

On States and Events: the case of non-verbal predication

This talk focuses on the aspectual distinction between States and Events and its manifestations in Romance languages, with particular attention to Spanish. The main goal of this study is to establish a satisfactory limit between these two aspectual classes, by answering two main questions: (i) what is an Event (and as a consequence, a State)? (ii) How is this distinction encoded in grammar?

The need for this study derives from the puzzling (and long-standing) observation that [dynamism], as any other equivalent criterion (Vendler 1957; Kenny 1963; Comrie 1976; a.o.), is not a relevant primitive of eventivity, since there are predicates that behave as Events despite they are non-dynamic, i.e. static (Dowty 1979; Maienborn 2005, 2007, 2011; Fábregas & Marín, ms.; a.o.). I observe that, once we break with [dynamism], we reach a State/Event distribution that is equivalent to the Individual-Level/Stage-Level distinction (Milsark 1974; Carlson 1977), whose understanding, in fact, represents another big unknown for the research on inner aspect (see Fernald 2000; Fábregas 2012).

I put forward the hypothesis that the State/Event and the Individual/Stage distinctions are one and the same thing (see also Hoekstra 1992), and that the difference between the two classes rests merely on the lack or the presence of inner aspect (also Silvagni 2015), as stated in (1).

- (1) States = ILPs = property-descriptive predicates: lack of inner aspect
Events = SLPs = situation-descriptive predicates: presence of inner aspect

Moreover, basing on the concept of ‘event’ adopted in modern (post-Einsteinian/Minkowskian) physics and philosophy, where reality is taken as a 4D continuum (3 Space + 1 Time dimensions), I propose that the aspectual primitive of eventivity is a ‘Spacetime point’, which I label as [Stage] (also Silvagni 2016).

In order to find out how such a [Stage] primitive (and, thus, the State / Event distinction) is encoded in grammar, I focus on non-verbal predication, and more in particular, on the Spanish copular alternation (*ser/estar*). I empirically show that [Stage] is a formal feature (in the sense of Zeijlstra 2008, 2014), which is encoded in Event predicates (that is, SLPs) as an uninterpretable instance [uS], and that Eventive (or SL) structures are derived by an agreement operation between a predicate and an Asp head endowed with an [iS] feature, which is realized as *estar* in the case of Spanish.

The study provides a more accurate understanding of the State/Event distinction and, at the same time, the Individual/Stage contrast. Additionally, it constitutes a detailed analysis of non-verbal predication and copular alternation in Spanish, which can offer a comprehensive explanation of typical controversial phenomena, such as coercion and category-specific restrictions on the distribution of *ser* and *estar*.

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