Aspect and temporal relations in Evidentials.

It has been proposed ([2 /3/ 5/ 7/8 /10/11] a.o.) that Evidentials involve a tense encoding the time the evidence is acquired. Based on Bulgarian, Mëbengokre, and Matses ([3]), we argue that Viewpoint Operators ([1/12]) interacting with Evidential Operators can dispense for the need to postulate a specific tense for Evidentials. Adding Viewpoint also allows a unified cross-linguistic perspective on apparently unrelated evidential systems.

Within Kratzer evidential system partially encoded in imperfective or perfective participles (pišel in (2a) vs. pisál in (2b)), (a) participles signal a modal evidential operator EV ([4]), (b) EV scopes over Viewpoint, (c) imperfective participles encode Viewpoint IMPF, and (d) perfective participles encode Viewpoint PERF:

(1) [ EV [ [Viewpoint Aspect IMPF/ PERF [ ……….]]] ]

As (2a) shows, imperfectives are compatible with past, present, and future temporal locations (disambiguated by adverbs); perfectives as in (2b) can only be past.

(2) a. (Spored dobre osvedomeni iztočnitsi,) Ivan pišel kniga včera /dnes /utre.
   ‘(According to well informed sources) I. was writing a book yesterday/today/tomorrow.’

b. Ivan pisál kniga (*utre).
   ‘(Apparently), Ivan wrote a book (*tomorrow).’

The temporal flexibility of the imperfective in (2a) depends on readings independently available to IMPF (e.g. ongoing, generic, inertia) ([1], [9]); an inertia analysis gives rise to the ‘was-supposed-to-happen-in-the-future’ reading: (3a-b).

(3) a. [ EV [ IMPF [Ivan pišel kniga utre]]]

b. [(3a)]*[1] = 1 iff ∀s*: s’ is compatible with the knowledge available in s*, ∃s: s<s’ & ∀s"*: MBPrep-infinitia(s)(s") = 1, ∃e: e is an event of I. writing a book tomorrow in s”.

In contrast with (2a), pisál in (2b) embeds perfective past-oriented aspect, with semantic composition leading to a past reading (omitted for space reasons). Our proposal contrasts with the view ([10/11]) that participles in (2a-b) encode a temporal relation specific to Evidentials, which orders Event/Reference-Time (RT) with Evidence-Acquisition-Time (EAT) instead of Speech-Time: i.e. pišel (PRES: RT=EAT), pisál (PAST: RT=EAT).

Mëbengokre evidential marking is morphologically independent from Viewpoint ([1]). Evidential we combines with all aspectual auxiliaries: (4). Evidentiality is independent from tense, and always anchored to Speech-Time: (5). Claims about the future / present depend on we combined with specific Viewpoints (imminent, prospective, etc.), (4). Adverbs shift Event-Time: (5). Thus, Mëbengokre morphology transparently displays the semantic composition behind multiple readings in Bulgarian (2a), which depend on IMPF with a unitary participial morphology.

(4) a. We bóx ‘ýr / mâ.

b. We kábën o=nûh.

WE arrive IMM/PROSP WE speak APL=be.sitting. V

‘He is (I am told) about to arrive /arriving.’

‘He is (I am told) speaking.’

(5) Amrêbê /on /kryräm /we bóx.

Long.ago /now /morning WE arrived

‘He (I am told) arrived long ago /now /tomorrow.morning.’

For Matses evidentials, we propose that EV anchored to Speech-Time scopes over a ‘past perfect’ aspectual configuration where Event-Time precedes Tópic-Time; a similar aspectual relation is found in ‘past perfect’ evidential constructions in Bulgarian.

In sum, aspectual operators interacting with evidential operators may account for complex temporal relations, raising doubts about the need for an extra evidential tense.
References: Aspect and temporal relations in Evidentials.


