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TIME AND VIEWPOINT IN NARRATIVE DISCOURSE

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Shifting tenses, viewpoints, and the nature of narrative communication

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Abstract: This paper first develops a theoretically motivated view of narrative as a special form of inferential, cooperative human communication, of the role that the past tense plays in the intersubjective coordination of narrators and readers, viz. that of 'curtailing' the immediate argumentative applicability of the represented situation, and of its relation to viewpoint management. In three case studies, it is subsequently shown how this helps to elucidate certain effects of present and past tense alternations in stories. While these effects are multifaceted and highly text-specific, there is a common denominator of the use of the past tense in the dimension of narrator-reader communication in the narratives. The analysis supports an independently motivated conception of intersubjectivity that assigns a special status to 'coordination with other minds', apart from senders and addressees.

Keywords: past tense, viewpoint, narrative, intersubjectivity, argumentativity, pretend-play

1 Introduction

Narration is a special form of human communication, and one aspect of what makes it special consists in a complex web of connections between the use of the linguistic feature of verbal tense[1] (in languages that exhibit such a grammatical system) and the conceptual organization of time and viewpoints in narratives. Human communication in general is characterized by a combination of two relations: one between the communicators (Sender, Addressee), the other between these two and some object of joint attention, given a joint project (Clark 1996; Tomasello 2008).[2] In the

1 I will only be concerned with tense as a category of finite verbs (including auxiliaries), so with the distinction between 'present' and 'past' tenses.

2 The second dimension is what philosophers call 'intentionality' (not to be confused with 'intention' as aim, purpose) or 'aboutness' (Dennett 1987).

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extensive literature on the effects and functions of (different) tenses and of tense shifting observable in narratives, these are quite commonly characterized with respect to the second type of relations, e.g. as temporal or conceptual distance or proximity between, on the one hand, communicating subjects (narrators, readers) and events, situations and characters in the narrative on the other hand. Consider the two parallel representations of the structure of human communication in Figures 1 and 2, adapted from Verhagen (2005) and Du Bois (2007), respectively.

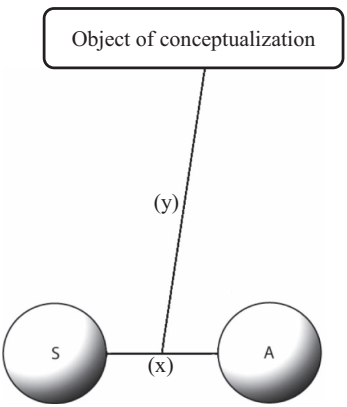

Figure 1: Construal configuration (cf. Verhagen 2005: 7).

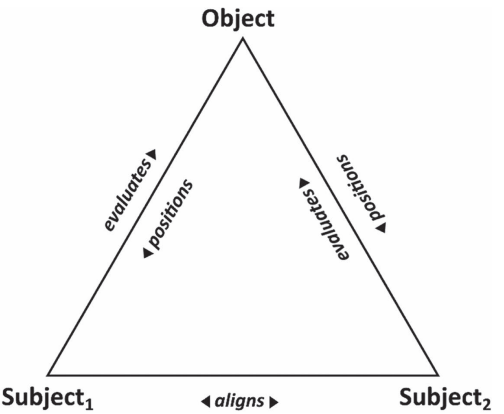

Figure 2: Stance triangle (cf. Du Bois 2007: 163).

Despite a few possible (terminological) differences, such representations display the two dimensions generally assumed to be definitional for human cognition and communication: the horizontal one (x) of intersubjective coordination (Verhagen 2005) or alignment (Du Bois 2007) between the subjects mutually, and the vertical one (y) of construal or evaluation/positioning (Du Bois 2007) between the subjects (individually and jointly) and the relevant object of conceptualization. In terms of this two-dimensional structure, then, it is the vertical, 'perspectivization' dimension that is highlighted when the function of, say, the past tense is characterized as putting the situation being described at some temporal or conceptual distance from the communicative situation of sender (S) and addressee (A) – the "ground". In the same vein, when the effect of an incidental use of the present tense in a mostly past tense (third person) narrative is characterized as an activation of or shift to the viewpoint of the character in the story, it is also this vertical dimension where the effect is located. In general,

it is this relation between subject(s) and object where such functions are primarily located, not the communicative dimension of intersubjective coordination between S (i.e. narrator) and A (i.e. reader).

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, I will show in Section 2 that it is useful to include a specific function for the past tense in the dimension of intersubjective coordination, viz. to 'detach' the relevance of the represented situation from the communicative situation. This turns out to help making sense of the close connection between the past tense and narration. Secondly, I will argue in Section 3 that this function is also closely connected to viewpoint management, based on a new model of intersubjectivity that assigns a special role to third party conceptualizers (others than S and A), effectively adding a third dimension to the standard two-dimensional one as represented in Figures 1 and 2 (van Duijn 2016; van Duijn and Verhagen 2019). Finally, Section 4 shows how the concepts introduced in Sections 2 and 3 help cast light on the effects of alternations of past and present tenses in a few case studies, which in turn provides support for the theoretical points.

2 Cooperative communication, narration, and tense

While human *communication* always involves both dimensions of the construal configuration/stance triangle, it is not necessarily immediately obvious to what extent a specific linguistic *item*, as a *tool* for communication, conventionally *encodes* an operation on (or feature of) one dimension or the other (or both). This observation constituted the point of departure for the critical examination of the semantics and pragmatics of a number of grammatical phenomena in Verhagen (2005), and for the ultimate conclusion that their primary function pertains to the dimension of intersubjective coordination (alignment), rather than to that of the construal of an object of conceptualization. Especially negative expressions and complementation constructions are to be analyzed as signifying an operation on the inferences that an addressee is invited to make on the basis of the utterance produced by the sender, i.e. on the cognitive coordination between S and A. This is not to say that the use of such expressions does not have systematic consequences in the other dimension (such as truth conditions), but it is their role in constructing and updating intersubjectivity that is decisive for their grammatical (combinatorial) and discourse-functional properties (cf. Verhagen 2008 for discussion).

The encoding of intersubjective coordination in several grammatical constructions and lexical items reflects the fundamental pragmatic fact that human language and communication have an inferential character. Without specific marking, the default situation, in accordance with the cooperative nature of human communication, is that the speaker commits herself to a particular attitude towards a proposition, and that the addressee is invited to draw inferences that are relevant to him in the communicative situation. The logical structure of a communicative act is that it provides the addressee with an argument (a premise) for an inference (a conclusion) to be drawn given the common ground of S and A, which provides the second premise required for drawing a conclusion; all language use is, in this sense, argumentative (cf. Verhagen 2015 for a comprehensive account).[3] Sentence negation, complementation, and other constructions of intersubjectivity operate on these inferential, argumentative relations (and thereby often on the construal of the object of conceptualization as well). In a context where it is mutually clear to me and my interlocutor that I am wondering whether to take my umbrella, her saying *It's going to rain* communicates the advice to take the umbrella (it provides me with an argument oriented towards that conclusion); *It's not going to rain* reverses this argumentative orientation and thus constitutes the advice to leave the umbrella at home; *They say that it's going to rain* or *I think it's going to rain* or *Maybe it's going to rain* all still communicate the advice to take the umbrella, but leave room for counter-arguments and my own decision making, by profiling a subjective source and/or the speaker modifying her commitment.

In this argumentative perspective, story-telling is a rather special kind of communication, and might at first sight even appear peculiar. Part of the point of telling a story is that a sender's presentation of an individual event or situation (commonly in a clause), is only directly relevant within the story as such, and should not constitute a ground for the addressee to draw a conclusion that is immediately relevant in any practical sense. A prediction of rain should not lead the addressee to pick up his umbrella when it is part of a story. However, a story as a whole normally does have some import for an ongoing joint project of sender and addressee, making it worth processing its component parts without making inferences to be applied to the addressee's actual situation, apart from processing the story itself. We can now see that it is this special

3 Note that this constitutes a claim about the structure of a communicative *task*, not about the cognitive *processes* used in performing the task (cf. Geurts and Rubio-Fernández 2015). So it does not entail that the process of interpreting an utterance proceeds as a series of steps in a logical deduction. On the contrary, it is highly likely that the psychological processes involved are of a very different kind (Mercier and Sperber 2017).

kind of communicative relevance that is marked by past tense morphology: The individual situation marked with a past tense verb does not provide an argument for a conclusion that would hold in the common ground of the *actual* interlocutors – it can only contribute to one or more actually relevant conclusions indirectly, as part of a larger story. In short, an individual past tense clause is shielded against being used as an actually consequential argument. Put informally, the past tense so to speak tells the addressee: "Process this, but don't take immediate action".

Belonging to the past is, of course, one common kind of situation motivating and justifying such a presentation as argumentatively curtailed, and fictionality is another one. In both cases, the cognitive ability of imagination is the only source for the addressee to construe an object of conceptualization –both historical and fictional situations are, by definition, not perceivable in the communicative situation–, the difference being that historical stories come with a claim of evidence that *is* perceivable (perhaps with some effort). In terms of the relations making up Du Bois' (2007) stance triangle: While the past tense may be quite polyfunctional (or even polysemous) in marking the ways interlocutors evaluate an object and position themselves with respect to it, argumentative curtailment to an imagined domain is a common denominator in the dimension of alignment. I follow Fleischman (1990, ch. 2) in taking the past tense to be a marked category, asymmetrically opposed to the unmarked present tense, but the relevant conceptual domain is not primarily temporal. Whereas a present tense clause presents an *instance* of a situation type (as opposed to the infinitive, which designates a category), the past tense indicates argumentative curtailment and being-imagined on top of that. Given the inherent cooperative and argumentative nature of human communication, this asymmetry makes sense: Applicability in the actual communicative situation is the default, deviations need to be marked (cf. Section 2).

The role of the past tense in preventing an utterance from being directly relevant to the actual interactors is clearly visible in its use in children's discourse in pretend play. Investigators of first language acquisition have been observing for a long time that young children typically use the past tense in their 'stage directions' in setting up and conducting games of make-believe, in several Western European languages (Lodge 1979; Kaper 1980; see also Garvey and Kramer 1989). Schaerlaekens (1977: 159) even claims that this kind of use constitutes children's first use of the past tense in Dutch. An example is the Dutch girl Carmen (3;7) uttering (1) (personal observation, my translation) as a direction to her brother playing (and dressed up as) St Nicholas:

(1) The scooter was the horse.

The following extended example (two children apparently playing *Cinderella*) is taken from Lodge (1979: 365):

(2)	*Speaker*	*Game*	*Directions*
	A:	Where are you going tonight?	You said you were going to the ball
	B:	I'm going to the ball.	
	A:	Is the Prince going too?	
	B:	Yes, and I'm going with him.	You got cross and argued about it
	A:	Oh no you're not — I am.	
	B:	We'll see about that. Mother!	You were mother and she didn't want you to go.
	A:	(in a different voice) You're not going to the ball tonight!	

Assuming a usage-based perspective, this kind of use of the past tense appears to be a (slight) generalization of patterns of use in the children's input. The past tense in adult language use is tied to story-telling and moreover to grammatical environments expressing non-actuality ("If you were the mother…", "Suppose you were the mother…"); apparently this constitutes sufficient evidence for children to associate the past tense with 'not to have consequences in our actual situation', 'imagined', and generalize this somewhat beyond the input itself (Lodge 1979; Kaper 1980 already observed that the general functions of the past tense in adult and in child language are not really different). Notice, moreover, that the *structure* of the discourse that children jointly produce in such games, as illustrated in (2), in fact resembles that of a story with events and background presented by a narrator in the past tense and otherwise a lot of dialogue (direct speech), though not produced by a single voice but with different roles, of characters and 'narrators', distributed over multiple players constructing the story/game together. In terms of the distinction between depiction and description of Clark (2016): With the utterances in the *Game*-column, the children simulate those of Cinderella, her sisters and the mother, and thereby *depict* an imaginary situation – with those in the *Directions*-column, they use symbolic means, in particular the past tense, to *describe* the same imaginary situation to each other.

As we will see below, this role of the past tense in organizing the communicative relationship between sender/narrator and addressee/reader is linked to its role in viewpoint management in narratives, and actually sheds additional

light on the motivations and effects of different kinds of viewpoint organization in which tense is involved.

3 Cooperative communication, 'other minds', and viewpoint

Models as those presented in Section 1 focus on the interaction between speakers and addressees as the prototype of human communication. In fact, they suggest that human communication is exhaustively characterizable in terms of these participants and their joint attention for an object of conceptualization. When applied to narratives, this leads to the consequence that a story character is commonly viewed as included in the object of conceptualization, albeit as an element of a special kind, or else as included in the ground, albeit in a special way (the latter proposal is presented in Verhagen (2005: 104–113), for third person complement taking predicates). However, van Duijn (2016) argues that neither choice does justice to the actual complexity and heterogeneity of the networks of relationships between characters, narrators and readers in stories (both fictional and journalistic). The interaction between several viewpoint expressions, including complementation and 'viewpoint packages' such as *supposedly* and *allegedly*, shows that a more complex view of possible connections between these three types of roles is needed than is in principle possible in the two-dimensional view of communication represented in Figures 1 and 2. As a brief illustration, consider (3), from *The Tiger Moth* by H.E. Bates (1972):

(3) She rested her fork on the edge of her plate and he noticed for the first time that she was wearing no wedding ring. He immediately changed the subject.

The complement taking verb *notice* suggests that we are being told what the male character *observes*, but we actually also get to see part of his reasoning. The *absence* of something cannot be perceived, so the negation in the complement clause indicates an inference, hence a reasoning process, based on the implicit assumption that a woman in the position of the female character might well be married. This has to be constructed by the reader and at the same time attributed to the character, if only to count as an explanation for him changing the subject (as it apparently does).

It is on the basis of these and analogous considerations that van Duijn (2016) and van Duijn and Verhagen (2019) conclude that a two-dimensional conception of human communication as in Figures 1 and 2 is *in principle* too

limited for representing what happens when communication also involves cognitive coordination/alignment with others than S and A, which is characteristic of stories. Hence the proposal to assign a special, separate status to other minds, effectively implying a three-dimensional model, as indicated in Figure 3[4]:

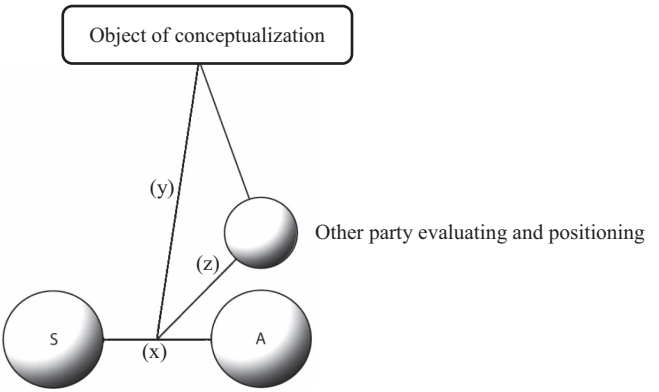

Figure 3: Basic 3D model of intersubjectivity.

In narrative discourse, characters are not objects of conceptualization which sometimes also happen to have thoughts and to communicate with each other in the story world, with their own 'embedded' objects of conceptualization, isolated from evaluation by narrator (S) and reader (A). Rather, there are dynamic networks, connecting narrators', readers', and characters' mental spaces in various ways (Dancygier and Vandelanotte 2016; Dancygier this issue).[5] Characters are thus construed as other parties with the same mental and

4 Du Bois' (2007: 163) definition of stance taking mentions "self and others" as subjects, but the stance triangle itself does not have space for more than two in a single stance taking act. One "other party" may of course be represented as communicating with another one, effectively leading to a replication of the front plane (= Figure 1) in the model, and/or as (recursively) representing other minds itself (cf. van Duijn and Verhagen 2019), but this does not add to the dimensionality of the configuration. The addition of dimension (z) is the crucial step differentiating this model from the other ones.

5 The framework of mental space theory employed by these kinds of approaches has been a source of inspiration for the 3D-model. The explicit recognition of the separate dimension for third-party subjects is an innovation that allows for a more straightforward generalization over seemingly distinct phenomena, including cross-linguistic similarities and differences, and for a simpler, more transparent structural representation. See van Duijn and Verhagen (2019) for discussion.

communicative abilities as S and A, with whom S and A are aligning with respect to the same object of conceptualization. When a character in a story is taking a stance, the narrator and reader are, more or less indirectly, taking a *related* stance with respect to the same object as well. As we saw in narrative fragment (3), for example, the narrator tells the reader that the female character is not married *by* aligning with the observations and reasoning processes of the male character.

How does the intersubjective function of the past tense relate to this general viewpoint structure? The answer is that in a significant range of contexts, the past tense's role of limiting the argumentative relevance of a clause in the *ground* serves as a signal for its relevance for another party in another situation, i.e. for activating (or keeping activated) the third dimension of the model in Figure 3. In itself, the past tense does not necessarily introduce a viewpoint distinct from that of S and A. For example, when I say *An hour ago it was still raining* to my fellow runners at the start of an outdoor exercise, I only invite them to imagine a situation of rain without consequences for our actual situation, not necessarily as consequential for anyone else.[6] But when there is another mind available in the discourse, and the past tense is used, then it is naturally interpreted as marking that party's viewpoint. The following example from Declerck (2003: 86) illustrates this well:

(4) My parents did not join the climbing party yesterday because the mountain was too steep for them

As Declerck notes, the effect of the past tense in the *because* clause is precisely that it expresses the assessment of the steepness of the mountain from the point of view of the speaker's parents, rather than her own evaluation (or a generic one), which would be associated with the present tense (which is in itself perfectly possible). The relevant third party does not have to be in any way syntactically connected to the tensed clause; it is sufficient if it is available in the context. When a newsreader on Dutch TV once uttered (5) (cf. Onrust et al. 1993: 71), he was accused of uncritically accepting the spokesman's claim, as he

6 One might argue that it invites the addressee to imagine the perspective of someone in this non-actual situation ('imagine we would have started an hour earlier!'), which would be explicitly expressed in the negated present tense clause *It is not raining anymore*. I would claim, however, that such a construal is at most optional and context dependent for the past tense clause, but this is, admittedly, hard to assess for an isolated case.

did not explicitly restrict the validity of the second statement to the latter's point of view, as would have been the case with the use of the past tense. This example also clearly shows how argumentative curtailment contributes to the management of relations *between* viewpoints (here between the spokesman and the newsreader/viewers): It is certainly possible, in fact natural, to interpret the spokesman as the source of the information in the second sentence in (5) – so his point of view can be *present* in both the present and the past tense version of the second sentence – but the problem is that its argumentative relevance is not limited to the story about the press conference that the newsreader is telling the viewers.

(5) The junta's spokesman told the journalists at the press conference that Gorbatsjov was ill. The nature of his disease is unclear.

Pretend-play is another type of context that involves viewpoints beyond those of S and A (Clark 2016), and thus displays the three-dimensional conceptual structure of Figure 3. Indeed, the connection between argumentative curtailment by the past tense and viewpoint is also clearly visible in the use of the past tense here: A stage-direction like *You got cross*... in (2) obviously invokes the viewpoint of the mother-figure in the game.

Thus, when a conceptual configuration with the structure of Figure 3 is activated and the past tense is used, then this signals the primary relevance of the viewpoint of a character. This effect is a consequence of the role of the past tense to curtail the argumentative relevance of the clause in the intersubjective coordination of narrator and addressee, limiting it to an imagined situation. These theoretical considerations produce some specific expectations about possible effects of tense use, in particular tense shifting and tense alternation in narratives:

– The use of the past tense allows for a clear distinction between a narrative as an account of events involving characters and as communication (between narrator and addressee) – the present tense is available for passages highlighting the latter dimension, and setting it apart from the story. In terms of Figure 3: with the past tense, the difference between the ground (the coordination relation of S and A) and the relation to other minds (the third dimension) is strongly profiled. Especially argumentative moves in the ground, in the perspective of narrator and readers, can be straightforwardly distinguished from the perspective of story characters, through the use of the present tense.

– Given the analysis of the present tense as lacking the kind of marking that the past tense provides and not necessarily marking the opposite, it is certainly possible to tell a story entirely in the present tense. But the difference between narrative as communication and as an account of events will in general be less clear-cut, and cannot be organized in the same way. Especially argumentative moves will generally involve both narrator/reader and characters' viewpoints.

We will now explore these consequences, and the concrete ways they take shape in specific contexts, in three case studies of Dutch narratives.

4 Tense shifting and narrative communication

1The first two case studies are short ones demonstrating interactions of tense choice with another viewpoint construction. The third analysis concerns a first person narrative that exhibits a few shifts from present to past tense and back again. In each of the case studies, the totality of effects in which tense choice is involved, is specific to the story at hand, but an element of commonality is the relevance of acknowledging a special role for tense marking in the dimension of narrator-reader communication and secondarily, in the management of relations between their viewpoints and those of third parties.

4.1 Argumentative language in a past tense story

The first case concerns the short novella *De Val* ("The Fall", 1983) by the Dutch author Marga Minco, who was awarded the P. C. Hooft-prize, the main literary prize in The Netherlands, for her complete works in 2019. It is a third person narrative that is basically told in the past tense, in line with the idea that this is 'natural' for fiction (Fleischman 1990; see Fludernik 2003: 121–123 for an overview of relevant considerations and insightful discussion). However, Daalder and Verhagen (1993) observe that there are a few passages where the present tense plays a significant role. For example, the novella starts as follows[7]:

7 The original texts of all Dutch fragments in this paper are provided in the appendix. Translations are mine, except the one in (7).

(6) It is certain that the two servicemen of the public works department stopped off at the Salamander cafe first thing that Thursday morning, rather than going straight from the central boiler house to the location of their job as usual. It had been freezing that night [...].

It may be that they thought it was still too cold or too dark for the job they had to do. It is also possible that it was simply due to the reaction of Baltus, who sat behind the wheel and stepped on the brake instinctively when he saw the neon lights above the counter flash on just as they drove by the cafe.

The first sentence of the first paragraph consists of a matrix clause with an epistemic modal expression (*certain*) in the present tense and a complement clause in the past tense.[8] The first two sentences of the second paragraph repeat this (*It may be, It is also possible*), creating a pattern. An immediate effect is that readers 'feel' from the very beginning that this story is not going to end well: These expressions evoke the style of a formal report on a (judicial) investigation that is usually initiated after an accident or disaster. Some other brief passages in the present tense (some but not all with the same complementation constructions as in [6]) evoke the same kind of non-fictional texts from a judicial environment, such as a description of the working of the city heating system in the style of an expert report (see Daalder and Verhagen 1993 for details). Ultimately, these intrusions of argumentative discourse in significant parts of the generally fictional story contribute, at the level of the meaning of the text as a whole, to the notion that the substantial role of coincidence in human affairs (as illustrated by the story events) does not remove the need to establish responsibility and guilt. What is, moreover, special about this particular presentation, is that this message is not presented in separate statements by the narrator, but achieved by means of grammatical choices in clauses that contribute to the development of the story as such.

Technically, the pattern described here is a case of "intermittent use of the present tense in a past tense context" (Fludernik 2003: 126), but functionally it does not constitute a case of the so-called historical present, as the relevant clauses do not designate events that move the temporal development of the narrated situation forward. The present approach, by contrast, provides a solid basis for the above observations: The role of the past tense in the

8 Cf. Verhagen (2005: 131–140) for a demonstration that impersonal complementation constructions (*It is true/appropriate/ ... that ...*), like personal ones (*He knows/says/believes/ ... that ...*), are perspectival operators, evoking the idea of *some* mind performing an epistemic or evaluative assessment.

intersubjectivity dimension consists in marking a situation as argumentatively limited to the story and the omission of this kind of marking through the use of the present tense at some significant points in this story constitutes a signal that important aspects of the events are in fact argumentatively relevant beyond the story, in the actual world of the readers. In terms of the relations in Figure 3: The majority of past tense clauses have no immediate argumentative relevance on the x-axis, they profile the z-axis and the third parties' construal of the object of conceptualization. But a few ones that occur at significant points in the story contrast with this because of their present tense, and thus allow a construal as pertaining to the x-axis, inviting inferences about real world implications of the narrated events.

4.2 Evaluative discourse in a present tense story

Another case of interaction between the choice of tense and the use of (impersonal) complementation can be found in Jan Arends' *Het ontbijt*, 'The breakfast' (1972), a well-known and regularly reprinted Dutch short story about an old man in a psychiatric asylum who tries to escape by turning into a monkey (or so the story suggests...). This is the start of a paragraph just after the opening of the story (I quote the translation by Richard Huijing, 1993).

(7) It's September the first, 1968. But Mr. Koopman is still asleep. He's seventy-nine years old now. It is true that Mr. Koopman is the most difficult gentleman in the home. He's a little senile. But that doesn't alter the fact that he is contrary in general. He's bad at obeying and cannot stay in bed at night. When the other gentlemen are already asleep, he's still scuttling about the ward, turning over ashtrays still standing there and wastepaper baskets. (Arends 1972)

The narrator's voice and subjectivity are clearly present in this fragment, as there is explicit evaluation of Mr Koopman's behaviour and character (*difficult, contrary, bad at obeying, scuttling about the ward*). Besides these lexical signals, the two instances of the complementation construction also contribute to this evaluating attitude: *It is true that..., that doesn't alter the fact that...*. These expressions closely resemble the complementation cases found in *De Val*, but unlike *De Val*, this story is entirely told in the present tense (what Fludernik 2003 labels the "narrative present"), and according to the approach developed here, the *relationship* between the viewpoints in the ground (along the x-axis of Figure 3) and the third party viewpoint (along the z-axis) is different.

In Arends' present tense story, there is no clear distinction between a narrator presenting events and someone presenting evaluations, i.e. with the complementation construction. The instances of this construction can be taken to express judgments by the same subject of conceptualization who is responsible for the other evaluative statements and for telling the story. When we change the tense of this fragment to past while maintaining everything else, an interesting change occurs in the interpretation of the complementation constructs[9]:

(8) It was September the first, 1968. But Mr. Koopman was still asleep. He was seventy-nine years old now. It was true that Mr. Koopman was the most difficult gentleman in the home. He was a little senile. But that didn't alter the fact that he was contrary in general. He was bad at obeying and could not stay in bed at night. When the other gentlemen were already asleep, he was still scuttling about the ward, turning over ashtrays still standing there and wastepaper baskets.

Here, the construal of a single subject responsible for both narration and evaluation is not available, due to the combination of the past tense with a construction evoking a viewpoint (complementation). As we saw above in connection with (4) from Declerck (2003) and (5), a clause in the past tense marks another viewpoint than that of the actual communicators when a third party is available. But in view of the content, the character Mr Koopman is clearly the *object* of the evaluation, so we are invited to construe yet another subject of conceptualization who engages in the argumentation ("true... but does not alter...") within the story – perhaps a character who has not (yet) been introduced, or a story counterpart of the narrator (as a first person character)? In order to maintain the attribution of these considerations to the narrator, we would have to keep the present tense of (7) in the matrix clauses of (8) as indicated by the underlining in (9), creating a pattern much like the one in the story discussed in Section 4.1:

(9) It was September the first, 1968. But Mr. Koopman was still asleep. He was seventy-nine years old now. It <u>is</u> true that Mr. Koopman was the most difficult gentleman in the home. He was a little senile. But that <u>does</u>n't alter the fact that he was contrary in general. ...

9 The deictic *now* is used in the third sentence of both (7) and (8) as change of tense does not change its reference (September 1, 1968). I leave open the question if it might nevertheless participate in viewpoint management in some way. Cf. Dancygier (this issue) on proximal (and distal) deictics in interaction with other elements in the narrative 'viewpoint network'.

We see an effect of the use of tense that is not sufficiently characterized by the distinction between "narrative past" and "narrative present", reinforcing the idea that such effects are a matter of interaction between tense and other meaningful elements of the text (cf. Sanders and Van Krieken this issue), and thus more variable than a single dimension of discourse interpretation (say, something like 'less distance to the story events'; cf. Nijk this issue, for other arguments). The other type of meaningful elements in this case is that of complementation, analysed as performing an operation (specified by the lexical semantics of the matrix clause) on the argumentative value of the complement clause. The present approach attributes a basic function to the past tense on the x-axis of Figure 3 (limiting argumentative relevance), and a particular role in viewpoint management in narratives related to that function on the z-axis, and it is because of this that it can readily account for different effects of the interaction of tense and complementation as we observed here.

4.3 Repeated tense alternation

Whereas the two narratives discussed so far both exhibit a consistent overall pattern of tense use (past in the first, present in the second case), it is also possible for tenses to alternate in the same story in a way that does not clearly fit the following three-way classification described by Fludernik (2003: 124), and that is not sufficiently characterized in terms of the distinctions used either:

1. *deictic present* (referring to the narrator's and/or the reader's here-and-now, deictically and temporally interrupting the telling of the story),
2. *historical present* (brief shifts from the past tense into the present, to performatively highlight major junctures of the narrative or index episode beginnings or climaxes),
3. *narrative present* (consistent use of the present tense in the entire text, or at least long passages).

In fact, Fludernik's (2003) own analysis of "odd" tense alternations in Ondaatje's *The English Patient* is intended as a demonstration of the fact that the specifics of a single narrative text challenge attempts to assign patterns of tense alternations to such a limited number of functional types.[10] The

10 Fludernik (2003: 125) characterizes this as "the hazards of theorizing". I prefer to label it the hazards of "typologizing", i.e. a wrong *kind* of theorizing. See also the conclusion.

observations in this paper may be seen as further support for this general point; with a specific theoretical addition, viz. that tense and tense alternations play a systematic role in managing a narrative as a form of communication, i.e. as cognitive coordination between (the viewpoints of) speakers/narrators, addressees, and other minds.

The story *Tsjip* (1934) by the Flemish author Willem Elsschot (not translated into English) is about the events that lead up to the narrator's daughter getting married, moving to Poland, giving birth to a son *Jan*¸ and the narrator's first interactions with his first grandchild. The book starts with a two page dedication, with the narrator explaining, in an apologetic way, why he is leaving his family: He feels he simply *has* to undertake this journey (a metaphor for writing the story). Naturally, this is all in the present tense, and the reader is regularly addressed. When the actual story starts, the first person nature of the dedication is actually continued (so we have a first person narrative), as well as the use of the present tense. The reader is also regularly addressed in these initial pages of the story. In a sense, the story might be said not to have started, as no subsequent events are being told.[11] Still, the difference with the dedication is that the narrator/character's home *situation* at the start of the sequence of events is being sketched. There is a wife, a younger son, an older daughter, and a male Polish student from the same school as the daughter, who regularly visits, officially to help the daughter with economics, while she is helping him with French – but it has gradually become clear that the two are romantically involved. This (aspectually) non-dynamic situation at some point turns into the conclusion that "I" will really have to undertake some action, and speak to the Polish student about his plans. And then, a few pages after the start of the story, the first *past tense* sentences appear, *narrating* rather than describing a visit of the protagonist's father. A few examples of such sentences[12]:

(10) a. First he showed me a leaflet of the cinema that somebody had put into his hands along the way, finally found the departmental form that cut off his life line, and asked what he should do. (p.645)
b. Saying he was right, I managed to get him to the front door, when he suddenly turned around on his bandy legs. (p.646)

11 There are only some references to events, in the present perfect, thus not narrated but embedded, in a summary way, in the situation being described; cf. Onrust et al. (1993: 73–78) on discourse functions of the present perfect in Dutch.

12 Page references are to the first publication of the story in the journal *Forum*, which has been published online at http://dbnl.nl/tekst/elss001tsji01_01/.

However, these past tense events are interspersed with comments and evaluations in the present tense, very often with some irony or cynicism; for example, (10)a is immediately followed by:

(11) As he is too old to throw bombs, I gave him the advice to sell the slum and booze away the money. In that way, he'll certainly get his pension back. But he is stubborn... (p.645)

The actual meeting between the Polish student and the protagonist in which the student asks permission to marry the daughter, is also narrated in the past tense, with interspersed present tense comments. Thus the construal of a kind of private, intimate relationship between reader and narrator is maintained, while the details of the specific events are clearly distinguishable. There is an observable difference between the events in which the first person character participates, and the way these events are evaluated in (humorous) communication with the reader by the first person narrator – thus assessing the narrator's character and effectively inviting the reader to assess it as well. This pattern is continued in the narration of a meeting of the protagonist with his wife. But halfway through, this interaction is presented in the following way.

(12) I told her [...] that the foreigner had asked for Adele's hand and that I wanted to know if she approved of the marriage. It really caught her, so she sat down and I had to relate the whole thing in the minutest detail.
– And what did you say to him in response?'
– That I had to talk about it with you and Adele.'
She looks at the floor and is thinking intensely. That's the way officials in Foreign Affairs must be thinking when war threatens. [...]
– Didn't you ask...'
She does not continue. She probably understands that I didn't ask anything, nothing at all. That I am too much of a slob to ask anything whatsoever in a situation like this.
I fill a pipe, but feel quite awkward when I turn my back to her to light it. (p.648)

Before the question and answer turns (presented directly, without reporting clauses), the past tense is used for presenting the events, but after them, the present tense is used for both the events (the actions of the characters) and the comments by the narrator. Now there is no longer a distinction between the I-protagonist's responses to the events as they happen, and the I-narrator who communicates them to the reader – they blend completely. That is to say: until

an opportunity arises to keep them apart again. As the events of the story extend over a considerable amount of time, there are some periods of relative stasis in which nothing really crucial happens, and which are just summarized when new developments occur. These temporal gaps offer a natural opportunity for a 'restart' – giving the narration a diary-like character – and then we see basically the same pattern repeated.[13]

A major instance can be found in episodes X-XII. These report on a "lengthy period", explicitly announced as such, of waiting while the future son-in-law is in Poland. The starting event, a visit by two aunts who don't really believe the relationship to be lasting, is narrated in the present tense, continuing the existing pattern. But episode XI reports on the consideration of several possibilities to cheer up the daughter who is suffering from the absence of her fiancé and from uncertainty as the boy's father has not (yet) approved of the marriage. One possibility is music as the daughter is a good piano player, but it is hard to get her to play. On one occasion, referred to as "last week", with a few friends visiting, she gives in to her father's request, and what happens then is narrated in the past tense, as well as a conversation between father and daughter "yesterday afternoon". Interestingly, it is thus precisely a shift to the *past* tense, with a focus on details, that signals to the reader that we are starting another important episode. The crucial point for the overall structure of the story is that at the end of episode XI, the distinction between I-narrator and I-protagonist has been re-established.

Episode XII initially continues the past tense: When returning home, the I-protagonist heard his daughter loudly singing a happy song:

(13) I carefully took off my coat, kept quiet for a while, and then I heard a discussion going on in the living room between Adele, Ida, and my wife.
– Please, Adele, in white. Then I'll carry the train', Ida begs.
– That depends whether his parents are coming or not', my wife says.
'If they come, you'll have to have a church wedding, and then it is practically unavoidable. But if they don't, [..]. Ask Bennek how he feels about it.'
– OK, mummy dear', Adele sings.
What might be going on? It looks like a rehearsal for a musical comedy.
I have been standing in the living room for quite a while before Ida notices me.
– God, here's dad' she shouts. (p.865/6)

13 Janzen (this issue, esp. section 6) discusses highly similar conceptual phenomena in an ASL story, not supported by verbal tense (which is absent from ASL) but by body partitioning and gaze direction.

As in (12), the report of a conversation (an overheard one, with qualifications by the narrator: 'begging', 'singing') is used to establish the shift from event narration in the past tense to narration in the present tense. From this point onwards, again, the roles of I-protagonist and I-narrator are blended in the narration of the next series of consecutive events.

There is a natural connection between the viewpoint organization and the temporal structure of the story, with periods of important events alternating with some less eventful periods and moments of contemplation: The latter allow for a clear distinction between the narrative as communication between narrator and reader on the one hand and as representation of events on the other, whereas the former characteristically exhibit a blend of these two viewpoints. This connection is confirmed in an interesting way by another story by the same author, *Het dwaallicht* ('The will-o'-the-wisp', 1946). Unlike *Tsjip*, this tells the events of a single evening, and it is entirely narrated in the present tense. It is significant that Dutch narratologists Van Boven and Dorleijn (2013: 222–223) use precisely this story as a demonstration of a first person narrative in which the narrative and experiential *I* appear to be "fused with one another". They mention that it is natural for such a story to be entirely told in the present tense, "as if everything is happening *now*", but the analysis of *Tsjip* above shows that the internal temporal structure of the story is also a relevant dimension.

Returning to the three functional types of present tense use listed by Fludernik (2003) at the beginning of this section, we may conclude that none of them can characterize tense use in this story adequately. As the present tense is used for the largest part of the narrative, "narrative present" may seem the proper label, but then we have no way to account for the tense shifts: these involve relatively brief stretches of text, but the label "historical present" does not apply as the shifts are in the 'wrong' direction, from present to past. Moreover, both of these categorizations would ignore characteristics of the present tense narrative that justify the label "deictic present", especially that of the continuous evaluation of the narrator's behaviour, experiences, and character; but the label cannot apply in the definition given, because in this story, the evaluation is an integral part of the story-telling, and does not (deictically or temporally) interrupt it.

The present approach, in contrast, does allow for an adequate account of what is going on in this *specific* story, based on a *general* understanding of the role of the past tense: as an operator limiting argumentative relevance along the x-axis of Figure 3 with a role in viewpoint construction along the z-axis in the case of narrative. The text does not really start as a narrative, but as 'straightforward' communication between (implied) author and reader, about the author's state of mind motivating the telling of a story, as well as the negative consequences for his family life. This evaluative discourse actually continuous after

the start the narrative, now with reference to the situation the author found himself in at the beginning of the sequence of events that ultimately would lead to the strong motivation to tell a story. Only when a specific event is going to be narrated in detail does the tense of the relevant clauses shift to past, resulting in the z-axis being profiled, explicitly marked as distinct from the x-axis; these clauses alternate with evaluating clauses still in the present tense, so for these stretches of text, the label "deictic present" would more or less fit, although this would miss that they simply continue the dominant present tense use of the story up to this point. While the alternation is observable, it suggests awareness of the distinction between I-character and I-narrator, but quite soon after this shift to the past, the distinction is no longer maintained, and the narrated events also become a source for immediate evaluation of the narrator. Thus, the effect of 'fusion' of narrative and experiential *I* as Boven and Dorleijn (2013) call it, does not consist in –at the very least, is more than– an impression of 'everything happening now'; in this story, it consists in the 'deprofiling' of the z-axis of the 3D-model of Figure 3, observable in shifts from past to present tense narration, that is consistent with the relatively high degree of activation of the x-axis, the intersubjectivity of narrator and reader as participants in narrative communication, that determines the character of the text from the start.

5 Summary and conclusion

In this paper, I first developed the theoretical idea first proposed in van Duijn (2016) that a proper characterization of intersubjective, inferential communication that includes narrative, has to assign a separate status to third party conceptualizers ('other minds'), which implies a three-dimensional structure of the concept of intersubjectivity. This framework allows us to recognize a communicative function of the past tense that is otherwise hard to state, that is related to its being specifically associated with narrative, and that can still be considered a *general* function of this tense form. Schematically:

- Given the cooperative nature of human communication, communicating an event to an addressee normally serves to provide the addressee with reasons to infer a conclusion that is directly relevant to him in the communicative situation, the 'ground' (this is the argumentative theory of language use, Verhagen 2005).
- The use of the past tense in a clause signals that this immediate argumentative relevance does not apply to the situation being represented; features of the situation (as an object of conceptualization) that may justify this

cancellation of argumentative relevance are its belonging to the real past, or its fictional or hypothetical status.
- Given that the event is being communicated, it has to have some *other* kind of relevance, i.e. in another framework which, as a whole, *is* relevant to the communication participants; a typical framework is that of pretend-play, or a narrative (fictional or historical).
- A narrative conceptually implies the relevance of other minds and their viewpoints, distinct from the actual communication participants; thus a narrative context at the same time provides justification for limiting the relevance of a past tense clause along the x-axis of the 3D-model, and for its profiling the relation to a character's viewpoint, along the z-axis.

In the second part of this paper (Section 4), this theoretical analysis was applied in three case studies investigating the interaction between the use of tense, in particular alternation of present and past tenses, and other lexical and grammatical elements. In each case, the interpretive effects are specific to the story being investigated, but at the same time they can be insightfully related to the supposed general function of the past tense in the domain of intersubjectivity. These analyses not only avoid the problems of more traditional approaches that distinguish a limited number of functions of tense use in narratives (such as 'historical present' or 'narrative present'), the very fact that they can be successfully formulated in terms of the theory proposed here, also supports the theory. On an even more general level, this result constitutes a contribution to a theoretical understanding how a linguistic sign (in this case a grammatical one), as a form associated with a particular function, can contribute to an endless variety of interpretations in specific instances of use.

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Appendix: Original Dutch fragments

Minco (1983)

(6) Het staat vast dat de twee monteurs van gemeentewerken zich die donderdagochtend niet zoals anders regelrecht van het centraal ketelhuis naar

hun werk begaven, maar onderweg eerst aanlegden bij De Salamander. 's Nachts had het flink gevroren,[...].

Het kan zijn dat ze het nog te koud of te donker vonden voor het karwei dat ze moesten uitvoeren; het is ook mogelijk dat het kwam door de reactie van Baltus, die achter het stuur zat en als vanzelf op zijn rem trapte toen hij bij het passeren van het koffiehuis de tl-buizen boven de toog zag aanflitsen.

Arends (1972)

(7) Het is 1 september 1968. Maar mijnheer Koopman slaapt nog. Hij is nu 79 jaar. Het is waar dat mijnheer Koopman de lastigste heer van het huis is. Hij is licht dement. Maar dat neemt niet weg dat hij zich over het algemeen dwars gedraagt. Hij gehoorzaamt slecht en kan 's avonds niet in bed blijven. Als de andere heren al slapen, scharrelt hij nog over de zaal en keert asbakken, die er nog staan, en prullenmanden om.

Elsschot (1934)

(10) a. Eerst toonde hij mij een strooibiljet van een bioscoop dat ze hem onderweg in de hand hadden gestopt, vond eindelijk het ministerieel formulier dat zijn levensader afsneed en vroeg wat hij doen moest.
b. En hem gelijk gevend kreeg ik hem tot aan de straatdeur, toen hij zich plotseling op zijn kromme pikkels omkeerde.

(11) Daar hij te oud is om bommen te gooien, gaf ik hem den raad zijn krot te verkoopen en 't geld op te zuipen. Hij krijgt zijn pensioen dan zeker terug. Maar hij is koppig...

(12) Ik zei nu maar dat de vreemdeling de hand van Adele gevraagd had en dat ik wilde weten of zij in dat huwelijk toestemde.
Het pakte haar zóó dat zij ging zitten en toen moest ik van 't gebeurde verslag geven tot op den draad.
– En wat heb je geantwoord?'.
– Dat ik er met jou en Adele moest over spreken.'
Zij kijkt naar den grond en denkt intens. Zóó moet op Buitenlandsche Zaken nagedacht worden als er oorlog dreigt. [...]

– Heb je dan niet gevraagd…'
Zij gaat niet verder. Zeker begrijpt zij dat ik niets gevraagd heb, heelemaal niets. Dat ik te vodachtig ben om in zoo'n geval wat dan ook te vragen. Ik stop een pijp maar voel mij niets op mijn gemak als ik haar den rug toekeer om ze op te steken.

(13) Ik trok voorzichtig mijn jas uit en hield mij dan even koest, waarop ik hoorde dat er in de huiskamer een discussie aan den gang was tusschen Adele, Ida en mijn vrouw.
– Toe nou, Adele, in 't wit. Dan zal ik je sleep dragen' smeekt Ida.
– Dat hangt er van af of zijn ouders komen of niet' zegt mijn vrouw.
'Komen zij, dan moet je in de kerk trouwen en dan kan het haast niet anders. Maar komen zij niet […]. Vraag eens aan Bennek wat hij er van denkt.'
– Goed, moederlief' zingt Adele.
Wat mag er aan de hand zijn? 't Lijkt wel een repetitie van een operette. Ik sta al een tijd in de huiskamer voor dat Ida mij in de gaten krijgt.
– God, daar is Pa' roept zij.

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