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TOWARDS A FORMAL DESCRIPTION OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SOME TENSES IN FRENCH AND ENGLISH[1]

In this paper we compare the passé composé, the imperfect and the passé simple in French with their presumable equivalents in English: the Present Perfect, the Past Progressive and the Past Simple tense. We show that the proper explanation of the similarities and differences in the usage of these tenses has to be based on three parameters: aspectual instruction of the tense, aspectual constraints it imposes on the ontological nature of the predicates it is combined with, and the relation between the reference point and event point.

Key words: verbal tenses, aspect, discursive instructions, semantics, pragmatics, contrastive analysis

1. Introduction

In this paper we will try to account for the differences in the usage of three tenses in French and their presumable equivalents in English: more precisely we will compare the passé composé with the Present perfect, the imperfect with the Past Progressive and the passé simple with the Past Simple tense. Our choice of this particular topic is both theoretically and practically motivated: In traditional French and English grammars the above mentioned pairs of tenses are analyzed in a similar way: for the passé composé and the Present perfect it is usually stated that they represent events which consequences are present / actual at the moment of speech.. As for the Imperfect and the Past Progressive, it is said that they both give a picture of an ongoing unbounded process in the past. Finally, the French Aorist and the Past Tense are renowned for their

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delimitation from the moment of speech: they denote eventualities in the past that have no conceptual relation to the present state of affairs.

In the following sections we will show that though the above mentioned qualifications are not entirely wrong they are unsatisfactory, for they can neither explain all the characteristic of these tenses nor clarify the differences in the functioning of the French and English equivalents.

2. *A modern approach to the semantics of verbal tenses*

Our basic assumption is that information chunks encoded by verbal tenses in French and English are quite complex and cannot be regarded as simple markers of temporal reference. In other words, verbal tenses do not only label events as present, past or future, but they also reflect the way in which the speaker is seeing them and relating them to other events. Hence, we suggest that for a proper treatment of verbal tenses in these two languages, we have to take into consideration three types of instructions encoded by verbal forms (see Stanojević & Ašić, 2008):

a) Temporal localisation of the event
b) Aspectual, concerning the way the eventuality is viewed (as global or progressing)
c) Discursive, related to the notion of temporal order: temporal progression, temporal regression and simultaneity.

Each of these instructions deserves to be explicitly introduced. Let us start with the temporal localization. Since Reichenbach's revolution in the temporal ontology (1947) it has been widely admitted that the temporal instruction cannot be reduced to the simple fact that tenses situate the eventualities in the present, past or future period. The additional information that they obligatory convey is whether the eventuality in question is observed from the moment of speech or from some other moment on the temporal axis. Thus, the temporal instruction can be defined as a relation between three pertinent points on the time axis: speech point (S), event point (E) and reference point (R). These three points can coincide as with the present tense (S,E,R) or they can be temporally separated as with the Past Perfect Tense or The French Pluperfect (E-R-S) which denotes events that occurred before a reference point which is itself situated before the moment of speech.

As for the aspectual instruction, it concerns the meronomic (part-whole) relation between E and R. Here two types of relation are possible. either $R \subseteq E$ or $E \subseteq R$. In the first case E is viewed as ongoing in the moment serving as a reference point- (E has existed before and after

a particular point in time R or, if R is an interval, it has lasted all along R). In the second case E is accomplished in R. This is unmistakably illustrated by the opposition *l imparfait – passé simple* in French:

1. A cinq heures (R) Paul lisait (E). $R \subseteq E$
2. A cinq heures (R) le téléphone sonna (E). $E \subset R$
3. L'année dernière (R) Paul habitait à Paris (E). $R \subseteq E$
4. L'année dernière (R) Paul épousa Marie (E). $E \subset R$

One important thing should be clarified at this moment: the above introduced grammatical (view-point) aspect, should not be conflated with the lexical aspect, denoting the opposition between telic and atelic eventualities (Vendler, 1957).[2] This later distinction is uniquely based on the semantic properties of the process a predicate denotes (i.e. depends on the nature of a verb and on its (occasional) complements, see Verkuyl, 1993), and therefore can be considered as a kind of lexical information. Its conceptual basis is the opposition between cumulative and quantized entities (Filip 1999).

Finally, the discursive instruction refers to the so called temporal order between the eventuality in focus (E) and its temporal antecedent. Temporal antecedent should be understood as a moment introduced in the previous context that serves as a conceptual anchor for calculating the temporal location of the eventuality newly introduced in the discourse. Logically, if the temporal antecedent is not explicitly given it should be pragmatically calculated.

There are three possible discursive relations between the eventuality and its temporal antecedent. If E<TA, (as with past perfect tense in English and *plus-que-parfait* in French), time is regressing:

5. He said that he had graduated in 1991.
6. Il a dit qu'il avait fini ses études en 1991.

If the temporal antecedent is anterior to E (as with passé simple in French) time is progressing:

7. Max entra. Marie téléphona.

If E encompasses its temporal antecedent (TA$\subseteq$E; $\rightarrow$TA=R), time is not moving and the effect we get a so called *global simultaneity*. This happens with the Imperfect in French and the Past continuous tense in English:

8. I was reading (E) when the phone rang (TA, TA=R).
9. Je lisait lorque le téléphone sonna.

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2 As shown in the work of Borik and Reinhart, the perfective-imperfective opposition and telic-atelic distinction are two independent categories (Borik & Reinhart, 2004).

3. Encoding temporal and aspectual information in English and French

A very important characteristic of the English verbal flectional system is that in this language aspectual and temporal information are syntactically (derivationally) and morphologically separately encoded. Namely, in simple tenses a lexical verb takes only a temporal marker which function is to distinguish the present situation from the past one. (*He plays* VS *He played*; *He enters* VS *He entered*). So the aspectual interpretation of a predicate depends on the lexical nature of a verb (telic or atelic) and on the presence of complements.

This is a consequence of the generative operation *affix hopping*[3] in the phonological component of the Grammar. In complex tenses the temporal information is yielded by auxiliary verbs (*John is/was sleeping)*, while the aspectual information (VProg/Perf) is encoded by participles In addition, the auxiliary verb selects a participle-type of the lexical verb: *to be* always selects a present participle (the *-ing* form), whereas *to have* selects a past participle (the *-ed* form):

10. He was eating [Tpast +BEprog] + V-ing
11. He has eaten [Tpres+HAVEperf]+Vpart perf
12. He has been eating. [Tpres+HAVEperf]+ BEENprog + V-ing[4]

The basic function of a progressive aspect in English is to indicate a dynamic action in the process of happening. Attention is focused on some internal stage of the process which is viewed as something directly observed, unfolding before our eyes. By contrast, the *ed-* form marks an action as complete and refers to it as a single whole in which internal structure the speaker is not interested.

We have now reached a very interesting point in our discussion: Although, in the syntactical derivational process the aspectual and temporal information are separately generated, morphologically they can be expressed with the same verbal flexion endings. This is what happens in French.

This is the case with simple tenses (passé simple and imparfait) – the endings here are actually amalgams of the temporal and aspectual information:

13. Il écrivait/écrivit un livre.

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3 The *Affix Hopping* is a rule of transformation, which attaches an affix (a bound form) to the very first element that follows it within the Aux+VP complex
4 (participsku formu BEEN selekcionise pomocni glagol za perfekat HAVE

Thus the Imparfait's ending -*ait* indicates that the situation situated in the past is seen as unbounded while the aorist 's ending -*it* labels the situation as accomplished.

It should be highlighted that there are no progressive participles in French conjugation. Progressivity is just one of the possible interpretations of the French imperfect

4. *The French Passé Composé and the English Present Perfect tense*

The passé composé is the most commonly used past tense in the modern French language. It is used to express that an action has been completed at the time of speech, or at some time in the past that can be either explicitly pointed out, unknown or irrelevant to the speaker. In addition, it is commonly used as a "narration tense" for oral and written narration. Numerous questions that usually arise from linguistic analyses of the variety of usages of this tense can be reduced into two basic: what in its semantic enables this tense to fulfill different functions and whether .its functions are related or not.

A proper understanding of the parameters defining the passé composé should yield some possible answers to both of them.

The key parameter for understanding the passé composé is its aspectual instruction: $E \subseteq R$. This means that events introduced by this tense are always presented as accomplished (regardless of their inherent lexical aspect) and hence they cannot hold/ be valid at the moment of speech. This can be shown by the examples X and Y, where the usage passé composé implicates that the eventualities in question (the state of being sick and the processes of dancing, (both naturally unbounded) ceased to exist before S:

27) Marie a été malade.
28) Marie a dansé il y a cinq minutes. On attend maintenant les notes du jury.

The second consequence of its aspectual nature is that the passé composé introduces in the discourse not only an event but also the resulting state, which begins immediately after the event: $E \supset \subset s$ (Kamp i Reyle 1993). It is of a vital importance to understand that the information $E \supset \subset s$ does not guarantee that the resulting state encompasses the moment of Speech. For this to be true, another condition has to be satisfied: $S \subseteq s$. Note that this condition is actually temporal in nature for it situates the consequent state either to the present or to the past.

We can thus conclude that the so called "resultative" and narrative usage of the passé composé share the same aspectual instruction ($E \subseteq R$ & $E \supset \subset s$) but differ in the temporal relation between S and s.

Therefore, some authors ((Co Vet 2001, Borillo et al., 2004)) for the passé composé stipulate two different temporal instructions: for the resultative usage we would have E-R,S while for the narrative one: E,R-S. This solution, at the first sight logical, exhibit a significant weakness: it does not take into consideration the fact that even when the consequences of an event are not valid in S, a predicate in the passé composé is not seen as totally independent from the moment of speech. Namely, there is a lot of evidence that events introduce by this tense are generally observed from the moment of speech. They serve as a kind of elaboration or explanation for what the speaker is claiming. So it can be said the predicate is discursively related to S. For that reason we have opted for a uniform temporal instruction: E-R,S:

29) Max est un homme aventureux et audacieux. Il a atteint le Mont Everest sans oxygène.

By uttering this sentence the speaker does not want to claim that a physical consequence of the achievement *to climb* (being on the top of the Mount Everest) is valid in S. The accent is on the importance and relevance of this particular event for the credibility of the psychological characteristics attributed to Max. The fact that the informational focus can be on the event and not on its consequences explains why the passé composé can be used with temporal adverbs denoting a particular point in time.

30) Le 20. juillet 1969 Neil Armstrong a mis le pied sur la lune[5].

The temporal instruction E-R,S also explicates why with the passé composé the temporal progression is not a compulsory relation between events. This is because a sequence of sentences in passé composé introduces a set of events that are observed from the moment of speech (R = S). Their function is to elaborate a topic set up in S and consequently, the type of temporal relation between them is lexically determined or pragmatically inferred.

In contrast to the French passé composé the English Present Perfect does not give a perfective aspectual instruction. That is, it does not transform atelic eventualities into bounded entities. Its main function is to introduce the results of the inherently perfective events (that is why

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5 Naturally the sentence does not mean that N. Armstrong is still walking on the Moon.

it is a *perfect* tense). This means that it imposes aspectual constraints on the nature of predicates it can be combined with.

Moreover it signalizes that these consequences are valid in S (that is why it is labeled as *present;* S⊆s). It has to be underlined that since this tense brings attention not to the action but to the consequences it generates, a sentence in the Present Perfect cannot contain the precise temporal localization of the event, even when it is clear that the consequences of the event in question are valid in S:

31) John has arrived (John is here).

32) Look, his airplane has landed! You can see it from this window.

33) He *has come/come to our place at 6 o'clock. And he is still around.

From what we have said so far it is possible to deduce both the conceptual correspondence and discursive dissimilarities in the usage of the passé composé and the Present Perfect. Both tenses give the same temporal instruction (E-R,S) but diverge as far as the aspectual information is concerned: the passé composé gives the perfective instruction while the Present Perfect, in stead of giving aspectual instructions, selects lexically perfective verbs (achievements and accomplishments). In addition, both tenses introduce events and their resulting states but with the passé composé the resulting state does not have to be valid in S. Therefore sentences in the passé composé in which the condition S⊆s does not hold and the accent is on the event (which is only discursively related to S) are obligatory translated with the Past tense:

34) Je suis fatigué. Je suis sortie hier soir et je me suis couché à minuit :

34a) I am tired. I went out last night and I went to bed at midnight.

35) Regarde les dernières nouvelles à la télé ! Un avion américain a atterri dans la rivière Hudson quelques minutes après son décollage de l'aéroport de New York

35a) Look at the latest news on TV! An US airplane crash-landed into the Hudson River minutes after its take off from the New York airport.

In spite of its aspectual constraints the Present perfect can be combined with lexically atelic eventualities (states and activities). However in this type of usage predicates are usually accompanied by specific adverbs – the co called measurement phrases (such as *for 5 years)*. Thanks to the external boundaries given by measurement phrases, imperfective

verbs are transformed into quantized eventualities and the interpretation output is the existential reading[6]:

36) Mary has lived in Paris for 5 years.

Interestingly, the consequent state of the events can be viewed as a simple fact that a subject has had a certain experience in his life and that in the moment of speech he is still marked by this experience. This is in some way similar to what we have with French passé composé: the sentence serve as an explanation for the statement given in S (for ex: Mary knows Paris very well etc.). This might suggest that the Perfect Tense is historically evolving into a tense with a discursive function of elaboration and that even with the inherently perfective verbs the consequences don't necessarily have to be valid in S.

5. *The French passé simple and the English Past Simple tense*

The passé simple (aorist) is regularly used in French in narration to introduce events that happened in the past. But unlike the passé composé, this tense indicates that the events the speaker is refereeing to are by no means connected to the present time. Its temporal instruction E,R-S signalizes its detachment from the moment of speech. This means that the consequences of the events designated by the French aorist are not at all relevant in the moment of speech. Consequently, they cannot serve as elaboration indicators for a statement that a speaker wants to express.

The aspectual information encoded by French aorist is perfectivity ($E \subseteq R$). It follows that the process E is accomplished and entirely situated within the boundaries of R (if R is an interval) or that a punctual process is identical to a point in time R.

37) Paul se réveilla (E) à cinq heures (R).
38) Cette nuit-là (R) il dormit bien (E).

Given its strict aspectual instruction, the French aorist always introduces events disregarding the lexical aspect of the verb. This means that when it is combined with atelic eventualities (activities and states) it changes their aspectual values. The outcome of this process is the inchoative (as in 39 and 40) or global reading of the atelic predicates (as in 41, in which a sentence contains an adverbial expression limiting the du-

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6 For the semantic analysis of the universal interpretation of the Past Perfect (as in *Mary has lived in Paris for 5 years now*) in which states are not bounded to the right, see Asic & Stanojevic, 2008).

ration of the process). This semantic mechanism is known as aspectual coercion[7] (Swart, 1998; Ašić & Stanojević 2008):

39) Stefan marcha à l'âge de 11 mois.
40) Dusan aima la chimie à l'âge de cinq ans.
41) Max marcha de 2 à 3 heures

The discursive instruction of the French aorist is TA<E can be seen as consequence of its aspectual nature. The sequence of verbs in aorist usually gives an idea of a temporal progression: time is moving forward with the events:

42) Paul entra dans le bureau (TA). Ses collègues le saluèrent (E).
43) Paul se réveilla plus tôt que d'habitude (E1). Il s'habilla (E2) et sortit (E3) quelques instants plus tard[8].

However, in our approach we consider that Kamp and Rohrer's (1983) rule, saying that in a sequence of predicates in aorist each new predicate takes its referential point from the preceding one, is too strong. This means that in the sequence E1, E2 the TA for the event E2 is not automatically the event E1. Consequently, (as shown in 44) the TA of E2 is not necessarily the event E1 immediately preceding it but the previously introduced event En satisfying the following condition: it can neither be the consequence[9] of E1 (see 45) nor it can hold a meronomic relation with it (see 46):

44) Le petit caniche s'échappa (TA for E2). Nous ne le retrouvâmes plus (E1) car il fut pris par des flics (E2).
45) ??Paul tomba(=/=TA). Pierre le poussa (E).
46) Marie chanta (=/=TA) et Pierre l'accompagna au piano (E).

We believe that a proper treatment of the aorist, in which the notion of reference point is replaced by a semantically and pragmatically more sophisticated notion of temporal antecedent, can explain the cases in which the temporal progression is apparently cancelled.

Unlike the English Present perfect tense the Past simple tense (its temporal instruction being R<S) situates eventualities in the past delimiting it from the moment of speech. The problem arises when it comes to its aspectual instruction. Is its imperfective ($R \subseteq E$) or perfective $E \subseteq R$? If

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7 By analogy to a general mechanism of coercion (Pustejovsky, 1995) in which predicates are generated because of a clash between a function and its argument, in aspectual coercion implicit aspectual operators are triggered by a conflict between the lexical aspect and the constraints imposed by aspectual instructions of tenses. The role of these aspectual operators is to coerce the eventuality into the appropriate type.
8 E1=TA for E2, and E2=TA for E3 .
9 Given the fact that the cause ontologically precedes its consequence

the Past simple tense is imperfective then, since grammatical aspectual instructions are by default stronger then the lexical ones, with telic verbs it would create a picture of unbounded (or iterative) events and there would be no temporal progress (TA$\subseteq$E and TA=R).

The following examples show that telic eventualities in the Past tense are seen as global and accomplished and that in addition they license a temporal progression:

47) When John looked at Mary (TA), she smiled at him (E). TA<E
48) He entered (TA) and closed the door (E). TA<E.

Conversely, if we assume the Past tense obligatory gives a perfective instruction (like the passé simple in French) then it would generate a perfective interpretation of atelic verbs and consequently produce the effect of temporal progression. Again the examples show that the Past tense does not interfere with the aspectual nature of the predicates:

49) And *we sang* to the wind as *we danced* through the night
50) The *children played* table games and their parents watched TV.

This means that with activities ongoing in R, it can alternate with the Past Progressive:

51) "What a night!" he said. It was a horrible night indeed. The wind was howling / howled[10] around the house.

As a final point, we should highlight that since the Past progressive cannot be combined with states, the Past simple is the only option for denoting static eventuality that existed in the past.. Naturally, the aspectual relation here is R$\subseteq$E and the state serves a frame for the telic action

52) A man came in (TA). He had blue eyes (E)
53) When I first met him (TA), he was 20 years old (E). TA$\subseteq$E -> R$\subseteq$E

Unsurprisingly, the Past tense of activities and states is always translated with French Imperfect.

On the whole, it follows that the Simple Past should be considered as aspectually neutral. In addition this tense puts no specific constraints on the aspectual nature of predicates. It can be combined with states, activities, accomplishment and achievements. With perfective (telic) verbs we get E$\subseteq$R and hence no temporal progression, while with imperfective (atelic) we get R$\subseteq$E and the time is moving forward. This validates our

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10 Here in French we can only use the Imperfect (*le vent hurlait au tour de la maison*).

hypothesis (see Ašić & Stanojević, 2009[11]) that aspectual neutrality of a tense underlies its discursive neutrality

Before moving to the next section we would like to point out one additional interpretational value of the Past Tense. Namely it can, in some types of sentence, designate habitual past just like the French imperfect Actually, this particular usage of the past tense is favored with negative predicates, indefinite and inanimate subjects, stative verbs and the second person subject ((Tagliamonte & Lawrence, 2000)

However most of the sentences in which the Past tense designates habituality are actually ambiguous and the reiteration of the event has to be contextually (pragmatically) inferred[12].

6. *The imperfect in French and The Past Progressive tense in English*

Just like the Passé simple the Imperfect situates eventualities in the past, its temporal instruction being R<S. Unfortunately, the aspectual instruction normally applied for imperfective tenses R⊂E cannot explain all the cases of the usage of this tense. Namely sentences in which the reference point is not situated inside the eventuality in imperfect are not uncommon. Given the fact that it is possible for R to precede or to go behind the eventuality in imperfect we suggest the following aspectual instruction for this tense: $Ej \supseteq Ri(i \neq j)$, -> Ej is valid in Ri. The reference point Ri is either given by the previously introduced event (see A) or it can be implicated (see B):

A) Ri=Ei   (the imperfect does not introduce Ei). This is a typical case of the usage of the imperfect in French:

54) Quand Paul entra/A 5 heures (Ri=Ei), Marie buvait son thé (Ej).

Even if a predicate is telic by nature it will be stativized by the aspectual instruction of the imperfect. The input condition for the imperfect being a homogenous eventuality, the aspectual coercion output is iterativity or progressivity:

55) Paul sortait le samedi.

56) Quand il entrait dans sa maison il entendit un bruit bizarre. .

B) Ri=s, where s⊂Ei or Ei⊂s . Here the reference point is actually a state s which is either implicated or presupposed by Ei.

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11 We have shown that this is also valid for the Simple future tense in French.

12 For a proper understanding of the basic semantics of this tense it is essential to underline that even when the Past tense represents a series of event it quantifies over them cumulatively, marking the set of reiterated events as a whole (see Binnick, 2005)

57) Jean alluma les lampes (R). La lumière éclatante l'éblouissait (Ej). R=s

58) Pierre rentra a la maison(R). Le soleil lui brulait les épaules. (Ej). R=s

In 57) the event in aorist implicates a state (*light is turned on*), between which and the eventuality in imperfect there is a relation of global simultaneity. By contrast, in 58) the event in aorist presupposes the existence of a state (*Pierre was outside the house*), which is simultaneous with the predicate in imperfect.

One of the consequences of the semantic characteristics of the imperfect (imperfectivity, anaphoricity and global simultaneity) is that it cannot mark a temporal progression. With imperfect the temporal flux is at a halt.

The apparent exception of this rule is the so called "picturesque imperfect" in French:

59) Dix minutes plus tard il quittait son bureau et se dirigeait vers le Parc de Luxembourg.

Although the events depicted in 59) are represented as unbounded and ongoing, they preserve their inherent telicity. Therefore it is possible to infer that they are accomplished and that there is a relation of temporal progression between them.

It is usually stated in grammars that the Past Progressive tense marks that an eventuality lasted in the past (R<S) but that that, if the eventuality is telic, there is no implication that it has been accomplished. One the consequence of this is that it can still be going on at the time of speaking:

60) When I left Mary in her room, half an hour ago, she was quarrelling with her boy-friend. From the noise I can hear, I can tell that they are still arguing about something.

The imperfectivity and durativity features makes the Past progressive ideal for expressing the simultaneity between two states of affaires (61) and also for providing a frame within which another past event (serving as a reference point) took place (62). The reference point can (just like with the French imperfect) be given by a specific moment in the past (63):

61) Dusan was playing with bricks while his mother was writing a paper.

62) When Mary returned home Susan was having her dinner and watching TV.

63) At midnight we were still driving through the desert

From all these facts it can easily be concluded that the past progressive is semantically equivalent to the French Imperfect. However there are some cases in which the French Imperfect cannot be translated with the Past progressive. We will show that they are due to the dissimilarity in their aspectual instruction and to the constraints they impose on the ontological nature of the conjugated verb.

The aspectual instruction is different from the one for the French Imperfect. It states that R has to be strictly included in E ($R \subset E$). This condition means that, unlike in French, E cannot be punctual. Thus, achievement in Past Progressive (unlike achievements in the French Imperfect) cannot function as a frame for another past event:

64) ??When he entered the room, the clock was striking one.

69a) Quand il entra l'horloge sonnait une heure.

It is however possible to use the Past progressive with achievements but the interpretation is always iterative:

65) The rain was tapping the window.

The other consequence of the instruction that R has to be strictly inside E is that is not possible to have The Past progressive in the English for the equivalent of sentences such as 57) and 58):

66) John turned on the light. ??The light was blinding his eyes.

67) Peter returned home. ??The sun was burning his shoulders.

Moreover, the Past progressive requires that E is developing and not merely existing in R. Hence, it selects only processes and dynamic (temporary) states. If a predicate is a permanent (static) state, the Past Tense has to be used (68).

68) *She was having blue eyes / She had blue eyes.

Finally, unlike the French imperfect, the Past Progressive is almost never used for expressing past habituality. This is probably due to its dynamicity instruction which is incompatible with the idea of representing a reiteration of some event as a stable characteristic attributed to the sentence subject. In order to express this idea English has a specific construction *used to + infinitive*. Nevertheless there are some specific cases in which the Past Progressive is used to express eventualities repeating in the past. However this usage is highly marked, because the habitual Past Progressive always implicates a negative attitude of the speaker towards the repeated event he is talking about: he is troubled not only by the nature of eventuality he describes, but also by its repetition (Binnick, 2005).

69) We were always getting into fights.

70) She was constantly coming to class late.

7.   Conclusion

In this paper we have demonstrated that a proper contrastive study of the meaning and usages of verbal tenses in different languages has to be based on a systematic description and detailed analysis of their complex semantics. This means that differences between two apparently identical tenses (that encode the same temporal information) can be straightforwardly explained if the aspectual and discursive parameters are taken into account. One of our most important findings is that while in French all the past and perfect tenses are aspectually marked (they obligatory label the predicate as bounded or unbounded) in English the Present perfect tense and Past simple tense are aspectually neutral. The aspectual parameter clarifies why the aspectually neutral Past Tense has a wider distribution then The French passé simple, with which states and processes are quantized by coercion because its input condition is obligatory an event.

However tenses in English exhibit a characteristic that does not exist in the semantics of French tenses; they can be aspectually sensitive: they impose aspectual constraints on the nature of predicates they can be combined with. This is what actually delimitates the French Imperfect and the English Past Progressive tense. Nevertheless, the crucial difference in the functioning of the French Passe composé and the English Present Perfect is not the fact that only the second one puts aspectual constraints on its predicates, but the semantic rule stating that with the passé composé the resulting state does not have to be valid in S

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КА ФОРМАЛНОЈ ДЕСКРИПЦИЈИ РАЗЛИКА У ВРЕМЕНИМА У ФРАНЦУСКОМ И ЕНГЛЕСКОМ

Резиме

У овом се чланку испитују и пореде француска и енглеска прошла времена са посебним акцентом на сличностима и разликама у временима која се сматрају семантички еквивалентим. Циљ рада је да се покаже да се оптимална анализа глаголских времена мора заснивати на следећим, формално дефинисаним параметрима: аспектуална инструкција, аспектуалне принуде, које се тичу онтолошке природе глагола који се могу или не могу комбиновати са одређеним временом, релација између референцијалне тачке и догађаја и најзад, однос између резултата догађаја и момента говора.