Deciphering the Malayalam Universal Perfect

A number of morphemes are used in the Malayalam Universal (U) perfect. It, however, is not clear what the proper parse of these morphemes is. Asher & Kumari (1997) gloss the morpheme, *irikk-,* as the perfect, and Hany Babu (2008) suggests a parse similar to that of the English U perfect. However, in what follows I argue that *irikk-* is not a perfect morpheme but a light verb (in the sense of Butt (2010)) and that there are a number of reasons to think that an English-style parse is incorrect.

Introducing the puzzle Assuming the semantics for the U perfect in Iatridou et. al. (2002), the function of the perfect is to set up a time span called the Perfect Time Span (PTS). The left boundary (LB) of this time span is set by an adverbial (since 1990, for 1 week, etc.) or by the context (for example, the speaker's birth). The right boundary (RB) of the time span is set by tense. The U perfect gets this name because it requires that an event holds throughout the PTS (i.e. that there be universal quantification over points in the time span.). These facts are exemplified by the present perfect sentence and its corresponding timeline in (1). The RB is also set by tense in past and future perfect sentences. Example (1a) is the most natural way to answer the question *What have you been doing lately?*

> (1) a. njaan oru aazhcha aayi   ee paper ezhuth-i-kkond-irikk-uka(y)-aanu
> 　　 I　　 one week　　 ADV　 this paper have.been.writing
> 　　 'I have been writing this paper for one week.'
> 　　 b. LB_____RB
> 　　　 a week ago…………………...writing the paper………….Utterance Time (UT)

At first glance, one might think that Malayalam parallels English in using a progressive participle, the perfect participle of an auxiliary verb and a tense auxiliary, as parsed in (2) to express a U perfect.

> (2) ezhuthi-kkond(u)　　 irikk-uka(y)　　　　 aanu
> 　　 write-PROG.PART　 be-PERFECT.PART　 TENSE.AUX　　 cf. English 'has been writing'

However, in this paper I argue that such a parse is incorrect in the following three ways.

#1 *-uka* is not a perfect participle; it is a progressive viewpoint aspect marker The main evidence against *–uka* being a perfect participle marker is that it occurs outside of perfect contexts. For example, the progressive form of the verb is composed by adding *–uka* to the verb stem plus the addition of a tense auxiliary: *ezhuth-uka(y) aanu* 'is writing'. This form is a natural way to answer the question *what are you doing right now?* No perfect semantics are present here. As such, we can conclude that *–uka* is not a perfect participle marker in Malayalam but a progressive viewpoint aspect marker.

#2 *kondu* is not a progressive participle; it is a lexical aspect marker Despite having been called a progressive morpheme (Asher & Kumari 1997), the true function of *kondu* is to say that there is a telos to the event introduced by the verb and that that telos has not yet been reached (glossed as TNR). Without *kondu*, it is not clear whether Radha is still en route to the theater or if she is now sitting in the theater, (3a). When *kondu* is added, (3b), it is clear that she must be en route to the theater. With statives or other verbs without a natural telos, the presence of *kondu* coerces a telic interpretation.

> (3) a. raadha sinimu-kku pooy-irikk-uka(y)-aanu
> 　　　 Radha cinema-DAT go.ConjPART-irikk-PROG-be.PRES
> 　　　 'Radha has gone to the cinema.' [en route to theater or sitting in the theater, we don't know]
> 　　 b. raadha sinimu-kku pooy-i-**kkond-**irikk-uka(y)-aanu
> 　　　 Radha cinema-DAT go-ConjPART-TNR-irikk-PROG-be.PRES
> 　　　 'Radha has gone to the cinema.' [she is on her way now **but hasn't yet reached the theater**]

A present U perfect asserts that the event is still ongoing at the UT (RB). It is not enough to simply allow the possibility of the event happening at the UT, as (3a) does. In Malayalam, just as in English, following a present U perfect with an assertion that the event is not ongoing at the UT results in a contradiction, (4a). I argue that, in Malayalam, *kondu* is the morpheme responsible for asserting that the event is ongoing. This is supported by (4b) where when the *kondu* in (4a) is removed, the sentence is no longer a contradiction; it is an acceptable answer to the question *Have you finished your paper work?*

> (4) a. njaan oru aazhcha aayi ii　 paper ezhuth-i-**kkond-**irikk-uka(y)-aanu
> 　　　 I　　 one week　 ADV this paper write-ConjPART-TNR-irikk-PROG-be.PRES
> 　　　 #pakshe ini　　　　 muthal paper ezhuth-illa.

but   thenceforth since   paper write-NEG

'I have been writing this paper for one week, #but I am not anymore.'

    b. njaan oru aazhcha aayi ii   paper ezhuth-irikk-uka(y)-aanu

       I   one week ADV this paper write.ConjPART-irikk-PROG-be.PRES

       pakshe ini   muthal paper ezhuth-illa.

       but   thenceforth since   paper write-NEG

[the paper writing was going on for some time but its not anymore because finally I finished the paper]

#3 *irikk-* is not a perfect auxiliary; it is a light verb Turning to *irikk-*, notice that tense and viewpoint aspect morphology come after *irikk-*. Assuming the Mirror Principle (Baker 1985) and that PerfectP is located above AspP (Iatridou et. al. 2002, Pancheva 2003, a.o.), *irikk-* is not in the right position to be the spell out of a $Perf^0$ auxiliary. This is, however, the exact position where one would expect to find a light verb (LV) of the type argued for in Butt (2010). Like other LVs, *irikk-* has another life as a commonly used lexical verb meaning 'sit,' and it can be replaced with another verb *nilkk-* 'stand' in the sentences above with only a subtle meaning shift that does not have to do with sitting or standing. Furthermore, *irikk-* can co-occur with the morphology used to express the Existential (E) perfect (like a U perfect except that it involves existential instead of universal quantification over points in the PTS), (5). This E perfect form consists of the Conjunctive Participle plus *itt(u)* and the forms of the tense auxiliary, *undu.* This 'doubling up' is unexpected if *irikk-* is the spell out of a $Perf^0$, but par for the course if *irikk-* is a LV.

    (5) innale   raathri avan valare neeram vaayicch-u-kond-**irunn-itt-undaayirunnu**

       yesterday night he   much time   read-ConjPART-TNR-LV.ConjPART-itt-be.PAST

     'Last night he had been reading for a long time.' (Asher & Kumari 1997, p304: 1524)

Analyzing *irikk-* as a LV instead of a $Perf^0$ auxiliary illumines what is otherwise a puzzling mystery regarding the use of *irikk-* in E perfects. Many speakers do not accept *irikk-* in E perfects and instead require the usual E perfect form, (6a). However, the same speakers who find (6a) ungrammatical find (6b) to be completely natural. The only difference between the two sentences is the addition of the 'instead of' phrase in (6b). Nothing about the semantics of the perfect predicts this. However, LV's can be used to express subtle meanings cross-linguistically. Basu & Wilbur (2010) note that the Bangla LV meaning 'sit' expresses 'the sudden, unexpected initiate of an event' (p7) and provide an account based on Ramchand (2004). The facts in (6), replicate in Bangla, providing further support for the LV account of *irikk-* and suggesting that a similar account can be given for Malayalam LVs.

    (6) a. aval randayirathi pathrandu mudal war and peace   anjhu pravasyam

        she two thousand twelve   since   War and Peace   five   times

        vaayicch-itt-undu   /***vaayicch-irikk-unnu-∅**

        read.ConjPART-itt-be.PRES/read.ConjPART-lv-IMPFV-PRES

        'She has read *War & Peace* five times since 2012.'

      b. **[anna karenina vaayikk-unn-∅-ath-inu   pakaram]** aval

        Anna Karenina read-IMPFV-PRES-NOMLZ-DAT instead   she

        randa-yirathi pathrandu mudal war and peace anjhu pravasyam

        two-thousand twelve   since War and Peace five   times

        vaayicch-irikk-unnu-∅

        read.ConjPART-lv-IMPFV-PRES

        'She has read *War & Peace* five times since 2012 instead of reading *Anna Karenina*.'

Analysis The Conjunctive Participle contributes the event argument. *kondu* marks that that event has a telos and that that telos is not reached at the RB of the PTS. *irikk* contributes LV semantics, and the progressive aspect provides the subinterval property necessary for the U perfect. Iatridou et al. (2002) and Pancheva (2003, 2013) propose that differences in perfects cross-linguistically can be reduced to the types of aspect marking languages have. While the U perfect in Malayalam, like Greek, doesn't involve a PerfP, the lexical and viewpoint aspect morphemes play a central role, as they predict.

Selected References Asher, R.E. & Kumari, T.C. 1997. Routledge. ♦ Butt, M. 2010. CUP, 48-78. ♦Hany Babu, M.T 2008. Handout LISSIM 3. ♦ Iatridou et al. 2002. MIT Press, 153-204.