

Aspect in Hindi-Urdu and the indeterminacy of future

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This paper explores the syntax-semantics of aspect in Hindi-Urdu by focusing on two puzzles about the distribution of perfective and habitual morphology.

Puzzle 1: Aspectual morphology is obligatorily required in tensed clauses. However, imperatives and simple future clauses can never host aspectual morphology. This is shown for the perfective aspect in (1).

- (1) a. karan-ne ek khat likh-*(aa) hai
Karan-ERG one letter write-PFV.M.SG be.PRS
'Karan has written a letter.' Tensed clause
- b. ek khat likh-(*aa)-o
one letter write-PFV-IMP.2N
'Write a letter!' Imperative
- c. karan ek khat likh-(*aa)-e-gaa
Karan.NOM one letter write-PFV-SBJV.3SG-FUT.M.SG
'Karan will write a letter.' Simple future clause

Puzzle 2: A verb bearing aspectual morphology can stand alone without a tensed auxiliary. Crucially, such truncated structures lack a future interpretation. We demonstrate this via the perfective aspect in (2).

- (2) karan-ne pichhle hafte/#agle hafte ek khat likh-aa
Karan-ERG last week/next week one letter write-PFV.M.SG
'Karan wrote a letter last week/#next week.'

Assuming a tri-partition of the clause into a V domain mapped to events, a T-domain mapped to situations, and a C-domain mapped to propositions, we argue that aspectual morphology in Hindi-Urdu is hosted on a head labeled Asp_{hu}^* , which has two properties: (i) Asp_{hu}^* marks a transition from event descriptions to situation descriptions - it takes an event description as its complement and builds a situation description which encloses that event description and also provides a time and a world parameter, and (ii) Asp_{hu}^* encodes a uniqueness presupposition - it is defined only if the situation it creates is a unique situation.

Together, these properties explain both the ban on aspectual morphology in future-oriented structures (i.e. imperatives and simple future clauses), as well as the availability of truncated structures, which cannot be future-oriented.