

Readings of the German present perfect

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The GOAL of this paper is to give a monosemous analysis of the meaning of the German present perfect in terms of an Extended Now theory (McCOARD (1978)). I propose an account for the different present perfect readings in terms of KAMP & REYLE (1993)'s discourse-based approach to tense. Temporal and rhetorical relations between tenses in a given text will be used to account for the different readings of the present perfect.

The PROBLEM: Many analyses take the German present perfect to be ambiguous, having either a preterite meaning or a resultative reading. However, these accounts cannot explain why in some cases the present perfect cannot replace the preterite (see example (1) for illustration). While (1)a allows for a simultaneous and an anterior reading of the embedded tense in relation to the reference time of the matrix verb, (1)b only allows for the latter anterior reading. Hence, a monosemous approach is necessary.

- (1) a: Fritz dachte, dass es 8 Uhr war (STECHOW (1999:98))
 Fritz thought that it 8 o'clock was
 b. Fritz dachte, dass es 8 Uhr gewesen ist
 Fritz thought that it 8 o'clock been is

The meaning of the present perfect will be analysed in terms of an extendedNow-analysis. The present perfect introduces an extendedNow-interval (XN). "Traditionally", XN is an interval whose right boundary (RB) ends at the reference time set by the auxiliary. The position of its left boundary (LB) is not specified or can be given by adverbials like *since*. Within XN is the eventuality denoted by the perfect. (IATRIDOU et al (2001)).

However, this approach makes the wrong prediction for the present perfect with adverbials like *immer* in (2). The "living in Berlin" can clearly not continue at the time of utterance and XN has therefore to be modified.

- (2) Ich habe immer in Berlin gewohnt, aber vor kurzem bin ich nach Tübingen
 gezogen
 I have always in Berlin lived but recently am I to Tübingen moved

THE ARGUMENTATION: I follow PANCHEVA & STECHOW (2004) whose XN can be separated from the reference time of the auxiliary. My approach differs from their view in the following point: the XN Interval can be reduced to a single time point that lies before the reference time set by the auxiliary and therefore be identical to the event time of the present perfect. The XN can be stretched to the reference time of the auxiliary whenever this is necessary. The length of XN varies due to the different readings of the present perfect.

To distinguish the present perfect readings, MUSAN (1999) proposes pragmatic principles, but she almost exclusively analyses isolated sentences that can easily be overridden by context. To account for this, a discourse based approach will be pursued. Following KAMP & REYLE (1993), I introduce a further point in time. The reference

time point (Rtp) is used to account for the temporal ordering of events in texts: the preceding discourse yields a Rtp with which the following tense form establishes an antecedent-anaphora relationship. (Note that Rtp is not REICHENBACH's (1947) R. R is a point in time relative to which the event time of the tense can be located).

The distinction between R and Rtp becomes especially urgent with sequences in the pluperfect (see (3)). The sequence starts with a past tense. The events (e₂) to (e₆) are temporally ordered. Fred first gets up, then takes a shower and so on. The right temporal order of the events (e₂) to (e₆) cannot be given by referring to REICHENBACH's reference time R, since for the five pluperfects in (3) R is always the same: it is e₁, the event of Fred's arrival. Rtp resolves that problem: Rtp₂ precedes Rtp₃, which in turn precedes Rtp₄ and so on.

- (3) Fritz kam um 10 Uhr. Er war um fünf aufgestanden, hatte geduscht und gefrühstückt. Er war um 6 Uhr 30 losgefahren. (KAMP & REYLE (1993))
Fritz came at 10 o'clock. He was at 5 o'clock up-got, had showered and [had] breakfast-ed. He had at 6.30 left.
- (4) Albin hat um Sandrines Hand angehalten. Die Hochzeit fand im Juni statt.
Albin has for Sandrine's hand asked. The wedding took in July place.
- (5) Albin hat um Sandrines Hand angehalten. Die Hochzeit findet im Juni statt.
Albin has for Sandrine's hand asked. The wedding takes in July place.

Rtp provides a useful tool to account for the present perfect readings. It has a preterite reading when Rtp is simultaneous to the event time denoted by the present perfect, and a perfective reading when Rtp is located after the event time. The preterite reading arises when the Rtp serves as an evaluation time for another event time located before the time of utterance. This is illustrated in (4). In other cases, the present perfect has a perfective reading. (see (5)). Furthermore, Rtp serves to identify the boundaries of the XN-intervall. Whenever Rtp is not simultaneous to the event time, the XN is stretched to the time Rtp denotes.

The contrast in (1) is resolved if the present perfect is analysed as a compositional tense consisting of a present tense and a participle. The present perfect denotes a time prior to the present tense. A bound present tense is evaluated in relation to the reference time of the binding verb (see (6)). Hence, it follows that the present perfect must express a time prior to the time of the matrix verb (see (1)b) and that it therefore can only replace the preterite in a "prior-to-matrix verb" relation. I argue that Rtp is not sensitive to binding, since a transformation from direct to indirect speech does not change the temporal order of the reported events.

- (6) Fritz dachte, dass es 8 Uhr ist
Fritz thought that it 8 o'clock is

References

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