

Stativity and temporal interpretation in Capeverdean Creole

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A well-known although poorly understood property of Creole languages in general (Bickerton 1981) and Capeverdean (CV) Creole in particular (Baptista 2002, Pratas 2007) is that the system of tense and aspect is constrained by the property of stativity. The distinction between stative and dynamic verbs is best illustrated with uninflected verb forms in simple sentences without any temporal modification, as in (1). The stative *sabe* in (1a) has a present tense interpretation, whereas the dynamic *kume* in (1b) is interpreted as past. Note, however, that if the progressive marker *sata* is applied to a 'bare' form of a dynamic verb, the interpretation that results is present, as in (2a). As illustrated in (2b), a past progressive interpretation is achieved by attaching the past suffix *-ba* to the main verb.

Given (1b) and (2), the hypothesis that all dynamic verbs are 'lexically' marked as past or, following the lines of Bohnemyer & Swift (2002), as perfective, is highly implausible for Capeverdean. We suggest that the difference between stative and dynamic verbs is, indeed, lexical, but rather implemented in the following way. Following Katz (1995, 2003), we assume that the difference between stative and dynamic verbal predicates is formalized in terms of argument structure at the level of lexical representation. In particular, stative predicates are linked directly to times, whereas dynamic ones have an event argument. Formally, the difference can be represented as, for instance, in (3).

Temporal/aspectual operators in any language, including CV, are applied to times, but not to events. Hence, once the nominal arguments are satisfied, a stative predicate can be subject to other temporal operations without further complications. A dynamic predicate, however, has first to be converted from an eventive predicate into a temporal one.

Our proposal is that there are two ways to convert a predicate with an event variable into a temporal one. One operation is marked by *sata* and results in a present interpretation of an ongoing event. Another operation is marked by a \emptyset morpheme and results in a past interpretation of a dynamic predicate. Formally, these operations can be represented along the lines of (4).

None of these operations will apply to a state, because it is, by definition, a predicate that takes a temporal variable and not an event variable. This is why (1a) by default has a present (atemporal) interpretation. The progressive form of a state in (5) is ungrammatical, as expected.

The system we propose further works compositionally along the following lines. The past morpheme *-ba* is applied to a VP to yield a past interpretation of the temporal predicate it gets as an input. This VP predicate can be either a bare state or a progressive or past dynamic predicate (cf.6). The semantic contribution of *-ba* is uniform, independently of the input: it shifts the interpretation of the predicate to the past. Thus, (6a) is predicted to have a past interpretation comparable with the simple past or past perfect in English, (6b) will only have a past perfect interpretation (past applied to past), and (6c) will have a past progressive interpretation. Syntactically, *-ba* heads a TP in the syntactic structure.

The other temporal/aspectual marker in CV, namely, *ta* has, in fact, several functions, and we argue for distinguishing between a habitual *ta* and a modal/future *ta*. The habitual *ta* applies at the same level as *sata* and the \emptyset past morpheme, whereas the modal/future *ta* applies to a TP and yields a future/conditional interpretation. This predicts that, when *ta* applies to a stative predicate, it cannot yield a habitual interpretation. As can be verified with the example in (7), although this form is grammatical, it can only be interpreted as future or, in certain contexts, as a conditional. The fact that *sata*, the \emptyset past morpheme and *ta* are in complementary distribution in CV follows from this system.

- (1) a. *N sabe risposta.*
I know the answer
b. *N kume katchupa.*
I ate katchupa
- (2) a. *N sata kume katchupa.*
I PROG eat katchupa
'I am eating katchupa'
b. *N sata kumeba katchupa.*
I PROG eat-Pst katchupa
'I was eating katchupa'
- (3) a. [*sabe*]: $\lambda x.\lambda y.\lambda t$ [*sabe* (x,y,t)]
b. [*kume*]: $\lambda x.\lambda y.\lambda e$ [*kume* (x,y,e)]
- (4) a. PROG: $\lambda P.\lambda t.\exists e$ [P(e) & $t \subset \text{time-of}(e)$ & $t = \text{now}$]
b. PST: $\lambda P.\lambda t.\exists e$ [P(e) & $\text{time-of}(e) \subseteq t$ & $t < \text{now}$]
- (5) **N sata sabe risposta*
I PROG know answer
- (6) a. [N *sabe risposta*]-ba
b. [N \emptyset *kume katchupa*]-ba
c. [N *sata kume katchupa*]-ba
- (7) *N ta sabe risposta.*
I *ta* know answer
'I will know the answer'

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