

# A hierarchical approach to habitual expressions

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# Introduction

- This paper explores the idea that habitual aspect is not a single grammatical category, just as mood, tense, and evidentiality are not.
- Rather, it is a family of related meanings operating at different scopal layers within the clause.
- Some initial examples may illustrate this.

# Introduction

- (1) I **used to be wont to** read a book in a few days.
- (2) \*I **was wont to use to** read a book in a few days.
- (3) a. In those days, Mary **wouldn't** smoke after dinner.  
b. \*In those days, Mary **didn't would** smoke after dinner.
- (4) a. In those days, Mary **used not to** smoke after dinner.  
b. In those days, Mary **didn't use to** smoke after dinner.

# Introduction

*Plains Cree* (Wolvengrey forthc.)

- (5) ē-kī-nīmihito-**ski-t**                      **māna** awa  
CNJ-PST-AI.dance-HAB-3.SG    HAB    this.one  
kā-kī-wīcēwak                                      mistahi wiya ...  
REL-PST-VTA.accompany-1.SG>3.SG    much    3.SG  
‘This one that I accompanied used to be very fond of (“prone to”)  
dancing, she was, ...’

Wolvengrey, Arok (forthc.), The Expression of Habituality in nēhiyawēwin / Plains Cree.

# Introduction

- To arrive at a classification of types of habitual aspect, the layered structure of FDG is used.
- FDG offers a series of tests to establish at which layer a certain category operates.
- These tests are applied to constructions expressing habitual aspect in 10 different languages.
- The results show that indeed habitual aspect may occur at various layers, and that the distribution of habitual constructions across layers is not random.

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# Habituality

# Habituality

Definition: Habitual aspect expresses the unbounded repetition of an event or situation that typically occurs.

Three aspects of this definition are especially relevant: (i) repetition, (ii) unboundedness, and (iii) typicality.



# Habituality

**Repetition:** a habit manifests itself as a repetition of a certain situation over time, a property it shares with e.g. multiplicativity, as in *stutter*.

# Habituality

**Unboundedness** (Fortuin 2023): this distinguishes the unbounded nature of the repetition involved in habitual series from the bounded nature of the repetition expressed by iterative elements such as temporally quantified expressions, e.g. *He did it twice*.

Fortuin, Egbert (2023), Unbounded repetition, habituality, and aspect from a comparative perspective. *Folia Linguistica* 57(1): 135–175.

# Habituality

**Typicality** (Comrie 1976; Dik 1997, Gregersen & van Lier forthc.): habitual aspect expresses that a situation is characteristic for someone or something. This distinguishes it from other cases of unbounded repetition that do not involve typicality, as in *She did it often*.

Comrie, Bernard (1976), *Aspect*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dik, Simon C. (1997). *The theory of Functional Grammar. Part I: The structure of the clause*. Second, revised edition, edited by Kees Hengeveld. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Gregersen, Sune & van Lier, Eva. forthc. A cross-linguistic survey of habitual markers.

# Habituality

*Squamish* (Salishan; Bar-el 2008: 33)

(6) Na lhelh~lhelh-sp'utl'em.  
RLS HAB~ingest-smoke  
'He's a smoker.'

Paraphrase: 'The subject of the sentence is engaged in the **unbounded repetition** of smoking, something that is **typical** of the subject.'

Bar-el, Leora. 2008. Verbal number and aspect in Skwxwú7mesh. *Recherches Linguistiques de Vincennes* 37: 31–54.

# Habituality: related categories

Expressions of habituality are often used not only to denote the 'unbounded repetition of an event or situation that typically occurs', but also related categories. The relation may be seen as based on each of the three components of the definition mentioned above: repetition, unboundedness, and typicality.

# Habituality: related categories: repetition

Expressions used for habitual aspect may sometimes also be used for other types of repetition, as when they express multiplicative aspect:

*West-Greenlandic* (Trondhjem 2012: 70)

(7) Pujor-tar-tar-poq.

smoke-MLTPL-HAB-IND.3SG

‘She smokes.’ (lit. “She is in the habit of repeated inhaling.”)

Trondhjem, Naja Blytman (2012), Repetitive, iterative and habitual affixes in West Greenlandic. *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 44(1): 64–76.

# Habituality: related categories: unbounded

Occasionally elements expressing habitual aspect are also found in the expression of generic statements, containing general truths. Such sentences are unbounded in the sense that they are always true, whatever the situation in which they are uttered.

*English* (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/grammar/british-grammar/will>)

(8) He **will** leave his clothes all over the floor. (habitual)

(9) Some people **will** always complain. (generic)

# Habituality: related categories: typicality

Sometimes habitual expressions are also used to express that a typical situation that obtained in the past no longer holds in the present, without there being any repetition involved. Binnick calls this an *anti-present perfect*.

*English* (Comrie 1976: 27)

(10) The temple of Diana **used to** stand at Ephesus.

Comrie, Bernard (1976), *Aspect*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



# Habituality: related categories: typicality

*Slovak* (Indo-European; Genis & Kyselica forthc.)

(11) *Hovorí-va-l-a*                      *mi*              *to*              *asi*              *dva razy*              *do týždňa.*  
speak.IPFV-HAB-PPT-F.3.SG    1SG.DAT    that    some    two times    to week

‘She used to say that to me some two times per week.’

(12) *Na kopci pred*              *nami stá-va-l*                                      *chrám.*  
on hill    before    1.PL    stand.IPFV-HAB-PPT.M.3SG    temple

‘There used to stand/be a temple on the hill in front of us.’

Genis, Rene & Kyselica, Paula (forthc.), Slovak.

# Types of habituality

# Types of habituality and related categories

Taking into account the nature of the different layers at the Representational Level in FDG, one could potentially relate a subtype of habituality or a related category to each of the layers of this level.

# Types of habituality and related categories

Genericity at the layer of the **Propositional Content**: The propositional content is always true.

*English* (Bybee, Pagliuca & Perkins 1994: 157)

(13) Water **will** boil at 100 degrees Celsius.

Bybee, Joan & Perkins, Revere & Pagliuca, William. 1994. *The evolution of grammar: Tense, aspect, and modality in the languages of the world*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

# Types of habituality and related categories

Habituality at the layer of the **Episode**: The series of States-of-Affairs constituting the Episode occurs regularly. Since the friends Jane rings up in (14) may be different ones on every occasion, quantification is over a series of different events.

*English* (Eastwood 1994: 127)

(14) Every day Jane **will** come home from school and ring up the friends she's just been talking to.

Eastwood, John (1994), *Oxford guide to English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

# Types of habituality and related categories

*Dolgan* (Turkic; Stapert forthc.)

- (15) Tolor-o:ru    pla:n-i    tolor-o:ru    ilči    d'īē-ge  
fill-CVB.PURP    plan-ACC    fill-CVB.PURP    very    house-DAT  
egel-e-egel-e                                    tik-te:-čči                                    e-ti-bit  
bring-CVB.SIM-bring-CVB.SIM    sew-MLTP-PTCP.HAB    be-PST1-1.PL  
'To fulfil [it], to fulfil the plan well, we always took stuff home and  
sewed there' (Lit. "we always sewed it, (always) taking it home")

Stapert, Eugenie (forthc.), The scope of habituality in Dolgan.

# Types of habituality

Habituality at the layer of the **State of Affairs**: An individual State of Affairs occurs regularly.

(15) It **used to** rain most of the year.

# Types of habituality

*English* (Boneh & Doron (2013: 189)

- (13) When I awoke, a kind nurse **used to** be sitting beside me with warm milk for my stomach if it hurt. (State-of-Affairs – always the same nurse)
- (14) When I awoke, a kind nurse **would** be sitting beside me with warm milk for my stomach if it hurt. (Episode – nurse may be a different one)



# Types of habituality

*Slovak* (Indo-European; Genis & Kyselica forthc.)

- (15) Staršia sestra vraj                    **zvyk-l-a**                    pred            krikom  
older sister reportedly    AUX.HAB-PPT-F.3.SG    before    yelling  
uteka-ť            do bazéna.  
flee.IPFV-INF to pool  
'The older sister reportedly used to flee (in)to the pool to escape  
the yelling.'

Genis, Rene & Kyselica, Paula (forthc.), Slovak.

# Types of habituality

Habituality at the layer of the **Situational Property**: A certain type of State of Affairs occurs regularly due to a propensity of a specific animate participant involved.

(16) My daughter **is prone to** getting seasick.

# Types of habituality

*Mandarin* (Sino-Tibetan; Fang forthc.)

- (17) Bǎobǎo wǎnshàng shuìjiào zǒng ài fānláifùqù  
baby night sleep always HAB come.toss.go  
'Babies always tend to toss and turn in sleep at night.'

Fang Hongmei (forthc.), *Habituals in Mandarin*.

# Types of habituality

Multiplicativity at the layer of the **Lexical Property**: A single State-of-Affairs can be subdivided into several identical subparts.

*West-Greenlandic* (Trondhjem 2012: 70)

(18) Pujor-**tar**-tar-poq.

smoke-MLTPL-HAB-IND.3SG

‘She is in the habit of smoking.’

Trondhjem, Naja Blytman (2012), Repetitive, iterative and habitual affixes in West Greenlandic. *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 44(1): 64–76.

# Types of habituality

*Plains Cree* (Wolvengrey forthc.)

(19) **ē-nāh**~nakowēt

CNJ-MLTP-stop.speaking

‘(as) s/he stutters’

(20) **nāh**~nipā-si-w

HAB-VAI.sleep-DIM-3.SG

‘S/he naps repeatedly/again and again. S/he frequently sleeps a little.’

Wolvengrey, Arok (forthc.), The Expression of Habituality in nēhiyawēwin / Plains Cree.

# Typological predictions

# Predictions

1. Across and within languages, habitual expressions may differ from one another in terms of the layer(s) at which they apply.
2. If a habitual expression may apply to more than one layer, the layers involved will be contiguous in the hierarchy.

The latter prediction follows from FDG's claim that in grammaticalization, contentive change is a matter of scope increase, a process in which a grammatical element assumes new meanings or functions by moving up step by step along the layered hierarchies. The synchronic correlate of this is that, if a grammatical marker operates at more than one layer on the same level, these layers will be contiguous in the hierarchy.

# Testing for different types of habituality



# The operator test

Suppose a habitual expression can be shown to be within the scope of an Episode operator such as absolute tense, and to have scope over an operator of the Situational Property such as qualitative aspect, then this habitual expression will itself most likely be at the layer of the State of Affairs, which is the only intervening layer between the Episode and the Situational Property.

# The operator test

*Spanish* (Indo-European; Olbertz forthc.)

(21) A esta hora, en su casa **suele** estar trabajando.

at this hour in his home HAB.PRS.3SG be.INF working

'At this early hour he is usually working at home. (CORPESXXI)

*Soler* is in the scope of the present tense operator (Episode), expressed on the auxiliary itself, while it has scope over the progressive operator (Situational Property), expressed by a combination of the auxiliary *estar* and the converbal ending of the main verb.

Olbertz, Hella (forthc.), The grammatical expression of habituality in Spanish.

# The modifier test

Suppose a habitual expression can be shown to be within the scope of a State of Affairs modifier such as a relative temporal one, and to have scope over a modifier of the Lexical Property such as one of degree, then this habitual expression is itself most likely situated at the layer of the Situational Property, which is the only intervening layer between the State of Affairs and the Lexical Property.

# The modifier test

- (22) My daughter is wont to getting seasick **when she sails on a small ship**.
- (23) My daughter is wont to cry **a lot**.

*Wont to* is in the scope of the relative temporal modifier *when she sails on a small ship*, a modifier of the State of Affairs, while it has scope over the degree modifier *a lot*, a modifier of the Lexical Property.

# The modifier test

*Mandarin* (Sino-Tibetan; Fang forthc.)

(24) Háizǐ **měi tiān** shuìjiào qián ài chī qiǎokèlì  
child every day sleep before love.HAB eat chocolate  
'Every day before sleep the child tends to eat chocolates.'

(25) Yě ài **rènzhēnde** xué.xí.  
too love.HAB seriously study  
'I also tend to study hard.'

Fang Hongmei (forthc.), *Habituals in Mandarin*.

# The complementation test

In FDG, complement clauses can be classified in terms of the highest layer they contain. For instance, the complement of *believe* must be a mental construct, hence it is represented as a Propositional Content in FDG. Apart from the Propositional Content layer, this complement clause will then also contain all layers within the scope of the Propositional Content, i.e. the Episode, State-of-Affairs, and Situational Property layers. On the other hand, aspectual and achievement verbs such as *begin* and *manage* will take the Situational Property layer as their complement. This means that the higher layers of Propositional Content, Episode, and State-of-Affairs layers are irrelevant to these complement clauses.

# The complementation test

Therefore, to test which layer each habitual marker belongs to, one can make use of a set of complement clauses, each classified by a different layer, and run through them in a hierarchical fashion from highest-layer complement clause to lowest, attempting to include a habitual marker in each clause. If the habitual marker cannot feature in the complement clause, then that habitual marker must pertain to a layer higher than that of the complement clause.

# The complementation test

In Slovak, the lowest type of complement clause in which the *zvyknúť*-strategy can occur is that of the State-of-Affairs. The strategy can thus be located at this layer.



# The complementation test

*Slovak* (Indo-European; Genis & Kyselica forthc.)

- (26) Jej nehoda spôsobi-l-a, že **zvyk-l-a**  
her accident cause.PFV-PPT-F.3SG CONJ AUX.HAB-PPT-F.3.SG  
preleža-t' celý deň v posteli  
lie.PFV-INF whole day in bed  
'Her accident had caused her to [usually] spend the whole day in bed.'

# Results

# Slovak *zvyknúť* + infinitive: SoA

| Layers                | occurs within scope of modifier | occurs within scope of operator | can occur in complement | scopes over modifier | scopes over operator |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Communicated Content  |                                 | --                              |                         |                      |                      |
| Propositional Content |                                 | --                              |                         |                      |                      |
| Episode               |                                 |                                 |                         |                      |                      |
| State of Affairs      |                                 |                                 |                         |                      | ...                  |
| Situational Property  |                                 |                                 |                         |                      | ...                  |
| Lexical Property      |                                 |                                 |                         |                      |                      |

# Slovak *va*-verbs: Situational Property

| Layers                | occurs within scope of modifier | occurs within scope of operator | can occur in complement | scopes over modifier | scopes over operator |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Communicated Content  |                                 | ...                             |                         |                      |                      |
| Propositional Content |                                 |                                 |                         |                      |                      |
| Episode               |                                 |                                 |                         |                      |                      |
| State of Affairs      |                                 |                                 |                         |                      |                      |
| Situational Property  |                                 | ...                             |                         |                      | ...                  |
| Lexical Property      |                                 | ...                             |                         |                      | ...                  |

# Slovak

Smiech **zvykn-e** bý-**va-t'** nákazlivý.  
laughter AUX.HAB-PRS.3SG be.IPFV-HAB-INF contagious  
'Laughter is [usually] contagious.' [SNK - MYTZ2017/14]

Results (next slide)

| <i>Construction</i>                       | <i>p</i> | <i>ep</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>s</i> | <i>f</i> |
|---|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| English <i>will</i>                       |          |           |          |          |          |
| Coptic <i>šare</i>                        |          |           |          |          |          |
| Dolgan <i>-A:ččl</i>                      |          |           |          |          |          |
| English <i>would</i>                      |          |           |          |          |          |
| Ancien Greek <i>eío:tha</i>               |          |           |          |          |          |
| Ancient Greek modal past habitual         |          |           |          |          |          |
| European Portuguese <i>costumar</i>       |          |           |          |          |          |
| European Portuguese <i>ter.PRS + PTCP</i> |          |           |          |          |          |
| Russian <i>byvalo</i>                     |          |           |          |          |          |
| Mandarin <i>guànyu</i>                    |          |           |          |          |          |
| Spanish <i>soler</i>                      |          |           |          |          |          |
| Ancient Greek iterative habitual          |          |           |          | ?        |          |
| Cree <i>māna</i>                          |          |           |          |          |          |
| English <i>used to</i>                    |          |           |          |          |          |
| Slovak <i>zvyknúť</i>                     |          |           |          |          |          |
| Spanish <i>acostumbrar</i>                |          |           |          |          |          |
| Mandarin <i>ài</i>                        |          |           |          |          |          |
| Ancient Greek <i>philéo/ethélo</i>        |          |           |          |          |          |
| Plains Cree <i>-ski</i>                   |          |           |          |          |          |
| Slovak <i>va</i> -verbs                   |          |           |          |          |          |
| Plains Cree <i>Cāh</i> -reduplication     |          |           |          |          |          |

# Results

## Prediction

1. Across and within languages, habitual expressions may differ from one another in terms of the layer(s) at which they apply.

As shown in the results table, this is indeed the case. There are habitual strategies that apply at the layer of the Episode only (e.g. Dolgan - *A:ččl*), at the layer of the State of Affairs only (e.g. Slovak *zvyknúť*), and at the layer of the Situational Property only (e.g. Ancient Greek *philéo/ethélo*).



# Results

## Prediction

1. If a habitual expression may apply to more than one layer, the layers involved will be contiguous in the hierarchy.

As shown in the results table, this is indeed the case, with the potential exception of the Ancient Greek iterative habitual. Strategies spread over Propositional Content and Episode (e.g. English *will*), Episode and State of Affairs (e.g. Russian *byvalo*), State of Affairs and Situational Property (e.g. Spanish *solera*), and Situational Property and Lexical Property (e.g. Plains Cree *Cāh*-reduplication)

# Conclusions

# Conclusions

- Habitual expressions can be classified according to the layer of the Representational Level to which they apply.
- When habitual expressions apply to more than one layer, these layers will be contiguous.
- Thus, habituality is a family of hierarchically related meanings, just like, for instance, evidentiality, modality, and polarity.
- FDG offers an appropriate model for the systematic description of these meanings.

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