Negative Imperatives and Aspect: From Locality to Argument Structure

Abstract: I provide a number of arguments that the external argument introducing phrase *v*P in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (BCS) is located between two separate AspPs representing imperfective and perfective aspect (e.g., Travis 2010) and show how this proposal combined with a few additional assumptions about cyclic Spell-Out and Agree(ment) explains why negative imperatives in BCS (and other Slavic languages) are in general incompatible with perfective verbs. I argue that this restriction, which to different degrees holds in different Slavic languages, is a result of a particular alignment of a handful of essentially syntactic factors and can effectively be reduced the locality conditions on Agree. The proposed analysis is based on the following two assumptions: (i) the imperative operator licensing imperative inflection on the verb, which is in T in positive imperatives, is located in C in negative imperatives because it cannot stay within the scope of negation (Hand 2000, Zeijlstra 2006), and (ii) perfective verbs occupy a position in the spell out domain of the *v*P phase (i.e., complement of *v*), in contrast to imperfective verbs which are located in *v* (or higher). Consequently, perfective verbs in negative imperatives are too far away from the imperative operator to establish a successful Agree relation with it. The paper also discusses apparent exceptions to this restriction and shows how they directly follow from the key assumptions of the analysis.