

Tense (Mis)matches Between Verbs and Obliques in Malagasy

In the Austronesian language Malagasy, spatial deictic adverbs, certain PPs such as those headed by *amin* ‘at/with’, and the operator *aiza* ‘where?’ (referred to collectively as ‘obliques’) can take the prefix *t-*. When the oblique functions as the main predicate of the clause, *t-* appears to mark past tense (1b) while absence of *t-* marks present tense (1a). When the oblique is contained within a verbal predicate, the distribution of *t-* depends on type of oblique relation, and on the tense of the verb (past, present, or future). When the oblique denotes an instrument, manner, or spatio-temporal location, *t-* is required when the verb is in the past tense (2b), and disallowed otherwise ((2a) gives a present tense example). A different pattern obtains when the oblique phrase expresses the goal/endpoint of a motion verb: When the verb is non-past, *t-* is disallowed (3a/4a). When the verb is in the past, *t-* may be present or absent, with a difference in interpretation. Consider (3b) and (3c): With (3b) it is assumed that the woman has since left the house, while (3c) implies that she is still there (e.g., (3c) might be used to answer the question “Where is the woman?”). Similarly with (4b/c): (4b) is used if the speaker assumes that the children are no longer at school, while (4c) is used if s/he assumes that they are at school now, or are on their way. In general, goal obliques in past tense predicates are unmarked if the event took place in the recent past, such that the theme is presumably still at the goal, or has not yet reached it; otherwise they carry *t-*.

My account of these patterns builds on the following assumptions: (a) I assume (following Zagona 1990; Stowell 1995, 1996) that the tense head T is a two-place predicate which orders the time of the event denoted by the clause with respect to some reference time (in main clauses, the utterance time), e.g., PAST orders the event time after the reference time. The event time is encoded by a phrase of category EP (*event phrase*, cf. Travis 1994), which contains VP and binds the verb’s temporal argument, and is in turn selected as the complement of T. A second (null) EP, binding the reference time, merges in SpecTP. (b) I assume that goal obliques are small clause predicates generated in the complement of V, whereas instrumental/locative/manner obliques merge outside of VP. Goal small clauses function as delimiters of telic predicates, much as resultative AP small clauses do: they express the state/location resulting from an event of change. In its capacity as a delimiter, a goal small clause introduces its own temporal argument (bound within its own EP, selected as the complement of V). This argument expresses the time at which the theme occupies the endpoint location.

Telic predicates thus contain two temporal arguments, T_1 and T_2 , where T_1 is associated with the change event and T_2 with the resulting state/location, and the two are construed (perhaps mediated by an abstract ordering predicate) such that the endpoint of T_1 is aligned with (or defined as) the starting point of T_2 . Goal obliques and other resultatives overtly realize the state/location at T_2 . In these terms, the distribution of the *t-* prefix in (3) and (4) can be expressed as follows: the oblique is marked with *t-* when T_2 properly precedes the utterance time, and unmarked when T_2 does not precede the utterance time.

In the spirit of Stowell’s treatment of English tense morphology, I argue that *t-* is a past polarity item, licensed in the scope of the PAST tense predicate, while the covert counterpart of *t-* (required in non-past clauses) is an anti-polarity item which must be outside the scope of PAST. This accounts straightforwardly for the pattern in (2)—and in (1), if we assume these sentences contain a null tense head. As for (3) and (4): In (3b) and (4b), both the verb and the oblique are within the scope of PAST, such that T_1 and T_2 both properly precede the reference time—i.e., the change event and resulting state are both construed as over: the theme reached the goal and is now no longer there. (3c) and (4c) receive a treatment similar to Stowell’s treatment of the ‘double access’ reading of present-under-past sentences such as *John said that Bill is sick* (cf. Enç 1987): Here the oblique is unmarked, and so must appear outside the scope of PAST. I assume that an unpronounced copy of the embedded EP (which binds T_2) merges in a position outside TP to satisfy this requirement. As a result, T_2 is interpreted as following (by defining the endpoint for) T_1 , but not properly preceding the reference time—i.e., the change event is over, but the resulting state is not: the theme has reached the goal and is still there, or is currently on the way to the goal. This gives us the ‘recent past’ construal associated with tense mismatching. The impossibility of tense mismatching in the case of (2) is accounted for with the assumption that instrumental, locative, and manner obliques do not introduce a separate temporal argument, but share their temporal argument with the verb.

- (1) a. **Any** anatin' ny ala ny gidro
 there inside Det forest Det lemur
 "The lemur is in the forest"
- b. **T-any** anatin' ny ala ny gidro
t-there inside Det forest Det lemur
 "The lemur was in the forest"
- (2) a. Mandidy mofo (***t-amin'**) ny antsy i Naivo
 cut bread *t*-with Det knife Det Naivo
 "Naivo is cutting bread with the knife"
- b. N-andidy mofo ***(t-amin'**) ny antsy i Naivo
 Pst-cut bread *t*-with Det knife Det Naivo
 "Naivo cut bread with the knife"
- (3) a. Miditra (***t-ao**) an-trano ny vehivavy
 enter *t*-in.there Obl-house Det woman
 "The woman is going into the house"
- b. N-iditra **t-ao** an-trano ny vehivavy
 Pst-enter *t*-in.there Obl-house Det woman
 "The woman went into the house"
- c. N-iditra **ao** an-trano ny vehivavy
 Pst-enter in.there Obl-house Det woman
 "The woman has gone into the house" [*recent past*]
- (4) a. Alefan' ny vehivavy (***t-any**) am-pianarana ny ankizy
 send Det woman *t*-there Obl-school Det children
 "The woman is sending the children to school"
- b. N-alefan' ny vehivavy **t-any** am-pianarana ny ankizy
 Pst-send Det woman *t*-there Obl-school Det children
 "The woman sent the children to school"
- c. N-alefan' ny vehivavy **any** am-pianarana ny ankizy
 Pst-send Det woman there Obl-school Det children
 "The woman has sent the children to school" [*recent past*]

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