FRE113 Des Gaulois à De Gaulle: histoire pratique du français

How historical linguistics helps you understand modern French grammar

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Session outline

Historical perspectives on grammatical problems

2 case studies

1. past tenses  
   P. Simons

2. subjunctive
   C. Peersman

Health warning

Latin may be used!
(but it won’t hurt)
Case study 1
Past Tenses
Two Kinds of Verb Forms

- **Analytical forms**
  Consist of more than one word to express ideas of person/tense/mood
  
  - e.g. I used to procrastinate
  - j’ai été persuadé(e)

- **Synthetic forms**
  Convey ideas of person/tense/mood in a single word
  
  - e.g. I procrastinated
  - je persuadais

- French has an analytical and a synthetic perfect tense – very confusing for learners!
Historical Reasons and Implications

- Latin used largely synthetic forms
- French, a derivative of Latin uses largely analytical – how come?
- Synthetic forms in Latin rely on endings
- But it is precisely the endings which are vulnerable to sound change and loss – they are unstressed
  - Without endings we quickly lose the difference between:
    - amo – I love
    - ama – love!
    - amor – I am loved
    - amem – may I love

- So where do we go from here?
## Analytical Forms Move In

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Classical Latin</th>
<th>Late Latin/Gallo-roman</th>
<th>Modern French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Future</strong></td>
<td><strong>amabo</strong></td>
<td>amare habeo</td>
<td>j’aimerai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Passive</strong></td>
<td><strong>amor</strong></td>
<td>amatus sum</td>
<td>je suis aimé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perfect</strong></td>
<td><strong>amavi</strong></td>
<td>ama(v)i amatus habeo</td>
<td>j’aimai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pluperfect</strong></td>
<td><strong>amaveram</strong></td>
<td>amaveram amatus habebam</td>
<td>j’avais aimé</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Development of Analytical Future

Latin

synthetic future = amabo (am+abo)

Gallo-roman

analytical future = amare habeo
infinitive + auxiliary ‘I have’
attested in St Augustine, 4th-5th century AD

How do you form the future tense in modern French?

Infinitive stem + endings of verb avoir:

aimer + ai, aimer +as, aimer + a, etc.

Modern French future is an analytical form masquerading as a synthetic!

Case study 1 past tenses
But before we go any further, we need to understand another important idea ...

ASPECT
Can you explain the difference between the past tenses in the following two sentences:

- I wrote three essays
- I have written three essays

Try making the sentences longer to illustrate the difference

These two past tenses express different types of aspect
Aspect Defined

- Aspect expresses how the action of a verb relates to the flow of time. This may include things such as habitual aspect, expressed in English by ‘used to’, and it can also cover continuous aspect, expressed in English by using the verb ‘to be’ + a present participle.
  
  e.g. I am studying, he was running

- Aspect can also express a relation in time between the event and the time of reference. The English form ‘I have eaten’ implies a relationship between the past act of eating and the present relation of that event. That relationship is not present in the alternative form ‘I ate’.

Case study 1 past tenses
Development of Analytical Perfect

- Classical Latin – synthetic perfect
  amavi: covered both the sense of ‘I loved’ and ‘I have loved’
- In Late Latin/Gallo-roman, an analytical perfect developed alongside the synthetic form
  ama(v)i
  amatus habeo (past participle + verb ‘to have’)
- AND ... the existence of two forms enabled the expression of two different aspects for past tense
Changing Usage of Perfect Forms

ama(v)i
amatus habeo

- Into which Modern French forms do these Late Latin forms develop?
- Over time their use will change.
Different Aspects in Action in Old French

*Aucassin et Nicolette* 13th century

‘Nicolete est une caitive que *j’amenaï* d’estrange tere, si l’*acataï* de mon avoir a Sarasins, si l’ai *levee e bautisieee* et *faite* ma fillole...’ (*Aucassin et Nicolette*, p VI)

(‘Nicolete is a captive whom I ..........from a foreign land, and I .......... her with my own money from the Saracens, and I ............. her and I ................her and I ..........her my adoptive daughter’)

Case study 1 past tenses
Tandis qu’ils riaient, un nuage creva, et au contact de la pluie, Elmer redevint bariolé. Les éléphants riaient encore quand Elmer retrouva ses couleurs habituelles. « Oh Elmer, dit un vieil éléphant, tu nous as déjà fait de bonnes plaisanteries, mais jamais nous n’avions ri comme aujourd’hui. Tu t’es vite démasqué ».

(David McKee, Elmer)
Le 31 juillet 1944, quand un officier porta officiellement disparu le Lightning P38 no. 223 piloté par Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, un colosse trop à l’étroit dans sa combinaison d’aviateur est entré dans la légende.
Modern French

Passé simple

- Almost entirely a written form
- ... but not necessarily a ‘literary’ form
- May occasionally be used for effect in spoken language
  e.g. rhetorical purposes in speeches

Passé composé

- General use in spoken language, and conveys both kinds of aspect – ‘I did’ and ‘I have done’
- Also used in writing
- May occasionally be used in writing in contrast to the passé simple to differentiate between ‘I did’ and ‘I have done’
Case study 2
The Subjunctive
1. Flexional categories

Definition

Conjugation = flexion of verbs

Determined by 5 flexional categories

- Voice: active / passive
- Aspect: durative / accomplished
- Tense: past / present / future
- Mood: real / virtual / order
- Person: 1-2-3 singular or plural

These categories determined conjugations in CL, and they still do in many Indo-European languages.
1. Flexional categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mood</th>
<th>REAL</th>
<th>AMAS</th>
<th>tu aimes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>=&gt; indicative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIRTUAL</td>
<td>AMES</td>
<td>que tu aimes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>=&gt; subjunctive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORDER</td>
<td>AMA!</td>
<td>Aime!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>=&gt; imperative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

« virtual »
not real: a subjective or possible reality; used to express emotions, wishes, doubt, necessity, judgment, ...
1. Flexional categories

The subjunctive in CL

AMES \(<\text{je veux}>\) que tu aimes \(<\text{le latin}>\)

AMETIS \(<\text{je désire}>\) que vous aimiez \(<\text{le latin}>\)

Synthetic or analytical?

CL \ synthetic (for these examples)

Cf. English has both!

Synthetic: idiomatic expressions

\textit{e.g.} God \underline{save} the queen; so \underline{be} it

Analytical: modal auxiliaries

\textit{e.g.} \underline{May} God save the queen; \underline{may} it \underline{be} that way
The subjunctive in CL

Entirely synthetic: all flexional categories are expressed within the verbal forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJUNCTIVE</th>
<th>durative</th>
<th>accomplished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>present</td>
<td>past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subj. pres.</td>
<td>subj. impf.</td>
<td>subj. perf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amem</td>
<td>amarem</td>
<td>amaverim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ames</td>
<td>amares</td>
<td>amaveris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amet</td>
<td>amaret</td>
<td>amaverit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amemus</td>
<td>amaremus</td>
<td>amaverimus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ametis</td>
<td>amaretis</td>
<td>amaveritis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ament</td>
<td>amarent</td>
<td>amaverint</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Syncope

effacement within the word, of certain sounds, in specific phonetic contexts

the sound the phonetic context
-vi- verbal forms, before s amavissem > amassem
-ve- verbal forms, before r amaverim > amarim

this affects the accomplished subj. in CL, so all forms of the subj. perf. and plperf.
The subjunctive in CL - syncope
the CL subj. perfect and pluperfect before and after syncopation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJUNCTIVE</th>
<th>normal</th>
<th>syncopated</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ama verim</td>
<td>amavissem</td>
<td>amarim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ama veris</td>
<td>amavissses</td>
<td>amaris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ama verit</td>
<td>amavisset</td>
<td>amarit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ama verimus</td>
<td>amavissemus</td>
<td>amarimus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ama veritis</td>
<td>amavissetis</td>
<td>amaritis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ama verint</td>
<td>amavisssent</td>
<td>amarint</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### The subjunctive in French

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>subj. present</th>
<th>subj. imperfect</th>
<th>subj. perfect (sync)</th>
<th>subj. plpf. (sync)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMEM</td>
<td>AMAREM</td>
<td>AMARIM</td>
<td>AMASSEM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMES</td>
<td>AMARES</td>
<td>AMARIS</td>
<td>AMASSES</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMET</td>
<td>AMARET</td>
<td>AMARIT</td>
<td>AMASSET</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMEMUS</td>
<td>AMAREMUS</td>
<td>AMARIMUS</td>
<td>AMASSEMUS</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMETIS</td>
<td>AMARETIS</td>
<td>AMARITIS</td>
<td>AMASSETIS</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMENT</td>
<td>AMARENT</td>
<td>AMARINT</td>
<td>AMASSENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>que j’aime</td>
<td>que j’aie aimé</td>
<td>que j’eusse aimé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>que tu aimes</td>
<td>que tu aies aimé</td>
<td>que tu eusses aimé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>qu’il aime</td>
<td>qu’il ait aimé</td>
<td>qu’il eusse aimé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>que nous aimions</td>
<td>qu’en avons aimé</td>
<td>que nous eussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>que vous aimiez</td>
<td>qu’ils aient aimé</td>
<td>aimé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>qu’ils aiment</td>
<td></td>
<td>que vous eussiez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>que j’aimasse</td>
<td></td>
<td>aimé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>que tu aimasses</td>
<td></td>
<td>que vous eussiez</td>
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<td></td>
<td>qu’il aimât</td>
<td></td>
<td>aimé</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>que nous aimassions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>que vous aimassiez</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>qu’ils aimassent</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The subjunctive in French

• The French subj. imperfect originates in which Latin forms?
  • Subj. pluperfect

• Which is the biggest difference between the subjunctive in Latin and the subjunctive in modern French?
  • Entirely synthetic > synthetic durative / analytic perfective

• Describe the auxiliaries
  • aie, aies, ait, ayons, ayez, aient
  • eusse, eusses, eusse, eussions, eussiez, eussent
  • sois, sois, soit, soyons, soyez, soient
  • fusse, fusses, fût, fussions, fussiez, fussent
Thank you!

Q & A