On the Distribution of Imperfective Suffixation and the Position of Theme Vowels in Slovenian

Background: There are different views regarding the exact position of the Theme Vowel (TH) in the verb structure within Distributive Morphology (DM). One is that THs are realisations of a TH position that is added to v^0 (and other functional heads) (e.g. Oltra-Massuet 1999 and Embick and Halle 2005), another, argued for in Marvin (2002), is that THs are attached directly to the ROOT. The most recent proposal for Slovenian is the one made by Božič (2016, 2017), where he argues that TH is adjoined to Aspectual head (ASP^0). On the other hand, Marvin has claimed, contra Božič (2017), that TH could only adjoin to category-defining heads, i.e. that adjunction to any other functional head, such as Tense head, Aspect or Passive is not possible in Slovenian. Although we are not going to decide on the exact position of TH here, we will still argue that THs are merged somewhere close to the ROOT in Slovenian, possibly to v^0.

Problem: Božič (2017) argues that the position of TH can be determined by reference to the positions occupied by the verbalizing suffix *-ir-* and the secondary imperfective (SCD.IMP) *-av-*. Since the verbalizing suffix *-ir-* must be the spell-out of v^0 and the SCD.IMP directly follows it, Božič (2017) concludes that the element *-a-*, located between the SCD.IMP and participle (PTC) in the example (1a-b) below, must be a TH.

1. a)

pre	-	√doz	-	ir	-	av	-	a	-	l
PFX		dose		v^0		SCD.IMP		TH		PTC

   'to overdose'

   b)

s	-	√keš	-	ir	-	av	-	a	-	l
PFX		cash		v^0		SCD.IMP		TH		PTC

   'spend money'

(Božič, 2017; 29: (48), (49))

However, it should be emphasised that such a conclusion is possible only under the assumption that what the Slovenian segment *-av-* in (1a-b) is is indeed SCD.IMP. However, Božič (2017) does not provide any piece of evidence to support this assumption. Here we defend the position that this is indeed not the case, and we are going to argue that Božič's (2017) assumption about *-av-* as SCD.IMP is problematic for several reasons.

Proposal: First, we claim that the secondary imperfective suffix is actually *-va-* and not, as assumed in Božič (2016, 2017), *-av-*. As can be seen from the examples in (2a-c), ROOTs ending in vowels are not infrequent in Slovenian, and their interpretation turns imperfective when *-va-* is merged into the verb structure (whereas their counterpart without *-va-* is interpreted perfectively).

2. a) √…i e.g. *pi-ti* → *po-pi-ti* → *po-pi-va-ti*
      'to drink IMP' 'to drink PRF' 'to booze IMP'
   b) √…e e.g. *gre-ti* → *po-gre-ti* → *po-gre-va-ti*
      'to warm IMP' 'to warm up PRF' 'to warm up SCD.IMP'
   c) √…a e.g. *sta-ti* → *po-sta-ti* → *po-sta-va-ti*
      'to stand IMP' 'to stand PRF' 'to stand around SCD.IMP'

Next, secondary imperfectivization is not the only function of the morpheme *-va-* in Slovenian, as *-va-* does not occur only with prefixed verbs but can sometimes be found also in verbal forms without a prefix, as comparison between (2) and (3) reveals. Although this fact per se does not stand in opposition to Božič's (2016, 2017) analysis, it is however important that in addition to the exact position we also identify the exact function of *-va-*, after all, understanding the suffix *-va-* (its position and function) is crucial in determining the position of a TH.

3. a) *vele-ti* → *vele-va-ti*
      'to order PRF' 'to order IMP'

While *-va-* operates in a morphological environment typical of secondary imperfectivization, in the examples such as (2) above, the situation is somewhat different in the case of (3), where there is no prefix. Verb *veleti* 'to order' is one of the few non-prepositional verbs in Slovenian that is perfective, the presence of the *-va-* morpheme in (3) decisively influences the interpretation of the verb *velevati* 'to order' as imperfective, which makes *-va-* more like some sort of a "general imperfective interpretation marker" than just a SCD.IMP morpheme.

Moreover, the occurrence of the *-va-* imperfective is conditioned by the phonological realization of tense marker. It is only present in the verb structure if there is no overt tense marking, as evidenced in contrast between doublets in (4a) and (4b). We will assume that *-e-* in these cases is a tense marker, as it is never found in infinitives or under the participle. Consequently, we will treat as TH the element positioned before the imperfective suffix and not the one positioned after it. In (4b), where 1st person singular marking (1 SG) *-m-* is preceded by the present tense marker (PRS) *-e-*, imperfective *-va-* does not occur. Subsequently, in cases of this kind, a phonological operation of *-j-* insertion (adapted from Marvin, 2002) between two vowels is performed, transforming *pljuem* into *pljujem* 'to spit IMP'.

4. a)   plju   -   va   -   m   'to spit IMP'
            √   IMP   1 SG

    b)   plju   -   j   -   e   -   m   'to spit IMP'
            √   PRS   1 SG

Positing the phonological condition on the occurrence of *-va-* can also explain the very productive verb derivation pattern of the type *kupovati-kupujem* 'to buy IMP' (infinitive-1P.SG); the absence of imperfective suffix in the 1P. SG form of the verb is conditioned by the presence of the present tense marker *-e-*. Interestingly, *-va-* is, in this same case, present in the 1P.SG form in individual variants of the Goriška dialect, as shown in (5).

5. a)   kupu   -   j   -   e   -   m   'to buy IMP'
            √   PRS   1 SG

    b)   kupa   -   va   -   m   'to buy IMP'
            √   IMP   1 SG

If we compare the dialectal version, in (5b), to the standard, in (5a), we can see that in the standard variant the verb takes the *-e-* present tense marker, while in the dialect present tense is not phonologically realized. This is exactly what our analysis predicts.

Conclusion: The data presented suggest that contrary to Božič, it is *-va-* rather than *-av-* that is an imperfectivizing morpheme in Slovenian, and contrary to previous literature more widely, *-va-* is not just a secondary imperfective morpheme but more generally an imperfective morpheme. Our idea is supported by the clear distribution patterns shown by *-va-* in verbs which receive an imperfective interpretation. This suggestion makes further predictions on the position of TH vowel in Slovenian. We argue that TH precedes the imperfective suffix *-va-*, and thus cannot be a component of the imperfective morpheme, as assumed in Božič (2016, 2017). TH is rather a part of the ROOT (or verbalizing head to which it is attached).

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