A CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY AND THE TEACHING OF TENSES IN FRENCH

Hale and Buck's Latin grammar divides tenses into "tenses of stage" and "aoristic tenses." The latter, according to the definition, represent the act in summary (i.e., as a whole); the former represent it, "as in a stage of advancement at a time which is in mind, namely as completed, in progress, or yet to come," adding that, "the particular time with reference to which an act is seen as in a certain stage may conveniently be called Point of Reference or Point of View." ¹

For several years before Hale and Buck's grammar was published, but not, however, before I had had the benefit of coming under the indirect influence of Professor Hale's teaching, discarding for the moment whatever French grammar the class might be using, I had presented the tenses of the Indicative to my beginners by placing the diagram shown on p. 490 on the board.

The construction of the diagram was always preceded by a discussion in which the class was guided, as much as possible, to formulate by themselves a definition of tense, and the diagram was filled out by the class not only in French but also in English, and by individual students also in Latin. A better insight into the nature of tenses was thus reached, and a better "working-knowledge" acquired, than by the learning of the many rules generally given in grammars. Some added statements were, indeed, necessary, especially to explain the difference in use between the past anterior and the pluperfect, and between the past definite and indefinite, but they could be given briefly and gradually.

Practically, this mode of presentation of the tenses proved a success. The inextricable confusion between the use of the imperfect and past definite which I have known to persist even in the minds of "advanced" students of French was a very rare occurrence, if the student was a real beginner; and even when error occurred, the question, "what is the standpoint, what is the stage?" followed


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by, "then what should the tense be?" generally enabled the student to get his own bearings.

It is not, however, sufficient for a method of presentation to work apparently well in elementary teaching, to be, as it were, "practically expedient." If at any later stage of progress the student has to unlearn what he learned in the first place, if the elementary view he was made to take does not furnish a solid foundation for a scientifically sound superstructure, the most plausible, best-working "scheme" is not justifiable.

Having come to realize that this presentation of French tenses differed in some essential points from the one taken by some very authoritative French grammars, it became imperative to subject a
view which had been reached somewhat "empirically" to a more searching test than could be furnished by mere classroom use, and reject or modify it accordingly. With this purpose the following study of tenses was undertaken, and it is published with the hope that it may prove useful in a line of work for which there is a real need in America today, and the consciousness that its usefulness remains questionable until its results have stood the scrutiny "di coloro che sanno."

To trace the history of the evolution of opinion concerning the nature of tense-force in French grammars, or special works on the subject, is beyond the scope of this study. Herbig gives such a survey with regard to the classical languages in his article "Aktions-art und Zeitstufe," an article that is of supreme importance for all consideration of tenses. The views set forth in this survey have been influential, and justifiably so, in all consideration of tenses in the Romance languages.

Neither does it come within the scope of this article to take into consideration all "standard" French grammars or all special treatises on the tenses. Some recent publications, notably German ones, which, judging from their reviews, would have been exceedingly useful, were not accessible. On the contrary, the consideration of many "standard" French grammars in use in America appeared sheer waste of time, since they rest satisfied with cataloguing in the most perfunctory manner the different uses of tenses with no pretense of helping the student to any understanding of their real nature. Books that have been utilized will, therefore, be mentioned as the occasion arises, and it is hoped that the failure to utilize all existing material will not seriously invalidate the usefulness of a study in which, when all is said, the language itself is the decisive factor, and the opinions that are held concerning it are an important but only secondary consideration.

Ayer, § 196, says of the tenses of the Indicative that according to the state of the action expressed, they can be either imperfect or perfect; from another point of view, they are again divided into presents and preterites. His own classification is:

1 Indogermanische Forschungen, VI.
2 See also Vising, "Die realen Tempora der Vergangenheit," Franz. Studien, VI, VII.

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C. J. Cipriani

**Temps Imparfaits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Présent</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Futur</td>
<td>Present</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prétérit</th>
<th>Imparfait</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prétérit</td>
<td>Prétérit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conditionnel</td>
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**Temps Parfaits**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Parfait</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Futur parfait</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plus-que-parfait</th>
<th>Prétérit antérieur</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conditionnel passé</td>
<td>Conditionnel passé</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Left to itself this scheme does not enlighten us concerning a fundamental point in the conception of tense-force: is the division into présents and prétérits based merely on a distinction between past or present time, or does it imply present or past standpoint? The difference between mere time (time-sphere) and standpoint in time becomes apparent by comparing my diagram with a very ingenious one given by Piazza in his Italian grammar, in which something akin to “standpoint” is resorted to only for the graphical representation of the pluperfect and future perfect.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passato</th>
<th>Presente</th>
<th>Futuro</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1, 2, 3, stand for the present; 4, for the compound past (ho pensato); 5, 6, for the imperfect; 7, 8, for the “rimoto” (pensai); 9, for the pluperfect; 10, for the future; 11, for the future perfect. The conditional (past-future) has found and can find no place in the diagram, and the compound “rimoto” (ebbi pensato) is also omitted. Piazza happily avoids the error of considering the pluperfect a mere equivalent of the simple tense, as is clearly brought out by the graphical representation.
Ayer does not go to the extreme of completely ignoring the relation of the tenses to something that may be construed into a “past point in time.” He says: “Les prétérits marquent le temps non seulement par rapport à l’instant de la parole, mais encore par rapport à un autre fait passé.” Then he continues, “l’imparfait [qui] exprime une action passée simultanée à un autre fait également passé; le prétérit [qui] exprime une action passée postérieure ou antérieure à une autre action passée; le plus-que-parfait et le prétérit antérieur [qui] expriment une action comme passée dans le moment où l’on parle, mais en même temps comme accomplie antérieurement à une autre action également passée; les deux conditionnels [qui] expriment un futur par rapport à un passé . . . .”

If, for the sake of comparison, we should attempt to represent graphically the tenses as defined by Ayer, according to Piazza’s diagram, the graphical representation would bring out strikingly the inadequacy of Ayer’s definition of the preterite: when it is supposedly “anterior” to a past act, it becomes confused with the pluperfect; and when it is “posterior” to a past act, it becomes confused with the conditional. Nor is this splitting hairs. In his historical French grammar Brunot defines future time as “ce qui est postérieur à ce moment.” It is true that in the definition of the conditional (past-future) Ayer drops the word fait or action and says, “un futur par rapport à un passé,” and this may be construed as a suggestion of the distinction that Lücking, e.g., brings out by the use of the terms “real” and “ideal.” Even if this idea is implied in Ayer’s definition, it certainly is not brought out clearly, and confusion persists.

The idea of “standpoint” is suggested more forcibly by Mätzner, who says: “Es kann nämlich die ihrem Wesen nach der Zeit angehörende Thätigkeit, welche von ihrem Zeitpunkte oder Zeitraume aus ein Vorher und ein Nachher und somit ausserhalb ihrer Gegenwärtigkeit eine Vergangenheit und Zukunft hat, von zwei Standpunkten aus gemessen oder in ihre drei objektiven Stufen eingetheilt werden.” And further, “Der Redende kann nämlich die Thätigkeiten mit Beziehung auf die Zeit in welcher er redet, oder auf seine jedesmalige Gegenwart als gegenwärtig, vergangen oder zukünftig darstellen, oder mit Beziehung auf eine nicht mehr in seine Gegenwart fallende, also für ihn vergangene Zeit, welche durch den Zusammenhang der Rede
anderweitig näher bestimmt wird, die Thätigkeiten als damals gegenwärzig, vergangen oder zukünftig betrachten.”

Lückner explains the distinction between the imperfect “aimais” and the past definite “aimai” by stating that the first expresses the action “im Werden,” in progress, while the second, “die in der Vergangenheit werdende Thätigkeit unter die einfache Anschauung eines beschlossenen Daseins d. h. als Thatsache fallen lässt.”

The distinction between “ideal” and “real” action (a very important discrimination) easily explains why Lücking does not include future time in his scheme, since “ideal” takes the place of “future.” A definite standpoint in past time is, however, ignored, and the imperfect and past definite are respectively designated as both expressing “eine in der Vergangenheit unvollendet gedachte Handlung, und zwar (a) das Imperfekt eine damals im Verlauf begriffene, (b) das Perfekt eine damals eintretende.”

The confusion between conditional (past-future) and past definite, which is possible with Ayer’s definition, is not, however, possible here, since it is sufficiently guarded against by the distinction between “real” and “ideal.”

Seeger¹ divides tenses into two groups: “Praesentia,” or tenses of present time; and “Praeterita,” or tenses of past time. The “Praesentia” relate the temporal condition of the action to the actual time of the speaker. The “Praeterita” are the tenses of historical representation (Darstellung). A somewhat vague standpoint can therefore be implied for the “Praesentia,” but nothing of the kind is possible, according to the definition, with the “Praeterita.” The “Praesentia” are present, past indefinite, future, and future perfect. In a note Seeger remarks that the simple tenses, present, imperfect, past definite, future, conditional are also called “Zeitformen des Werdens”; and the compound tenses, past indefinite, future perfect, pluperfect, and past anterior are also called “Zeitformen der Vollendung.”

To this grouping (which is not, however, original; cf. Mätzner and others) the serious objection can be made that “aimerais” and “aimerai” which express, as Lücking brings out, not the statement of a “real” action, but merely the statement of “ideal” action

¹*Lehrbuch der neufranzösischen Syntax*, 1884.
(action merely thought of), no more express "Werden" than they express "Vollendung." An action that has no real beginning cannot properly be said to be in progress (im Werden) merely because it also lacks a real ending.

Since Seeger groups together imperfect and past definite (and conditional) as "Zeitformen des Werdens," it is interesting to note how he differentiates between them: "Das französische Imperfect stellt die Thätigkeit recht eigentlich als eine werdende, mitten in der Ausführung begriffene, unabgeschlossene dar. Beim Gebrauche des passé défini fliesst die Vorstellung einer werdenden mit der Vorstellung einer zum Abschluss kommenden und sich vollendenden Thätigkeit zu der einfachen Vorstellung einer sich vollziehenden Thätigkeit zusammen."

A vague feeling of standpoint can, however, be deduced from the statement, "Das passé défini ist das absolute Tempus und steht überall, wo es steht, um seiner selbst willen. Das Imperfect ist das relative Tempus und rechtfertigt seinen Platz häufig nur durch seine Beziehung zu dem was vorangeht und folgt." Even more clearly defined standpoint is resorted to for the definition of the "imperfectum futuri": "Als echt historisches Futurum d. h. eine vom Standpunkt der Vergangenheit aus zukünftige Thätigkeit bezeichnend, steht dieses Tempus in der indirekten und in der abhängigen Rede."

It is noteworthy that having resorted to "standpoint" for the explanation of the past-future, Seeger did not further utilize it for the explanation of pluperfect and past anterior, of which he holds the certainly erroneous view (which is, however, shared by others) that "die beiden Tempora verhalten sich zu einander wie das Imperfektum und das passé défini."

Standpoint receives greater recognition in the historical French grammar of Brunot, who says, "Sommairement et logiquement le temps se divise par rapport au moment où l'on parle en trois portions: (1) ce moment même; (2) ce qui est antérieur; (3) ce qui est postérieur à ce moment. Le verbe distingue ces trois divisions. Il y a des temps marquant le présent, le passé, et le futur par rapport au moment où l'on parle." And farther on, "Une action déterminée peut être conçue comme étant antérieure ou postérieure ou
contemporaine non plus seulement au moment où l'on parle, mais
d'une action quelconque elle-même présente, passée ou future par
rapport au moment où l'on parle. . . . En théorie il faudrait six
temps de ce genre:

1°) un passé marquant l’antériorité
    un présent marquant la simultanéité
    un futur marquant la postériorité
    par rapport au passé

2°) un passé marquant l’antériorité
    un présent marquant la simultanéité
    un futur marquant la postériorité
    par rapport au futur,”

adding, however, that neither Latin nor French ever actually had
all these tenses. Here the principle of standpoint is admitted as
explicitly as in the diagram which I used myself, though in his
definition Brunot ties it to the action of another verb. It should be
remarked also that the imperfect and passé défini are not grouped
together, but are considered as belonging to two different categories
of tenses.

Robert¹ also divides time into: (1) the actual moment; (2) all the
time which has preceded the actual moment; (3) all the time that
will follow, and states that the tenses which mark the time are
(1) the present, (2) the perfect, (3) the future. But he adds: “. . .
on peut présenter une action comme présente, passée ou future par
rapport au moment où l'on parle ou bien par rapport à un moment
du passé. De là deux séries de temps:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Présents</th>
<th>Prétérts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Présent</td>
<td>marche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passé</td>
<td>ai marché</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futur</td>
<td>marcherai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>aurai marché</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Moment du passé” is almost an exact equivalent for “past
standpoint,” and according to Robert’s diagram both the past
definite and the imperfect are brought into relation to it; both,
according to him, are “present at a past moment.”

¹ Questions de grammaire française.
Brinkman\textsuperscript{1} brings out very clearly the importance of “standpoint” for the understanding of tense-force. He calls “subjective” those tenses which emphasize the relation of the act of the verb to a definite standpoint “des betrachtenden Subjekts, des Sprechenden”; and “objective” those that express the action of the verb from the standpoint of the “acting subject.” Brinkman’s scheme, in a somewhat simplified form, is shown on p. 498.

It should be noticed that while Brinkman holds to one standpoint throughout, in the table of tenses “from the standpoint of the speaker,” he is not able to do so in his table of “objective time of action”; in this he alternates between (a) standpoint of the speaker, and (b) and (c) standpoint of the “acting subject.” According to the first table, the imperfect expresses “objective presence” to the past standpoint of the speaker; according to the second table, the imperfect together with the past definite express “objective present action from the standpoint of the acting subject in the past.”

This grouping together of imperfect and past definite that is to be found in a majority of grammars (even outside of those that have been considered here) has not, however, failed to find opponents. A very vigorous attack upon this view of imperfect and past definite has been made, e.g., by This,\textsuperscript{2} who feels so strongly an essential difference between the two tenses that he proposes to assign the past definite to a different mode, the “narrative.” A somewhat similar view is held by Kalepky,\textsuperscript{3} who says (p. 503) that the past definite is “mehr als blosse Tempus und Modusform, es ist zugleich Vorstellungskategorie für Zeitseiende und darf darnach nicht mit [den Indikativen des] präsent, imparfait, futur, conditionnel, in eine Reihe und auf dieselbe Stufe gestellt werden.” That Brunot avoids doing this has already been mentioned; and it would undoubtedly be easy to find others who take a similar position. In this connection it is, however, well to remember that there is no hard-and-fast dividing line between mode and tense-force. The future and past-future express a very different “mode of action” from the present (Lücking’s ideal action as opposed to real action), so different that the future and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} Syntax des Französischen und Englischen, 1885.
\item \textsuperscript{2} “Zur Lehre der Tempora und Modi im Französischen,” Gröber Festschrift.
\item \textsuperscript{3} “Zur franz. Syntax,” Zeitschrift für Romanische Phil., XVIII.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
### Nach dem Standpunkte des Sprechenden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standpunkt des Sprechenden</th>
<th>Objektive Zeit der Handlung</th>
<th>Zeitformen</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I) Vom Standpunkte der Gegenwart</td>
<td>a) als objektiv gegenwärtig</td>
<td>je loue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) als objektiv vergangen</td>
<td>j'ai loué</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) als objektiv zukünftig</td>
<td>je louerais</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II) Vom Standpunkte der Vergangenheit</td>
<td>a) als objektiv gegenwärtig</td>
<td>je louais</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) als objektiv vergangen</td>
<td>j'avais loué</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(als vergangen und bedingt)</td>
<td>j'eus loué</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) als objektiv zukünftig</td>
<td>j'aurais loué</td>
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<tr>
<td>III) Vom Standpunkte der Zukunft</td>
<td>a) als objectiv gegenwärtig</td>
<td>je louerais</td>
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<td>b) als objektiv vergangen</td>
<td>j'aurai loué</td>
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<td>c) als objektiv zukünftig</td>
<td>(laudaturus ero)</td>
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### Nach der Objektiven Zeit der Handlung

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective Zeit der Handlung</th>
<th>Gesichtspunkt</th>
<th>Die Zeitformen</th>
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<tr>
<td>I) Die objektiv gegenwärtige Handlung</td>
<td>a) vom Gesichtspunkt des betrachtenden Subjekts, Sprechenden</td>
<td>j'aime</td>
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<td>b) vom Standpunkt des handelnden Subjekts in der Vergangenheit</td>
<td>j'aimais</td>
</tr>
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<td>c) vom Standpunkt des handelnden Subjekts in der Zukunft</td>
<td>j'aimai</td>
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<td>j'aimerais</td>
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<tr>
<td>II) Die objektiv vergangene Handlung</td>
<td>a) vom Standpunkt des betrachtenden Subjekts</td>
<td>j'ai aimé</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) vom Standpunkt des handelnden Subjekts in der Vergangenheit</td>
<td>j'avais aimé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) wenn bedingt vom Standpunkt des handelnden Subjekts in der Zukunft</td>
<td>j'eus aimé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>j'aurai aimé</td>
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<tr>
<td>III) Die objektiv zukünftige Handlung</td>
<td>a) vom Standpunkt des betrachtenden Subjekts</td>
<td>j'aimerais</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) vom Standpunkt des handelnden Subjekts in der Vergangenheit</td>
<td>j'aimerais</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) vom Standpunkt des handelnden Subjekts in der Zukunft</td>
<td>(amaturus ero)</td>
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past-future tense-force is not infrequently accepted by the language as a perfect equivalent for the subjunctive mode-force. While I hope to show that it is not necessary to resort to the creation of a new mode-name for the explanation of the real difference between past definite and imperfect, I heartily agree with those who separate imperfect and past definite, against those who group them together.

Meyer-Lübke,\(^1\) in his consideration of tenses, says that Latin expresses by its tense-forms two entirely different things: "le moment de la durée" ("Zeitstufe") and "la modalité de l'action" ("Aktions-art"). The first designates the time of action as present, past, and future; in Latin and the Romance languages timeless verb-forms do not enter into consideration. The "Aktionsart" indicates whether an action is durative, iterative, momentaneous, inchoative, or completed. Literary Latin had a present, and also a preterite that marked duration and one that did not, and a future. These statements are based to a great extent on Herbig's article, "Aktionsart und Zeitstufe,"\(^2\) to which Meyer-Lübke refers; and a closer consideration of Herbig's opinions will help to throw a considerable light on the subject.

Herbig holds that "Aktionsart" and verbal action are indissolubly united; that in speech every verbal concept must enter into some relation to "Aktionsart"; but that the subjective time-spheres ("Zeitstufen") are categories that stand outside and above the simple verb-action. Individual verbal forms may assume a relation to them, but they are nowise obliged to do so.

Herbig considers "time-sphere" ("Zeitstufe") a later development of "Aktionsart," and says that this progress (for he considers it so) was due to the shifting of the attitude of the speaker. First, the speaker only considered the kind of action and rendered it accordingly in his speech; later he came to consider the action of the verb, even in its temporary relation to the actual present in which he spoke, and rendered it accordingly. In other words, the development of the idea of "time-sphere" in connection with verbal action was really a step on the road of greater subjectivity, and it will aid in the comprehension of the history of tense-force in French if we bear in mind

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\(^1\) Grammaire des langues romanes, III, 119.

\(^2\) Indogermanische Forschungen, VI.
that this language has traveled far on this road, and has not yet stopped its progress.

Elsewhere Herbig remarks that we may no longer distinguish the tenses from the essence of the verbs themselves. If, taking Herbig's clue, we inquire why this is so, we find that the verb-modifications that denoted originally "Aktionsart" only, and were characteristic of those verbs to which a given "Aktionsart" was essential, by their development into tense-forms (which was the result of their entering into some relation to time-sphere), became, so to speak, a rigid frame into which eventually even those verbs could be forced whose own essence logically excluded the "Aktionsart" upon which the given tense had been molded. Herbig himself shows (p. 200) that "der modus indicativus temporis presentis und die actio perfectiva schliessen begriflich einander aus." Nevertheless a perfective verb like "come" is often used in the present indicative tense. Yet when we say "I come," the real meaning is (a) I am doing the act that will result in my coming, (b) I have just come, (c) I came (historical present), (d) I shall or will come. ¹

This discrepancy between tense-force and "Aktionsart" is especially noticeable in the passive voice. Clédat² says, "quand un mur est construit, on ne le construit plus, mais quand un homme est redouté, on le redoute encore."

All the examples that Vising gives (in his above-mentioned article) of the "imperfectum conatus" are perfective verbs: "écraser, enlever, oublier, tuer, étouffer, suffoquer, crever," and the peculiar tense-force is fully accounted for by the discrepancy of the essential "Aktionsart" of the verb and the real tense-force of the imperfect.

One of the constituent elements of tense-force is then "solidified Aktionsart," the other is "time-sphere." Time-sphere ("Zeitstufe") is, according to Herbig, the result of an increase of subjectivity in the attitude of the speaker, who brought the verbal concept into subjective relation with the actual time of his speaking. Looked at from the moment of actual speaking, time naturally appears to the

¹ The essential "Aktionsart" will, of course, be greatly influenced by the context. Thus in "I read Latin" the verb is "durative," in "I read the whole book," it is perfective, while in "I read through the five volumes of his works," the verb is iterative perfective.

² "Double valeur des temps du passif," Revue de Philologie Francaise et Provençale.
speaker in three divisions, "spheres": past, present, and future; the present being felt as somewhat more than merely a point dividing past and future. And the action of the verb seen from the time of speaking will appear, (A) as a whole, (B) in some distinct stage of progress. The action "as a whole" will be felt to be momentaneous," or "durative."  

A) According to the essential "Aktionsart" of the verb, the simple (1) momentaneous verb may appear as (2) momentaneous-inchoative or (3) momentaneous-perfective; the durative verb, by stressing beginning, duration, or completion may be (4) durative-inchoative, (5) durative-intensive, (6) durative-perfective.  

B) The act that appears in some distinct stage of progress may be (7) begun and in progress, or (8) completed. Or the beginning which is tacitly implied in every action that is seen in progress may drop out of sight altogether and leave the action (9) in progress, with no consideration of beginning or end, but with the important difference that continuation logically implies the reality of a beginning, but by no means necessarily of the end of the action thus viewed.  

If now we bring these different possible tense-forces into a diagram and ask what tenses, if any, express them, we get the following scheme, which it is profitable to compare with Piazza's Italian one given above.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past Time-Sphere</th>
<th>Present Time-Sphere</th>
<th>Future Time-Sphere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A, 1) La foudre frappa l'arbre.</td>
<td>1) La foudre frappe l'arbre.</td>
<td>1) La foudre frapperà l'arbre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Le coup partit.</td>
<td>2) Le coup part.</td>
<td>2) Le coup partira.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) La balle le tua.</td>
<td>3) La balle le tue.</td>
<td>3) La balle le tuaera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Il apprit l'anglais.</td>
<td>4) Il apprend l'anglais.</td>
<td>4) Il apprendra l'anglais.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) La guerre dura long-temps.</td>
<td>5) La guerre dure long-temps.</td>
<td>5) La guerre durera long-temps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Il bâtira la maison.</td>
<td>6) Il bâtira la maison.</td>
<td>6) Il bâtira la maison.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B, 8) Les ateliers se vidè- rent.</td>
<td>7) J'étudie l'anglais depuis quelques mois.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9) Il pleut sans cesse.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Mützner denies the difference between momentaneous and durative action, since all action must have some duration, however short. Even admitting that "durative" and "momentaneous" are not essentially different, it is impossible not to insist that they do denote a very important distinction. And in the whole discussion of tenses it is well to bear in mind that we rarely have to deal with mutually exclusive opposites, but rather with frequently overlapping phases of one phenomenon.
Moreover, the context can change the action of the verb into iterative action, e.g., *La foudre frappait les arbres, Il lut les cinq volumes des œuvres de cet auteur, Il bâtit plusieurs maisons.*

The imperfect, past definite, past-future (conditional), future perfect, pluperfect, and past anterior find no place in this scheme of tenses. Why not? Because their tense-force implies not only "time-sphere" but a specialized phase of time-sphere, "standpoint" in this sphere. If time-sphere, according to Herbig, arose because the speaker brought the objective "Aktionsart" into subjective relation to the actual moment of speaking, standpoint became differentiated from pure time-sphere when the speaker took one more step on the road of subjectivity, allowing his mind to assume a definite standpoint in each time-sphere from which to view the action of the verb, primarily in relation to this subjective standpoint and secondarily, if at all, in its relation to the actual time of speaking. As far as the present is concerned, this increased subjectivity only stresses the standpoint; it by no means changes it. It would be foolhardy, indeed, from the point of view of the Romance languages to attempt to decide when and in what way standpoint was differentiated from time-sphere; whether they came into being simultaneously or consecutively.

This much seems evident, however: some tenses mark a relation both to time-sphere and to standpoint; some to standpoint only; one to time-sphere only, or at least principally. The first are, e.g., present and future; the second imperfect, past indefinite, pluperfect, past anterior, past-future, future perfect; the last one is the past definite. Much has been said and written on the difference between imperfect and past definite, and yet if my surmise should prove true, the difference would reduce itself to just this: the imperfect always implies a relation to the definite standpoint in the past time-sphere, and this relation is the one of a present to the subjective past standpoint. The past definite, on the contrary, either enters into no relation with a subjective standpoint at all, remaining thus a typical "time-sphere tense," with an unstressed relation to the time of actual speaking, or by stressing this relation, it may become a "standpoint tense"; but the standpoint is then always the present and never the past one. In modern French, however, it seems safe to say that the past definite is only a "time-sphere tense."
From the present standpoint the speaker, as we have seen, can perceive the *present* action of the verb either as a whole or in progress. The verb-action "as a whole" may be momentaneous or imply duration. With the action in progress the beginning may be stressed, or beginning and end may be equally disregarded. Since the action of the verb can be seen in all these different phases, when present to a present standpoint, there is no reason why it should not be seen in a similar way when present to the past standpoint. The imperfect expresses the action in all these possible present phases in relation to a past standpoint.

**SUBJECTIVE PAST STANDPOINT**

(Objective Present Action)

A, 1) Quelques minutes après il se jetait à la rivière.

2) Le bateau partait le lendemain.

3) Elle sortait du Sacré Cœur.

4) Walter s'installait dans son nouveau domicile.

5) Autrefois la guerre durait plus longtemps qu'aujourd'hui.

6) Il construisait une maison.

   L'empereur finissait comme il avait commencé.

B, 7) Il y avait longtemps que nous étions en Angleterre.

8) 

9) Il pleuvait sans cesse.

(The context, moreover, can introduce iterative force: "Le bateau partait tous les jours à dix heures," "Autrefois les guerres duraient plus longtemps qu'aujourd'hui," "Il construisait des maisons.")

The imperfect in a sentence like "Il n'avait pas fait dix pas qu'il s'arrêta, battait l'air de ses deux bras, et tombait d'un seul coup par terre," has been called the "pictorial imperfect," and explained as being used "where normally the past definite might be expected." And it does take the place of the past definite in a certain sense, but not in the sense of bodily substitution. What really happens (if my surmise is correct) would rather be that the more subjective standpoint is substituted for the vaguer, less subjective time-sphere. Once given the past standpoint, any action that appears in the present from that standpoint, whether it be seen as a whole or in a stage of

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1 Taken from Stenhagen, *Neuere Sprachen*, II, 311.

2 Vising, VII, 41.

3 E. de Pressensé, *Le petit marquis*.

4 Armstrong, *Syntax of the French Verb*. 

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progress, whether its beginning, or its duration or its completion be stressed, must of necessity take the imperfect and can take no other tense. It is this increasing encroachment of the more subjective past standpoint for the vaguer and less subjective past time-sphere that explains the preference modern French shows for the imperfect in many cases where Old French still commonly used the past definite. See on this point Vising, and Morf.

At the risk of repetition, it is necessary to insist that past time-sphere and past standpoint do not stand over against each other as mutually exclusive opposites. Standpoint is time-sphere (though all time-sphere is not standpoint) rendered, often only transiently and momentarily, more precise, more subjective.

In the following sentence: “Devenu songeur outre mesure, il lisait les Pensées de Pascal, il lisait la sublime Histoire des variations de Bossuet, il lisait Bonald, il lut saint Augustin, il voulut aussi parcourir les œuvres de Swedenborg,” etc., and in the sentence (quoted by Kalepky, Mätzner and Seeger), “Les accusés avaient des défenseurs, ils n’en eurent plus, . . . . on les jugeait individuellement, on les jugea en masse,” the change in tense from imperfect to past definite indicates that the definite standpoint assumed in past time while looking at the action of the first verbs fades for the second into mere time-sphere; and the moment this happens the past definite and not the imperfect becomes the required tense.

But is such a change from a more to a less subjective attitude possible within the same sentence? Some change in attitude is generally admitted, even in sentences like “Il arriva pendant que je parlais,” of which Mr. Armstrong says, “The activity, viewed from a standpoint in the past was occurring, was going on.” In this simple, commonplace sentence we have then, according to Mr. Armstrong’s definitions, first the attitude of a looker-on at a present

1 Franz. St., VII, 11.
3 Balzac, Ursule Mirouet, chap. vii, ed. Ollendorff, 1901, p. 105; example kindly suggested to me by Professor William A. Nitze.
4 Syntax of the French Verb, p. 30.
5 And in “The French Past Definite, Imperfect and Past Indefinite,” Modern Philology, VI, 3: “The imperfect then is the tense used to stress continuation or repetition in the past. . . . Properly speaking, the imperfect is a present in a past. The speaker, instead of looking back into the past as he does when he uses the past definite, transfers himself to the time of action, so that he is a looker-on.”
action, "the standpoint of a contemporary spectator" (p. 30, note), then the attitude "of looking back into the past" ("the past definite," says Mr. Armstrong, p. 35, "is the form which expresses past time"). This "past time" corresponds exactly to what I have called "time-sphere," and the past definites "eurent" and "jugea" in the one sentence, and "arriva" in the other equally express past time-sphere, a "looking backward" on the part of the speaker, while the imperfects equally express a "looking-on" from "a standpoint in the past." If in one sentence we feel that the past definites have inchoative force and practically stress the completion of the preceding imperfects (the tense which is considered incapable of expressing completion!), it is merely a question of context. Nothing more is needed, it seems to me, to account fully for the tense-use in these sentences than to account for it in the commonplace, "Il arriva pendant que je parlais."

Again, the difference between the imperfect and past definite seems to be that the former has specialized its function of "present to a subjective past standpoint," and the latter never has entered into any relation to the past standpoint at all. It remained the typical past time-sphere tense, but also entered into (or, more exactly, stressed its existing relation to) present time, inclusive of present standpoint. In this force it eventually had a most formidable rival in the past indefinite, and it is claimed that in modern French the past definite has completely lost its force of present perfect ("logisches Perfekt"), a force that still survives in Italian and some other Romance languages.\(^1\) Here again it may be well to point out that there is no opposition between the use of the same verb-form as logical perfect (present perfect) and as historical perfect, "pure time-sphere tense." The difference lies only in the greater or lesser stress laid on the subjective attitude of the speaker.\(^2\)

Given the time-sphere (and the past definite is the true past tense of the time-sphere), the present standpoint is implied, weakly subjective compared to the more strongly subjective standpoint, but

\(^1\) For an opposite view, it may be well to quote Mätzer: "Beide Zeitformen stehen auf demselben Boden der Vergangenheit, welche der Redende nicht mehr von seiner Zeitsphäre aus betrachtet, indem er sich vielmehr aus dieser schlechtthin auf den Boden der objektiven Vergangenheit versetzt."

\(^2\) Mätzer, p. 329: "Der Unterschied zwischen absoluten und relativen Tempora ist nicht durch die Natur derselben bedingt; jede Zeitform ist in einem gewissen Sinne relativ."
strongly subjective when compared to mere "Aktionsart." There is no past definite nowadays that has no connection with the actual time of speaking.\(^1\) This time of speaking cannot help to imply, even if it fails to stress "present standpoint." Thus Mr. Armstrong (\textit{Syntax of French Verb}, p. 35) says of the past definite, "It is the true past tense, and represents a looking backward." But a looking backward necessitates a point of vantage from which to look, a "standpoint," and since this standpoint is evidently not the past nor the future one, it can only be the present one. If these views prove acceptable to those competent to judge, the error of Ayer, Lücking, Mätzner, and others in grouping the past definite and imperfect together in their classification of tenses becomes apparent, and its cause can be determined. It consists in a failure to discriminate sufficiently and consistently between "time-sphere" and "standpoint," a failure that cannot help obscuring the difference between the specialization of function of the imperfect and past definite.

Granted—at least for the time being—that the past definite expresses a looking backward (from the less subjective time of speaking, if not from the more subjective present standpoint), how will the action of the verb thus looked back upon appear to the speaker? It seems to me that it is logically impossible to view the act "looked back upon" except as a whole. The tense-force of the past definite is therefore comparable to a frame which of itself must supply beginning and end. But beginning and end of the action imply some duration. Moreover, all other things being equal, the backward look will tend to bring into relief, to \textit{stress} completion. The "Aktionsart" of the verb (easily affected as we have seen by the context) can easily shift the stress, without, however, allowing beginning and end to drop completely out of sight, as is so frequently the case with the imperfect.

Combining the tense-force of the past definite with the possible "Aktionsarten"\(^2\) of the verb, we get the following results:

\(^1\) For an almost "timeless" use the following example taken from Vising, \textit{Franz. St.}, VII, 27, can be quoted, "Le temps détruit toujours les liaisons des méchants."

\(^2\) A comparison with the different "Aktionsarten," as Brugmann specifies them (\textit{Kurze vergleichende Grammatik der indogermanischen Sprachen}, p. 498), may be of interest here. He distinguishes between: (1) punctuelle (momentane, perfektive, aoristische); (2) kursive (durative, imperfective); (3) perfektische Aktion, expressing, "ein Zustand des Subjectes der sich aus einer vorhergehenden Handlung desselben ergeben hat: \textit{er}
A, 1) Momentaneous: La foudre frappa l'arbre.
2) Momentaneous-inchoative: Le coup partit.
3) Momentaneous-perfective: La balle le tua.
4) Durative inchoative: Elle apprit son malheur.
5) Durative:
   (duration unstressed) Charlemagne fut un grand roi.
   (duration stressed) La guerre dura longtemps.
6) Durative perfective: La neige fondit. Les ateliers se vidèrent.
Iterative:
   (durative-perfective) Il lut les cinq volumes des œuvres de cet auteur.
   (momentaneous-inchoative)1 Chaque jour la belle découvrit de nouvelles bontés de ce monstre.

It should be noted that while perfective “Aktionsart” and completed stage are akin, they are not, however, identical. Still an “imperfective” durative verb forced into the “completing” tense-frame of the past definite, will produce a “cumulative” effect similar to the one produced by a perfective verb placed in the imperfect tense. “Le jour après il mourait” conveys completion to our mind just as well as “La guerre dura longtemps”; only in the first case this sense of completion is caused by the “Aktionsart” of the verb itself; in the second, by the tense-force.

When it happens that the essential “Aktionsart” and the tense-force or tense-frame exactly coincide, the “cumulative” result is a peculiar sense of fitness that tends to leave the impression of being the use par excellence of the given tense. Thus the fact that the imperfect does not of itself provide any limiting, completing frame, and is naturally very frequently used with durative, imperfective verbs, has tended to create the impression that to stress duration is

1 Other iterative combinations are undoubtedly possible. The examples given may suffice for the present.
the vital function of the imperfect; the fact that the imperfect represents the action of any verb as present to a past standpoint, and that, therefore, the "Aktionsart" of the verb could of itself supply beginning and end, has been overshadowed.

This "completing frame" that the tense-force of the imperfect fails to supply, is always supplied by the past definite, and the "Aktionsart" of the verb will easily stress beginning and end, and bring them out with great relief. Viewed in this light, it is easy to see that the discordant opinions I have had to record contain all a certain measure of truth, though not the complete truth.

A special examination of the other tenses of the indicative (especially of the pluperfect and past anterior) would be of interest, but it shall not be undertaken here. If the principles I have tried to elucidate are accepted, their application to the other tenses of the indicative is obvious. A summary of the foregoing discussion may not be out of place, however, before returning to its application to elementary teaching.

A clear comprehension of tense-force is greatly helped by a survey of its gradual development. In their most primitive stage verb-forms denoted "Aktionsart" only, and while we have no timeless verb-forms in French today, we still have a timeless use of the present, and very rarely of a past definite. The next stage of development is marked by the verb-forms that denoted time-sphere as well as "Aktionsart," and these verb-forms have given origin to our tenses. A third stage (in point of development, if not in point of time) is reached by intensifying the subjective attitude already initiated by the time-sphere tenses, through the assumption by the mind of the speaker of a definite standpoint in time-sphere, beside the moment of actual speaking.

Tenses as we have them today are a crystallization of "Aktionsart" and time-sphere, which have become indissolubly welded. But the essential "Aktionsart" of individual verbs still has more or less affinity with, or antagonism to, different tenses, and stresses their force or modifies it. In this combination of tense-force with the varied "Aktionsart" of different verbs must be sought the explanation of the apparently contradictory uses of the same tense.

1 Compare example quoted on p. 506, note.

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The following diagram will give a survey of the development of tense-force:

**TIMELESS VERB-FORMS**
(No distinct verb-forms in French)

- Present
- Past definite (very rare)

**TIME-SPHERE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past Definite</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standpoint</td>
<td>Standpoint</td>
<td>Standpoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Diagram given on first page)*

The third stage is the most important in the teaching of modern French, since it is the really living one; it should therefore be presented first and most vividly to beginners. The diagram is, however, capable of expansion, and the introduction of the various tense-uses, due to the essential "Aktionsart" of the verb, is merely a question of space, and the stage of advancement of the students. If I have succeeded in establishing my case, the claim will hold good that at no further stage of advancement would the student of French be called upon to take a different view of the nature of tense-force in French than he was made to take in the first place; and all later necessary distinctions can come as a natural development of the first elementary presentation. Should this elementary presentation really succeed in conveying the truth about the real nature of tense-force without the need of cataloguing long lists of "different uses" of the same tense, perhaps it is not too sanguine to hope, "dass das Wesen der Sache erfasst ist."

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