

Child non-finite clauses and the mood-aspect connection:

Evidence from Child Greek

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1. Introduction.

This paper looks at the role of aspect and mood in first language development and their interaction with finiteness.

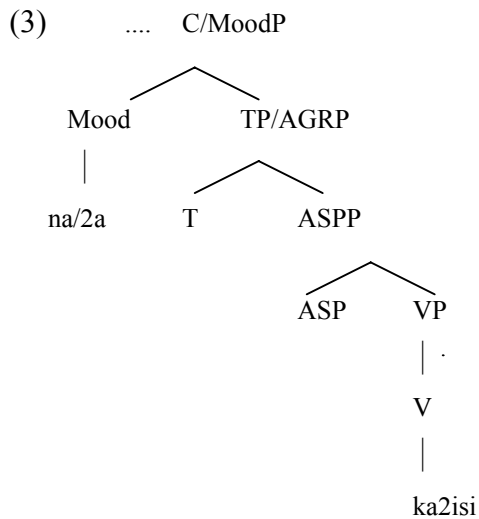
In a number of child languages non-finite verbs appear to be licensed in root contexts. The most well known case of this is the 'root infinitives' (RIs) of French and the various V2 languages, illustrated in (1a,b). Another example is provided by Greek - a language without an infinitival form. Young Greek children produce a clause type, illustrated in (1c), that shares the essential features of RIs: (i) it is (arguably) non-finite, as indicated by a lack of productive subject -verb agreement; (ii) it has a modal or irrealis meaning expressing desires, needs, or intentions with respect to some eventuality; (iii) it is restricted to eventive predicates; and (iv) - a property that pertains specifically to Greek – the verb is always marked as perfective (cf. Hoekstra & Hyams 1998; Hyams to appear, Stephany 1981, Varlokosta et al. 1998).

- (1) a. Michel dormir
Michel sleep-inf
- b. Papa ook boot maken
Papa boat make-inf.
'P must make a boat/I want P to build a boat'
- c. Ego katiti (=ka2isi)
I sit-3rd sing. perf.
'I will/want to sit'

In both Greek and the RI languages, the non-finite clauses co-occur with finite clauses and

person inflection (-i) that occurs even with non- 3rd person subjects (cf. 1c). In the adult grammar the verb in modal contexts (e.g. *ka2isi* in (2b)) agrees with the subject in person and number. The null modal analysis is also rendered implausible by the fact that during this stage Greek children never use overt modals. The analysis that we will propose below incorporates the central interpretive property of the null modal analysis, viz. that the Greek clause (like RIs) has a modal interpretation, while also deriving the non-finiteness of these clauses.

In adult Greek, modal/future sentences have the structure in (3), where the modal or future particle (*na/2a*, respectively) licenses Mood (Roussou 2000 and others).



I propose that the Greek child's RI analogue, which we henceforth refer to as the 'bare perfective', involves the projection of an active MoodP that is licensed by the perfective aspect feature in the verb. Iatridou (2000), among others, has noted that the past tense feature can be construed temporally or modally, the modal interpretation exemplified in counterfactual wishes or conditionals as in (4).

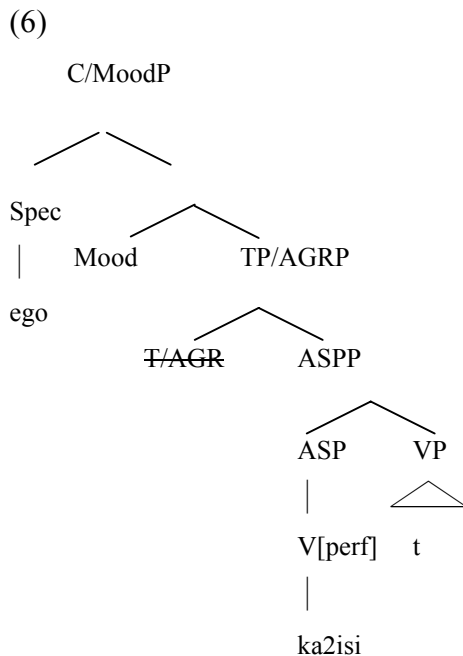
- (4) a. I wish I were/lived in Italy now.
 b. If Michael took driving lessons now, he could use the car this summer.

Translating this observation into the syntactic model I assume, this means that the past tense feature can license either TP or MoodP. My proposal is that aspectual features also have this dual function. More specifically, I assume that under appropriately local conditions, the perfective feature on the verb (Fperf) can license MoodP.

The locality condition I adopt is adapted from Chomsky's (1995) Minimal Link Condition given in (5).

- (5) K attracts F if F is the closest feature that can enter into a checking relation with a feature in K.

In child Greek, Mood attracts [Fperf] in the verb. It follows that there can be no features intervening between Mood and the verb and hence that T/AGR must be unspecified. Thus, the structure of the early Greek bare perfective is given in (6).



It is probably not coincidental that the past feature and the perfective feature both "match" Mood in the sense relevant to feature checking and hence are both potential licensers

since perfectivity and pastness share a semantic core (cf. Demirache and Uribe-Extebarria 1996 and Shirai and Anderson 1995).

3.0 Adult-child differences

There are three salient differences between the child's bare perfective and the adult Greek *na/2a* clauses, all of which are accounted for under this analysis:

- (7) i. Only perfective verbs have an irrealis interpretation in the child's grammar, while both perfective and imperfectives occur in *na/2a* clause in the adult grammar.
- ii. Bare perfectives decrease as *na/2a* clauses increase as a function of age.
- iii. Adult *na/2a* clauses show agreement, while the child's bare perfective does not.

(7i) follows from the fact that the perfective feature licenses MoodP. In adult Greek, in contrast, the modal particles -- *na/2a* license MoodP through Merge. The aspectual feature in the verb is thus free to do the "aspect job". Since in the adult grammar the perfective feature is not doing the "modal job", it follows that there will be no aspectual restriction on the verb and adult *na/2a* clauses can be either perfective or imperfective.

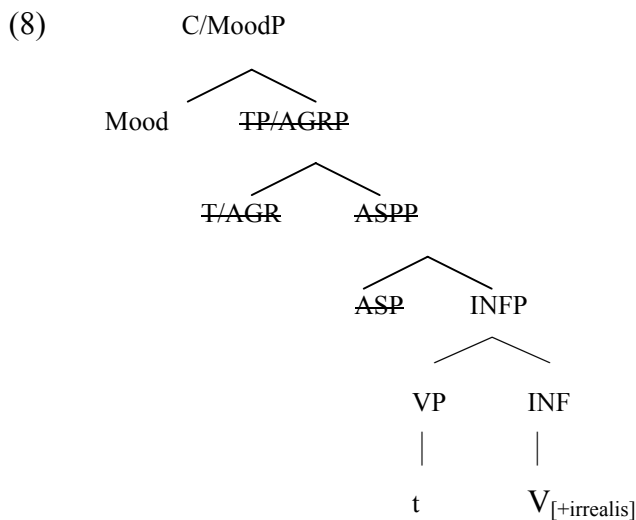
The decrease in bare perfectives and concomitant increase in *na/2a* clauses described in (7ii) arises because the aspectual feature in the bare perfective licenses MoodP and hence fulfils the grammatical function of *na/2a* in the adult grammar. Thus, there is a trade-off between functionally equivalent structures. In the absence of modal particles the early grammar avails itself of the feature checking option. The adult system emerges as the modals are acquired. We may assume, as proposed in Chomsky (2001) that Merge takes precedence over Move/Attract, and hence once the modals are acquired, they push out the feature checking option in the standard case.

The lack of agreement on the bare perfective described in (7iii) follows as a direct structural consequence of the aspect-mood relation discussed above. Given the structural constraints on attract/feature checking (cf. 5), the bare perfective is necessarily a non-agreeing form, with the unmarked 3rd person *-i* affix emerging as the default when AGR is unspecified.

Note that this is cannot be considered an agreement error in the strict sense. As we will show, Greek children at this stage have productive agreement with imperfective verbs and with non-3rd person verb forms. If the bare perfective does not involve an agreement error, then it must be the case that this structure does not provide the syntactic context for agreement.

4.0 Extension to RIs

We propose that the modal interpretation of RIs in languages such as Dutch and German is also associated with an active MoodP. In RIs, MoodP is licensed by the infinitival morpheme, which I assume has an irrealis feature (cf. Hoekstra and Hyams 1998, Duffley 1992, Stowell 1982) for discussion of the modal properties of the infinitival morpheme).



Given the locality condition on licensing, the irrealis feature in the infinitive can license Mood only if T/AGR and ASP are underspecified. This entails that there will be: (i) an absence of T/AGR specification in precisely those cases where a modal interpretation of infinitives arises, i.e. RIs; (ii) an underspecification of AspP and hence no RIs with aspectual auxiliaries; (iii) RIs will decrease as modals increase (as in Greek). We will show that all of these predictions are confirmed.

We will also discuss cases in which aspectual features license Mood in adult grammar. The early grammar is thus within the normal limits of UG in line with the Continuity Assumption.

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