

Aspect in the historical present

Roumyana Pancheva

In the context of narration, the present tense can be dissociated from the speech time and be interpreted instead as referencing a past time, a phenomenon known as the historical present, as in (1) (from Schlenker 2004). The mismatch between the past time adverbials and the present tense in (1) suggests that the two are not evaluated relative to the same context: whereas the time adverbials remain indexical to the speech time, the present tense is anchored to a past-shifted evaluation time (Schlenker 2004, Eckardt 2015, Bary 2016, Anand and Toosarvandani 2018).

- (1) Fifty eight years ago to this day, on January 22, 1944, just as the Americans are about to invade Europe, the Germans attack Vercors.

A notable feature of the English historical present is that dynamic predicates (e.g., *attack*) do not need to appear in the progressive to describe episodic eventualities, unlike the situation with the canonical present tense where they can only be habitual. Languages like Bulgarian and Russian, on the other hand, consistently use the imperfective in the historical present, although the perfective is the typical aspect in past narratives. I present an account that does not rely on differences in the duration of the speech time and the evaluation time (see Anand and Toosarvandani 2018), but on the semantics of the aspects in the different languages.