

Aspect and Temporal Ordering

A Contrastive Analysis of Dutch and English

It is well known that grammatical tense and aspect, as well as Aktionsart, all play a role in determining the interpretation of temporal relations, both in sentence grammar and across sentences in discourse. The precise way in which these factors interact, however, is very complex. This book examines this issue, and concludes that grammatical aspect plays the primary role in imposing semantic constraints in temporal ordering, though without fully determining it.

Approaching the issue from a contrastive viewpoint, this study provides a details analysis of the ways in which perfective and imperfective aspect are expressed in English and Dutch. In addition to showing how perfect and progressive verb forms express aspect, it also tackles certain problems posed by unmarked simple tenses. It is shown that the aspectual interpretation of these tenses is systematic and predictable, given an understanding of the contribution of Aktionsart and discourse type.

The contrastive approach taken here also sheds new light on two hotly debated issues within the domain of temporal ordering in discourse, namely the interpretation of tenses in complement clauses (sequence of tenses) and the so-called reverse-order phenomenon. A unified analysis is proposed for both problems, formulated in terms of aspect and the distinction between narrative and non-narrative discourse.

The study should be of interest to anyone concerned with the syntax, semantics, or pragmatics of tense and aspect, and more generally to anyone concerned with the interface between semantics and pragmatics.

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27

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