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The perfective present in Lithuanian

Further Perspectives on the Baltic Verb

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Outline

- the issue of Lithuanian aspect
- perfective present in habitual and generic predications
- perfective present in different text sorts (narratives and stage directions)
- peripheral constructionalised uses of the perfective present
- conclusions

‘Boulder-based’ perfectives

- One particular type of aspectual systems involve verbal prefixes that function as ‘bounders’ telicising the verb (Bybee & Dahl 1989, 85–89).

skaityti ‘read’

per-skaityti ‘read (through)’

pa-skaityti ‘spend some time reading’

- While initially prefixed and non-prefixed verbs only differ in lexical aspect, eventually the difference between lexical classes may become grammaticalised, as in Slavonic languages (Dahl 1985, 89).
- Telicising prefixes are found in many languages from Eastern Europe to the Caucasus, with various degree of grammaticalisation (Arkadiev 2015).
- It has always been an issue to what extent a grammatical aspect can also be acknowledged for Lithuanian (see Arkadiev 2011).

Degree of grammaticalisation in Slavonic

- only imperfective verbs have the ability to combine with a phasal verb like 'begin' (distributional test),
cf. Polish *zaczyna opowiadać*_{ipfv} : **opowiedzieć*_{pfv} 'starts to tell (a story)'
- only imperfective verbs have the ability to derive certain inflectional forms,
cf. Polish *czytając*_{ipfv} : **przeczytając*_{pfv} 'reading'
- bi-aspectual verbs and non-perfectivizing prefixes exist but are rare,
cf. Polish *kazać*_{pfv/pfv} 'order', *na-leżeć*_{ipfv} 'belong'

Degree of grammaticalisation in Lithuanian

- A distributional test like the ability to combine with a phasal verb like 'begin' point to strong tendencies rather than strict rules,
*pradedą pasakoti*_{ipfv} : *pa-pasakoti*_{pfv} 'starts to tell (a story)'
- A perfective verb in Lithuanian will have exactly the same paradigm as an imperfective one, even if some forms may be rare,
cf. *skaitant*_{ipfv} : *per-skaitant*_{pfv} 'reading'
- Lithuanian has a large number of bi-aspectual verbs,
cf. *pa-laikyti*_{ipfv/pfv} 'support'

Progressive present as a test for grammaticalisation

- Even if Lithuanian has perfective present forms, a considerable number of prefixed verbs cannot be used in progressive function, cf. the two verbs differing in Aktionsart with a common grammatical feature that can be characterised as perfectivity. A grammatical aspect emerges when such verbs are ousted from the progressive use.

su- completive (achievement of a natural boundary of the process)

Mes* *kaip tik* *su-organizuojame***_{pfv} *konferenciją.*
1pl.nom right.now pfx-organise.prs.1pl conference.acc.sg

Intended meaning: 'Right now we're organising a conference.'

pa- delimitative (arbitrarily singled out duration quantum of an activity)

Netrukdykit* *man,* *aš* *dabar* *pa-skaitau***_{pfv}.
neg.disturb.imp.2sg 1sg.dat 1sg.nom now pfx-read.prs.1sg

Intended meaning: 'Don't disturb me, I am now doing some reading.'

Non-progressive present

- Expansion of imperfective verbs at the expense of the perfective ones does not need to stop at the progressive use.
- In part of the Slavonic languages, perfective forms are also gradually ousted from those types of use that are not inherently progressive.
- In case of neutralisation, the imperfective verb does not refer to the durative process leading up to the transition, but includes the transition itself.

Rus	<i>Dvornik</i> caretaker.nom	<i>vsegda</i> always	<i>zapiraet</i> _{ipfv} lock.prs.3sg	<i>*zaprët</i> _{pfv} lock.prs.3sg	<i>vorota.</i> gate.acc
	'The caretaker always locks the gate.'				
S/Cr	<i>Vratar</i> porter.nom	<i>uvijek</i> always	<i>zatvara</i> _{ipfv} close.prs.3sg	<i>zatvori</i> _{pfv} close.prs.3sg	<i>vrata.</i> gate.acc
	'The porter always locks the door.'				

Non-progressive present

- In Lithuanian, perfective verbs are still possible in the present tense, cf. the same verb in the progressive and the habitual function.

Mes* *kaip tik* *su-organizuojame***_{pfv} *konferenciją.*
1pl.nom right.now pfx-organise.prs.1pl conference.acc.sg

Intended meaning: ‘Right now we’re organising a conference.’

Kasmet ***su-organizuojame***_{pfv} *apie 20* *gebėjimus*
every.year pfx-organise.prs.1pl about 20 skill.acc.p
ugdančių *projektų* *jaunimui.*
develop.ppra.gen.pl project.gen.pl youth.dat.sg

‘Every year we organise about 20 skill-improving projects for young people.’

Non-progressive present

- With respect to non-progressive uses of the present, Lithuanian aligns with some Slavonic languages

Lith	<i>Sargas</i>	<i>visada</i>	<i>rakina</i>	<i>užrakina</i>	<i>vartus.</i>
	caretaker.nom	always	lock.prs.3sg	pfv-rakina.prs.3sg	gate.acc
	'The caretaker always locks the gate.'				
S/Cr	<i>Vratar</i>	<i>uvijek</i>	<i>zatvori</i>	<i>zatvara</i>	<i>vrata.</i>
	porter.nom	always	close[pfv].prs.3sg	close.[ipfv].prs.3sg	gate.acc
	'The porter always locks the door.'				

Perfective present

- Since the present tense is mainly associated with the progressive function (Smith 2003, 76; but see Comrie 1985), the perfective meaning is often seen as incompatible with the present tense, cf. ‘the paradox of the perfective present’ in Malchukov (2009) and De Wit (2017).
- Present-tense uses compatible with the perfective meaning are subject to two conditions: a situation has to be viewed in its entirety, its different phases properly identified, and yet as completely included in the time of speaking
 - performatives, live sports commentaries and commentaries involving demonstration, as well as events referred to in narratives (praesens historicum) and habitual/generic contexts

Perfective present in Lithuanian

1. perfective present in habitual and generic predications
 2. perfective present in different text sorts (narratives and stage directions)
 3. also peripheral constructionalised uses of the perfective present that have their origin in the lexical aspect underlying the grammatical aspect in Lithuanian (accomplishment predicates)
- The first two groups are also most common in any sample of perfective verbs (prefixed or non-prefixed semelfactives) from LithuanianWac.
 - The constructions of the third group had to be specifically searched in both LithuanianWac and ItTenTen14.

Habitual and generic uses

- In a sample of 100 present tense forms from LithuanianWaC, preceded by *visada* ‘always’, only 15 belong to perfective verbs, the rest being either imperfective or ambiguous.
- The habitual and generic uses only differ in having particular or generic subjects, and are not always easily differentiated (see Carlson 2012, 830–831)

[*Niekšiška teigti,*]

<i>kad</i>	<i>ligonis</i>	<i>pa-sirenka</i> _{pfv}	<i>savo</i>	<i>ligą,</i>
that	sick.person.nom.sg	prfx-rfl.choose.prs.3	rfl.poss	sickness.acc.sg

[*o skurdžius savo skurdą.*]

‘[It is immoral to say] that a sick person chooses their sickness, [and a destitute one their poverty.]’

Other characterising uses

- In that habituality does not only refer to repeated events but also attribute a property to their participants, habitual uses are similar to other other types of sentences with a characterising function, that is attitudinal (*John smokes cigars*), potential (*John speaks French*), those with individual-level predicates (*Elina is Finnish*) (Bertinetto & Lenci 2012, 860); see also Shluinsky (2009).

Šaltiniai ***te-pa-sako***,
source.nom.pl only-pfx-say.prs.3

[*kad ji buvo nuskandinta.*]

‘The sources only say that she was drowned.’

(Even if nobody reads the historical sources, they still retain the ability to convey certain information.)

Other characterising uses

*Laimė — kaip kalėdinis žaisliukas — ima ir **su-dūžta**_{pfv} <...>*
take.prs.3 and pfx-break.prs.3

‘Happiness is like a Christmas decoration; it can break up any moment.’

(The perfective present coordinated with *imti* ‘take’ which is known to favour bounded events (Nau et al. 2019, 260–262), but it does not always have a habitual/generic meaning.)

Narratives and stage directions

- praesens historicum and praesens scenicum both relate to sequences of event but represent different text sorts
- while the historical present is used in narrative, stage instructions are essentially directions, not dissimilar from instructions in cooking recipes (Langacker 1991, 266)

Data on narratives and stage directions

- movie script *Purpuriniai dūmai* (“Purple Smoke”) by Marius Ivaškevičius, loosely based on a short story by Felix Roziner and thus closer to a narrative than to stage instructions in their pure form
- an autobiographical text by Irena Saulutė Valaitytė-Špakauskienė *Manėme, kad plaukiame į Ameriką* (“We thought we were sailing to America”) fuses the historical present with habitual and other characterising uses of the present tense
- the first 200 constructions with present tense from the movie script, and 200 present tense constructions from a ten-page excerpt of the memoirs

Data on narratives and stage directions

	pfv	ipfv	sum
movie script	147	53	200
memoirs	110	90	200

The higher frequency of imperfectives in the memoirs is due to characterising uses.

- Even with the numbers of perfectives and imperfectives being roughly equal (110 vs 90) in the memoirs, the frequency of perfective verbs in Lithuanian is still very high in comparison to Czech and Serbian/Croatian as presented in Dickey (2003, 147–148) with references to other authors.
- In comparison to Slavonic languages, the perfective-imperfective contrast in the Lithuanian historical present is maintained most consistently.

Perfective vs imperfective contrast

- Dickey's (2000, 151–154) interpretation of the Czech data as it is analysed by Stunová (1993) can be straightforwardly applied to Lithuanian.
- In both the memoirs and the movie script, perfective verbs refer to quick, momentary actions, and imperfective verbs to actions that unfold more slowly.

<...>	<i>skubiai</i>	<i>su-lipame</i> _{pfv}	<i>ir</i>	<i>ilgokai</i>
	hurriedly	px-climb.together.prs.1pl	and	long.time
	<i>vejamės</i> _{ipfv}	<i>tq</i>		<i>karavaną.</i>
	chase.prs.1pl.rf	dem.acc.sg		caravan.acc.sg

'<...> we board in a hurry and chase that caravan for a long time.'

Neutralisation in stage directions

- Even in the movie script with its extremely high frequency of perfectives, it is possible to find examples with an imperfective verb replacing a perfective one in a sequence of events.

[*Joškė skubiai įlipa į vagoną, iš kurio ką tik išlipo,*]

*ir slepia-si*_{ipfv} *pa-si-slepia*_{pfv} *po suolais.*

and hide.prs.3-rfl pfx-rfl-hide.prs.3 under bench.ins.pl

‘Joškė quickly gets into the railway carriage which he has just gotten out of and hides under the seats.’

Neutralisation in stage directions

- Switching to the past tense would only leave us with the perfective version:

[*Joškė skubiai įlipo į vagoną, iš kurio ką tik išlipo,*]

ir pa-si-slėpė_{pfv} po suolais.

and pfx-rfl-hide.prs.3 under bench.ins.pl

‘Joškė quickly got into the railway carriage which he had just gotten out of and hid under the seats.’

Neutralisation in stage directions

- Retaining the imperfective in the past would refer to a background state:

[*Joškė skubiai įlipo į vagoną, iš kurio ką tik išlipo,*]

ir ***slėpėsi***_{ipfv} *po* *suolais,*

and hide.prs.3.rfl under bench.ins.pl

[*kol jie vaikščiojo aplink*].

‘Joškė quickly got into the railway carriage which he had just gotten out of and hid under the seats [while they were walking around].’

Peripheral constructionalised uses

- So far we have concentrated on patterns of aspectual usage that follow from the rise of grammatical aspect in Lithuanian (rooted in the impossibility of using prefixed bounded verbs in progressive function).
- The Lithuanian perfective present has a number of more or less marginal patterns of use of perfective presents that originate in the actional differences historically underlying the aspect opposition in Baltic.
- These are differences relevant to the class of accomplishment predicates: accomplishments consist of a **preparatory phase** involving human agency directed at a change in state, and the **change of state** itself. The achievement of the change of state depends not only on human volition but is influenced by external factors.
- This creates a distinction between a volitional imperfective and a not specifically volitional perfective

Perfective presents with inanimate subjects

- Verbs like *aiškinti* 'explain' and *slėpti* 'hide' that describe some kind of social interaction involving an agent and an experiencer (argument, explain to whom) or observer (non-argument, from whom).
- A mental impact is made on the experiencer-observer as a result of the subject's agency, but a comparable mental impact may be made without such agency when an inanimate subject takes the place of an animate one.

Perfective presents with inanimate subjects

- Inanimacy excludes agency, which may block the use of the imperfective verb.

*Jei antras žodis pa-aiškina*_{pfv}
if second.nom.sg.m word.nom.sg pfx-explain.prs.3

*pa-tikslina*_{pfv} *pirmąjį*,
pfv-specify.prs.3 first.acc.sg.m.def

[*brūkšnelis nerašomas.*]

‘If the second word explains and specifies the first one, [the dash is absent.]’

Irresultative use

- The irresultative use of the negated perfective present is activated in conjunction with the non-negated imperfective present.

[*Lietuvoje yra daug miestų ir miestelių, kurie daug labiau užsikonservavę tarybinėje praeityje.*]

Tarkim, Kaunas, kuris dvidešimt metų

say.imp.1pl Kaunas.nom rel.nom.sg.m twenty year.gen.pl

*areną stato_{ipfv} ir **nepastato**_{pfv}.*

arena.acc.sg build.prs.3 and neg-pfx-build.prs.3

‘[There are many towns and townlets in Lithuania that are much more stuck in their Soviet past.] Like, say, Kaunas, which has been building its arena for twenty years and cannot build it to the end.

Irresultative use

- When an incremental process fails to achieve its completion and the situation is valid at the time of speech, the failure to complete can be stated for the present without precluding a successful completion in the future.
- As Anna Zaloznjak (2015, 316) points out, a perfective present like this refers to a state of non-occurrence, which is perfectly compatible with progressive semantics.

Irresultative use (Russian)

- In Russian the original perfective present has acquired a default future interpretation, but this particular construction makes a claim about the present rather than the future, as in Lithuanian.

Vostočnyj *kosmodrom* *strojat-strojat*_{ipfv}
eastern.acc.sg.m spaceport.acc.sg build.prs.3pl-build.prs.3pl
ne ***po-strojat***_{pfv}
neg pfv-build.3pl

‘They are building the Eastern Spaceport and cannot get it built.’

‘Frustrated expectation’ (Russian)

- The term ‘present of frustrated expectation’ (*prezens naprasnogo ožidanija*) was coined by Zaliznjak (1990).

[*Prošël uže mesjac posle jubileja,*]

<i>a</i>	<i>ja</i>	<u><i>vsë</i></u>	<u><i>nikak</i></u>	<i>ne</i>	<i>na-pišu</i> _{pfv}
but	1.sg.nom	all.the.time	no.way	neg	px-write.1sg
<i>vam</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>nëm.</i>			
2pl.dat	about	3.loc.sg			

‘It has been a month since the anniversary, but I still cannot get myself to write you about it.’

‘Frustrated expectation’

- The introduction of the ‘present of frustrated expectation’ in Russian aspectology was predated by the observation of a similar use of the Lithuanian perfective present in Buch (1959).
- As in Russian, the construction typically contains a marker of continuity or duration like *vis* ‘all the time’.

[*Po Rimo ir Nijolės išvažiavimo praėjo daug laiko,*]

*o aš vis ne-pa-rašau*_{pfv}.

and 1sg.nom all.the.time neg-pfv-write.prs.1sg

[*Buvo visokių rūpesčių.*]

‘A lot of time has gone by since Rimas and Nijolė left, but I still cannot get myself to write [to them]. I’ve had all kinds of things to attend to.]

Irresultative use vs 'frustrated expectation'

- In the irresultative use, the result is not being achieved despite the actual occurrence of the runup process (a building is being built), but it does not preclude the possibility that this result will be achieved in the future.
- In a further extension, the whole event is conceived as failing to be initiated over a long period during which its initiation is expected (the writing of a letter has not even started, the runup process is reduced to having an intention to write a letter).

Dynamic modal construction

- In the absence of a specific context a dynamic modal interpretation arises, which is rendered in other languages by a modal verb.

[*Ar pertraukė skersvėjis, ar kas—Andriui suspazmavo sprandą.*]

Ne-pa-suka_{pfv} *galvos,* ***ne-pa-kečia***_{pfv} *rankos.*

neg-pfv-turn.prs.3 head.gen.sg neg-pfv-lift.prs.3 hand.gen.sg

‘[Whether it was a draught or something else—Andrius has a spasm in his neck.] He can neither turn his head nor lift his arm.

Dynamic modal construction

- The Lithuanian perfective present negates the completion of a process in the present: it refers to the state of non-achievement of a change of state.
- The reasons for this non-achievement can be construed in different ways, which is largely a matter of pragmatic inferences which can be conventionalised and constructionalised.
- One possible construal is that there are situational (participant-internal or participant-external) factors blocking the achievement of the change of state.

Dynamic modal construction

- The negative polarity requirement could, in principle, be abandoned, but the construction is nevertheless skewed towards negative polarity.
- Non-negated uses may involve approximate negators like *vos* ‘hardly or particles indicating the upper end of a possibility scale, like *dar*, literally ‘still’.

Šaukštą *dar* ***pa-keliu***_{pfv} *bet* *pats*
spoon.acc.sg still pfx-lift.prs.1sg but self.nom.sg.m

maisto ***ne-pa-si-gaminu***_{pfv}
food.gen neg-pfv-refl-cook.prs.1sg

‘I can somehow lift a spoon, but I cannot cook my own food.’

Conclusions

- Lithuanian has a weakly-grammaticalised opposition of perfective and imperfective aspect
- Imperfective verbs are generalised in the progressive use at the expense of perfective verbs
- there is a slight tendency to oust perfective verbs from non-progressive uses of the present tense (neutralisation in the habitual use and in narratives/stage directions) where perfective verbs still hold
- perfective present forms of accomplishment verbs are found in several constructionalised uses predating the emergence of the grammatical aspect

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