

On Adjunction, Complementation and the Problem of Present Perfectives in Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian

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ABSTRACT

We focus on the well-known fact that in BCMS simple present perfective sentences are in general unacceptable as independent clauses, in contrast to present imperfectives. A plausible analysis of these facts could be that they are in some sense syntactically impoverished, e.g., they are not full CPs, and for that reason they cannot function as independent clauses. We argue for an alternative analysis. We will first show that present perfectives can appear in unambiguous CP environments. The second argument comes from the behavior of complements of *misliti* 'think', which are ambiguous between propositional and future irrealis meaning. Present perfectives are felicitous in both contexts; crucially, propositional complements are unambiguously CPs. Instead of the syntactic explanation, we show that all the facts can be explained via semantic requirements of present perfectives, as in Todorović (2015).

KEYWORDS Present perfectives · infinitives · clausal size · negative concord

1 INTRODUCTION: THE MAIN FACTS AND PROPOSAL

A well-known property of the Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian (BCMS) tense-aspect system is that simple present perfective (PrsPFV) sentences are in general unacceptable as independent clauses, as illustrated in (1), in contrast to present imperfectives (PrsIMPfV), which are acceptable (e.g., (2)).

- (1) *Milan zaspi. PrsPFV
Milan fall-asleep.PFV.PRS.3.SG
intended: 'Milan has fallen asleep (just now).'
- (2) ✓Milan spava. PrsIMPfV
Milan sleep.IMPfV.PRS.3.SG
'Milan is sleeping.'

Also, present perfectives cannot combine with proposition-selecting verbs, as shown in (3), while present imperfectives can (e.g., (4)), as has been observed by many (Browne 1987, Progovac 1993a,b, 1994, Stjepanović 2004, Todorović 2015, Veselinović 2019, etc.):

- (3) *Ja mislim [da Milan zaspi]. PrsPFV
I think.PRS.1.SG DA Milan fall-asleep.PFV.PRS.3.SG
intended: 'I think that Milan has fallen asleep (just now).'
- (4) ✓Ja mislim [da Milan spava]. PrsIMPfV
I think.PRS.1.SG DA Milan sleep.IMPfV.PRS.3.SG
'I think that Milan is sleeping.'

One way of analyzing these facts could be that the problem with (1)/(3) is syntactic; e.g., present perfectives are in some sense syntactically impoverished (e.g., they are not full

CPs). This would seemingly explain why they cannot function as independent clauses, as in (1). Similarly, since propositional complements are in general assumed to be CPs, the fact that present perfectives, as in (3), cannot combine with them may lead one to infer that present perfectives are not CPs.

However, we show in this paper that such an alternative cannot be maintained. We first show that present perfectives are felicitous in a clause modified by temporal and conditional adjuncts, yet these adjuncts do not affect the CP-status of a clause they modify. Second, in §2.2 we show that complements of *misliti* ‘think’ are ambiguous between TP- and CP-structure. Crucially, present perfectives are felicitous in unambiguously CP-complements.

Instead, we argue that all the data can be captured by resorting to the semantic properties of present perfectives, providing further support for the analysis in Todorović (2015). In particular, as discussed in the next section, present perfectives are not felicitous when the reference time with respect to which the event time is ordered in near-instantaneous.

1.1 TEMPORAL/CONDITIONAL ADJUNCTION

The main evidence for our claim that the semantic properties of present perfectives matter comes from the fact that (1)/(3) become completely acceptable when they combine with a certain kind of temporal and conditional adjuncts (see also Veselinović 2019, who observes this effect, but doesn’t provide an analysis):

- (5) ✓_{PrsPFV}: Main
 ✓Milan zaspi kad/ako se mnogo najede.
 Milan fall-asleep.PFV.PRS.3.SG when/if REFL a-lot eat.PRS.3.SG
 ‘Milan falls asleep when/if he eats a lot.’
- (6) ✓_{PrsPFV}: Embedded
 ✓Ja mislim da Milan zaspi kad/ako se mnogo najede.
 I think.PRS.1.SG DA Milan fall-asleep.PFV.PRS.3.SG when/if REFL a-lot eat.PRS.3.SG
 ‘I think that Milan falls asleep, when/if he eats a lot.’

A potential analysis of data like (1) or (3) would be that present perfectives are somehow syntactically impoverished (e.g., are not CPs). However, this would fail to successfully explain the contrast between (1) and (5), on the one hand, and (3) and (6) on the other. The standard assumption is that adjuncts are elements which can optionally be added to certain categories, without changing their categorial status. That is, an adjunct to TP cannot change its category to something else, say, CP. Given this, the conclusion is that present perfectives have the same syntactic category in (1) and (5), as well as in (3) and (6), since the only thing that differentiates them is the presence vs. absence of the adjunct. Under the approach where (1) and (3) are syntactically impoverished and ungrammatical, it is puzzling why (5) and (6) are grammatical. Or the other way round, since (5) and (6) are grammatical, it would be left unexplained why (1) and (3) are not grammatical. Given that grammatical sentences like (5) and (6) are generally considered to be CPs, if (1) and (3) are categorially identical to (5) and (6), they would also need to be CPs. Since (1) and (3) would not be syntactically impoverished, it would still be puzzling why they are ungrammatical. Thus, the problem with (1) and (3) cannot be their syntactic size. Rather, all the data can be accounted for if the semantic properties of present perfectives affect their grammaticality, as argued by Todorović (2015).

Regarding tense, we adopt a referential analysis of tense (Partee 1973). Following Bochnak (2016), reference times (the RT hereafter) are provided by a temporal variable in *T*, which has indices that receive the truth values from the assignment function. Present tense is a partial identity function, with a presupposition that the RT *t* is the contextually salient time *t_c*. In root clauses, this time is the Utterance Time (the UT hereafter). We take the UT to be near-instantaneous.

$$(7) \quad \llbracket \text{PRESENT} \rrbracket^{g,t_c,wo} = \lambda t:t=t_c.t \quad (\text{adapted from Bochnak 2016})$$

As for perfectives, Todorović (2015) adopts Kratzer's (1998) definition in (8-a), according to which the event time interval (the ET hereafter) must be included within the RT. In contrast, in imperfectives the RT is included in the ET, as shown in (8-b):

$$(8) \quad \begin{aligned} \text{a.} \quad & \llbracket \text{Perfective} \rrbracket^{g,t_c,wo} = \lambda P_{\langle l,st \rangle} . \lambda t . \lambda w . \exists e [\text{time}(e) \subseteq t \ \& \ P(e)(w)] \\ \text{b.} \quad & \llbracket \text{Imperfective} \rrbracket^{g,t_c,wo} = \lambda P_{\langle l,st \rangle} . \lambda t . \lambda w . \exists e [t \subseteq \text{time}(e) \ \& \ P(e)(w)] \end{aligned}$$

In a nutshell, the problem with present perfectives is the following: perfective aspect requires the ET to be included within the RT established by present tense, which, in turn, is determined by the UT. Given the semantics of present tense in (7), the RT for the perfective is the UT; this interval is near-instantaneous. Consequently, it is impossible to satisfy the inclusion requirements of the perfective, since the RT is too short. As a result, the ET cannot be temporally located, and the present perfective is infelicitous. Crucially, Todorović's (2015) analysis is compatible with (1) not being syntactically impoverished, and the problem instead being semantic in nature.

Similarly, under that analysis, the facts in (5) are expected, since the RT for the ET is specified by the adjunct (e.g., *when/if he eats a lot*); such RT is crucially not near-instantaneous, since it is not determined by the UT, but by the adjunct. Thus, the problem of the ET inclusion we see in (1) does not arise in (5). The present perfective is correctly predicted to be felicitous.

Note that examples like (5) and (6) always have a habitual interpretation, and they can always be accompanied by *svaki put* 'every time, whenever' or similar universal modifiers. For instance, in (9), the event described by the adjunct can be interpreted as "Milan falls asleep in every situation/whenever the balloon explodes", but it crucially cannot be interpreted as "Milan is falling asleep at that one moment when a balloon explodes".

Regardless of whether the modifier is overt or covert, we assume that these adjuncts come with a covert universal modal quantification, quantifying over world-time pairs in which a balloon explodes. Due to the quantification, the RT for the ET in the main clause is not the near-instantaneous anymore. Given that the RT for the ET in the main clause is extended, the ET can be included in the RT and the perfective is correctly predicted to be felicitous.

- (9) ✓ Milan zaspi svaki put kad balon pukne.
 Milan fall-asleep.PFV.PRS.3.SG every time when balloon explode.PRS.3.SG
 ✓ 'Milan falls asleep in every situation/whenever when a balloon explodes.'
 # 'Milan is falling asleep at that one moment when a balloon explodes.'

Similarly, the universal quantification allows the present perfective in the adjunct to be felicitous, by the same mechanism. Assuming that the modals c-command the viewpoint aspect (Condoravdi 2002, Rullmann & Matthewson 2018), the RT for the perfective is then directly determined by the modal. Since the modal quantifies over world-time pairs, it introduces the RT for the perfective that is not near-instantaneous. The ET can be included in the RT and present perfective is correctly predicted to be felicitous.

1.2 FURTHER PREDICTIONS FOR PRESENT PERFECTIVE IN SIMPLE CLAUSES

Todorović's (2015) analysis further predicts that present perfective should be infelicitous whenever the RT is near-instantaneous, but not otherwise. This prediction is borne out. First, present perfectives are infelicitous in sport commentaries, in which the reporting is about the ongoing events at the UT. This is illustrated in (10-a), which is unacceptable as a report on an ongoing event. Note that (10-b), in which the verbs take imperfective forms, is acceptable in such a context:

- (10) a. #Fernandez **doda**, Mesi **šutne** i **pogodi**!
 Fernandes pass.PFV.PRS.3.SG Messi shoot.PFV.PRS.3.SG and score.PFV.PRS.3.SG
 intended: 'Fernandes passes the ball, Messi shoots and scores!' (adapted from De Wit 2016:164)
- b. Fernandez **dodaje**, Mesi **šuta** i **pogađa**!
 Fernandes pass.IMPFV.PRS.3.SG Messi shoot.IMPFV.PRS.3.SG and score.IMPFV.PRS.3.SG
 'Fernandes passes the ball, Messi shoots and scores!' (adapted from De Wit 2016:164)

Second, present perfectives are infelicitous in performatives, which also refer to the ongoing event at the UT. This is shown in (11-a). As in the previous case, such examples become completely acceptable with imperfective forms, as illustrated in (11-b):

- (11) a. ***Proglasim** vas mužem i ženom.
 pronounce.PFV.PRS.3.SG you.ACC husband.INSTR and wife.INSTR
 intended: 'I pronounce you husband and wife!'
- b. **Proglašavam** vas mužem i ženom.
 pronounce.IMPFV.PRS.3.SG you.ACC husband.INSTR and wife.INSTR
 'I pronounce you husband and wife!'

In both (10-a) and (11-a), the reference time for the perfective is the UT (mediated by present tense), which is too short for the ET to be included in it; the perfective is correctly predicted to be infelicitous.

On the other hand, present perfectives are predicted to be felicitous on our analysis in a number of contexts. First, they are completely acceptable in antecedents of conditionals, as shown in (12):

- (12) Ako **dodeš** na vreme, uzećemo te.
 if come.PFV.PRS.2.SG on time take-will.1PL you.ACC
 'If you come on time, we will take you.' (Tomić 2006:507 via De Wit 2016:163)

Present perfectives are also acceptable in generics, as (13) and (14) show:

- (13) Ulje uvek **ispliva** na vodi.
 oil always floats-out.PFV.PRS.3.SG on water
 'Oil always floats on water.'
- (14) Ako **sediš** na hladnom betonu, **prehladiš** se.
 if sit.PFV.PRS.2.SG on cold concrete get-a-cold.PFV.PRS.2.SG REFL
 'If you sit on a cold pavement, you get a cold.'

Habituals also allow present perfectives:

- (15) Zimi Marija uvek **obuče** crveni kaput.
 winter.DAT Marija always put.on.PFV.PRS.3.SG red coat
 'In winter, Mary always wears a red coat.'

All of the facts in (12)-(15) are expected on our analysis, on the assumption that: (a) modality is present in habituals (Ferreira 2016, *i.a.*), generics (Krifka et al. 1995, *i.a.*) and antecedents of conditionals (Kratzer 1986, 2012), and (b) modals c-command the viewpoint aspect. Given this, the RT for the perfective is then directly determined by the modal, and not by the UT. Since the modal extends the RT for the perfective, the ET can be included in the RT, and present perfective is correctly predicted to be felicitous. (12)-(15) further confirm that the UT is not the RT – both (13) and (15) include *uvek* 'always', while in (12) and (14), the RT of taking one/getting cold is determined by the conditional; in (12), this is some point in the future, while in (14), it is whenever one sits of a cold pavement. Crucially, the RT is not the UT in any of those examples. Finally, present perfectives are felicitous in historical present as well:

- (16) Onda on **dode** i **kaže** mi...
 then he come.PFV.PRS.3.SG and tell.PFV.PRS.3.SG me
 ‘Then he comes and says to me...’ (Gvozdanović 1995:186 via De Wit 2016:163)

We assume for examples like (16), following Anand & Toosarvandani’s (2019) analysis for English, that historical present is not evaluated with respect to the UT, but some time before the UT. The RT for the perfective can be wide enough, allowing for the ET to be included in it and for the historical present perfective to be felicitous.

To sum up, all of the facts discussed so far challenge the view that present perfectives are in some sense syntactically impoverished and are completely consistent with Todorović’s (2015) analysis.¹ We believe that strong support for our proposal comes from the behavior of the verb *misliti* ‘think’ (ambiguous between propositional and future irrealis meaning), which we discuss in the next section.²

2 IMPLICATIONS FOR DA-CLAUSE COMPLEMENTS

Complements to verbs in BCMS can be infinitives and the so-called *da*-clauses. The latter include a fully finite verb in either aspect, and can come in different sizes; i.e., even though they look like CPs, not all *da*-clauses are CPs. We follow here Todorović & Wurmbrand’s (2020) analysis of BCMS *da*-complements. Todorović & Wurmbrand (2020) build on Wurmbrand’s (2001) analysis of complements – complements of different verbs come in different sizes:

- (i) **vPs**: tenseless complements of *try*, *begin*, *manage*.
- (ii) **TPs**: future irrealis complements of *decide*, *plan*, whose event must occur in the future with respect to the matrix event.
- (iii) **CPs**: propositional complements of *claim*, *believe*, *think*, which have their own tense properties independent of the matrix tense.

These three types are given in (17) (based on Wurmbrand 2001):

- (17) a. *Leo tried/began/managed* [_{vP} to eat (*tomorrow)]. tenseless: **vP**
 b. *Leo decided/planned* [_{TP} to eat (tomorrow)]. irrealis, future: **TP**
 c. *Leo claimed* [_{CP} to be eating (*tomorrow)]. propositional: **CP**

On the surface, BCMS complements are different from English. As shown in (18), all three types of embedded clauses can be expressed via (morphologically) finite clauses. Todorović & Wurmbrand (2020) argue, however, that BCMS *da*-complements also come in three sizes. Note also that for purposes of clarity we use the term *vP*, although this should more appropriately be called MoodP (e.g., Veselinović 2019, Despić 2026, 2025),

¹Thus, both perfectives and imperfectives can be CPs structurally, but the semantic properties of AspP containing perfective, as opposed to AspP containing imperfective, limit the distribution of present perfectives. See Despić (2026) on the syntactic position of AspP.

²As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, there are also examples like (i), in which present perfectives can be used felicitously. Here the verb *obaviti* ‘do’ is present perfective, and the sentence is fine. We argue that these are best analyzed as some form of truncated future, where the future auxiliary and the subject are dropped, as in (ii). Importantly, these dropped elements can always be spelled out in such examples. As shown in §2.1, present perfectives are felicitous with the future.

- (i) Samo nešto da obavim, pa dolazim.
 only something DA do.PFV.PRS.1.SG then come.IMP.FV.PRS.1.SG
 ‘Just one thing to do, and I’ll be back.’
- (ii) Ja ću samo nešto da obavim, pa dolazim.
 I will only something DA do.PFV.PRS.1.SG then come.IMP.FV.PRS.1.SG
 ‘I’ll just do one thing, and I’ll be back.’

a projection that in addition to ν P includes AspP, which does not affect our main point (see more on this in §2.1).

- (18) a. TENSELESS: ν P (or MoodP; e.g., Veselinović 2019, Despić 2026, 2025)
 Jovan je pokušao [ν P da čita knjigu].
 Jovan is try.PTCP.M.SG DA read.IMPFV.PRS.3.SG book
 'Jovan tried to read the book.'
- b. IRREALIS; FUTURE: TP
 Jovan je odlučio [$_{TP}$ da čita knjigu].
 Jovan is decide.PTCP.M.SG DA read.IMPFV.PRS.3.SG book
 'Jovan decided to read the book.'
- c. PROPOSITIONAL; SIMULTANEOUS: CP
 Jovan je tvrdio [$_{CP}$ da čita knjigu].
 Jovan is claim.PTCP.M.SG DA read.IMPFV.PRS.3.SG book
 'Jovan claimed to be reading the book.'

Importantly, Todorović & Wurmbrand (2020) observe that if finiteness were (solely) a matter of the CP domain as in the cartographic approaches (e.g., Rizzi 1997), BCMS embedded clauses should be non-transparent and behave like the 'strongest' boundaries, finite CPs (see e.g., Adger 2007, Wurmbrand & Lohninger 2023, Wurmbrand 2024, for discussion of whether finiteness is confined to a particular domain). However, Progovac (1993a,b, 1994, 1996), Stjepanović (2004) and Todorović & Wurmbrand (2020) show that tenseless and future complements display certain restructuring (i.e., size reduction) effects, i.e., they are transparent for cross-clausal operations, whereas propositional complements are non-transparent. These tests include clitic climbing, negative concord item (NCI) licensing, wh-ordering, etc. Given the syntactic transparency of these complements, they cannot be CPs.

For example, while tenseless ν P complements in (19-a) and future-irrealis TP complements in (19-b) do allow Negative Concord Item (NCI hereafter) licensing by the matrix negation, propositional complements (19-c) do not. Assuming that CP is a boundary for NCI-licensing by the matrix negation in BCMS (Progovac 1996, Stjepanović 2004, etc.), it is correctly predicted that only propositional complements would block it (examples adapted from Todorović & Wurmbrand 2020):

- (19) a. TENSELESS: ν P ✓NCI Licensing
 Jovan **nije** pokušao [ν P da čita **ništa**].
 Jovan not-is try.PTCP.M.SG DA read.IMPFV.PRS.3.SG anything
 'Jovan didn't try to read anything.'
- b. IRREALIS; FUTURE: TP ✓NCI Licensing
 Jovan **nije** odlučio [$_{TP}$ da čita **ništa**].
 Jovan not-is decide.PTCP.M.SG DA read.IMPFV.PRS.3.SG anything
 'Jovan did not decide to read anything.'
- c. PROPOSITIONAL; SIMULTANEOUS: CP *NCI Licensing
 Jovan **nije** tvrdio [$_{CP}$ da čita ***ništa**].
 Jovan not-is claim.PTCP.M.SG DA read.IMPFV.PRS.3.SG anything
 'Jovan did not claim to be reading anything.'

Note also that unlike tenseless complements, irrealis future complements can be modified by an independent temporal adverbial which indicates that the latter are indeed TPs.

- (20) a. TENSELESS: ν P
 *Jovan je danas pokušao [ν P da pročita knjigu sutra].
 Jovan is today try.PTCP.M.SG DA read.PFV.PRS.3.SG book tomorrow
 intended: 'Jovan tried today to read the book tomorrow.'

- b. IRREALIS; FUTURE: **TP**
 Jovan je danas odlučio [TP da pročitati knjigu sutra].
 Jovan is today decide.PTCP.M.SG DA read.PFV.PRS.3.SG book tomorrow
 'Jovan decided today to read the book tomorrow.'

Another important difference between tenseless complements (ν P) or future-irrealis (TP) complements, on the one hand, and propositional complements (CP), on the other, is that the latter cannot combine with infinitives. This is shown in (21):

- (21) a. TENSELESS: ν P ✓INFINITIVE
 Jovan je pokušao [ν P čitati knjigu].
 Jovan is try.PTCP.M.SG read.IMP.FV.INF book
 'Jovan tried to read the book.'
- b. IRREALIS; FUTURE: **TP** ✓INFINITIVE
 Jovan je odlučio [TP čitati knjigu].
 Jovan is decide.PTCP.M.SG read.IMP.FV.INF book
 'Jovan decided to read the book.'
- c. PROPOSITIONAL; SIMULTANEOUS: **CP** *INFINITIVE
 *Jovan je tvrdio [CP čitati knjigu].
 Jovan is claim.PTCP.M.SG read.IMP.FV.INF book
 'Jovan claimed to be reading the book.'

Now, present tense perfective *da*-complements have identical distribution with infinitives: they can combine with tenseless (ν P) (e.g., (22-a)) and future-irrealis (TP) complements (e.g., (22-b)), but not with propositional (CP) complements (e.g., (22-c)).

- (22) a. TENSELESS: ν P ✓PERFECTIVE DA-CLAUSE
 Jovan je pokušao [TP da pročitati knjigu].
 Jovan is try.PTCP.M.SG DA read.PFV.PRS.3.SG book
 'Jovan tried to read the book.'
- b. IRREALIS; FUTURE: **TP** ✓PERFECTIVE DA-CLAUSE
 Jovan je odlučio [TP da pročitati knjigu].
 Jovan is decide.PTCP.M.SG DA read.PFV.PRS.3.SG book
 'Jovan decided to read the book.'
- c. PROPOSITIONAL; SIMULTANEOUS: **CP** *PERFECTIVE DA-CLAUSE
 *Jovan je tvrdio [CP da pročitati knjigu].
 Jovan is claim.PTCP.M.SG DA read.PFV.PRS.3.SG book
 intended: 'Jovan claimed to have read the book.'

Given this state of affairs, one could argue that present perfective and infinitives are both somehow syntactically incomplete/impoverished and simply cannot occur in contexts which require force of an independent clause; i.e., CPs. Consider also the following examples, in which infinitives and present perfectives are put side by side. As shown in (23), neither of them can function as an independent clause:

- (23) MATRIX
- a. *Marko pročitati knjigu. *INFINITIVE
 Marko read.PFV.INF book
 '≈Marko to have read the book.'
- b. *Marko pročitao knjigu. *PRESENT PERFECTIVE
 Marko read.PFV.PRS.3.SG book
 intended: 'Marko has read the book.'

And as illustrated in (24), neither of them can function as a complement of propositional verbs like *claim* (see also (21-c) and (22-c)):

(24) COMPLEMENTS OF PROPOSITIONAL VERBS

- a. *Marko tvrdi [pročitati knjigu]. *INFINITIVE
 Marko claim.PRS.3.SG read.PFV.INF book
 intended: 'Marko claims to have read the book'
- b. *Marko tvrdi [da pročitaj knjigu]. *PRESENT
 Marko claim.PRS.3.SG DA read.PFV.PRS.3.SG book
 PERFECTIVE
 intended: 'Marko claims to have read the book'

But this cannot be quite right, given the effect of temporal and conditional adjunction to these structures from §1. Such adjunction completely improves the **b.** sentences in (23)-(24), while it has no effect on the **a.** examples (with infinitives), which remain equally ungrammatical. This is shown in (25) and (26).

(25) MATRIX

- a. *INFINITIVE
 *Marko pročitati knjigu svaki put kad ode u biblioteku.
 Marko read.PFV.INF book every time when go.PRS.3.SG in library
 '≈Marko to read a book every time he goes to the library.'
- b. ✓ PRS. PERFECTIVE
 ✓Marko pročitaj knjigu svaki put kad ode u biblioteku.
 Marko read.PRS.3.SG book every time when go.PRS.3.SG in library
 'Marko reads a book, every time he goes to the library.'

(26) COMPLEMENTS OF PROPOSITIONAL VERBS

- a. *INFINITIVE
 *Marko tvrdi [pročitati knjigu svaki put kad ode u biblioteku].
 Marko claim.PRS.3.SG read.PFV.INF book every time when go.PRS.3.SG
 u biblioteku].
 in library
 '≈Marko claims to read a book every time he goes to the library.'
- b. ✓ PRS. PERFECTIVE
 ✓Marko tvrdi [da pročitaj knjigu svaki put kad ode u biblioteku].
 Marko claim.PRS.3.SG DA read.PFV.PRS.3.SG book every time when
 ode u biblioteku].
 go.PRS.3.SG in library
 'Marko claims that he reads a book every time he goes to the library.'

This clearly indicates that there is a fundamental difference between infinitives and present perfectives; i.e., they cannot be treated as one natural category.

On Todorović's (2015) analysis, the contrast between (24-b) and (26-b) is expected. It is argued that propositional complements also introduce a very short RT - the attitude holder's (AH hereafter) 'now', i.e., the time which the speaker believes to be his/her 'now'. In complements with a simultaneous interpretation, as in (24-b), the embedded present tense introduces the AH's now as the RT for the perfective. Since the RT is too short to include the embedded ET, the perfective is correctly predicted to be impossible in propositional complements. But the expectation is that adjunction would be able to resolve this problem as well, which is indeed the case, as shown in (26-b) (see also (6)). Similarly, the contrast between (23-b) and (25-b) can be accounted by the difference in length of the RT for the perfective (see the discussion around (5)).

2.1 A NOTE ON INFINITIVES

Unlike present perfectives, infinitives in BCMS cannot occur in contexts which require the force of an independent clause, i.e., CPs (e.g., Todorović & Wurmbrand 2020, Progovac

1993a,b, 1994, 1996, Stjepanović 2004, etc.), as in (23-a), (24-a), (25-a), and (26-a). We predict that infinitives and present perfectives should both be felicitous whenever the complement is smaller than a CP. This is correct – with future forms, both can occur under *će* ‘will’, as in (27) and (28). Assuming that *će* ‘will’ is in T, these complements are then *v*Ps or MoodPs (Veselinović 2019, Despić 2026, 2025), but certainly smaller than CPs. In particular, Veselinović (2019) and Despić (2026, 2025) assume that MoodP is an extra projection between TP and AspP, which hosts *da* in simple future forms (see below). This is different from ModP, which is higher in the structure than MoodP. Since the future auxiliary in (28) encodes Tense, it cannot be the case that the complement of *će* ‘will’ is a CP or a TP; it must be another smaller type of phrase. This is, again, completely consistent with our analysis.

- (27) Ona *će* sutra kupiti kola.
 she will.3.SG tomorrow buy.PFV.INF car
 ‘She will buy a car tomorrow.’
- (28) Ona *će* sutra da kupi kola.
 she will.3.SG tomorrow DA buy.PFV.PRS.3.SG car
 ‘She will buy a car tomorrow.’

2.2 MISLITI ‘THINK’

Here we provide novel data with the ambiguous verb *misliti* ‘think’, which again confirm that present perfectives can be complements of propositional verbs and that those are structurally CPs. This, in turn, refutes the alternative analysis on which present perfectives cannot be CPs (and are necessarily structurally smaller).

Misliti ‘think’ can either have the propositional meaning, as in (29), or it can have the future irrealis interpretation (‘intend/plan’), as in (30):

- (29) PROPOSITIONAL ‘think’
 Mislim [_{CP} da sam pojeo nešto pokvareno].
 think.IMP.FV.PRS.1.SG DA be.PRS.1.SG eat.PFV.PTCP.3.SG something rotten
 ‘I think I ate something bad.’
- (30) FUTURE IRREALIS ‘think’
 Mislim [_{TP} da pojedem jednu jabuku].
 think.IMP.FV.PRS.1.SG DA eat.PFV.PRS.1.SG one apple
 ‘I plan/intend to eat an apple.’

We assume that the present tense complement of the future irrealis ‘think’ in (30) is a TP, not a CP. The immediate prediction is that *misliti* with an infinitive complement can only have the future irrealis meaning of ‘intend’/‘plan’. This is because infinitives cannot be complements of propositional verbs, as we already saw. The prediction is borne out, as illustrated in (31), which cannot have the propositional meaning.

- (31) Mislim [_{TP} pojesti jednu jabuku].
 think.IMP.FV.PRS.1.SG eat.INF one apple
 ‘I plan/intend to eat an apple.’
 #‘I think/believe that I have eaten an apple.’

As Veselinović (2019) shows, *misliti* ‘think’ is completely unacceptable with a present perfective complement in examples like (32). Here the propositional complement is excluded because of the already discussed problem with the present perfective (e.g., (22-c)). At the same time, the future irrealis interpretation with the meaning of ‘intend’/‘plan’ is excluded since one cannot intend for it to rain.

- (32) *PROPOSITIONAL ‘think’
 *FUTURE IRREALIS ‘think’
 *Mislim [TP da padne kiša].
 think.IMPV.PRS.1.SG DA fall.PFV.PRS.3.SG rain
 ‘I think it’s raining.’ (Veselinović 2019:19)

The present perfective da-clause in (30) is a TP (given that future irrealis take TP complements), but we have argued in the previous sections that present perfectives can also be CPs. When they are CPs, and thus have the propositional reading, they often are unacceptable because the semantic requirements of present perfectives are not satisfied; namely, the RT is contained within the AH’s ‘now’. The prediction is then that if this issue is resolved via adjunction (as shown in the previous sections), the propositional reading should become fully acceptable, which is borne out (see (33)). That is, present perfectives are syntactically perfectly fine CPs, with typical distribution and properties of CPs, as long as their semantic requirements are satisfied.

- (33) ✓PROPOSITIONAL ‘think’
 ✓Mislim [CP da padne kiša svaki put kad ja hoću
 think.IMPV.PRS.1.SG DA fall.PFV.PRS.3.SG rain every time when I want
 da idem u grad].
 that go.PRS.1.SG in town
 ‘I think it rains every time I want to go out.’

At the same time, sentences like (30), which have future irrealis meaning, can also have a propositional meaning, if an adjunct is added. This is also expected on our analysis; see (34):

- (34) ✓PROPOSITIONAL ‘think’
 Mislim [CP da pojedem nešto slatko svaki put
 think.IMPV.PRS.1.SG DA eat.PFV.PRS.1.SG something sweet every time
 kad se pronervozim].
 when REFL get-anxious.PRS.1.SG
 ‘I think I eat something sweet every time I get anxious.’

Now, the complements of *misliti* in (30) and (34) (repeated below as (35) and (36), respectively) look similar, as they are both present perfectives, with a covert embedded 1st person singular subject identical to the matrix subject:

- (35) FUTURE IRREALIS ‘think’
 Mislim [TP da pojedem jednu jabuku].
 think.IMPV.PRS.1.SG DA eat.PFV.PRS.1.SG one apple
 ‘I intend to eat an apple.’
 (36) PROPOSITIONAL ‘think’
 Mislim [CP da pojedem nešto slatko svaki put
 think.IMPV.PRS.1.SG DA eat.PFV.PRS.1.SG something sweet every time
 kad se pronervozim].
 when REFL get-anxious.PRS.1.SG
 ‘I think I eat something sweet every time I get anxious.’

However, on our analysis (35) is a future irrealis TP complement, whereas (36) is a propositional CP complement. If there is indeed such a syntactic difference between the two, we predict that the matrix negation should be able to license NCIs only in (35), but not in (36), since NCIs in BCMS cannot be licensed across a finite CP. As shown in (37)-(38), this is indeed correct.

- (37) NEGATED FUTURE IRREALIS ‘think’ ✓NCI Licensing
 Ne mislim [TP da pojedem ništa slatko danas].
 not think.IMPV.PRS.1.SG DA eat.PFV.PRS.1.SG nothing sweet today
 ‘I do not intend to eat anything sweet today.’
- (38) NEGATED PROPOSITIONAL ‘think’ *NCI Licensing
 *Ne mislim [CP da pojedem ništa slatko svaki put
 not think.IMPV.PRS.1.SG DA eat.PFV.PRS.1.SG nothing sweet every time
 kad se pronervozim].
 when REFL get-anxious.PRS.1.SG
 intended: ‘I do not think I eat anything sweet every time I get anxious.’

Thus, although the complement of *misliti* in (36) is present perfective, the lack of NCI-licensing in (38) demonstrates that this complement is unambiguously a CP. Since it must be a CP (and the sentence is grammatical) then it cannot be the case that present perfective complements are always syntactically impoverished and smaller than CPs.

3 SUMMARY

In this paper we provided a new argument for Todorović’s (2015) proposal that simple present perfectives as independent sentences or complements of propositional verbs are unacceptable because the semantic requirements of present perfectives are not satisfied. An alternative to this view would be that present perfectives are structurally impoverished, and in that sense similar to infinitives, which also cannot function as independent clauses or be complements of propositional verbs.

We showed, however, that present perfectives can appear in unambiguous CP environments. We used temporal/conditional adjunction to demonstrate this point, which in turn refutes the hypothetical analysis on which present perfectives are always syntactically impoverished and can never be CPs. We believe that strong support for our proposal comes from the behavior of *misliti* ‘think’, which is ambiguous between propositional and future irrealis meaning. In both cases *misliti* can take a present perfective complement: the future irrealis *misliti* naturally combines with present perfective complements, while the propositional *misliti* can combine with a present perfective complement, if “the present perfective problem” is resolved via adjunction. As predicted by our approach, the NCI licensing shows that the complement of the future irrealis *misliti* is structurally a TP, while the complement of the propositional *misliti* is a CP. Finally, the general picture seems to be that present perfectives can come in all three sizes: *v*P, TP and CP, whereas infinitives can structurally only be *v*Ps or TPs.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	accusative	NCI	negative concord item
AH	attitude holder	PFV	perfective
BCMS	Bosnian/Croatian/ Montenegrin/Serbian	PRS	present
DAT	dative	PTCP	participle
ET	event time interval	REFL	reflexive
IMPFV	imperfective	RT	Reference time
INF	infinitive	SG	singular
INSTR	instrumental	UT	Utterance Time

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