

Some general thoughts on tense and aspect in Modern Greek

Robert Bielecki & Kamil Trąba

Institute of Linguistics, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
robertbi@amu.edu.pl, prooffek@gmail.com

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The morphological categories belonging to the semantic dimension of *Tense* in Modern Greek, as it is traditionally conceived, seem to be distinguished by means of non-homogeneous criteria. In this paper the temporal and aspectual meanings are treated separately. In consequence, Modern Greek has at its disposal (i) six *Tenses* and (ii) two *Aspects*. The meanings of the six *Tenses* are captured systemically by means of three *Time-points*: (i) *Event Time*, (ii) *Reference Time* and (iii) *Speech Time*, which are referred to each other in the order given by means of the relations of (i) previousness and (ii) simultaneity. In turn, the meanings of the two *Aspects* are captured by means of the notions of (i) *Shortness* and (ii) *Longness*, which are identified as the bedrock of the aspectual oppositions in Modern Greek. Other aspectual meanings such as *Termination*, *Inchoativity*, *Completion*, etc. are conveyed by the lexical stems of the appropriate verbs linked with the affixal markers of the two *Aspects*.

Keywords: Modern Greek, tense, aspect, grammaticalization, adversative sentences

1. Introduction

The parameters which constitute the inflectional paradigm of the Modern Greek verb are customarily, with greater or lesser deviations, referred to by means of the following terms: (i) (*Ρηματικός*) *Χρόνος* [(rimati'kos) 'xronos] 'Tense', (ii) *Φωνή* [fo'ni] 'Voice', (iii) *Έγκλιση* ['ɛŋglisi] 'Mood', (iv) *Πρόσωπο* ['prosopo] 'Person' and (v) *Αριθμός* [ariθ'mos] 'Number'. We feel justified in interpreting these as **semantic dimensions**.

In each of these semantic dimensions there are distinguished appropriate **morphological categories**. The dimension of *Tense* in Modern Greek comprises 8 morphological categories: (a) *Ένεστώτας* [ene'stotas] 'Present', (b) *Παρατατικός* [paratati'kos] 'Imperfective Past', (c) *Αόριστος* [a'oristos] 'Perfective Past', (d) *Παρακείμενος* [para'cimenos] 'Present Perfect', (e) *Υπερσυντέλικος* [ipersi'ndelikos] 'Past Perfect', (f) *Συνεχής Μέλλοντας* [sine'çis 'melondas] 'Imperfective Future', (g) *Απλός Μέλλοντας* [a'plos 'melondas] 'Perfective Future' and (h) *Συντελεσμένος Μέλλοντας* [sindele'zmenos 'melondas] 'Future

Perfect'. The dimension of *Voice* comprises 2 such categories: (a) *Ενεργητική* [enerjiti'ci] 'Active' and (b) *Μεσοπαθητική* [mesopaθiti'ci] 'Mediopassive'. The dimension of *Mood* has 4: (a) *Οριστική* [oristi'ci] 'Indicative', (b) *Προστακτική* [prostakti'ci] 'Imperative', (c) *Υποτακτική* [ipotakti'ci] 'Subjunctive' and (d) *Δυνητική* [ðiniti'ci] 'Conditional'. The dimension of *Person* has 3: (a) *Πρώτο* ['proto] 'First', (b) *Δεύτερο* ['ðeftero] 'Second' and (c) *Τρίτο* ['trito] 'Third'. Finally, the dimension of *Number* comprises 2 morphological categories: (a) *Ενικός* [eni'kos] 'Singular' and (b) *Πληθυντικός* [pliθindi'kos] 'Plural' (cf. Triantafyllidis 1946: 146-147; Tzartanos 1963: 256; Dahl 1985: 1; Paprotté 1988: 447; Hedin 1995: 233; Xydopoulos 1996: 53-54; Holton et al. 1998: 119-120; Klairis & Mpampiniotis 2005: 449; Makropoulos 2009: 9; Tsangalidis 2013: 7; Papafilippou 2017: 895).

The markers of the morphological categories listed above, being subject to different grades of grammaticalization, acquire the form of: (i) affixes ((a) suffixes, (b) infixes, (c) circumfixes), (ii) auxiliary words and (iii) particles. In periphrastic verb forms, two or even three of these types of markers may be combined (e.g. *έγραψα* ['εγρapsa] 'I wrote', *θα γράψω* [θa'γρapsɔ] 'I will write', *θα έχω γράψει* [θa'exo 'γρapsi] 'I will have written').

The markers of particular morphological categories characteristic of the verb in Modern Greek – as befits a typical fusional (inflectional) language – display on the one hand a high degree of **allomorphy**, and on the other a high degree of **polysemy**. For example, a form of the type *γράφω* ['γrafo] 'I write', based on today's Modern Greek paradigmatics, is morphologically analyzable as consisting of only two morphs: the lexical stem *γράφ-* [γraf-] and the suffix (ending) *-ω* [-o]. Nevertheless, this verb form belongs to five morphological categories: *Present Tense*, *Active Voice*, *Indicative Mood*, *First Person* and *Singular Number*. If the affiliation of the verb form *γράφω* to these five categories (beside the obvious affiliation to the appropriate lexical category) is signaled by such a small number of markers, then why are these categories so meticulously kept apart? Does it not mean that in the contemporary lingual consciousness they tend to "fuse" into a single category? We would answer this question in the negative. The morphological categories of the five relevant semantic dimensions do indeed "fuse" in Modern Greek, but solely *en bloc* (i.e. within any verb form some category of the dimension of *Tense* is combined obligatorily with some category of the dimension of *Voice* etc.). The particular morphological categories of these dimensions do not display such fusion (cf. *γράφω* ['γrafo] 'I write' with *γράφεις* ['γrafis] 'you write': *Present Tense*, *Active Voice*, *Indicative Mood*, *Second Person*, *Singular Number*).

The reader may perhaps be surprised that not a single word has yet been written about **meaning**. This by no means implies that we are afraid to join the discussion on that topic because of its ephemerality, or because we espouse some approach to language that may be summed up as *asemantic* or *purely morphological* (cf. Bloomfield 1933: 139-157; Hockett 1958: 137-144; Antal 2005: 276-279). Quite the reverse – and indeed, we regard such an approach as illusory. As far as the morphological categories are concerned, it seems clear that those categories belonging to any semantic dimension should be bound by the relation of **semantic homogeneity**, i.e. they should display identity (or at least some resemblance) from the point of view of their meaning. For example, the meanings conveyed by words belonging to the morphological categories *First*, *Second* and *Third*

Person refer to the communicative statuses of the participants in the communicative event (*locutor, allocutive, delocutive*) (cf. Bańczerowski 1977: 441-461, 1999: 59-78; Zabrocki 1980: 136-137; Bielecki 2012: 28-30).

From this standpoint, among the semantic dimensions under discussion, the dimension of *Tense* turns out to be the most problematic. It seems that the meanings that distinguish the different morphological categories within *Tense* **are not semantically homogeneous**. They refer simultaneously to the meanings which are known in the literature as *temporal* and *aspectual* (or even *Aktionsart*). This state of affairs seems to have various and multifaceted causes. One of them is certainly the unfathomable conceptualization of the notion of *Time*. However, in this short article we do not wish to expatiate upon a philosophical approach to *Time*, in spite of the obvious fact that it is unavoidably bound in some way with *Tense*.

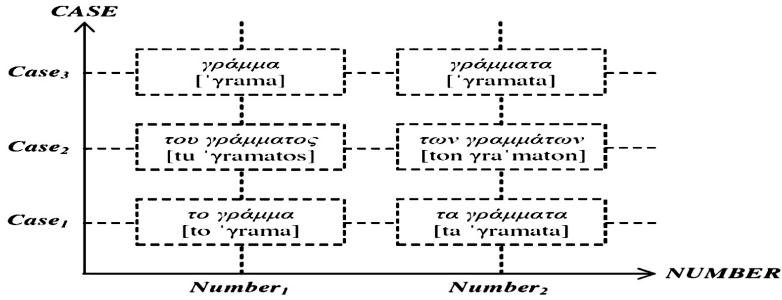
What strikes one in the traditional logical construction of the semantic dimension of *Tense* and its subdivision into morphological categories in Modern Greek is a blindness to the fact that the possible distinguishing of different aspectual morphological categories, conveying appropriate aspectual meanings beside temporal ones, **would actually change nothing** in the traditional methodology of distinguishing semantic dimensions relevant to the description of the inflectional paradigms of the Modern Greek verb. We assert that the appropriate morphological categories of “pure” *Tense* and those of *Aspect* also “fuse” only *en bloc*. What is more, paradigmatic configurations show very clearly that we are not dealing here with some kind of imaginary deep syncretic forms (*aspects fantômes*).

2. Construction of the morphological space

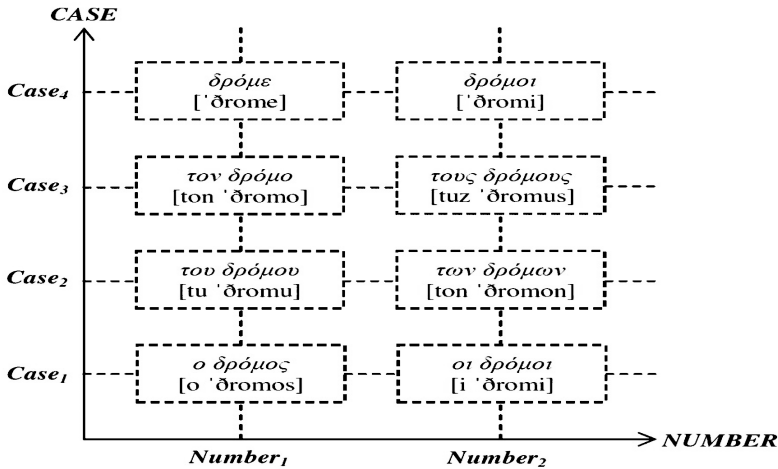
A reader of Modern Greek texts, seeking speech segments (words) which convey for example the meaning ‘the letter’, may excerpt the following tokens: *το γράμμα* [to ‘grama], *γράμμα* [‘grama], *των γραμμάτων* [ton gra‘maton], *τα γράμματα* [ta ‘gramata], *του γράμματος* [tu ‘gramatos], *γράμματα* [‘gramata]. A linguist cannot content himself with such an enumeration. His task as a scientist consists in ordering language material, in detecting regularity in the chaos which he believes to be apparent only. In the case under discussion he constructs a kind of **morphological space** constituted by the appropriate semantic dimensions ascribed to appropriate axes. In the case of the words just listed, the relevant morphological space seems to be relatively simple; it is constituted by two semantic dimensions (termed *Number* and *Case*) with their appropriate “values” (morphological categories). Compare Schema 1.

Broadening the scope of our investigation to include other Modern Greek nouns, for example by considering the word forms meaning ‘the road’, the morphological space presented in the above schema turns out to be insufficient. The “values” that need to be distinguished on the axis *Case* are more numerous. Let us compare Schema 2.

The superposition of Schema 2, which is more “dense” in the dimension of *Case*, on Schema 1 appears to produce, as if as an incidental effect, an undesired disorder. It turns out that *Case*₁ (*Nominative*) and *Case*₃ (*Accusative*) differ in case of the word meaning ‘the road’, but are phonetically indistinguishable in case of the word meaning ‘the letter’.



Schema 1



Schema 2

How to account for such an idiosyncratic fact in the light of the scientific goal of detecting regularity, if the irregularity must sooner or later emerge in the description? Such a question might be answered as follows: **a scientist endeavors to detect and describe adequately as much regularity as possible at higher levels of abstraction.** When one descends to lower levels of abstraction – in our case, when filling lexically the morphological space relevant to the Modern Greek noun – the obfuscating irregularities which inevitably emerge are bound only with this filling, and do not affect the relevance of the abstract schema (morphological space) itself.

3. The temporal-aspectual morphological space

Our everyday experience makes us conceptualize *Time* as a one-dimensional object, a kind of line (straight rather than circular – cf. Moser 2014: 104) on which the present *Time* moves forward towards the future, leaving the past behind. From this point of view the *Time*-line is divided into three fundamental sections: (i) past, (ii) present and (iii)

future. These three sections are unequal in status in many senses. The past is known and irreversible. The present seems to be an ever-fleeting boundary point between the past and the future. The duration of the present time is disputable. In turn, the future is unknown and exists only in the sphere of potentiality.

The primary semantic content of the morphological categories (as lingual objects) belonging to the dimension of *Tense* reflects the *Time*. Because of communicative needs, the present moment, the *Now*, i.e. the moment when somebody is communicating something to somebody, is a moment which is conspicuously distinguished among all other moments. If *Tense* distinctions are grammaticalized in a given language, then we expect to find that they will include a distinction between *Present Tense* and some other *Tense* (cf. Greenberg 1966: 47-49). The *Now* is the moment around which everything revolves as far as *Tense* is concerned.

Analysis of the *Tenses* of different languages has led linguists to the conclusion that the somehow self-imposing tripartite division into (i) *Past*, (ii) *Present* and (iii) *Future Tense* turns out in many cases to be insufficient and inadequate. Jespersen, in his now classical work *The Philosophy of Grammar*, proposes to introduce even smaller divisions, concerning *before-* and *after-*relations with regard to some point in the past or future. Thus, his *Tense*-system comprises seven *Tenses*: (i) *Ante-Preterite*, (ii) *Preterite*, (iii) *Post-Preterite*, (iv) *Present*, (v) *Ante-Future*, (vi) *Future* and (vii) *Post-Future* (Jespersen 1965: 255-257). Reichenbach observes that, in introducing these *before-* and *after-*relations, Jespersen in fact introduces a third temporal point beside the *Speech Time* (S) and *Event Time* (E), i.e. the *Reference Time* (R). For example, a verb form belonging to the *Ante-Preterite* expresses an event which took place before some other event (expressed in the actual sentence or the actual text by some other finite verb form) which, in turn, took place before the present moment ($E < R < S$). Reichenbach asserts that these three points (*Event*, *Reference* and *Speech Time*) should be considered in the analysis of all temporal forms; otherwise such *Tenses* as English *Simple Past* (e.g. *I wrote*) and *Present Perfect* (e.g. *I have written*) – both being absolute *Tenses*, in contrast to relative *Tenses* such as the aforementioned *Ante-Preterite* (*Pluperfect*) – remain undifferentiable in the semantic dimension of *Tense*. According to Reichenbach, the *Event Time* is never referred directly to the *Speech Time*. The *Event Time* is referred first to the *Reference Time*, and only the latter is referred to the *Speech Time*. The temporal structures of the two aforementioned English *Tenses* may therefore be depicted as follows: (i) *Simple Past*: $E = R < S$, (ii) *Present Perfect*: $E < R = S$ (Reichenbach et al. 1967: 135).

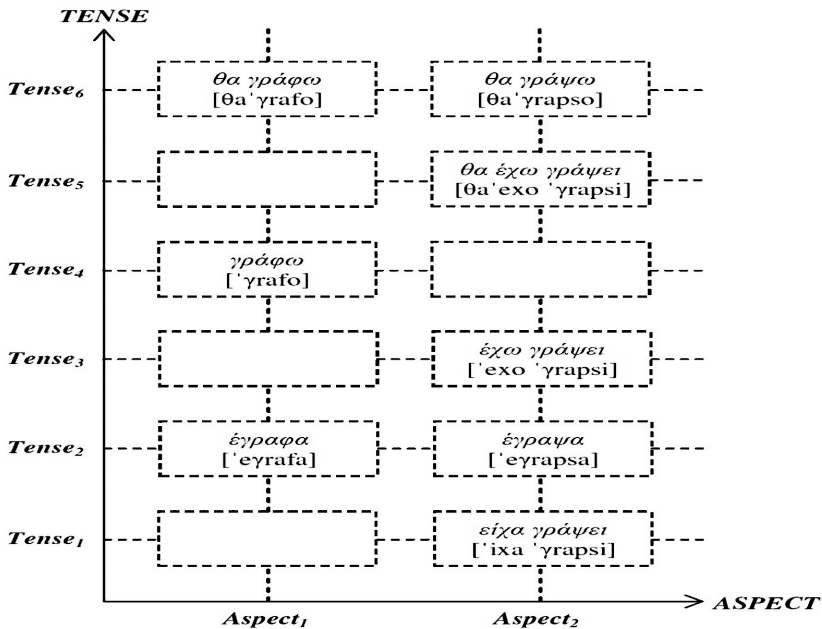
Some languages also grammaticalize the **distance** between the relevant points on the *Time*-line. For example, in somewhat archaic written Spanish, there are two types of *Ante-Preterite*: (i) the remote (neutral) (e.g. *había escrito* ‘I had written’) and (ii) the proximate (e.g. *hube escrito* ‘I had just written’) (Llorach 2000: 210-212).

Other entanglements may arise as a consequence of the **gradualness** of the phenomenon of grammaticalization. For example, in Swedish the construction ‘*komma* + *att* + infinitive’ is described in the literature as “the purest expression of the future”. Nevertheless, there seem still to be interwoven within it two temporal structures: (i) the historically original structure (which seems to be slowly retreating): $S =$ or $< R$ (*komma*) $< E$ (*att* + infinitive) and (ii) the new reinterpreted structure: $S < R$ (*komma*) = E (*att* +

infinitive) (Sadalska 1993: 180-182; cf. also Hilpert 2006: 164-167). The Swedish sentence *Jag kommer att hjälpa dig* would therefore have three meanings: (i) ‘I am going [now] to help you [in the future]’, (ii) ‘I am going [in the future] to help you [after that future moment]’ and (iii) ‘I will help you [in the future]’.

Our argument thus far leads us to the conclusion that as we become acquainted with the different *Tense* systems of world languages, we will constantly have to reinterpret our view of how many “points” must be taken into consideration if we want to reflect consistently the morphological categories within the *Tense* system of the language in question (cf. Bull 1968: 14-15; Vikner 1985: 95). Nevertheless, these “points” must refer, one way or another, **to the present moment**. Any other semantic “admixtures” found systematically in the analyzed verbal forms **are irrelevant to *Tense*** and belong to some other semantic dimension(s).

As we see it, the traditional semantic dimension of *Tense* in Modern Greek as presented in the *Introduction*, comprising eight morphological categories, is constructed so as to include such “admixtures” – in this case aspectual ones. Under the approach argued for in this article, these dimensions are explicitly distinguished from each other. The temporal-aspectual morphological space in Modern Greek therefore takes the form presented in Schema 3:



Schema 3

4. Tense

The temporal meanings of the six distinguished *Tenses*, as morphological categories relevant to Modern Greek, can from our point of view be adequately reflected by means of three *Time*-points on the *Time*-line: (i) *Event Time*, (ii) *Reference Time* and (iii) *Speech Time*, in accordance with Reichenbach's approach. Let us compare Schema 4:

tense	temporal meaning	example	approximate English equivalent
<i>Tense</i> ₁	E > R > S	είχα γράψει ['ixa 'ɣrapsi]	'I had written'
<i>Tense</i> ₂	E = R > S	έγραψα ['ɛɣrapsa]	'I wrote'
		έγραφα ['ɛɣrafa]	'I was writing'
<i>Tense</i> ₃	E > R = S	έχω γράψει ['exo 'ɣrapsi]	'I have written'
<i>Tense</i> ₄	E = R = S	γράφω ['ɣrafo]	'I write'
<i>Tense</i> ₅	S > E > R	θα έχω γράψει [θa'exo 'ɣrapsi]	'I will have written'
<i>Tense</i> ₆	S > E = R	θα γράψω [θa'ɣrapsɔ]	'I will write'
		θα γράφω [θa'ɣrafo]	'I will be writing'

Schema 4

A verb form belonging to a certain *Tense* category indicates the relation of the *Event Time* via the *Reference Time* to the *Speech Time* in a fairly rough way. Hearing a sentence of the type *I wrote a letter*, we can conclude only that the event of the speaker's writing the letter took place at some moment before the *Speech Time*. To make this moment more specific, one has to make use of some adverbial of time or some time clause. Thus, the verb forms in question have only the potential of indicating temporal relations; the points (or sections) on the *Time*-line to which they refer are specified only to a certain extent. The verb forms belonging to some *Tense* category and the appropriate adverbials of time or time clauses are bound by the relation of **semantic compatibility** as regards the dimension of *Tense*. In other words, not all combinations of *Tenses* and adverbials of time or time clauses produce sensible sentences in the investigated language.

Depending on how the *Reference Time* is expressed, i.e. depending on whether it is expressed (i) by a sentence containing a finite verb form or (ii) just by an adverbial of time, we can distinguish two types of *Tenses* in Modern Greek: (i) relative and (ii) absolute. The Modern Greek language has only two relative *Tenses*: *Tense*₁ and *Tense*₅. The remaining *Tenses* – *Tense*₂, *Tense*₃, *Tense*₄ and *Tense*₆ – are absolute *Tenses*.

What characterizes the temporal meaning of the two relative *Tenses* is the fact that all of the relevant *Times* follow each other in some order (*Tense*₁: E > R > S, *Tense*₅: S > E > R). Let us take a look at some examples illustrating the use of *Tense*₁ (1) and *Tense*₅ (2):

- (1) Όταν ήρθες, είχα γράψει το γράμμα.
 ['otan 'irθes 'ixa 'ɣrapsi to 'ɣrama]
 'Before you came, I had written the letter.'
- (2) Όταν έρθεις, θα έχω γράψει το γράμμα.
 ['otan 'erθis θa 'exo 'ɣrapsi to 'ɣrama]
 'Before you come, I will have written the letter.'

The Modern Greek absolute *Tenses* can be divided into three classes: (i) *Tenses* in which the *Event Time* and *Reference Time* are simultaneous ($E = R$), while the *Speech Time* either follows them ($E = R > S$) (cf. *Tense*₂) or precedes them ($S > E = R$) (cf. *Tense*₆); (ii) a *Tense* in which all *Times* are simultaneous ($E = R = S$) (cf. *Tense*₄) and (iii) a *Tense* in which the *Event Time* precedes both the *Reference* and *Speech Time*, these two being simultaneous with each other ($E > R = S$) (cf. *Tense*₃). Let us take a look at some examples illustrating the use of:

(i) *Tense*₂:

- (3) Χθες έγραψα το γράμμα.
 [xθes 'eɣrapsa to 'ɣrama]
 'Yesterday I wrote the letter.'
- (4) Χθες έγραφα το γράμμα.
 [xθes 'eɣrafa to 'ɣrama]
 'Yesterday I was writing the letter.'

(ii) *Tense*₆:

- (5) Αύριο θα γράψω το γράμμα.
 ['avrio θa 'ɣrapso to 'ɣrama]
 'Tomorrow I will write the letter.'
- (6) Αύριο θα γράφω το γράμμα.
 ['avrio θa 'ɣrafo to 'ɣrama]
 'Tomorrow I will be writing the letter.'

(iii) *Tense*₄:

- (7) Τώρα γράφω το γράμμα.
 ['tora 'ɣrafo to 'ɣrama]
 'Now I am writing the letter.'

(iv) *Tense₃*:

- (8) Έχω γράψει ήδη το γράμμα.
 ['exo 'ɣrapsi 'iði to 'ɣrama]

'I have written already the letter.'

Interestingly, the aspectual opposition seems to be direct, i.e. not involving temporal opposition, only in those *Tenses* in which the *Event Time* and the *Reference Time* are simultaneous and precede or follow the *Speech Time* (cf. *Tense₂* and *Tense_δ*).

5. Aspect

In the aspectological literature relating to Modern Greek it is generally agreed that there can be distinguished two types of *Aspect* (ὄψη ['opsi]): (i) grammatical and (ii) lexical (cf. Paprotté 1988; Moser 1994, 2009, 2014; Xydopoulos 1996; Horrocks & Stavrou 2003a, 2003b, 2007; Kitis & Tsangalidis 2005; Tsimpli & Papadopoulou 2006; Sioupi 2009; Alexiadou 2010; Panitsa 2010; Tsangalidis 2014; Papafilippou 2017). In this paper we shall focus on grammatical *Aspect*, i.e. such *Aspect* whose signifiers are of grammatical (affixal) character.

Within grammatical *Aspect* there are generally distinguished two categories: (i) *Συνοπτικός* [sinopti'kos] 'Perfective' and (ii) *Μη συνοπτικός* [mi sinopti'kos] 'Imperfective' (Hedin 1987; Xydopoulos & Tsangalidis 2007; Panitsa 2010; Tsangalidis 2014).

Some of the representative attempts to capture the semantic content of both *Aspects* are of a descriptive and somewhat atomized nature. For instance, Horrocks & Stavrou (2003a: 309) refer to the meaning of the *Perfective Aspect* as "a single, complete whole with external 'bounds' (beginnings and ends), but without specification of any internal temporal 'contour' (in Comrie's 1976 terminology) characterized in terms of properties like continuousness or progressiveness". The meaning of the *Imperfective Aspect* is described as "focus[ing] on part of the situation" (Alexiadou 1994: 146) or as "view[ing] the situation(s) from within" (Hedin 1995: 235). In turn, the approach of Xydopoulos & Tsangalidis (2007: 325-335) is more systemic. They seem to assume that the relevant sentences contain information about the length of the so-called *Event Time* and *Reference Time* even without appropriate time adverbials. When the *Event Time* is included in (is shorter than) the *Reference Time*, then we are dealing with the *Perfective Aspect*. In the opposite case, i.e. when the *Reference Time* is included in (is shorter than) the *Event Time*, we have the *Imperfective Aspect*. In other words, the *Perfective Aspect* refers to an event whose duration does not exceed the duration of the *Reference Time*, whereas the *Imperfective Aspect* refers to an event whose duration exceeds that of the *Reference Time*. Newton (1979: 139) and Mackridge (1985: 113-116) attempt to grasp the semantics of both *Aspects* in terms of markedness, reaching the conclusion that the *Perfective Aspect* is the unmarked member of the opposition ("zero aspect") because its forms appear if the meaning of *Durativity*, *Iterativity*, *Habituality* or *Progressivity* is not given in the sentence or context explicitly or implicitly (cf. the arguments in: Tzeveleku 2009: 240).

Some scholars consider the above dichotomous division of grammatical *Aspect* in Modern Greek to be too general, because the relevant perfective and imperfective forms display different semantic shades in different contexts. For instance, Horrocks & Stavrou (2003a: 310-311, 2003b: 292-293) argue that the perfective verb forms may carry the meaning of (i) *Completion* (e.g. *Η Άννα διάβασε το βιβλίο* [i 'ana 'ðjavase to vi'vlio] 'Anne read the book'), (ii) *Termination* (e.g. *Η Άννα χόρεψε χθες το βράδυ* [i 'ana 'horepse xthes to 'vraði] 'Anne danced yesterday evening'), (iii) *Punctuality* (e.g. *Η Άννα βρήκε το βιβλίο* [i 'ana 'vrice to vi'vlio] 'Anne found the book') or (iv) *Semelfactivity* (e.g. *Η Άννα χτύπησε τον αδερφό της* [i 'ana 'xtipise ton ader'fotis] 'Anne hit her brother'). As regards the imperfective verb forms, they can be said to carry the following semantic shades: (i) *Habituality* (e.g. *Η Άννα το διάβαζε κάθε πρωί* [i 'ana to 'ðjavaze 'kaθe pro'i] 'Anne used to read it every morning'), (ii) *Genericity* (e.g. *Ο ουρανός είναι γαλάζιος* [o ura'nos 'ine γa'lazjos] 'The sky is blue'), (iii) *Progressivity* (e.g. *Η κατάσταση βελτιωνόταν* [i ka'tastasi veltio'notan] 'The situation was improving' and (iv) *Duration* (e.g. *Η Άννα διάβαζε το βιβλίο επί τρεις ώρες* [i 'ana 'ðjavaze to vi'vlio e'pi tris 'ores] 'Anne was reading the book for three hours') (Kitis & Tsangalidis 2005: 145; Moser 2009: 66-70; Sioupi 2009: 224).

We believe that, in order to construct an appropriate picture of grammatical *Aspect* in Modern Greek, one should compare minimal pairs of sentences which contrast with each other on the paradigmatic plane of the language only in the dimension of *Aspect*. At first glance, the pair of sentences (3) *Χθες έγραψα το γράμμα* [xthes 'εγrapsa to 'γpama] 'Yesterday I wrote the letter' and (4) *Χθες έγραφα το γράμμα* [xthes 'εγrafa to 'γpama] 'Yesterday I was writing the letter' fulfills this condition. Nevertheless, since the relevant semantic difference between the sentences containing perfective and imperfective verb forms may be distinct from the difference between sentences (3) and (4), depending on the lexical class to which the verb belongs, the scope of our investigation should be enlarged to cover also the following representative cases:

- (9) *Χθες* *αρρώστησα.*
[xthes a'rostisa]
'Yesterday I got sick.'
- (10) *Συχνά* *αρρώσταινα.*
[si'xna a'rostena]
'Often I used to get sick.'
- (11) *Ο* *παπούς* *πέθανε.*
[o pa'pus 'peθane]
'The grandfather died.'
- (12) *Ο* *παπούς* *πέθαινε.*
[o pa'pus 'peθene]
'The grandfather was dying.'

The sensicality of the adversative sentence (18) indicates that the event of ‘my writing the letter’ (i.e. *έγραψα το γράμμα* [‘egrapsa to ‘grama]) may be “converted” from ordinarily terminative into completive by means of an auxiliary word of the type *όλο* [‘olo] ‘all’, which refers to the letter as the object of writing (cf. Trąba 2017).

Given this diversity of aspectual meanings of the perfective verb forms (as compared with the imperfective ones), comprising (at least) (i) *Termination* (convertible to *Completion*) ((3)-(4)), (ii) *Inchoativity* ((9)-(10)), (iii) *Completion* ((11)-(12)) and (iv) ordinary *Termination* ((13)-(14)), it seems justified to ask whether the morphological categories referred to in the literature by means of the terms (i) *Συνοπτικός* [sinopti‘kos] ‘Perfective’ and (ii) *Μη συνοπτικός* [mi sinopti‘kos] ‘Imperfective’ **are not fully grammaticalized**, because they do not constitute semantic monoliths covering the entirety of the relevant word class (i.e. verb). In our opinion this is not the case.

Modern Greek grammaticalizes fully, in the sense just mentioned, the opposition between (i) *Shortness* (lack of any duration, punctuality) and (ii) *Longness* (duration) by means of, respectively, perfective and imperfective verb forms (i.e. the appropriate affixes). This is the **bedrock** of the aspectual oppositions in the language. Such meanings as *Termination*, *Inchoativity* and *Completion* **are added by the appropriate lexical stems** linked with the markers of the *Perfective Aspect*. The ending, beginning or completing of an action is conceptualized as lasting for a very short time (if at all). This being so, they are semantically compatible with *Shortness*.

In our opinion, the aforementioned semantic regularity does not seem to be invalidated by the occurrence of the following correct sentence type containing a perfective verb form and an appropriate adverbial of time expressing *Durativity*:

- (19) *Έγραψα το γράμμα σε μία ώρα.*
 [‘egrapsa to ‘grama se ‘mia ‘ora]
 ‘I wrote the letter in an hour.’

An adverbial of time of the type *σε μία ώρα* [se ‘mia ‘ora] ‘in an hour’ **does not refer** to the fact reflected by the verb form *έγραψα* [‘egrapsa] ‘I wrote’ itself, but to the fact reflected by the verb form *έγραφα* [‘egrafa] ‘I was writing’, which **is implied** by sentence (19). *Σε μία ώρα* [se ‘mia ‘ora] ‘in an hour’ is **a different kind of adverbial of time** than, for example, *επί μία ώρα* [e‘pi ‘mia ‘ora] ‘for an hour’, which refers directly to the fact reflected by the verb form occurring in the actual sentence containing it:

- (20) *Έγραφα το γράμμα επί μία ώρα.*
 [‘egrafa to ‘grama e‘pi ‘mia ‘ora]
 ‘I was writing the letter for an hour.’

6. Summary and conclusions

The semantic dimensions which constitute the inflectional paradigm of the Modern Greek verb are customarily given as *Tense*, *Voice*, *Mood*, *Person* and *Number*. Within each of these dimensions there are distinguished appropriate morphological categories: eight *Tenses*, two *Voices*, four *Moods*, three *Persons* and two *Numbers*. The morphological categories relevant to the verb in Modern Greek, in spite of the scantiness of their markers in actual words – a fact which goes hand in hand with the fusional character of the language – are meticulously kept apart from each other because they are linked only *en bloc*, e.g. some *Tense* category is linked with some *Voice* category etc. Particular morphological categories are not subject to such linking.

The morphological categories belonging to the same semantic dimension should be bound by the relation of semantic homogeneity. From this point of view the dimension of *Tense*, as it is traditionally conceived in the literature, turns out to be problematic. The meanings on the grounds of which particular *Tenses* in Modern Greek are distinguished do not seem to be homogeneous, because they refer simultaneously to temporal and aspectual meanings. Different *Tenses* and *Aspects*, as discussed in this paper, are linked with each other *en bloc* also. This fact provides what appears to be additional justification for the need to distinguish a separate dimension of *Aspect* in opposition to “pure” *Tense*.

When investigating the morphology of a language, the linguist’s task as a scientist consists in constructing such a morphological space (scheme) which is able to grasp as much regularity as possible at higher levels of abstraction and which is not disturbed by the (lexis-bound) irregularities that emerge when one descends to lower levels of abstraction.

The primary semantic content of the morphological categories belonging to the dimension of *Tense* reflects *Time*. In the *Tense* systems of ethnic languages there may indeed appear different semantic entanglements, related to the number of *Time*-points to be taken into account, temporal distance, gradualness of grammaticalization, etc. Nevertheless, *Tenses* refer ultimately to the present moment, i.e. a moment which is for communicative reasons conspicuously distinguished among all other moments. The semantic “admixtures” which do not refer one way or another to the present moment are irrelevant to *Tense*. The proposed morphological temporal-aspectual space for Modern Greek contains six *Tenses* and two *Aspects*.

The specificity of the *Tense* system of Modern Greek requires the use of three *Time*-points – *Event Time*, *Reference Time* and *Speech Time* – which are referred to each other in the order given by means of the relations of (i) previousness ($>$) and (ii) simultaneity ($=$). Accordingly, the temporal structure of the six Modern Greek *Tenses* can be depicted as follows: *Tense*₁: $E > R > S$ (e.g. *είχα γράψει* [‘ixa ‘ɣrapsi] ‘I had written’), *Tense*₂: $E = R > S$ (e.g. *έγραφα* [‘eɣrapsa] ‘I wrote’, *έγραφα* [‘eɣrafá] ‘I was writing’), *Tense*₃: $E > R = S$ (e.g. *έχω γράψει* [‘exo ‘ɣrapsi] ‘I have written’), *Tense*₄: $E = R = S$ (e.g. *γράφω* [‘ɣrafo] ‘I write’), *Tense*₅: $S > E > R$ (e.g. *θα έχω γράψει* [θa‘exo ‘ɣrapsi] ‘I will have written’), *Tense*₆: $S > E = R$ (e.g. *θα γράψω* [θa‘ɣrapso] ‘I will write’, *θα γράφω* [θa‘ɣrafo] ‘I will be writing’).

The six *Tenses* may be classified into (i) relative (*Tense*₁, *Tense*₃) and (ii) absolute (*Tense*₂, *Tense*₃, *Tense*₄, *Tense*₆) depending on whether the *Reference Time* is expressed by

(i) a sentence containing a finite verb form or (ii) an adverbial of time. The absolute *Tenses* may be put into three categories: (i) $E = R$ ($Tense_2, Tense_6$), (ii) $E = R = S$ ($Tense_4$) and (iii) $E > R = S$ ($Tense_3$). Direct aspectual opposition occurs only in the case of the first category of absolute *Tenses* ($E = R$ ($Tense_2, Tense_6$)).

In comparing appropriate minimal pairs of sentences, one reaches the conclusion that, depending on the lexical class to which the verb belongs, the verb forms referred to in the literature as *Perfective* and *Imperfective* convey different aspectual meanings (e.g. *αρρώστησα* [a'rostisa] 'I got sick' – *Inchoativity*; *πέθανε* ['peθane] 'he died' – *Completion*). This may arouse the suspicion that the categories in question are not fully grammaticalized, because they do not constitute semantic monoliths covering the entirety of the relevant word class (i.e. verb). Nevertheless, we have noted that Modern Greek grammaticalizes fully, in the sense just mentioned, the opposition between (i) *Shortness* and (ii) *Longness* by means of perfective and imperfective verb forms (i.e. the appropriate affixes). In consequence, the opposition *Shortness–Longness* has been identified as the bedrock of the aspectual oppositions in Modern Greek. Such meanings as *Inchoativity*, *Completion*, etc. are added only by the lexical stems linked with the markers of the appropriate *Aspect*.

Our goal in this paper was to present some general thoughts on *Tense* and *Aspect* in Modern Greek. The reader may evaluate whether we have achieved it. Finally, we would like to share with him or her one thought of an even more general nature. The grammatical systems of ethnic languages did not emerge *ex nihilo*. They are the fruit of the teleological use of the language handed down from generation to generation, at each stage striving to an astonishing degree after systemicity. The *Tense-Aspect* system of Modern Greek, though having its own unique features, is no exception to this rule.

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