

Aspect Marking and Modality in Child Vietnamese

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This paper examines the acquisition of aspect morphology in the naturalistic speech of a Vietnamese child, aged 1;9. It shows that while the omission of aspect markers is the predominant error, errors of commission are somewhat more frequent than expected (~20%). Errors of commission are thought to be exceedingly rare in child speech (<4%, Sano & Hyams, 1994), and thus it appears as if these errors in child Vietnamese are more common than in other languages. They occur exclusively with perfective markers in modal contexts, i.e., perfective markers occur with non-perfective, but modal interpretation. We propose, following Hyams (2002), that these errors are permitted by the child's grammar since perfective features license mood. Additional evidence from the corpus shows that all the perfective-marked verbs in modal context are eventive verbs. We thus further propose that the corollary to RIs in Vietnamese is perfective verbs in modal contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

There has been considerable debate regarding the acquisition of tense and aspect by young children. Studies on the acquisition of tense-aspect morphology have either attempted to make a general distinction between tense and aspect, or the more specific distinction between grammatical and lexical aspect, or they have centered their analyses around Vendler's (1967) four-way classification of the inherent semantics of verbs: achievement, accomplishment, activity, and state. The majority of the studies have concluded that the use of tense and aspect inflectional morphology is initially restricted to certain semantic classes of verbs (Bronckard and Sinclair 1973, Antinucci and Miller 1976, Bloom et al. 1980), and that the inherent lexical aspect of verbs (also known as *Aktionsart*) can have a strong influence on the development of tense-aspect morphology (Shirai and Andersen 1995).

Intertwined with the acquisition of tense-aspect morphology is the phenomenon of root infinitives (RIs) and bare forms which have been of great interest for researchers in first language acquisition in the past decade. Extensive cross-linguistic studies on root infinitives have been done to address the question of what the properties of root infinitives are and what temporal references they have as opposed to bare forms and finite verbs. The following representative examples illustrate the RI-phenomenon very common in languages such German, Dutch, French, Swedish.

- | | | |
|-----|--|-----------|
| (1) | a. Thorsten das haben.
Thorsten that have-inf. | (German) |
| | b. Papa schoenen wassen.
Daddy shoes wash-inf. | (Dutch) |
| | c. Michel dormir.
Michel sleep-inf. | (French) |
| | d. Jag också hoppa där å där.
I also hop-inf. there and there | (Swedish) |

A recently growing number of studies on tense-aspect morphology have specifically addressed the interaction and relationship between tense, aspect, and mood. In this section, a brief review of the relevant literature on aspect and mood relationship is provided.

Hoekstra and Hyams (1998) addressed the importance of the properties of root infinitives and underscored the distinction between true root infinitives and English bare forms. They argue that languages that have root infinitives are subject to the Eventivity Constraint (EC): Only eventive verbs can occur in RI-constructions. In other words, non-finite verbs are typically eventive (non-stative), whereas non-eventive verbs (i.e. stative) are exclusively finite. Concurrently RIs also are subject to the Modal Reference Effect (MRE), which means that RIs receive a modal interpretation or an irrealis meaning rather than a deictic tense interpretation. Hoekstra and Hyams argue that the modal interpretation comes from the infinitival morpheme itself. English bare forms, on the other hand, are not subject to EC and MRE as they do not bear infinitival morphology. Their study shows that English bare forms occur predominantly with non-eventive verb.

Varlokosta et al. (1998) found that very young Greek children produce a ‘bare perfective’ form, which in adult Greek is ungrammatical. Even if Greek is a language without infinitival morphemes, these ‘bare perfective’ forms occurring in child Greek do share the central properties of root infinitives. The MRE of root infinitives is thus prevalent in child Greek, i.e. Greek bare perfective verbs have a modal or future interpretation. The following adult and child utterances illustrate the difference between the *-i* affix in adult speech the *-i* form in child utterance.

- (2) a. O Spiros *exi* *diavási*. (adult Greek)
 the Spiros has read-participle
 ‘Spiros has read.’
- b. O Spiros *tha/na* *diavási*. (adult Greek)
 the Spiros fut/subj read-perf.pres.3sg
 ‘Spiros is going to/should read.’
- (3) Pío *vavási*. (child Greek)
 Spiros read-perf.3sg
 ‘Spiros is going to/wants to read.’

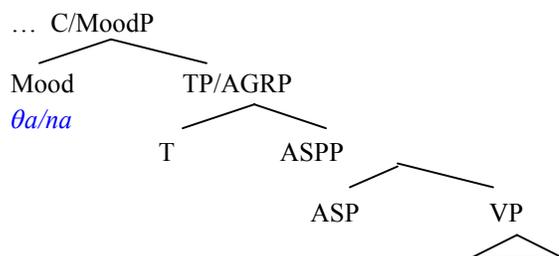
The *-i* affix in adult Greek reflects two homophonous forms: a perfect participle as in (2a), and the 3rd person singular perfective form as in (2b) occurring in future and subjunctive clauses. The child’s verbal utterance in (3), on the other hand, is a perfective verb with an *-i* affix and is missing either an auxiliary, such as *exi* in (2a), or the modal particle *tha/na* as in (2b). Due to the absence of an auxiliary or a modal verb, the child’s verbal form in (3) is referred to as a “bare perfective”, but claimed by Varlokosta et al. to bear the RI-properties. They characterize the *-i* form in this bare perfective as a participle, on the grounds that the child’s bare perfective is a non-finite, non-agreeing form, resembling more the adult version of the participle structure in (2a) rather than the future/subjunctive structure in (2b). They claim that the child *-i* affix is rather a participle and analogous to the child Italian bare participle, which lacks the support of an auxiliary, as exemplified in (4a) and (4b) below:

- (4a) Presa Checco campana. (child Italian)
 taken Checco bell
- (4b) Francesco ha preso la campana. (adult Italian)
 Francesco have-3sg taken the bell
 ‘Francesco has taken the bell.’

Hyams (2002) discusses the development of functional structure in the early grammar of Greek and addresses the resemblance of this bare perfective construction in child Greek to root infinitives found in RI-languages. After a thorough analysis of the structure of the bare perfective, she argues, however, against identifying the Greek bare perfectives as participles, because root infinitives and bare participles are structurally and semantically distinct. She proposes an alternative that captures the semantic property of bare perfectives, namely their very close correspondence to the modal/future structure. Thus the Modal Reference Effect of root infinitives shared by bare perfectives in Greek is a phenomenon that rather results from the match between perfective features and mood, i.e., perfective features check mood features in the syntax.

The following relative ordering of functional heads in Greek is proposed by Roussou (2000) and adopted by Hyams (2002: 251).

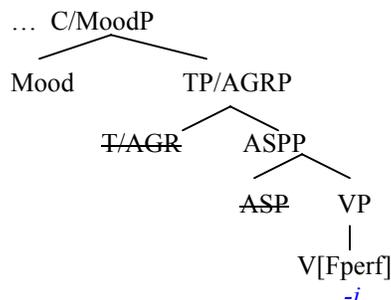
Adult Greek:



In adult structure, T/AGR and ASP projections are above VP. The modal and future particles *tha/na* are generated in the lower C head specified for Mood or $C_{M(mood)}$, hence license MoodP through Merge.

Hyams proposes that in child Greek, T/AGR is unspecified because “the bare perfective is necessarily a non-agreeing form, with the unmarked *-i* affix emerging as the default where AGR is unspecified” (p.258), and ASP is underspecified as the perfective verb does not bear an aspectual meaning. Hence, the irrealis interpretation of the bare perfective is given by the active MoodP, which has to be licensed by syntactic features. Hyams suggests that it is the perfective feature in the bare perfective verb that checks and licenses MoodP because there are no intervening features between Mood and the perfective verb. The structural analysis of bare perfective proposed thus involves an active Mood licensed by the perfective feature in the verb under Attract.

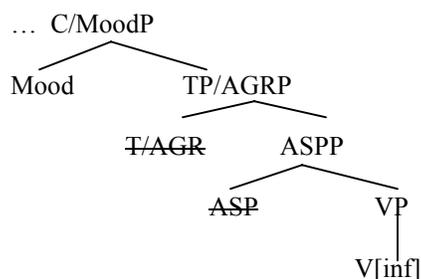
Child Greek bare perfective:



This explains both the modal meaning associated with the bare perfective (from MoodP), which is unexplained in VVR’s participle analysis, as well as the restriction to perfective verbs...In the absence of modal particles the early grammar avails itself of the feature checking option. The adult system emerges as the modals reach adult-like productivity. We may assume, as proposed in Chomsky (1995), that Merge takes precedence over Move/Attract, such that once the modals are acquired, they push out the feature checking option. (Hyams, 2002: 258)

This proposal by Hyams (2002) not only explains the irrealis *-i* form used by Greek children, but also the vast occurrence of root infinitives in child RI-languages. In child Greek, perfective features license mood in child language. In RI-languages, it is the irrealis feature in the infinitive itself that licenses MoodP through Attract:

Child root infinitive in RI-languages:



1.1 Purpose and organization

In this paper, we investigate the following questions:

- (1) What aspectual markers occur in child Vietnamese? What errors (if any) are manifested?
- (2) Is there a correlation between Aspect and Mood in child Vietnamese?

The present paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a brief grammatical sketch on how aspect is used in adult Vietnamese. Section 3 describes the methodology. Section 4 illustrates and analyses the necessary results, from general to specific. Some actual examples from the data are included. Section 5 turns to the gist of the paper, namely the errors of commission and the relationship between aspect and mood with regard to the data. Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. ADULT VIETNAMESE

Vietnamese is an SVO and isolating language, thus has no inflectional morphology. Verbs are not inflected, i.e. they never have a stem change, but there are various markers (separate morphemes) that accompany the verb to express Tense and Aspect.

There are two types of expressions for tense and aspect. One type (a set of three: *đang*, *đã*, *sẽ*) comprises preverbal markers. These markers are used in writing and formal conversation, except for the progressive marker *đang* which is also commonly used in informal conversation. The other type is a postverbal aspect morpheme, *rồi*. This morpheme is very common in informal conversational context.

Table 1: Tense and aspect morphemes in declaratives

<i>Morphemes</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Ø	present stative
Ø	present habitual
đang	present progressive
rồi	perfective
đã	past
sẽ	future

Meaning (Ngo, 1999)

đang	=	to be happening, occurring	(progressive)
rồi	=	finished, completed, already	(perfective)
đã	=	to have happened, occurred	(past)
sẽ	=	to happen, occur [in the future]	(future)

In reliance with the distinction between grammatical and lexical aspect explained by Shirai & Andersen (1995)¹, all of the tense and aspect marking morphemes (T/A markers) in table 1 involve grammatical aspect, simply because they cannot stand by themselves.

The next distinction to be made is the positioning of *đã* and *rồi*. All preverbal aspect markers must immediately precede the verb; no lexical item can intervene. On the other hand, the postverbal *rồi* does not have to immediately follow the verb. Other lexical items can come between the verb and this morpheme. The following examples show the contrast:

- (5) a. Em bé đã uống sữa. b. Em bé uống sữa rồi.
 Baby Pst drink milk. Baby drink milk Perf
 ‘The baby drank milk.’ ‘The baby drank milk.’

Tense and aspect can also be signaled by the use of a time adverb. When such a time adverb is used, both preverbal and postverbal aspect morphemes are optional.

One idiosyncrasy in the Vietnamese verbal system is the lack of the copula *be* when used with an adjective. Instead, adjectives can function as verbs. These are referred to as adjectival verbs and they are stative.

- (6) Con mèo dễ thương.
 cl cat cute
 ‘The cat is cute.’

¹ “GRAMMATICAL ASPECT (what Smith 1983 calls VIEWPOINT ASPECT) refers to aspectual distinction marked explicitly by linguistic devices, usually auxiliaries or inflections, as in the English progressive and Spanish, Russian, or Greek perfective and imperfective. INHERENT LEXICAL ASPECT, also called SITUATION ASPECT (Smith 1983) refers to characteristics inherent in the lexical items which describe the situation. For example, *live* is inherently stative, while *jump* is inherently punctual.” (Shirai and Andersen, 1995: 743/4)

3. METHODOLOGY

The data used for analysis is taken from the naturalistic speech of a monolingual Vietnamese female child, Kim, at the age of 1;9 (MLU = 2.0). The recording was done by the child's father primarily at home, and the last 45 minutes in the car and at the playground. The duration of the recording is approx. 3 hours on audiotape. The total number of utterances in this three-hour-stretch of data including imitations and repetitions is 897. Of these, 201 utterances were eligible for counting. These are spontaneous one-word to multiword utterances excluding imitations, repetitions, and unintelligible utterances. Out of the 201 utterances eligible for counting, 46 were nominal utterances and 155 were verbal utterances. For analysis, only verbal utterances are considered.

Table 2: Types of verbal utterances

Declaratives	118
Imperatives	37

Total	155

The types of verbal utterances used for analysis are only declaratives (118 total) as they contain aspect marking morphemes.

4. RESULTS

4.1 General verbal utterances

At first, a general analysis and counting of the verbal utterances was conducted. This is presented in table 3.

Table 3: General breakdown of verbal utterances

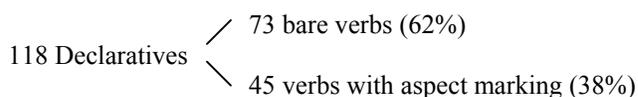
<i>Type of VP / IP</i>	<i>Occurrences</i>	<i>Example</i>
V	24	write
V + N	27	draw dog
V + P	4	go in
V + (N) + Subj. NP	5	hug Daddy
V + V + N	1	draw kick horse
V + N + N	1	change diapers horse
Subj. NP + V	25	Daddy eat
Subj. NP + V + Obj. NP	4	Daddy take milk
Subj. NP + V + V	1	Daddy come lie
Adj.	26	dirty too

The sentence types shown in table 3 indicate that the child is in stage I according to Brown's Stages. Her utterances are characterized as telegraphic speech.

4.2 General breakdown into bare verbs and bare verbs with markers

The total of 118 declaratives taken from the corpus consists of bare verbs and verbs with aspect marking (figure 1).

FIGURE 1: Make-up of verbs



The next step of analysis involves a more specific breakdown, focusing particularly on correct utterances and errors. Table 4 shows the number of the child's correct uses, as well as errors in declaratives. The errors are

e.	Kim đổ Kim pour 'Kim is pouring.'	<i>adult form:</i>	Kim đang đổ Kim Prog pour
f.	ôm chó hug dog 'I'm hugging the dog.'	<i>adult form:</i>	Con đang ôm chó child Prog hug dog
g.	ba ăn Dad eat 'Dad is eating.'	<i>adult form:</i>	ba đang ăn Dad Prog eat
h.	ăn cháo eat soup 'I'm eating soup.'	<i>adult form:</i>	con đang ăn cháo child Prog eat soup
i.	ba đi nằm Dad go lie 'Dad is going to lie down.'	<i>adult form:</i>	ba đang đi nằm Dad Prog go lie
j.	bỏ thùng đồ quá put box things too 'I'm putting too many boxes.'	<i>adult form:</i>	Con đang bỏ nhiều thùng đồ. child Prog put many box things

(B) Omission of the perfective aspect morpheme:

(8)	a.	má đi tắm Mom go bathe 'Mom went bathing / to take a shower.'	<i>adult form:</i>	má đi tắm rồi Mom go bathe Perf
	b.	ma-mi đi chợ Mommy go market 'Mommy went shopping.'	<i>adult form:</i>	ma-mi đi chợ rồi Mommy go market Perf
	c.	ba-bi ăn baby eat 'Baby has eaten.'	<i>adult form:</i>	ba-bi ăn rồi baby eat Perf
	d.	trúng đầu bang head '(My) head banged / was banged.'	<i>adult form:</i>	bị trúng đầu rồi suffer bang had Perf

The research question (1), repeated here again,

(1) What aspectual markers occur in child Vietnamese? What errors (if any) are manifested?

can now be answered: The only aspectual marker that occurs in the child's speech is the perfective morpheme *rồi*. Errors of omission occurred 8% of the time (4/49) with *rồi*, but with the progressive markers *đang* they occurred all the time (100%). Interestingly, errors of commission are manifested as well: 9 out of 45 utterances containing the perfective *rồi*, yielding 20%. It is these errors of commission that we now turn to in the remainder of the paper.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Errors of Commission

Errors of commission from the data set involve errors occurring exclusively with perfective markers in modal contexts, i.e. perfective morpheme *rồi* occurs with non-perfective, but modal interpretation, as shown in (9):

(9)	<i>child form:</i>	<i>adult form:</i>
	vẽ cá rồi draw fish Perf.	Con muốn vẽ cá. child want draw fish
		'I want to draw a fish.'

Table 5 below shows the child's use of the perfective marking morpheme *rồi* for meanings other than the perfective. The perfective marking is overextended and overgeneralized to the present (1 token) and the modal meaning (8 tokens). The child overuses the perfective aspect marking morpheme *rồi* to refer to mood.

The next stretch of utterances is taken from home. Right before this, Kim repeatedly asked her Dad to draw a fish for her, and he didn't do it. In this utterance, she wants to draw it herself. Note that sometimes Kim uses the verb 'write' for 'draw'.

(12) CHI: vẽ - viết rồi - viết - viết rồi - viết (*child makes very demanding sounds*) viết (9x)

draw - write Asp - write - write Asp - write write

'Draw - I want to write - write - I want to write - write write (9x)'

DAD: há? cái gì? há? há? cái gì đây? Kimbi lấy đi, lại đây 3x, lại hung ba 'n miếng ba lấy, hung ba miếng huh? what? huh? huh? what's the matter? Kimbi take IMP - come here - come kiss Daddy a piece '.....Kimbi, take (it) - come here - come here give Daddy a kiss.'

The father's response, 'take it' signifies that *it* = pen. So he finally understood her desire to draw. The father's multiple short utterances for clarification indicate that he is confused about what his child wants. It would be inappropriate to code the child's utterance *viết rồi* as *wrote* as it is very unlikely that the child says *wrote* if it did not write anything before. Father and Kim had been conversing in the last 40 minutes, and there was no clue at all from the tape that Kim wrote anything.

The context for the dialogue listed below between father and child is that Dad has already changed Kim's diapers, as is understood from the stretch of verbal exchange preceding this one. In this dialogue, the child still wants her diapers to be changed:

(13) CHI: thay tả (2x)

change diapers

DAD: há? thay tả rồi

huh? change diapers Asp

'Huh? I changed the diapers.'

CHI: thay tả

change diapers

DAD: thay rồi

change Asp

'I changed.'

CHI: thay tả rồi - thay tả nữa rồi (2x)

change diapers Asp - change diapers again Asp

'I want to change diapers - I want to change diapers again.'

The crucial hint for coding the last utterance as having modal meaning is the word *nữa* (*again*). It would be inaccurate to code it as perfective because Dad changed the diapers only once before, so the child cannot mean to say *changed diapers again*, but she wants her diapers to be changed again at the moment she produces this utterance. Thus, the incorrect use of the perfective aspect marker together with the bare verb here signifies mood.

5.2 Eventivity Constraint and Modal Reference Effect

Although the Vietnamese child utterance *vẽ cá rồi* in (9) is clearly non-infinitival due to the presence of the perfective morpheme, it appears to have a resemblance to the Greek bare perfective verbs and the root infinitives in RI-languages. Our proposal is thus the following:

Hypothesis: Vietnamese perfective aspect marker, analogous to the Greek 'bare perfective' (Varlokosta et al. 1998), can also have RI-like properties.

Recall that root infinitives are known to be subject to the Modal Reference Effect, which entails that they typically have an irrealis or modal meaning. Since the Eventivity Constraint is derived from the Modal Reference Effect, the most appropriate way to test our hypothesis is to investigate whether the Eventivity Constraint holds in child Vietnamese child verbal utterance.

Eventivity Constraint (Hoekstra & Hyams 1998)

- a) Non-finite verbs are typically eventive (non-stative)
- b) Stative verbs are exclusively finite

To determine the eventivity of the child's verbal utterances, we examined all the verbs that occurred with the modal *rôi* and all the verbs that occurred with the perfective *rôi*, in terms of their inherent lexical aspect (Shirai and Andersen 1995), along the lines of the four-way inherent-aspectual classification (Vendler), as shown in table 6 below:

Table 6: Vendler's (1967) four-way classification of the inherent semantics of verbs (in Shirai and Andersen 1995):

<u>Semantic type</u>	<u>Definition</u>	<u>Example</u>
STATE (non-eventive)	that which has no dynamics, and continues without additional effort or energy being applied	<i>see, love, hate, want, etc.</i>
ACTIVITY (eventive)	that which has duration, but with an arbitrary endpoint, and is homogeneous in its structure. For example, in <i>John is running</i> , at every moment the fact of his running has the same quality of running	<i>run, sing, play, dance, etc.</i>
ACCOMPLISHMENT (eventive)	that which has some duration, but has a single clear inherent endpoint	<i>run a mile, make a chair, build a house</i>
ACHIEVEMENT (eventive)	that which takes place instantaneously, and is reducible to a single point in time	<i>recognize, die, reach the summit, etc.</i>

Each verb was classified according to this schema, and the results are presented in tables 7 below.

Table 7: Verb occurring with modal *rôi*⁵ Verb occurring with perfective *rôi*

<i>Verb</i>	<i>Gloss</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Eventivity</i>	<i>Verb</i>	<i>Gloss</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Eventivity</i>
vẽ	draw	Act.	√	chật	is tight	Stat.	
viết	write	Act.	√	dơ	is dirty	Stat.	
đề	put	Acc.	√	nắng	is sunny	Stat.	
đề dỏ	put in	Acc.	√	nóng	is hot	Stat.	
đánh răng	brush teeth	Acc.	√	thay tả	change diapers	Acc.	√
thay tả	change diapers	Acc.	√	ăn (N)	eat (N)	Acc.	√
đi về	go home	Ach.	√	đánh răng	brush teeth	Acc.	√
				gãy	break	Ach.	√
				về	come	Ach.	√
				ngã	fall	Ach.	√
				té	fall	Ach.	√
				ướt	get wet	Ach.	√
				đổ	spill	Ach.	√
				đi	leave	Ach.	√
				ra	come out	Ach.	√
				trời mưa	start to rain	Ach.	√

The results from table 7 indicate that all the verbs that appear with the modal *rôi* are eventive and all the verbs that appear with the perfective *rôi* are both eventive and non-eventive.⁶ There were a total of 8 utterances occurring

⁵ The classification of the inherent lexical aspect of the verbs in this table is based on Shirai and Anderson (1995: 754-6). For some of the verbs that are not listed in Shirai and Anderson, we based the classification on our own interpretation and inferences from the description given in Vendler's schema.

with modal *rôi* and 36 utterances occurring with perfective *rôi*. In the left part of table 7, one of the verbs occurs twice in modal context. Hence 7 verbs are listed but the total number of occurrences is 8. In the right part of table 7, some of the verbs occurred more than once. Hence 16 verbs are listed but the total number of occurrences is 36.

The contrast between modal and perfective use of the perfective morpheme *rôi* is summarized in table 8.

Table 8: Eventivity with *rôi*

	eventive	non-eventive
Modal <i>rôi</i>	8	0
Perf. <i>rôi</i>	26	10

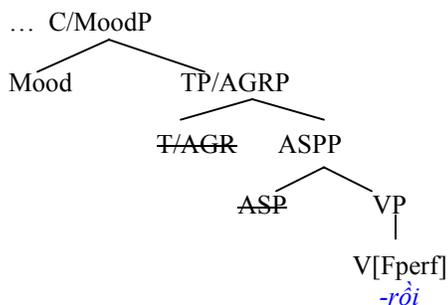
The Eventivity Constraint holds true based on the following pieces of evidence from the data:

All modal *rôi* utterances are eventive. The claim we would like to make is that the Vietnamese child modal *rôi* constructions are equivalent to the RI-construction due to the MRE that obtains in these constructions, i.e. the modal or irrealis meaning obtains in these modal *rôi* utterances. The discussion in the next section can account for this claim.

5.3 Aspect-Mood connection

First, the modal features in the Vietnamese child modal *rôi* construction are licensed in the syntax, hence the incompatibility with non-eventives. Roussou's syntactic structure proposal and Hyams' structural analysis of child Greek can be applied here:

Child Vietnamese perfective verb:



In child Vietnamese modal perfective construction, ASP is underspecified as the perfective verb used in modal context does not bear an aspectual meaning. Hence, the modal/irrealis interpretation of the perfective verb, V[Fperf]-*rôi*, is provided by its perfective feature under Attract. In other words, analogous to child Greek, perfective features check mood in child Vietnamese, hence there is a modal reference with perfective *rôi*.

Second, the properties that Vietnamese modal perfectives share with Greek bare perfectives and root infinitives constitute another convincing piece of evidence for the claim we made above that the Vietnamese corollary to root infinitives corresponds to perfective verbs in modal contexts.

Table 9: Shared properties

Root infinitive and Greek bare perfective

Vietnamese modal perfective

⁶ The only statives occurring in the data are adjectival verbs (*be + Adj.*).

DATA:
 (Spiros 1;9)
 Ego katiti
 I sit-PERF-3.sg.
 'I am going to/want to sit'

CHARACTERISTICS:
 - are overwhelmingly eventive
 - express modal meaning (MRE)

DATA:
 (Kim 1;9)
 Vẽ rồi
 draw PERF.
 '(I) am going to/want to draw.'

CHARACTERISTICS:
 - all perfective-marked verbs in modal context are eventive
 -express modal meaning (MRE)

6. CONCLUSION

Errors of commission are not that rare (up to 20%, 9 out of 45), unlike <4% as reported in Sano & Hyams, 1994. The particular errors of commission are not random, but are permitted by the child's grammar because perfective features license Mood. This answers the research question (2): There is a correlation between Aspect and Mood in child Vietnamese. The Vietnamese perfective verb in modal context is the equivalent of the root infinitive in German/Dutch/French/Swedish and the bare perfective in Greek.

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