New current relevance in Croatian: epistemic immediacy and the aorist

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1. Introduction: the *aorist*

(1) **Stigoh iz daleka.**

‘I have arrived/arrived from far away.’

- traditional account:
  - absolute past time = the action was completed before the reference point and it cannot be in any way connected to the present
  - in other words = corresponds to the English Past Simple
  - evokes “vividness, (...) succinctness and (...) intimacy” (Katičić 1991: 58)
1. Introduction: the *perfekt*

(1a) **Stigao sam iz daleka**

‘I have arrived/arrived from far away.’

- traditional account:
  - connected with the present = corresponds to the English Present Perfect
  - stylistically neutral
1. Introduction: the problem

- Aorist usages:
  - traditionally described use (completed past action, sequence of several actions)
  - recent actions (e.g. with upravo ‘just’)  
  - inevitable or planned future

- The problem:
  - what is the symbolic value of the aorist?
1. Introduction: aim

- the aorist expresses epistemic immediacy, i.e. the immediacy of the process in relation to the speaker and her knowledge about the event
2. Aorist usage patterns

Sequence of several actions:

(2) **Odgovorih, i u roku par minuta dobih odgovor. Pa ja opet odgovorih. Pa dobih odgovor.**

‘I replied, and I got an answer in a matter of minutes. So I replied again. And I got another answer’.
2. Aorist usage patterns

Recent past usage with current relevance:

(3) *Eto mene, dođoh iz grada*

‘Here I am, I have returned from the city.’
2. Aorist usage patterns

Planned future or inevitable future with particular verbs:

(4) ...**odoh** i ja sutra, ali se vraćam kroz tri dana.

‘I am also leaving tomorrow, but I will be back in three days.’
3. Current usage tendencies

- 2 studies: how is the aorist predominantly used?
  - corpus study
  - speakers’ judgments
3.1. The corpus study: procedure

- six most frequent perfective verbs:
  - doći ‘come’, otići ‘leave’, reći ‘say’, vidjeti ‘see’, dobiti ‘get’ and kupiti ‘buy’
- only first person forms (most frequent!)
- 2 factors:
  - ‘positional’ adverbials
  - current relevance or future
3.1. The corpus study: results

- Total: 418 tokens
- Results 1: ‘positional’ adverbials
  - ‘positional’ adverbials: 30% (123) of the verbs
  - intervals and no adverbials: 70% (295) of the verbs
    (cf. 3.1.1 on the handout)
- Results 2: current relevance or future
  - Current relevance or future clear from the context: 43% (182 verbs)
  - Unclear context: 47% (236) (cf. 3.1.2 on the handout)
3.2. Speakers’ judgments: participants and procedure

- Participants:
  - 159 native speakers of Croatian (cf. 3.2.1 on the handout)

- Questionnaire:
  - 5 tasks
  - 4 point forced choice Lickert scale; Y/N question; ordering elements
3.2. Speakers’ judgments: participants and procedure

• Items:
  – Inevitable future (cf. ex. (4))
  – Recent past (cf. ex. (3))
  – Counter sequentiality (Givón’s criteria)
3.2. Speaker’s judgments: results

- Inevitable future (cf. ex. (4); 3.2.2 on the handout)
  - 72% report they may use it or use it with some frequency
  - 28% of participants say they would never use it
3.2. Speaker’s judgments: results

- Recent past (3.2.2 on the handout)
  - Would you say *rekoh* when “your collocutor has not heard what you have just said, and you are repeating your words”?
    - 72% report they may use it or use it with some frequency
    - 28% of participants say they would never use it

- Recent past (cf. contrast between (1) and (2); 3.2.2 on the handout)
  - “Which is more distant?”
    - Perfekt (48%)
    - Aorist (19%)
3.2. Speaker’s judgments: results

- Recent past (cf. contrast between (1) and (2); 3.2.2 on the handout)
  - What is the order of adverbials? (upravo ‘just’, danas ‘today’, jučer ‘yesterday’ and prošle godine ‘last year’, no adverbial)
    - upravo ‘just’ with aorist and perfekt
4. Discussion and cognitive analysis

• Recapitulation of results
  – narrative context (several actions in sequence)
  – epistemic immediacy:
    • highest frequency of 1st person forms (frequency data: Moguš, Bratanić and Tadić 1999)
    • primarily non-positional adverbials (corpus)
    • recent action (corpus + speakers)
    • future (corpus + speakers)
    • no counter-sequentiality (corpus (negative evidence) + speakers)
4. Discussion and cognitive analysis

- virtual plane
- action precedes the moment of speech
- epistemic immediacy = the process designated by the aorist is construed in such a way that the speaker/hearer and the ground are included in the immediate scope (extreme subjectification)
4. Discussion and cognitive analysis

• Schematic characterization
  – epistemic immediacy = $V_1$ vs. $V_2$
  – action = prior to $G'$
4. Discussion and cognitive analysis: 2 virtual planes

- $V_1 =$ within immediate scope, epistemically immediate = aorist, imperfective present (in subjunctive...), etc.
- $V_2 =$ outside immediate scope, distant = perfekt
4. Discussion and cognitive analysis: prior to G’

- Schematic characterization
  - action = prior to G’
4. Discussion and cognitive analysis

- actions in sequence (cf. (2))
4. Discussion and cognitive analysis

• recent past (cf. (3))
4. Discussion and cognitive analysis

- inevitable/planned future (cf. (4))
5. Conclusion and future research

• epistemic immediacy of the aorist + schema

• Future research:
  – types of pragmatic inference of current relevance: across planes (actual and $V_1$) and within a plane (Langacker’s proposal for English)
  – epistemic path = consequences of $V_1$ and $V_2$ for the Croatian tense system
    • (e.g. Croatian conditional (historically aorist of be + l-participle))
  – subjectification vs. dominion ($V_1$ as dominion internal?)
Thank you!

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