

MEANING AND INTERPRETATION OF TENSE

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Abstract

This paper addresses the problem of the relation between tense meaning (also called 'general' or 'grammatical' meaning) and the possibilities of tense use with the corresponding interpretations (also called 'contextual meanings'). This is done by analysing languages with similar general tense meanings but different possibilities of tense use, not only in subordinate clauses, but also in temporal vs. modal interpretations, as found in Germanic languages on the one hand and Slavic languages on the other. The analysis shows that the different possibilities of tense binding which are found in e.g. English and Dutch as compared with Russian may be related to different principles of textual organization found in these languages.

1. Introduction

Tense does not equal time in any straightforward conceptual way, but may have time- and mode-related uses and the corresponding interpretive variants. Analyses of tense meanings throughout the history of linguistics have tried to account for the observed variation in tense uses in two major ways: either by postulating time-based meanings for the tenses, on the basis of their most frequent use, and assuming that modal tense uses are derived or part of a different paradigm, or by postulating general tense meanings which can account for both time-based, i.e. temporal, and modal tense uses. The reason for the different emphasis of the two groups is in part based on the theoretical framework in which they have formulated their analyses: the analyses which focus on temporal meanings usually do so against the background of the propositional contents in which these tenses occur (cf. e.g. Reichenbach 1947), and the analyses which focus on general tense meanings do so against the background of language analysis in terms of meaning-form units as signs at various levels (cf. e.g. Janssen 1989). The latter framework is based on the assumptions that variants of language use are fully analyzable in terms of the meanings of the individual meaning-form units which are effectuated only if there is a possibility of choice, and their interplay with the meaning-form units which contextually surround them, including the effects of their relative order and (phrasal or clausal) accentuation. This set of assumptions leads to a methodology by which the systematic interpretive contribution of each presumed meaning-form unit is evaluated against its choice possibility in a given context, yielding on the one hand a systematic distinction between distinctive and predictable meaning components, and on the other a possibility to decompose complex meaning-form units into their constitutive parts. It is this latter approach to meaning analysis

which will be largely discussed and advocated here, but results of the former type of analysis will be mentioned as well, because they reveal the differences between the two types of approach, and must be accounted for by the latter approach in its own way.

The best known primarily temporal analyses of tense meanings make reference in one way or the other to the points (or periods) of speech (S), of reference (R), and of the event (E). For English, Reichenbach (1947: 297) proposed an analysis by which "the position of R relative to S is indicated by the word 'past', 'present', and 'future'. The position of E relative to R is indicated by the words 'anterior', 'simple' and 'posterior', the word 'simple' being used for the coincidence of R and E".

(1) Reichenbach's (1947: 297) analysis of the English tenses:

<i>Structure</i>	<i>New Name</i>	<i>Traditional Name</i>
E - R - S	Anterior past	Past perfect
E, R - S	Simple past	Simple past
R - E - S } R - S, E } R - S - E }	Posterior past	-
E - S, R	Anterior present	Present perfect
S, R, E	Simple present	Present
S, R - E	Posterior present	Simple future
S - E - R } S, E - R } E - S - R }	Anterior future	Future perfect
S - R, E	Simple future	Simple future
S - R - E	Posterior future	

These are the temporal meanings of entire verbal syntagms characterized by tense, consisting of non-finite and/or finite verbal forms as they include so-called 'compound tenses' as well. According to the methodology of the sign-oriented meaning-form analysis described above, the possibility of a compositional analysis must be investigated for the compound tenses, because they consist of clearly distinguishable finite and (one or more) non-finite verbal forms. A compositional analysis may be considered adequate if the meanings of the constitutive parts are still found in the syntagm and may be e.g. referred to by temporal adverbials, as shown for Dutch by Janssen (1989: 311 etc.). A comparison between Dutch and English is interesting in this respect, as will be shown later.

The meanings of all the compound tenses in Dutch can be analysed in terms of their constitutive parts, such that the meanings of the non-finite verbal forms are used as related to either the meanings of the finite verbal forms or to the meanings of the other non-finite verbal forms which are in their turn related to the meanings of the finite verbal forms. The kind of this relation is in accordance with the meanings of the tense morphemes involved, I would like to further specify Janssen's analysis. For instance, the past participle denotes by virtue of its meaning

of 'effect (in principle conceivable in its coming about)' that the event expressed by means of the verbal stem combined with the past participle is responsible for the coming about of this effect, and must consequently at least in part precede the effect. The effect itself is either directly or indirectly (through a mediating non-finite, infinitival, verbal form) connected with the event expressed by means of an auxiliary, which is the only tensed verbal form. This means that compound tenses can be decomposed into their formally indicated components as meaning-form units, with the events of the non-finite verb forms interpreted as having an internal relative ordering, whereas the events of the finite verb forms are ordered with respect to some external orientation point. These orderings led Janssen (op. cit.) to assume that the so-called R and S are manifestations of a more general notion, called by him 'origin' (so as to formulate it in a more general way than 'orientation point' or 'orientation period'). Janssen's compositional analysis of Dutch thus led him to establish the following temporal interpretive entities which are ordered with respect to each other.

- (2) Temporal interpretive entities in Dutch according to Janssen (1989: 313):
 O = origin (which may equal the speech event),
 E = event denoted by the finite verb,
 E' = event denoted by the first non-finite verb,
 E'' = event denoted by the second non-finite verb.

Janssen (1989: 319 etc.) established that a finite verb can denote an event occurring before, at or after its origin, the first non-finite verb can denote an event occurring either before or after the event denoted by the finite verb, and the second non-finite verb can only denote an event occurring before the event denoted by the first non-finite verb. At this point it may be added that the established relations follow from the meanings of the tense morphemes occurring in finite verbs, and the past participle vs. infinitive morphemes occurring in non-finite verbs: the event denoted by the past participle is interpreted as preceding the event of its origin (whereas its effect coincides with the origin), and the event denoted by the infinitive is interpreted as following (and possibly including) its origin. In the temporal interpretation of finite verbs, event occurrences at or after the origin are (also) not systematically distinguished. This leaves us with only two basic temporal relations, i.e. these of anteriority and simultaneity, as expressed by the preterite and the present verbal morphologies.

The temporal interpretations are not the only ones triggered by the tenses of the finite verbs. In Dutch, modal interpretations of the preterite verbal morphology are as usual as the temporal ones. Janssen showed that this can be accounted for if the meanings of the preterite and the present in Dutch are formulated as follows.

- (3) Tense meanings in Dutch according to Janssen (1988: 128):
 "A finite verb with the form of the present tense means that the expressed event is presented as lying within the advancing stream of current and developing events surveyed from the vantage point of the relevant origin."
 "A finite verb with the form of the past tense means that the expressed

event is presented as lying not within the advancing stream of current and developing events surveyed from the vantage point of the relevant origin."

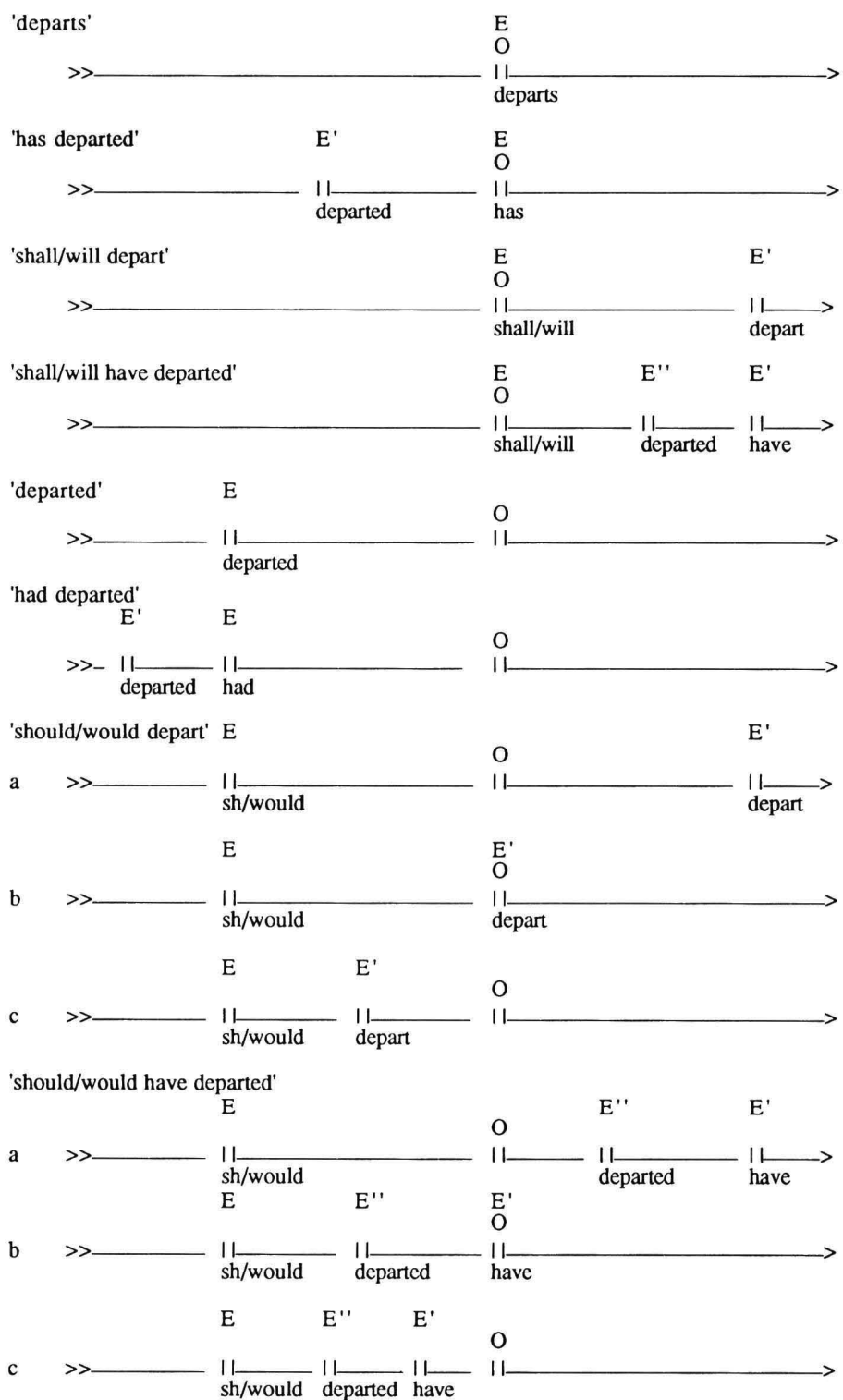
An independent argument in favour of the proposed compositional analysis of the Dutch tenses is found in the possibility of adverbial reference to the period of the event expressed by any of the involved verbs, as stated in (4).

- (4) Janssen (1988: 119) concerning interpretation of temporal adverbials:
"... it is not necessary to assume a special relation between the temporal adverbial and the time of reference [i.e. Reichenbach's R]. Rather a relation has to be assumed between the adverbial and one of the verbs involved, be it the finite or the non-finite verb."

A temporal adverbial in Dutch may thus denote a period which is fully or in part simultaneous with the period in which the event of the past participle took place. This differs strikingly from the impossibility of such coincidence in English, where temporal adverbials do not specify the period of the events denoted by means of past participles. One of the consequences of this characteristic of English is that the present perfect is incompatible with temporal adverbials that refer to a specific moment or stretch of time located wholly in the past (as discussed a.o. by Comrie 1985: 32), which led various authors to the analysis of the so-called compound tense meanings as single wholes, the meaning of the present perfect being 'present, or current, relevance of a past event'. However, in view of the generality of the restriction on temporal coincidence between the period denoted by a temporal adverbial and the period of the event denoted by a past participle, this generality may be viewed as an idiosyncrasy of the category past participle in English, and not in itself the decisive argument against compositional analysis of the English compound tenses.

If we analyse the possible temporal interpretations of the English tenses, including the compound ones, we can see that only relative temporal placements of the events can be established (in part signaled already by Comrie 1985: 70). This essential relativity of the constitutive parts of the English compound tenses may be taken as an argument in favour of their compositional analysis, which directly resembles the compositional analysis of the Dutch tenses, and may in accordance with the methodology proposed by Janssen (1988 etc.) be taken to lead to the following temporal interpretations.

- (5) Temporal interpretations of the English tenses (analysed in the way comparable to Janssen's analysis of Dutch, 1988 and 1989):



The differences discussed above point to partly language-specific tense properties. In addition to language-specific rules of co-occurrence possibilities and the corresponding interpretive relations among tense components and temporal adverbials, language-specific rules of tense co-occurrence and interpretive relations among the tenses in compound sentences exist as well. Major differences in this respect are found among languages which have the so-called 'sequence of tenses' rule, such as Germanic languages, and languages which do not have the same rule, such as Slavic languages. The difference between these two types of languages, as exemplified by English and Russian, respectively, comes out clearly in the rules of tense co-occurrence in indirect speech, as shown in (6).

- (6) Indirect speech in Russian and English, a typological difference (cf. Comrie 1986: 277f.):
- a (Russian) Tanja *skazala* (PAST): Ja *tancuju* (PRESENT).
(English) Tanja *said* (PAST): I *am dancing* (PRESENT).
 - b (Russian) Tanja *skazala* (PAST), čto ona *tancuet* (PRESENT).
(English) Tanja *said* (PAST) that she *was dancing* (PAST).

"More generally in Russian, we can say that the same tense is used in indirect speech as would have been used in the corresponding direct speech. The net effect of this in Russian is that, in indirect speech, tenses have relative time reference, rather than absolute time reference, this relative time reference always being relative to the time reference of the time of speech in the main clause. This is not, however, a general property of tense in subordinate clauses, since in general Russian tenses have absolute time reference whether in main or subordinate clauses" (...)

- c (Russian) V to vremja kak Xazbulat *pel* (PAST), Yzargadžax *tancevala* (PAST)
(English) While Xazbulat *was singing* (PAST), Yzargadžax *was dancing* (PAST).
(Comrie's example, 1986: 276)

Language-specific differences in temporal relations of the type illustrated above form one of the topics of the present investigation. In the course of this investigation, special attention will be paid to language-specific differences in tense 'origins' or 'orientation periods' and the systematicity underlying their distribution as reflected by co-occurrence restrictions on the one hand, and systematic interpretive effects on the other.

2. Tense in Russian

Slavic languages differ in the use of their tenses from various other languages to the extent that translators from Slavic languages consider adequate translations of tense to be the most difficult part of their job. The present investigation will pay special attention to Russian, because it is the best known Slavic language, and still insufficiently investigated in the respect of tense use as related to its meaning.

Linguists investigating tense in Russian (as well as other Slavic languages) generally distinguish between indicative and modal tense uses, and within indicative uses, between 'absolute' (i.e. oriented towards the moment or period of speech) and 'relative' uses (i.e. oriented towards a moment or period which is indicated by the context). The only point of agreement about modal tense uses may be found in their being 'non-temporal', or 'not localized in time', but, unfortunately, no decisive criterion for distinguishing between temporality and modality of tense interpretations has been given in the literature (cf. the discussion in Seljakin 1980 and e.g. Gorup 1987: 42 etc.).

As the problem of tense analysis in relation to temporal and modal interpretations cannot be solved without taking into account the meaning interplay between tense and aspect in Russian, we should have a look at the tense and aspect combination possibilities in the Russian verbal forms first, and then discuss their meaning analyses proposed by Russian and foreign investigators, among the Russian ones most notably by Bondarko (1971). Finally, Russian tense use will be discussed against the background of various contextual possibilities, and an analysis will be proposed.

- (7) Bondarko's (1971: 62) analysis of the verbal forms characterized by tense and aspect in Russian ('imperf.' denotes the imperfective verbal aspect, and 'perf.', the perfective verbal aspect; in Bondarko's intention, brackets denote optionality):

<i>TENSE-ASPECT FORMS</i>		<i>SEMANTIC FEATURES</i>				
<i>TENSE</i>		<i>anterior</i>	<i>simultaneous</i>	<i>posterior</i>	<i>localized in time</i>	
Past	past imperf.	+	-	-	+	(+)
	past perf.	+	-	-	+	+
	present imperf.	-	+	-	+	-
Present						
Future	present perf.	-	(+)	(-)	(-)	-
	future imperf.	-	-	+	+	-

The semantic feature 'localized in time', intended to distinguish between temporality and modality at the level of meaning, appears to be questionable even at a first glance at this table. (Its only unique assignment, to past perfective forms, will also appear, in our example (13.a), to be based on an insufficient data analysis.) This reflects the fact that temporality is in Russian distinguished from modality only at the level of interpretation, in a given discourse and/or pragmatic setting,

not at the level of meaning if meaning is conceived of in strictly relational terms, i.e. as general meaning. I shall return to the point of temporality vs. modality later on in this section.

The double feature assignments of 'result' also reflect the fact that this distinction in the case of past events is a matter of interpretation, not the system-relational meaning itself. Finally, the double temporal feature assignments (of 'simultaneous' and 'posterior') to the perfective present reflect interpretive effects of the perfective aspect in combination with the present tense, and we must analyse aspect in Russian by itself in order to be able to understand the effects of its combination with other categories. For the aspect, the following definition has been offered by Barentsen (1985).

- (8) Barentsen's (1985: 427f.) definition of the perfective vs. the imperfective aspect in Russian, as expressed morphologically in verbal forms:

"The meaning of the perfective aspect is defined on the basis of three hierarchically ordered features: 'event-unit', 'totality' and 'sequential connection'. A perfective form presents the image of a single change of situation, connected with the total passage of the given event-unit. The feature 'sequential connection' means that this complete event must be thought of as a link in a greater whole. By presenting the event as connected with the preceding and/or following situation, the contrast that is brought about between these situations is emphasized.

The meaning of the imperfective aspect can be defined negatively: at least one of the features connected with the perfective aspect must be missing. However, the presence of the feature 'event-unit' in an imperfective form is a prerequisite for forming an aspectual opposition with a perfective form."

We can see that the perfective aspect denotes a change of the event situation within the narrated period, such that there is a situation characterized by the presence of the event and a situation characterized by its absence, in either order: an event may start, end, or last for a while within the narrated period. As distinguished from the perfective aspect, the imperfective aspect is not characterized by a single change of situation (but either by no change, in its durative variant, or by repeated changes, in its iterative variant). This is why the event in the imperfective aspect can be anterior, simultaneous, or posterior to its 'origin' or 'orientation period', and the perfective aspect can be fully or in part anterior or posterior to its 'origin' or 'orientation period', but never fully simultaneous with it (as one of the two situations characterizing it is either anterior or posterior to it).

Being able to abstract from the effects of combination with aspect, we are now able to turn to the analysis of tense meanings in Russian. These can be fully understood only if we analyse them against the background of their distributional possibilities in the verbal syntagms of Russian, as done by Barentsen (1985: 41 etc.), following the glossematic tradition and Ebeling (1956 etc.). Barentsen analysed the infinitives and imperatives as 'non-localizing', whereas the remaining verbal forms are 'localizing', i.e. as he formulated it, they participate in the category 'perspec-

tive', which is further subdivided into 'remotospective' and 'irremotospective', as in the following survey.

- (9) Tense in Russian as based on the category 'perspective', according to Barentsen (1985: 41):

ASPECT	LOCALIZING (THE CATEGORY 'PERSPECTIVE')			
	Remotospective		Irremotospective	
	<i>Irreal (conjunctive)</i>	<i>Retrospective</i>	<i>Neutrospective</i>	<i>Prospective</i>
Perfective	Preterite + <i>by</i> (<i>sostavil by</i>)	Preterite + \emptyset (<i>sostavil</i>)	Present (<i>sostavlju</i>)	
Imperfective	Preterite + <i>by</i> (<i>sostavljal by</i>)	Preterite + \emptyset (<i>sostavljal</i>)	Present (<i>sostavljaju</i>)	<i>bud-</i> + inf. (<i>budu (pres.)</i>) <i>sostavljat'</i>

'Preterite' = 'past tense', 'inf.' = 'infinitive', 'pres.' = 'present tense'.
Sostavit' (perfective), *sostavljat'* (imperfective) = 'compose'.

Barentsen's analytical contribution, as reflected by the chart, consists in rejecting a systematic relational, i.e. paradigmatic, distinction between temporal and modal interpretations of the Russian tenses, which is usually found in traditional studies (but not supported by data on possible oppositions), and in the corresponding unification of temporal and modal interpretations as based on the category 'perspective', with respect to which ordering in time has the status of interpretation. In his further explanation of the feature specifications of the category 'perspective', Barentsen (1985: 43f.) wrote that 'irremotospective' is used for denoting phenomena which are within reach for the observer, whereas 'remotospective' is used for denoting phenomena which are out of the observer's reach. While this formulation is generally speaking agreeable (but perhaps not sufficiently specific, as will be shown by the discussion of tense uses which will be given below), the contents of these feature specifications do not justify the labels 'irremotospective' vs. 'remotospective', which suggest that the former is a negation of the latter, whereas on the basis of the feature formulations, the opposite feature specifications would be expected.

The deictic or pragmatic origin of 'perspective', strikingly similar to Janssen's (1988: 128) 'vantage point' in the formulation of the Dutch tense meanings (cf. (3) above), may consequently be assumed to be of crucial importance to the meanings of the Russian tenses and the corresponding possibilities of their use. However, in indirect speech at least, Russian has a basically different use of tense than e.g. Dutch or English. In order to be able to establish whether this must be ascribed to a difference in meaning or in textual organization, we must investigate tense uses more extensively, starting from the possibilities of tense use in subordinate clauses.

Concerning this, 'rather complicated' subject matter, Barentsen (1985: 76f.) wrote that in subordination, the orientation period (OP) for the 'perspective' of the subordinate clause is regularly "taken over from the actant of the main clause" with a verb of speaking in the main clause, and often also with a verb of perception or a mental process. In the latter case, examples such as (10.a) and (10.b) occur.

- (10) a Anna *videla* (IMPERFECTIVE PAST), čto Petr *spit* (IMPERFECTIVE PRESENT).
'Anna saw, that Peter *slept*.'
b Anna *videla* (IMPERFECTIVE PAST), čto Petr *spal* (IMPERFECTIVE PAST).
'Anna saw, that Peter *slept/had slept*.'

In (10.a), the OP of the subordinate clause is interpreted as set by the event of the main clause: the event of the subordinate clause, in the present tense, is interpreted as simultaneous with that of the main clause. In (10.b), on the other hand, there are two possibilities: either the OP of the subordinate clause is interpreted as set by the event of the main clause, in which case the event of the subordinate clause, in the past tense, is interpreted as preceding the event of the main clause, or the main and the subordinate clause are interpreted as having the same OP, from the viewpoint of which both events are past, and may be interpreted as temporally coinciding in the past.

- (11) a Ivan *govoril* (IMPERFECTIVE PAST) v to *vremja* kak ona *tancevala*
(IMPERFECTIVE PAST)
'John *spoke* while she *was dancing*.'
b Ivan *čital* (IMPERFECTIVE PAST) v ee pis'max kak ona *proživael*
tam (IMPERFECTIVE PRESENT) in her letters how she *was doing*
John read
there.'

literature is primarily found in the relation between the clauses within a compound sentence: object, complement and *poka* clauses (cf. (12.b)), which semantically specify the domain of the event of the main clause, have their OP as set by the event of the main clause. This is the rule with declarative verbs in the main clause, the predominant usage with cognitive verbs, and a possibility whenever any kind of cognition, including perception, is suggested on the side of the agent and/or the narrator. In the latter two types of cases, it is also possible to have a less close connection between the subordinate and main clauses, and the so-called 'absolute' tense usage in the subordinate clause. Other types of subordinate clauses, not expressing an object or a complement (including the *poka* specification) of the main clause, are semantically less closely connected with the main clause, and their tense is not set by the tense of the event of the main clause, but rather used 'absolutely', i.e. as related to the same OP as the tense of the main clause. However, even then the narrator may deviate from the predominant pattern and choose to set the OP for the subordinate clause by the main clause, as in (12.a), where Vojnovič decides to describe all the characteristics of the kind of people living in Peterburd at the beginning of the century in the present tense in the subordinate clause, after placing the main clause in the past.

- (12) a Pomnju (IMPERFECTIVE PRESENT), ešče v šašnadcatom gode *služil* (IMPERFECTIVE PAST) ja v Peterburde xel'dxebelem. A narod tam *prožival* (IMPERFECTIVE PAST) takoj, čto rabotat' ne *xočut* (IMPERFECTIVE PRESENT), a s utra poran'she *berut* (IMPERFECTIVE PRESENT) trjapočki raznye, na ix fuljuganskije slova *pišut* (IMPERFECTIVE PRESENT), potom na palki *nacepjut* (PERFECTIVE PRESENT) i *idut* (IMPERFECTIVE PRESENT) na ulicu - gramotnost' svoju pokazat'. (Vojnovič 1981: 129)

'I remember, back in 1916, I was stationed in Peterburd as a sergeant major. They *had* the kind of people there that *did not want* to work, but first thing in the morning they *grab* rags, *write* all this hooligan stuff on them, then they *would fasten* these rags onto sticks, and out they *go* parading to show everybody they know how to read and write.'

Even though the OP for the clauses starting from the first subordinate clause of the second sentence may be viewed as set by the main clause of that sentence, the 'origin' of the present tenses cannot strictly speaking be analysed as set by that main clause, but rather by the narrator's cognition of the events, as even formally expressed by the verb *pomnju* 'I remember' in the preceding sentence. By using the present tense, the narrator places himself into Peterburd of 1916 and reports about the events from his vantage point. In the given example we may speak of the narrator's cognition, in the original text presented in the form of the reported speech of one of the personages, but examples such as (12.b) show that it may also be the agent's cognition, which is shared by the narrator.

- (12) b Ej *prišlo* (PERFECTIVE PAST) v golovu, čto lučše (Ø PRESENT) pokinut' zal, no potom ona *rešila* (PERFECTIVE PAST) ostat'sja, poka *xvatit* (PERFECTIVE PRESENT) mesta. (Sirin/Nabokov; Barentsen 1985: 352)
'It *occurred* to her that it would be better to leave the hall, but then she *decided* to stay, as long as there *would* be enough space.'

The present tense forms in these clauses have been used on the basis of the same general meaning as elsewhere. They may be said to fit Seljakin's (1980: 7) definition of the present tense in Russian as denoting events which at the speech or 'zero' moment (resembling 'orientation period' or 'origin' of the other investigators) "exist or still/already exist and are relevant to the speaker". Seljakin showed that the temporal and modal meaning components, as specified by the first and the second part of the definition, respectively, are effectuated by the different contexts. The present tense of perfective verbs in Russian, which is known to have either present modal or future temporal or modal interpretations, was assumed by Seljakin to be characterized by syncretism of present and future, and a possibility of aspect neutralization (as the perfective aspect may in some cases be replaced by the imperfective aspect). However, if aspect - and the situational change characteristic of the perfective aspect - is assumed to be present in the meaning, then the interpretational binding of the first situation to the present and the second one to either the future or the speaker's modality appears to follow from this combination of tense and aspect. The only finite tense forms in Russian are the present and the past tense, and the latter is opposed to the former in one dimension, not two, with a preferably temporal interpretation, and a modal one instead if a temporal interpretation would be inadequate in a given discourse.

This leads us to postulating a single general meaning for the past tense and the present tense in Russian, not basically different from Janssen's (1988: 128 etc.) analysis of the general meanings of the Dutch tenses. The difference between the two languages is found in the possibilities of 'origin' placement, which is in Russian generally determined by declarative and cognitive verbs for the domains of the events denoted by them, be it by means of object, complement, or *poka* clauses, or other discourse domains which are ascribable to cognition as in (12.a) above (whereas in Dutch and other Germanic languages there are only restricted possibilities of shifting the vantage point of the relevant origin, attested especially in reported speech with a main verb in the future, cf. a.o. Janssen 1990: 7). This principle of semantic congruence from the cognitive point of view takes precedence over general coherence principles valid for parts or discourse structures as established across languages.

The principle of semantic congruence in Russian narrative discourse may be said to underlie a wide range of modal interpretational possibilities, which may and do indeed occur whenever a temporal interpretation of a tense form is precluded by the context or the speech situation, as illustrated by (13.a).

- (13) a *Pošli* (PERFECTIVE PAST)!
'(Let's) *get going!*' (With the speaker(s) and the hearer(s) still present.)

On the other hand, whenever the context or the speech situation (i.e. the narrative discourse) allows for a temporal interpretation of tense, this is found with the same form, as illustrated by (13.b)

- (13) b Tak nam i *slučilos'* (PERFECTIVE PAST). *Pošli* (PERFECTIVE PAST).
'And so it *happened* to us. We *left*.'

Modal use and the corresponding interpretation of the past tense reflects the speaker's/narrator's vantage point; it may be the agent's vantage point only if the agent is also the narrator in the relevant subpart of the narrative discourse (and if this is not stated explicitly, it is understood from the impossibility of a temporal interpretation due to its discrepancy viz. the narrative setting). In a comparable way in Russian, modal use of the present tense occurs under the same conditions, as reflecting the agent's and/or the narrator's vantage point. It is found whenever specific and non-specific (including so-called 'gnomic') temporal interpretations are precluded within the narrative discourse which always comprises the immediately preceding sentence within the same thematic unit and in the transitive way possibly extends over larger stretches of the narrative discourse. An example of what may be called modal use and the corresponding interpretation of the present tense is found in (14.a).

- (14) a V molodosti, skučaja, *byvalo* (IMPERFECTIVE PAST), v te dni, kogda Fedor Ivanovič nadolgo *uxodil* (IMPERFECTIVE PAST) s vizitami, ona *mečtala* (IMPERFECTIVE PAST) o sobstvennoj masterskoj. V bol'šoj, svetloj komnate *sidjat* (IMPERFECTIVE PRESENT) milovidnye devuški, naklonjas' nad nispadajuščimi volnami šelka, a ona *pokazyvaet* (IMPERFECTIVE PRESENT) im fasony i vo vremja primerki *zanimaet* (IMPERFECTIVE PRESENT) svetskoj besedoju elegantnyx dam. Mašinopisnoe bjuro *bylo* (PAST), požaluj, ešče lučše: kak-to značitel'nee. (Čukovskaja 1989: 5f.)

'In her youth, bored, usually on the days when Fedor Ivanovic *went* on his long rounds, she *dreamt* of having her own dressmakers. In a big, light room, pretty girls *would sit* tumbled above silk waves, and she *would show* them the patterns and *distract* elegant ladies with wordly conversations during the fittings. The typing department *was*, if you like, even better: somehow more important.'

It is exclusively due to the context that the present tense occurrences in the second sentence of (14.a) may be interpreted as modal, rather than as historical or gnomic present tense uses, in view of a clash between the imperfective aspect of these examples and their non-integration into the temporal line of the narrative discourse. Other examples of temporality vs. modality, usually found with perfective verbs, may be distinguished on the level of interpretation by taking into consideration a.o. pragmatic factors as in (14.b).

- (14) b Ja *znaju* (IMPERFECTIVE PRESENT) neskol'ko zagadočnyx strannyx smertej, pričinu kotoryx *voz'mutsja* (IMPERFECTIVE PRESENT) ob"jasnit' tol'ko spirity i mistiki, čelovek že so svežej golovoj v nedoumenii *razvedet* (PERFECTIVE PRESENT) rukami i tol'ko. (Čexov, Sledovatel'; Bondarko (1971: 53))

'I *know* of several puzzling strange deaths, the explanation of the cause of which *might be* undertaken only by spiritists and mystics, but a cool-headed man *would* only *raise* his hands in perplexity and that's all.'
(MODAL)

'I *know* of several puzzling strange deaths, the explanation of the cause of which *will be undertaken* only by spiritists and mystics, but the cool-headed man *will* only *raise* his hands in perplexity and that's all.'
(TEMPORAL)

If we consider this sentence in isolation, we can see that the modal interpretation is the most likely one, in part due to the combination of the perfective aspect with the present tense, and in part due to such pragmatic considerations as specificity vs. non-specificity of the actants, by which in combination with the given lexical meanings, the non-specific interpretation is the most frequent one. This is how this sentence has been used in the narrative discourse indeed. In a different narrative discourse, however, for example if told by someone who knows how some specific spiritists and mystics behave as distinguished from the expected behaviour of a specific cool-headed man, the temporal interpretation given in (14.b) would be possible as well. Even if the temporal interpretation would be possible or preferable, the modal interpretation is never fully ruled out with the present tense of perfective verbs. This is due to the perfective aspect, which denotes a situational change, and with the present tense, the second of the two situations involved in the change follows the situation which holds at the vantage point of the relevant origin. Given the rule of 'sequential connection' in Russian (cf. (8) above), the second situation of the perfective aspect is either temporally bound to the narrative discourse, or interpreted as bound exclusively due to the agent's and/or the narrator's cognitive viewpoint, i.e. modal. We can see now that the 'sequential connection' of the Russian perfective aspect, which dictates temporal binding to either the temporally sequential or superordinate domain, if available, forms part of the same textual component based on semantic congruence which has been established to play a role in the tense distribution in subordinate clauses in Russian.

Whereas the present tense of the perfective aspect in Russian inherently, due to the aspect, combines the temporal and modal interpretations and even a narrative discourse favouring the temporal interpretation cannot fully rule out the modal one, the present tense of the imperfective aspect may have temporal interpretations of various scope of simultaneity with the vantage point, and modal interpretations of the imperfective present in Russian occur only if no temporal interpretation is possible within a given narrative discourse, as in the second sentence of (14.a) mentioned above.

In a way comparable to what Fabricius-Hansen (1986: 75 etc.) established for German, the scope of the temporal interpretation of the present tense in Russian

depends on the aspectual, lexical, and discourse context in the sense of temporal adverbials, other tense forms, and the sort of sentence in which it occurs in subordination, as shown above. In the absence of a contextual determination of scope, the interpretation of general validity is found as the least specific one, in accordance with the meaning of the present tense, by which an event is presented as lying within the advancing stream of current and developing events as surveyed from the vantage point of the relevant origin. This is illustrated by the following example.

- (15) Tak že izdavna *povelos'* (PERFECTIVE PAST): na Rusi novogodnij prazdnik ne *obxoditsja* (IMPERFECTIVE PRESENT) bez Deda Moroza, a v Amerike - bez Santa-Klausa. Tak vot, v Mokvu *sobirajutsja* (IMPERFECTIVE PRESENT) priexat' srazu 200 Santa-Klausov! (Pravda, Moskva, 6. 12. 1989: 6)
 'It *has been* like this since long ago: in Russia no New Year's feast *passes* by without Grandpa Frost, and in America - without Santa Claus. So by and by, two hundred Santa Clauses *are planning* to arrive in Moscow!'

This example shows once again that the scope of the present tense interpretation depends on the context (and pragmatic considerations), and can be broadened or narrowed down by it, whereas the meaning on which this interpretation is based remains the same as defined relationally, in paradigmatic terms. This and the other examples presented here illustrate the fact that the distinction between the 'basic' variant of the present tense, with reference to present time, and its 'non-basic variants' is not one of the system, but only of its use.

General conclusions

Tense meanings allow for various temporal and modal interpretations as related to textually and pragmatically different vantage points of the relevant origin. Languages differ typologically in the textual binding possibilities of these vantage points, especially as semantically related to declarative and cognitive events viz. their domains, and also more generally in the possibilities of taking the agent's and/or narrator's vantage point and disregarding the temporal one. Russian is an example of a language which allows for a relatively high degree of such meaningful choices based on vantage point shifts and semantic congruence and expressed also by means of word order and intonation. Dutch and English are examples of languages which allow for vantage point differences as well, but order secondary vantage points in the past with respect to the primary one(s) (and 'transform' them accordingly, in some investigators' terminology), as reflected a.o. by tense sequence rules operative in subordinate clauses. This 'ordering' typological property is paralleled by other characteristics of these languages, including partly fixed word order.

It seems to be a general property of languages that a narrator may switch out of the temporal organization of the narrative discourse (and, as formulated by Fleischman (this volume), "neutralize one or more of the properties which collectively define the Preterite as the unmarked tense of narration"). This switching

out may involve placing the vantage point within a period narrated in the past (in which case the so-called 'historical present' is used), or making a general statement from the agent's and/or narrator's vantage point (in so-called 'evaluative' statements in the sense of Labov 1972 and Silva-Corvalán 1983), or switching out of the narrative temporal sequence altogether and presenting an additional stream of developing events, distinguished from the narrative temporally ordered one and ascribable to the agent's and/or narrator's vantage point and imagined or imaginable stream of developing events. These are modal tense uses, and languages differ greatly in possibilities of this usage within the constraints set by lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic parameters.

Switching out of the temporal narrative discourse is done typically by means of the present tense. Notwithstanding its potential present, past, omnitemporal, and atemporal reference, the meaning of the present tense is always to present an event as being of 'actual concern to the vantage point of the relevant origin' (cf. Janssen 1990: 24), and this meaning is taken into account by the interpretation of the event as lying within the advancing stream of current and developing events as surveyed from the vantage point of the relevant origin. According to some investigators (following Jakobson 1932), it is because of the unmarked nature of the present tense (as opposed to the preterit which is marked) that it is compatible with a context which forces a past interpretation of the verbal process (i.e. 'event'). However, we have seen a mirror image of this in connection with the preterite, or the past tense, which is in Russian and not only there compatible with a context which forces a non-past interpretation of the verbal process (which is then interpreted as modal). There is still an asymmetry between the preterite and the present, but of a different kind: whenever there is no temporal specification (i.e. with omnitemporal and so-called atemporal reference), the present tense is used. This means that whenever tense is not at issue, the present tense is used as the representative of the category tense - and so because its meaning makes it suitable for that use. This is the only asymmetry which may be assumed to be general in nature, possibly justifying the use of the labels 'marked' for the preterite and 'unmarked' for the present. These are labels of use, and in accordance with the tense meanings.

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