantic English-based creole Pichi (Yakpo 2009) demonstrate that temporal reference is dependent on three-way actional distinctions, taking into account telicity (in the case of Tuwuli) and inchoativity (in the case of Pichi). Only a larger sample of languages can reveal which actional parameters need to be taken into account in a comprehensive analysis of present-time reference.

2. Describe the objectives of the research.

The current project sets out to analyze the present perfective paradox in a typologically adequate sample of languages in order to address the intriguing gaps identified in (i) to (iv) in Section 1. The ultimate goal of the project is to propose a cross-linguistically applicable account of the interaction between the present tense and various types of aspect in the form of a semantic connectivity map, a commonly used typological tool to represent meanings in terms of their similarity, thus yielding important descriptive and theoretical insights in the field of semantic typology. Descriptively, this typological study will offer a novel, comprehensive overview of the ways in which present-tense constructions behave in different types of contexts and in interaction with different types of aspect, and provide the tools for future descriptive accounts of tense-aspect systems in hitherto under-/undescribed languages. These descriptions have important theoretical implications, in that they will reveal cross-linguistic tendencies in the way we conceptualize present-time situations – tendencies that need to be accounted for in a cognitively plausible fashion.

More concretely, the proposed project comprises the following five objectives. The first goal is purely descriptive. It tackles, among other things, the issue raised in (iv) above, and it lays the basis for the subsequent objectives, which relate to the issues raised in (i) tot (iii) in Section 1. The final objective of this project is to lay out a semantic connectivity map based on the results of Objectives 1 to 4.

1) First and foremost, this study will provide a detailed description of the present perfective paradox on the basis of a typologically adequate sample of languages. For each language in the sample, those constructions that can be used for present-time reference will be identified and charted, thereby taking into account fine-grained aspectual distinctions (such as those identified and described by Bar-el 2015) and special contexts, such as narrative texts, performatives and conditionals.

2) The second objective of this project is to analyze the retrospective/structural/prospective strategies employed across languages. We will verify which strategy is most frequent, explain why this should be so, and identify the language-internal and language-external, cognitive-functional factors influencing the choice of one strategy rather than another. We hypothesize that the retrospective strategy is most common, given its cognitive plausibility, yet specific language-internal factors can override this default option.

3) Thirdly, the project will shed a new light on the similarities and differences between different imperfectivizing type-shifting constructions. Given their shared functionality, we will argue that there are various languages in which imperfective, habitual, and (continuative) perfect aspect are expressed by means of the same construction. In those cases in which languages resolve the present perfective paradox by means of a construction that can express only one of these functions, we will explain why this should be so on the basis of language-specific factors, and verify whether any cross-linguistic patterns emerge in this respect.

4) Preliminary data lead us to hypothesize that present tenses that are primarily used for present-time reference are comparatively rare if we look beyond European languages. The fourth objective of this project is to verify whether a cross-linguistic sample of languages confirms this hypothesis.

5) Ultimately, the data collected for this project should enable us to lay out a semantic connectivity map, of the type proposed by van der Auwera & Plungian (1998) and Gast and van der Auwera (2013). Such connectivity maps represent theoretically plausible patterns of polysemy and diachronic change, and they can be developed and put to the test by sampling cross-linguistic data. Thus, drawing a connectivity map on the basis of the constructions investigated to reach Objective 1 as well as the cognitive-functional motivations and patterns identified to attain Objectives 2 to 4 would enable us to make predictions about the range of uses and the diachrony of present-tense constructions in any language.

3. Describe the methodology of your research.

This project comprises seven Work Packages (WPs), each associated with deliverables (such as journal articles and conference presentations), which constitute the intermediate goals of the WPs and, on a larger scale, of the entire project. Yet before going into these different methodological and analytical steps, we need to delineate the data set on which this study will be based. In view of the crosslinguistic objectives outlined in Section 2, we will need a typologically adequate sample of languages. What constitutes an "adequate" sample is determined by the nature of the objectives of the study (quantitative and/or qualitative), the amount of information needed from every language in the sample to attain these objectives, and the availability of resources (in the form of grammars, native speakers and/or experts). Typically, a distinction is made between so-called probability samples and variety samples, whereby the former serve to test quantitative (statistical) claims and the latter to chart the range of possible variation displayed across languages within a given functional domain (Rijkhoff et al. 1993). Probability samples are comparatively small, since, in order to make statistically adequate claims about, for example, correlations, one needs to make sure that the languages in the sample are genetically and geographically independent from one another. On the other hand, variety samples which attempt to unveil the whole range of possible variation within a certain domain need to be as large as possible (Miestamo et al. 2016: 234-235). In fact, this project combines both quantitative and qualitative objectives. Verifying which strategy is most frequent across languages and how many present-tense constructions can be used for actual present-time reference (objectives 2 and 4) are clearly quantitative goals. Quantification (more specifically, correlation analysis) is also involved when we measure whether there are any (extra-)linguistic variables that systematically influence strategy selection. Yet each of the objectives (also) serves to discover how the present perfective paradox can be manifested in a variety of languages (if at all) and why the patterns are what they are, thus having qualitative goals. We will therefore need to strike a balance between these considerations when compiling our sample. Crucially, however, typological studies are evidently limited by the availability of good descriptions for the languages under consideration, and, depending on the level of detail of the investigation, experts and native speakers that can be consulted. Naturally, when actual fieldwork data are needed, feasibility concerns arise that have additional bearing on the potential sample size.

In view of the fine-grained nature of the research objectives of this project, as well as the importance of independence for the quantitative components, the sample will be limited to 50 languages. Miestamo (2009) proposes a variety sample of 50 languages, which is geographically and genetically stratified to aim for as much independence as possible. In other words, this sample caters qualitative objectives of this study and, to a large extent, its quantitative objectives as well (see below). Since the sample also solely contains

languages that have been adequately documented (see Miestamo 2009: 85), this sample constitutes the ideal starting point for the current project.

Now that the basic input data for this project have been delineated, we can list the methodological and analytical Work Packages comprised in this project (note that these WPs are not necessarily carried out in a chronological sequence, as is also reflected in the work plan in Section 4):

1) The first step will be to collect **grammars** for each of the 50 languages of the sample and distill from these grammars that information that we need in order to tackle Objective 1. Each of the grammatical descriptions referred to by Miestamo (2009: 85) is available at the Grammar and Pragmatics research center (GaP) and/or the University of Antwerp library. On the basis of these grammars, those constructions that can be used for present-time reference will be identified and systematically collected in a **database**, with detailed descriptions and illustrations of the attested patterns (Deliverable 1). Yet this first WP also serves to arrive at a more extensive inventory of tense/aspect constructions in an individual language. We need those data to identify whether competing constructions in the paradigm systematically influence the way in which the present perfective paradox is manifested and resolved (e.g. it is quite plausible that a language with two grammaticalized future-tense constructions will be less likely to resort to the prospective strategy). The database will furthermore include some basic information about the origin, development and language family for each language, and be made available for other researchers via the GaP webpage.

2) The second WP serves to identify and fill the gaps in the database constructed in WP1 by means of a **questionnaire** (Deliverable 2). Since this project aims to uncover tense usage in both canonical and less canonical contexts, such as performatives, and since it aims to work with fine-grained actional distinctions, it is to be expected that grammars will not provide all the required information for each of the languages. Building on the growing body of literature on cross-linguistic aspectual, actional and temporal semantics (e.g. Bochnak & Matthewson 2015; De Wit 2017), we will develop a questionnaire that specifically targets less canonical contexts of use for different event types (see, among others, Vander Klok & Conners (2019) on the advantages of such targeted research by means of written questionnaires). The questionnaire will be designed according to the method proposed by Dahl (1985), which consists of sentences with infinitival verb forms to be translated into the target language by native speakers and/or experts. This questionnaire-based study will allow us to further complete the database developed during WP1, which can then presented at various relevant conferences, such as the bi-annual Chronos conference on tense, aspect and modality (Deliverable 3).

3) It is to be expected that some of the languages under investigation will display notably interesting patterns with regard to the present perfective paradox. Because of this, and in view of the limitations of translational data for the study of tense and aspect categories (see Cover 2015), the third WP will be devoted to a detailed description of those selected languages, and possibly their genetically closely related languages, on the basis of **advanced elicitation techniques** by means of storyboards (see Bochnak & Matthewson 2015). More specifically, we will make use of a selection of the MelaTAMP storyboards that were developed at the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin to elicit fieldwork data from the domains of tense, aspect and modality. On the one hand, this third WP will thus allow us to develop in-depth case studies, to be presented a peer-reviewed journal article (Deliverable 4). On the other hand, it will offer methodological insight into how large-scale typological work can be complemented with intricate semantic-fieldwork techniques in the domains of tense and aspect. These insights will be reported in a presentation at the annual meeting of the Association for Linguistic Typology (Deliverable 5).

4) WP4 will consist of the **quantitative analyses** to be carried out on the basis of the database developed in the first two WPs. Since the sampled languages are not entirely independent of one another, we will first carry out an exploratory, non-statistical study of frequency differences in terms of resolution strategies, overlap in terms of type-shifting strategies, the frequency of occurrence of imperfective present tenses, and areal variation in this respect. This preliminary investigation, which constitutes Deliverable 6, should allow us to find answers to the questions associated with Research Objectives 2 and 4. In a second step, we will conduct correlation analyses for each of the linguistic (presence of other aspectotemporal markers, kind of imperfectivizing construction, etc.) and

extralinguistic parameters (e.g. language family, contact languages etc.) listed in the database (Deliverable 7). In line with Dryer (1989), detected areal correlations will only be considered meaningful when they are also valid at the level of the macroareas (six continent-size linguistic areas distinguished by Dryer).

5) The fifth WP is a **qualitative** one, where we verify whether the hypotheses formulated in 1-4 in Section 2 can be confirmed or not and we subject these findings to cognitive-functional analyses. This is obviously a most comprehensive WP, which should result in at least two peer reviewed journal articles or book contributions (Deliverables 8 and 9).

6) Development of the **connectivity map** (Deliverable 10). On the basis of the form-meaning pairings that we will discover, we will attempt to map the meanings in a way that shows their degree of similarity and that predicts that if a form in a language expresses more than one meaning, these meanings will be directly connected on the map.

7) Finally, WP7 is devoted to **dissertation** writing (Deliverable 11). It should be noted that large chunks of the thesis will already have been written in the form of (journal) articles (cf. Deliverables 4, 8, and 9), which will be integrated into the dissertation.

4. Enumerate the bibliographical references that are relevant for your research proposal.

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van der Auwera, Johan & Vladimir Plungian (1998), 'Modality's Semantic Map', *Linguistic Typology* 2: 79-124.

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5. Interested in working on this project as a PhD researcher? Here are some details:

Job description
- You prepare a doctoral thesis in the field of semantic typology.
- You publish scientific articles related to the research project of the assignment.
- You contribute to teaching and research in the Department of Linguistics.

Profile and requirements
- You hold a master degree in Linguistics, Language and Linguistics, Literature and Linguistics, or equivalent.
- You can submit outstanding academic results.
- You have demonstrable expertise in the area of linguistic typology.
- Knowledge of the domains of tense and aspect is an asset.
- Acquaintance with methods in semantic typology and fieldwork is an asset.
- Students in the final year of their degree can also apply.
- Foreign candidates are encouraged to apply.
- Your academic qualities comply with the requirements stipulated in the university's policy.
- You are quality-oriented, conscientious, creative and cooperative.

We offer
- a doctoral scholarship for a period of two years, with the possibility of renewal for a further two-year period after positive evaluation;
- the start date of the scholarship will be between May 1st 2020 and October 1st 2020;
- a gross monthly grant ranging from € 2.373,36 to € 2.516,73;
- a dynamic and stimulating work environment.

How to apply?
- Applications may only be submitted online, until the closing date **February 2nd, 2020** and should include a copy of your **CV** and a **cover letter**.
- A pre-selection will be made from amongst the submitted applications. The remainder of the selection procedure is specific to the position and will be determined by the selection panel.
- The interviews of the candidates, preselected by a selection panel, will take place between February 17th and March 1st, 2020.
- More information about the online application form can be obtained from vacatures@uantwerpen.be. For questions about the profile and the description of duties, please contact Prof. Astrid De Wit, 03 265 45 88, astrid.dewit@uantwerpen.be.