

Continuous Aspect in Nsyilxcn (Okanagan Salish)

John Lyon

University of British Columbia – Okanagan

Nsyilxcn (a.k.a. Okanagan, ISO: 639-3) is a Southern Interior Salish language spoken in south-central British Columbia, and the northern interior of Washington State. There are approximately 81 fluent elder speakers in Canada (FPCC 2022).

This paper examines the semantics of ‘continuous aspect’, which I argue constitutes an outer layer of inclusion aspect, further modifying the temporal sub-interval or super-interval semantics introduced at the level of (im)perfectivity (Kratzer 1998). Two continuous aspects have been described (A. Mattina 1993, N. Mattina 1996): A prefix *s-* yields a ‘perfect continuous’ (1a), meaning “something like the English perfect, with present relevance” (A. Mattina 1993:12), while a prefix *sc-* yields a ‘continuous’ (1b), described as a “situation in progress.” (N. Mattina 1996:61). A suffixal portion *-x* occurs with both (and surfaces as *-mix* with inherently unstressed stems). I argue that continuative prefixes are compositional, and contain (null) perfective and *c-* imperfective markers, as supported by their interpretation with respect to punctual adverbials (1).

- (1) a. ła? c-n?ułx^w Hailey, kn **s- \emptyset -nik-x** t spicən .
 when CISL-enter Hailey 1SG.SUBJ CONT-PFV-dance-MID+CONT OBL rope
 When Hailey came in, I *had already* cut the rope.
 DM Comment: Or it could mean you were cutting the rope when she walked in.
- b. ła? c-n?ułx^w Hailey, kn **s-c-nik-x** t spicən .
 when CISL-enter Hailey 1SG.SUBJ CONT-IPFV-dance-MID+CONT OBL rope
 When Hailey came in, I was (still) cutting a rope.

Unlike base imperfectives (2a) however, continuatives (2b) do not have habitual readings, only in-progress readings.

- (2) a. kn **c-tr'q-ám** kn $\text{ła? sk}^w\text{ək}^w\text{iy}m\text{ə}l\text{t}$.
 1SG.SUBJ IPFV-get.kicked-MID 1SG.SUBJ when child
 I danced when I was younger.
- b. #kn **s-c- \emptyset -tr'q-mix** kn $\text{ła? sk}^w\text{ək}^w\text{iy}m\text{ə}l\text{t}$.
 1SG.SUBJ CONT-IPFV-/PFV-get.kicked-MID+CONT 1SG.SUBJ when child
 #I danced (continuously) when I was younger.

I suggest that continuative *s-...-(mi)x* enforces an in-progress reading of an imperfective predicate by introducing an atomicity requirement on a super-interval ϵ of the run-time of the event (ATOM(ϵ), 3). This approach utilizes components of Alexyenko’s (2018) analysis of imperfectivity.

$$(3) \llbracket s\text{-}\dots\text{-(mi)x}_{\text{CONT}} \rrbracket = \lambda P_{\langle s, i, t \rangle} \lambda t \exists e. [P(e)(t) \wedge \exists \epsilon [\tau(e) \subseteq_{\text{nf}} \tau(\epsilon) \wedge P(\epsilon) \wedge \text{ATOM}(\epsilon)]]$$

With perfectives, the semantics in (3) introduce an ambiguity: Assuming that perfectives are defined in terms of $\tau(e) \subseteq t$ (Kratzer 1998), and given that continuativity requires $\tau(e) \subseteq \tau(\epsilon)$ (3), $\tau(\epsilon)$ and t remain crucially unordered with respect to one another. In case $\tau(\epsilon) \subseteq t$, a completive reading emerges, or in case $t \subseteq \tau(\epsilon)$, an in-progress reading emerges. This ambiguity is borne out by the data, in terms of speakers judgements (see DM’s comment in 1a) and a tendency for fluent

speakers to ‘drop’ imperfective *c-* for in-progress readings. Overall, this analysis captures not only the absence of habitual readings in continuatives built on imperfective predicates (1b,2b), but also the aspectual ambiguity seen in perfective continuatives (1a). Comparisons with the English perfect (Bertrand et al 2022) remain an area of ongoing research.

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