On describing tense and aspect systems. A review-article

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Aaron Uche E., *Tense and Aspect in Obolo. Grammar and Discourse. Grammar and Discourse*, Dallas, Summer Institute of Linguistics and The University of Texas at Arlington 1999, pp. xii+186 (ISBN 1-55671-063-1).

Eisele John C., *Arabic Verbs in Time: Tense and Aspect in Cairene Arabic*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag 1999, pp. xiv+264 (ISBN 3-447-04062-9).

Mreta Abel Yamwaka, *An Analysis of Tense and Aspect in Chasu. Their Form and Meaning in the Affirmative Constructions*, Hamburg, LIT Verlag 1997, pp. 186 (ISBN 3-8258-3719-x).

1. Laying the groundwork [*]

A highly desirable goal in grammatical description, considering the extraordinary diversity of natural languages, is the development of a consistent and robust system of conceptual tools and (if possible) terminological conventions, such that typological comparison may easily be pursued. This is even more the case in the domain of tense and aspect, notoriously haunted by a conspicuous variety of theoretical approaches.

In this review-article, devoted to the discussion of three recent works, I would like to address the problem of how a grammatical description of tense and aspect structures should be conceived in order to make it interlinguistically useful. This would considerably improve the situation in our task of constructing a general typology of tense and aspect systems; a task that should best be tackled before too late, i.e. before most of the languages still spoken on this planet lose their speakers and remain frozen for ever at the status of written record. Since we are engaged in a race against time, we had better do our homework as well as possible, so that future generations of linguists can profit from our present efforts.

The three languages addressed in the three books under review are all spoken in Africa. The choice of these particular examples, for my present purpose, is purely accidental. However, as will soon

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become apparent, these three languages are very different from each other, despite their geographical proximity. Chasu (also called Asu, Athu, Pare) is a Bantu language spoken by some 400.000 speakers – of which only 5% are monolinguals, plus 63% bilinguals with Kiswahili, and 32% trilinguals with Kiswahili and English – all living in the Pare mountains in the Kilimanjaro region, North Eastern Tanzania. Obolo (also called Andoni by outsiders) is a Niger-Congo language spoken by some 250.000 speakers living in the deltaic coast of Nigeria, between the mouths of the Bonny and Qua Iboe rivers. As for Cairene Arabic, a Semitic language, it is too easy to locate to deserve further qualifications.

I shall first discuss the three works separately, and I shall then attempt to provide some general – theoretical and methodological – remarks.

2. Chasu

2.1. The tense and aspect system

I begin with Chasu, described by Mreta (1997), a native speaker of the language. The A. provides a thorough description – although limited to the affirmative forms – of the morphological and semantic properties of the tense and aspect system of this language. He also provides a sketchy discussion of other works relating to Bantu languages (p. 27-36). As for his own theoretical premises, he is rather eclectic, freely reinterpreting suggestions by Bernard Comrie and – as far as the actional, i.e. Aktionsart, classification is concerned – Walter Breu. He is certainly right, I believe, in taking issue with purely morphological analyses, for "morphology cannot be studied in isolation. It interacts with both phonology and syntax as well as semantics" (p. 37).

A sketch of the structure of verb morphology of Chasu – defined by Mreta as "weakly agglutinative" (pp. 51-53) – is given on pp. 53-88, with a useful summary in the table on p. 55. Disregarding minor details (as well as the location of the negative morphs), one finds a pre- and a post-root field. The pre-root field hosts the subject pronominal marker, followed by one or more tense-aspect markers, and (when relevant) by the object pronominal marker. The post-root field hosts the so-called extensions, i.e. formatives with either inflectional (passive) or derivational flavour (causative, reciprocal, etc.), combined in a non-arbitrary way.

The actual description of the tense and aspect system is given in ch. 4. In Chasu we find the following tenses, which I am going to list in the order provided by Mreta, although I shall tentatively attach to them the labels that look most appropriate to me, according to the discussion (and, even more, the examples) offered by this author:

[a/1]: A fully-fledged Present tense, marked by -Ø-. This may have both an imperfective interpretation (habitual or progressive) and a perfective (futural) one. This is one indication – among others – that Chasu is likely to be, in terms of Bhat's (1999) classification, a tense-prominent language.

[a/2]: A rather ambiguous form (marked by *-ra-*) that may convey either the idea of a Continuative Present (possibly in the sense of Eng. "*keep* + V-*ing*" or Sp. "*seguir* + Gerund"), or a futural meaning (see also d/2 below).

[b/1]: A perfective Past, marked by *é-…-ie* (p. 99). Although Mreta introduces this, as well as all tenses in this set, as referring to "a situation that existed in the past but the effects of which may still be valid at the present moment", the only form that really seems to conform to this characterization – clearly reminiscent of the (Present) Perfect meaning – is [b/2]; but see also [f] below.

[b/2]: An 'Experiential' perfective Past, marked by *á-na-*, suggesting that the given situation "has held at least once in the period leading up to the present" (p. 99). This tense conveys one of the characteristic values of the English (Present) Perfect, and it is indeed interesting to observe that it cannot be combined with any temporal adverbial (p. 117).

[b/3]: A Habitual Past, marked by *é-na-*. Here, the reader might get a bit confused, for Mreta says that this meaning can also be conveyed by *-na-* alone (p. 100), although later on he says that the default meaning of the latter form would be Present Progressive (p. 114). Besides, one also meets the more emphatic form *-na-re-*, expressing the idea of "persistently or consistently" doing something (p. 122). This is one point where the reader would definitely wish for more help from the author.[1]

[b/4]: A Progressive Past, marked by *é-!kí-* (p. 100).

[c/1]: A perfective 'Intermediate' Past (i.e. a tense used for not too distant events), marked by *é-…-íe* (p. 101).

[c/2]: A perfective 'Remote' Past, marked by *é-!kí-…íe* (p. 101).

[d/1]: A general purpose Future, marked by *-ne-* (p. 102).

[d/2]: A Future tense pragmatically characterized by some sort of factuality flavour, i.e. referring to events that the speaker considers to be definitely likely to occur (p. 102). Since this is the same form as [a/2] above, the reader is quite obviously led to believe that this might simply be a fairly normal extension to future-time-reference of a Present form (note that, given its special meaning, [a/2] might easily suggest a pragmatic implicature of continuation of the event in the future). Unfortunately, Mreta provides no argument suggesting that this cannot be the correct interpretation. Actually, even the -Ø-marked Present may appear in futural contexts; as for the *-ra-* form, the only restriction seems to be that it cannot co-occur with temporal adverbials referring to a distant future (p. 118).

[e/1]: A perfective Recent Past, marked by *é-ré-* (p.103-4). The A. adds later on that this form may also convey the idea of "resultant state 'past'" (p. 130); and in fact the examples provided there and on p. 132 are compatible with a reading such that the 'recentness' of the event yielding the resultant state may apply to a past moment. If this is so, this form would then be interpreted as a 'relative' recent Past, i.e. not only with respect to the Speech Time, but also to a contextually provided Reference Time.

[e/2]: An 'Absentive' tense (to use the label proposed by De Groot 2000), i.e. a tense expressing the idea that somebody is presently away, supposedly performing a certain activity (p. 104); it is marked by *é-re-*. Judging from the examples given, this seems to be a present-referring absentive, but once again we get no explicit hints from the author.[2]

[f]: A (Present) Perfect tense, marked by *á-…-á* (p. 105-7). With a few achievement verbs (such as *tónga* 'to go'), this form may also express the idea of a completed immediate Future (p. 134), which may easily be interpreted as a fairly obvious pragmatic extension. Quite regrettably, though, Mreta does not tell us whether this tense rejects the localization of the event by means of past temporal adverbials, as

would be the case with a fully-fledged Present Perfect, despite the fact that the problem of the compatibility of temporal adverbials with the different tenses is addressed in ch. 5 (pp. 114ff.). Thus, we lack an important piece of information.

[g/1]: The last set of tenses deals with 'absolute relative tenses', as Mreta calls them following a suggestion by Comrie (1985). The first of these, marked by *á-ré…é*, might be called Posterior-in-the-Past, for it designates events located between a contextually provided past Reference Time and the Speech Time. Thus, it should not be confused with the Future-in-the-Past to be found in English or in the Romance languages, for in the latter case the event referred to may also follow the Speech Time. Besides, in contradistinction to a typical Future-in-the-Past, the Chasu Posterior-in-the-Past need not be introduced by any sort of syntactical device. Consider the following sentences:

(1) a. Mary said that she would come.
     b. … Later on, she would find out the truth.
     c. á-ré-im-é ishamba lakwe, w-éki-na-tóng-é.
         'S/he cultivated her/his farm, after you left'.

As may be seen, while the actual Future-in-the-Past depends either on the explicit tense of the main clause, as in (1a), or on the implicit 'time anchor' provided by the preceding context, as in (1b),[3] the Chasu Posterior-in-the-Past is autonomously licenced by its – so to say – 'absolute relative' location on the time axis.[4]

[g/2]: A tense marked by *á-ná-* that Mreta calls Future Perfect, although the only example provided suggests that it might be inter-preted rather as a 'Counterfactual' (p. 109).

[g/3]: A 'Narrative' tense marked by *-ka-*, i.e. a tense used in narra-tives, normally after past-time-reference has been fixed at the outset by an explicit Past tense such as [c/1] or [c/2] (pp. 109-110). This form carries the 'propulsive' function, consisting in pushing forward the narrative thread. It is therefore a perfective tense.

In an attempt to characterize the Chasu tense and aspect sys-tem, at least the following may be said. There is a threefold temporal distinction: future, present, past. Future-time-reference is provided by the Future tense [d/1], as well as by the Present(s) in the appropri-ate context ([a/1-2], plus [d/2] possibly coinciding with [a/2]). As for

the latter tenses, they apparently cannot be used for past-time-reference. This may depend on the fact that the past domain is richly articulated, for one can count no less than three temporal planes: Remote [c/2], Intermediate [c/1], Recent [e/1]. Other tenses that find their collocation in the past domain are the ones listed under [b], which – with the exception of [b/2], presumably referring to a non-recent past – seem to be underspecified with respect to temporal distance. Now, while this appears to be self-evident with respect to [b/3-4], since they have to carry the whole burden of expressing the imperfective value in the past domain (habitual and progressive, respectively), the interpretation of [b/1] in terms of temporal distance is not at all obvious. Indeed, an event may have present consequences even though it occurred long before the Speech Time. Possibly, the actual import of this form is at the aspectual level, for it may ultimately be a sort of Perfect. However, whether this is really the case we do not know, for the author has not provided enough information; besides, the relationship of [b/1] and [f] is not discussed, either in terms of temporal or in terms of aspectual characterization. As for the remaining tenses, the Absentive [e/2] is presumably linked to the present domain, while the Narrative [g/3] and the Posterior-in-the-Past [g/1] are quite obviously bound to the past domain, possibly at any temporal depth. Finally, the 'Counterfactual' [g/2] – if this is indeed its real function – has no localization on the actual time axis.

In terms of aspectual characterization, the Present(s) is/are aspectually ambiguous. The Future [d/1] seems to be perfective, according to the default characterization of future-referring tenses. As for the various past-referring tenses, with the exception of [b/3-4], they are all perfective. Among these, there are three candidates for the role of tenses conveying the aspectual notion of 'perfect' – which is to be regarded as a quite specific subcategorization of the perfective value – namely: [f], the most likely candidate, but also [b/2], the next likely one – although restricted to a marginal function – and possibly [b/1], whose interpretation (as noted above) is unfortunately unclear.

As should be evident from this tentative summary, there is much that we can draw from Mreta's book, but also quite a lot that needs further clarification. Note, for instance, that besides the tenses listed above, Chasu seems to have at least the following two periphrases: (i) a habitual periphrasis, incidentally quoted on p. 141, about whose degree of integration into the tense system of Chasu we do not get any information; (ii) a progressive periphrasis, incidentally quoted on p. 123 and based on the auxiliary *ho* 'be at a place, exist', for which

Mreta does not state what tenses it may combine with (for instance, can it be used to form a progressive Future?).

As for mood, this is not the main focus of Mreta's analysis, as the title of the book reveals. In any case, we learn that Chasu has an imperative, a subjunctive, a conditional, and an hortative (pp. 120-1).

2.2. Chasu: Actionality and its interactions with the tenses

It is now time for me to spell out what I expect to learn from a book devoted to the analysis of the tense and aspect system of a given language. First, I would like to know the temporal meaning – or rather the range of temporal meanings – conveyed by the various tenses. Second, I would like to know the aspectual value – or, possibly, the range of aspectual values – attached to each tense. Any insufficient or ambiguous information complicates my task as a reader. Whenever I cannot draw precise conclusions, there is a lot that I cannot make use of in what I read, however potentially rich it is. Thus, although I learned quite a lot from Mreta's book, I feel that there is a lot more that I still do not know about the actual structure of Chasu.

I would like to stress, in this connection, that all tenses convey both temporal and aspectual information. Unfortunately, this point is not universally accepted, and perhaps even Mreta has problems with it when he states: "When a given form combines Tense and Aspect specification a cover term Tense/Aspect is employed". However, careful analysis reveals that all tenses have both a temporal and an aspectual facet; if this is not always fully evident, it might simply depend on the fact that the temporal or the aspectual values (or maybe both) may be highly ambiguous (hence, neutralized) in some cases. However, ambiguouity in itself is a relevant type of information. Indeed, a given tense may either be fully explicit as to its temporal and/or aspectual meaning, or vague, to the extent that we need a specific context to clarify its possible interpretations. Unfortunately, the widespread habit (shared by Mreta himself) of confusing 'tense' with 'temporal reference' does not help. If this distinction were systematically maintained, it would become easier to realize that each 'tense', i.e. any morphosyntactic coalescence to be found in a given language in what we usually call the 'tense and aspect system', has to receive an interpretation in both temporal and aspectual terms, for the events referred to must necessarily have a location in time, as well as be viewed from a certain perspective (perfective or imperfective, with the appropriate subspecifications). The only alternative, as I said, is between tenses with a narrow temporal and/or aspectual

characterization and tenses with a vague one, allowing for a range of contextually bound interpretations.

To further substantiate my contention, let me quote one feature of Mreta's theoretical approach. With respect to the suffixes *-íe* and *-ie*, he writes: "These forms will be referred to as 'Completives' instead of 'Perfectives' […]. These forms are […] often used to refer to situations that occurred in the past. […] It is quite natural for completives to occur in the past tensed verb because only events […] which have already occurred can be evaluated as to their completion or non-completion." (p. 122) This does not sound very convincing. It is obviously true that future events may turn out differently than foreseen, but this does not prevent the speaker from having a 'global' view of them, i.e. to conceive of them as perfective events. If this were not so, we could not build a perfective / imperfective distinction in the future; but I do not believe anyone would seriously defend this view. Perhaps, what Mreta ultimately wants to say is that Chasu has no explicit (i.e. morphologically marked) aspectual distinction in the future domain, as opposed to the past domain, but this boils down to being another instance of the above-mentioned fallacy, consisting in denying the pervasive role of temporal and aspectual values in terms of semantic interpretation. Even though the Chasu Future is (admittedly) unmarked for aspect, it needs to be aspectually interpreted in each context in which it is employed.[5]

One merit of Mreta's endeavour is that he devotes quite a lot of attention to actional phenomena, and in particular to the possible interplay of the actional specification of the predicates with the various tenses (p. 124ff). This is definitely a welcome feature, for this interaction should always be taken into consideration. The theoretical background of the actional classification is provided by Breu's (1994) and Sasse's (1991) analyses. The specific reinterpretation of these models is spelled out on pp. 90-93. According to Mreta, Chasu verbs should be divided into the following categories: 'static', 'inchoative', 'activity', 'terminative'. Among these, the least problematic classes are the last two, by and large corresponding to Vendler's (1957) activities and achievements, respectively. Let us then consider the situation of the remaining classes.

The list of 'static' verbs provided on p. 90 contains, besides a bunch of obvious statives, such as the verbs meaning 'be heavy' or 'stink', predicates like 'shine' and 'burn' which (on comparative grounds) do not appear to be typical members of such a class. Unfortunately, the only criterion for 'staticness' is non-agentivity (p. 91), which cannot possibly work, for one can find many examples of

predicates that are at the same time non-agentive and non-stative (cf. *stumble*, in its most obvious interpretation).[6]

'Inchoatives' are defined as "verbs which serve to express a change in condition or state or location of the subject" (p. 91). Actually, one should add that the given change should be followed by a durative event implementing the resulting condition. So, for instance, *sleeping* is quite naturally preceded by *falling asleep*. This class is clearly reminiscent of Breu's (1994) class of 'inceptive static' verbs (p. 26; this is Mreta's own translation of the original term). It contains complex predicates, liable to receive a dynamic or a non-dynamic interpretation, depending on the context. The dynamic interpretation often corresponds to a reading which in other languages would be rendered by an achievement, while the non-dynamic interpretation corresponds to either a stative or an activity. Indeed, the fact that in Chasu this class contains both initio-statives and initio-activities may be inferred from the short list provided by the author (p. 91; cf. *manya* 'learn, discover / know' vs. *shínjia* 'fall asleep / sleep'). Breu and Sasse are certainly right in suggesting this as a relevant actional class, because it turns out that in many languages one and the same predicate may convey both readings, as a consequence of its differing contextual interpretation. But note that even English (and Germanic or Romance languages in general) possess such predicates: cf. e.g. *connect* ('create a connection / keep connected'). Thus, the relevance of this class in a given language is ultimately a matter of its dimension. In Chasu it is likely to be quite large, according to Mreta's testimony. An indirect hint to this is yielded by the observation that Chasu contains no more than five activities, namely the predicates meaning 'cook', 'cultivate', 'dig', 'eat', 'sing'.[7]

As I said, Mreta provides a detailed analysis of the interaction of the various tenses with the actional classes. This is certainly useful, but it would have been even more so if the author had, on the one hand, tried to highlight the underlying regularities (thus reducing descriptive redundancy) and, on the other hand, exploited the analytic character of the presentation in order to test the validity of his classification. Here are some examples.

The observation that the Perfect form [f] with 'static' predicates yields a situation where the temporal localization of the event is not recoverable (p. 132), should have suggested at least two considerations. First, as noted above, Mreta should have explicitly stated whether the use of localizing adverbs is allowed with this tense. Second, if it is the case that *madhi y-á-ho-á* 'the water is cold' literally means 'the water has become cold (at some indeterminate preced-

ing moment)', then there is reason to suppose that so-called 'static' verbs (or maybe some of them) behave in fact like 'inchoatives', namely they are initio-statives. Further reason to hold this view is the fact that some 'static' verbs do not combine with the Ø marked Present (p. 126). Significantly, in order to convey the meaning 'the load is heavy' the Chasu speaker needs to say 'the load became heavy (and it still is)', using the appropriate tense.

One statement that is repeatedly put forth is that 'static' verbs undergo severe restrictions. Thus, for instance, they cannot be used with the Posterior-in-the-Past [g/1], the Experiential [b/2], the Future [d/1], and the Habitual Past [b/3] (p. 135-8). Note that the first three tenses – on top of being intrinsically perfective – suggest a change of state, either in the past or in the future; thus, it is quite understandable that a purely 'static' predicate – i.e., presumably, a 'permanent' stative – cannot be used in such contexts, since a permanent situation cannot by definition undergo change. Something similar holds true for the Habitual Past, since a purely 'static' situation – in the sense just defined – cannot be (more or less) regularly repeated. However, the last example quoted, concerning the 'static' verb *hóa* 'be cold', shows that at least some 'static' verbs may tolerate a change of state. Thus, the reader may doubt that perhaps – and quite naturally – in Chasu there are two types of 'static' predicates, namely permanent and non-permanent (or contingent) ones. This is indeed what one is inclined to guess on comparative grounds. Needless to say, only the former predicates are expected to undergo the severe restrictions mentioned.

A similar case should be made concerning the observation (pp. 139-140) that some 'terminative' verbs cannot co-occur with the Habitual Past [b/3]. The examples given by the author raise the suspicion that the particular type of predicates concerned with this constraint are what I have proposed to call 'non-reversable' achievements (Bertinetto 1986), i.e. achievements depicting situations that cannot be repeated (like *die*). In this case, a simple and obvious refinement of the actional classification would have yielded the correct prediction, hence (presumably) a better interpretation of the data.

Note also that the Recent Past [e/1] cannot be used with verbs like 'die' or 'arrive' (p. 132), although I believe there must be a different reason behind this. Maybe this tense does not only convey the idea of the recentness of the event, but also some pragmatic implicature concerning the situation instaurated at the relevant Reference Time. My guess in this respect is based on the statement on p. 104, to

the effect that with 'inchoatives' [e/1] expresses "the state whose time of inception was in the past but the effects go beyond the referred moment". This is illustrated by the following example: *n-ékí-fik-a, é-ré-shi-ji-a* 'when I arrived, s/he was still sleeping'. This suggests to me that this form is aspectually hybrid, and may possibly be likened, to some extent, to the English Perfect Progressive plus the meaning of recentness. If this guess is on the right track, then a possible translation of the given example might be something like: 's/he had been sleeping for some time', namely 'had just fallen asleep and was still sleeping'. Thus, [e/1] should best be characterized as an 'Inclusive' Recent Past, i.e. as a tense referring to an event that started shortly before, and is still going on at, the Reference Time.

A further instance in which a more refined classification might have helped is to be found on p. 130, where Mreta observes that although with 'terminatives' the *-ra-* form ([a/2], = [d/2]) usually yields a futural reading, with some of them it conveys a Present Progressive reading. However, the apparent exceptions are not actual ones, for the supposed 'terminatives' that yield the deviant reading are verbs like 'cough', which in their durative/iterative interpretation behave in all respects like activities. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that the *-ra-* form "can only be used with very few static verbs" (p. 129). This suggests that this tense yields an implicature of inherent dynamism, even in its use as a Present.[8]

3. Obolo

3.1. The tense system

Obolo is defined by Aaron – himself a native speaker – as an agglutinative language (p. 8). The morphological tool most employed for expressing tense and aspect meanings is prefixation, but periphrastic constructions (of the 'serial verbs' type) are also exploited. The skeleton of the (relevant) morphological structure is provided on p. 8; a summary of the various morphological operations required to generate the Obolo verb forms is provided on p. 162 (and following). It is to be noted that Obolo verb forms consist of two independent morpheme strings, each headed by its own subject prefix. Evidence for this bipartite structure is offered by subjunctive sentences, where the two sequences may be separated by a full NP subject. On the other hand, since the subject prefix is always obligatory, even when a full NP appears, one may wonder whether this is a

bound pronoun, as claimed by Aaron (p. 10), or rather an agreement mark. Whatever the case, Obolo is to be regarded as a 'switch reference' language, since in affirmative indicative serial verb constructions where the subject remains the same, only the first subject pronoun is specified, while all the following ones neutralize to *í-* until a new subject is introduced (p. 10-11).

The moods of Obolo are the following: indicative, imperative, hortative, subjunctive, conditional, interrogative, iussive, and consequential, where the latter brings about the meaning of "whenever X" and is apparently only used in this type of dependent temporal clause (pp. 12-16). However, Aaron's analysis refers almost exclusively to the indicative mood, which is the only one for which the full paradigm of tenses is exploited.

Obolo presents a basic Future / Non-Future split.[9] According to Aaron's description, Obolo has the following tenses:

[a/1]: Simple Future, manifested by the morpheme *-mV-*, with falling tone, where *V* stands for the relevant vowel, depending on person[10] (p. 20).

[a/2]: Definite Future, marked by *-bV-*, with falling tone, used to convey the idea that the event referred to will definitely occur. However, it may also express intentionality, and in this meaning it is not necessarily a future-referring tense; indeed, in example (34), p. 21-22, it acts as a type of Future-in-the-Past (see also below), i.e. as a purely prospective – as opposed to futural – tense.

[a/3]: Immediate Future, which stems from the combination of the Simple Future morpheme and the so-called 'inchoative' morpheme *-ni-* (p. 22; but see below). Judging from the translations provided by Aaron, this tense conveys by default the imminential meaning ('be going to'), unless it is syntactically introduced by the temporal adverb *sábùm* 'before', which seems to require the use of the Immediate Future with no hint at imminentiality (cf. also p. 26). However, in at least one case (cf. example 50, p. 26) [a/3] is used in a past-referring context, namely in a generic past context. Thus, ultimately, the only purely futural tense seems to be [a/1].

[b]: Non-Future, marked by Ø, ambiguously suggesting present- or past-time-reference, unless the relevant temporal adverbials add the necessary information (pp. 23-24).

[c]: Generic, marked by *-rà-* (p. 26-27). It is temporally unmarked, i.e. compatible with any sort of temporal specification, including the vacuous one involved by timeless truths (and perhaps including also future-time-reference). This form needs to be introduced by other tenses, possibly couched in the consequential or conditional mood.

[d]: Perfect, equally marked by *-rà-* (p. 29ff). Although the outer appearance is the same,[11] [c] and [d] should not be confused, for: (i) the Generic always occurs "dependent on other clauses", while the Perfect can be self-sufficient; (ii) in conjoined clauses, all subject prefixes of the Perfect, except the first one in the series, neutralize to *í-*, while all subject prefixes in a series of Generic forms need to be fully specified (pp. 32-33). The A. insists that [d] is a well-behaved (Present) Perfect, conveying the idea of current relevance, not mere anteriority. Unfortunately, he fails to provide the decisive argument, namely incompatibility with temporal localization, and what he writes on p. 30 is not reassuring in this respect.[12] On the other hand, [d] may also occur in past- or future-referring sentences to express the meaning of Past or Future Perfect, respectively.

The last point is worth underscoring, for it shows that Obolo is a RELATIVE TENSE language, rather than an ABSOLUTE TENSE one. The various tenses do not have a rigid deictic orientation; and indeed in the case of the Non-Future they could not have it as a matter of principle. Further evidence to this effect is offered by the fact that the Non-Future may be used in futural contexts to express the notion of Past-in-the-Future, just as the Future tenses – though Aaron does not tell us which, in particular, of the forms listed under [a][13] – may be used in past-referring contexts to express the idea of Future-in-the-Past (p. 25). Regrettably, Aaron does not specify the difference – if any – between [b] used as Past-in-the-Future and [d] used as Future Perfect.

3.2. Obolo: Aspect and Actionality

Obolo also exhibits explicit marking of aspect. Actually, one should be aware that, in Aaron's view, aspect is a broad notion including:
(A) "perfectivity", ranging over the values 'perfective' and 'imperfective' (this is what other scholars would call "viewpoint aspect");
(B) "inherent aspect" (namely actionality);
(C) "phasal aspect", with its possible instantiations, such as:

'inceptive', 'completive', 'durative', 'iterative', 'immediative', and 'inchoative'.

Starting with (A), Aaron observes that the perfective is unmarked, while the imperfective is marked by *-ki-* (p. 36). The latter morpheme may combine with all indicative tenses (p. 41), which means that all perfective indicative tenses have an imperfective counterpart. The latter should be understood as expressing a general imperfective value, for Aaron notes that it may have both progressive and habitual meaning, depending on the context. In addition, the language presents a periphrastic progressive built on an otherwise rarely used existential locative verb coupled with the formative *-ki-* (p. 38-39). A further periphrasis (based on the verb meaning 'look', again combined with *-ki-*), called "continuous", is employed to render the meaning roughly corresponding to Eng. 'keep on V-ing' (p. 39-40). Aaron claims that this is another possible manifestation of the category 'imperfective', and the reason seems to be connected with the presence of the imperfective morpheme *-ki-*. However, it is not clear whether this periphrasis is actually restricted to imperfective contexts; it would be nice to read an explicit statement, considering that the overall sense of this type of periphrases in other languages is aspectually neutral.[14]

Much more disappointing, however, is the lack of information that we get with respect to the ultimate interpretation of 'perfective' forms. Indeed, among the examples provided, (76-77) present the generic reading attached to the Non-Future (pp. 40-41), something quite reminiscent of the generic reading available to the Eng. Simple Present. Typologically speaking, it would be highly relevant to know the possibile factors that lead to this result. One might be invited to speculate (as Giorgi & Pianesi 1997 indeed have) that, perhaps, whenever a Present – or, as in the Obolo case, a Non-Future – tense exhibits a sharp perfective characterization it excludes the progressive reading but does not prevent the generic interpretation. However, since the Obolo imperfective, as noted above, may easily convey the notion of habitual (a close relative of generic), it would be helpful to have a better grasp of the matter. Is it, for instance, the case that the generic Non-Future perfective is used to permanently qualify the behaviour / condition of a given individual or entity, while habitual imperfective tenses simply qualify contingent behaviours / conditions?[15]

Quite appropriately, Aaron devotes a large part of his treatise to the tense / actionality interplay. The classification adopted is inspired by Smith (1991); namely, it includes semelfactives (i.e., punctual

atelics) in addition to the four Vendlerian classes. The vast number of stative verbs compensates for the rarity of attributive adjectives (p. 43,fn.). As for activities, Aaron claims that they all invariably imply volitional control (p. 44). If this is true, it means that the Obolo verbs corresponding to Eng. *rain*, *weep* (usually an involuntary event) etc. do not belong to activities. But in the absence of explicit hints, this has to remain at the level of speculation, not to mention doubt. Finally, as for accomplishments, it should be noted that the list on p. 46 includes several examples that would rather, on interlinguistic evidence, be considered achievements, like 'take', 'give', 'kill'. One remarkable fact is the presence of serial verbs constructions – based on an activity verb plus a "bounder" verb – in this class: so, e.g., from the activity 'beat' one can form 'beat to death' by adding 'kill' (p. 47).

As for compatibility with tense and aspect values, I would particularly like to stress the behaviour of stative verbs which, when combined with the imperfective morphology, seem to indicate "a somewhat dynamic phasal situation" (p. 57). For instance, 'know-IPF.' roughly gets the meaning of 'get to know more and more'. This is comparable to English sentences like: *John is resembling his father (more and more)*. From this we can conclude that the imperfective, in its progressive interpretation, has a 'destativizing' effect on statives, a typologically not uncommon fact (Bertinetto 1994), which contrasts with the widely held view that progressive sentences depict stative situations. It would be interesting to know, on the other hand, whether Obolo also exhibits 'temporary state' progressives, such as Eng.: *The statue is standing in the corner*, where the progressive brings about the idea of 'contingent' – as opposed to 'permanent' – situation, without implying any kind of dynamic evolution.[16]

With respect to the combination of progressive and achievements, Aaron claims that in such cases the latter predicates turn into accomplishments (p. 57-58). However, although this proposal is not new, it appears to be highly disputable on theoretical grounds (Bertinetto 1997, ch. 4). A much better example of actional coercion would be provided instead by the iterative reading of semelfactives in imperfective contexts; although the author cites this fact (p. 58), he does not note its consequences in terms of actional interpretation, namely the fact that iterativity transforms achievements into activities.

A sizeable section of the book is devoted to what Aaron calls "phasal aspect". This corresponds by and large – but not entirely, as we shall see – to constructions corresponding to the phasal periphrases of other languages, based on auxiliaries such as Eng.

begin, *start*, *continue*, *keep*, *finish*, *stop*, etc. Indeed:

[α]: The 'inceptive' consists in a serial verbs construction based on the auxiliary 'begin' (p. 49).

[β]: The 'completive' is based on auxiliaries meaning 'finish', 'pass' or 'be just enough' (p. 50).

[γ]: The 'durative', which emphasizes the duration of an already durative predicate, may have two realizations. Besides repetition of the verb itself (a device to be found in virtually all languages, and quite typical of folk-tales: cf. *he walked, walked and walked*), Obolo presents in this function a construction based on the postverbal adjunction of a "prepositional conjunction" meaning 'until' (p. 50-51).

[δ]: The 'iterative' is also conveyed by alternative means: either reduplication (with low tone) of the first syllable of the verb, or use of one of two serial verbs, meaning respectively 'untie' and 'turn' (pp. 51-52). From examples (111-112), one gathers that these two devices may be combined together. But to complicate the matter:

[ε]: The 'immediative' – purportedly meant to suggest that a given event immediately precedes another one – is illustrated by two sentences (one of them including the serial verb 'turn') that are also employed to illustrate the iterative (p. 52); thus, the reader cannot understand where the difference between immediative and iterative lies, and a further example on p. 63 does not help to clarify the matter.[17] Unfortunately, we find again the same auxiliary verb meaning 'turn' in:

[ζ]: The 'inchoative', a construction suggesting "the coming about of a situation that was not present before or expected" (p. 52).[18] This indeed makes sense, considering the lexical meaning of the auxiliary (cf. *He turned to clean the room*, which may be understood as 'he (unexpectedly) began to clean the room'). The inchoative thus seems to be a special type of inceptive, with a pragmatic side-effect of surprise.[19]

A number of comments are in order. First, the durative [γ] does not seem to relate to a phase of the event, but rather to its actional nature. Aaron himself is ultimately aware of this, for he states that the "prepositional conjunction" meaning 'until', used to build one of

the two manifestations of this type of construction, "functions like a bounder to make an unbounded activity verb into a telic situation" (p. 51). Unfortunately, this appears to be another instance of the fallacy that led Depraetere (1995) and Egg (1995) to claim that delimited atelic events should be interpreted as telic. However, the use of delimitative phrases, such as "*until* t_x", simply stresses the perfective character of such clauses, on the crucial assumption that the predicate be atelic. Indeed, such phrases have the opposite effect (with respect to Aaron's contention), namely they detelicize telic predicates, as in:

(2)   John did his homework until 5 o' clock

which obviously does not imply (telic) termination of the task (for John may have just done the first part of his homework), although the event is in itself complete, i.e. perfectively viewed (Bertinetto 2001). Equally, the iterative [δ] is unfit to express the notion of 'phase', for it conveys the idea of multiple occurrences of the event; it ultimately consists in a type of quantification over events. As for the immediative [ε], this construction would perhaps fit better in aspect proper (i.e., viewpoint aspect), for it conveys the intrinsically perfective idea of 'immediate completion'; or, maybe more appropriately, it belongs in the domain of temporal reference, under the characterization of 'immediate succession' (something one may render by means of: 'as soon as X', where X stands for a clause containing a tense liable to be read perfectively). Thus, ultimately, the category of "phasal aspect" turns out to be – under Aaron's interpretation – a fairly composite one, unlikely to be useful for typological comparison.

   Be that as it may, all so-called phasal aspects may take on the unmarked perfective morphology. As for imperfective morphology, the only combinations that seem to bring about semantic consequences are those with inceptive or completive; but unfortunately Aaron's remark is rather obscure (p. 58), and indeed, as a matter of principle, it is not at all clear why this should be the case.[20] At any rate, given what I noted above with respect to the actional – rather than 'phasal' – character of some of these constructions (cf. durative [γ] and iterative [δ]), it is not particularly surprising that they may freely combine with both perfective and imperfective aspect. On the other hand, should the perfective nature of the immediative [ε] turn out to be the correct interpretation, one would not expect the imperfective morphology to be accessible to it. It is hard to imagine how an imperfectively viewed event could combine with the idea of immediate succes-

sion, which presupposes sharp boundaries of the contiguous events.

As for the combination of so-called 'phasal' aspects and actionality, Aaron provides a number of hints (pp. 59-63) that altogether sound quite convincing and appropriate. There is no doubt this author, as opposed to Mreta, has an overall solid conception of actional matters.

The real emphasis in Aaron's book is however on the textual usage of the tenses in Obolo (pp. 67ff). Chapters 7 to 11 deal with narrative, procedural, expository, compare-and-contrast and hortatory discourses respectively. This is indeed a very relevant perspective, for it is well-known, at least since Weinrich (1964), that the different types of texts have a strong impact on tense choice. Aaron's discussion is enriched by quantitative data comparing the different distribution of the tenses in each text type and at the same time provides new examples of the morphosyntactic structures previously described.[21] I do not have special remarks to put forth with respect to this part of the book, except that I do not agree with the idea that perfective statives "cannot shift narrative time" (p. 78), i.e. cannot advance the narrative thread. I willingly admit that this is a rather infrequent event; however one may occasionally observe it, due to the fact that in perfective contexts most 'contingent' – i.e. non-permanent – statives may develop a dynamic reading which is quite compatible with the textual propelling function normally associated with non-stative perfective events (Bertinetto 2001).

4. Cairene Arabic

Eisele's treatment of Cairene Arabic (henceforth **CA**), based on direct interviews with native speakers, is inspired by Dowty (1979) as to the actional classification of predicates, and by Reichenbach (1947) as to the interpretation of tense-aspect phenomena. However, important modifications to Reichenbach's approach are introduced, inasmuch as the three basic components (**S**peech Time, **E**vent Time and **R**eference Time) are not freely ordered with respect to one another, but entertain mutually exclusive relationships. Specifically, S and E never enter into a direct relation, for this is mediated by R, which relates to S within the "deictic time reference" dimension, and to E within the "non-deictic time reference" dimension (p. 33). This is not a new idea, for it was previously proposed by Comrie (1981) and most prominently by Hornstein (1990). In my opinion, this view has merits and drawbacks. It may indeed be useful in accounting for the well-

known fact that the Future-in-the-Past and the Future Perfect do not normally (i.e., in many languages) specify the deictic location of E but rather indicate its non-deictic orientation of posteriority (for Future-in-the-Past) or anteriority (for Future Perfect) with respect to R. However, this position turns out to be rather counterintuitive in the not infrequent cases where E's location is deictically defined, obviously with respect to S. Now, one may object that this relation can easily be recovered through the intermediation of R. However, this does not seem to make things really different. The real point is that some tenses should be described as deictically oriented and some as non-deictic; this goal may easily be achieved without the adoption of the Comrie/Hornstein convention through a convenient enrichment of Reichenbach's model, namely by splitting Reichenbach's R into two alternative notions (R proper vs. Temporal Localization), as suggested in Bertinetto (1986) among others.

One point on which I find myself in full agreement with Eisele's treatment – see my comment on this in § 3 above – is his distinction between the notions of 'tense' and 'temporal reference' ("time reference" in the author's wording, p. 30). However, the distinction between 'temporal reference' and 'aspect' is not always enforced with equal strength. For instance, on p. 63 Eisele contends that the morphemes that build up the Perfect and the Imperfect tenses express the opposition past / non-past. Yet, the description provided makes it clear that temporal reference is but a secondary connotation of these two tenses, whereas their aspectual qualification always comes to the fore. This, by the way, is more consistent with the situation in Semitic languages as a whole.

In order to have a better understanding of this issue, it is useful to summarize the overall structure of CA's verbal system. The Simple tenses make up the following list, reproducing the examples and definitions provided on p. 3 of the book:

[a] Perfect (e.g. *katab-* 'he wrote'), "complete action in the past (also in conditionals)";

[b] Imperfect (e.g. *yi-ktib* 'he should write'), "subjunctive";

[c] *bi*-Imperfect (e.g. *bi-yi-ktib* 'he writes' or 'he is writing'), "present progressive or habitual";

[d] Active Participle (e.g. *kåtib* 'has written' or 'writer'), "present, stative, resultative and predictive (i.e. future)";

[e] *˙a*-Imperfect (e.g. *˙a-yi-ktib* 'he will write'), "future tense".

A glance at the list suffices to suggest that this cannot be the whole picture. If this were all, CA would not have any means to express the idea of imperfectivity in the past, which sounds hardly plausible. In fact, CA also has a series of Compound tenses. But before examining their status in the system, let us consider in some detail Eisele's own description of the use of the Simple tenses, to the extent of course that one can really understand the situation in the absence of literal glosses (a rather surprising flaw). It will soon appear that the descriptive labels reported above do not nearly provide a faithful summary. Note that Eisele also provides a direct comparison with the Literary Arabic tense system (p. 3), which lacks the *bi*-Imperfect and has two Future tenses instead of just one. In that system, the interpretative labels attached to the tenses clearly suggest that the bulk of the Perfect / Imperfect opposition is considered to be aspectual, rather than temporal. Thus, Eisele's contention that things are different in CA has to be taken seriously.

The Perfect is the only Simple tense that collocates with past-time adverbials; furthermore, it selects a past-time reading with deictically ambiguous adverbials such as the one meaning 'Saturday' (p. 64). From this we can unambiguously draw two conclusions. First, the Perfect is indeed a past-time-reference tense. Second, it should be regarded, despite its name, as a purely perfective past, rather than a 'perfect' proper, considering the repugnance of fully-fledged Present Perfects vis-à-vis time-localizing adverbials.

As for the Imperfect, it receives a rather contradictory treatment. On p. 81, we read that its "temporal value […] is to indicate a rather general non-past deictic time reference, while the non-deictic time reference associated with it may be described as either 'simultaneous-with', or as 'not-prior-to'"; however, in the summary on p. 89, we find that this tense "cannot be associated with a specific time reference", which is quite another matter. Now, the Imperfect may be used in habitual/generic sentences (p. 82), and also after a *bi*-Imperfect or a *ˀa*-Imperfect, in such a way that it inherits the temporal reference previously introduced (p. 81). On top of this, the Imperfect may take on a number of modal meanings, such as jussive, imperative, cohortative, volitive, optative (pp. 83-86). Finally, the Imperfect may appear in dependent clauses introduced by phasal or causative verbs, as well as by a selected set of subordinating predicates (p. 207). From this, we may conclude that: (i) the Imperfect is aspectually neutral, for it may work as an imperfective tense when introduced by a *bi*-Imperfect, but it may also convey a predominantly perfective reading when introduced by a *ˀa*-Imperfect or when used modally; (ii) as for

its temporal interpretation, although the Imperfect is admittedly more often used in non-past contexts, it may also appear in past-time-reference contexts, as for instance in sentences introduced by a past-time-inflected phasal verb (cf. the examples provided on p. 87 and 207, conveying the reading 'he kept on writing', where, incidentally, the Imperfect clearly functions as an imperfective Past).

The *bi*-Imperfect is a neat instance of an imperfective Present tense (pp. 91ff). It may typically be used as a progressive or habitual/generic Present, where the specific aspectual interpretation depends both on context and on the actional value of the given predicate. For instance, if the verb is a 'contingent' stative, the *bi*-Imperfect can, quite obviously, only be read habitually. A similar restriction also applies to perception, cognition, and movement verbs; however, in these cases the restriction is ultimately idiosyncratic, considering that the progressive reading is obligatorily attached to their Active Participle (p. 93). Finally, as often happens with Present tenses, the *bi*-Imperfect may take on future-time reference in the appropriate contexts, for instance in combination with future-time adverbials.

The *ˈa*-Imperfect presents no problems; it is a well-behaved Future. Much more intriguing is the interpretation of the Active Participle. At the outset, the Active Participle is defined by Eisele as a non-present tense (p. 128): whether it receives past- (specifically, 'resultative') or future-interpretation, depends on the type of verb used. Generally speaking, the resultative reading is found with telic predicates and is normally enforced (with the important exception of stative verbs: see below) by an adverb such as *lissa* 'just/still', which brings about a 'recent past' resultative meaning (p. 129). This is actually a case of semantic interaction between tense and adverb; as a result, the latter selects its 'perfective' meaning ('just') and the former its perfectal, namely resultative, interpretation. As for the futurate reading, it emerges with almost every verb in negative sentences (pp. 128-129, 139). In addition, it is typically associated with motion/translocative verbs, called 'locationals' by the author (pp. 96, 129, 140, 142). Note, however, that with these verbs (as observed above) a present progressive reading may also emerge in the appropriate context. Thus, the actual range of temporal meanings available to the Active Participle is not restricted to non-present situations, as initially claimed by Eisele. Indeed, the Active Participle receives present-time-reference reading with stative verbs, or more exactly with initio-stative ones (pp. 132-133, 146; see below for further qualifications on the actional classes). Interestingly, in these cases the adverb

lissa gets its 'imperfective' reading ('still'), as in the sentence translating 'I still hear his voice' (where the Active Participle is employed). It should also be borne in mind that the Active Participle of locationals may get a reading of simultaneity-in-the-past in a certain type of dependent clause, as in the sentence translating: 'I saw him going to school' (where the verb 'to go' takes the form of an Active Participle). Now, although this reading is compatible with the default non-present qualification of this tense, it is aspectually quite different from the resultative interpretation. In fact, while the latter is obviously perfective, the former is clearly imperfective. This implies that although this tense has a predominantly perfective characterization, it should ultimately be regarded as an aspectually neutral form.

Ch. 6 deals with Compound tenses and tense sequencing phenomena. Here, one has to make some important prior assumptions. The so-called Compound tenses in CA look like serial verbs constructions rather than fully-fledged compound forms, as these appear, e.g., in Indo-European languages. In fact, all the elements that build up a Compound tense in CA are inflected. Actually, even the CA equivalents of English clauses involving a dependent non-finite tense contain an inflected form (pp. 148-149). On the other hand, CA Compound tenses should not be confused with paratactic constructions, since they build up a single phrasal structure (pp. 154-155); to the extent that Compound tenses are involved, one should therefore distinguish them from dependent clauses, despite the fact that the (frequently) optional deletion of the complementizer might, at first sight, make the situation look somewhat unclear (p. 158).

Now, since the forms that combine with the auxiliary *kån* 'to be' are the same as those discussed above, it follows that their interpretation should be enriched accordingly, taking into account the non-deictic readings elicited by their use as the second member of Compound tenses, in addition to the (mostly) deictic reading that they get in isolation. Thus, the perfect, the *bi*-Imperfect and the ˙*a*-Imperfect take on, respectively, a '"prior-to", a "simultaneous-with" and a "subsequent-to" meaning, in a largely compositional fashion, as shown by (p. 170-2):[22]

(3)

kån katab	(be.PERF + write.PERF)	'he had written'
kån yiktib	(be.PERF + write.IMPERF)	'he should have written'
kån biyiktib	(be.PERF + write.*bi*-IMPERF)	'he was writing'
kån ˙ayiktib	(be.PERF + write.˙*a*-IMPERF)	'he was going to write'
[låzim]yiku n katab	([must] + be.IMPERF+ write.PERF)	'he [had to] have written'
[låzim]yiku n biyiktib	([must] + be.IMPERF+ write.*bi*-IMPERF)	'he [must] be writing'

biyk¥n katab	(be.*bi*-IMPERF + write.PERF)	'he has (usually) written'
biyk¥n biyiktib	(be.*bi*-IMPERF + write.*bi*-IMPERF)	'he is (usually) writing'
˙ayk¥n katab	(be.*˙a*-IMPERF + write.PERF)	'he will have written'
˙ayk¥n biyiktib	(be.*˙a*-IMPERF + write.*bi*-IMPERF)	'he will be writing'.

As may be seen, the Imperfect seems to bring about some sort of modalization which in certain instances, when this tense is used on the auxiliary, should best be lexically expressed by means of a governing modal verb. This fits well with the availability of modal interpretations with this tense. But most importantly, the above list shows that the Perfect and the *˙a*-Imperfect are primarily perfective tenses, coupled – respectively – with a retrospective or prospective temporal orientation in their non-deictic interpretation, while the *bi*-Imperfect is an imperfective tense with a temporal meaning of simultaneity. Thus, the emphasis Eisele places on the temporal as opposed to aspectual facet of CA Simple tenses is at odds with their use in Compound tenses. In fact, I believe that the latter use could not be explained without duely stressing the essentially aspectual character of CA tenses, which is ultimately responsible for their temporal orientation in terms of simultaneity (*bi*-Imperfect) vs. retrospectivity (Perfect) and prospectivity (*˙a*-Imperfect).

In the light of this, it is not surprising that CA tenses do not show (or show just to a very limited extent) backshifting within sequence-of-tenses (pp. 194ff). There is no need to develop a fully-fledged Future-in-the-Past, for the prospective orientation is maintained by the *˙a*-Imperfect even in embedded contexts. This situation is reminiscent of what happens in Russian, but with important differences. In fact, the sentences corresponding to 'X say-PAST that he arrive-FUTURE yesterday' and 'X say-FUTURE that he arrive-PAST tomorrow' are ungrammatical in Russian, whereas in CA they get a prospective-in-the-past and retrospective-in-the-future reading, respectively (p. 195). As for the embedding of a *bi*-Imperfect under a Past (namely, a Perfect), this allows two interpretations, roughly corresponding, e.g., to the following English sentences (but see below): *He said that he is / was studying*. In other words, the embedded *bi*-Imperfect may carry both a present- (i.e., persisting validity) and a past-progressive reading, depending on whether the Time Anchor is provided by the Speech Time or by the main clause verb. If, on the other hand, the Compound tense consisting of auxiliary-Perfect + *bi*-Imperfect is used in this type of dependent clause, one obtains again a twofold interpretation, though a significantly different one: either plain past-time or backshifted past-time, corresponding to the two

readings of the following English sentence: *He said that he was studying*. Indeed, this Compound tense may be used to express a past-progressive reading with respect to either the Time Anchor provided by the main clause verb (as in the previous example), or an implicit Time Anchor suggested by the preceding context.

Eisele rightly attributes due relevance to actional phenomena. In ch. 7 (pp. 214ff) he presents morphosyntactic criteria to identify the various actional classes in CA. This will undoubtedly be of great interest to semitists in general. To the major Vendlerian actional classes, Eisele adds that of "statives-inchoatives", i.e. initio-statives. This is especially important as far as the Active Participle is concerned: with these verbs, the Active Participle indicates a present state that results from the previous initiation of the event. For instance, the Active Participle of 'know' means that the subject is currently in a state of 'knowing' as a result of having entered into such a state (pp. 227, 232). This situation is of course reminiscent of similar instances in English, although the details concerning their morphosyntactic implementation differ. On the other hand, pure stative verbs tend to lack the Active Participle altogether (p. 232). Another prominent feature of CA's actional classification is the fact that, purportedly, with achievement verbs the *bi*-Imperfect can only have a habitual interpretation, rather than both habitual and present-progressive (p. 236; however, example (52,b), p. 92, does not seem to support this).

My enthusiasm for the prominence that Eisele rightly attributes to actional phenomena is however greatly diminished by the frequent confusion of aspectual and actional categories, which on the whole make up a rather messy picture. First of all, Eisele at times oscillates in his terminology, for he inexplicably mixes the traditional Vendlerian labels and others, partly of his own coinage (like "momentary-change-of-state" and "interval-change-of-state" for achievement and accomplishment, respectively). But the problem is unfortunately not merely terminological. If this were the case, we should simply get used to the fact that this author calls 'event' and 'process' what virtually everyone else would call 'perfective' and 'imperfective' aspect (pp. 43, 45). Clearly, one hardly sees any reason to introduce this idiosyncratic convention, especially considering that the simultaneous usage of 'event' for perfective aspect and 'event' in its normal use (referring to the state-of-affairs denoted by a given verb) is rather cumbersome (cf. p. 60). But the point is that this terminological mess is mirrored by a fairly embarassing theoretical mess. A striking example of this can be found on p. 61, where the notion 'stative' is explicitly applied both to lexical predicates that are non-dynamic in nature and to the

Active Participle (although the author also adds that the Active Participle does not always convey 'stative' meaning, possibly when it simply brings about a 'purely perfective', as opposed to 'perfect(al)', reading). In the latter case, Eisele speaks of 'morphological' stativity. However, a better way to express this would be to appeal to the widespread notion of 'perfect' aspect – notoriously associated with the idea of 'resultant state' – without unduly mixing actional stativity (a lexical concept) and perfect aspect (a morphosyntactic one).

The theoretical confusion is especially evident, in my view, in the treatment of habituality. On p. 82, Eisele appears startled by the fact that in habitual contexts the *bi*-Imperfect preserves, despite its imperfective nature,[23] the telic interpretation of accomplishments. The example given is a sentence corresponding to: 'He writes.*bi*-IMPERFECT a letter to his father every day'. This situation is described by Eisele, in his rather obscure language, in the following way: "even for the explicitly processive *bi*-imperfect, a non-deictic time reference does not yield an explicit processive reading". Now, I believe that this formulation contains a number of shortcomings. First, it is not true that habitual sentences are non-deictic. This would apply rather to generic sentences, such as *Cats are mammals*, which are true at all times. But the habitual event of writing a letter to somebody may be habitually instantiated relative to a temporal frame overlapping the Speech Time, as in the example suggested above, or to a past temporal frame, as in: *In that period, he wrote a letter to his father every day*. The difference is of course to be understood in deictic terms, depending on the localization of the reference temporal frame with respect to the Speech Time. Second, in the formulation proposed by Eisele the term 'processive' is used ambiguously: first with respect to the aspectual domain, then with respect to the actional one, where it is synonymous with 'atelic'. This does not help the reader in his task of working out an interpretation. Finally, the alleged paradox alluded to by Eisele is inexistent because the essential character of habitual situations consists in proposing an indeterminate number of occurrences of a given event that is regarded as imperfective with respect to the reference temporal frame, while each single occurrence of the event is in itself viewed perfectively. Indeed, it could not be otherwise; since we know that each occurrence of the event takes place at more or less regular intervals, it is by definition perfective. Consequently, the intrinsic nature of telic predicates (such as *write a letter*) may be smoothly fulfilled. However, this creates no problem to the extent that the overall imperfectivity of the (indeterminate) series of occurrences is preserved (cf. Bertinetto 1997, ch. 9; for a formal treatment, cf. Lenci & Bertinetto 2000).[24]

5. Conclusions and prospects

From the analysis developed in this paper, one major conclusion should emerge. Although the wealth of descriptive knowledge that one can draw from works such as the ones here discussed is impressive, the field of tense-aspect studies still suffers from a much lower than desirable consensus on the basic theoretical premises. This translates into a rather unsatisfactory situation. Much energy gets lost in discussing the overall conceptual framework, so that the circulation and spreading of scientific knowledge is considerably slowed down. Even worse than that, a considerable portion of the potential wealth of language description simply remains unexploited for the purpose of typological comparison for lack of a commonly shared framework. I believe everyone should agree on this unhappy conclusion, even though not everybody will share (all) the views defended here. Nevertheless, given the situation, we have to believe and hope that the exercise of mutual criticism will, in the long run, advance our general understanding of these matters. At any rate, there is no other way to proceed.

On a more optimistic note, I would like to draw the attention of the reader to one general feature which should hopefully emerge through typological comparison. Given the basic contrast between perfectivity and imperfectivity in the aspectual domain, is there any reason to assume that one of the two makes up the unmarked member of this pair? As far as I know, this point has not often been addressed. One exception in this respect is Delfitto (2002), who takes imperfectivity to be the unmarked member. Now, this seems to be supported by the example of CA, for the aspectual characterization seems to be stronger in the purely perfective Perfect and *ʾa*-Imperfect than in the basically imperfective (but in relevant contexts also aspectually ambiguous) Imperfect, which is indeed morphologically unmarked. Contextual flexibility is, as we all know, one often appealed to criterion for unmarkedness. The Chasu case is similar, for the morphologically unmarked form [a/1], although aspectually ambiguous, has a predominantly imperfective character. However, Obolo seems to go in the opposite direction. There, it is the perfective tense that allows more contextual flexibility and is morphologically less marked (recall that the imperfective is essentially obtained by adding the morpheme *-ki-*). This should not appear particularly surprising. It might indeed be the case that the implementation of the perfectivity / imperfectivity opposition – to the extent that is is mor-

phologically manifested in the aspectual system of natural languages – obeys different tendencies.

But how does the situation appear in the broad typological context? I bet nobody knows the answer as to which of these two tendencies prevails. This is, indeed, explicitly stated by Dahl (1999).[25] And this is but one example – although, admittedly, not the least in terms of importance – of a phenomenon on which more comparative data should be collected in order to shed light on the inner constitution of the tense-aspect domain. Perhaps this branch of linguistics is still in its early stages. Let's take it as an exciting prospect for future research.

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Note

[*] In this paper I shall make a minimal use of abbreviations. Here is their interpretation: PF = perfective, IPF = imperfective, PERF = Perfect, IMPERF = Imperfect, S = speech time, E = event time, R = reference time. The preparation of this work took place during a two-months sray at the Institut für Evolutionäre Anthropologie in Leipzing.

[1] I would like to confine to this space a few minor criticisms that do not refer to the main topic of the book.

Although Mreta provides a phonological sketch of the language (pp. 43+50), he does not fully explain his orthographical conventions, thus complicating the task of the reader. For instance, the actual meaning of the exclamation mark used in the transcriptions is not explained. As for abbreviations, although T usually stands for "tense", in at least one case it stands for "tone" (p. 64). Incidentally, it should have been explicitly noted (in the orthographic transcriptions provided in the text) that the stress mark stands for high tone.

Also, although the glosses are in general quite clear, in a few cases one might wish for more information. Occasionally, one also finds obvious (and thus harmless) mistakes, as in examples (13-14), p. 125, where a noun is glossed as a pronominal marker. As to example (4e), p. 105, the suggestion that the formative -*re*- indicates repetition is greatly diminished in its significance by the fact that this sentence contains an explicit marker of repetition, namely *wa* 'again'.

I also find the statement that the Present Habitual "is marked by -Ø- overtly" (p. 138) sort of oxymoronic. Finally, Crystal (1966), quoted at p. 114, is not listed in the bibliography.

[2] Note that the habitual Past (b,iii) of activity verbs (in the form -*é-na-re*) may take on the sense of a habitual-absentive-in-the-past (p. 140), supposedly by pragmatic extension. However, Mreta does not tell us whether Chasu also presents a semelfactive absentive-in-the-past.

[3] The context in (1b) is actually hinted at by the dots; I trust to the cooperative attitude of the reader.

[4]   As one reviewer suggests, *after you left* may itself work as a 'time anchor'. However, the kind of anchoring I refer to with respect to (1b) is of a different sort. If that were not so, then even the English translation of (1c) would sound like a Future-in-the-Past, but this obviously does not seem to be the case.

[5]   That Mreta has problems in correctly interpreting aspectual notions is also evidenced by the following statement: "The idea of 'completive' is not apparent in the verbal construction like *á-im-á* 's/he has cultivated'. […] This is due to the fact that the verb *-ima* 'to cultivate' is an 'atelic activity verb' whose boundary characteristics do not indicate an inherent final limit in the scope of the action" [p. 134]. However, it is well-known that events denoted by atelic verbs may easily be conceived of as perfective.

[6]   I do not know how to interpret the observation put forward on pp. 79-80 and 125, according to which Chasu presents a derivational morpheme yielding stative verbs. The A. apparently distinguishes between 'static' and 'stative'. However, judging from the examples given, the cited morpheme may turn out out to be a 'potential(izing)' – or maybe 'passive adjective' – morpheme, as the following translations of some (admittedly, not all) of the Chasu materials show: 'break – breakable', 'climb – climbable'.

[7]   It has to be noted that at p. 133 Mreta unexpectedly introduces the label 'transitional inchoative verbs', which seems to correspond exactly to the label 'inchoative verbs' used up to that point.

[8]   Incidentally, the 'static' verbs that do not obey this restriction are those like 'shine', which indeed look less stative than the core members of this class.

[9]   The A. provides arguments to the effect that this should not be confused with a realis / irrealis split (p. 19). For instance, Obolo has means to express irrealis, but these do not convey any idea of prediction.

[10]   Incidentally (and this is not the only hint of it), this shows that Obolo must not be very high in the agglutinative scale, for this morpheme conveys both tense and person meaning.

[11]   Actually, depending on the dialect, the Perfect may be expressed by other morphemes, such as *-ràbí-*, *-bà-* etc. (p. 30fn.). However, at least the first of these alternative morphemes may also be used as Generic, as shown by example (133), p. 58; thus, I dare to speculate that the formal identity between Generic and Perfect is a pervasive feature in Obolo, most likely pointing to the original fusion of these two forms into a single one.

[12]   He claims in fact that [d] "requires a definite reference time point, and [the adverb used in the example discussed, meaning] '(in) time past' is not definite enough". But with well-behaved (Present) Perfects what really makes the difference – as to the ban concerning their use – is temporal localization, not degree of definiteness.

[13]   The fact that [a/2] may convey this meaning, as noted above with respect to example (34) on p. 21-22, is not explicitly discussed by Aaron.

[14]   For comparison, consider the case of Italian, where one may contrast:

[i] Gianni *continuò*   a disturbare
    Gianni kept on.PF   disturbing
[ii] Gianni *continuava*   a disturbare
    Gianni kept on.IPF   disturbing.

What Aaron does not specify is whether the auxiliary verb on which the Obolo periphrasis is based may undergo aspectual commutation.

[15]   Since, as one reviewer observes, Obolo has an explicit marker of imperfectivity (*-ki-*), it might be the case that the progressive reading is unavailable to the perfective Present simply because of a neat division of labour between this tense and

the imperfective Present. This is indeed plausible, but the point raised above concerns more specifically the availability of the generic meaning to the perfective Present, and the possible contrast between this reading and the habitual one.

[16]   The A. also observes that progressive statives may carry the idea of "continuity in the given state"; however, example (129) p. 57, which purports to illustrate this fact, contains a word meaning 'still', so that the intended reading seems to be lexically, rather than morphologically, expressed.

[17]   Equally confusing is the fact that example (73), p. 40, presents an inchoative construction that should illustrate what Aaron calls "continuous" periphrases, rendered in the translation by 'keep on V-ing'.

[18]   Needless to say, Aaron's 'inchoative' has nothing to do with Mreta's conception of this word. Note further that the inchoative may alternatively be vehicled in Obolo by the affix *-ní-*, derived from the verb *nà / nú* 'come'. Considering that morphophonological processes are also to be observed in other instances of 'phasal' aspect, the statement (p. 35) to the effect that 'inherent' and 'phasal' aspects are expressed by purely lexical means – as opposed to the "grammatical" (presumably, morphological) means used to express viewpoint aspect – should be revised.

[19]   The polysemous nature of *yákà* 'turn' is explicitly stressed by Aaron, where he notes that it may also mean 'again' or 'also' (p. 51fn.). Putting together all information concerning this word, the reader is invited to speculate that its use as a serial auxiliary might be based on its iterative meaning, from which the so-called 'inchoative' may have rather naturally developed. Indeed, something that repeats may, in the appropriate context, convey a pragmatic sense of surprise connected with the reinstantiation of the event.

As a matter of fact, one should observe that even in translating purportedly iterative sentences Aaron oscillates between 'V repeatedly' and 'V again' (cf. e.g., p. 62). But the latter interpretation (which I would like to call 'reiterative'), although not orthogonal to the former, seems closer to the meaning of the inchoative as defined by Aaron, than to the iterative proper. In any case, this lends further support to the hypothesis that although these two so-called 'phasal' aspects should not be confused, there must be a connection between them.

[20]   For comparison, note that in Italian one may find, in the appropriate contexts:

[i]	a.	Gianni *cominciava*	/ *cominciò*	a lavare i piatti
		Gianni began.IPF	/ began.IPF	to wash the dishes
[ii]	b.	Gianni *finiva*	/ *finì*	di lavare i piatti
		Gianni finished.IPF	/ finished.IPF	washing the dishes.

[21]   At times, new information is provided. For instance, on pp. 83-84 one finds the reduplicated form of the affix *-ni-*, for which, however, no clear explanation is given.

[22]   In his theoretical introduction, Eisele presents a rather puzzling treatment of English Compound tenses, where the Pluperfect is analysed as, e.g.: "*had left* = perfective (of a stative verb) + perfective (of an activity)" (p. 46, with modification of Eisele's own terminology; incidentally, *leave* should be considered an achievement, rather than an activity). In my view, this hardly makes sense: the aspectual value of Compound tenses should be assessed only once, with respect to the whole structure. Otherwise, undesirable consequences arise. For instance, the Italian Pluperfect could hardly be regarded as a basically perfective form, since it is composed of, e.g.: *era* (imperfective of a stative verb) *uscito* (perfective of an achievement).

[23]   Incidentally, this shows that the aspectual characterization of CA tenses is not unknown to Eisele; however, contrary to the view defended here, it is not considered to be their most salient feature.

²⁴ There is thus no reason to say that habitual sentences entail a perfective interpretation, as Eisele suggests at p. 94. Here is his formulation (recall that 'event' means 'perfective' in his terminology): "the *bi*-imperfect is explicitly processive only with specific time reference; with non-specific time reference it functions for all intents and purposes as equivalent to an event form, since the processivity of the form is then interpreted as iterativity".
Incidentally, it should be observed that the undue confusion of habituality and iterativity is a frequent misunderstanding. However, it should be quite obvious that these two notions should not be identified with each other (Lenci & Bertinetto 2000). Consider for instance the following Italian sentences:

[i] In quel periodo, Gianni andò spesso al cinema
    'In that period, Gianni often went.PF to the movies
[ii] In quel periodo, Gianni andava spesso al cinema
    'In that period, Gianni often went.IPF to the movies.

Any native speaker would immediately agree that only the second sentence conveys the notion of habituality; yet, they both quite obviously refer to an iterative situation.
²⁵ The literature on this issue is indeed confusing. The imperfective is generally considered to be the unmarked member in Slavic languages (see, e.g., Jakobson 1932; Forsyth 1970); the perfective, by contrast, is claimed by some scholars to be the unmarked member in Romance, English and Turkish (Johanson 1971; Comrie 1976). Unfortunately, there is a problem within the problem, since the pair 'perfective / imperfective' takes on quite different meanings in Slavic languages as opposed to the other languages mentioned. This topic was addressed at length in Bertinetto (1997, ch. 2).

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