Aspectual composition of Polish stative psych verbs
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While events and their composition have received a lot of attention in the literature, the compositional nature of states similar to that of events entered the linguistic stage only recently with the theory developed in Husband (2012). Husband argues that quantization (understood as Borer’s (2005 a, b) quantity) forms the basis of a unified theory of aktionsart, including stative predicates of various sorts. Importantly, according to him, states are a configurational category, determined compositionally. For example, the distinction between stage-level and individual-level predicates is correlated with the referential properties of arguments of stative verbs, similarly to the distinction between telic and non telic predicates in the domain of events. Moreover, following recent ideas coming from various directions (e.g., Kennedy & Levin 2008), Husband argues that one of the important ingredients in the compositionality of all predicates (adjectives, nouns and verbs) which is crucial for quantization are scale structures. In view of the above, we would like to explore further the aspectual compositionality hypothesis, in particular the contribution of prefixation and the role of scale structure in the domain of Polish psych verbs, because among states, psychological eventualities (i.e., eventualities with the Experiencer participant) are especially puzzling in various areas of grammar and provide a good testing ground for the theories related to argument structure, event structure and aspectuality. Importantly, aspectual composition in Slavic languages works differently from the aspectual composition in English as it is mediated by verbal morphology, which following Borer (2005a, b) and Filip (2000) plays a quantificational function over the predicate. We support the unified theory of aspectual compositionality based on quantization with the following observations:

(1) Polish psych verbs of all types come in aspectual pairs, perfective and imperfective, the former describing the onset to a state, the latter describing a state (e.g., zafascynować/ faszynować ‘fascinate’); the perfective variant satisfies Borer’s relaxed definition of quantity/telicity (quantization without a telos, failure of divisiveness), whereas the imperfective variant is homogenous, a characteristic of non quantity; the quantity is overtly introduced by the perfective prefix in line with Borer (2005a, b) and Filip (2000), where prefixes are taken to have a quantificational effect on the predicate. Thus, variable telicity in languages such as English is disambiguated in Polish by an overt morphological perfective marker. This applies across the board in all types of verbs, including stative psych verbs:

(1a) Składa generatywna fascynowala moich studentów przez wiele lat.
   ‘Generative syntax fascinated my students for many years’

(1b) Składnia generatywna nagle zafascynowala moich studentów.
   ‘Generative syntax suddenly fascinated my students.’

Thus, we argue that the contribution of the prefix to the aspectual composition is similar in the domain of states and in the domain of events, but only in the latter case it leads to telicity. In the former case it introduces quantity without a telos.

(2) Psych verbs in Polish easily co-occur with modifiers such as bardzo ‘very’, trochę ‘a little’, lekko ‘slightly’, ogromnie ‘awfully’ (see Willim 2015), whereas they resist proportional modifiers such as całkowicie ‘completely’, or częściowo ‘partly’:

(2a) Janek bardzo imponuje/ zaimponował Marysi swoją erudycją.
   ‘John impresses / impressed very much.’

We support the unified theory of aspectual compositionality based on quantization with the following observations:
According to Kennedy & McNally (2005), modification with very requires a relative standard of comparison which is available only for open scales. Since both perfective and imperfective psych verbs in Polish accept such modifiers (in contrast to eventive verbs), we conclude that these modifiers are compatible with the open scale and the lower closed scale (see 2a-2b), but not with the closed scale and the telic events:

(2c) Pojemniki są bardzo całkowicie puste.
‘The containers are #very/ completely empty.’

(2d) Janek bardzo całkowicie zjeżdżał obiad / wybudował dom.
‘John #very/ completely ate the dinner/ built a house.’

The above pattern of modification with stative psych verbs provides further support for Husband’s universal theory of aspectual composition, and explains their non-telic status.

(3) The view on psych verbs from scale structure and “relaxed” telicity as understood in Borer (2005 a,b) supports the approaches to psych verbs advocated in Marin & McNally (2011) and Rozwadowska (2012) that inchoativity is different from telicity and change of state, yet allows for a more precise reformulation of this distinction: both inchoative verbs and change of state verbs are quantized, but they differ in scale structure (lower closed vs. upper closed or closed, respectively).

All in all, we conclude that both states and events are compositional, thus extending Husband’s compositional theory of states to Slavic prefixed psychological stative predicates.

References: