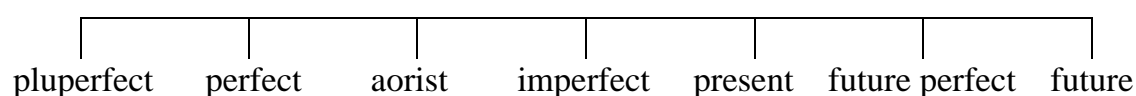


Lecture 6: Verbal morphology – Tense and Aspect

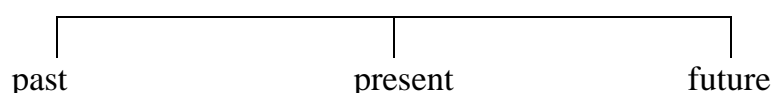
1. Introduction

- Could describe each tense in Latin in Greek = form-to-function
- But rather will describe the categories then explain how each form expresses it
- Problem of names
- Greek has 7 ‘tenses’: pluperfect, perfect, aorist, imperfect, present, future perfect, future
- If they are all tenses, then they must exist on the same axis
- Possible schematisation:



2. Tense

- Tense = grammaticalised expression of locating an event in time
- 3 parameters:
 - Deictic centre
 - Prior, simultaneous, subsequent
 - Remoteness
- Three logical tenses: past, present, future



- = ‘Absolute tense’
- Deictic centre = *hic et nunc*
- Some languages grammaticalise different amounts of remoteness
- Temporal distinctions more common in the past
- e.g. Haya
 - hodiernal ‘earlier on today’
 - hesternal ‘yesterday’
 - remote ‘before yesterday’
- Other cultures have ‘no concept of time’?
- e.g. Whorf on Hopi
- Really emphasis on different things e.g. Hopi has aspectual and mood system
- Comrie claims different attitudes towards ‘progress’

- Different ways of expressing tense:
 - Lexically composite expressions: *five minutes after John left*
 - Lexical items: *now, today, yesterday*
 - Grammatical categories: *present, future perfect etc.*
- Different languages assign different amounts to the different types
 - e.g. *last year* = lexically composite expression, Czech *loni* = lexical item
- Not necessarily on verbs – Warlpiri in particles
- Relative tenses in Latin, Greek and English – pluperfect, future perfect
- These relate time to another time – are not found in isolation
- *Graeci cum Troiam deleverant, domum redire paraverunt.*
- Tenses used to express different notions
 - e.g. Past time used to indicate unreality
 - If I won the lottery I would buy a car*
 - won* and *would* = grammatical past tense, referring to (unlikely) future
 - εἰ βοηθεῖν ἠθέλετε, ἐδυνασθε ἄν
 - If you wanted to help, you would be able to*
- Past tense = remote?

3. Aspect

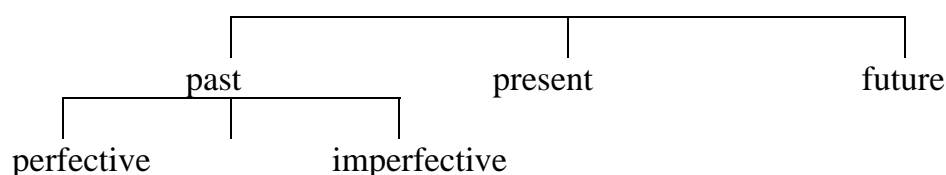
- Tense traditionally separated from category of aspect
- Aspect = internal temporal constituency of an action
- Fundamental distinction between imperfective (imperfect) and perfective (aorist)
- Perfective:
 - Single, unanalysable whole
 - Global unit, with beginning, middle and end rolled into one
 - Complete point, no division of the situation into individual phases
- Imperfective:
 - Event with internal interest
- What they are not:

Perfective	Imperfective
short	long
momentary	on-going
completed	incomplete

- Perfective also ingressive
 - ἐβασίλευσα ‘I reigned’ as a global completed historical fact or ‘I became king’
- Also completed
 - ἔβαλον ‘I threw’ but also ‘I hit’
- Imperfective also repeated action
 - ἔβαλλον ‘I threw, was busy throwing’ or ‘I threw and threw and threw’
- Aspect not always grammaticalised = semantic category

4. Survey

- Present tense – rare to coincide exactly with the present moment
- English present tense ‘I ride a bike’ rarely refers to the present
- Present ‘tense’ can only be described as imperfective
- Present perfective often expresses future e.g. in Russian
- Past – implicature is that it does not hold in the present
- Difference between aorist and imperfect really *aspect*
- Aspect is *grammaticalised* in Greek
- Aorist nothing to do with past tense e.g. in participles, mood, infinitive etc.
e.g. φεύγειν ‘to flee = to be fleeing’
φυγεῖν ‘to escape or to take flight’
- Past tense just expressed by augment in Greek?
- Aspect is more important than tense – aspect is always expressed but tense not always:
Homeric λυόμεν could be either present or past (optional augment)
- Future not well differentiated for aspect
- Occasional differentiation: ἔξω I shall hold vs. σχήσω I shall obtain
- Therefore aorist indicative usually past – explains confusion
- Re-schematisation:



- Is future the same as the past?
- Represented as symmetrical
- But different – more like a mood

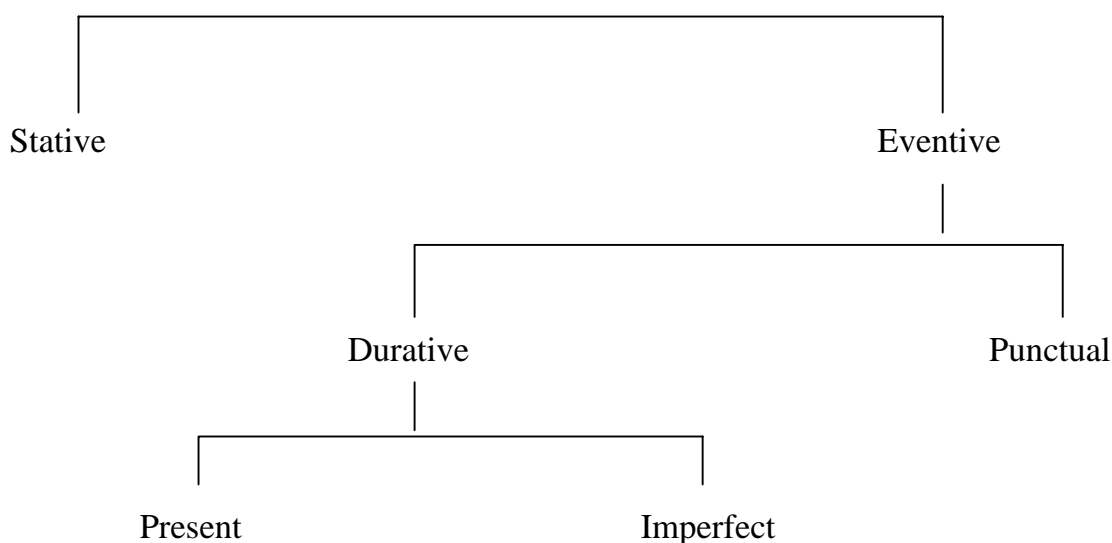
5. Morphological contrast

- Root/thematic present: affixed aorist
γράφω vs. ἔγραψα
aorist has affix ‘s’ – is formed from the present stem
- Root/thematic aorist: affixed present:
ἔγνω vs. γιγνώσκω
ἔβαλον vs. βάλλω
ἔλαθον vs. λα-ν-θ-αν-ω
- Both can be affixed: ζευγ-νυ-μι vs. ἐ-ζευξ-α
- They can be distinguished by ablaut alone: λείπω vs ἔ-λιπ-ον
- Suppletion, typically where the lexical semantics of the root do not permit changing the ‘natural’ aspect: φέρω vs. ἦνεγκον

- Aspect can be inherent in the lexical semantics of a verbal root
e.g. a verb like ‘to be’ is naturally imperfective: εἶμι does not have an aorist
- verb like ‘to give’ is goal-oriented and perfective: δίδωμι = root aorist
- Roots with inherent perfective semantics (give, take, kill etc) are called telic, those with imperfective semantics (be, carry) atelic
- Difference between telic and atelic verbs grammaticalised in Greek?

6. Latin and Greek perfect tenses

- Some people call Greek perfect (e.g. τέθνηκα) another aspect
- But it indicates the present state as the result of a completed action in the past
- Thus defined as a tense
- Latin perfect also has present meaning
novi, odi, memini
urbs nostra deleta est; fuimus Troes: ‘Our city is destroyed; We Trojans are gone.’
- But it also denotes the perfective aspect in the past
ibam sacra via; cucurrit ad me Marcus
- Latin perfect = syncretism of original perfect and aorist
- In fact there is a difference – perfect = stative, other tenses = eventive
- Possible schematisation:



Reading

Comrie 1976, *Aspect*

Comrie 1985, *Tense*