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VERBAL ASPECT IN FRENCH

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The present interest in verbal aspect is largely due to the research of the Slavacists of the last century.¹ Although many other languages (IE or not) have something which bears a strong resemblance to the categories of punctual, iterative, and durative as they appear in the Slavic languages, there are but few in which such a distinction is so clearly a part of the grammatical, nonlexical structure. Nevertheless, Slavic verb aspect has attracted the attention of some linguists to comparable semantic categories in other languages. This concept has been particularly fruitful for IE linguistics. In PIE the aspectual meanings are most particularly expressed by verbal themes, i.e. elements between the root and the ending; this process is described by Meillet and Vendryes (*Traité de grammaire comparée* §257) as expressing 'les modalités de la durée, suivant que l'on considère le procès dans un point ou dans l'ensemble de son développement, dans son début ou dans son terme, suivant qu'on le suppose inachevé ou achevé, limité à lui-même ou prolongé sans un résultat, etc.'

We owe what is perhaps the clearest and most systematic description of the aspectual categories of PIE to Streitberg.² He finds five main categories, as follows: (1) the durative or imperfective aspect, which expresses the process in its uninterrupted duration or its continuity; (2) the inchoative aspect, which expresses the gradual transition from one state to another of a process (the verbs in *-skōd*); (3) the perfective aspect, which adds to the material meaning of the verb the subsidiary concept (*Nebenbegriff*) of the achieved or finished: the process is viewed from the moment of its achievement; there are two subtypes of perfective verbs—momentaneous-perfective, which present the moment of achievement and which may be graphically represented by a point, and durative-perfective, which present the moment of the achievement of a process explicitly envisaged as having had duration; (4) the iterative aspect, which represents a regular repetition of a durative process (the durative-iterative aspect) or of a perfective process (the perfective-iterative aspect); (5) the perfect (*perfektisch*) aspect, not to be confused with the perfective, which designates a process in its accomplished state, i.e. in the state of having been done.

This classification of aspect, like that of the Slavists, far from being a purely

¹ For the role of Slavacists in the development of the concept of aspect, and for the history of the concept, see H. M. Sørensen, *Om definitionerne af verbets aspekter*, *In memoriam Kr. Sandfeld* 221-33 (Copenhagen, 1943).

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² Wilhelm Streitberg, *Urgermanische Grammatik* §190 (Heidelberg, 1896).

logical or semantic construction, has its origin in the structure of what PIE must have been, to judge from the testimony of the oldest IE languages, especially Greek, Sanskrit, and OCS. Whatever its origin may have been, it has led to a semantic classification which, once started, has shown itself to be capable of a limitless and most often unsystematic development. Studies in French aspects exemplify this confusion, probably because aspectual oppositions do not play a very important role in the morphological system of French.

The meaning of the word ASPECT as far as French is concerned varies considerably from one author to another. One seeks in vain the near unanimity which characterizes Slavic, Greek, or IE studies. The concept has been utilized with varying degrees of understanding of its original usage among Indo-Europeanists and of its applicability to the Romance languages. The extreme of confusion is perhaps to be found in a work which, in spite of this flaw, remains the best normative grammar of French, *Le bon usage* by Maurice Grevisse. The definition given there³ is rather well formulated: 'L'aspect du verbe est le caractère de l'action considérée dans son développement, l'angle particulier sous lequel l'accomplissement (le "processus") de cette action est envisagé.' After this more or less traditional definition, Grevisse draws up the list of the 'principaux aspects', applying to them his own designations, adding the traditional terms in parentheses. The gap which exists between the traditional acceptance of many of his aspects and the examples he furnishes is disturbing. Grevisse cites as an example of 'l'instantanéité (aspect momentané)' *La bombe éclate*; obviously he wanted to emphasize the suddenness which he regards as the essential feature of this aspect. This is, of course, rather a characteristic of a bursting bomb than of the proposition that expresses the event. In fact, the choice of tense here would express more plausibly the image of the bomb in the midst of its explosion or its propensity to explode under certain conditions. A traditional linguist would call it durative or iterative. As an example of the iterative aspect, Grevisse proposes *Je relis la lettre*, since, for him, the iterative denotes repetition. But a single repetition is a single act: to deserve the term ITERATIVE a proposition must denote an indefinite number of repetitions.

In these examples (and the others are hardly better) the essential error is a double one: a false apprehension of the meaning of the term designating a given aspect (as of REPETITION); and the confusion of a feature of the referent with a feature of the linguistic expression which denotes it (the explosion of a bomb, although of short duration, can be envisaged, like any other event, in its duration or as accomplished, etc.).

It is clear from the organisation of the book that aspect does not constitute a cardinal notion of *Le bon usage*; even the number of the section, §607 bis, indicates that it was only as an afterthought that Grevisse decided to describe the aspects;⁴ in the preceding paragraph, §607, he had prepared his discussion of verb forms by attributing to them the categories of number, person, voice, mood, and tense. What is aspect in his system? Obviously not a morphological category. Could it be a syntactic category, or a semantic one? There is no indication of the

³ *Le bon usage*⁵ §607 bis (Gembloux [Belgium] and Paris, 1953).

⁴ Earlier editions lack this section §607 bis.

place of aspect in the structure of French; we must seek it elsewhere than in Grevisse's book.

One of the most original thinkers in French linguistics is C. de Boer.⁵ He defines aspect as representing 'la nature intérieure des temps'. *Temps* as he uses it here has two meanings: the sets of verb-forms called *tenses* (the *tiroirs* of Damourrette and Pichon⁶), and the meanings of these forms, when it is not a matter of mood or aspect. De Boer recognizes five aspects: (1) entrance into action, (2) duration, (3) the accomplished state, (4) the recently accomplished state, and (5) the finishing action. He draws up a short list of some aspects recognized by other authors: 'l'aspect ponctuel (représentant l'action comme accomplie en même temps que commencée ...); l'aspect cursif, ou duratif, ou imparfait; l'aspect parfait (indiquant un état du sujet comme résultat d'une action précédente du sujet); l'aspect itératif; l'aspect terminatif (par lequel une action est représentée dans son cours, en considérant spécialement son début ou sa fin).' He cites a few more besides, and then adds: 'C'est encore une différence d'aspect que de distinguer les formes verbales qui énoncent de celles qui associent.' In this last sentence he alludes to the theory of J. M. Buffin,⁷ which he accepts and expounds in his *Syntaxe*. We shall return to Buffin's theory below.

As for the five aspects isolated by de Boer, he does not in this book return to them, for the only aspectual difference which he finds preserved in French is in the triple opposition of the past tenses, *passé composé*, *imparfait*, *passé simple*. According to de Boer, the aspects 'peuvent être exprimés dans la forme verbale (notamment dans les trois temps du passé), soit par des formes dissociées: *Je suis sur le point de*; *je commence à*; *je viens de*; *je vais finir de*, etc.; des adverbes comme: *sans cesse ...*, *souvent ...*, *vite ...*, etc. De cette façon-là, nos langues occidentales "réintègrent" la notion d'aspect que nos formes verbales n'expriment plus, depuis qu'elles expriment essentiellement les "temps".' In order to understand the last sentence, one must be acquainted with de Boer's distinction between *exprimer* (an essential function) and *suggérer* (a subordinate value).

One thing that de Boer does not suggest as a vehicle for aspect is the meaning of a given verb as a lexical unit, or, as some would say, the meaning of the root. He does however suggest the possibility of the existence of a lexical problem alongside the grammatical one when he cites, among the aspects of 'other linguists', 'l'aspect ponctuel (représentant l'action comme accomplie en même temps que commencée; cf. le sens du verbe *trouver*).' We will see later how much importance this notion will assume.

Since he does not define any of the aspects which are not those of 'other linguists' and which we may therefore consider his own, nor give any examples of them, one wonders why he drew up his list of five aspects; he does not seem to have any system in terms of which they could be pigeonholed. But before leaving de Boer's ideas on aspects, let us glance at what he cites, with unreserved approval, of the work of Buffin. The *passé défini*, the *imparfait*, and the *passé indéfini* (I use the authors' names for these tenses) are distinguished from each

⁵ *Syntaxe du français moderne* (Leiden, 1947).

⁶ *Des mots à la pensée: Essai de grammaire de la langue française* (Paris, 1911-52).

⁷ *Remarques sur les moyens d'expression de la durée et du temps en français* (Paris, 1925).

other by aspect alone, since they all express the same 'tense'. De Boer has hinted at this usage in the sentence already cited: 'C'est encore une différence d'aspect que de distinguer les formes verbales qui énoncent de celles qui associent.' Here is Buffin's system as de Boer presents it: (a) Passé indéfini: 'associe subjectivement un fait de mémoire au présent': *J'ai perdu mon mouchoir; La cérémonie a été belle*; (b) Imparfait: 'associe objectivement un fait de mémoire au passé': *Napoléon était de petite taille*; (c) Passé défini: 'énonce un fait de mémoire dans le passé': *Son père vint la voir*.

Buffin and de Boer maintain that there are differences of function among the three tenses, and that all the other shades are values, following the terminology of de Boer (or, alternatively, secondary functions), flowing from the functional differences. As nearly as I have managed to understand the terms used in these definitions, *associer subjectivement* means 'associate the speaker' in such a way that the latter expresses his continuous participation in the thing remembered (fait de mémoire), while *associer objectivement* means 'associate the subject of the sentence', i.e. place the subject in the time in which the action denoted by the verb takes place. *Énoncer* means 'make a simple observation referring to the past'. Here are a few consequences of the distinctions, according to Buffin: 'Si je dis: *Mon ami était bon*, j'associe l'idée de temps à celle de qualité, d'un côté, et à la personne de mon ami, de l'autre ... J'applique à mon ami tout l'espace dont il est susceptible, et je suppose par là-même cet espace achevé, mon ami mort, puisque j'utilise un temps du passé.' Buffin seems to have gone a little too fast and too far in his reasoning. Is it not possible to say of a friend whom one has not seen for fifteen years, *Mon ami était bon*, whether one knows or not if he is still living? 'Si je dis: *Hier, mon oncle était malade*, j'associe *oncle* et *malade* au temps, dans la mesure où le terme *hier* le permet. Je m'exprime non dans mon passé subjectif [sc. le passé indéfini], mais dans le passé social, universel.' (The remark between brackets was inserted by de Boer.) Is it, then, necessarily a question of a fait de mémoire, as it is formulated in these definitions? Would it not be better to speak of an event or process than of a fact or act of memory?

But what is a fait de mémoire? I have the impression that Buffin is giving two meanings to this expression: the act of remembering something, and that which one remembers, what is usually called in these verb studies the event, the process, or the like. He gives the first meaning to fait de mémoire when it concerns the passé indéfini, and that of what one remembers when it is a question of the passé défini and the imparfait. This gives us an indication of what he means by *objective* ('that which relates to an event, to what one remembers') and *subjective* ('that which relates to a mental act of the speaker, like the act of remembering something or judging something'). If these interpretations of Buffin's terms are correct, it is only necessary, in order to understand his triple distinction, to explain the difference between *associer* and *énoncer*, in order to distinguish between the two objective tenses, the imparfait, which associates, and the passé défini, which enunciates (or perhaps a better translation would be *affirms*). We have to do here, I believe, with a subjective impression on Buffin's part that the imparfait attributes an essential trait to the subject of the sentence. This impression can well come from the descriptive use of the

imperfect, but, in my opinion, it is only a statistical illusion: it happens rather often that the imparfait is used to describe such notions, to describe 'essences' in the past; that is a statistical fact which has cast its shadow on the other uses of the imparfait. This attribution of an essential trait to the subject of the sentence Buffin calls *association*. In contrast, *énoncer* means 'to affirm coldly and objectively, to state without judging or participating'. I hope that my reinterpretation of Buffin's ideas will not do an injustice to his intentions. In the absence of definitions of his key terms, it has been necessary to attribute to them a sense which would be plausible within the framework of Buffin's ideas and contribute as far as possible to a structural or systematic apperception of the problem.

In order to show by a minimal contrast the difference between the imparfait as 'objective association' and the passé indéfini as 'subjective association', he compares *Alexandre était un grand conquérant* with *Alexandre a été un grand conquérant*, saying that the first attributes the quality of conqueror to Alexander as an essential feature, i.e. one which 's'associe à toute sa durée, qui est un fait comme l'existence de l'individu même', while the passé indéfini expresses a judgment on the part of the speaker.

As for the passé défini, Buffin and de Boer furnish definitions which, though very subtle, seem perhaps too intuitive. No serious exception need be taken to the following passage: '[Le passé défini] est "narratif". C'est un temps d' "historiens"; il marque dans le récit "la suite des événements", mais il ne les peint pas. Le passé qu'il énonce est achevé, ce que le passé décrit au moyen de l'imparfait n'est pas.' Besides the difficulty of translating into terms usable for syntactic analysis these rather impressionistic terms, there is a rather serious internal contradiction: Buffin had already said that the imparfait attributes a quality to the subject of the sentence equal to 'tout l'espace dont il est susceptible', and he had supposed, following this line of reasoning, that his friend was dead. But he has just now told us that the passé défini, in contrast to the imparfait, expresses a completed past, 'un passé achevé'.

What explains these contradictions, these examples which prove the opposite of what was to be proved, in the midst of these subtle intuitions, where one glimpses a certain nail-on-the-head quality, based on a very sure feeling for the French language? I believe that it is because Buffin (and with him, de Boer) has fallen into the very trap that de Boer has warned us against: that of taking a secondary value for a primary function.

Buffin and de Boer are right in supposing that the difference between the three past tenses is aspectual, but I do not think that they have found the aspectual opposition which differentiates them. The fact that the passé indéfini and the imparfait associate, while the passé défini only 'enunciates', and that the passé défini and the imparfait are objective as against the passé indéfini, which is subjective, flows from the relation between the moment of the event and the period of reference, a relation which is different for each one of these three tenses. But more of this later.

The idea of verbal aspect is scattered all through the book that is basic for many French linguists, *La pensée et la langue*, by Ferdinand Brunot (3rd edition,

Paris, 1953). On page 435 is found a classification of the ACTIONS, which correspond more or less to the aspects of other linguists. Brunot distinguishes: instantaneous actions, limited actions ('ce sont celles dont la durée ... est comprise entre des limites'), unlimited actions, and partially limited actions (i.e. whose beginning or end is explicit, but not both). On page 440 is a discussion on 'Dates et aspects', in which ASPECT expresses the temporal relation between the completion of an event and a given moment: that is, the mechanism of the compound tenses of French. This idea was to be developed by Gustave Guillaume in *Temps et verbe*,⁸ who also uses the term 'aspect' for this relationship. But much later, on page 777, there is a chapter called 'Les aspects', which concerns itself almost exclusively with the imparfait. Again, on page 450, Brunot presents a series of semantic classes which resemble more his actions than his aspects, as the former appear on page 440, viz. entrance into action, duration of the action, aspects of progression, repetition, and accomplishment. This chapter is more concerned with adverbs or periphrastic formations than with verb forms.

It would be impossible to do justice to Brunot's ideas within the limits of this essay, which must confine itself to aspect alone. In the first place, the idea of aspect is difficult to isolate in this book, in which it is found in several places under different names (and in which the word 'aspect' is found designating several concepts which resist union under a single definition). In the second place, this idea, as he treats it, is so intimately bound up with all the other formal and semantic dimensions (which is as it should be) that we would require a global definition of the verb as Brunot conceives it. This task would be particularly delicate and complicated in view of the logical or semantic point of departure which is our author's.

As I have suggested elsewhere,⁹ the expression of certain facts in the experience of the speaker is facultative in a given language, that of others is obligatory, imposed by the structure of the language in question. The expression of number is, for example, facultative in Chinese, obligatory in French—which does not amount to saying that the Chinese does not have the means of expressing this concept, but that he can express or omit this detail at will. Now it is the neglect of this primordial distinction between the facultative and the obligatory in language that leads to this burgeoning of categories which cross-cut each other in every direction in Brunot's book. The facts, the brilliant insights, the intuitive genius displayed by Brunot are, it must be said, obscured and even vitiated by the veil behind which they are hidden: the system in accordance with which thought becomes the point of departure for a description of the mechanism which expresses it.

It will be useful now to consider the fine and subtle, if at times somewhat complicated system of Damourette and Pichon.¹⁰ No summary could do them justice, and one can only recommend to the reader who may not yet have attempted it that he make the effort to know their grammatical system directly.

⁸ *La pensée et la langue* (Paris, 1929). The first edition is dated 1926.

⁹ *The historical development of tenses from Late Latin to Old French* §1.2, §1.3 (Language diss. No. 51, 1955).

¹⁰ Op.cit. in fn. 6.

Damourette and Pichon (hereafter DP) do not use the term 'aspect' in a systematic way; but this can easily be excused, as it could not be in the case of Grevisse or de Boer. The latter seemed to be promising us something systematic, and the disappointment was great. The system of DP, on the contrary, is rigorous enough and at the same time flexible enough to permit them to describe in somewhat impressionistic terms some of the effects which are produced by the use of a given grammatical category. And it is in this spirit that they make use of such terms as *punctual* in their usual acceptation.

Their conception of the French language is that of a system of *RÉPARTITOIRES* which cut across each other at different angles, the concept of what Gustave Guillaume calls, in his courses at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, 'un système de systèmes'. And what is more striking is that a subsystem can contain subsystems. For DP the French language consists of four *CATÉGORIES*—the factives, the substantives, the adjectives, and the affunctives—and three *CLASSES*—the nouns, the verbs, and the struments—whence twelve 'logical essences': the nominal factive, the verbal factive, etc. 'Le factif ... marque les phénomènes', 'le substantif ... exprime les substances', 'l'adjectif ... exprime les qualités applicables aux substances', and 'l'affonctif ... exprime les modalités applicables tant aux phénomènes qu'à la façon dont se présentent les qualités, ou même les substances, dans le déroulement desdits phénomènes' (§66).

The struments form the class of free elements which have no lexical meaning but are limited to 'grammatical' meaning. The verbs are the free elements which play a 'constructive role' in the sentence and which, at the same time, carry a 'lexical' meaning. The nouns are the free elements 'susceptibles d'être assemblés par l'intermédiaire des struments et des verbes'.

The class of verbs is distributed over the four categories in four logical essences: the verbal factive (which in traditional grammar is called the verb with personal forms, the finite verb), the verbal substantive (the infinitive), the verbal adjective (the participles), and the verbal affunctive (en ... *-ant*). The verbal factive will concern us particularly in the present study. It is in turn divided into three parts (*répartitioires*), which the authors call temporaneity (*temporaineté*), actuality (*actualité*), and enarration (*énarration*).

The three phases of temporaneity present the phenomenon in relation to the me-here-now of the speaker. They are (1) the precedential phase, which consists of two series—the fontal, *Je viens de faire*, and the anterior, *J'ai fait*; (2) the timeless phase (phase extemporanée), *Je fais*; and (3) the ulterior phase, *Je vais faire*. One always feels the psychological participation of the speaker in the phenomenon which he is describing, unlike the enarrative verbal sets, which are (1) the prisal (*Je fis*), (2) the horane (horain) (*Je fais*), and (3) the future (*Je ferai*). Enarration presents the phenomenon objectively. If the présent, *je fais*, appears in these two repartitioires (as well as in that of actuality), there is no failure of the system involved: the présent appears as the pivot of the whole system of the verbal factive. If you imagine this system in three dimensions, the présent will be at the intersection of the three coordinates which

represent the three repartitories. That is why DP call the *présent* the canon set (le tiroir-canon). This nomenclature is also justified by the ability of the *présent* to express the nonlinguistic past, present, and future.

The repartitory of actuality is divided into two series: the nuncal sets (tiroirs noncaux) and the tuncal sets (tiroirs toncaux), named after the Latin *nunc* and *tunc* respectively. The nuncal sets are, morphologically, those whose stem is at the base of the formation of the tuncal sets by the addition of the endings *-ais*, *-ait*, *-ions*, *-iez*, *-aient* / ϵ , $j\bar{o}$, $je/$. The only nuncal sets are, then, the present and the future, with the *passé composé* and the *futur antérieur* (the last two being formed with auxiliaries capable of tuncalization, according to this definition). But what is tuncalization from a semantic point of view? One of the most striking explanations is found at §1705: 'une réalité différente de la réalité de maintenant, mais véritablement revivable par report mémoriel ou imaginatif'. That is a description which can embrace the temporal uses as well as the modal uses of the *imparfait* and the *conditionnel*, and perhaps provides a good alternative to the theory according to which the *conditionnel* is split into two homonymous series, one a tense and the other a mood. The theory that the forms in *-rais* have a modal use is based on their use in conditional sentences, yet it is not usually held that the *imparfait* is also modal in such sentences. But such a view would be as justified, especially in the light of the not exactly temporal sense attributed to the tuncals by DP.

This formulation also explains the striking temporal mobility of the tuncal tenses: they can express events in the past as well as in the present and the future of the speaker; what makes them so particularly apt for the representation of the past, according to DP's interpretation, is this separation from the 'réalité de maintenant'.¹¹

We can now begin to consider DP's treatment of aspectual questions. As always, we find the best aspectual contrasts in the past tenses:

Au point de vue du procès dans son déroulement, on pourrait ... dire que le *prisca* [le *passé simple*] le fait surgir, le *toncal* [l'*imparfait* de l'*indicatif*] se dérouler et l'*antérieur* [le *passé composé*] finir; mais en y apportant ce correctif que le *prisca* et l'*antérieur* ayant, contrairement au *toncal*, une valeur non pas actuelle, mais ponctuelle, ils sont capables d'exprimer la totalité du procès, l'aspect respectivement surgissant ou accompli dans lequel ils se présentent, ayant une valeur psychologique bien plus que réellement chronologique. On peut dire 'à sept heures précises, il a poussé un cri' ou 'à sept heures précises il poussa un cri.' L'instant du cri considéré comme sans durée est, dans les deux cas, représenté dans son entier; mais, dans la première phrase, cet instant s'inscrit comme accompli à côté des instants qui lui succèdent, tandis que dans la seconde il se présente comme surgissant brusquement à côté des instants qui le précèdent.

¹¹ A vivid interpretation of the *imparfait* appears in §1709, which it is interesting to read at this point: 'Le caractère commun à tous les emplois du *toncal* pur [l'*imparfait*] ... c'est que ce tiroir marque ... le placement du fait verbal dans une autre sphère d'action, une autre *actualité*, que celle où se trouve le locuteur au moment de la parole. La position naturelle et fondamentale de l'esprit c'est de centrer le monde des phénomènes sur le locuteur se concevant lui-même dans l'instant présent: Le "moi-ici-maintenant". Ce mode d'apercevement des phénomènes constitue l'*actualité* noncale. Toutes les fois, au contraire, que l'esprit fait l'effort de se reporter dans un monde phénoménal autrement centré, on est dans une *actualité* toncale, et il apparaît dans la phrase soit le *saviez* [l'*imparfait*], soit, selon les nuances nécessaires, le tiroir complexe approprié.'

All the same there are certain asymmetries in the play of chronological and aspectual meanings in the system of DP. One could raise the objection that, if one of the marks of tuncality is durative aspect, one would expect the future to be punctual (and at §1835 it is noted that this is exactly what the future and the *priscal* have in common) and the verbs in *-rais* to be durative, both of them in the future. In reality, the distinction between the futur and the conditionnel is not an aspectual one, based on a punctual/durative opposition. But one could not possibly reproach DP for this, since they never claim that aspectual differences in French are systematic. The fact is that this aspectual meaning which they attribute to the imparfait is a semantic by-product of the system of the verb. We find then that this little aspectual subsystem has no relationship to such morphological considerations as sets of endings (*-ais* etc.).

One view of the verb which has aroused much interest among students of French linguistics and gained a good number of adherents is that of Gustave Guillaume, the first of whose works to treat this subject was *Temps et verbe* (Paris, 1929). There is no need here to summarize his system; besides the work itself, there are several résumés, the best of which perhaps is to be found in *Les formes surcomposées en français* by Maurice Cornu (Bern, 1953). I shall therefore limit myself to explaining with as little as possible of the specialized terminology of Guillaume, first his definition of the word *aspect*, and then what there is in his system which most resembles the usual acceptance of this word; for, as far as French is concerned, the difference between these two concepts is sharp.

Aspect, according to Guillaume, is the relationship between such terms as *j'aime:j'ai aimé; j'aimais:j'avais aimé*, on the one hand, and between such terms as *j'ai aimé:j'ai eu aimé*, on the other. In his terminology, simple verbs are in the TENSIVE aspect, compound verbs in the EXTENSIVE aspect, and sur-compound verbs in the BI-EXTENSIVE aspect.

The particular function of the extensive aspects is to express the anteriority of one event with respect to another without leaving the EPOCH denoted by the verb of the main clause (23):

Voici des exemples: *Dès qu'il a déjeuné, il s'en va*. Dans cette phrase, "a déjeuné" exprime une action passée et "s'en va" une action présente. En surface, pour exprimer ce rapport, il faudrait changer d'époque et dire, à supposer que ce fût possible: *Dès qu'il déjeuna, il s'en va*. Mais ce n'est pas ainsi que la pensée opère, car il importe beaucoup pour elle de pouvoir concentrer toutes les relations qu'elle veut mettre en lumière dans le champ étroit, et conséquemment d'époque unique, de la conscience actuelle. Aussi exprime-t-on l'antériorité de *déjeuner* par rapport à *s'en aller* à l'aide d'un changement d'aspect, ce qui permet de ne pas changer d'époque et d'exprimer le passé sans quitter du regard le présent.

Guillaume's system has, then, three epochs: past, present, and future, each of which is cut into the three aspects tensive, extensive, and bi-extensive.

I shall resist the temptation to set forth all of Guillaume's system, limiting myself to his explanation of the oppositions among the various past tenses of French.

As we have seen, the *passé composé* is the extensive aspect of the present; the two tenses of tensive aspect which are really past are the imparfait and the *passé simple*. It would hardly seem to do justice to the complexity and subtlety

of Guillaume's thought to summarize the difference between these two past tenses as that between inceptive (the *passé simple*) and completive (the *imparfait*); that is, the latter represents an event already started and going towards its completion, while the former presents it at the moment of coming into being. This recalls DP's description of the *passé simple*, which makes the event 'surgir', and of the *imparfait*, which makes it 'se dérouler'. But the description of the *passé simple* seems to falter a little where Guillaume describes it as a sort of future in the past (70), apparently having forgotten that he assigned a similar function to the conditionnel (56): 'un futur qui s'appuie sur le passé ... qui n'exprime rien de plus que la subordination du futur au passé.' His reasoning is as follows.

The time which he describes as being in *esse* (i.e. the indicative tenses) is divided into three epochs: future, present, and past. But the present is not a mere cut in the time line, on one side of which is the past, on the other the future, for the present has duration, it represents a moment of consciousness during which the mind performs its operations; see Roch Valin, *Petite introduction à la psychomécanique du langage* 23 ff. (Quebec, 1954). The present, then, contains within it a piece of the past, of time which goes away (*du temps qui s'en va*), and a little piece of the future, of time which is coming (*du temps qui vient*): 'Nous nommerons ces deux parcelles de temps, statiquement équilibrées l'une par l'autre, les deux *chronotypes* constitutifs du présent ... La juxtaposition de ces deux *chronotypes* est une condition nécessaire [et suffisante] du présent.' The time which precedes the present, i.e. which is going away, is called *decadent*, and the time that follows the present, the time which is coming into it, is called *incident*.

But according to Guillaume, the *passé simple* (which he calls the *PARFAIT SIMPLE*) is *incident* and the *imparfait* *decadent*. To justify this apparent anomaly he has recourse to an explanation which does not seem clear (60): 'Si le présent est appelé à descendre dans le passé, il devra le faire ou sur *chronotype* ω [his symbol for *decadent* time] ou sur *chronotype* α [*incident* time], mobilisés isolément; jamais sur les deux à la fois.' What seems difficult to me here is the notion of the present which descends into the past: what does that mean? Why did Guillaume not say it was the mind, or thought, which makes this descent? Is he talking about an imaginary present, from which one glimpses the chronological phenomena as if it were the actual present? But let us follow his explanation a little further:

Cette nécessité de faire choix d'un des deux *chronotypes* avant de s'engager dans le passé a conduit à les confronter dans le moment même où ils vont reprendre leur autonomie. Le *chronotype* ω , qui constitue la partie passé du présent, est ainsi apparu comme une unité n'ayant pas cessé d'apporter du réel à l'esprit et le *chronotype* α , qui en constitue la partie future, comme une unité n'ayant pas cessé d'apporter à l'esprit, non pas du réel mais une promesse du réel.

Later (65) he will describe the *passé simple* as having to do with an 'image verbale [qui] se présente RÉELLEMENT arrivant (α = incidence réelle)'

He recognizes two ways of looking at the past: (1) 'une vision *sécante* de l'image verbale véhiculée dans le passé sur *chronotype* ω ... de sorte que, en

quelque point de son déroulement qu'on la considère, elle se divise en deux parties, l'une déjà accomplie qui figure dans la perspective *réalité*, et l'autre inaccomplie qui figure dans la perspective *devenir*'; (2) a nonsecant view (*vision*) of chronotype α of a verbal image 'qui, d'instant en instant, diffère sa réalisation *usque ad finem*, et, s'il y a lieu *ad infinitum* [Footnote: Et Dieu dit: Que la lumière soit! Et la lumière fut.], de sorte qu'en aucun point de son déroulement, elle ne peut opposer une partie déjà accomplie d'elle-même à une partie non encore accomplie.' It is of course the imparfait which presents the division of the verbal image into two parts, whereas the image presented by the passé simple is indivisible. And now we know why Guillaume wanted to 'call the present into the past'. It was in order to distinguish the three tenses of the past as follows: the imparfait is partially accomplished, with a part yet to occur; the passé défini has no past, i.e. no portion anterior to itself, but is not 'accomplished' at all; and the passé indéfini has nothing but an accomplished portion—that is, there is no remaining portion yet to come.

Elegant as this system is, it is not entirely satisfying. One has the impression that Guillaume means that, at the moment at which the verbal image is envisaged, the event of a passé défini has not taken place. Let us consider one of his examples. In comparing the two sentences *Pierre s'était levé et marchait* and *Pierre se leva et marcha*, Guillaume says: 'Dans la première phrase *marcher* est perçu en cours, partiellement accompli et partiellement inaccompli. Dans la seconde, *marcher* est perçu naissant, puis en cours, c'est-à-dire s'accomplissant, *mais non déjà partiellement accompli* [Guillaume's italics].' I know what he means by 'naissant', but, if you grant that the event is already in progress, is it possible to say that it is not partially accomplished? We appear to be faced with the ambiguity of the word 'accomplished': as far as the imparfait is concerned, what has been started without having been brought to its conclusion may be partially 'accomplished'; as for the passé défini, what has not been terminated has not been 'accomplished' at all, that is, it is not enough, in order to 'accomplish' an action, simply to have started it. One may well start from one of two interpretations of a term designating a distinctive feature which, by its presence or absence, distinguishes two items in a system—but it is hardly playing the game to change definitions while demonstrating the contrast between the two items.

This difference is capable of a less complicated formulation. The passé défini is punctual, global, comprising the entire act, including its last moment, while the imparfait is what I would call preinceptive past, that is, at the moment in the past at which one envisages it, the event has already begun, is still in process at that moment, and is capable of continuing beyond the moment of reference as well as of ceasing at that same moment. *Je chantais quand le téléphone a sonné*: from the evidence of this sentence one does not know whether I stopped singing when the phone rang or whether I continued to sing; the imparfait does not tell us. Where then are the two parts which Guillaume tells us are essential to the imparfait? If an act in process ceases at a given moment, does there remain, at that moment, an unaccomplished part?

We now consider Guillaume's way of distinguishing between the passé défini and the passé indéfini (70). But first, in order to do him justice, it will be neces-

sary to explain some of his key terms. He describes the verbal image as beginning in a pure potentiality of realization which he calls TENSION for the nominal forms of the verb (the forms in *posse*—infinitives and participles), then going through a phase consisting of moments in which there is still tension (because the action is not yet finished) and DETENSION, which represents the used-up part of the action, as it were, terminating at last in a phase in which there is no remaining tension, but just detension. He symbolizes the first moment of pure tension by t_0 , the last moment of pure detension by t_n , and the moments between these two extremes by $t_1 + t_2 \dots t_{n-2} + t_{n-1}$. To represent a phase in which there is only tension, he has recourse to the symbol *tension/0*; similarly he uses *tension/detension* and *0/detension* to represent the remaining possibilities. What tension and detension are for the verbs in *posse*, α and ω are respectively for the verbs in *esse* (the indicative forms). We are now equipped to follow Guillaume's discussion of the difference between the *passé défini* and the *passé indéfini* (69–70):

L'autre question est celle de la concurrence victorieuse que le parfait indéfini a faite au parfait défini. On ne peut en concevoir le vrai ressort que si on la rapporte au caractère particulier de la position finale t_n du verbe dans le temps *in posse* ...

En t_n l'image verbale de forme *0/détension*, c'est-à-dire exclusivement détensive, n'est, à la vérité, plus un verbe, mais une sorte d'adjectif: le participe passé. On en rétablit la tension et le caractère *verbe* en juxtaposant au participe passé un nouvel élément tensif: l'auxiliaire. Ce qui donne la formule: *tension/0 + 0/détension = tension + détension = avoir + marché*.

Lorsque cette juxtaposition a lieu sous les espèces *tension + détension* dans le temps *in posse*, elle n'a d'autre conséquence que de créer un nouveau verbe, mais si on la transporte dans le temps *in esse* elle a, en outre, celle de déterminer l'époque présente.

En effet, d'après les correspondances connues ... , *tension + détension* dans le temps *in posse* donnent $\alpha + \omega$ dans le temps *in esse*. Or, la juxtaposition de $\alpha + \omega$ est condition suffisante de la conception de présent ...

C'est dire qu'au niveau de t_n , au lieu du passé tensif attendu, on a, nécessairement, un présent d'aspect extensif, autrement dit un présent d'auxiliaire suivi de participe passé: *j'ai marché* au lieu de *je marchai*; en un mot un parfait indéfini.

On tire de là que le parfait défini est un passé *ad finem* qui embrasse le développement entier du verbe moins la position finale au niveau de t_n et le parfait indéfini un passé *in fine* qui embrasse le développement du verbe y compris la position finale au niveau de t_n .

Différence confirmée par l'expérience. Si je dis: *Louis XIV régna longtemps en France*, c'est que ma pensée suit *ad finem* et sur $\alpha/0$ (c'est-à-dire sans jeter de coup d'oeil en arrière sur ω) le déroulement de ce long règne; mais si je dis *Louis XIV a longtemps régné en France*, ma pensée prenant position *in fine*, réalise purement et simplement que ce règne a eu lieu et qu'il a été long.

To help myself imagine this final moment, t_n , I have had recourse to a perhaps banal image. A runner, on his mark, muscles tensed, waiting for the pistol-shot to hurl himself forward—this is t_0 , or *tension/0*. Now our runner begins to run: $t_1 + t_2 \dots t_{n-2}$, that is, he covers a certain distance during a certain period of time. Let us follow him this time from the moment that he takes his first step until he breaks the tape: $t_1 + t_2 \dots t_{n-1}$. But if we look at him in the very next moment, the race over, we have the formula $t_n + t_{n+1} \dots t_{n+\infty}$, or pure detension. Now, before leaving our runner, let us return to the past, and look at him for a moment during his run: ... $t_3 + t_4 + t_5 \dots$. We have, of course, just symbolized the imparfait in this last example: *il courait*. And according to the paragraphs

of Guillaume just quoted, *il courut* suggests the formula $t_0 + t_1 + t_2 \dots t_{n-2} + t_{n-1}$, while *il a couru* may be represented by $t_0 \dots t_n$, the difference between the last two residing in the presence or absence of t_n .

Why does Guillaume insist that *il courut* does not include the moment t_n ? It is because t_n represents in a way the DEATH of the action—nothing remains of it but its effects. For Guillaume, *il courut* goes to the last moment without including it, for in t_n there is only detension, there is no more movement, no more becoming. In contrast, *il a couru* comments on this dead event, it states that a certain event has taken place, but it does not present it to us still vibrating, still active.

What makes Guillaume's explanation a little difficult to follow is that he does not take into explicit account the need of a reference period;¹² by operating with three chronetic elements, the moment of the event (E), the moment of speech (S), and the point or period of reference (R), one can characterize most temporal relationships. To express what Guillaume sees in the imparfait, it suffices to say that it is an EXTENDED PREINCEPTIVE PAST, i.e. the event (E) begins before R, continues as far as R and perhaps even beyond. The passé indéfini would be an ANTERIOR PRESENT—which amounts to saying that the reference period includes the speech moment, but that E takes place before. The passé défini, as Guillaume seems to envisage it, is an EXTENDED COINCEPTIVE PAST, which means that E begins with R and goes a little beyond R, if that is what is meant by the exclusion of t_n from this tense. But this is precisely where there seems to be room for doubt: why should not R be at least equal in duration to E? One can understand that Guillaume would want E to continue beyond R: it is because, without an explicit notion of a period of reference (although he gets near to it in speaking of the present which is 'appelé dans le passé'), he has no means of contrasting the imparfait and the passé défini except by the decadence of one and the incidence of the other, and, in order to bring out the peculiar nature of the latter, he characterizes it as 'perçu naissant, puis en cours, c'est-à-dire s'accomplissant, mais non déjà partiellement accompli'. In his own example, *Louis XIV régna longtemps en France*, is there any suggestion that this reign persists into our own day? If it is entirely past, it is because, in my terminology, the reference period is understood as containing the reign (E). In my opinion, only R can explain the contradiction (noted above) of something which, though already come into existence, then in process, is yet not already partially accomplished. If one considers any process as a whole (that is, if E does not exceed R, either before or after) however long it may be, one sees it as not having any history, or, to use Guillaume's terminology, any decadence. In short, if it is true that the E of the passé défini lasts after the beginning of R, it is no less true that it does not last after the end of R. On the other hand, what characterizes the E of an imparfait is that it has a past, an anterior portion, in relation to the beginning of R.

Can we make a larger generalization? We define a simple tense as a tense in which at least part of E and part of R are simultaneous (the other tenses are either posterior or anterior). A simple tense is capable of several aspects: EXTENDED if E begins before R or goes on after the end of R, or both; INCLUDED

¹² See my dissertation (op.cit. fn. 9), p. 12 on the reference period.

if E is shorter than R and entirely contained in it; CONGRUENT if there is a perfect coincidence of E and R. The most general description of the imparfait, then, would be PREINCEPTIVE EXTENDED PAST (which allows for the possibility of E's going beyond the end of R), and that of the passé défini would be NON-EXTENDED PAST (which includes the two possibilities of inclusion and congruence).

There remains one more book to be discussed. It is in *Les temps du verbe fini (indicatif) en français moderne* (Copenhagen, 1952), by H. Sten,¹³ that I found the idea which made it seem necessary to deal at last in a definitive way with the notion of aspect as it may apply to French. Sten expresses, with regard to linguistic systems, a certain skepticism, which he bases on convincing arguments: the same facts can lead to diverse interpretations; one interpretation of a given fact is often just as valid as another; two interpretations which seem mutually contradictory at first sight can be equally correct; and so on. Yet he understands the motive behind this quest for a system: 'Être tourmenté par le désir d'arriver à une définition qui embrasse tout (et qui souvent doit être très abstraite), c'est reconnaître l'aspect stable de la langue qu'il serait vain de nier.'

This is an attitude which can lead to very solid results. Without worrying about the fit of a given linguistic fact to a preconceived theory, Sten finds examples of practically all the verb tenses in almost all functions. Such facts, brought together without prejudgment, constitute a challenge worthy of the structuralist. As Sten suggests himself, both kinds of workers—fact-gatherers and systematizers—are needed to arrive at valid results.

It may be regretted, however, that through an excess of zeal Sten has, in one passage, deviated from his principle (which, through most of his book, has led him to subtle, penetrating discoveries and observations) by attributing to the primary reaction of a native informant no more value than to the theoretical preoccupations of a grammarian. Yet perhaps we should be grateful to him for having brought to our attention the phenomenon mentioned on pages 25 ff., and for having made the crucially unacceptable statement, 'Si, il s'est noyé.' Here is the passage in question:

Une phrase comme *il se noyait* s'explique ... de cette façon. "Il essayait de se noyer, il était près de se noyer, mais heureusement on lui a porté secours de sorte que de fait il ne s'est pas noyé." Si, il s'est noyé [!]. Il a fait l'action de se jeter ou de tomber dans le fleuve, de commencer à couler, à perdre la respiration, cela s'appelle *se noyer*. Et cela finit souvent par la mort. Mais parfois cette dernière phase de l'action peut manquer (on est arrivé à temps), et c'est dans ce cas qu'on a coutume de dire que l'action *se noyer* n'a pas eu lieu, et on aurait raison si ce verbe était partout et toujours perfectif. Mais qui le dit? Les grammairiens, ou même un vague sentiment linguistique? La langue, elle, semble au moins se refuser à admettre une telle conception simpliste. [Footnote: On peut même dire que s'il fallait prendre à la lettre l'aspect "accompli" du participe passé on ne comprendrait pas bien l'utilité du *Secours au noyés* ...] Elle considère que l'action de se noyer commence déjà au moment où le malheureux a plongé (ou même au moment où il a quitté sa maison avec la ferme résolution de se jeter à l'eau) et tout ce qui se déroule en ce laps de temps est une manifestation aussi réelle que celle que nous trouvons dans *il joue*. Prenons justement une phrase comme *ils jouaient au bridge*. Cette action se termine ordinairement par le gain d'un robre. Mais si on est interrompu avant? On ne dirait sûrement pas qu'on n'a pas joué

¹³ There is a very good review of this work by Knud Togeby in *Lingua* 4.379-93 (1955).

au bridge, qu'il s'agit d'un imparfait de tentative (on pourrait bien, en certains cas, dire qu'on a seulement essayé de jouer au bridge, mais ce serait pour d'autres raisons). On voit bien en quoi consiste la différence: *jouer* est "ordinairement" considéré comme un verbe "imperfectif" tandis qu'on regarde "généralement" *se noyer* comme un perfectif. La distinction a sa valeur, mais nous avons vu que la langue possède des moyens pour passer outre.

This would perhaps be convincing if the facts were true. For it is not the linguist alone who is shocked by the affirmation 'YES, he DID drown' (Si, il s'est noyé); any Frenchman would be shocked, even if he never bothered himself with linguistic problems. It is sufficient to say to a Frenchman, 'Figurez-vous un homme qui se noyait, mais qu'on a tiré du fleuve avant qu'il n'ait pu mourir: s'est-il noyé?' All the Frenchmen I have asked have answered No. Sten says that the 'language refuses to allow such a simplistic conception'; but if a 'vague linguistic feeling', as he calls it, is held in common by all French speakers, one must admit that it has a certain value.

Sten has given us the two examples of a drowning man pulled out of the river and an interrupted rubber of bridge. Did the man drown? Has bridge been played? Frenchmen whom I have asked say, 'Non, il ne s'est pas noyé', and 'Oui, on a joué au bridge'. This suggests that there might be two categories of verbs (or constructions) according to the answer you get to the following question: if one was *verbing*, but was interrupted while *verbing*, has one *verbed*? (Si on *verbaît*, mais a été interrompu tout en *verbant*, est-ce qu'on a *verbé*?) Substitute the test verb where the formula has *verb*: Si on se noyait ..., Si on jouait au bridge ..., and so on. The conception is simplistic, but can be deepened. It suggests a solution to the problem of aspect: that there must be a distinction between LEXICAL ASPECT and GRAMMATICAL ASPECT. In many discussions of the perfective and imperfective, the durative and punctual and iterative, the accomplished and the nonaccomplished, one finds a good deal of confusion: it is often hard to tell whether a given discussion concerns a 'perfective verb' or a 'perfective tense'. For example, what Sten seems to have tried to prove in his discussion of *il se noyait* is that a perfective verb is imperfective because it is sometimes used in an imperfective tense, the imperfect.

As a matter of fact, Sten's dilemma seems to involve the inclusion or noninclusion of a GOAL in the lexical sense of the verb. If you ask a Frenchman, 'Est-ce qu'il se noyait?', after describing the thrashing around in the water, the Frenchman will answer, 'Oui'; which seems to prove that *se noyer* means 'fall into the water, begin to sink, lose one's breath, etc.' But ask him, 'S'est-il noyé?' and he will answer 'Non'—which seems to prove that *se noyer* means 'die of suffocation in a liquid', which is the definition given in the *Dictionnaire de la langue française* of Littré and Beaujean.¹⁴ But if we grant equal authority to these two testimonies, how do we resolve the contradiction? Is death a necessary part of the definition of *se noyer* or is it not?

One possible solution is to say that there are two homonymous verbs *se noyer*,

¹⁴ Sten has chosen only the first of these definitions as the right one—quite arbitrarily it would seem. He explains the second as due to the habit of considering *se noyer* a perfective verb. *Jouer*, on the other hand, is generally considered imperfective, which explains why it is said that one who was playing bridge has in fact played bridge. But how many Frenchmen-in-the-street have even heard the terms *perfective* and *imperfective*?

of which one implies death, the other not. This is a logical solution but it lacks elegance—first because the meaning changes according to the tense in which the verb appears, so that this semantic change seems more grammatical than lexical (whereas homonymy is a lexical description), second because there would be a long series of homonym pairs in which the only semantic distinction between members of each pair would be the inclusion or the exclusion of a given goal (*acheter, amener, changer, quitter*, etc.). But it is just this relationship between the members of the pairs which shows us the way out of the dilemma. We bring back together the two members into a single lexical item, which we put into a category of verbs expressing an action tending towards a goal—envisaged as realized in a perfective tense, but as contingent in an imperfective tense.

Let us call verbs of this class **TELIC**, from the Greek **télos**. **ATELIC** verbs are those which do not have to wait for a goal for their realization, but are realized as soon as they begin.¹⁵ *Nager* 'to swim', for example, is atelic. But what do perfective and imperfective mean? Here we require a more general description of the terms of which I made a particular application above in discussing Guillaume. The reference period (R) is the time—the point of time or period of time—in reference to which events (E) are situated. In its turn the reference period is situated with respect to the moment of making the utterance, called the speech moment (S). The relation of R to S we call **TENSE**—past, present, future. The relationship of E to R is called **TEMPUS**. There are three tempora: anterior, simple, posterior. When necessary we can specify the relationship of the event to speech directly as prelocutory, collocutory, and postlocutory **ACTION**. In this article we are dealing most particularly with the simple past tense, that is, the tense in which E and R come before S and are simultaneous, if not necessarily congruent; they at least overlap.

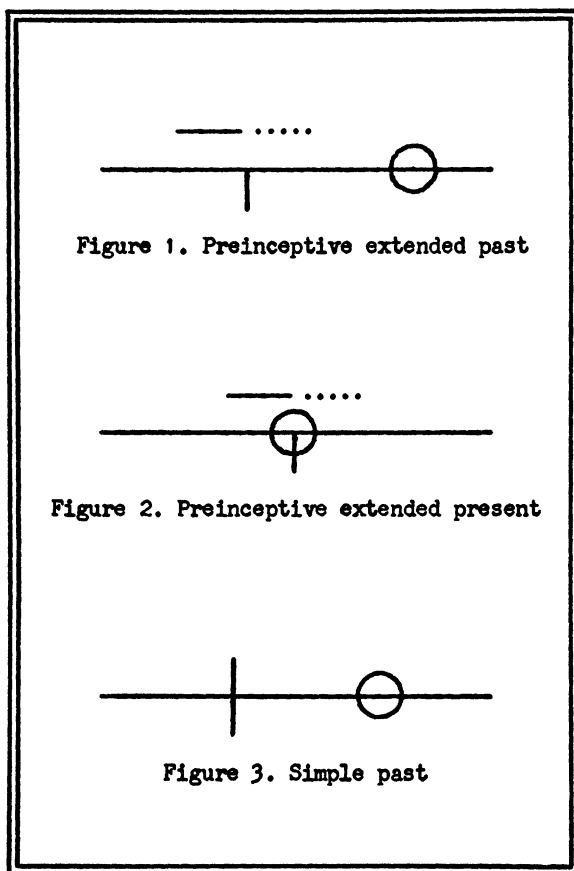
For our present purposes we can define as **PERFECTIVE** any simple tense in which E explicitly does not last beyond the end of R. Let us now consider the four aspectual combinations: those of a telic verb in an imperfective and in a perfective tense, and those of an atelic verb in an imperfective and in a perfective tense:

	IMPERFECTIVE	PERFECTIVE
TELIC	<i>Pierre arrivait</i>	<i>Pierre est arrivé</i>
ATELIC	<i>Pierre jouait</i>	<i>Pierre a joué</i>

Our first combination is telic imperfective (TI), *Pierre arrivait*. At a given moment in the past, Pierre was in the act of directing himself towards a goal. Since the moment in question—the reference period—was shorter than the action, one does not know if the goal will be attained.

Second, telic perfective (TP), *Pierre est arrivé*. At a given moment, either anterior to the speech moment or simultaneous with it, Pierre finds himself at the goal towards which a moment earlier he had been directing himself. In the

¹⁵ Sten recognizes the existence of these classes of verbs, which he calls (8) 'les "perfectifs"' (pour lesquels l'action n'a pas eu lieu si elle n'est pas portée à son terme, p. ex. *tuer*) et [les] verbes "imperfectifs" dont l'action s'effectue vraiment dès qu'elle a commencé, sans avoir besoin d'attendre la fin, p. ex. *jouer*.' But he has not grasped the systematic relations between the aspect of a verb and the aspect of a tense.



absence of context, we do not know, from this sentence alone, when, in reference to R, Pierre started on his way. Thus, the sentence is ambiguous; it involves the possibilities diagrammed in Figures 1, 2, and 3.

Third, atelic imperfective (AI), *Pierre jouait*. The word *jouer* has several meanings: one is to be occupied with some sort of vague childish activity; another, to play a game; a third, to make music with an instrument; and a fourth, to complete a game or a piece of music. Here we begin to see more clearly into the problem. If there is a direct object, and if this object designates something that has a structure with a temporal ending to it—a game of chess or of tennis, a Beethoven sonata—the expression verb-plus-object is telic. In the contrary case, if the complement of the verb is atelic—*aux échecs* ‘chess’, *du violon* ‘the violin’, *du Beethoven* ‘some Beethoven’—or if there is no object (for example, *il a joué toute la journée* ‘he played all day’, *il joue très bien* ‘he plays very well’), the expression is atelic. For Sten, *jouer au bridge* ‘play bridge’ means *finir un robe* ‘finish a rubber’, but here he seems to force things a little. Since we need an atelic verb here, we will use *jouer* in the sense ‘be engaged in vague childish activity’: *Quand j’ai regardé par la fenêtre il y a un moment, Pierre jouait tranquillement* ‘When I looked out of the window a little while ago, Pierre was playing quietly’.

Fourth, atelic perfective (AT), *Pierre a joué*. This can appear in a series: *Il s'est réveillé, il s'est levé, il est allé dehors, il a joué jusqu'à l'heure du petit déjeuner ...* 'He woke up, he got out of bed, he went outside, he played until breakfast time ...' Or, with a well-marked reference period, *Qu'est-ce que le gosse a fait aujourd'hui?*—*Oh, il a joué toute la journée* 'What did the kid do today?—He played all day long.'

We can summarize these combinations of the two series of aspects as follows.

An imperfective tense applied to a telic verb has the effect of hiding the arrival or nonarrival at the goal. It is this circumstance that gives the illusion that the lexical sense of a telic verb is 'go towards a given goal'—like the thrashing around in the water denoted by *se noyer*.

A perfective tense applied to a telic verb expresses the attainment of a goal. This creates the illusion that the achievement of the goal is part of the lexical meaning of such a verb; here *se noyer* seems to include the notion of death as an attained goal.

A perfective tense applied to an atelic verb affirms the existence in time of an action, including its cessation.

An imperfective tense applied to an atelic verb expresses the existence of an action without saying anything about its beginning or its end: one knows simply that the lapse of time represented by R is full of this action. As Sten puts it, you cannot say of a given verb that it always has the same lexical aspect. But the aspect which it has depends, not on the tense that it is in—that is precisely where I do not agree with Sten, who claims that in *il se noyait* the verb is imperfective because it is in the imparfait—but rather on the lexical sense of the verb in a given context. For example, *se noyer* is ordinarily telic, in the 'literal' sense of committing suicide by throwing oneself in the water or of dying by suffocating in the water. But it is capable of being used in a figurative way: *se noyer dans les larmes* 'drown in tears' or *dans la débauche* 'plunge into debauchery' or *dans le travail* 'lose oneself in work', where the idea of death as a goal does not appear.

Can a verb have an aspect different from the aspect of its complement? Can it have an aspect different from that of the construction, verb plus complement, in which it appears? The answer is necessarily complex.

In the first place one must know how to determine the aspect of the complement. A construction whose nucleus is an atelic verb has the same aspect as the complement; compare *jouer du Mozart* 'play some Mozart' and *jouer un concerto de Mozart* 'play a Mozart concerto'. The verb, considered by itself, remains atelic: it is only the complement that puts a term to the activity, which itself does not change essentially while it goes on. One can say of someone who was interrupted in the course of executing the concerto, that he has played some of it—*qu'il en a joué un peu*; on the other hand one cannot say, except to produce a comic effect which itself is made possible by the abnormality of the procedure, that one has drowned a little—*qu'on s'est un peu noyé*. It follows that the aspect of a construction with an atelic verb depends on the aspect of the complement.

A complement can be ambiguous outside its context. The partitive construction can designate a certain quantity understood either as a whole or as part of a vaguer quantity. Consider the example *Pierre sortait du papier de son bureau*

'Pierre was pulling paper out of his desk'. We apply the test: *Est-ce qu'il a sorti du papier?* 'Did he pull out some paper?' That depends on the intention of the speaker. If we are talking about a little piece of paper, and if Pierre pulled it part way out, he was pulling out paper; if interrupted, he has not pulled it out. But if we are talking about great quantities of scrap paper, then—yes, he has pulled some out, and there still remains some more to be pulled out. Observe that in this example we are dealing with two parallel semantic distinctions: in the meaning of the partitive, and in the lexical sense of the verb *sortir*.

When *sortir* is used intransitively in the meaning 'to go out', we usually consider it telic, because the act of going out involves the crossing of a threshold. If one starts to go out but is interrupted before that threshold is really crossed, before he has really got away, the goal has not been attained. Yet this telic verb, with a certain adverbial complement, may change its meaning: *sortir un peu* 'go out for a while'. The telic *sortir* presents us the subject at the exit, whether he gets through it or not, according to the grammatical aspect of the verb; the atelic *sortir* shows us the subject (or the object, if we are concerned with something being pulled out) already outside.

Now consider a telic verb with two kinds of complements. A good example occurs in Stendhal's *Chartreuse de Parme*: *Fabrice regarda cet homme et le reconnut un peu* (lit. 'Fabrizio looked at that man and recognized him a little'). *Un peu* here means 'not entirely, but enough to make him believe that he had already seen the man somewhere'; it is an atelic complement. Nevertheless, the construction is telic, as the application of our criterion would prove: if Fabrizio was in the midst of recognizing him, but was interrupted, did he recognize him? The answer would certainly be No. We will say then that a construction with a telic verb is telic, whatever the aspect of the complement.

To sum up: in a construction with an atelic verb, the complement has priority over the verb in determining the aspect of the construction; in a construction with a telic verb, the verb has priority over the complement in determining the aspect of the construction.

One can determine the lexical aspect of a verb by applying our criterion, *Si on verbaît ...* If we generalize the relationship between the imparfait and the passé composé, we arrive at the following formulas. For all constructions, telic and atelic, an affirmation in a perfective tense implies the same affirmation in an imperfective tense. If we use the symbol \supset for 'implies' we have these formulas:

(1) CP \supset CI. **A perfective construction implies an imperfective.** If it is true perfectly, it is true imperfectively; e.g. *il s'est noyé* implies *il se noyait*—'he drowned' implies 'he was drowning', because every action can be stretched out, or dilated, as Sten puts it.

(2) AI \supset AP. **An atelic construction in an imperfective tense implies a corresponding construction in a perfective tense;** e.g. *il nageait* implies *il a nagé*.

(3) TI $\sim \supset$ TP. **Telic imperfective does not imply telic perfective;** e.g. *il se noyait* does not imply *il s'est noyé*.

We are now in a position to determine the grammatical aspect of the several tenses of French, which up to now we have not considered. Having provided ourselves with a verb already established as telic, we ask the following question

each time that we put this verb in a tense that we are trying to class as imperfective or perfective: is the goal understood as attained? Thus, if we want to know the aspect of the future indicative, we consider an expression such as *il se noiera* 'he will drown', *il jouera un robre de bridge* 'he will play a rubber of bridge'. Will he die drowning? Will the rubber of bridge be completed? The answer to these questions is clearly affirmative. Hence the future indicative is perfective: it represents a reference period which includes the end of the event. For those tenses which are generally perfective, we can supply a corresponding imperfective by means of the expression *être en train de* in that tense. Compare *ils joueront un robre de bridge* with *ils seront en train de jouer un robre de bridge*.

In the past tense the difference is already marked, as we have seen, by the choice of different sets—that is, by the distinction between the *passé composé* and the *imparfait*. Even here, *était en train* has its use, to distinguish between a marked noniterative and a nonmarked iterative. *Ils jouaient* may mean 'they used to play', while *ils étaient en train de jouer* can mean only 'they were playing'.

I indicate here the aspects of the other nonperiphrastic sets (all the compound tenses are perfective): the *conditionnel*, *il m'a dit qu'il se noierait* 'he told me that he would drown himself': perfective; the *conditionnel* in the apodosis of a conditional sentence, *il se noierait s'il croyait cela* 'he would drown himself if he believed that': perfective; *passé simple*, *il se noya*: perfective.

A word about the iterative aspect. Iteration is the repetition several times of an action; it represents the sequence of such actions, not the actions considered separately. This sequence of actions can, like any event, be related to a reference period R, hence it can be perfective or imperfective. Examples are quoted by Sten: *J'entendis souvent parler de ce projet* 'I often heard this plan talked about' vs. *C'est pourquoi elle y pensait souvent* 'That is why she often thought about it'. In the first sentence, each act of the sequence is localized within the reference period; the other does not limit the sequence to any reference period.

The present indicative is imperfective except when the verb designates the very act of making the affirmation in which it figures, as in *je vous dis que oui, je demande une explication de votre conduite, j'affirme que tout ce que j'ai dit est vrai*. In these sentences the present is perfective. Of the imperfective uses of the present, some are simply imperfective, others are iterative; thus, *vous buvez trop* can mean 'you drink too much' or 'you are drinking too much'. Unlike English, French does not mark this difference formally.

What then are the aspectual distinctions which are formally marked in French? The opposition between the imperfective and the perfective aspects is found in the morphological system of the French verb, but only in the difference between the *imparfait* and all the other past tenses. The distinction between telic and atelic verbs is not part of the formal structure of French, since it does not correlate with any formal criterion, but is rather part of the semantic structure of the language, determined as it is by a semantic trait.