ON THE ANALYSIS
OF THE TENSE-SYSTEM OF FRENCH

I

Anyone who wishes to state even in the simplest terms the changes which have taken place during the history of French in the uses of the very numerous tenses of the indicative mood finds himself at once confronted with a bewildering variety not only of terminologies but of classifications and characterisations of the tenses [1]. Ambiguities in nomenclature may be avoided by indicating each tense-form by a representative example (in this article the first person singular of the verb *faire* [2]). An objective statement of the functions fulfilled by these tense-forms in contemporary French might in principle be provided by structural linguistics. The structural method is, however, essentially synchronic; it can give only a classification and definition of the tenses in terms of their relationship

1. The following frequently-quoted works are referred to by author's name alone, except where otherwise indicated : L. Foulet, ' La disparition du prétérit ', *Romania*, XLVI (1920), 271 (Foulet, *Disp.*); L. Foulet, ' Le développement des formes surcomposées ', *Romania*, LI (1925), 203 (Foulet, *Surcomp.*); G. Guillaume, *Temps et verbe*, Paris, 1929; G. Gougenheim, *Étude sur les périphrases verbales de la langue française*, Paris, 1929 (Gougenheim, *Périphr.*); G. et R. Le Bidois, *Syntaxe du français moderne*, Paris, 1935-1938; J. Damourette et E. Pichon, *Des mots à la pensée : Essai de grammaire de la langue française*, Paris, 1936-1952 (D.-P.); G. Gougenheim, *Système grammatical de la langue française*, Paris, 1938 (Gougenheim, *Syst.*); W. von Wartburg et P. Zumthor, *Précis de syntaxe du français contemporain*, Berne, 1947; R. A. Hall Jr., *Structural Sketches 1 : French (Language Monograph no. 24)*, 1948 ; M. Grevisse, *Le bon usage*, 4ᵉ éd., Gembloux et Paris, 1949; K. Togeby, *Structure immanente de la langue française (Travaux du cercle linguistique de Copenhague*, vol. VI), 1951; H. Sten, *Les temps du verbe fini (indicatif) en français moderne (Dan. Hist. Filol. Medd.*, 33, no. 3), 1952; M. Cornu, *Les formes surcomposées en français (Romanica Helvetica*, vol. XLII), 1953; H. Weber, *Das Tempussystem des deutschen und des französischen (Romanica Helvetica*, vol. XLV), 1954 ; C. De Boer, *Syntaxe du français moderne*, 2ᵉ éd., Leiden, 1954.

2. In the case of compound tenses, *j'ai fait* is of course to be taken as including also *je suis venu* and *je me suis levé*, and so on.

to each other at a given point in time. Even if we possessed satisfactory structural descriptions of the tense-system at a series of successive dates, the elements constituting the system of any one period would not necessarily be identifiable with any of the elements constituting the system of another period, and no direct comparison would be possible.

What we need for the historical study of the French tense-system is a system of categories, outside the language itself, to serve as permanent co-ordinates against which we may plot the relative values of the tense-forms at different periods, and in terms of which we may state what changes have taken place. These categories cannot be based on directly observable data; they will not be " scientific ". They must rest on deductions, from particular utterances and their context, about the " meaning " of the tense-forms contained in the utterances. Like all categories of meaning, they will be psychological in character, and will consequently be liable to varying subjective interpretations. If, however, they are appropriately chosen, are defined as clearly and simply as possible, and are applied according to the strictest principles of the traditional " philological " method, they may be made to serve our purpose.

The categories that have so far been employed by traditional grammarians and psychological linguists appear, however, to be inadequate. French grammarians, perhaps misled by the term *temps*, have often tended to assume that all distinctions of tense depended on the notion of time [1]. More recently it has become usual to distinguish two independent categories, time and aspect; but " time " continues to include disparate notions, and " aspect " is used in widely differing senses [2]. Damourette and Pichon (§§ 1701-1706) recognise three categories, which they call *temporaineté*, *actualité* and *énarration*, but all three involve in some way the notion of time. As an example of the unsatisfactory nature of these

1. Damourette and Pichon (§ 1701) consider that in general grammarians of French have identified tense with time; cf. H. Yvon in *Le français moderne*, XIX (1951), 265 ff. Guillaume (p. 11) explicitly derives all distinctions of tense and mood ultimately from time in one sense or another.

2. It is sometimes considered as partly or wholly independent of tense; thus the " aspects " are listed as « l'entrée dans l'action, la durée, la progression, la répétition, l'accompli, le récemment accompli, l'action finissante » (Le Bidois, § 712, and very similarly Grevisse, § 607 *bis* and De Boer, § 94). For Guillaume (p. 20) the aspects of the French verb are : *simple* or *tensif, composé* or *extensif* and *surcomposé* or *bi-extensif*; and this unusual application of the term " aspect " is accepted by H. Yvon (*Le français moderne*, XIX (1951), 161 ff).

systems, as frameworks for the description of the functions of the tense-forms of Modern French, we may cite the characterisation of the " perfect " or " compound past " or " past indefinite " *j'ai fait*. This tense-form [1] is often described as expressing a mixture of present and past time : « un mélange complexe, instable et presque contradictoire de présent et de passé » (Foulet, *Surcomp.*, p. 252), « la pensée, tout en plongeant dans le passé, reste plus ou moins dans le présent » (De Boer, § 154); or even a mixture of past, present and future : « sorte de texte complexe, de temps à deux visages, de passé-présent... la perspective de l'avenir ne lui est pas fermée » (Le Bidois, § 742). When some degree of precision is sought, the tense-form is defined as referring to a process situated in past time whose effects persist in the present : « indique un fait achevé à une époque déterminée ou indéterminée du passé et que l'on considère comme étant en contact avec le présent, soit que ce fait ait eu lieu dans une période de temps non encore entièrement écoulée ou que ses conséquences soient envisagées dans le présent » (Grevisse, § 721). Even this rather vague definition is, however, found in practice to be too definite to cover all cases, and the " present consequences " are whittled down until we arrive at the formulation of Damourette and Pichon (§ 1760, p. 265) that « l'avez-su présente toujours le passé comme vu du présent et comme en relation avec ce présent », of Wartburg and Zumthor (§ 326) that the process referred to « présente en quelque manière, ne fût-ce que par l'intérêt qu'on y porte, une relation avec le moment actuel », or of Weber (p. 59) that " die Wirkung in der Gegenwart sich von konkretem Weiterbestehen bis zu blossem Vorhandensein im Gedächtnis erstrecken kann [2] ". Such definitions are obviously useless. If the speaker refers to the process at all, it must evidently bear some relation to his present, arouse some interest in him, have a place in his memory; and it is therefore impossible on this basis to distinguish between the function of the form *j'ai fait* and that of any other tense-form referring to past time.

The definitions or descriptions of other tenses in terms of time alone, of time and aspect, or of *temporaineté, actualité* and *énarration*, are in most

1. Like the other compound tenses, it is excluded from the inventory of tenses by structuralists such as Hall and Togeby.

2. Cf. also D.-P., § 1810, p. 353, where examples of this tense-form in a passage also containing examples of the tense-form *je fis* are justified by the statement that the former « marquent tous des faits d'une portée générale pour l'histoire de l'humanité ».

cases equally unhelpful, and are sometimes positively misleading (see for example p. 22 f below).

II

A more useful analysis of the French tense-system can perhaps be obtained by considering the functions of the tense-forms in terms of the categories of time, stage and aspect.

Time is to be taken as meaning the time-relation between the moment of speech and the process referred to, as envisaged by the speaker [1]. The category of time is to be considered as having three and only three members, present, past and future. *Present* time is the normal or neutral member; it is indeterminate as regards objective duration, and may in different situations correspond to a fraction of a second, or a lifetime, or an aeon. In virtue of the neutral character of present time, tense-forms which normally express it may in certain cases be used with reference to processes which the speaker does not situate in time at all. *Past* time is associated with memory; it is conceived of as cut off from the present by a barrier which no doubt consists essentially in the irrevocability of processes assigned to it. *Future* time is associated with inference and imagination, and is conceived of as cut off from the present, perhaps by the intrinsic uncertainty of processes assigned to it.

No process can be simultaneously situated in more than one time by the utterance of a single tense-form. Thus for example in the sentence « Je demeure dans cette maison depuis dix ans » the only time expressed by the verb is present, and it is misleading to comment, as Gougenheim does (*Syst.*, p. 207) : « Le présent exprime aussi un processus verbal qui, commencé dans le passé, persiste encore au moment où l'on parle. »

Instead of situating a process in time considered directly from the moment of speech (which may be called *direct* or *absolute time*), the speaker may situate it in time reckoned from a moment which itself lies for him

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1. Not necessarily the objective time-relation between moment of speech and process referred to, as is sometimes implied. Thus Damourette and Pichon (§ 1709, p. 176), in support of their view that the " toncal pur " (the form *je faisais*) is not essentially a " past tense ", quote from a play of Courteline the sentence « Vous avez dit que j'*étais* là ? » and comment : « *Étais* indique ici un véritable présent, puisque le locuteur est chez lui au moment où il dit cette phrase à sa bonne... » But the fact that the process referred to by *étais* is objectively contemporary with the moment of speech is irrelevant.

in past or future time. In this case we have instead of present, past or future the *indirect* ou *relative times* " present relative to a point in past ", " past relative to a point in future ", etc. For convenience these times may be referred to by the traditional abbreviations " present in past ", " past in future ", etc.; but it must be borne in mind that a process assigned to, e. g., future in past is not thereby situated in past time (or indeed in any time) in relation to the moment of speech.

The category which has been most frequently misunderstood is that of *stage*. Here the speaker envisages the process referred to in relation to its own intrinsic development. The process may be considered as, in itself, in being (stage of *actuality*, the normal or neutral member), or as having been (stage of *completion*), or as about to be (stage of *imminence*). The category of stage is entirely independent of that of time, so that a process situated in a given time may be assigned to any one of the three stages; further, to allocate a process to the stage of completion or of imminence in, say, present time does not imply any particular relationship in objective time (such as proximity) between the stage of actuality of the process and the moment of speech. For Modern French the three stages are well illustrated by a sentence quoted from Maurras by Damourette and Pichon (§ 1767, p. 276) : « L'heure difficile et dangereuse ne *va* pas *sonner*, ne *sonne* pas, elle *a* déjà *sonné*. » The time is throughout present; the striking of the hour is considered successively at its stages of imminence, actuality and completion.

The category of *aspect* is to be taken as comprising two members, which may be called respectively continuance and attainment [1]. In the aspect of *continuance* the process, or rather the stage at which the process is envisaged, is conceived of as static and relatively permanent (the verb in this aspect has psychologically much in common with the noun and adjective); in the aspect of *attainment* it is conceived of as dynamic and relatively transitory [2]. In French aspect normally receives distinctive lin-

1. Of the more usual terms, *durative* and *punctual* (or *momentaneous*) stress the actual duration of the process more than is appropriate for French ; *imperfective* and *perfective* are liable to cause confusion with the stages of actuality and completion, or with the distinction sometimes made between imperfective and perfective verbs (cf. Sten, p. 8 f).

2. Hence the actual duration of a process may be specified if it is envisaged in the aspect of attainment but not if it is envisaged in that of continuance (contrary to the assertion of Wartburg and Zumthor (§ 314) that the French imperfect « indique qu'une action s'est produite... pendant une certaine période dont on envisage plus ou moins explicitement la durée »).

guistic expression only in association with past time, and therefore a
neutral aspect has sometimes been postulated for present and future
time [1]. But the psychological distinction can usually be easily made for
these times also; it is clear that in « Je *serai* là quand il *arrivera* » (in most
contexts), as in « J'*étais* là quand il *arriva* », the first verb-form expresses
the aspect of continuance and the second that of attainment. It is there-
fore impossible to maintain either that the Modern French future tense
is exclusively " perfective " or " punctual " [2], or on the other hand that
the Modern French present and future are exclusively " durative " or
" imperfective " [3]; but it is probably true to say that of the direct or
absolute times, present is most usually associated with the aspect of con-
tinuance, and past and future with that of attainment. Further, although
with very few exceptions all French verbs can be used in both aspects,
some (" verbs of state ") occur more frequently in the aspect of conti-
nuance, and others (" verbs of action ") more frequently in that of attain-
ment.

It must be emphasised that the categories of time, stage and aspect do
not necessarily exhaust the content of the various tense-forms *qua* tense-
forms. Besides members of these three categories, other values may be
present, either occasionally or invariably, and either as consequences of
the time-stage-aspect content of the tense-form or independently. Thus
in Modern French the tense-form *je vais faire* can express future time,
but normally only with the additional implication of proximity in time.
This value of proximity, however, finds no place in our analysis.

III

The application of this system of categories to the Modern French
tenses of the indicative is in most cases obvious and requires no illustra-
tion [4]. For present time, there is usually no formal distinction of aspect,

1. E. g. by Togeby (p. 173 f), for present time only, on structural grounds.

2. So Togeby, p. 173, Weber, p. 180, 252.

3. So H. Yvon, *L'imparfait de l'indicatif en français* (*Études françaises*, IX), 1926,
p. 33; Le Bidois, § 713. It is equally inaccurate to suggest that the " conditional " *je
ferais* is necessarily " non-punctual " or " imperfective " (Hall, p. 27, Togeby, p. 173).

4. Where there is no standard tense-form, the stage-value or aspect-value can often
be conveyed by a periphrase. Thus the aspect of continuance can be suggested by *être
en train de* (present actuality continuance *je suis en train de faire*, etc.), and the stage of

and we have for the three stages : present actuality *je fais* [1], present completion *j'ai fait* [2], present imminence *je vais faire*. For future time, also normally without distinction of aspect, the stage of actuality is expressed by *je ferai* and that of completion by *j'aurai fait*. For past time, the aspects of continuance and attainment are distinguished in each stage. Past actuality continuance *je faisais* contrasts with past actuality attainment *je fis* (literary), *j'ai fait* (conversational). Past imminence continuance is expressed by *j'allais faire*; there is no corresponding form for past imminence attainment.

The tense-forms for past completion call for some comment. The " pluperfect " *j'avais fait* expresses past completion continuance, that is, the continuance in past time of the stage of completion of the process referred to. It says nothing about the stage of actuality of the process; neither the duration nor the repetition or non-repetition of that stage, nor its relation to any other point in time, is envisaged at all by the speaker in his use of the tense-form. All the statements in the following passage are therefore untrue : « Dans la catégorie de l'aspect, le plus-que-parfait est susceptible de marquer dans sa valeur même d'antériorité les mêmes notions que l'imparfait : la durée : *il avait dormi très longtemps, son visage en restait boursouflé* [3]; la simultanéité entre le moment où une action parvient à son accomplissement, et celui où une autre action se produit : *j'avais achevé ma lecture quand il entra* [4]; la répétition : *il avait fait une faute à chaque phrase* [5] » (Wartburg et Zumthor, § 330).

imminence by *être sur le point de*, *être pour*, *devoir* (future imminence *je serai sur le point de faire*, *je serai pour faire*, *je devrai faire*; past imminence attainment *je fus sur le point de faire* (literary), *j'ai été pour faire* (colloquial), etc.; cf. Gougenheim, *Périphr.*, p. 64 f, 66 ff, D.-P., § 1851). These periphrastic forms have been omitted here; they can hardly be considered as tense-forms, and *être en train de* is in any case not restricted to the expression of the aspect of continuance.

1. Usually expressing continuance; but attainment also occurs, e. g. in " efficient statements " (« Je soussigné *déclare* que... », etc.) and in the " timeless" use of the form, commonly described as the " historic present ".

2. Usually expressing continuance; but in, e. g. « Comme il fait vite sa besogne, le bourreau... En un tournemain, il *a ligoté* sa victime... » (Marie Gasquet, quoted D.-P., § 1759, p. 262), *a ligoté* expresses the attainment of the completion of the process of binding.

3. The duration of the stage of actuality of the process of sleeping is not indicated by the tense-form, but solely by the adverb *très longtemps*.

4. The tense-form *avais achevé* makes no statement at all about the attainment of the completion of the process referred to; that completion may have been attained long

Past completion attainment is expressed by the " past anterior " *j'eus fait* (literary) and the « passé surcomposé » *j'ai eu fait* (colloquial) [1]. It must be emphasised that the tense-form *j'eus fait* (like the colloquial *j'ai eu fait* when used as its syntactical equivalent) is always an expression of direct past time, and expresses only the attainment in past time of the stage of completion of a process; the common view that it expresses "anteriority " [2] is as intenable as the now generally abandoned view that the imperfect expressed " simultaneity " [3]. In a sentence like « Dès qu'il (Après qu'il) *eut dîné*, il *partit* », the respective tense-forms express simply the attainment, in past time, of the completion of the process of dining, and of the actuality of the process of departing; the time-relation is expressed exclusively by the conjunction, simultaneity with *dès que* and anteriority or posteriority, according to the point of view, with *après que*. It is equally inaccurate to say that in the other common use of these tense-forms, represented by, e. g. « Le drôle *eut lapé* le tout en un moment » and « Il *a eu* vite *fait* de déjeuner », they express the " rapidity

before the process of entering attained actuality; the time-relation between the indicated stages of the two processes is expressed solely by *quand*.

5. The repetition of the process of making a mistake is not indicated by the tense form *avait fait*, but solely by the expression *à chaque phrase*.

1. Since the form *j'ai eu fait* is often considered " incorrect ", and the form *j'eus fait* is sometimes felt to be over-literary, past completion attainment is occasionally expressed, in speech and in writing, by *j'ai fait* or by *j'avais fait*, cf. « Quelques-uns s'en tirent en employant partout le passé indéfini : ' Dès qu'il *a fini*, il est parti '. Mais quelle pauvre façon de s'exprimer au regard de ' dès qu'il *a eu fini*', et comme la phrase y perd en couleur et en netteté ! Un autre expédient : ' Dès qu'il *avait fini*, il est parti.' n'est pas beaucoup plus heureux. Voilà où conduit un purisme irraisonné et irréfléchi » (Foulet, *Surcomp.*, p. 224; cf. Cornu, p. 8 ff, 108). There is no place in our system for a tense-form *j'eus eu fait*. This form is listed by several grammarians (e. g. Le Bidois, § 745, D.-P., § 1856, Wartburg et Zumthor, § 331, De Boer, § 150), but no genuine examples of its use seem ever to have been adduced (cf. Cornu, p. 124 ff).

2. E. g. Le Bidois, § 744, Gougenheim, *Syst.*, p. 212, Wartburg et Zumthor, § 327. If " anteriority " as applied to tense means anything, it can refer only to indirect time (past in past, etc.), and this is never expressed by the " past anterior " (contrary to the statement of Sten, p. 213, 216).

3. Still in Wartburg et Zumthor, § 318 (cf. also § 330 quoted above). Damourette and Pichon follow H. Yvon in pointing out that « un phénomène ne peut être simultané à lui tout seul » (§ 1731, p. 209); neither can a phenomenon be anterior or posterior in itself (cf. H. Yvon in *Le français moderne*, XXI (1953), 173 f), yet they make the *antérieur* and the *ultérieur* members of their category of *temporaineté*.

of completion " of the process [1]; in such sentences the " rapidity " or " brevity " in question is expressed solely by the adverb or other expression of time (cf. H. Yvon in *Le français moderne*, XIX (1951), 173), and all that the tense-form itself expresses is that at the indicated point in past time the process attained completion.

Among the tense-forms used to express indirect time, much the most important are those for time relative to a point in past, which occur chiefly in " reported speech " (either depending on a verb in past time or in *style indirect libre*). Those for future in past (without distinction of aspect) are special forms : future actuality in past *je ferais*, future completion in past *j'aurais fait*. For present in past (again without distinction of aspect) the forms used coincide with those for direct past time, aspect of continuance : present actuality in past *je faisais*, present completion in past *j'avais fait*, present imminence in past *j'allais faire*. For past in past the two aspects are distinguished. For attainment we have : past actuality attainment in past *j'avais fait*; past completion attainment in past *j'avais eu fait* [2]. For continuance, however, past in past is normally expressed by the same tense-form as direct past (i. e. the expression of indirect time is here neglected for the sake of unambiguous expression of the aspect); so for past actuality continuance in past we

1. E. g. « Le passé antérieur exprime l'action qui s'est achevée rapidement... Le passé surcomposé exprime... l'achèvement rapide d'une action » (Gougenheim, *Syst.*, p. 212, cf. Wartburg et Zumthor, § 328); « rend une nuance particulière... celle d'action accomplie, et accomplie si promptement qu'elle paraît presque antérieur au fait même qui la détermine » (Le Bidois, § 744); « exprime qu'à la fin d'un délai dont la brièveté même a empêché l'observation du développement du phénomène, le phénomène est accompli » (D.-P., § 1759, p. 262, applied here to certain uses of the tense-form *j'ai fait* (cf. Weber, p. 59), and extended in § 1776, p. 299 and § 1853 to the forms *j'eus fait* and *j'ai eu fait*); cf. also Sten, p. 216, 229, Cornu, p. 31.

2. E. g. « Elle me raconta en marchant, qu'à peine *avois-je été parti* pour l'Abbaye, que le Grand-Duc avoit envoié chez moi un de ses Gentilshommes... » (Abbé Prévost, quoted Cornu p. 82, but misinterpreted); « Ah! l'idiote *avait eu* vite *fait* de se couler ! » (Mauriac, quoted Gougenheim, *Syst.*, p. 212; other examples in Foulet, *Surcomp.*, p. 223, Cornu, p. 82, 112 f). However, since all surcomposé forms are suspect of incorrectness, would-be purists often replace *j'avais eu fait* by *j'avais fait* or even by *j'eus fait* : « Quand on *avait vu* qu'elle ne se mariait pas, qu'elle ne se marierait sans doute point, de Lise on avait fait Lison » (Maupassant, quoted in another connection by D.-P., § 1714; other examples in Sten, p. 222); « Longtemps après qu'il *eut refermé* la porte, Thérèse était demeurée étendue » (Mauriac, quoted Sten, p. 215; other examples, *ib.*, also D.-P., § 1852, p. 452 and § 1854).

find not *j'avais fait* but *je faisais* [1], and presumably also for past comple-
tion continuance in past *j'avais fait* and for past imminence continuance
in past *j'allais faire*.

Time relative to a point in future receives expression less frequently;
in indirect speech depending on a verb in future time, the forms nor-
mally used are those for direct time [2]. Time relative to a point in future
has, however, a special (" modal ") use to express presumption or pro-
bability; thus we have for present actuality in future the form *je ferai*
used in the sense of " it will turn out at a point in future time that I
now do ", and similarly for present completion in future and past actua-
lity attainment in future *j'aurai fait*, and for past completion attainment
in future *j'aurai eu fait* [3].

A brief note may perhaps be added about the application of our system
of categories to the tenses of moods other than the indicative. The tenses
of the subjunctive mood, as has often been pointed out, do not (at any
rate in Modern French) lend themselves to analysis in the same terms
as those of the indicative. In the imperative, there is no distinction of
time (which is always present-future) nor of aspect, but there are dis-
tinct forms for the stages of actuality and completion, as in « *Travaillez*
vite et *ayez fini* avant trois heures [4] ». Our categories can also be applied

1. E. g. « Ils éprouvaient un contentement de barbares à voir s'écrouler les splendeurs
qu'ils *adoraient* naguère avec servilité » (Gaxotte, quoted Sten, p. 126; other examples,
ib., also p. 170, 223).

2. We have, however, a past actuality continuance in future in, e. g., « Quand vous
m'aurez perdu, vous connaîtrez ce que je *valais* » (Vigny, quoted in another connection
by D.-P., § 1858, p. 456), where *valais* expresses actuality continuance in a past calcu-
lated not from the moment of speech but from the point in future time indicated by the
temporal clause); cf. also an example from Bergson in D.-P., § 1747, p. 245.

3. E. g. « Voilà quelqu'un qui lui ressemble, ce *sera* son frère aîné » (Stendhal, quoted
Gougenheim, *Syst.*, p. 188); « Je *me serai* mal *expliquée*. — Ou plutôt j'*aurai* mal
compris » (Augier, quoted Le Bidois, § 759); « On pense que M. Tardieu en *aura eu
fini* hier soir avec les résistances du Dr Schacht, il *aura pris* le train de 20 heures pour
être à 6 h 30 à Paris... » (Maurras, quoted D.-P., § 1859; *aura eu fini* represents the
transposition into future time, here expressing mere inference, of the past completion
attainment *eut fini* or *a eu fini* which might have been used if the writer had considered
the content of the clause as established fact).

4. The form *ayez fait* is traditionally but improperly called the past imperative (e. g.
Gougenheim, *Syst.*, p. 219, Grevisse, § 744); Wartburg et Zumthor (§ 354) say that it
« se situe nécessairement dans le plan de l'avenir», but its time-reference is clearly no
more and no less future than that of the form *faites*.

in principle to two other moods, the eventual (traditionally called "conditional") and the hypothetical (the mood normally used in the *si*-clause of a hypothetical sentence). In these two moods there is usually no formal distinction between present and future time, nor between the aspects of continuance and attainment. The commonest forms of the eventual mood are : present-future actuality *je ferais*, present-future completion *j'aurais fait*, past actuality *j'aurais fait*, past completion *j'aurais eu fait* [1]. The corresponding forms of the hypothetical mood are : present-future actuality *je faisais*, present-future completion *j'avais fait*, past actuality *j'avais fait*, past completion *j'avais eu fait* [2]. Not only do these forms contrast as regards their time-reference with the similar forms of the indicative mood : in general semantic content the eventual and hypothetical moods are at least as different from the indicative as the indicative is from the subjunctive.

It will have been observed that many of the tense-forms of Modern French have been shown as occupying more than one place in the framework which we have set up. Thus the form *j'ai fait* appears as (1) indicative present completion and (2) indicative past actuality attainment; the form *j'aurais fait* appears as (1) indicative future completion in past, (2) eventual present completion and (3) eventual past actuality; while the form *je faisais* has been shown as fulfilling no fewer than five functions [3], and the form *j'avais fait* as fulfilling six. Such a fragmenta-

1. E. g. « En cas d'alerte, chacun *aurait eu* vite *fait* de retrouver son bien. Les fusils seuls étaient en ordre... » (R. Bazin, quoted Cornu, p. 132; *aurait eu fait* is the tense-form of the eventual corresponding to an indicative past completion attainment *eut fait* or *a eu fait*).

2. E. g. « Si je l'*avais eu mise* [sc. mis la lettre à la poste], je n'aurais pas pu la ravoir » (quoted from speech by D.-P., § 1800); *avais eu mise* is the tense-form of the hypothetical corresponding to an indicative past completion continuance *avais mise*.

3. This multiplicity of functions goes some way towards explaining certain exaggerated views of the significance of the imperfect : for Damourette and Pichon, for example (§§ 1703, 1707 ff), under the name of "toncal pur", it ranks with the present (the "noncal pur") as the *chef de file* of a whole range of tenses, while Weber (p. 266) declares that "im Französischen kommt dem imparfait etwa soviel Bedeutung zu wie allen übrigen Tempora [der Vergangenheit] zusammen". This *mystique* of the imperfect is no doubt based to some extent on the fact that even in ordinary conversation it appears, with different time-values, in two distinct moods (indicative past actuality continuance and hypothetical present-future actuality); but it also derives in large part from predominantly literary uses of the tense, notably as present actuality in past (especially in the *style indirect libre*) and in that special application of the past actuality continuance,

tion of the field of employment of a given form is of course in direct
opposition to the postulate adopted by many scholars, that to each tense-
form there must correspond a single unified function or meaning [1]. But
this postulate is justifiable only in synchronic structural linguistics, for
which the meaning of a form is the totality of its uses. In descriptive lin-
guistics on a psychological basis the assumption is as gratuitous as the
exactly parallel assumption that a preposition or conjunction such as *de*
or *que* has a single unified meaning [2]; while for historical linguistics it is
obviously false. It is perhaps worth noting that some of the distinctions
of function that have been made can be supported on more or less struc-
tural grounds; thus for example the form *j'ai fait* may be accompanied by
the adverb *déjà* or by an adverbial phrase with *depuis* when it expresses
present completion continuance, but not when it expresses present com-
pletion attainment or past actuality attainment; the same form is syn-
tactically interchangeable with *je fis* when it expresses past actuality
attainment, but not when it expresses present completion; similarly the
forms *j'aurais fait* and *j'avais fait* are syntactically interchangeable with
j'eusse fait in their eventual and hypothetical functions respectively, but
not in their indicative functions. For our purpose, however, these par-
ticular distinctions are no more valid than others which cannot be sup-
ported by considerations of this kind.

IV

Within the framework of this system of categories it is possible to
state many of the changes that have taken place in the use of the tenses,

initiated by the naturalist novelists, which in the hands of their less competent succes-
sors became virtually a " narrative imperfect ".

1. E. g. (apart from the structuralists) Guillaume, p. 56 f, D.-P., §§ 1740 (p. 234),
1749, 1843 (p. 432), etc., Cornu, p. 131, Weber, p. 25, 251, etc.

2. It is in fact the failure to make a distinction between the two quite separate func-
tions of the tense-form *j'ai fait* (present completion and past actuality attainment)
that gives rise to the meaningless definitions of its use quoted above. The tense-form *je
ferais*, traditionally considered as always belonging to the " conditional mood ", has
been correctly recognised as having two quite distinct functions (indicative future actu-
ality in past or " conditionnel-temps " and eventual present-future actuality or " con-
ditionnel-mode ") by Clédat, Brunot, Dauzat, Grevisse, De Boer and others; but the
old confusion has been reintroduced by Guillaume, Damourette and Pichon and others,
who, going to the opposite extreme, consider it as always belonging to the indicative
(cf. H. Yvon in *Le français moderne*, XX (1952), 249 ff).

of the indicative mood between Latin and contemporary colloquial French, though in some cases the date of the change has not yet been even approximately established. The main features of these changes are briefly sketched below.

Expression of imminence. — The Classical Latin periphrase with the "future participle", *facturus sum,* etc. (which expressed imminence in the sense in which we have defined it, rather than proximity in future time) was replaced in Late Latin by the periphrase *facere habeo,* etc. [1], originally an expression of obligation or necessity. The resulting French tense-forms, *je ferai,* etc., still occur as expressions of imminence at least down to the end of the Old French period [2], e. g. « mout me poise Que por nos deus se *conbatront* Dui si prodome » (Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain,* 5968 ff); « et quant il est venus a son compaignon, il li demande : « Que me *mousterrés* vous ? — Che *verrés* vous bien', fait il » (*Roman de Balain,* p. 93); « Tu ne sés que je te *dirai,* Compains ? Je me *marierai* » (Montaiglon et Raynaud, *R. G. F.,* II, 163 quoted Gougenheim, *Périphr.,* p. 85). In Old French, however, imminence is more usually expressed by *voloir* + infinitive [3] and especially by *devoir* + infinitive, which not infrequently loses its sense of obligation and becomes an expression of imminence pure and simple. In this use it occurs in all times and in both aspects [4], e. g. (Thomas Becket falls into a mill-race) « Quant il *dut* en la roe *chair,* le chief devant, Li molniers *out mulu; mist* la closture a tant.» (Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, *Vie de saint Thomas,* 223 f); here the tense-forms, all in past time and in the aspect of attainment, are respectively in the stages of imminence, completion and actuality. This use of *devoir* survives in Modern French, generally speaking, only in the subjunctive and infinitive. By about the beginning of the fifteenth

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1. It was no doubt the function of *facere habebam* > *je ferais* as past imminence continuance (not its later use as future actuality in past) that gave rise to the use of this form as a tense of the eventual mood; cf. the almost eventual use of past imminence forms in Latin (« *Emendaturus,* si licuisset, *eram* ») and Modern French (« *J'allais commencer* mon histoire s'il ne m'avait interrompu », Gougenheim, *Périphr.,* p. 110).

2. This use probably survived later in various formulas such as « escoute que je te *dirai* », etc.; but two Middle French examples alleged by Gougenheim (*Périphr.,* p. 85) and D.-P. (§ 1771, p. 290) respectively are of the type « il sera ici maintenant », in which *maintenant* = ' soon, shortly' and the verb-form expresses future time.

3. Examples from Old and Middle French, and from modern dialects and regional French, are quoted by Gougenheim, *Périphr.,* p. 88 ff.

4. Examples in Tobler-Lommatzsch, II, 1889 ff.

century [1] *devoir* + infinitive was superseded, as the normal expression of imminence, by *aller* + infinitive, which has become a standard tense-form of Modern French (cf. Gougenheim, *Périphr.*, p. 97 ff); it is, however, restricted to present and past time and to the aspect of continuance : *je vais faire, j'allais faire.*

Expression of completion. — In Classical Latin completion was expressed by the perfect-stem tenses : present completion *feci*, past completion *feceram*, etc. In Late Latin this function was gradually taken over by the periphrase *habere* + past participle, and by the beginning of Old French this constituted the normal expression of completion : present completion *j'ai fait* [2], past completion continuance *j'avoie fait*, past completion attainment *j'oi fait*, etc. Since the Old French period there has been no important change in the " standard " language, apart from the extension of the form *je viens de faire*, etc., used since the fifteenth century to express recent completion (Gougenheim, *Périphr.*, p. 122 ff). In " non-standard " French, however, there has arisen a use of the form *j'ai eu fait* (a use variously called the « parfait surcomposé » or the « passé sur-composé absolu » or « à valeur spéciale ») in which it serves essentially to express present completion. One of the derived functions of any present completion form is to stress the fact that the process referred to is no longer actual — i. e., by implication, that it was actual on an unspecified occasion or occasions in the past. As this function can no longer be unambiguously fulfilled in Modern French by the form *j'ai fait*, there is a widespread tendency in dialects and regional French to use in this sense the form *j'ai eu fait*, e. g. « Ça marche pas, l'usine ? — Elle a eu marché » ; « J'en *ai eu acheté*, des fois, du fromage qui... » (quoted from speech by Foulet, *Surcomp.*, p. 232 [3]; other examples *ib.*, also D.-P., § 1777, Cornu, p. 169 ff, 221 ff).

1. The thirteenth-century example alleged by D.-P. (§§ 1643, 1771) rests on a misinterpretation of a corrupt text.

2. It is doubtful how far present completion could be expressed in Old French by the tense-form *je fis*. Most of the examples which have been quoted (e. g. Meyer-Lübke, *Grammaire des langues romanes*, III, § 108, Foulet, *Disp.*, p. 292, D.-P., §§ 1814, 1817) can and probably should be understood as expressing past actuality attainment ; but the present completion sense probably survived into Old French at least in certain formulas such as « Je ne mangeai hui » (cf. *Queste del Saint Graal*, p. 106, quoted Foulet, *Petite Syntaxe de l'ancien français*, 3e éd., § 333).

3. The above explanation is given by Foulet, *l. c.*, p. 231 ff, 250 ff; we do not, however, accept his view that the use of the form *j'ai eu fait* necessarily marks « un recul dans le passé » (cf. C. De Boer, *Introduction à l'étude de la syntaxe du français,*

Expression of future time. — Forms descended from the Latin future survive in Old French only in the verb *estre*. Already in the earliest Old French texts the expression of future time has been taken over by forms which must previously have expressed solely imminence, *je ferai*, etc. The same evolution is tending to repeat itself in Modern French [1]. The imminence forms of Modern French, *je vais faire*, etc., have since about the beginning of the seventeenth century been used also as future time forms, though until recently only for immediate future time, e. g. « Ils *vont être* ici dans un moment » (Molière, quoted Gougenheim, *Périphr.*, p. 107); « Il *va venir* aussitôt qu'il sera débarrassé de Mme Argante » (Dancourt, *ib.*); « Bientôt mes oncles auraient fini leur partie de cartes et *allaient revenir* » (Proust, quoted in another connection by Le Bidois, § 762; *allaient revenir* represents immediate future actuality in past); « Quand l'Allemagne *va avoir fait* faillite, ça *va entraîner* la chute du franc suisse » (quoted from speech by D.-P., § 1779; *va avoir fait* represents future completion, no doubt immediate). In contemporary colloquial speech, however, the form *je vais faire* tends to become an expression of future time generally, e. g. « On y regardera quand on *va y aller*, samedi » (quoted from speech by D.-P., § 1768. p. 281 [2]).

Expression of past attainment. — In Latin past actuality attainment was expressed by the "perfect" *feci* in its function as "historic perfect"; and its descendant the French « passé simple » or "past definite" or "past historic" *je fis* still retains this function in literary usage; similarly past completion attainment is expressed by the "past anterior" *j'eus fait*. By about the beginning of the Middle French period [3], however,

Groningue et Paris, 1933, p. 108 ff). The explanation of Cornu (p. 179 ff) appears to miss the point.

1. Cf. Ch. Bally, *Linguistique générale et linguistique française*, 2e éd., Berne, 1944, § 343; Gougenheim, *Périphr.*, p. 106 f (view rejected by D.-P., § 1768, Weber, p. 199, n. 4).

2. Cf. also « Huysmans est bien trop peu perspicace pour que son admiration soit aussi féconde qu'*allait être* quelques années plus tard, le mépris amusé du clairvoyant Proust » (*Europe*, quoted Sten, p. 240), where *allait être* represents future actuality (not immediate) in past.

3. Alleged examples from Old French quoted by, e. g., Foulet, *Disp.*, p. 272 ff and D.-P., § 1760 need not, and almost certainly should not, be taken as expressing past actuality attainment. It is certain that Old French writers, especially poets, used in narration, alongside the forms *je fis* (past actuality attainment) and *je fais* (present (timeless) actuality attainment), the form *j'ai fait* in its original sense as a present completion;

the present completion form *j'ai fait* had come to be used also to express
past actuality attainment (at first, no doubt, only recent past actuality
attainment); it competed more and more successfully, especially in col-
loquial usage, with the traditional form *je fis*, until in comparatively
modern times (probably in the early nineteenth century) it completely
displaced *je fis* in conversation, except in certain provinces. Once *j'ai fait*
had acquired the sense of *je fis*, *j'ai eu fait* became a possible equivalent
of *j'eus fait* as past completion attainment (the earliest unambiguous
examples belong to the first half of the fifteenth century, cf. Foulet,
Surcomp., 209 ff, Cornu, 11 ff), and it has similarly displaced that form
in conversation.

The fact that in terms of our system of categories the two forms *je fis*
and *j'ai fait* appear in Modern French as expressing past actuality attain-
ment, and the two forms *j'eus fait* and *j'ai eu fait* as expressing past
completion attainment, would not of itself imply that in these functions
each pair of forms is necessarily identical in all respects. It does, how-
ever, seem certain that there is at the present day no difference of tense-
value between *je fis* and *j'ai fait* as past actuality attainment, or between
j'eus fait and *j'ai eu fait* as past completion attainment, but only a diffe-
rence of style and tone [1]. The character of objectivity, coldness or
inertness sometimes ascribed to the form *je fis*, as contrasted with the
subjectivity or active or living quality found in the forms *j'ai fait* and
je faisais [2], is simply due to the fact that the first, unlike the other two,
is now an exclusively literary form which does not occur in ordinary
conversation.

The examples which have just been given are not intended to suggest
that the history of the uses of the various tense-forms of the indicative
mood can be established only with the help of the proposed categories
of times, stage and aspect. All that is claimed is that the historical evo-
lution, and many of the oppositions existing between tenses at any given
date, can be fairly clearly and conveniently stated in terms of these cate-
gories.

Manchester.   T. B. W. Reid.

there is probably no direct connection between this literary usage and the later develop-
ment in spoken French by which *j'ai fait* came to express past actuality attainment.

1. Cf. A. Meillet, *Linguistique historique et linguistique générale*, p. 149 ff, Foulet,
Disp., p. 308 ff, Bally, o. c., § 585, etc. (view rejected by D.-P., §§ 1759 f, 1810, 1819,
etc., Wartburg et Zumthor, § 326, Cornu, p. 105 ff, Weber, p. 60, n. 2).

2. E. g. Le Bidois, § 728, Wartburg et Zumthor, § 314, Weber, p. 97.