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STATIVE, ITERATIVE, HABITUAL: SLAVIC-SOMALI PARALLELS

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This paper examines the ways in which some of the semantic values underlying the imperfective aspect forms in Russian, a Slavic language, are conveyed in Somali, a Cushitic language. As is well known, phenomena characterizing one language can be better understood in the light of analogous data regarding another language that is typologically different and genetically distant. In addition, such confrontation allows for a better interpretation of linguistic categories on the universal level.

1. Russian

In contrast with the case in Somali, the verbal aspect in Slavic languages is a grammaticalized category, obligatory with every single occurrence of a verb form (be it finite or infinite) and expressed by the perfective/imperfective opposition marked by verbal affixes (mostly prefixes, derived from spatial prepositions, but also by suffixes).

As scholarship has established, aspectual behavior of verbs in aspect-prominent languages, such as Slavic ones, is strictly dependent on verb semantics, that is, on the lexical class of the verb[1]. The basic distinction is between change-of-state verbs (whose "natural" form is the perfective) on the one hand, and, on the other, verbs denoting homogenous situations (such as state and activity verbs that involve no change). The latter occur in the imperfective form even when they denote a past, completed and finished event,[2] thus contradicting some commonplaces about aspect, according to which, roughly speaking,

completion is expressed by the perfective, whereas the imperfective conveys a durative-continuous meaning. The following examples of Russian illustrate the above use of imperfectives for accomplished facts:

(1)

Ja	*uže*	*govorila*	*s*		*etim*	*čelovekom*
I	already	speak.PST.F-**IMPF**	with		this	man

'I have already spoken to this man'

(2)

My	*videli*	*etot*	*fil'm*	*dva*	*dnja*	*tomu*	*nazad*
we	see.PST.PL-**IMPF**	this	movie	two	days	from-this	ago

'We saw this movie two days ago'

(3)

Včera	*rebjata*	*guljali*		*a*	*potom*	*pošli*	*domoj*
yesterday	children	take-a-walk-PST.PL-**IMPF**		and then		go.PST.PL-**PERF**	home

'Yesterday children took a walk and then went home'

(4)

On	*uže*	*slyšal*	*etu*	*istoriju*
he	already	hear-PST.M-**IMPF**	this	story

'He has already heard this story'

These examples are puzzling to those who know the most "obvious" meaning of the Slavic imperfective aspect: the durative-continuous one, which corresponds to the imperfect tense in Romance languages.

In Slavic languages, the imperfective aspect is not only a "natural" form of stative and activity verbs, but it is also found when the verb expresses a repeated, habitual, or potential situation, illustrated respectively in (5-7):

(5)

Vse	*vremja*	*rebenok*	*brosal*	*igrušku*	*na pol*
all	time	child	throw-PST.M-**IMPF**	toy	on floor

'All the time the child kept throwing the toy on the floor'

(6)

Ego	*syn*	*izučaet*	*francuzskij*	*jazyk*
his	son	study.PRES.3SG-**IMPF**	French	language

'His son studies French'

(7)

Pticy   *letajut*
birds   fly.PRES.3PL-IMPF
'Birds fly'

Habitual and potential values can be considered as an abstract repetition of single events: (5) expresses repetition on the same occasion, habituality in (6) refers to the repetition that takes place on different occasions, whereas potential in (7) denotes a possible repetition. All these differences apart, semantic values underlying the predicates in (5-7) can be summarized by the same common superordinate concept: iterative.

The encoding of both activity and iterativity values with the same morphological form (cf. (1), (3), (5-7)) can be explained by the fact that either the iterative or the activity verbs convey the idea of a sum of elementary, single-action events. In addition, Slavic languages suggest the analysis of activity verbs in terms of 'inherently iterative' situations, since a limited set of activity verbs exhibits semelfactive perfective counterparts with a single-action value marked by the infix *–n-*. When referring to an iterative event, such semelfactives become activity verbs, as shown by the following examples of Russian:

(8)

SEMELFACTIVE (PERF)	ACTIVITY (IMPF)
kriknut'	'to utter a cry'
kričat'	'to shout'
machnut'	'to make a single gesture of waving'
machat'	'to wave'
mignut'	'to flicker'
migat'	'to flash intermittently'
drognut'	'to make a single motion of shivering'
drožat'	'to shiver, tremble'
skripnut'	'to make a single act of creaking'
skripet'	'to creak'
čichnut'	'to make a single act of sneezing'
čichat'	'to sneeze'
trognut'	'to make a single gesture of touching'
trogat'	'to touch'
etc.	

The semelfactives (which are available for only a limited set of activity verbs in Russian and other Slavic languages) are an explicit expression of a single, elementary act conveyed by these verbs; however, the analysis in terms of 'inherent iterativity' also holds for many other verbs of this lexical class. Accordingly, the activity of smoking (*'kurit'*) can be seen as the sum of a series of puffs on a cigarette; the activity of talking (*'govorit'*) as the sum of sentences pronounced by a person; the activity of walking (*chodit'*) as the sum of steps producing the walking, etc. Nevertheless, for conceptual reasons, some other activity verbs (such as, for example, *work*) cannot be easily represented as the sum of elementary acts.

As far as the meaning of both states and activities is concerned, the common feature is the fact that they imply no change, but at the same time imply continuity (extension) on the time axis. On the other hand, activity and iterative change-of-state verbs have in common the semantic value of repetition (which in activity verbs, as seen above, is an inherent one). A repetition, or in other words an action constantly identical to itself, can be seen from this point of view in a more abstract way, as a sum that has also an extension on the time axis, and hence is similar to a state. All the above mentioned semantic values in Slavic languages are expressed by the same aspectual imperfective form. The common denominator is their being extended on a time axis which produces different results according to the type of situation. Thus, if referring to temporally extended situations, telic verbs (including punctual verbs) can only express a repetition of events, giving rise to the meaning of iterativity. On the contrary, stative and activity verbs, as a result of extension in time of the situations they refer to, express continuity.

2. Somali

The existence of a common denominator between states, activities and iterativity is confirmed by the way they are

encoded in Somali. The strategy adopted by Somali to express the iterative meaning morphologically is stem reduplication, a highly iconic operation. The transparent character of iconicity allows for a better and more insightful understanding of the relationship between iterative and stative semantic values. As is well known, reduplication in languages is an icon of the plurality in nouns and an icon of a repeated action in verbs (see, for example, Heine 1978; Ajello 1981; Heine & Reh 1984). The latter is illustrated by the following Somali examples of iterative and habitual meaning[3]:

(9)

a. *Wuu   qurquriyay*
DECL.he   drink-one-draught-after-another.PST.3SGM
'He drank one draught after another'

b. *Wuu   labayaa*
DECL.he   fold.PRES.PROG.3SGM
'He is folding'

c. *Wuu   laalaabayaa*
DECL.he   fold.REDUPL. PRES.PROG.3SGM
'He is folding many times'

d. *Wuu   tegayaa*
DECL.he   go.PRES.PROG.3SGM
 'He is going'

e. *Wuu   tegtegaya*
DECL.he   go.REDUPL.PRES.PROG.3SGM
'He is going every time'

f. *Ninku   waa   xidhan   yahay*
man.the.SUBJ   DECL   tied   be.PRES.3SGM
'The man is tied'

g. *Ninku   waa   xidhxidhan   yahay*
man.the. SUBJ   DECL   tied.REDUPL   be.PRES.3SGM
'The man is tied in several places'

Some other examples of repeated action encoded by stem reduplication (a), as opposed to their non-reduplicated counterparts (b), are the following[4]:

(10)

a. *Wuu   qorqoraa*
DECL.he   write.REDUPL.PRES.3SGM
'He writes many times' or 'he usually writes'

b. *Wuu   qoraa*
DECL.he   write.PRES.3SGM
'He writes'

(11)

a. *Maalin walba suuqa   ayaan   dhax   warwareegaa*
day   every   market FM.I   center   wander.REDUPL.PRES.1SG
'Every day I wander at the market place'

b. *Magaala   kale   ayuu   u   wareegay*
town   different   FM.he   to   move.PST.3SGM
'He moved to another town'

(12)

a. *Halkaas ayaan   ku   noqnoqdaa   maalin   walba*
there   FM.I   to   return.REDUPL.PRES.1SG   day   every
'I go back there many times every day'

b. *Wuu   noqdaa*
DECL.he   return.PRES.3SGM
'He goes back'

(13)

a. *Halkaas   ayaan   ku   noqnoqonayaa   maanta*
there   FM.I   to   return.REDUPL.PRES.PROG.1SG   today
'I am going back there many times today'

b. *Wuu   noqonayaa*
DECL.he   return.PRES.PROG.3SGM
'He is going back'

(14)

a. *Ma   guurguurin   karo   xaaska*
NEG   move.REDUPL.NEG   can.NEG   family.the
'I cannot make the family move all the time'

b. *Xaskayga   Rooma   ayaan   u guurin   doonaa*
family.my   Rome   FM.I   to move   want.PRES.1SG
'I will make my family move to Rome'

(15)

a. *Ha   jeexjeexin   warqadda*
EXHORT   tear.REDUPL.NEG   letter.the
'Do not tear the letter into pieces'

b. *Jeex   warqadda!*
tear.IMP.2SG   letter.the
'Tear the letter!'

(16)

a. *Wax*   *ayuu*   ***doondoon**ayaa*
   thing   FM.he   search.REDUPL.PRES.PROG.3SGM
   'He is searching something everywhere (repeatedly)'

b. *Rooti*   *ayuu*   ***doon**ayaa*
   bread   FM.he   wantsPRES.PROG.3SGM
   'He wants bread'

What is interesting is that reduplication apparently loses its iconic function when used to derive stative predicates such as (17)[5]:

(17)
fur ('to open') vs. ***furfur**an* ('to be open, comunicative' – of a person)
xir ('to close') vs. ***xirxir**an* ('to be closed or linked'; also: 'to have a closed character').

Stative meaning marked by reduplication is a feature found in a number of other African languages, as observed by Heine and Reh (1984: 47): "The transition from process to state, for example, which is a widespread characteristic of Reduplication in Africa, tends to be paralleled by a change in word category: in this way, action or process verbs change into state verbs, or verbs into adjectives or nouns, e.g.: Ewe[6] *dzò* 'to leave'; *dzò-dzò* 'left, gone away (adj)'; *dzo-dzò* 'leaving, departure' "

As has been mentioned, stem reduplication, being an icon of a sum of events if referring to a verb, also underlies the idea of plurality when referring to nouns: in this respect, events can be seen as abstract objects having a temporal dimension. However, the repetition of events produces different effects according to the lexical class of the predicate. Again, what is crucial here is the telic/atelic distinction: thus, when applied to telic events, a sum of events that immediately follow each other and share the same participants produces repetition. This result is due to the fact that telic (change-of-state) events, if added together, imply an interval, since a change from p to q, in order to be immediately followed by the same event of change from p to q, has to go back to p (cf. Kamp 1979).

On the other hand, the sum of atelic events gives rise to what

Dowty (1979) defined as cumulativity (cf. Rothstein 2004). Cumulativity, as distinguished from iterativity conveyed by verbal predicates, can be compared to the difference between mass and count nouns (cf. Krifka 1998, Rothstein 2004). This means that, in contrast to telic verbs, a sum of atelic events with the same participants produces not just a sum but a new, singular event, since such a sum implies temporal adjacency of its parts, due to the lack of stages in atelic situations (cf. Rothstein 2004).

This is particularly evident in stative events, since no change takes place while the state holds (for example: *sleep*, *believe* or *sit*): the state consists of a sequence of adjacent instants, at all of which exactly the same thing occurs. Similarly, the activity verb *run* is cumulative since an event *running from 1 pm to 3 pm* can be divided into sub-events of running (for example, from 1 pm to 2 pm and from 2 pm to 3 pm), and the sum of these two sub-events still falls within the overall denotation of *run* in much the same way as the sum of two measures of *water* is still simply denoted as *water*. On the other hand, the sum of two distinct telic events such as *closing two windows* will not yield a new singular event (*closing two windows)* but will produce the final result of closing four windows.

Therefore, a sum of atelic events forms a singular homogenous entity expressing only the extension in time of an event of activity or state. This feature of atelic verbs can explain the fact that the same morphological means are selected for conveying both iterative and stative value in Somali. As we can see, not only Russian (and Slavic in general), but also Somali marks both iterative and stative meaning in the same way. In this respect, the Slavic imperfective marker (conveying the repetition of events with telic verbs on the one hand, and temporal extension with a single occurrence of stative events, on the other) corresponds to Somali stem reduplication. Such parallelism between the two languages confirms the hypothesis about a common denominator underlying the semantic values discussed above. In the first presentation of the aspect model

referred to in this paper (cf. Antinucci & Gebert 1975/76), the common denominator responsible for the imperfective marking of stative, activity and iterative meanings was indicated by an abstract semantic component of STATE. From this point of view, Somali also exhibits semantic coherence between habitual meaning (which we include under a more general label of iterative) and stative markers occurring in the habitual past tense forms. As we can see below, the habitual auxiliary selected in this grammatical paradigm is the past tense of the stative verb *jir* meaning 'stay, exist'[7]:

(18)
Wuu	*keeni*	*jiray*
DECL.he	bring	stay.PST.3SGM

'He used to bring it'

(19)
Xamar	*ayaan*	*degganaan*	*jiray*
Moqdiscio	FM.I	live	stay.PST.3SGM

'I used to live in Moqdiscio'

(20)
Waagi	*aan Xamar*	*ku nolaa jaamacadda ayaan ka shaqayn*
time.the I	Moqdiscio	in live university.the FM.I at work

jiray
stay.PST.3SGM

'When I lived in Moqdiscio I used to work at the university'

In general, stative verbs are a frequent lexical source for marking habituals in many unrelated languages of the world (cf. Bybee *et al.* 1994). The stative marker on habituals (see (13 - 15)) is a different way of marking iterativity (as a superordinate term for habitual eventuality) that Somali also encodes by stem reduplication, when a repetitive event is concerned.

The different but parallel morphological strategies chosen respectively by Russian and Somali to convey the iterative, habitual and stative values (such as the imperfective aspect marker on the one hand and reduplication and stative marker on the other) provide evidence of the semantic homogeneity underlying such values.

Notes

[1] See for example: Antinucci & Gebert (1975/76), Gebert (1991), Chung & Timberlake (1985). For a general survey, see Sasse (2002).

[2] This is not the case in Romance languages where the perfective tenses (such as Italian *passato remoto* or *passato prossimo* or French *passé composé*) can be used with any verb, regardless of its lexical class.

[3] The examples in (9) are quoted in Ajello (1981).

[4] I am indebted to Cabdallah Omar Mansuur for these examples.

[5] See A.A.V.V. (1985).

[6] Ewe is a Kwa language spoken in Togo, eastern Ghana and parts of Benin (Heine and Reh 1984).

[7] Notice that the present habitual in Somali is marked by the simple present, such as: *wuu tegaa* ('he goes'), as opposed to the continuous form: *wuu tegayaa* ('he is going').

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