Periphrasis is not failure of word building

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1. Overview

Simple/synthetic vs. compound/periphrastic verbal forms

(1) Simple: Lexical V only
played, plays

(2) Compound: Lexical V + auxiliary V
was playing, has played


Common misconception

Periphrasis = Failure of word building (between the verb and inflection)

(3) Word building → Synthetic form

(4) No word building → Periphrastic form

Evidence from movement to C:

(9) French: V and T move to C as a unit

(10) Swahili: T moves to C alone

Importantly, Swahili (4, 8) is a simple tense, different from compound tenses with auxiliary V:

(11) Tu as parlé français
you AUX speak French

(12) A-li-kuwa a-ki-soma
1girl 3SG-PST AUX she 7book read
the girl that read the book

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3. Periphrasis with and without word building

Turkish has simple and compound tense constructions (Kornfilt 1996):

(13) kal-di-nız
     stay-PST-2PL
     ‘you stayed’

(14) kal-di  i-se-niz
     stay-PST AUX-COND-2PL
     ‘if you had stayed’

In compound forms, auxiliary and main verb can form a single word or two separate words:

(15) **Type 1: Separate words → two vowel harmony domains**
    kal-di  i-se-niz
    stay-PST AUX-COND-2PL
    ‘if you had stayed’

(16) **Type 2: Single word → one vowel harmony domain**
    kal-di-y-sa-niz
    stay-PST-AUX-COND-2PL
    ‘if you had stayed’

Kornfilt 1996, Fenger 2018: The auxiliary optionally cliticizes/lowers to main verb:

(17) **Type 1 compound tense: two separate words**

(18) **Type 2 compound tense: a single word**

Appendix A: Against base-generation of auxiliaries

(19) **Traditional view: auxiliaries are base-generated**
    or
    b. as an independent category (V<sub>Aux</sub>) selecting certain functional projections (21) (an idea going back to Ross 1967, 1969 and adopted in a lot of subsequent syntactic literature.)

(20) The functional head approach

(21) The V<sub>Aux</sub>P approach

Incorrect prediction of the base-generation approaches

Due to base-generation, a given inflectional category (e.g. perfect Asp) should **consistently** appear with or without an auxiliary.

Bjorkman (2011) shows that this prediction is incorrect; in many languages, the co-occurrence of auxiliaries and inflections is **inconsistent** (the overflow pattern of auxiliary use).

The overflow pattern of auxiliary use (Ndebele)

(22) *Future and perfect need an auxiliary to co-occur:*
    U-za-be  u-dl-ile
    2sg-[FUT]aux  2sg-eat-FV[PERF]
    ‘You will have eaten’.

(23) *Perfect alone doesn’t always need an auxiliary:*
    U-Ø-dl-a
    2sg-PRES-eat-FV[PERF]
    ‘You have eaten’.

(24) *Future alone doesn’t always need an auxiliary:*
    U-za-dl-a
    2sg-[FUT]eat-FV
    ‘You will eat’.

→ The auxiliary in (22) is base-generated neither with future T nor with perfect Asp.

Only the works cited in Appendix B predict the overflow pattern.


**Appendix B: The right analysis of periphrasis**

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**Observation:** Compound-tense periphrasis is triggered by *feature* complexity.

For many languages, the generalization is: one inflectional feature per verb, no matter what inflection.\(^a\)

\[ \begin{array}{c|c}
\text{Inf}_{1} & \text{Verb-Inf}_{1} \\
\text{Inf}_{1} \text{Inf}_{2} & \text{Aux-Inf}_{1} \text{Verb-Inf}_{2} \\
\text{Inf}_{1} \text{Inf}_{2} \text{Inf}_{3} & \text{Aux-Inf}_{1} \text{Aux-Inf}_{2} \text{Verb-Inf}_{3} \\
\end{array} \]

(simple form) (periphrasis) (“double” periphrasis)

\(^a\)This generalization relies on the assumption that featural contrasts in the inflectional domain can be privative. Thus, in some languages “present tense” is the absence of tense feature, etc. (See references below.)

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**Claim**

Periphrasis is regulated not by movement but by feature transmission/agreement.


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**Agreement-based account of periphrasis**

- T, Asp, Voice, etc. have Infl-features that must be licensed on a verb
- Verbs have an unvalued inflectional feature

(25) She played.

(26) She was playing.

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**Deriving the double dissociation**

- Infl-agreement doesn’t entail word building (see Swahili simple tense)
- Lack of Infl-agreement doesn’t preclude word building (Turkish Type 2 compound tense)

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**References**


