In Malagasy, spatial deictic adverbs and certain prepositions (referred to here as 'obliques') can take the prefix t-. When the oblique functions as the main predicate, t- marks past tense (1b) while its absence marks present tense (1a). It is usually claimed that within a verbal predicate, an oblique must 'agree' with the verb in tense: the oblique is t-marked if the verb is past tense, and bare otherwise. However, recent investigation shows that while non-past tense verbs require bare obliques, past tense verbs take either t-marked or bare obliques. When the oblique denotes an instrument or location, t-marking yields a simple past reading (2a), while absence of t- results in a past habitual reading (2b). However, when the oblique expresses a goal, absence of t- seems to mark 'recent past'—e.g., in (3) any is used if the children are no longer at school, and tany if they are at school now, or are on their way.

In this paper I describe the various t-marking patterns in detail, and explore proposals for a unified structural account. For example, I suggest that goal obliques are (contained within) resultative verb complements, which include a temporal argument representing the terminal state (endpoint) of the motion event. The oblique in (3) is t-marked when that terminal state properly precedes the utterance time, and bare when it does not precede the utterance time. I propose that t-is licensed within the scope of a [+PAST] tense head, while its covert counterpart (on bare obliques) must be outside the scope of [+PAST] (cf. Stowell 1996). In (3a), both verb and oblique are within the scope of [+PAST], such that the motion event and terminal state are both over: the theme reached the goal and is now no longer there. In (3b), by contrast, the resultative complement scopes outside [+PAST]: hence the terminal state is interpreted as following (by defining the endpoint for) the motion event, but not properly preceding the utterance time—i.e., the change event is over, but the resulting state is not: the theme has reached the goal and is still there, or is currently on the way there. I speculate on how a scope-based analysis might extend to cover the aspectual contrast found with locative/instrumental obliques.

(1)a. Any anatin’ ny ala ny gidro
    there inside DET forest DET lemur
    ‘The lemur is in the forest’
b. Tany anatin’ ny ala ny gidro
    T-there inside DET forest DET lemur
    ‘The lemur was in the forest’

(2)a. Nandidy mofo tamin’ ny antsy i Naivo
    PST-cut bread T-with DET knife DET Naivo
    ‘Naivo cut bread with the knife’
b. Nandidy mofo amin’ ny antsy i Naivo
    PST-cut bread with DET knife DET Naivo
    ‘Naivo would/used to cut bread with the knife’
(3) Nalefan’ ny vehivavy (t)any am-pianarana ny ankizy
PST-send DET woman T-there obs-school DET children

‘The woman sent the children to school’

REFERENCES