

## IX. McTaggart's Paradox: Time and the Parity of Tenses

„All in the golden afternoon // Full leisurely we glide...“ These lines from a poem by which Carroll introduces his book refer the reader to a specific event from the past: to a day in July 1862 when for the first time he told the *Alice*-story to the Liddell sisters in order to entertain them during a boat trip. Here, the morphological form of the verb *to glide* has the semantics of historic present, calling to mind an episode from the past as if it were still vividly present. Simultaneously, this recollection anticipates a story which the reader of the book has to learn immediately after the poem's end, that is, the poem also addresses the future, referring to both the adventures of Alice in Wonderland and, by extension, to the infinity of generations to come that will become familiar with her story. However, as I will try to show in this chapter, this symbolical merging of tenses, when the past, present, and future seem to become one, paradoxically also demonstrates the reality of time.

Probably in no other part of Carroll's book does the relationship between time and reality feature as prominently as in the story's framework: Having awoken from her dream, Alice tells the story to her older sister who instantly begins to think about the future and to picture to herself how, having grown up, Alice might one day tell wonderful stories to her own children and make their eyes shine with excitement. The particular quality which in the eyes of the sister would help Alice sustain harmony in her future life is the ability to „keep ... the simple and loving heart of her childhood.“<sup>1</sup> Childhood is thus also a category which is conceived at different temporal levels, i.e. as the actual childhood of Alice (the present), that of her children (the future), and a childhood which is supposed to be preserved within her heart after growing up (the past in the future.) Yet, again, by making these levels run together, Carroll does not make any of them lose their individual reality so that all of them retain their distinct positions on the temporal scale. Time is by no means conceived of as an illusion, as something that is inexorably flowing away into nothing, but rather as a complementary existential relationship between past, present, and future. Within this conception, *childhood* appears as a focal category which is opposed to what Carroll calls a *dull reality*<sup>2</sup>: a down-to-earth perception of the present as the only tangible dimension of existence.

Reflections concerning the relationship between time and reality which so prominently feature in the narrative frame (the introductory poem and the conclusion of the story), sometimes reappear in the story itself, e.g. in an episode from Chapter V in which Alice is completely confused by the Caterpillar's seemingly quite simple question as to who she is: „I-I hardly know, sir, just at present – at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.“<sup>3</sup> It is nothing but the strange course of the time that makes her identity suddenly turn into quite a mystery. Yet the metamorphoses of self appear wondrous only when they are measured against the experience of time in everyday life: that all of a sudden she has gained the ability to grow huge and tiny within seconds makes time itself appear as one of the main sources of wonders throughout the story. Nevertheless, however great her confusion about all the sudden changes of size may appear, one thing which she still perfectly knows in this episode is who she was when she got up in the morning and it is not coincidental that the form *was* has been marked by the author in the above sentence. The tense morphology comes as a rescue to her since the world where she got up „this morning“ is the only one in which she has a sure experience of spatial and temporal laws so that the past form makes it possible for her in the given situation to judge at least partly with certainty about her own identity. Compared with the above mentioned reflections of her older sister upon the course of time, this, of course, is a different kind of thinking about it since it is free of anything symbolic and of any abstractions which would make the past and present meet. Still the problem of time and of its relation to reality is as prominent here as in a number of other episodes in the book.

In the dialogue with the Caterpillar, the „at least I know who I was“ is a means of self-protection with which language directly provides her: although she cannot conceal her embarrassment about all the changes she has to go through in Wonderland, there is one area which has remained completely real to her, i.e. the familiar world within her memory. It is not only the issue of time and reality which seems to be centrally concerned in episodes like this, but also one of time and tenses, the question as to how the temporal system of a language is related to time in physical and metaphysical senses. This

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<sup>1</sup> *Alice*, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> *Alice*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Alice*, p. 49.

last problem has been heatedly discussed in modern language philosophy and quite a prominent role in the related debates over the un/reality of time has played John E. McTaggart's (1866-1925) essay „The Unreality of Time” (1908.)

In McTaggart's hypothesis concerning the unreality of time, the crucial argument is the negation of reality of what he calls the A-series of events in which every single event has a definite position in the future, then moves away from it first to become present and later turns into past<sup>4</sup>. Since, according to his theory, in absolute reality, among the primary qualities of time would be its parity, that is, all the three temporal levels would be supposed to exist side by side, the change of positions in the A-series causes a paradox, for these positions are mutually incompatible and no event can be said to be positioned simultaneously in the future, present, and past.

Among numerous recent studies dedicated to this paradox, Rögnvaldur D. Ingthorsson's monograph *McTaggart's Paradox* (2016) deserves special mentioning, for both its systematic approach to the problem and for the clarity of argumentation, a characteristic which significantly distinguishes its author from most scholars in this area. Ingthorsson emphasizes the great achievement McTaggart's as an idealistic proponent of metaphysics who especially nowadays, in the postmodern era in which the plurality of realities is so frequently postulated, deserves much attention. I believe that one of the most fascinating things about the whole discussion of the unreality of time by McTaggart and by Ingthorsson is that they both belong to the most vocal advocates of *one* absolute reality and objectivity. It may appear strange that here the discussion of them is called to elucidate the issue of time and tenses in Carroll's work as well as in its various translations: in the *Alice*-books, it is the direct experience which counts as the source of evidence for what is real or not, which in Ingthorsson's interpretation of McTaggart's thesis could at best convince only a naïve realist<sup>5</sup>. Yet the reading of Carroll is not understood here as a possible defense or as a negation of McTaggart's theory. What is of paramount importance for the present chapter is rather the variety of implications which in the modern philosophy of language have resulted from discussions on his theory in regard to tense. While I completely agree with the key argument in Ingthorsson's critique of McTaggart's hypothesis, namely, that its basic premise concerning the parity of future, present, and past is dubious, some points in his discussion of what meaning has been conceded by McTaggart to the issue of language and particularly to that of tenses, should be corrected. Whereas it is certainly true that McTaggart's work was produced before the *linguistic turn* and language did not play as crucial a role in his philosophy as in the philosophical works that appeared in the decades after his death, it is not correct to maintain that in McTaggart's argumentation language was not attributed any significance at all<sup>6</sup>. Consider, for example, the following passage from McTaggart's essay:

“The characteristics, therefore, are incompatible. But every event has them all. If M is past, it has been present and future. If it is future, it will be present and past. Thus all the three incompatible terms are predicable of each event, which is obviously inconsistent with their being incompatible...It may seem that this can easily be explained. Indeed it has been impossible to state the difficulty without almost giving the explanation, since our language has verb-forms for the past, present, and future, but no form that is common to all three. It is never true, the answer will run, that M *is* present, past and future. It *is* present, *will be* past, and *has been* future. Or it *is* past, and *has been* future and present, or again *is* future and *will be* present and past.”<sup>7</sup>

In this quote, McTaggart's argument essentially rests on observations of the temporal grammar in modern English and some linguists might regard it as naive that in these words the morphology of tenses in English is called to support universalistic claims as to the unreality of time. If he had considered other natural languages with underspecified tense morphology, he may have totally discarded tenses from his theory since languages in which one and the same verbal form is usually taken for the past, present, and future would obviously contradict it, at least at the formal level. Consider, e.g. the following Chinese rendition of the above phrase from *Alice* by Zhao Yuanren (p. 55): „我不大知道，先生，我现在不知道， - 无论怎么，我知道我今儿早晨起来的时候是谁...” Here, no formal differentiation has been made between verbs referring to the present (I don't really know –

<sup>4</sup> John Ellis McTaggart, „The Unreality of Time“, in: *Mind, New Series*, Vol. 17, No. 68 (Oct. 1908), pp. 457-474, here p. 467.

<sup>5</sup> Rögnvaldur D. Ingthorsson, *McTaggart's Paradox*, New York: Routledge 2016, p. 52.

<sup>6</sup> Ingthorsson, *op. cit.*, p. 47: „He (McTaggart) is not asking what is implied by language itself, either by how it is popularly used or what its syntax or grammar implies, or what competent speakers take it to mean...”

<sup>7</sup> McTaggart, *op. cit.*, p. 468.

wo bu da *zhidao*) and those referring to the past (who I *was* when I got up this morning – wo jin'er zaochen *qi lai de shihou shi shui*.) In itself, this absence of formal temporal markers cannot be taken as evidence of the reality of time, yet it clearly demonstrates that languages lacking a well-developed morphology of tenses are as able to differentiate between the semantics of the past, present, and future, as languages like English in which this semantics is made explicit by verbal forms. In terms of the relationship between time and tenses, Chinese may be regarded as an extreme case since it displays no temporal morphology. At the end of this chapter I am going to draw on some predominant standpoints towards the issue of time in Chinese linguistics, yet, as the above quote from McTaggart's essay suggests, in approaching the issue of time and tense, it would first of all be necessary to turn to languages with a well developed temporal morphology.

In the modern philosophy of language, one of the predominant views that have been expressed in discussions of McTaggart's hypothesis is marked by a strongly skeptical approach to tenses, as is, for example, the case with the works of David H. Mellor and Peter Ludlow. Already the title of Mellor's monograph *Real Time* (1981) suggests the position adopted by its author: contrary to McTaggart, time is interpreted here as real. The category which, in turn, is considered unreal is tense: „Tense, it will turn out, is not being banished altogether, merely replaced where it belongs – in our heads.”<sup>8</sup> In Mellor's opinion, those who would not follow this advice would be committing themselves to the risk of a great confusion, misinterpreting their personal sensations as reality. On his part, Yuval Dolev challenges Mellor's view according to which tensed relations are entirely dependent on tenseless ones and for this reason cannot be regarded as pertaining to reality:

“...understanding a tenseless explanation turns on already possessing tensed language. In ordinary language this mix manifests itself in the presence of tense in sentences describing tenseless relations: we say that the American Revolution occurred *before*, or *preceded* the French Revolution, or that Kennedy *was* assassinated in 1963, or that it is raining at the time in which this very sentence is being uttered.”<sup>9</sup>

By showing how strongly our conceptions of reality actually depend on linguistic tenses, Dolev relativizes that unbreachable gulf that in Mellor's theory separates the mind („the dwelling place of the subjective tense”<sup>10</sup>) and the world of real time. On his part, Peter Ludlow has argued that this dependency may eventually result in serious misconceptions. This is one of the major ideas of his monograph *Semantics, Tense, and Time: An Essay in the Metaphysics of Natural Language* (1999), a work which by far surpasses even the radicalness of Mellor. Ludlow introduces it by critically distancing himself from Benjamin Lee Whorf's famous *Language, Thought, and Reality* (1956), referring the reader first to the following quotation:

„I find it gratuitous to assume that a Hopi who knows only the Hopi language and the cultural ideas of his own society has the same notions, often supposed to be intuitions, of time and space that we have, and that are generally assumed to be universal. In particular, he has no general notion or intuition of TIME as a smooth flowing continuum in which everything in the universe proceeds at an equal rate, out of a future, through a present, into a past; or, in which, to reverse the picture, the observer is being carried in the stream of duration continuously away from a past into a future.”<sup>11</sup>

The word *reality* in the title of Whorf's book is for him as important as for McTaggart. However, his conception of reality is quite dissimilar to that of McTaggart since, according to Whorf, in different cultures, reality is structured in radically different ways, which is constantly reflected in the respective languages. In the above quotation, the pronoun *we* is quite consciously used by him to represent Western civilization which has developed concepts of time and space that differ from the conceptual equipment of the Hopi. His theory does not suggest that the Hopi language is free from temporal relations. What he means instead is that these relations significantly differ from, say, those in English. In order to achieve understanding between these languages of what regards their aspectual and

<sup>8</sup> David H. Mellor, *Real Time*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981, p. 92.

<sup>9</sup> Yuval Dolev, „The Tenseless Theory of Time: Insights and Limitations”, in: *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 54, No. 2, Dec. 2000, pp. 259-288, here p. 280.

<sup>10</sup> Yuval Dolev, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality*, Cambridge (Massachusetts): The MIT Press 2012, p. 73, quoted by Ludlow, Peter, *Semantics, Tense, and Time: An Essay in the Metaphysics of Natural Language*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 1999, p. xiii.

temporal categories, it is primarily required to become familiar with the cultural other, among other things, with its metaphysical concepts. For example, he provides the following comment to a Hopi phrase that has the literal meaning of „it stops getting eaten”: „Without knowing the underlying Hopian metaphysics, it would be impossible to understand how the same suffix may denote starting or stopping.”<sup>12</sup>

Ludlow does not engage himself in a detailed analysis of what in Whorf’s opinion represents differences in the metaphysics of the Hopi and the English and he even admits that Whorf’s main thesis, according to which language structures the reality, is basically correct.<sup>13</sup> Yet paradoxically, right after this benevolent remark, he negates the importance of structural differences in languages for the construction of reality. In Ludlow’s eyes, differences in natural languages are „superficial at best”<sup>14</sup>, which leads him to the following conclusion concerning the reality: „It follows that humans all share the same reality.”<sup>15</sup> The main personal thesis which he proposes in his book is the following: „More to the point, I doubt that we actually have a „general notion or intuition of TIME”...I am quite sure that we have “no words, grammatical forms...that refer directly to what we call “time.””<sup>16</sup>

By this radical negation of direct semantical and grammatical relations in English and some other Indo-European languages to the temporal concepts of the past, present, and future, he intends to provide a personal contribution to metaphysics. After all, the major aim of his analysis of the semantics of natural languages is no more and no less than gaining „insight into the metaphysics of time.”<sup>17</sup> However, on closer scrutiny, his study reveals that temporal semantics is relevant to him only from the point of view of grammatical ambiguity. For example, in English, the present perfect is sometimes used after the conjunction *since* to mean continuity („I’ve been in England since January 1“, „been there continuously”<sup>18</sup>), yet occasionally it may also refer to actions with interruptions („I’ve been in (to) England since January 1“, „been there once or more”<sup>19</sup>.) Since this particular tense which is normally associated with the semantics of the past in fact does not always display a clear reference to the past, by pointing it out, Ludlow thinks to provide enough reason for denying its temporal reference in general. Discussing similar cases of temporal ambiguity, Ludlow aims at banishing the category of tense from the linguistic discourse altogether:

“Perhaps we can go one step further and exorcise the talk of temporality from what we sloppily call „temporal adverbs“, „temporal anaphora“, “tense morphemes”, and so on. This might sound crazy, but in a sense it is entirely natural, since many natural languages don’t have tense morphemes anyway. We need not look to unfamiliar languages such as Hopi. English doesn’t have a genuine future-tense morpheme; rather, it relies on modals to do (or so we think) the work of a future-tense morpheme. As we move from English to other languages, we find that future-tense morphemes ...are always suspicious looking. In Romance languages, they appear to have modal elements packed within them. Purported past-tense morphemes are no less suspicious, usually being nothing more than aspectual markers. The standard view supposes that we are using modals and aspectual markers to express future tense and past tense (hence, to express things about the future and the past), but why should we suppose that? Why not suppose we are just using modals to express modality...and aspectual markers to express aspect?”<sup>20</sup>

The reasons why Ludlow suggests a critical revision of some of the traditional grammatical categories of natural languages are in themselves quite clear. After all, he is not the first to point to instances of a simultaneous interaction between different categories which may produce a confusing impression on

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<sup>12</sup> Benjamin Lee Whorf, *op. cit.*, p. 78. A careful reader would notice that it is not a total negation of tense which is highlighted by Whorf, but rather significant differences in the world-view structures, which, among other things, can be observed in the conceptualization of time in Hopi and in English. Whorf himself discusses three tenses of Hopi (*op. cit.*, pp. 65-66: “factual, or present-past, future, and generalized or usitative”.) Ekkerhart Malotki, whose seminal study *Hopi Time: A Linguistic Analysis of the Temporal Concepts in the Hopi Language* (Berlin: Mouton Publishers 1983) was a direct critical response to Whorf’s language relativity thesis, is also acutely aware of the actual existence of such differences. See, for example, his discussion of “how deeply his (Hopi’s) thinking has been affected by English thought” (Malotki, *op. cit.*, pp. 620ff.)

<sup>13</sup> Ludlow, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

<sup>14</sup> Ludlow, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

<sup>15</sup> Ludlow; *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

<sup>16</sup> Ludlow; *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

<sup>17</sup> Ludlow; *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

<sup>18</sup> Ludlow; *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>19</sup> Ludlow; *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>20</sup> Ludlow; *op. cit.*, pp. 156-157.

the philosophers of language. Otto Jespersen has, for example, demonstrated how modals are used in English to express the future<sup>21</sup>, and in his classical study on the category of aspect, Bernard Comrie has provided various examples of a strong interrelation between aspect and tense in a number of languages. The extent to which this grammatical phenomenon has progressed is, among other things, reflected in his terminology, e.g. in terming tense *situation-external time* and aspect *situation-internal time*<sup>22</sup>. I believe that the problem with Ludlow's thesis is rather that the category which is traditionally termed *tense* and which he seeks to reduce to modality and aspect cannot so easily be divested of temporal semantics. The temporal use of perfective and imperfective verbs in Russian may serve as a good illustration of a close interaction between semantics and grammar: whereas the perfective verbs never refer to the present, the imperfective ones can be used in all tenses. On the other hand, whenever two related perfective (e.g. *прочесть*, *to read through*) and imperfective (e.g. *прочитывать*, *to read through*) verbs are used in the past or in the future tense, they always express different temporal semantics, which would perfectly correspond to Comrie's use of terms, since the *internal situation*, i.e. an action which does not depend semantically on the time in which a sentence is produced, will be understood as completed only in cases with perfective verbs. Even languages that do not possess a similar fixed aspectual opposition of verbs, demonstrate a close reciprocal relationship between tense and aspect. Consider, e.g. Gilbert Ryle's contrasting of *task verbs* and *achievement verbs* in English, differences in the logical behavior between *kicking* and *scoring*, *treating* and *healing*, *hunting* and *finding*, *clutching* and *holding fast*, *listening* and *hearing*, *looking* and *seeing*, *travelling* and *arriving*. As Ryle puts it, „in applying an achievement verb we are asserting that some state of affairs obtains over that which consists in the performance.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, the logic of the achievement verbs is in the implication of a *finis*, a conclusion, which makes them quite similar to the perfective verbs in Russian.

In terms of temporal semantics, the following observation of Ryle is worth mentioning: „To begin with, seeing and hearing are not processes. Aristotle points out, quite correctly (*Met.* ix, vi. 7-10) that I can say 'I have seen it' as soon as I can say 'I see it'. To generalize the point that I think he is making, there are many verbs part of the business of which is to declare a terminus.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, in the present tense, the idea of a terminus (a *finis*) which is expressed by verb *to see* may be interpreted as relativizing the semantics of the present, which is why it can easily be replaced with perfect tense forms (i.e. the semantics of the past underscores the declaration of a terminus.) Zeno Vendler goes even one step further and regards similar uses of achievement verbs in the present tense in general as historic present:

„in cases of pure achievement terms the present tense is almost exclusively used as historic present or as indicating immediate future. "Now he finds the treasure (or wins the race, and so on)" is not used to report the actual finding or winning, while the seemingly paradoxical "Now he has found it" or "At this moment he has won the race" is.”<sup>25</sup>

All perfective verbs in Russian display a similar logic and their grammatical behavior may be interpreted as still more radical since they cannot be used in the present tense at all. Similar cases may also be found in German. Consider, e.g. the verb *abkochen* (*to boil off*) which only seldom refers to the present. Its semantic domain is rather in the past and in the future (cf. the corresponding perfective verbs in Russian *отварить*, *вскипятить*.) Situations in which it is used in the present tense are nevertheless quite common, yet they mostly refer rather to the future (e.g. „Jetzt/gleich kochen wir die Milch ab.”, cf. „Now, we'll boil the milk.” in English.)

This apparent contradiction between a definite perception of the temporal position of an event (i.e. the temporal semantics) and the choice of a particular grammatical tense is exactly the point at which Ludlow targets in negating the existence of temporal semantics: in the above examples, for one and the same situation, the present tense would be used in German, but the future tense – in English. Yet in spite of his critique, it would be difficult to deny that in both languages the action is equally positioned

<sup>21</sup> Otto Jespersen, *The Philosophy of Grammar*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1992 (1924), p. 260.

<sup>22</sup> Bernard Comrie, *Aspect: An Introduction to the Study of Verbal Aspect and Related Problems*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1976, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (1949), New York: Penguin Books 1976, p. 143.

<sup>24</sup> Gilbert Ryle, *Dilemmas*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 1954, pp. 102-103.

<sup>25</sup> Zeno Vendler, „Verbs and Times“, in: *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 66, No. 2, Apr. 1957, pp. 143-160, here p. 147.

in the future, i.e. for any German speaker, the future semantics in the above example will be as clear as the future semantics in the corresponding English sentence for the speakers of English.

In his critical reflections concerning temporal semantics of natural languages, some of the examples drawn on to illustrate incongruities between semantics and grammar are taken from Italian. Since an English sentence like „I am going to the theater tomorrow” would be translated into Italian in the present tense („Vado al teatro domani”), whereas the future tense is often used to express possibility „Saranno le otto“ („I think it is about eight o’clock *now*“, referring to the present), Ludlow suggests it would be reasonable to dismiss the conventional idea according to which the grammatical present has something in common with the semantics of the present time and the future tense - with the future semantics. The conclusion which he reaches in the end is the following:

“We moved from the assumption that there must be a future and a past to the conclusion that there must be linguistic elements that allow us to speak about such things. Perhaps this philosophical assumption has become a procrustean bed in which we categorize things as temporal elements, when to a Martian linguist with no knowledge of western philosophy of time, these elements would look like ordinary modals and aspectual markers.”<sup>26</sup>

The metaphysics of natural languages announced by Ludlow in the title of his book reaches in the above quote its culmination: time is declared to be something external to language, a category which is imposed upon it from philosophy. By these words, he actually proposes a two-fold negation, one of the temporal semantics and one of western philosophy of time

While Ludlow’s conclusions may rightly be regarded as extremely far-reaching, his observations of incongruities between semantics and grammar of time actually rest on rather sporadic examples (like the two Italian sentences mentioned above.) In what follows, I would like to produce a closer and more systematic analysis of similarly complex, seemingly incongruous cases in *Alice* as well as in the translation languages that have a well-developed morphology of tenses.

As I have tried to demonstrate at the beginning of this chapter on the examples of the temporal semantics of the verb *to glide* and of the conceptualization of time (the idea of *childhood*) in the narrative frame of Carroll’s text, choosing a definite grammatical tense to refer to temporal semantics which is different to what is normally associated with this tense (e.g. the present tense – for past and future events) does not necessarily result in a contradiction. The conceptual interconnectedness of grammatical tenses is rather a factor which directly affects temporal semantics and enables the realization of highly complex links between morphology and semantics. This complexity is by no means confusing or chaotic. On the contrary, on closer examination, the manner in which grammatical tenses converge reveals quite a transparent pattern: the choice of the present or of the future tense for events in the past by no means results in the semantics of the past becoming in some way ambiguous, the same thing holds good for choosing past morphology to refer to the present or with taking future tenses to express the idea of the past.

Looking back on the debates concerning the un/reality of time, and once again raising the question as to the possibility of freeing tenses – at least partially – from the blame of subjectivity and of showing their clear reference to reality, one of the perspectives which may prove to be particularly illuminating for discussing this complex issue is provided by a theorist of language who, for the best of my knowledge, has not yet been drawn on by the philosophers of time: Walter Benjamin. Benjamin’s reflections on a close mutual relation between languages as „a continuum of metamorphoses” („Kontinuum von Verwandlungen”<sup>27</sup>), and as a unique convergence act which demonstrates that languages are „not strangers to one another” („einander nicht fremd”), but rather that they come most closely together in their intentions<sup>28</sup>, his ideas concerning „(a) pure language” („eine reine Sprache”) as a sum of these intentions<sup>29</sup>, i.e. as an objective category which is the only

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<sup>26</sup> Ludlow, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

<sup>27</sup> Walter Benjamin, „Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen“ (1916), in: Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Rolf Tiedemann, Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Eds.), Vol. II.i, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1987, pp. 140-157, here p. 151.

<sup>28</sup> Walter Benjamin, „Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers“ (1921), in: Walter Benjamin (Transl.), Preface to Charles Baudelaire, *Tableaux Parisiens*, Heidelberg: Richard Weissbach 1923, pp. VII-XVII, here pp. IX.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. XI.

fathomable source of any good translation, may be regarded as the implicit theoretical background for the whole of my following attempt in defense of the semantics of tenses and of their relation to reality.

### The Semantics of the Present

Quite common are situations in which Carroll uses the habitual present in the form of *wh*-clauses, e.g. in the following phrase of Alice in Chapter IV: „I know *something* interesting is going to happen, **whenever I eat** or **drink** anything.”<sup>30</sup> Formally, French, German, and Italian are close to English in using similar forms of temporal morphology. Consider the following examples:

J.-P. Berman (p. 85): „Je sais que, chaque fois que je **bois** ou **mange** quoi que ce soit, à coup quelque chose d'intéressant va se produire.” A. Zimmermann (p. 22): „Ich weiß, etwas Merkwürdiges muss geschehen, sobald ich **esse** oder **trinke**...” B. Oddera (p. 36): „So che accadrà di certo qualcosa d'interessante, qualsiasi cosa **possa** mangiare o bere...”

Leaving aside for the moment the future semantics of „to be going to” and putting the focus first on the corresponding verbs for *to eat/ to drink*, each of the above examples reproduces exactly the temporal semantics of the original present tense: *bois/mange, esse/trinke, possa mangiare o bere*. Consider, by contrast, some Russian versions of the sentence:

Ščerbakov (p. 59): „Каждый раз, как только я что-нибудь **выпью** или **съем**, происходят очень интересные вещи.” Zachoder (p. 57): „Я уж знаю: **стоит** мне что-нибудь **съесть** или **выпить**, - обязательно случится что-нибудь интересное”. Demurova (p. 124): „**Стоит** мне что-нибудь проглотить, как тут же происходит что-нибудь интересное. Olenič-Gnenenko (p. 75): „Я знаю, всякий раз, когда я что-нибудь **ем** или **пью**, случаются интересные вещи. ”

In the above renditions, Ščerbakov, Zachoder and Demurova have reproduced the verbs in question by corresponding perfective verbs (*выпить/съесть*), whereas Olenič-Gnenenko has taken the imperfective counterparts (*есть/пить*.) It would seem that the perfective verbs come nearer to the needs of the original, for *something* interesting (in Alice's phrase) is a direct result of her *eating/drinking* and by using the perfective verbs the translators have provided the sentence with additional dynamic. However, as mentioned above, a perfective verb in Russian cannot be used in the present tense, as *eat/drink* are used in the original. The solution to the problem found by Zachoder and by Demurova is the following: they link both verbs with the imperfective *stóit* which has the semantics of a temporal conjunction (*as soon as*) and is used in both versions quite naturally in the present tense.

Ščerbakov's version offers a still more elegant solution: the perfective verbs in the dependent clause are used in the future tense *выпью / съем*, which enables the translator to reproduce the dynamic of the action and to avoid the usage of the rather formal *stóit*. From the point of view of the relation between tense and (extra-linguistic) time, it is worth mentioning how natural the rendition of the main verb (*происходят – happen*) is in the present tense, although it is conceived as a result of actions in the future tense (*выпью / съем*.) Here, future morphology does not suggest the idea of a future event and refers unequivocally to the present, or, more specifically, to a general rule, to something that is likely to happen at any time, or *whenever*, as it is put in the original. Still another possibility of rendering the temporal clause in Russian would be by putting both perfective verbs in the past, without in any way affecting the semantics of the present, by the conjunction „что бы ни“ (*whatever*): „Что бы я ни выпила или ни съела, происходят очень интересные вещи.“ („Whatever I drink or eat, something interesting is going to happen.”) Consider Ščerbakov's translation of another phrase from Chapter V: „Whoever **lives** there,” thought Alice, “it'll never do to come upon them *this* size: why, I should frighten them out of their wits!<sup>31</sup>” Ščerbakov (p. 76) offers the following rendition: „Кто бы здесь ни **жил**, - подумала Алиса, - нельзя являться к ним при моем собственном росте. Они же с ума сойдут от страха..” A back-translation of the phrase would be an exact copy of Carroll's passage, yet in terms of the tense morphology it is again worth pointing out how natural the past tense in Russian reproduces the semantics of the present: the past form *žil* is

<sup>30</sup> Alice, p. 39.

<sup>31</sup> Alice, p. 58.

required by the grammatical norms after the particle *ni*. Moreover, it is important to note that in this particular case the verb *zhít* (*to live*) is imperfective, so that in other grammatical environments it can quite naturally be used in the present tense, yet not in constructions like *kto by ni* in which the idea of the present can be expressed strictly by a past form.

Incidentally, something that would hardly be imaginable in the morphology of Russian is the use of the future tense for suppositions referring to the present, which is quite a common temporal pattern in German, French, and Italian. Consider the episode from Chapter IV in which Alice, having heard strange sounds in the chimney of the Rabbit's house, supposes that Bill is approaching her: „This is Bill.”<sup>32</sup> In Enzensberger's version (p. 43), the present is rendered by the future tense: „Das wird Egon sein.” In all the other German renditions that I have studied, by contrast, the present tense has been used, exactly as in the original. However strange it may seem, in all the Italian versions that I have consulted, the phrase has also been rendered in the present tense „Questo è Bill”, although the future tense (*futuro semplice* „Sarà Bill“) would probably much better reflect the actual grammatical habits of the Italians. The same thing holds good for the French renditions: although there are striking parallels in the use of the epistemic future in French, Italian, and German, I could not find one single instance of its use in French in this context<sup>33</sup>. Contrary to Ludlow's critique, in situations in which this particular form of the future is used in German, French, and Italian (cf. „Saranno le otto”), there can be no doubt about the temporal semantics expressed by it: such suppositions refer mostly to the present time. A comparison of competing grammatical forms for the expression of suppositions, e.g. of the conditional mood and the future tense in Italian and in German, reveals for both languages the same regularity: in an actual context, the future tense is used (for example, „Es wird Bill sein“, in German, since somebody is actually climbing up the chimney in this episode), whereas in hypothetical contexts, the preference would be for the conditional mood. Consider the following examples for this rule in Italian from R. Solarino's *Imparare dagli errori*: „Bussano: - chi sarà” („Someone is knocking at the door: who could it be?” - not „sarebbe“) vs. „Che cosa direbbe tua madre? („What would your mother say?“)<sup>34</sup>

A *contradictio in adiecto* represents, as I believe, the designation „non-temporal use of tenses” which, e.g. Otto Jespersen has applied in describing the semantics of the preterit forms when referring to unreality, impossibility, found in wishes and conditional sentences.<sup>35</sup> The term „non-temporal” suggests the idea of timelessness, while in wishes and in conditional sentences it is usually totally clear what temporal semantics is meant by the speaker. Consider, for example, the following translations of Alice's phrase from Chapter I: „Well, I wouldn't say anything about it, even if I fell off the top of the house!”<sup>36</sup>

Zimmermann (p. 4): „Ich würde nicht viel Redens machen, wenn ich selbst von der Dachspitze hinunter **fiele!**“ Nabokov (p.7): „Если бы я даже с крыши **грохнулась**, я и тогда бы не **пикнула**.” Ščerbakov (p. 30): „С крыши **свалюсь** - и не **охну!**“ Zachoder (p. 40): „Может, даже с крыши **слечу** и не **пикну!**”

Whereas Zimmermann and Nabokov have rendered the conditional clause by preterit forms (*fiele / grohnulas*), Ščerbakov and Zachoder have preferred more categorical forms in the future tense: *svaljus / ne ochnu // slechu / ne piknu*. Yet in both cases the reader will be quite aware of the fact that in this episode Alice is reflecting upon what might be a likely result of her decision in the future, rather than imagining a timeless situation or one referring to the past. The conditional mood used by Nabokov

<sup>32</sup> Alice, p. 44.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Bué, p. 52: „Voilà Jacques sans doutes”; Berman, p. 93: „C'est Bill”; Sueur: „Voilà Bill.” For a comparison of the epistemic future in Italian and French, see Andrea Rocci, „L'interprétation épistémique du futur en italien et en français: une analyse procédurale”, in: *Cahiers de Linguistique Française*, Vol. 22, 2000, pp. 241-274.

<sup>34</sup> Rosaria Solarino, *Imparare dagli errori*, Napoli: Tecnodid 2009, p. 115. Solarino defines the epistemic future form in Italian as „una congettura su un contesto situazionale vero, relativa cioè a un evento che sta avvenendo realmente” („an opinion expressed in a real situational context, referring to an event which is actually happening”, *ibid.*, pp. 114-115.) For a more detailed analysis of the epistemic future in Italian, see Pier Marco Bertinetto, *Tempo, aspetto e azione nel verbo italiano*, Firenze: L'Academia della Crusca 1986, pp. 491-498. Bertinetto (p. 495) interprets this particular use of the future tense as addressing a present situation with uncertainty, which is typical of discussing any future events. For a discussion of *will*, the epistemic future in English (e.g. *Mary will be at the opera now.*) and the problem of interrelations between tense and modality see Philippe De Brabanter, Mikhail Kissine, Saghie Sharifzadeh, „Future tense vs. future time: An introduction”, in: P. De Brabanter, Mikhail Kissine (et al., eds.), *Future Times, Future Tenses*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014, pp. 4-16.

<sup>35</sup> Otto Jespersen, *The Philosophy of Grammar*, p. 265.

<sup>36</sup> Alice, p. 13.



requires that the verb be used in the preterit tense, yet for the reader this grammatical form is not in any way suggestive of the past. Consider some translations of another relevant example which is a wish-sentence from Chapter I: „Dinah, I wish you were down here with me!”<sup>37</sup>

Zimmermann (p. 4): „ich **wollte**, du wärest hier unten bei mir.” // Enzensberger (p. 12): „Suse, liebe Katze, ich wollte, du **wärest** hier unten bei mir!” Nabokov (p. 8): „если бы ты **была** здесь со мной!” Demurova (p. 80): „Ах, Дина, милая, как жаль, что тебя со мной **нет!**” Ščerbakov (p. 32): „Дина, миленькая, вот бы ты **падала** вместе со мной!”

In all the above translations, except for that by Demurova, the wish-sentence is rendered in the conjunctive mood, i.e. the verbal stems are all preterit (in the German versions, even the „I wish” has been put in the preterit.) In Ščerbakov’s rendition („Dinah, dear, I wish you were falling together with me!”), the verb of the wish-sentence is different to the original, yet its temporal semantics has been reproduced exactly. As for the rendition provided by Demurova („Dear Dinah, it’s such a pity you are not here with me.”), although the verb is used here in the present tense, this version may be regarded as an exact semantic equivalent for all Russian renditions in which the verb stands in the preterit form, that is, the morphological pattern (either the past or the present) does not bear on the reader’s clear interpretation of the temporal semantics of the present.

### The Semantics of the Past

Exactly like the future perfect tense in English may express suppositions concerning events from the past (e.g. „He will have arrived by now”), similar forms are used in German and in Italian: in German, it is the *Futur II* tense („Er wird angekommen sein.”) and in Italian it is the *futuro anteriore* („Sarà arrivato.”) Unfortunately I could not get hold of any German or Italian translations in which these two rather antiquated morphological future forms would have been used to express the semantics of the past. By contrast, a grammatical pattern which can much more easily be drawn on for this purpose, may be found in numerous renditions of English passages containing a sequence of tenses, i.e. whenever in the original narration two or more subsequent actions in the past are introduced by two or more verbs in the past tenses, as, for example, in the following passage from Chapter I: „...she (Alice) **had** plenty of time as she went down to look about her, and to wonder what **was** going to happen next.”<sup>38</sup> Consider first three translations of this phrase into French:

Berman, p. 27: „...elle **eut** tout le temps, pendant sa chute, de regarder autour d’elle et de se demander ce qui **allait** se produire ensuite.”

Sueur: „...elle **eut** beaucoup de temps pour regarder autour d’elle et de se demander ce qui **allait** se passer après.”

Bué, p. 3: „...elle **eut** tout le loisir, dans sa chute, de regarder autour d’elle et de se demander avec étonnement ce qu’elle **allait** devenir.”

The exact equivalence between the *futur proche dans le passé* in French and the „was going to” in English represents quite a lucky case in the translation practice. In all the three renditions above, this form of the past has been used: on the one hand, the preterit form *allait* allows an exact reproduction of the original semantics of the past (the positioning of two events in the past from the narration perspective), on the other hand, it is also an exact copy of the temporal morphology in the original. Totally different to it are, e.g. translations of the passage into Russian which does not offer any similar morphological possibilities. Consider the following examples:

Nabokov (p. 6): „вполне хватало времени осмотреться и подумать, что **может** дальше случиться”; Ščerbakov (p. 30): „подумать о ближайшем будущем”; Zachoder (p. 40): „что ее **ждет** впереди”; Demurova (p. 72): „подумать, что же **будет** дальше”; Olenič-Gnenenko (p. 24): „гадать, что **произойдет** дальше.”

In none of the above Russian versions is the past morphology rendered by a past form of the corresponding verbs: in Ščerbakov’s text, the verb is substituted by a noun (*to think about the next*

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<sup>37</sup> Alice, p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> Alice, p. 12.

*future*), Nabokov and Zachoder put the verbs in the present tense (*mozhet / zhdjot*), whereas Olenič-Gnenenko uses the future tense (*budet / proizojdjot*.) Unlike the conditional mood which requires past tense morphology, in the objective clause that follows the infinitive *podumat'* (*to think*), it is possible to use all the three tenses, so that the phrase could have been translated in the past tense as well, e.g. as: „подумать, что могло случиться дальше” („to think what could happen next.”) Yet, again, for all the three possible choices of temporal morphology, the perception of temporal semantics is exactly the same: the sentence will be interpreted as referring to the past, even when the verb is put in the present or in the future tense.

This chapter began by the discussion of a line from Carroll’s introductory poem in which the verb is symbolically put in the present tense, referring to events from the past: „Full leisurely we *glide*”. Consider still another example of the historic present used in an episode from Chapter IV in which Bill, having luckily survived his flight from the chimney in the Rabbit’s house, recounts his adventure to his friends:

„Well, I hardly know, - No more, thank’ye, I’m better now - but I’m a deal too flustered to tell you - all I know is, something **comes** at me like a Jack-in-the-box, and up I **goes** like a sky-rocket!”<sup>39</sup>

The historic present tense is sometimes also labelled ‘narrative’ or ‘dramatic’ present: its use makes events from the past – like the forms *comes / up I goes* in Bill’s story – appear particularly spectacular. An exact reproduction of this form may be found in the German rendition by Enzensberger (p. 43): „Also, ich weiß selbst kaum – genug jetzt, es geht mir schon wieder besser – ich bin nur noch so aufgeregt, kann noch gar nicht recht erzählen – ich weiß nur noch, plötzlich **geht** von unten etwas auf mich **los** wie ein Springteufel, und schon **zisch ich ab** wie eine Leuchtrakete!” In all the languages under study, the present tense may similarly be used here to underscore the dramatic effect of the narration. By contrast, what would seem to be a specific characteristic of Russian grammar is the possibility to use the future tense for the same purpose, i.e. as the narrative future. Consider the following rendition of the passage by Zachoder (p. 60): „Ничего-то я не разобрал, ка-аа-аак оно **шандарахнет** меня, так я и **полетел** оттуда турманом.” (Literally: „I couldn’t figure anything out, when something **will strike** me and I **flew off** like a bullet.”) What in the back-translation is totally ungrammatical in terms of temporal morphology is completely natural in Russian: the alternation between past and future forms serves the same aim as that between past and present forms in the original and in the above German version. And here, again, the temporal semantics of the past is by no means affected.

In terms of temporal semantics, the present perfect forms represent quite a special category since they make the semantics of the past merge with that of the present and this temporal ambiguity has received lots of scholarly attention. I have already mentioned some ideas expressed by Ryle and Vendler regarding the semantic convergence of time in the past and present forms of the achievement verbs: it is possible to say „I have seen it” as soon as one can say „I see it”, so that the present form in the latter sentence may be interpreted as historical present. And yet it is remarkable how differently the conceptualization of temporal convergence has progressed in different languages. As early as at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Otto Jespersen wrote the following observations concerning this phenomenon in his *The Philosophy of Grammar*:

„...the perfect tends to become a mere preterit, though the tendency is not equally strong in all languages. English is more strict than most languages, and does not allow the use of the perfect if a definite point in the past is meant, whether this is expressly mentioned or not. Sentences containing words like yesterday or in 1879 require the simple preterit...On the other hand, Germans will often say: *Waren Sie in Berlin?* where an Englishman would have to say: “Have you been in Berlin?” When an Englishman hears a German ask: “Were you in Berlin?” his natural inclination is to retort: “When?”<sup>40</sup>

More than one hundred years have passed since Jespersen published these observations, yet in general nothing has changed about the relatively free use of the perfect by the Germans and, contrastively, about the great sensitivity of the English to the temporality expressed by the perfect and the preterit forms. This is easily seen in comparing the frequent instances in which the perfect has been used by

<sup>39</sup> Alice, p. 44.

<sup>40</sup> Otto Jespersen, *The Philosophy of Grammar*, pp. 270-271.

German translators to render the preterit forms of the original. Consider the following renditions of the King's question to the Hatter from Chapter XI: „When did you begin?”<sup>41</sup>

Zimmermann (p. 79): „Wann hast du damit angefangen?”; Enzensberger (p. 113): „Wann hast du denn angefangen?” Teutsch (p. 121): „Wann haben Sie damit angefangen?”

As these examples suggest, the use of the perfect after the interrogative „wann?” in German is as natural as that of the preterit in English. Consider also some counterexamples where the perfect form of the original „I've had such a curious dream!”<sup>42</sup> (Chapter XII) has been reproduced in German by the preterit and, in the version by B. Teutsch, even by the past perfect:

Enzensberger (p. 125): „Ach, und ich hatte so einen seltsamen Traum!”; Teutsch (p. 135): „Ach, und ich hatte so was Komisches geträumt!” Hansen (p. 110): „Oh, ich hatte so einen seltsamen Traum!”

Although some translators into German have used the present perfect tense (e.g. Zimmermann, p. 89: „O, ich habe einen so merkwürdigen Traum gehabt!”), the general frequency of rendering this phrase by the preterit testifies to a much looser connection between the present and the past in the German perfect compared with its English counterpart.

Jespersen regards the perfect as a variety of the present and not of the past, which he illustrates by the use of the adverb *now* in: “Now I have eaten enough.”<sup>43</sup> (Cf. in German: “Nun habe ich genug gegessen.”) This is a somewhat controversial view and many readers would be likely to doubt its validity, yet theoretically it could be supported by various translations in which the semantics of the present in the original has been reproduced by means of the perfect tense. Consider, as an example, the following Italian and French renditions of the sentence „The Dormouse is asleep again.”<sup>44</sup> from Chapter VII:

Oddera (p. 65): „Il Ghiro si è addormentato di nuovo.”; Petricòla-Rossetti (p. 98): „Il Ghiro è tornato a dormire.”; D'Amico (p. 71): „Il Ghiro si è riaddormentato.”; Giglio (p. 173): „Ecco, il Ghiro s'è addormentato un'altra volta.”; Bué (p. 103): „Le Loir est rendormi.”; Berman (p. 157): „Le Loir est à nouveau endormi.”

On the other hand, although the frequency with which the present has been rendered by the perfect tense in the above versions may appear striking, there are also instances of rendering it by the present (cf. Battistutta (p. 61): „Il Ghiro dorme di nuovo.”) On the whole, the perception of the temporal semantics associated with the perfect forms in the languages under study may be regarded as reflecting a balance between the past and the present. This can also be corroborated by comparing the following renditions of the Queen's question to the gardeners from Chapter VIII: „What *have* you been doing here?”<sup>45</sup>:

Enzensberger (p. 83): „Was war denn *hier* wieder los?”; Bué (p. 121): „Qu'est-ce que vous faites donc là?”; Giglio (p. 197): „Che cosa facevate, qui?”; Ščerbakov (p. 106): „Вы что здесь делали?”; Nabokov (p. 71): „Чем вы тут занимались?”; Zachoder (p. 86): „Отвечайте: что вы тут делаете?”

In these versions, the temporal semantics is introduced either by means of past morphology (the preterit forms in the versions by Enzensberger, Ščerbakov, Nabokov, Giglio) or by the present tense (the versions by Bué and Zachoder.) Unlike the previously discussed cases in which a form of the past is used to express the idea of the present (e.g. in „Кто бы здесь ни **жил**” for „whoever lives here”) or, vice versa, in which present forms refer to events from the past (e.g. „and up I goes like a sky-rocket”), here, the traditional terms for tenses prove to be in complete accord with the actual temporal semantics: the past forms stand for the idea of the past, and the present ones – for that of the present.

As these examples reveal, to a certain extent the temporal semantics of the present perfect tense in English is perceived by the translators as ambiguous, as being both past and present and in this quality different to the corresponding semantics in the target languages which require the use of either a past

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<sup>41</sup> *Alice*, p. 117.

<sup>42</sup> *Alice*, p. 130.

<sup>43</sup> Otto Jespersen, *op.cit.*, p. 269.

<sup>44</sup> *Alice*, p. 75.

<sup>45</sup> *Alice*, p. 87.

or a present form. Of course, this ambiguity becomes all the more visible when it is observed in its relation to the allness of translations or, to use once again the expression of Walter Benjamin, to the infinite „continuum of metamorphoses” („Kontinuum von Verwandlungen”) within the one pure language.

### The Semantics of the Future

Compared to other tenses, one that meets with most skepticism among linguists is the future tense. As I have shown elsewhere, the future form in Italian which is occasionally used to express suppositions concerning the present (e.g. „Saranno le otto”), raised Ludlow’s suspicions as to its ability to express the temporal semantics of the future in general. A similar criticism, though in a different context, has been made by the American linguist John White about the future morphology in German. According to him, the use of the simple future tense (Futur I, i.e. constructions in which the verb *werden* is combined with infinitive forms of other verbs) indicates „a very formal and stilted speech”, whereas the use of the present tense for future semantics will be a sure sign of „the prevailing, cultivated, colloquial German.”<sup>46</sup> However, even if in both languages the future tense morphology is often used to refer to the present it does not mean that future semantics has become absolutely alien to it. To demonstrate this, I would like to draw on some Italian and German renditions of the following passage from Chapter I: “Well, I’ll eat it”, said Alice, “and if it makes me grow larger, I can reach the key; and if it makes me grow smaller, I can creep under the door, so either way I’ll get into the garden...”<sup>47</sup>

Oddera, p. 17: „Bene, la **mangerò** – disse Alice – e se mi **farà** crescere, **riuscirò** ad arrivare alla chiave, e se mi **farà** diventare piú piccola, **potrò** strisciare sotto la porta, cosí, in un modo o nell’altro **andrò** nel giardino...”; D’Amico, p. 24: „Be’, io la **mangio** – disse Alice – cosí se mi **fa** crescere, **arrivo** a prendere la chiave; e se mi **fa** diminuire, **potrò** strisciare sotto la porta. In un modo o nell’altro **riuscirò** a entrare nel giardino...”; Enzensberger, p. 17: „wenn er mich größer **macht**, **kann** ich zu dem Schlüssel hinaufreichen, und wenn er mich kleiner **macht**, kann ich unter der Tür durchkriechen. In den Garten komme ich so oder so. ”; Kurt Hansen, p.14: „Wenn er mich größer **macht**, **kann** ich den Schlüssel erreichen, wenn er mich kleiner **macht**, **kann** ich unter der Tür hindurchkriechen. So **werde** ich auf jeden Fall in den Garten **gelangen**...”

The first Italian version above clearly illustrates how natural the use of future morphology (*futuro semplice*) is in Italian for expressing the semantics of the future: all the verbs in the passage (*mangerò, farà, riuscirò, ecc.*) have been rendered in the future tense. In the second version, by contrast, present (*mangio, arrivo, fa*) and future (*potrò, riuscirò*) forms are counterbalanced. In the corresponding German versions, the lesser use of the future morphology is first of all due to the grammatical norm which requires that in conditional clauses introduced by *wenn (if)* the verb should be put in the present tense. Yet in different grammatical environments, the future tense can be quite naturally used in German, as is illustrated by Hansen who does not shy away from rendering the last phrase by „*werde ... gelangen*” (lit.: *will get.*) Although in both Italian and German the present morphology and that of the future represent two competing forms for expressing future semantics, in situations that involve a sure supposition about future events, the use of the future tense will be much more likely than of the present. Consider the following renditions of another passage from Chapter IV: “How surprised he’ll be when he finds out **who I am**. But **I’d better** take him his fan and gloves.”<sup>48</sup>

Enzensberger (p. 36): „Der **wird** aber Augen **machen**, wenn er **merkt**, wer ich bin! Aber den Fächer und die Handschuhe will ich ihm doch lieber holen.”; Hansen (p. 29): „Wie überrascht **wird** er **sein**, wenn er **merkt**, wer ich bin! Aber es ist am besten, wenn ich ihm seinen Fächer und seine Handschuhe **hole**...”; Oddera (p. 34): “Come si **stupirà** quando **verrà** a sapere chi sono! Ma **farò** meglio a portargli il ventaglio e i guanti...”; T. Pietricòla-Rossetti (p. 42): “Ei **sarà** molto sorpreso quando **scoprirà** chi io sia. Ma è meglio recargli il ventaglio e i guanti...”; D’Amico (p.40): “Chissà la sorpresa quando **scoprirà** chi sono! Intanto però sarà meglio che gli porti il ventaglio e i guanti...”; Giglio (p. 101): “Come **resterà** sorpreso quando saprà chi sono. Ma è meglio che il ventaglio e i guanti glieli porti.” (Cf. the use of a past (sic) tense in the Russian version by Ščerbakov (p. 59): „Вот бы он **удивился**, когда **узнал** бы, кто я на самом деле!”)

<sup>46</sup> John White, ““Die gebildete Umgangssprache” and Our College Grammars: The German Present Tense in Future Meaning”, in: *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 3, May 1944, pp. 131-134, here p. 132.

<sup>47</sup> Alice, p. 18.

<sup>48</sup> Alice, p. 38.

Aside from the instances of using present forms in temporal and conditional clauses after *wenn*, which is required by the grammar rules, in the rest of the above German examples the semantics of the future has been rendered mostly by the future tense, which by no means sounds formal or stilted. In the Italian versions, the predominance of the future morphology is still more evident, which is due to the fact that – unlike German – Italian grammar allows the use of the future tense in temporal and conditional clauses.

In terms of the relationship between temporal semantics and tense morphology, the last quotation from *Alice* is particularly interesting since all the three tenses are used in it to refer to the future: the future (he'll be), the present (when he finds out) and the past (I had better / I'd better.)

The intentional and forward-looking form *I had better* in English and the use of a past form in the Russian conditional „Вот бы он **удивился**” in Ščerbakov's rendition both seem perfectly suitable to conclude the present chapter on the ways in which all tenses are *semantically* interconnected: what is probably most striking about the morphological forms of natural languages is that tenses that conventionally are termed *future*, *present*, and *past* reveal quite a paradoxical semantical behaviour, that is, every single of them is actually used to refer to *any* temporal semantics. This parity of grammatical tenses may be regarded as a real and firmly tangible counterpart to the controversial idea concerning the parity of times in McTaggart's paradox. The fact that the paradox of the semantical behavior of tenses does not result in any confusion concerning the semantics of time and that in most cases it is, on the contrary, quite clear how an event is positioned on the chronological scale with respect to the speech (or the narration) time strongly testifies to the objectivity and reality of tenses.

Two languages that have featured prominently in all the other chapters of this book have not been discussed in the present chapter: Japanese and Chinese. This was motivated by the following reasons. The temporal morphology of Japanese verbs is limited to two morphemes – *ru* and *ta* the use of which does not reveal the variety of mutual connections between tenses and temporal semantics as one that may be observed in languages with a complex temporal morphology. As for Chinese, since it does not have any temporal morphology at all<sup>49</sup> it does not offer much material that would be relevant to the present chapter, i.e. the question as to how temporal semantics is reflected in the *forms* of verbs. However, the fact that these languages occasionally also reveal complex ambivalent connections between temporal semantics and temporal grammar (in Chinese – at the syntactical level) that are similar to those discussed above, may be regarded as further evidence of the reality of pure language in which, to use Benjamin's words again, intentions of all human languages coalesce.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. the wide-spread opinion according to which Chinese is a “tenseless” language in such studies as Clara S. Smith's „Time With and Without Tense”, in: Jacqueline Guéron, Jacqueline Lecarme (eds.), *Time and Modality*, Dordrecht: Springer 2008, pp. 227-249 and Jo-Wang Lin's, „Time in a Language without Tense: The Case of Chinese”, in: *Journal of Semantics*, Vol. 23, 2005, pp. 1-53. This, however, is not a universally shared attitude. See, for example, the reservations expressed by Jiun-Shiung Wu in „Tense as a Discourse Feature: Rethinking Temporal Location in Mandarin Chinese”, in: *Journal of East Asian Linguistics*, Vol. 18, No. 2, May 2009, pp. 145-165, p. 146: „In this paper, the definition of tense is extended to refer to temporal location in general. Under this extended definition of tense, it is possible that every language has tense because expressing the temporal location of situations is a universal need.”

<sup>50</sup> For Japanese, see, for example, the occurrences of *-ta-forms* (past) referring to the present and the future and, vice versa, of *-ru-forms* (present/future) referring to the past. This phenomenon has been in the focus of Kayako Hirata's dissertation *Temporal Properties in Japanese*, Ann Arbor: UMI 1987. While I agree with most observations made in this study, many instances of the ambivalent semantic behavior of Japanese tenses which are drawn on by its author could prove insightful in further critical discussions of this subject. See, for example, the interpretation of „Basu ga kita!” („The bus has come.”) as „The bus is coming.” (p. 15) The author states that “by native speakers' intuition, it is judged to be associated with present interpretation of a time model” (*ibid.*), saying at the same time that it would be possible to interpret the phrase as referring to past: „The bus has come” or „The bus came” (*ibid.*, fn. 4.) Some other illustrations of the same kind are the expressions „Katta, katta!” interpreted as „We're winning” (p. 16) or „Wakatta!” as „I understand it.” While it is certainly true that all these expressions may be interpreted as referring to the present, the past semantics of the morpheme – *ta* is not completely neutralized in them. Cf. the above discussion of „I see” / „we're winning” by Ryle and Vendler, where the present forms of the achievement verbs are interpreted as historic present. The interpretation of some analogous Japanese cases provided by Hirata may corroborate this view: semantics of the past does not disappear in Japanese, but rather merges with that of the present. For Chinese, I mean first of all the grammatical particle “le” which is equally able to function as a marker of perfect referring to the past and as a change-of-state aspectual marker referring to *both* the past and future.