

ASPECT AND TEMPORAL ORDERING: A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH & ODIA LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

ELT situation in English has undergone a rapid change these days. Insights from Psychology, Linguistics, and Pedagogy have enriched the field of contemporary studies. Our study is therefore based on an eclectic model. Our users of English are not necessarily stakeholders of a cognitive/competence model. They represent vast cross sections of disadvantaged learners, technical students, with exposure in vernacular teaching. Our aim here is to help the learners to acquire the ability of expressing themselves within the possibilities of target language. It is in a sense a pedagogically motivated contrastive analysis where a constructivist begins by working out a comparison between the meaning carrying units of the target language and their equivalents in L₁.

KEYWORDS: Contrastive, Odia, English, Language

INTRODUCTION

This study deals with the question what enables readers and hearers of English and Odia discourse to arrive at an adequate understanding of the temporal ordering of the situations presented in the discourse. More specifically, the question to be answered is to what extent, and in what way, the information conveyed by the verb forms contributes to an understanding of inter-clausal temporal ordering. The focus of the investigation is on clauses containing simple past tense forms in English and in Odia. However, as it is one of the claims of this thesis that these cases can only be explained by considering alternative means of expression available to the language user-in particular present perfect and past progressive forms-these other forms will be amply discussed in this thesis as well.

In this chapter, I will first present the relevant Odia and English data containing simple past forms (1.2). In the remainder of this chapter, I will introduce the basic notions to be used in this book (1.3), and present a quite detailed summary of the entire analysis.

THE PROBLEM

Interclausal Temporal Relations

A well-known, and much studied, distinction in the domain of inter-clausal temporal ordering is that between temporal sequence and temporal overlap in narrative sequences such as (1) and (2).

- John opened the door and walked to the bookcase.
- John opened the door. It was pitching dark in the room.

In (1), the situations are assumed to have happened in sequence and, moreover, in the order in which they are presented. I will refer to this reading as an *iconic* one as the order of presentation mirrors the order in which these situations happened in the world. One of the interpretations of (2), which are not available for (1), is that the situation

presented in the first sentence is temporally included in the situation presented in the second sentence: the room was dark *before* and *after* John opened the door.

However, the linguistic information provided by (2) is also compatible with a reading in which the situation of the second sentence did not start to hold until the situation of the first sentence took place. Although such a reading might be difficult to construct for (2), it is the most plausible reading of the sequences in (3) a (Hendricks 1986) and (3) b

- John switched off the light. It was pitching dark in the room.
- John opened the door of the fridge. The inside was brightly lit.

In addition to sequence, as in (1) and (3), and inclusion, as in (one of the readings of) (2), a situation should sometimes be understood to entirely precede rather than follow a situation presented in an immediately preceding sentence. In fact, if we assume that in (2) the second sentence presents an explanation for the fact that John opened the door—he did so in order to let some light in—then we may understand the situation of the room being dark to precede the situation of opening the door. Since Moens (1987), the English sequence given in (4) has been the standard example of this "reverse-order phenomenon"

- John fell. Max pushed him.

The sequence in (4) obviously allows for an iconic reading of the sort exemplified in (1). However, given a non-narrative context (Caenepeel & Moens 1994), and a marked intonation pattern, this sequence will receive an interpretation in which the situation of Max pushing John caused, and thus preceded, the situation of John falling (Lascarides 1992; Lascarides & Asher 1993; Wilson & Sperber 1993). The sequences in (1)-(4), exemplifying cases of sequence, overlap and reverse-order, all contain syntactically independent main clauses. The relationship between a situation presented in a complement clause and the situation presented in the matrix clause is more constrained. Thus, the situation of being sick presented in the embedded clause of (5) may either overlap or precede the situation in the matrix clause, much like the situation of the room being dark in (2). However, the sentence in (5) does not allow for a reading, as in (1) and (3), in which the being sick is to be located *after* the telling.

- Mary said that she was sick.
- Mary said that John walked to the bookcase.

Likewise, both in (1) and in (6) the situation of walking to the bookcase cannot be simultaneous with the situation of opening the door and Mary speaking respectively, but whereas in (1) it necessarily *follows* the situation of entering the room, the only interpretation available for (6) is one in which this situation precedes the situation of John telling us about it presented in the matrix. The general purpose of the investigation reported on in this thesis is to determine to what extent the temporal interpretation of sequences such as exemplified in (1)-(6) is determined by the syntactic and semantic information provided by these clauses, in particular by the verb forms they contain, and to what extent it has to be left to pragmatic inference. This question will be approached from a contrastive perspective: it is a more specific aim of this thesis to account for differences between English and Odia in the domain of temporal ordering. In the following subsection, I will present the contrastive data to be explained.

Contrastive Puzzles

When we consider the standard case of temporal sequence and temporal overlap in narrative discourse, as was exemplified for English in (1) and (2), then any immediately obvious difference between English and Dutch is lacking.

The readings allowed for by English (1) and (2) are equally possible for their Odia counterparts presented in (7) and (8). (The same is true of the Odia equivalents of the sequences in (3).)

- (O) jan duaara kho-li-laa ebon bahi-thaaka aadaku ga-laa |
(E) John door opened and bookcase to went.
- (O) jan duaara kho-li-laa|kothari bhirta kalaa-much-much andhaara thilaa |
(E)John door opened. Room inside-the pitch dark was.

This should not be taken to imply that there are no differences between English and Odia when it comes to determining inter-clausal temporal ordering for clauses containing simple past tense forms. In particular, some Odia sequences do not allow for an inclusion reading while their English counterparts do. Thus, the sentence (9) in English may not receive an overlap reading, but in Odia it is- the verb 'wrote' could be interpreted in three ways as in (10 a), (10 b) and (10 c). The meaning interpretations of which are in (11)

- (9) When john entered the room, Mary wrote a letter.
- (O)jan jetebele kothari bhitaraku pas-i-ala, setebele meri chithi-tie lekh-i-bas-i-laa|
- (O) jan jetebele kothari bhitaraku pas-i-ala, setebele meri chithi-tie lekh-u-thilaa|
- (O)jan jetebele kothari bhitaraku pas-i-ala, setebele meri chithi-tie lekh-i-laa|
(E)John when room inside entered, that-time-at Mary letter- a writing-was.

The most readily available interpretation for English (9) is an inchoative one, in which Mary starts writing a letter after, and in response to, John's entrance or a progressive-Mary was writing a letter when John entered; this reading is, in fact, allowed by the use of different tense forms in by Odia, such as (10 a), (10 b) and (10 c). It should be noted that the difference is not restricted to *when*-structures as (9) and (10); the intuitions about the sequenced main clauses in (11) and (12) are the same.

- (E)John entered. Mary wrote a letter.
- (O)jan (kothari bhitaraku)pas-i-laa| meri chithitie lekh-i-bas-i-laa|
- (O)jan (kothari bhitaraku)pas-i-laa|meri chithitie lekh-u-thilaa|
- (O)jan (kothari bhitaraku)pas-i-laa|meri chithitie lekh-i-laa|

The difference between English and Odia exemplified in (9)-(11) can equally be observed in complement clauses; examples (12) and (13) present literal Odia translations of English (5) and (6), respectively

- (E) Mary said that John was ill.
- (O)meri kah-i-laa je jan-ra deha thi-laa kharaap|
- (O)"mari kahilaa je janra deha kharaap thilaa|
- (E)Mary said that John walked to the bookcase.
- (O)meri kah-i-laa je jan ga-laa aadaku-bahithaaka|
- (O)"meri kahilaa je jan bahithaaka aadaku ga-laa|

CONCLUSIONS

In Odia (10) the situation of the when-clause can be temporally included in the situation of the main clause, but in Odia (13) the situation of John walking to the bookcase cannot be interpreted as going on at the time of Mary's speaking. This overlap reading was not available for either English (11) or (6). Interestingly, however, no such difference is manifested in Odia (12) as compared to English (5); the possible readings of these sentences, presenting the situation of being ill in the embedded clause, are the same.

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