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The simple form again:
an analysis of direction-giving and related uses[☆]

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Abstract

The use of the simple form in English to give directions (e.g. You *take* the first turning on the left ...) has been categorized variously as future, habit, imaginative and imperative. These uses are compared on the basis of the grammatical representation of duration, of 'event time', inherent in each. It is shown that in direction-giving event time is seen as prospective and so differs from that found in habit, future and other uses commonly classified as stative or dynamic. This prospective representation of event time is also found in *either/or* sentences, in commands, in certain uses of the past tense and in several other types of usage. It is seen to stem from the same meaning potential of the simple form that gives rise to stative and dynamic uses.

1. Introduction

The majority of the simple form's uses have long been catalogued insofar as their expressive effect is concerned and analyzed from the point of view of how the duration of their event is represented. This representation of duration, or 'event time' as it will be called here, is often alluded to in terms of the two most common expressive effects found in discourse with the simple form: dynamic and stative. Because this classification of uses has been so widely accepted and applied, there is little possibility of a hitherto unnoticed fact of usage leading us to a clearer view of the form in itself, on the level of the system, of the means of grammatical representation in tongue. For that reason it is of some interest to find a certain hesitation in classifying a use, even though it may be a relatively infrequent one. Here I would like to examine one such use and follow up some of the avenues of reflection it gives rise to in the light of what is already known of the simple form in English.

[☆] I wish to thank an anonymous reader for a number of pertinent criticisms and suggestions.

The approach adopted here, Guillaume's theory of the psychomechanics of language, postulates that any grammatical morpheme like the simple form has a systemic meaning potential in tongue which is one: "Its oneness is absolute" (Guillaume, 1984: 97). Provided this "invariable condition of representation" on the level of the system is respected, the potential meaning can be diversely actualized on the word level to meet the varying needs of expression in discourse. To hypothesize this underlying systemic meaning, numerous uses of the simple form have been observed and their expressive effect on the level of the sentence analyzed in order to discern the way event time is represented in the verb. This has led to characterizing the potential meaning of the simple form as the means for representing the event time required for all development involved in the event, and this in any use whether in the past or non-past of the indicative, in the subjunctive or the infinitive. It has been shown that dynamic and stative uses of the simple form arise from actualizing this hypothesized representational potential in two different ways. On the other hand, it is not clear how verbs in sentences expressing direction-giving relate to these two types of use; they may well provide data establishing a third way of representing event time, or even call into question the potential meaning itself. The purpose of the present article therefore is to see if this use provides counter-evidence for the hypothesized unity of the simple form and ultimately to resolve the problem of polysemy posed by its diverse uses.

2. Direction-giving

The problem case is brought up in Leech (1987: 17), where two examples are presented in the section 'Simple present: imaginary uses' as a "special use ... hard to classify":

- (1) You *test* an air-leak by disconnecting the delivery pipe at the carburettor and pumping the fuel into a container.
- (2) You *take* the first turning on the left past the police station, then you *cross* a bridge, and *bear* right until you reach the Public Library.

Leech first suggests a habitual reading for both examples, but then seems to prefer a different interpretation:

"In each of these cases, it is possible to interpret the sequence of events iteratively; for instance, one might preface the set of street directions: *Every time you want to get to the library* (understanding you as an impersonal pronoun equivalent to *one*). On the other hand, perhaps a more plausible interpretation is that of the 'imaginary present': the person describing the set of events envisages them as happening now, before his mind's eye, while he speaks."

The same two examples are discussed in a note to the section 'Simple present referring to the future' in Quirk et al. (1985: 182-183):

"The use of the simple present in directions with a 2nd person subject might be considered a case of the present tense referring to the future ... However, these may more justly be taken as examples of the habitual present ..., the *you* being interpreted impersonally, as equivalent to generic *one* ..."

According to Palmer (1987: 66), in examples like (2) "There is futurity, but no prediction", whereas for Wekker (1976: 150) "in meaning, this construction comes very close to being a command or an instruction". Leech (loc. cit.), on the other hand, points out a phonetic distinction between this use and the imperative use:

"Notice that there is a difference between the *you*+Present Tense construction illustrated above and the *you*+Imperative construction of *You leave this to me*, *You mind your own business*, etc. *You* preceding an Imperative receives sentence stress, (*You* 'mind) whereas normally as subject of a finite verb it does not."

Habit, 'imaginary' use, futurity, command – clearly there is no settled opinion about how to classify these examples for expressive effect on the level of the sentence. It will not be possible to analyze satisfactorily the representation of event time on the level of the verb which these uses embody until this problem of interpretation is solved since, as was pointed out in Hirtle and Curat (1986: 64), the expressive effect of a sentence constitutes the observational data on which reflection aimed at discerning the grammatical meaning of a word must be based. This is why we must first devote some attention to pinpointing what exactly such uses express.

2.1. Direction-giving compared with quite different uses

In order to sort out the impressions involved here and get a clearer view of this 'direction-giving' use, it will be useful to situate the above attempts to deal with it by first mentioning certain uses of the simple form which are not compared with it, presumably because they are felt to be so different that they have little in common with giving directions. For example, well known uses of the simple non-past like:

- (3) ... and then, in *walks* my boss. (the historic present)
- (4) He *shoots*, he *scores!* (commentaries of rapid actions)
- (5) I *congratulate* you. (performative)

are never mentioned in this connection, and for good reason. In each of these uses, involving respectively an action already realized, an action just realized or an action realized as one speaks; the simple form represents the event as really taking place, as actualized from beginning to end, whereas in giving directions the event is, by definition, not carried out at the moment of speech. Granted this, one might have expected some attempt to compare our use with examples like:

- (6) Here *comes* the teacher!
- (7) I *beat* three egg whites and *fold* them into the mixture.

both of which express events whose realization is not complete at the moment of speaking. Since no such comparison is found, it is useful to see why: although the announcing of an expected occurrence (6) and the pattern of a recipe demonstration (7) often evoke events whose realization extends beyond the moment of speech, both require at least the beginning of the event to be realized in the present of speech; and

the impression on the part of the speaker that its continued accomplishment through to its end is assured, whereas in direction-giving even the beginning of the event is yet to be realized and there is no guarantee the subject will carry it out.

All of this goes to show that the way the speaker represents event time expressed by the simple form in direction-giving is quite different from that found in (3) to (7) which, as pointed out elsewhere (Hirtle, 1967: 36-41; 1987: 87-93) depicts the development of the event throughout its various phases right to its end, producing what is frequently called a dynamic or, to use a more general term, 'metaphase' event. This representation of event time in the simple form – an abstract mental representation like any other grammatical representation – can be diagrammed as in Fig. 1, where B stands for the beginning of the event, E, its end, and the solid vector depicts its actualization.



Fig. 1.

Such considerations will help to clarify the affinity between the direction-giving use and those uses with which it has been compared: the 'future' use, habit, what Leech calls an 'imaginary present' and the imperative. Each of these evokes something in prospect, something yet to be accomplished, and so would appear to embody a representation of event time unlike that exemplified by (3) to (7). And yet the use of the simple form to express a future event, a habit, an imaginary event or a command results in such different expressive effects that it cannot simply be assumed they all exemplify the same representation of event time. A brief examination of each one will permit us to settle this problem and so throw further light on the direction-giving use.

2.2. Direction-giving and the 'future' use

Concerning the 'future' use, Wekker (1976: 82) has made it quite clear that the simple form gives rise to a suggestion of complete predetermination, either a scheduled happening:

(8) I *leave* tomorrow.

or an inevitable happening:

(9) The sun *rises* at 6:15 tomorrow.

To account for this effect and the many other characteristics of this use, it is argued in Hirtle and Curat (1986: 45-65) that the simple form here provides a representation, not of the future realization of the event from beginning to end (as in Fig. 1), but rather of the necessary and sufficient conditions of this future realization. That is,

in the eyes of the speaker all the preconditions of the event's realization, including even the foreseeing of its place in time, are represented as existing at the moment of speech so that it is actually the potentiality of the event's existence, not its realization, which is situated in time. Being represented in a state of potency, the event here involves no change, no succession of phases, and so is, in effect, a stative, or to use a more general term 'monophase' event,¹ each instant of its duration actualizing the same set of preconditions. Thus, this 'future' use involves a state-like representation wherein one moment of the event's duration, somewhere between its beginning and its end, is evoked as existing in the present of speech. The representation of event time involved in monophase events can be diagrammed as in Fig. 2, where the short solid vector symbolizes the only moment of the event's duration represented, that coinciding with the present of speech.



Fig. 2.

How do the two direction-giving examples, (1) and (2), fit this description of 'future' usage? On the level of expressive effect, there is certainly no suggestion of complete predetermination – of either a scheduled or an inevitable happening – because the addressee is not bound to carry out the directions given. It seems then that these cannot be classified as 'future' uses. That is to say, the existence at the moment of speech of the necessary and sufficient conditions for the event's realization is not represented.

2.3. Direction-giving and habit

If direction-giving is not a case of 'future' use, is it, then, a case of iterative usage, of habit? It will be recalled (cf. Hirtle, 1987: 96–97) that there are two distinct expressive effects associated with iterativity: an actual set of repeated occurrences:

(10) He *walked* to work all summer.

and an assurance that, under given circumstances, an activity will recur indefinitely:

(11) He *walks* to work.

This suggests there are two distinct representations of event time involved here: as a repeated event, wherein the realization of the whole series of occurrences is evoked

¹ The more general terms 'metaphase' and 'monophase' have been substituted for the better known but more limited 'dynamic' and 'stative' in order to characterize usage in terms of how event time is represented rather than in terms of expressive effect. Being more general, these terms allow for more precision in some cases. Thus the example *Time marches on* involves a monophase representation of event time, but one would hardly speak of a stative here. For discussion see Hirtle and Bégin (1991: 103–105).

from beginning to end, and as a habit, i.e. a tendency or disposition to carry out the activity on given occasions. Seen as a tendency or disposition, an event is represented in terms of the preconditions governing its recurrences, not in terms of the actual recurrences. That is, a simple verb evoking a habit expresses a moment in time when the necessary and sufficient conditions guaranteeing the recurrences are seen to exist. This is basically a monophasic, state-of-potency representation of the event resembling that of the 'future' use, except that the habit use involves the conditions for an open-ended series of recurrences, not just for a single occurrence as in the 'future' use.

Can we classify our two examples as habit? (1) certainly suggests something like 'whenever you want to test an air-leak ...', and *you*, which would probably be pronounced with a weakened vowel, is impersonal here. Furthermore, *an air-leak* has greater-than-minimal (non-specific) extensity, again suggesting the possibility of an unlimited series of recurrences. Finally the situations where one might find this example – in an instruction booklet, according to Leech, but it might also be spoken before a class or in training a new employee – all lend support to the idea that this is a habit use because each such situation prepares for an unlimited series of occurrences. (1) can therefore safely be interpreted as expressing habit, as a monophasic event.

How about (2)? In a similar situation such as a guide book, the expressive effect would be that suggested by Leech's comments concerning an impersonal *you* with an 'every time someone wants to ...' paraphrase, namely a habit interpretation. On the other hand, when Leech introduces an 'imaginary present' interpretation as a more plausible alternative, he would seem to contradict the appropriateness of the habit reading. The difficulty arises because he considers (2) as a spoken example and fails to take into consideration that as such, it might arise in two similar but not identical situations.

In one type of oral situation the habit interpretation is quite appropriate. For instance to rent a room close to the public library, a landlord might well say (2) to a prospective roomer because he wishes to evoke the conditions for an open-ended series of recurrences. Or again, if I ask a policeman, 'How does one get to the library from here?' the example expressing habit would be an appropriate answer because the impersonal *you* suggesting 'anyone' requires the possibility of a series of recurrences. In both these situations the habit interpretation with its monophasic representation of event time stands. In a slightly different situation, however, it would not: if, in some remote part of the city, one says to a policeman: 'I'm lost. How do I get to the public library from here?', there would be no suggestion of 'Every time you are lost here, you ...' or 'Anyone who is lost here ...' in the answer, no hint of habit. Indeed, it might well be the first time the question arises, in which case the policeman would have to work out in his own mind the route to be followed. In other words, "the person describing the set of events envisages them as happening now, before his mind's eye, while he speaks" as Leech suggests for the 'imaginary present' interpretation. This interpretation, then, is quite appropriate for the sentence arising in such a situation, but, as we shall see, it could only reflect a metaphasic representation. In short, (2) as it stands is ambiguous as to which interpretation is

intended by the speaker because we are not given certain crucial pragmatic circumstances at the time it was uttered.

Direction-giving can thus be expressed in two ways: as a habitual, customary way of doing things or as a one-time course of action to be realized in that particular situation. It is the latter type which interests us here, and to bring out more clearly the expressive effect involved let us examine the air-leak example to see if it too might arise as a spoken utterance, not in a teaching situation, but in a situation where the speaker has a single realization in prospect. This does indeed seem to be the only possible interpretation for the following exchange in a repair shop:

(12) 'What do I do now?'

'You *test* the air leak by disconnecting the delivery pipe'

Here, a novice is being told what to do next for a particular repair job and there is no suggestion of habit. The fact that this intended message can be rendered only if the noun phrase has minimal (specific) extensity explains the need to use the definite article. In fact, it is thanks to the use of the indefinite article that (1) is not ambiguous. (12) also brings out a point about the pronoun. *You* here would not be the impersonal pronoun equivalent to *one*, and would not have the reduced vowel characteristic of that use. Impersonal *you* might, of course, be used in the answer even here, but then it would suggest the speaker has adopted the role of an instructor, almost as though he were quoting from the instruction manual. That is, because it offers the possibility of numerous realizations, impersonal *you* is found with the habit interpretation but not with the single, now-to-be-realized interpretation.

Granted then these two distinct expressive effects of direction-giving, we can understand why Leech, sensitive to both, hesitated in classifying (2). Of more concern to us, however, is what this possible ambiguity on the sentence level can tell us with regard to the representation of event time within the verb here because, according to our hypothesis, it is the role of the simple form to provide this representation. We have already seen how event time is represented in the habit interpretation but have yet to analyze its representation in the one-realization interpretation.

3. Direction-giving for a single realization

If we imagine for this here-and-now type of direction-giving a representation of event time like that of habits and other monophase events, a contradiction arises on the level of the grammatical meaning of the verb. This sort of representation (cf. Fig. 2) situates in time a moment of the actual duration of a state – of the event's state of potency in the case of habit – whereas in our use no moment of the event's duration has yet been realized. The event has not started and may not even get started. Furthermore, if the speaker envisages the above events as 'happening before his mind's eye', one can hardly characterize his view of them as state-like, monophase, the way habit is represented. Thus for direction-giving we are led to seek a different way of representing the event's duration.

If they do not express a monophasic view of the event, *test*, *take*, etc. must express a dynamic, metaphase view. Do they therefore embody the same representation of event time as that found in performatives and the like (cf. Fig. 1)? As seen above, such a postulate would again give rise to a contradiction because this representation situates in time the realization of the whole event from beginning to end, whereas in our use no part of the event's realization can yet be situated in the non-past time-sphere. (This contrast can be felt if the air-leak example were to read *I test ...*; as a demonstration use like (7), it would then require the real accomplishment of the first part of the event at the moment of speaking and the assurance of continued realization through to its end.) It seems, then, that this direction-giving use is based on neither of the above representations but on a third representation of event time.

In (1) and (2) interpreted as direction-giving for the here and now, the events are both metaphase and totally prospective. A representation which would give rise to both characteristics in the resulting verb would have to offer a view of the complete duration of the event as a possible accomplishment. Such a view can be diagrammed as in Fig. 3, where the dotted line symbolizes the totality of the event's duration as not yet realized.

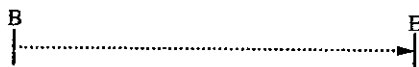


Fig. 3.

Some such representation must be at the root of a use which gives us a preview of the event, that is, which allows us to imagine the subject in a position to actualize the event from beginning to end and yet obliges us to understand this actualization as not real, as only imaginary. It follows that the subject is seen prior to the event's actualization (and this corresponds to the particular situation, where the person spoken to is presumably ready to undertake the directions given but not yet doing so), so this representation of event time might be termed 'prospective' to bring out what contrasts with the other two representations, where the subject is seen involved in the actualization of the event.

This, then, is the representation of event time proposed for direction-giving of the single-realization type. It is, of course, neither surprising nor original to suggest that direction-giving involves a prospective event. The point of interest for our understanding of the simple form is rather to characterize this type of use in terms of how its event time is represented² because it can then be compared and contrasted with the other types of event expressed by the simple form. That is, in the other uses dis-

² It might be recalled here that this representing of event time is part of the grammatical meaning of the verb and so is quite distinct from the particular lexical meaning of the verb. Thus, even in a sentence like *To avoid my mother you simply stay here*, the verb *stay*, which means lexically something like 'continue in a place', expresses a prospective event because it evokes not the being here, but the continuation, which is yet to be realized. That is to say, we can see how the prospective event time provided by the simple form and the lexical sense of *stay*, combined with the other components of the sentence, can produce the resulting sentence meaning of 'direction-giving'.

cussed above (3) to (11), the event is not prospective because its realization is represented: the verb's tense situates at least one moment of the event's realization in universe time.³ Fig. 4 depicts this for the monophase event in (11), where one moment

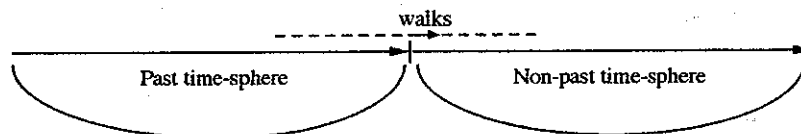


Fig. 4.

of the habit's existence is seen to coincide with the beginning of the non-past time-sphere. This is to be compared with Fig. 5, which depicts the metaphase event in (5),

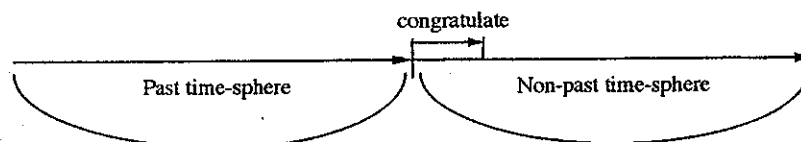


Fig. 5.

a performative whose whole realization is situated in the present of speech. In (2) on the other hand, none of the events are represented as being realized: the tense situates these metaphase events in the non-past time-sphere somewhere beyond the present of speech. The first of these events is depicted in Fig. 6. In order to situate in

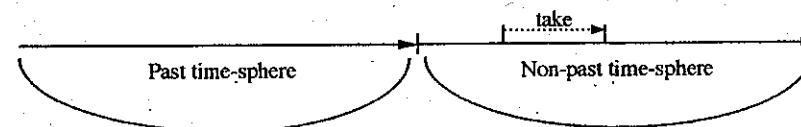


Fig. 6.

the present of speech an event seen not as prospective but as merely possible, as in *You can leave on the morning train*, English has recourse to an auxiliary construction, modal+infinitive (cf. Duffley, 1992: 93-99).

³ The term 'universe time', as opposed to 'event time', designates the infinite stretch of time in which an event can be situated. In the indicative mood of English it consists of the past time-sphere, which extends up to the present instant and the non-past time-sphere, which extends from the present instant as far into the future as one wishes to imagine it.

This shows how the simple form is related to tense, how the particular event with its representation of event time provided by the simple form is given a place in universe time by the non-past tense. In like fashion, the past tense situates an event in the past time-sphere. That is to say, the representational mechanism we call the system of tense, wherein the invariable meaning potential of each tense is defined, is quite distinct from that opposing simple and compound forms in English. The two systems should not be confused even if, on the level of usage, any verb embodies a representation arising from each. With this relationship in mind, we are ready to consider the next question: are there uses other than direction-giving with event time represented as prospective?

4. Other uses of prospective representation

4.1. In the non-past

Direction-giving was mentioned as one of two problem cases in Hirtle and Curat (1986: 64–65). The other problem case is exemplified in (13) and (14):

(13) Either that alligator *goes* or I *go*.

(14) Alright, whoever wrote that sign *takes* it back or I *clean* their clocks.

Does this type of use, which is clearly linked to conditional sentences, find its solution here as well? In examples like these, Palmer (1987: 66) sees “total commitment by the speaker”, a sort of scheduled activity, and Wekker (1976: 86), considering “that the future is presented as fixed and inevitable” here, classifies such sentences as examples of ‘future’ use. Close (1959: 57), however, considers that in such cases “the notion of scheduling is not necessary to ensure *will*-deletion”.

One cannot but agree that there is an expressive effect of inevitability here, but what is inevitable in the eyes of the speaker is a choice between two alternatives. Because this choice arises from the conjuncture of two possible events, neither one of them can itself be seen as inevitable, as completely predetermined. One can, therefore, hardly consider these as cases of ‘future’ use. Besides, this use may occur with verbs like *rain*, which are not otherwise found in the ‘future’ use. For example, in discussing plans for the next day one might well say:

(15) Either it *rains* or it doesn’t.

If, on the other hand, we consider these as examples of yet-to-be-actualized events, both the fact that each event is merely possible, and the fact that the occurrence of the one or the other is seen as inevitable can be explained. Furthermore, this would avoid the implication that verbs like *rain* are used to express a completely predetermined event. This, then, appears to be a second case of representing an event as totally prospective in the non-past.

Another use of the simple form which deserves attention here is that occurring in sentences expressing commands of all sorts, partly because of its affinity with direction-giving, but also because it has been curiously neglected in discussions of the simple form.⁴ This is all the more surprising in view of the fact that other uses where the progressive is rarely found have been widely commented on in the grammars.

The similarity Wekker finds between single-realization direction-giving and commands can no doubt be traced back to the fact that both involve an event yet to be realized by the person addressed. The difference between the two on the level of the situation prompting speech is, obviously, that direction-giving takes for granted that the addressee is already disposed to undertake the activity, whereas a command implies the need to impose the activity on the addressee, although the degree of imposition intended may vary from an outright order to a mere offer or good wish.⁵ The distinguishing mark of an imperative sentence is that, in most cases, the subject is not expressed, and even where it is expressed, sentence stress indicates the difference between commands and direction-giving, as Leech points out in the passage cited above.

Granted this difference, what interests us here is that imperative sentences by definition express an event yet to be actualized. This points to the fact that its event time is represented as prospective. Indeed, assuming this representation we can explain not only their affinity with the direction-giving use but also why they can “refer to a situation in the immediate or more remote future” (Quirk et al., 1985: 828):

- (16) *Make yourself at home.*
 (17) *Ask me about it again next month.*

The significant point here is that any verb in an imperative use is referred without constraint to a place in time beyond the present of speech, to whatever future moment suits the particular experience the speaker wishes to express. This contrasts sharply with most other uses of the simple form. For example, the ‘future’ use of the simple form, as explained above, situates the actualization of the event’s preconditions in the present, not the prospective actualization of the event in the future.

With the prospective type of event time representation proposed here, we can understand why there are no constraints on situating the event in the non-past time-sphere beyond the present: because an imperative use situates yet-to-be-actualized event time in yet-to-be-actualized universe time, there can be no clash on the level of the impressions involved. The same remarks apply to the direction-giving and *either/or* uses discussed above. By the same token, the imperative use is necessarily “incompatible with time adverbials that refer to a time period in the past or that have habitual reference” (Quirk et al., 1985: 828) because a command, like direction-

⁴ Thus for example in Leech (1971, 1987) imperatives are barely mentioned, in Palmer (1988: 34–35) they are grouped with infinitives and participles, and in Quirk et al. (1985: 803) are considered a sentence type.

⁵ See Quirk et al. (1985: 831–832) for a good illustration of the range of illocutionary force imperatives can express.

giving, can situate no part of the event in the past or even in the present of speech. Hence it always carries with it the implication of a yet-to-be-actualized event.

These considerations show what ordinary commands have in common with other uses of the simple form and how they differ. They also provide a basis for examining uses which resemble commands and direction-giving insofar as the representation of event time is concerned. Thus in examples like:

(18) I hope the weather *is* fine tomorrow.

hope certainly does not involve a prospective representation because it depicts the actualization of the state of hoping at the moment of speech, but *is* represents its event beyond the present as yet-to-be-actualized and so is to be analyzed as prospective. This can be depicted as in Fig. 6. The fact that *will be* might easily replace *is* here with little change in meaning confirms this analysis. On the other hand, a sentence like:

(19) I hope the weather *is* fine in Stockholm.

would be ambiguous for a listener with no further contextual clues as to what the speaker had in mind: some future moment as in (18), or the present. If the speaker's concern is with the weather at the moment of speaking, *is* then represents the stative event's existence at that moment as the object of the hoping. This can be shown as in Fig. 4. In this case, *will be* cannot replace *is* without giving the sentence the same reading as (18). Such examples show how the manner of representing event time conditions where the tense situates the event in the non-past time-sphere.

Certain uses of *when*-clauses deserve mention here:

(20) When I *finish* it, I'll call you.

Here too the verb gives only a preview of the finishing and so *finish* must, if our hypothesis is valid, involve a prospective representation of event time. In this case, however, the simple form could not be replaced by *will finish*. The reason for this was made clear in Hirtle (1980): *finish* does express a position in universe time beyond the present, but it must be seen prior to that of the calling in order to bring out the condition/consequence relationship between the two events. Some other sentence types discussed in the same study can now be seen to involve prospective representations as well:

(21) Whoever *opens* the door will get a surprise.

(22) The longer you *wait*, the more difficult it will be.

The same condition/consequence relationship can be observed in the following use:

(23) *Make* a move and I'll shoot.

(24) *Join* the committee and you'll regret the waste of time.

The fact that the condition is expressed as not yet actualized here indicates that the event time of *make* and *join* is represented as prospective. A problem remains, however: how to classify these examples. Should they be classified as imperative sentences (cf. Quirk et al., 1985: 832) even though the expressive effect is one of dissuading rather than imposing the event on the addressee?

The last two examples bring up the problem of how to analyze ordinary conditional sentences with the protasis introduced by *if*:

(25) If you *join* the committee, you'll regret the waste of time.

Granted the argument so far, it would also appear that the simple verb in this example has a prospective representation, but an extensive examination of conditional sentences is required before this observation can be generalized.⁶ Of interest here is the following quite unusual example (cited in Williamson, 1978: 122) of a conditional sentence from a car ad showing an expanse of desert:

(26) Your car *breaks* down here, you're dead.

The evoking of the condition/consequence relationship by mere juxtaposition, typical of a cryptic advertising style, would not make sense without a prospective representation. However one wishes to classify the uses exemplified in (23), (24) and (26) from the point of view of their condition/consequence sentence meaning, there can be little doubt that on the level of word meaning the verbs here involve a representation of prospective event time, with the event situated in the non-past beyond the moment of speech.

The number of possible uses in which the non-past simple form is found may appear bewildering. It will perhaps help clarify this situation somewhat if we ring the changes on a single expression, *You leave on the morning train*, to show how two different representations of event time can contribute to at least six different sentence types:

(27) You *leave* on the morning train; I won't have you here!

(28) You *leave* on the morning train and you are in Liverpool before noon.

(29) You *leave* on the morning train and you will be in Liverpool before noon.

(30) You *leave* on the morning train tomorrow.

(31) You *leave* on the morning train to get to work every day.

(32) You *leave* on the morning train and see the same people going to work.

Although all six examples contain the simple non-past indicative *leave*, only the first three involve a representation of event time as prospective: (27) expresses a command, like (16); (28) expresses direction-giving like (2), as when a travel agent is outlining an itinerary; (29) expresses a condition/consequence relationship almost

⁶ Thus, there does not appear to be a prospective representation when *if*, in the sense of 'even though', poses, rather than supposes, its event: *If we are broke, still we got our money's worth*.

like a conditional sentence as in (24) – and *you* might also be dropped here. The point here is that the same representation of the verb lends itself to different expressive effects on the sentence level: imposing the leaving, proposing the leaving, supposing the leaving, respectively.

In the other three examples *leave* expresses a monophasic event represented as existing at the moment of speech: (30), a ‘future’ use, evokes the existence of all the conditions governing a single realization of the event, as in (8); (31) evokes the existence of the conditions governing the subject’s habitual realization of the event, a sort of generalization in time, as in (11); (32), with impersonal *you*, involves a generalization of the subject and so evokes the existence of the conditions governing anyone’s realizing the event. In each case here, the verb represents something as present, as real, and so these three could be checked for ‘truth value’, whereas in the first three no such check would be possible because the event is situated beyond the present as something prospective.

4.2. In the past

For a more complete view of the prospective representation of event time, let us glance briefly at uses of the simple form which appear to embody it in the past tense. An infrequently observed use, here a commentary from a hockey broadcast, clearly illustrates it:

- (33) Had he received the pass, he *was* in the clear. (Example noted by Michael Abboud)

The usual means of expression here – *he would have been in the clear* – emphasizes the fact that the subject is seen as not having actualized any part of the event. This suggests that in (33) the event time of *was* is previewed at a moment in the past. A similar analysis can be applied to:

- (34) A moment later and he *was* a goner.

As pointed out elsewhere (Hirtle, 1967: 58), however, this example could be ambiguous, giving rise to either a real accomplishment, monophasic reading or a prospective accomplishment reading.⁷ Granted this latter reading here, as in (33), the event, situated at a moment in the past time-sphere, is felt as imminent but not yet actualized. A similar type of representation is found in literary usage:

- (35) He [Darwin] was no longer sick, only ‘growing old and weak,’ and dreading the day when his intellectual powers *began* to fail. (Desmond and Moore, 1992: 595)

⁷ Worth noting in passing is that without *and* (34) would be understood only in a ‘real accomplishment’ sense. Something analogous can be observed in comparing (24) and (25). To find an explanation for such observations, it will probably be necessary to determine the potential meaning of *and*.

At the point in the past evoked here, the beginning of Darwin's intellectual decline is clearly seen as prospective.

The simple past is also found evoking the realization of the event in the non-past as improbable:

(36) Anything I *did* would only react on me. (Visser, 1966: 766)

The expressive effect here is that the event will probably not be accomplished. This use is more commonly found in clauses where the condition is expressed by *if* as in:

(37) If we *left* on the noon train we would be late for the meeting.

The possible ambiguity here – repeated event in the past ('whenever we left on the noon train') as opposed to the hypothetical event in the non-past – can be explained through the different representations of event time referred by means of the past tense to different places in universe time.⁸

It is significant that once again a prospective representation of duration permits the tense to situate an event outside its usual place in time: here, an event in the past tense is referred to the non-past; in (18) an event in the non-past tense is referred to a place beyond the present of speech. As noted above, it appears to be the affinity between the representation of universe time and the representation of event time, both of which involve yet-to-be-actualized time, which permits usage of this sort. Before the solution offered here for this highly problematic type of usage can be considered definitive, however, further analysis is called for within the framework of conditional sentences in general. From what we have just seen it seems clear that the different ways of representing both the event's duration and the time-sphere, contained time and containing time, are important. That is, to have a better understanding of how the two tenses of the indicative work, the different relationships possible between event time and universe time must be clarified, but this is a question which would take us far beyond the scope of the present article.

5. Conclusion

Our discussion of direction-giving sentences has brought into focus a previously overlooked way of representing event time: as a prospective realization. Discerning this element of formal meaning on the word level permitted us to contrast direction-giving with better known uses of the simple form embodying a representation of event time as realized, whether in monophase or metaphase events. Each of these ways of representing event time can be seen as a different way of actualizing the potential or systemic meaning of the simple form: the means for representing the

⁸ Although the subject cannot be pursued here, the two major uses of the past tense of the modal auxiliaries – referring to the past and referring to the non-past – offer an interesting area of analysis from the same point of view.

duration required for all the development involved in the event. This potential meaning of the simple form, which is the basis of its opposition with the compound forms of the verb, provides an explanation of usage in the sense that it appears to be a necessary prior condition for the observed consequences in discourse,⁹ the various uses involving monophase or metaphase events, prospective or real actualization.

The representation of event time proposed for direction-giving is, like the representations provided by tense and the other elements of grammatical meaning integrated into any verb, a formal, mental representation. It is found in a number of other sentence uses, the most frequent of which, commands and conditionals, will require further examination to see if the proposed representation does in fact correspond to the expressive effect of all observed uses. So far, however, the observation of these different uses has brought to light no counter-evidence for the hypothesized unity of the simple form. That is to say, the solution of the problem posed by the polysemy of the simple form is to be found in its single systemic meaning potential, which makes possible on the word level several actual meanings, which in turn contribute to a large number of expressive effects in innumerable different sentences. In this respect, the simple form is perhaps the most versatile form of the English verb, one of the most remarkable instruments for representing experience made available to a speaker of English. By the same token it is probably the verb form which poses the greatest challenge to the linguist – to explain how it can be such an efficient instrument for communication in view of its polysemy.

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⁹ For a similar view of explanation as based on a conditioning or causal factor of a potential type, see Harré (1988).

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