Grammatical categories in discourse

II. The grammar of narratives: a closer look

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The structure of narrative

- Based mainly on Labov's, Chafe's and Longacre's work; for more detail, cf. also Плунгян 2004 and 2008.

- Linguistically relevant fragments!

- Functional "passages" distinguished by their information role within the narrative.

Labovian classification

- – *Orientation*
- – *Development*
- – *Culmination*
- – *Outcome*
- – *Code*
- – *Summary*

- Not sufficiently relevant from the linguistic point of view!

Types of "passages"

- Hopper, Fleischman, Longacre, Schiffrin et al.
- **Introduction** (setting the scene)
- **Main storyline** (narrative plot)
- **Retrospection** (flashback from the main storyline)
- **Background** (concomitant and/or secondary)
- **Commentary**

The main hypothesis

Natural languages develop so-called "discourse uses" of grammatical mechanisms primarily for distinguishing between different <u>types of passages</u>.

A flashback: the history

- Benveniste 1959: French aorist (*passé simple*) as a marker of narrative register (*récit*)
- Weinrich 1964: **Foreground** vs. **background** as the main grammatical opposition in Romance and Germanic
- Hopper 1979: (primary) discourse functions of aspect cross-linguistically

Secondary discourse functions

- ***Degree of focality*** (within the main storyline)
  - NB: the use of Praesens historicum (Fleischman)
- ***Degree of discourse cohesion***, or ***loose*** / ***tight linkage***: episodic structure
  - NB: the use of Biblical Hebrew 'tenses' (Baayen, Heller)

Examples of discourse uses

- Aspect in Russian:
  - Imperfective for background and comment
  - Perfective for main storyline and retrospection
- Not exactly the same in other Slavic languages!
  - Consecutive uses of Imperfect (Stunová):

  ?*Она вышла на сцену и пела*

Examples of discourse uses

- Pluperfect in Latin and Romance languages
- Not a mere precedence, but rather a special discourse function:
- Retrospection, comments, irreal hypothesis (a kind of a "retrospective alternative")
- A "notional break" between *then* and *now* (Plungian & van der Auwera 2006)

Examples of discourse uses

- Special verbal forms for the passages of the main storyline: "narratives"

- Typical for many African [Contini-Morava 1989] and Oceanic [Hooper 1998] languages (as well as for Creole languages)

- Often, a "narrative" is an unmarked verbal form

Beyond the narrative

- Other types of discourse:
- *Actual* (= deictic) vs. *non-actual* discourse: recourse to the "deictic centre"
  - Cf. verbal forms like *progressive*, *perfect* etc. (not very prominent in Russian)
- Non-actual discourse: *narrative* vs. *irreal* (non-specific)
  - *Habitual*, *hypothetic* and *counterfactual* events

Types of verbal systems

- Discourse-oriented (with primarily discourse markers) vs. notionally-oriented (with primarily temporal, aspectual or modal markers)

- Discourse functions are not necessarily "derived" from notional ones (pace Comrie and some other scholars): it depends on the verbal system

Why discourse?

- Helps to classify text types and analyze the linguistic structure of narratives and other "speech genres"

- Provides a better account for established uses of grammatical categories

- Allows to discover previously non-described grammatical oppositions and types of meanings