How perfect is the perfect of evidentiality: Evidence from Georgian

1. Languages all over the world make extensive use of perfect morphology to encode indirect source of information (Aikhevald 2004: 112-116, Johanson&Utas 2000). These include Albanian, Bagvalal, Dogon, Komi, Turkish, and Udmurt, to mention only a few. Izvorski (1997) introduces this phenomenon as Perfect of Evidentiality (PE) and, based on Bulgarian, makes several important claims that are supposed to hold cross-linguistically.

1.1. First, according to the view advocated by Izvorski (1997), PE languages actually possess two superficially identical forms that differ distributionally and semantically. One form is a genuine perfect and shows restrictions peculiar to perfect such as incompatibility with certain predicates and adverbials (*yesterday, at 5 o'clock*). Another form is an indirect evidential that only parasitizes on perfect morphology and imposes no aspectual restrictions.

1.2. Second, Izvorski predicts that the non-perfect form is a general indirect evidential in the sense of Willet 1988. Such an evidential is supposed to be intrinsically ambiguous between inferential (the speaker infers that p) and reported (the speaker was told that p) readings with the disambiguation provided solely by context.

2. I argue that these claims do not receive empirical support from some PE languages and draw on my fieldwork data from Georgian (Kartvelian) to challenge Izvorski's theory.

2.1. Contra Izvorski, Georgian perfect (described as having an evidential flavour by Boeder 2000, Topadze 2011) has aspectual restrictions even when used as an evidential. For instance, unlike Bulgarian, it is incompatible with aorist-loving adverbials:

(1)   *minaxixart   / gnaxe   guʃin   / ori   k'vir-is c'in
        see.1SG.2SG.PERF   / see.1SG.2SG.AOR   yesterday   / two   week-DAT forward
'I (#apparently) saw you yesterday / two weeks ago.'

Moreover, the perfect form *minaxixart*, absolutely grammatical without adverbials, yields an evidential "black out" reading 'Apparently, I have seen you {and I do not remember that}' but not the genuine perfect reading 'I have seen you', which, again, shows that there is one form with both aspectual and evidential semantics.

2.2. I argue that, contra Izvorski, the availability of inferential or reported reading in Georgian depends on grammar, not only on context. Namely, it is the Aktionsart of a predicate that determines whether inferential reading is possible. Reported reading is always good regardless of the Aktionsart (Vendler's classification for Georgian adopted from Holisky 1979). Consider the following example:

(2)   maria-s   damxrtʃvala   / sul   ʃeumtʃamia   satʃmel-i/
        Maria-DAT   drown.3SG.PERF /all   eat.3SG.PERF   food-NOM/
        / ucek'via   / udzinia
        dance.3SG.PERF   / sleep.3SG.PERF
'*I conclude that* Maria drowned / ate all the food/ #was dancing/ #was sleeping.'
'*I was told that* Maria drowned / ate all the food/ was dancing/ was sleeping.'

For telic verbs 'drown' (accomplishment) and 'eat' (achievement), both readings are possible. For atelic verbs 'dance' (activity) and 'sleep' (stative), inferential reading is not available, although Izvorzki predicts they should be.

I propose that this restriction follows naturally from the two things.

1) Cross-linguistically, inference comes in two flavours (Willet 1988): visual evidence based on results vs. inference based on reasoning and other mental constructs. In Georgian inference should be visual, hence the following contrast:

(3)   chem-s   megobr-eb-s   eldorado   up'ovniat
        my-DAT   friend-PL-DAT   Eldorado   find.3PL.PERF
'*I conclude that* my friends found Eldorado.' {They sent me a letter, I see the stamp / #They did not return from the trip in search of Eldorado. I infer that they made it to there.}

The fact that only one class of inferential readings is possible is also left unexplained by Izvoski's theory that seemingly assumes that the whole range should be always accessible.

2) Perfects cross-linguistically might have several interpretations: universal (*I have always paid my taxes*) and existential, further divided into experiential (*I have tried yoga a few times*) and resultative (*The snow has melted by now*). Different actional classes go well with different varieties (Pancheva 2004): telic verbs prefer existential interpretation, atelic prefer universal.

So in Georgian, visual inferential reading requires a resulting state with a visible result, and a resultative interpretation of perfect is allowed for telic predicates only, which is the source of observed restrictions.

3. Georgian PE does not fit into Izvorki's model: it preserves aspectual restrictions and the grammar restricts the inferential reading (A similar observation is made by Şener (2011) for Turkish, though actual grammatical factors are different from those in Georgian). Moreover, in all the examples above it is the case that p for which the speaker has indirect evidence took place in the past, so a theory should incorporate this fact as well.

Georgian data seem to support Koev's (2011) analysis of Bulgarian PE. The core idea of this analyis is the temporal distance between when p took place and when the speaker learned this p. Namely, learning should always happen later, which entails indirect evidence for p.

It is very appealing to extend this proposal to Georgian. However, it does not straightforwardly account for the following puzzle. When applied to individual-level predicates (a subclass of statives) such as 'know' or 'be beautiful', Georgian PE yields a mirative reading:

(4) nino-s   codnia   kartul-i!
     Nino-DAT   know-3SG.PERF   Georgian-NOM!

'Oh, Nino knows Georgian!' {She speaks Georgian to me and I am surprised.}

(expected '*I was told that* Nino knew Georgian' is available but less preferred)

Here both the past requirement and the indirect evidence requirement disappear leaving the pure mirative, which is problematic for a theory that requires getting to know p occuring later than p and entails p was not wintnessed by the speaker. It should be noted that this is not the only case where mirative shows up. Georgian PE often has an optional mirative effect with other predicates as well, adding a flavour of surprise to some past p that the speaker has indirect evidence for. But the pure non-evidential mirative (witnessed by the speaker) is possible with individual-level predicates only.

4. The question of perfect-evidential overlap is heavily data-driven, and it is desirable to have a theory addressing reasons of this overlap. One view on PE (Izvorski 1997) says that this is just an evidential that uses perfect morphology without being an actual perfect. I challenge universality of this theory and propose an alternative view based on Georgian.

Georgian PE presents a case of interplay between actional clasess, interpretations of perfect and semantics of evidential and provides a puzzle with a surprising mirative effect for individual-level predicates. I argue that both aspectual and evidential component participate in composition of PE, and neither of these components can be "turned off". It explains why restrictions associated with present perfect show up in the evidential use of the form because there is no evidential use separate from the perfect use. This new data demand a uniform theory that is capable to account for both non-perfect PE of Bulgarian type and perfect PE of Georgian type and add fuel to the debate about the nature of PE.

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