Nouns affect aspect syntactically
Inner aspect, aspectual affect of nouns, Slavic, English, syntax-semantics interface

Since Verkuyl (1972), we have known that there is an aspectual influence of the noun (AIN) on the VP. The data are typically presented as in (1a) where with a q(uality)DP (following Borer 2005) internal argument, the for-adverbial is infelicitous.

\[(1)\]
\[a.\] John ate a pizza #for 10 mins.
\[b.\] John ate a pizza for 10 mins., but didn’t finish it.

However, it has been sporadically noted that there is a felicitous reading of a sentence like (1a), in which the pizza is not entirely eaten (see Alsina 1999, Jackendoff 1996, Piñón 2008, Smollet 2005, Tenny 1987, Verkuyl 1993), as in (1b), an atelic reading. This observation has important consequences for the correct characterization of the AIN. In particular, I show that 1. The aspectual influence of [q] vs. non-[q]DPs is asymmetrical; and 2. That Slavic, which lacks the AIN, shows the same aspectual asymmetry as well. Finally, I argue that the aspectual asymmetry is best handled in the syntax.

Restricting the discussion to incremental theme verbs, a [q]DP internal argument can appear with both a telic (1a) and an atelic VP (1b). In contrast, as noted in Piñón (2008), non-[q]DPs never appear with telic VPs, illustrated in (2), where the in-adverbial cannot express the amount of time that elapsed before the end of the event.

\[(2)\]
John ate pizza #in 10 mins.

The data in (1) and (2) illustrate the asymmetrical influence of [q] vs. non-[q]DPs: [q]DP internal arguments appear with telic and atelic VPs both, while non-[q]DPs appear only with atelic VPs.

Slavic also shows an aspectual asymmetry. Although technically speaking Slavic lacks the AIN, it shows the inverse, an aspectual influence of the predicate on the noun, as has been observed (Borer 2005, Filip 2000, Krifka 1992). More concretely, with telic VPs, only a [q]DP interpretation of the internal argument is available, illustrated in (3) by Czech.

\[(3)\]
Ota vypil vino. [Krifka 1992:49]
Ota drank the wine/*wine (perfective)

In contrast to telic VPs, as Borer (2005 and references therein) discusses extensively, atelic VPs allow for both a [q]DP and a non-[q]DP interpretation, illustrated by Czech in (4a) and (4b) respectively.

\[(4)\]
a. Pil\(^3\) vino, co mu jeho neunavny hostitel stale doleval. [Borer 2005: 164]
drank.3SG wine that …
“He drank (of) the wine that his tireless host kept pouring.”
b. Psal\(^5\) pet dopisu.
wrote.3SG five letters

Consider the resulting picture when treating the aspectual asymmetry in terms of (il)licit combinations of (a)telic VPs & (non-[q])DPs, as in (5).

\[(5)\]
a. Atelic VP & [q]DP
b. Atelic VP & non-[q]DP
c. Telic VP & [q]DP
d.* Telic VP & non-[q]DP

It becomes immediately apparent that both Slavic and English show the same aspectual asymmetries, even though they show the inverse directionality of aspectual influence. The conclusion: aspectual asymmetry is independent of directionality of aspectual influence.

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of space, I simply mention here—but will explicate the details of—two prominent semantic proposals, which cannot account for the combination in (5a). In concrete, Verkuyl (1993) has difficulty due to his *plus principal*, and Krifka’s (1989) mereological approach also encounters problems since quantized DPs cannot give rise to an atelic VPs.

In contrast, by adopting a syntactic approach like Borer (1994, 2005), the patterns fall out naturally. This is illustrated in (6a-d), a reinterpretation of the patterns in (5a-d) in Borer’s syntactic terms.

(6)  
   a. \[ [\text{AspP Asp}] \quad [\text{qDP}] \]
   b. \[ [\text{AspP Asp}] \quad \text{non-[q]DP} \]
   c. \[ [\text{AspP [q]DP Asp}] \quad [\text{qDP}] \]
   d. * \[ [\text{AspP [non-[q]DP Asp]}] \quad \text{non-[q]DP} \]

A [q]DP can appear with an atelic VP, as in (6a), because it need not move to Spec,AspP. A non-[q]DP does not establish any relation with AspP, thus the atelic VP in (6b). In (6c), the [q]DP moves to Spec,AspP and gives rise to the configuration that is interpreted as telic. (6d) is ruled out in Borer (2005) because the non-[q]DP does not have the relevant feature to check AspP (i.e. assign range), while in Borer (1994) the non-[q]DP semantically incorporates precluding that configuration.

Given the current syntactic and semantic approaches, syntactic accounts appear to better handle the AIN. What then of the directionality of aspectual influence, since it is independent of the aspectual asymmetry? I briefly suggest that it may be a morphological property.

Selected references:


MacDonald, J.E. 2008 The domain of aspectual interpretation. LI 38.1. 128-147.


