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Ambiguous Verb Sequences in Transeurasian Languages and Beyond

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Preface

This publication is based on papers presented at the workshop *Ambiguous [V + V] sequences in Turkic and other Transeurasian languages* held in Astana at the 19th International Conference on Turkish Linguistics (ICTL). This ICTL, the first to be held in Central Asia, was organized at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences of Nazarbayev University, August 17–19, 2018, under the supervision of Professor Uli Schamiloglu. Earlier conferences had taken place in Turkey and in various other countries, but never in another Turkic country. Thirty-six years after the first ICTL was held in Berkeley in 1982, the conference took place for the first time in the middle of the Turkic-speaking world, in Kazakhstan.

This new geographical setting inspired us, the organizers of the workshop, to widen the range of the languages covered. We accordingly invited papers on ambiguity in verb sequences in Turkic and other Transeurasian languages. The response of the linguistic community was positive and resulted in highly rewarding presentations and discussions. The linguistic traditions dealing with Turkic, Japanese, Tungusic and Korean languages are disparate. The participants at the workshop made an effort to interpret the data according to Lars Johanson's theoretical framework and terminology in order to ensure the compatibility of the descriptions. The outcome, as presented in this volume, shows that setting a common frame is rewarding, but adapting to it can be demanding. We hope that this attempt will be followed up in Transeurasian linguistics.

We would like to thank the organizers of the 19th ICTL. We also wish to express our thanks to the contributors to this volume and to the external reviewers, who generously spent time evaluating and commenting on the papers. We are grateful to Anju Saxena, Stig Eliasson, and Nurettin Demir for valuable advice and to Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskaps-Samfundet i Uppsala for financial support.

Special thanks go to Mr Everett Thiele for correcting the English in two-thirds of the papers.

The editors

Introduction

Éva Á. Csató, Lars Johanson and Birsel Karakoç

Ambiguity of verb sequences

Turkic morphology, which is known for its exceptional regularity, presents numerous structurally ambiguous forms that cause intricate problems for morphological, syntactic and semantic analysis. This volume deals with cases of systematic ambiguity of contiguous verb sequences, focusing on the relation between overt syntactic and morphological properties, the types of ambiguities, and the possibility to disambiguate the sequences through different accentuation patterns in Transeurasian languages—with a focus on Turkic—and beyond. The context and the broader syntactic environment may, of course, resolve the ambiguity. This will only marginally be studied in the contribution. See however the discussion in Danko (this volume).

The topic of ambiguity of verb sequences was first comprehensively addressed in a dissertation on a Turkish dialect written by Nurettin Demir at the University of Mainz in 1993 under the supervision of Lars Johanson. In this study Demir applied Johanson's theoretical framework for describing the viewpoint-aspect and actionality meanings of Turkish verb sequences composed of a lexical verb and an auxiliary. The use of such postverbal constructions is rather limited in standard Turkish, but, as illustrated in Demir's dissertation, is richly represented in certain dialects. The nomadic Turkish dialect of the village of Aliefendi has highly complex postverbal constructions marking either viewpoint aspect or actionality modification depending on the accentuation pattern.

During the last two decades, a number of papers have dealt with different types of ambiguity of verb sequences. In a monograph on Noghay (2005), Birsel Karakoç further widened the potential range of ambiguity to also include various viewpoint-aspect readings of verb sequences.

Ambiguity of verb sequences is structural and arises when two or more different analyses can be assigned to one and the same sequence. For instance, the expression (1) is structurally ambiguous because it can be analysed in two ways: (i) as a sequence of two predicates describing two consecutive events (pluripredicative reading), or (ii) as one predicate consisting of a lexical verb and a following auxiliary verb (monopredicative reading).

- (1) Turkish
Al-di git-ti.
take-DI.PST3SG go-DI.PST3SG
(i) 'X took (it) and went.' versus (ii) 'X took (it) (definitely).'

Example (2) is structurally ambiguous between assigning (i) actionality, or (ii) a viewpoint aspect meaning to the auxiliary verb.

- (2) Aliefendi dialect of Turkish
Koş-up dur-ur.
 run-B.CONV stand-AOR3SG
 (i) ‘X continues to run.’ (ii) ‘X is running.’

In Turkic, the structural ambiguity of verb sequences is disambiguated by different accentuation patterns. The case studies in this volume give detailed descriptions of ambiguity and disambiguation in different Transeurasian languages and for the sake of a broader perspective, also in a Tibetic language.

Contiguous verb sequences

The term “verb sequence” is used here as a non-technical term to refer to any contiguous sequence of two or more verbs. The sequence may be composed of two lexical verbs or a lexical and one (or more) auxiliary verbs. There are no restrictions on what classes of lexical verbs that occur in verb sequences. We will only deal with sequences that can be ambiguous, i.e. in which the non-first component of the sequence is a lexical verb that is also used as an auxiliary verb grammaticalized as an actionality, modality or viewpoint-aspect marker. Ambiguity arises only in this case. Non-contiguous verb sequences, in case with a limited set of intervening particles, do not manifest any ambiguity of this type and will not be dealt with.

The class of auxiliary verbs grammaticalized as actionality markers is restricted. The lexical source verbs, for instance, are motion verbs meaning ‘to go’, ‘to come’, ‘to go away’, ‘to go out’, ‘to proceed’, postural verbs meaning ‘to stand’, ‘to remain’, ‘to sit’, ‘to lie’, phasal verbs such as ‘to begin’, ‘to finish’, and verbs denoting various activities such as ‘to put’, ‘to place’, ‘to hold’, ‘to throw’, ‘to send’, ‘to give’, ‘to take’. The verbs grammaticalized as marking modality include ‘to know’ (Turkish *bil-*), ‘to take’ (Karaim *al-*).

Thus, we distinguish between pluripredicative verb sequences describing two events and monopredicative verb sequences describing a single event. We refer to the latter as postverbal constructions, where the second component—belonging to a limited set of semantic classes—is an actionality/modality modifier that can be further grammaticalized as a viewpoint-aspect operator.

Grammaticalization

Verb sequences serve as targets of typical Transeurasian grammaticalization processes that result in postverbal constructions. Auxiliary verbs grammaticalized as actionality modifiers can be further grammaticalized as viewpoint-aspect operators. Grammaticalization often results in ambiguity between pluripredicative, actionality, and viewpoint-aspect readings because the grammaticalized items do not demon-

strate any special morphological or syntactic properties that disambiguate different readings (see Johanson 1995). Accentuation patterns may, however, be able to resolve ambiguities.

Actionality modification: Phase specification

Postverbal constructions are typically used for phase specification, highlighting an inherent phase of the actional phrase, specifying it qualitatively or quantitatively. The basic classificatory criterion is transformativity. An actional content is transformative if it has a natural evolutionary turning point, a crucial initial or final limit. A nontransformative actional content does not imply any such limit and is therefore homogeneous. Postverbal constructions can recategorize the internal phase structure, specifying one inherent phase of the action (Johanson 2000: 66–76). Connotations of durativity, continuity, intensity, suddenness, involuntariness or unintentionality, etc., are common effects of these functions.

Internal phase structure: Distinctions

Following internal phase structures can be distinguished (Johanson 2000: 58ff.):

Internal Phase Structure	The actional content is conceptualized
Transformative [+t]	as implying transformation
Finitransformative	as implying final transformation
[+mom]	with a salient cursus
[-mom]	without a salient cursus
Initiotransformative	as implying initial transformation
Nontransformative [-t]	without transformation
[+dyn]	as dynamic
[-dyn]	as static

This scheme allows five basic categories to be distinguished:

- (i) momentaneous finitransformatives, e.g. ‘to explode’:
Test: **It exploded and is still exploding.*
- (ii) non-momentaneous finitransformatives, e.g. ‘to reach’:
Test: *To reach the house in two hours* vs. **To reach the house for two hours* and **It reached the house and is still reaching the house.*
- (iii) initiotransformatives Turkish, e.g. *otur-* ‘to sit down and sit’:
Test: ‘has V-ed and is still V-ing’, e.g. *Oturdu ve hala oturuyor* ‘X sat down and is still sitting.’
- (iv) dynamic nontransformatives, e.g. ‘to run’:
Test: *runs fast.*
- (v) non-dynamic nontransformatives, e.g. ‘to know’:
Test: **Knows fast.*