Unifying VP-ellipsis and aspectual tenses: On the cross-linguistic presence of TP

In this paper I illustrate availability of VP-ellipsis in Serbian and asymmetries in the distribution of aspect with aspectual tenses, i.e. Aorist and Imperfectum. I argue that the absence of a TP layer in Serbian unifies these two seemingly unrelated phenomena. I also argue that cross-linguistic differences regarding these phenomena can be accounted for under the parametric variation in the presence of TP.

Availability of VP-ellipsis Portuguese, a Verb-raising language with rich verbal morphology, allows for VP-ellipsis (1). In European Portuguese (henceforth EP), however, VP-ellipsis is subject to a finiteness parallelism requirement between the antecedent and the target (Cyrino and Matos 2005). If a finite form of the main verb is antecedent to its infinitival form (2), VP-ellipsis is impossible. Assuming feature identity requirement for ellipsis (Merchant 2008 i.a.), I propose that finiteness mismatches in EP are not tolerated due the mismatch in the T feature. If a finite verb raises to T in Portuguese (Nunes and Zocca 2009) entering into a feature checking relation with T, and if there is a T feature with finite, but not with non-finite forms, then the feature identity requirement will not be satisfied, and finiteness mismatches are not expected to be tolerated. In Serbian, ellipsis of non-finite VPs is allowed with the corresponding non-finite antecedents (3). However, contrary to EP, Serbian allows for finiteness mismatches: non-finite VPs can also be elided with finite antecedents (4) (cf. Stjepanović 1997). This is surprising because if there is a T feature on the finite form, the featural mismatch is expected to arise; the ellipsis is incorrectly predicted to be impossible. I propose that finiteness mismatches in Serbian are tolerated due to the lack of a mismatch in the T feature: there are no T features to match with, this being due to the lack of TP in the language. If TP were present, finiteness mismatches would be expected to be impossible; there would always be a featural mismatch. However, if TP is not present, then there are no T features to cause the mismatch between finite and non-finite forms, explaining why ellipsis in (4) is acceptable.

The lack of TP in Serbian Serbian has rich verbal morphology. However, despite its richness, there is no pure temporal morphology; what has traditionally been assumed to be tense morphology actually denotes agreement markers (5). I propose that the lack of overt temporal markers in a language has a reflex in the absence of the structural part directly related to temporal properties, i.e. TP (see Lin 2003, 2006 for Chinese, Wiltschko 2003 for Halkomelem Salish, Tonhauser 2011 for Guarani; but see Matthewson 2006 for Lil’looet Salish). Thus, Serbian also lacks a TP layer. I argue that parametric presence of TP also accounts for cross-linguistic differences with aspectual tenses.

Distribution of aspect in aspectual tenses Serbian, in addition to most common periphrastic past (6), has two aspectual tenses, Aorist (AOR), denoting punctual, completed events and Imperfectum (IM), denoting incompletions, long-lasting events. Interestingly, aspectual values, which are always specified in the verbal root in Serbian, are restricted with aspectual tenses: IM occurs only with imperfective (7a), and AOR only with perfective aspect (7b). In Bulgarian, however, both AOR (8) and IM (9) can occur with either imperfective or perfective aspect. The difference in meaning between the two forms in (8) and the two forms in (9), respectively, is crucially contributed by aspect, e.g. whether the emphasis is placed on the completion, or the lack thereof (Scatton 1984). I propose that differences between Serbian and Bulgarian stem from differences in terms of TP, which I argue is present in Bulgarian, but absent in Serbian. Consider first Bulgarian. Assuming that: 1) the major contribution of perfective and imperfective in (8) and (9) is aspectual, i.e. situation and viewpoint aspect, while the major contribution of Aorist and Imperfective is to locate the event in the past, and 2) the temporal component is computed in TP in Bulgarian, and the aspectual one in AspP, it should be possible to combine aspectual tenses with either aspectual value in Bulgarian, correctly predicting their co-occurrence. In Serbian, however, due to the lack of Tense, Aorist and Imperfectum are aspctualized, highlighting certain aspectual, rather than temporal properties, and imposing restrictions on aspectual values. More specifically, Aorist in Serbian emphasizes the aspectual component, i.e. the completeness (10), or punctuality of the event (11). Given the meaning of completeness or punctuality, Aorist can only occur with perfectives, since only perfectives can mark the end point of the event or occur with instantaneous events. Regarding Imperfectum, it denotes continuity (e.g. a permanent state (12)), compatible only with the meaning of imperfectives.

Temporal interpretations In the absence of TP, temporal interpretations can be derived with the help of imperfective (13a), perfective (13b), aspectual component Perfect (14), and a will component (15a).
To illustrate, since AOR denotes past events, it could be structurally represented as a two-tiered aspectual system (Smith 1991, Pancheva 2003): one level is viewpoint aspect, and the other is Perfect, a time span generalizing over time intervals and extending backwards from the contextually salient reference time interval (RTI) (14). The default RTI is the Utterance Time. In the absence of TP, (15b) can refer to either periphrastic past with perfective verbs (6b) or AOR. With IM, AspP would be unbounded (13b).

**Summary** I argued that the lack of overt temporal morphology in a language has a reflex in the absence of the structural part directly related to temporal properties, i.e. TP. Moreover, under the parametric approach to the presence of TP, we can account for cross-linguistic differences regarding the finiteness-sensitivity of VP-ellipsis and aspectual distribution with aspectual tenses. Finally, I suggested that, in the absence of TP, temporal interpretations can be alternatively derived by the means of perfective and imperfective aspect, aspectual component Perfect, and a *woll* component.

(1) O João já tinha lido este livro, mas a Maria não tinha [lido este livro].

the João already had read this book, but Maria hadn’t.’ (Nunes and Zocca 2009)

(2) *O João trabalha e a Ana também há-de trabalhar.

the João works and the Ana also has-to work

‘João works and Ana also has to work’ (Cyrino and Matos 2005)

(3) Aca je već pobedio Anu, ali Iva nije pobedio Anu neće pobediti Anu.

‘Ivan occasionally wins Anu, while Petar sometimes beats Ana, while Petar has (defeated Ana) only once’

(4) Ivan povremeno pobedi Anu, a Petar je samo jedanput pobedio Anu ce samo jedanput pobediti Anu.

‘Ivan occasionally wins Anu, while Petar is only once won Ana and Petar is only once win-inf of Ana’

(5) To illustrate, since AOR denotes past events, it co-

summarizes, in our theoretical framework, the following sentences:

1. João works and Ana also has to work
2. João finished his homework