

Tense (Non-)Concord Between Verbs and Obliques in Malagasy: A Complement–Adjunct (Non-)Asymmetry

Certain adverbial and PP constituents in Malagasy, referred to here as *obliques*, can carry the prefix *t-* or appear unprefix. When the oblique is the main predicate of the clause, *t-* marks a past-tense interpretation (1b) and is absent when the clause is non-past (1a). When the oblique functions as a verb dependent, the presence or absence of *t-* generally covaries with the tense of the verb: the oblique must be unmarked when the verb is non-past (2a), and takes *t-* when the verb is past tense, as indicated by the prefix *n-* (2b). This suggests that *t-* encodes the presence of a [+PAST] feature on T, either as the sole indication of tense in the clause (1b) or in concord with past-tense marking on the verb (2b).

Pearson (2001) showed that the concord requirement illustrated in (2b) only obtains when the oblique is an *adjunct* denoting a spatio-temporal location, instrument, or manner. When the oblique merges as a *complement* and denotes the goal/endpoint in a motion event, both the unmarked and the *t*-marked form are possible in past-tense clauses, with a difference in interpretation. In (3a), where the oblique is unmarked, it is understood that the children are either at school at utterance time (UT), or that they have not yet reached the school as of UT but are still in transit. However (3b), with *t*-marking, entails that the children reached the school, and implies that they are no longer there at UT. This pattern can be explained if the oblique in (3) is treated as a kind of resultative complement which introduces an event argument. Past-tense marking on the verb indicates that the event—or the initiation point of the event, if the event is durative—precedes UT. *T*-marking on the oblique indicates that the result state also precedes UT, while absence of *t-* indicates that the result state does not precede UT (but instead overlaps/follows UT). The necessity for *t*-marking in (2b) follows from the fact that an oblique adjunct does not denote a result state, but instead predicates a property of the event named by the *vP* to which it adjoins (as in a Davidsonian event semantics). Lacking an event argument independent of *vP*, the oblique adjunct cannot be separately ordered relative to UT. Hence the oblique adjunct in (2), unlike the oblique complement in (3), must agree in tense with the verb.

In this paper I provide additional data on *t*-marking, showing that a contrast similar to (3a,b) becomes available for oblique adjuncts when the adjunct is embedded in a temporally-dependent complement clause. This environment resembles (3) insofar as the sentence contains two event arguments within the immediate scope of a single (interpretable) tense feature. Consider (4), where an instrumental oblique appears in the complement of ‘begin’. Note the tense of the embedded verb must match the tense of ‘begin’ (Paul & Ranaivoson 1998). Here, unlike in (2b), the oblique can be unprefix (4a), in which case it is understood that Rabe is still cutting the bread at UT. When the oblique is *t*-marked (4b), the cutting event is assumed to be over: i.e., the events associated with ‘begin’ and ‘cut’ both properly precede UT. Similarly in (5), the oblique occurs in the clausal complement in a construction denoting direct perception of an event (Pearson 2018). Here again, the tense of the embedded verb must match the tense of the superordinate verb. In (5a) the cutting event is understood to overlap UT, while in (5b) the cutting event precedes UT.

To account for the verb-tense matching requirement in (4) and (5), I propose that the embedded clause has a featurally deficient T head, and hence the initiation point of the embedded event (cutting the bread with the knife) is interpreted—i.e., ordered with respect to UT—with reference to the tense feature in the higher clause. By contrast, the form of the embedded oblique encodes the ordering of the embedded event as a whole relative to UT: *t-* is present when the endpoint of the embedded event precedes UT, and absent when the endpoint fails to precede UT. I propose a phrase structure which captures the parallels between (3) and (4)/(5), and consider why tense morphology on verbs and obliques should differ in which portion of the event is ordered with respect to UT.

- (1) a. Any anatin' ny ala ny gidro
there inside.of Det forest Det lemur
'The lemur is in the forest'
- b. Tany anatin' ny ala ny gidro
T.there inside.of Det forest Det lemur
'The lemur was in the forest'
- (2) a. Mandidy mofo { amin' / *tamin' } ny antsy Rabe
AT.cut bread with T.with Det knife Rabe
'Rabe is cutting bread with the knife'
- b. Nandidy mofo { tamin' / *amin' } ny antsy Rabe
Pst.AT.cut bread T.with with Det knife Rabe
'Rabe cut bread with the knife'
- (3) a. Nalefan' ny vehivavy any am-pianarana ny ankizy
Pst.TT.send Det woman there Loc-school Det children
'The woman sent the children to school' (*they're{still/not yet} at school*)
- b. Nalefan' ny vehivavy tany am-pianarana ny ankizy
Pst.TT.send Det woman T.there Loc-school Det children
'The woman sent the children to school' (*they're no longer at school*)
- (4) a. Nanomboka [nandidy mofo amin' ny antsy] Rabe
Pst.AT.begin Pst.AT.cut bread with Det knife Rabe
'Rabe{began/has begun} cutting bread with the knife' (*he's still cutting*)
- b. Nanomboka [nandidy mofo tamin' ny antsy] Rabe
Pst.AT.begin Pst.AT.cut bread T.with Det knife Rabe
'Rabe began to cut bread with the knife' (*he's no longer cutting*)
- (5) a. Nahita [ny vehivavy nandidy mofo amin' ny antsy] aho
Pst.AT.see Det woman Pst.AT.cut bread with Det knife 1sNom
'I saw the woman cutting bread with the knife' (*she's still cutting*)
- b. Nahita [ny vehivavy nandidy mofo tamin' ny antsy] aho
Pst.AT.see Det woman Pst.AT.cut bread T.with Det knife 1sNom
'I saw the woman cut(ing) bread with the knife' (*she's no longer cutting*)

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