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► **To cite this version:**

Patrick Caudal. On so-called 'tense uses' in French as context-sensitive constructions \*. Martin Becker; Jakob Egetenmeyer. Tense, aspect and discourse structure, De Gruyter, In press. hal-03511443

**HAL Id: hal-03511443**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03511443v1>**

Submitted on 4 Jan 2022

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## On so-called ‘tense uses’ in French as context-sensitive constructions\*

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The purpose of this paper is to establish that so-called ‘uses’ of verbal inflections such as the French *imparfait* can articulate a conventionalized, ‘entrenched’ dimension, alongside with a productive, context-sensitive dimension at the semantics/pragmatics interface – i.e., that one type of modelling mechanism (entrenchment vs. dynamic context-sensitivity) does not preclude the other. In order to reveal the complexity of the matter at stake, I will here focus on two relatively well-known uses of the *imparfait*, namely the so-called attenuative *imparfait* (or ‘politeness’ *imparfait*), which associates with utterances conveying polite, negotiable requests, and the so-called ‘narrative *imparfait*’, which associates with sequence-of-events narrative discourses. The term ‘construction’ highlights a fundamental hypothesis explored in these pages, namely that tense uses are often conventionalized in one way or another. I will use it here in two distinct senses: in the (strong) sense of a special set of lexicalized syntactic constructs in the *imparfait* paired up with a conventionalized semantic content non-compositionally derivable from the elements making up the construct, and in the (weaker) sense of a conventionalized meaning attached to the lexical entry of a verbal inflection. More specifically, I will analyze the so-called ‘attenuative *imparfait*’ as an instance of strong construction, and the ‘narrative *imparfait*’ as an instance of weak construction, i.e., as a matter of semantic homonymy – the main contribution of this paper being that in spite of their constructional nature, these ‘tense uses’ are nevertheless endowed with significant context-sensitivity.

### 1.1 Introduction

Until recently (cf. e.g. (Caudal 2017; Patard 2017; Caudal 2018)), most accounts of ‘tense uses’ in French put the stress on various kinds of productive, online, semantic and/or pragmatic strategies, to contextually adapt and/or enrich some underspecified ‘core’ meaning. From the 1990’s onwards, this was usually achieved through various productive interpretative mechanisms (semantic composition, discourse structural parameters such as discourse relations or other contextual parameters in general, either purely pragmatic or at the semantics/pragmatics interface), the nature of which do not matter here. Typically, such works ascribed a relatively adaptable nucleus of meaning to tenses, which could either be enriched by semantic and/or pragmatic means.<sup>1</sup> Analyses of the various known uses of the *imparfait* are no exception to this, from (Molendijk 1990) to (Brisard

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\* I here gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Labex *Empirical Foundations of Linguistics* (ANR “Investissements d’Avenir” programme, ANR-10-LABX-0083); this paper has especially benefited from interactions with members of the GD4 and GL3 (Strand 3) and MEQTAME (Stand 2) operations. The Labex EFL has also funded fieldwork I conducted Australia between 2013 and 2020; this has deeply influenced my understanding of TAM categories in general.

I would also like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments, as well as the audience and organizers of the *Sektion 12 „Tempus, Aspekt und Diskursstruktur“* workshop at Romanistentag 2019 in Kassel – it was a privilege to be invited by Martin Becker and Jakob Egentenmeyer to give a talk at this exciting workshop. Of course, remaining errors and misconceptions are entirely mine.

<sup>1</sup> *Polysemy* or *monosemy*, depending on how one defines monosemy vs. polysemy, and how much a particular account relies on what kind of meaning extension mechanisms are at play, were thus frequently invoked when trying to account for the wild variety of so-called uses exhibited by French tenses. The distinction does not matter for the purpose of the present investigation, though.

2010).<sup>2</sup> However, concerns were soon voiced that this might not a suitable explanation for at least some so-called tense uses. This was notably the case for both the ‘attenuative’ and ‘narrative’ uses of the *imparfait*, as early as (Berthonneau & Kleiber 1993; Berthonneau & Kleiber 1999) – who made a strong case for analyzing the ‘narrative *imparfait*’ as a case of homonymy – or (Abouda 2001; Anscombe 2004; Abouda 2004) – who stressed that the attenuative *imparfait* suspiciously looks like a lexified, syntactically entrenched construction. In time, such observations gave rise to a (still limited) number of novel constructional analyses, where *de facto*, there emerged a clear tendency<sup>3</sup> to analyze conventionalized ‘uses’ (be they ‘weak’ (mere tense homonyms) or ‘strong’ constructions) in static semantic terms (i.e., disregarding context-sensitive mechanisms), and non-conventionalized uses being treated as hinging on productive, dynamic context-sensitive mechanisms (i.e., by resorting to a non-static approach to their meaning, based on contextual update mechanisms). This raises an obvious question: is it legitimate to view ‘tense uses’ as falling squarely either within the realm of entrenched, static meanings, or within that of dynamic, context-sensitive meanings? Or more specifically, can constructionalized, conventionalized uses of tenses remain context-sensitive? And if so, how?

While the present analysis will argue that what has been dubbed ‘tense uses’ is indeed generally the byproduct of some kind of conventionalization process, I will try and demonstrate that it does not imply all their connections with context-sensitivity *qua* dynamic semantic and/or pragmatic mechanisms contributing to their interpretation should be severed. By studying so-called *attenuative* and *narrative* uses of the *imparfait* in turn, and after demonstrating their conventionalized nature, I will compare the manner in which context sensitivity (and a dynamic theory of meaning, whether seen as a formal pragmatics or a formal theory of the semantics/pragmatics interface) plays a different part in each case. I intend to highlight the joint necessity for:

## 1.2 Research question and core hypothesis investigated in the paper

- Conventionalization-based, constructional approaches, with various types of form/meaning pairing conventionalization mechanisms being at stake. I will claim that ‘attenuative’ uses of the *imparfait* derive from cross-linguistically common language change patterns, historically starting in the pragmatics of tenses, and later becoming properly semanticized, albeit in a lexicalized, constructionalized fashion, and involve *conventionalized implicatures* in the sense of (Potts 2005; Potts 2007b) – i.e., they involve an arbitrary network of ‘strong’, complex verbal constructions. In contrast, I will propose to analyze the narrative *imparfait* as a separately encoded (i.e., homonymous) meaning of the *imparfait*, whose semantic contribution is conventionally distinct from that of the normal, past imperfective reading of the *imparfait*, but does not involve any complex construction;<sup>4</sup> this is a ‘weak’ instance of constructionalization, à la (Michaelis 2011).

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<sup>2</sup> A partial list of relevant references would include (Molendijk 1990; Gosselin 1996; Bres 1999; Caudal 2000; Caudal, Veters & Roussarie 2003; Saussure 2003; Saussure & Sthioul 2005; Patard 2006; Bres 2006; De Mulder & Brisard 2006; Patard 2007; Bres 2009a; Bres 2009b; Brisard 2010); most of them focus on only one of the above uses of the *imparfait*, plus its standard past imperfective reading.

<sup>3</sup> I believe this follows from an unconscious bias in constructional approaches, who tend to downplay or disregard (but do not overtly exclude) context-sensitivity in reaction to its excessive use in many existing, previous works on ‘tense uses’.

<sup>4</sup> I must thank an anonymous reviewer for very constructive criticism in this respect. It has led me to abandon my initial ‘strong’ constructional analysis of the narrative *imparfait*, so that I eventually came up with a ‘weak’ constructional analysis instead.

- Semantic and pragmatic contextualization mechanisms-based approaches; the need for such mechanisms, I will argue, can be retained even by well-established, or acquired, by constructions. I will show in this paper that some constructions call for dynamic pragmatic interpretative process (as is the case with the attenuative *imparfait*), or are sensitive to discourse structural parameters (as is the case with the narrative *imparfait*).

Or to put it in a nutshell, I will claim that the two ‘uses’ here studied embody two different types of conventionalized form-meaning pairings (strong vs. weak constructions), as well as two different types of context-sensitivity – and illustrate two different sorts of interplay between semantics and pragmatics (multidimensional meanings/conventionalized implicatures à la (Potts 2005; Potts 2007a) vs. the integration of aspectuo-temporal and semantic discourse structural meaning within so-called ‘common sense entailment’ reasoning à la (Asher & Lascarides 2003)).

### 1.3 A quick review of existing approaches to tense uses in context

The contextual interpretation of French verbal inflection has been a much debated topic among Romanists and semanticists/pragmaticists alike for well over forty years already, starting with seminal references such as (Vet 1980; Kamp & Rohrer 1983) on the theoretical and formal semantics front, or (Molendijk 1983) on the theoretical-descriptive front – although one should probably go as far back as (Weinrich 1964). The 1995-2005 period was truly the ‘golden decade’ for the semantic extension/pragmatic enrichment type of approaches, with countless papers converging w.r.t. the set of angles of attack they adopted in order to account for the seemingly endless variability of tense meanings in context. I will not say much about these here, as I am going to focus here on their successors, namely approaches more concerned with formal, arbitrary constraints on so-called tense ‘uses’.

However, not all analyses of ‘tense uses’ resorted to such strategies. Non-meaning enrichment based accounts of tense uses appeared for English at least as early as (Michaelis 1994). For French, (Berthonneau & Kleiber 1993; Berthonneau & Kleiber 1999; Kleiber 2003) or (Abouda 2001; Anscombe 2004; Abouda 2004) were some of the first accounts *de facto* advocating what can be retrospectively branded ‘weak’ (homonymy-based) or ‘strong’ constructional accounts for so-called ‘uses’ of the *imparfait*. *Theoretically* constructional analyses of tense uses followed those pioneering analyses – i.e. analyses effectively advocating the use of a construction grammar-based approach (cf. e.g. (Goldberg 1995)) or some other lexicalized formal syntax-based (Pollard & Sag 1994; Ginzburg & Sag 2000; Dalrymple 1999; Dalrymple 2001). For English, (Michaelis 2004; Michaelis 2011) pursued a fully developed, formal syntactic constructional approach to various tense-aspect grammatical phenomena; for French, a related line of analysis (though of an informal kind, syntactically speaking) can be found in (Patard 2014; Patard 2017; Caudal 2017; Caudal 2018), especially for the *conditionnel* and the *imparfait*.

According to such approaches, most form/meaning pairings for so-called tense uses are not achieved by means of online, contextual meaning enrichments, as they are either:

- cases of *homonymy/polysemy*, with polysemy then refer to separately conventionalized meanings as well (if one assumes that the relevant form/meaning pairings operate at the morphological exponent level for tenses)
- instances of separate, full-fledged constructions à la (Goldberg 1995) (i.e., involve entirely different forms, extending well beyond the *imparfait* morphology).

One important defect of such constructional approaches though, is that they tend to tightly separate constructionalized meanings (their relation to context-sensitivity being effectively considered to be non-existent, or being at least left unexplored), from non-constructionalized uses (the analysis then almost exclusively focusing on their context sensitivity). I will show below that this *de facto* divide may not be warranted by certain ‘tense uses’, whose constructionalized nature does not preclude context-sensitivity (it does not prevent from possessing a dynamic semantics and/or pragmatics in order to construe their context-dependent interpretation). It is my intention to here lay the foundations for a theory providing a complex theory of ‘uses of the *imparfait*’, involving both a constructional component, and a dynamic semantics / pragmatics component – theoretical syntactic concerns will be mostly set aside here for want of space to address them in detail.<sup>5</sup>

#### 1.4 Mapping out the paper

My argumentation will proceed as follows. I will first (§2) show that ‘attenuative uses’ of the *imparfait* are an instance of verbal constructions in a strong sense, and involve a lexified multidimensional semantics à la (Potts 2007a; Gutzmann 2015; Gutzmann & McCready 2016); and at the same time, I will argue that a dynamic pragmatic account of the notion of attenuation (*qua* attenuated directives) based on (Portner 2018)’s theory of commitment management in dialogue is also necessary to account for their contextual interpretation. I will then show in §3, that discourse structural parameters (especially discourse topics, as well as rhetorical relations) play a key role in the contextual licensing and interpretation of so-called ‘narrative *imparfait*’ sequences; and even though they also require the presence of some manner of support syntactic markers, the latter do not make up lexically discontinuous, verbal constructions. In my conclusion §4, I will argue that this suggests that the study of ‘tense uses’ calls for a complex articulation of (a) the morpho-syntax to semantics interface (i.e. the conventionalized form-meaning pairing part of the analysis), with (b) a formal pragmatics and/or semantics/pragmatics interface (i.e. the context-sensitivity part of the analysis), and that this results in a much more nuanced and complex picture of the interaction between conventionalization and context sensitivity in the grammar of TAM forms than has been hitherto assumed in the literature.

## 2 The attenuative *imparfait*

Let us turn to the analysis of the so-called ‘attenuative *imparfait*’. I will first try and attempt to define the semantic and pragmatic properties of attenuation as a root modal semantic category – for root modality is obviously involved here, as we will see.

### 2.1 Defining attenuative modality

Examples (1) and (2) will be my empirical starting point for such a definition. They are non-attenuated uses of verbs in the present here expressing some form of deontic meaning; however deontic meaning is only one of the many modal categories for which attenuative readings are available, and it is also only one out of the many possible modal meanings of *devoir* and *falloir*. As will soon become apparent, non-dynamic root modal meanings will be of key importance to the present investigation. I will adopt (Portner

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<sup>5</sup> Most existing approaches to the uses of the *imparfait* do not exhibit an explicit, formal constructional analysis, unlike e.g. (Michaelis 2004; Michaelis 2011). Due to size constraints, this paper, alas, will also be wanting in this respect.

2007)'s concept of *priority modals* to refer to such modals, as they involve a notion of preference over possible worlds. The term can cover a wide semantic range, comprising notably both subject-internal and subject-external necessity (van der Auwera & Plungian 1998), i.e. both deontic and non-deontic uses of such modals, as well as teleological and bouletic modal meanings.

- (1)            Vous devez                    partir.  
 You    NECESS-PR.2sg        go.INF  
 'You must go.'
- (2)            Il faut                                partir.  
 It IMPERS.NECESS-PR.3sg go.INF  
 'We/you must go.'

The first important empirical observation grounding the descriptive notion of modal attenuation, is that priority modals in (1)-(2) (indirectly) convey directives *qua* orders – i.e., they implicate a directive meaning, though they lack a *performative* dimension (they are not equivalent to an imperative, whose directive meaning is at-issue, not implicated). They exhibit what is known as strong modal force – here strong *directive* modal force (Portner 2007). Quantificationally, if one adopts a formal analysis in the spirit of (Kratzer 1991), necessity modals will involve a universal quantifier over possible worlds (all accessible worlds must ratifying the choice imposed upon the addressee). In contrast, in (3)-(4), due to the presence of the conditional inflection on the modal verb, the speaker issues a mere request,<sup>6</sup> and the quantificational force of the corresponding *possibility* modal is of a weaker, existential type (i.e., only some of the accessible<sup>7</sup> possible worlds will realize the choice the speaker is prompting the addressee to make; it is much less directive).

- (3)            Vous devriez                    partir.  
 You    NECESS-COND.2pl    go.INF  
 'You should go.'
- (4)            Il faudrait                            partir.  
 It IMPERS.NECESS-COND.3sg go.INF  
 'We/you should go.'

Of course, the proposed quantificational contrast between (1)-(2) and (3)-(4) also reflects on a difference in terms of social authority, i.e., the speaker presents herself as holding such an authority when the present inflection is used, but she does not when the conditional inflection is used (or at least, she chooses not to overtly express her authority).

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<sup>6</sup> While such a request meaning is most common with deontic verbs *devoir* and  *falloir*, it also extends to deontic/preference periphrases (e.g. *être bon/souhaitable de*) in the *conditionnel*. Furthermore, combining the *conditionnel* with epistemic verbs yields intuitively related attenuated readings, cf. *il se peut que P* ('P might be true') vs. *il se pourrait que* (attenuated-'P might be true'>lesser degree of certainty). Although it is tempting to argue that this is a thoroughly compositional process whereby an 'attenuative', negotiable meaning attaches to the *conditionnel* and then combines with different modal bases, this could also be a matter of collostructional networks à la (Timponi Torrent 2015), as evidenced by the existence of certain lexical gaps observable in the *conditionnel passé* (cf. *il se pourrait que P* vs. *\*il s'aurait pu que P*). I will leave this question open for future discussion, as it is independent from the matter here at stake.

<sup>7</sup> According to the relevant accessibility relation *R* attached to the modal at stake. Note that if we assume this relation to be lexically attached to the modal used, the modal strength difference between (1)-(2) and (3)-(4) cannot be modelled in terms of an accessibility relation *R*<sub>2</sub> yielding a subset of the worlds accessible via another, modally stronger accessibility relation *R*<sub>1</sub>, cf. e.g. (Portner 2009: 33–36).

In formal terms, if one adopts a theory of modals and imperatives à la (Portner 2007), deontic modals contribute both to the COMMON GROUND (or CG for short) and a TO-DO LIST, associated with a richer structure involving participant-specific ‘commitment slates’ – see (Portner 2018), and below. Thus, the contribution of imperative sentence (5) to the latter discourse component consists in adding (6) to the addressee’s TO-DO LIST.

(5) Sit down!

(6)  $\llbracket \text{Sit down!} \rrbracket =_{\text{def}} [\lambda w \lambda x : x = \text{addressee}_C : x \text{ sits down in } w]$

A related contrast can be found with special conventionalized uses of imperatives in the context of a social call, to convey e.g., invitations/permissions, cf. (7). These differ from a more mundane and stronger priority/deontic interpretation found in (8). Thus, even if the addressee in (8) is a guest, this utterance conveys a strong request, i.e., one that cannot be directly dismissed by the addressee – e.g., not by merely answering *no, thank you*, (whereas this is possible in (7)).<sup>8</sup>

(7) Have a piece of fruit / a seat!      (<sup>OK</sup>invitation/#request: declining is costless)

(8) Leave your coat on the peg!      (#invitation/<sup>OK</sup>request: declining is costly)

I will sidestep a more thorough formal definition of the standard Kratzerian approach to modality in terms of modal bases vs. ordering sources – these are two conversational backgrounds, i.e., functions from possible worlds to propositions, respectively pointing to propositions (information states or bodies of evidence) constraining accessible worlds (this is the modal base) vs. propositions ordering worlds in terms of the most desirable/best possible outcome (this is the ordering source). While a very worthwhile issue in its own right, this question is largely irrelevant to the matter at stake here, particularly as we will see that the kinds of modal readings under scrutiny are not purely contextually construed; they involve a conventionalized modal core (i.e., the modal bases/ordering sources underlying the attenuated request meaning I am focusing here will be shown to be lexified semantic elements).

In the remainder of section §2, I will assume that attenuated vs. non-attenuated uses for priority modals can be understood as a being part of graded interpretative continuum possessing two polar opposites: *negotiable* to *non-negotiable* requests. I will define as negotiable request-denoting modals, priority modal forms indicating that the speaker overtly acknowledges the addressee’s right to dismiss the request thus expressed, and at no cost (except maybe by reciprocating in her response the polite attitude of the initial speaker). Attenuation *via* a conditional marking of French priority modal verbs or constructions, will be presented as a conventional way of mapping a lexically non-negotiable request expression (e.g. *devoir*) onto a negotiable *inflected* request expression.

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<sup>8</sup> (Portner 2007: 359–360) argues that such examples convey realistic (circumstantial) modal bases, with the ordering source – a set of desires in (7), vs. a set of requirements in (8) – providing the required ‘invitation’ vs. ‘request’ meanings. However, the division of modal meanings between these two sets of examples is clearly not a contextual, but a conventional matter – *have a N* conventionally expresses an invitation, regardless of contextual parameters; verbs capable of similar readings in the imperative pertain to a very limited semantic class, and otherwise convey either orders or requests, i.e. have a deontic reading.

## 2.2 A recent evolution: past conditionals as novel attenuated request markers

Before moving to the study of the so-called ‘attenuative’ uses of the imparfait, I would like to stress that the attenuative value of the *conditionnel présent* (present conditional, COND.PR for short) seems to be currently headed towards a less marked, and possibly non-existent attenuated meaning, as a novel marked attenuation inflectional marking is on the rise, namely the *conditionnel passé* (past conditional, COND.PA for short), as was shown in (Caudal 2018).

As the COND.PR has been routinely associated with a polite priority modal meaning in interactional contexts since the Old French period, it is hardly as surprise that its attenuative function is now slowly eroding, and that a marked attenuation marking has emerged with bouletic and teleological modals – though not with deontic modals. (Caudal 2018: 58–59) gives two early examples of the ‘bouletic verb-COND.PA INF’ construction, cf. (9)-(10). The advent of the COND.PA as a well-established past counterfactual/conditional inflection is relatively recent, and only dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century (Patard, Grabar & De Mulder 2015); this constructional evolution is therefore remarkably precocious.

- (9) Mme. DE ROSELLE. –Mais, entre nous, pourtant, j'aurois voulu savoir...  
 M. DE PLINVILLE. –Savoir ? quoi ? (J.-F. Collin D'Harleville, *L'Optimiste ou l'Homme toujours content*, 1788, p. 141)  
 ‘But just between you and we, I would like<sub>COND.PA</sub> (lit. ‘would have liked’) to know...’
- (10) Mon cher ami, Je vous ai apporté les épreuves, j'aurais désiré que Théo les lût.  
 (Flaubert, *Correspondance* (1854-1857), p. 139)  
 ‘My dear friend, I have brought you the proofs, I would like<sub>COND.PA</sub> (lit. ‘would have liked’) Theo to read them.’

The above constructional evolution results in an interesting contrast between utterances involving ‘bouletic modal-V INF’ vs. ‘deontic modal-V INF’ patterns in the COND.PA: while the former have become semantically ambiguous between a past irrealis (avertive) use, or and an ‘entrenched’ (strongly) attenuated request use (also only in the 1<sup>st</sup> person), cf. (11), the latter only possess a past irrealis (admonitive) use (12).

- (11) J'        aurais        voulu        lui        parler.  
 I        have-COND.1sg    WANT.PP        OBL.3sg    talk-INF.  
 1. ‘I wanted to talk to her/him [but I didn’t]’  
 2. ‘I wish I could<sub>COND.PA</sub> talk to her/him (= let me talk to her/him, please).’
- (12) J'        aurais        dû        lui        parler.  
 I        have-COND.1sg    DEONT.PP        OBL.3sg    talk-INF.  
 ‘I should have talked<sub>COND.PA</sub> to her/him.’

In the light of such data, it is clear that COND-marked modal attenuation (i) is *gradable/scalar* in some way (attenuation in (11) is stronger than in (13)<sup>9</sup>) and (ii) is of an arbitrary nature; while the COND.PR can attenuate any type of priority (as well as epistemic) modal, the COND.PA can only attenuate some priority modals, i.e., bouletic modal constructions, and no epistemic modal at all.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For a general discussion of scalarity in modal meanings, see e.g. (Lassiter 2010; Katz, Portner & Rubinstein 2012; Lassiter 2014). This closely relates to the function of the *ordering source* in a Kratzerian model of modality, as it must provide a ranking function ordering accessible worlds.

<sup>10</sup> Epistemic modals in the COND.PA only have a past irrealis meaning – and again, the COND.PA cannot even mark some epistemic constructions (cf. *il se pourrait* vs. *\*il s'aurait pu*, note 6).



- (13) Je voudrais lui parler.  
 I have-WANT-COND.1sg OBL.3sg talk-INF.  
 'I would like to talk to her/him.'

### 2.3 Attenuative uses of the *imparfait*, or attenuative structures in the *imparfait*?

In addition to bouletic modals in the *conditionnel*, attenuated priority meanings can also be conveyed by *imparfait*-marked structures in French. Treated as a lexification phenomenon as early as (Abouda 2001; Anscombe 2004), this so-called 'use' of the *imparfait* has been recently analysed as a set of conventionalized structures, forming in effect a network of constructions (Caudal 2017).<sup>11</sup> It is indeed limited to a handful of arbitrary lexical verbs and constructions,<sup>12</sup> in particular bouletic constructions (*vouloir* INF, *desirer* INF, *souhaiter* INF 'want/wish to INF') the motion-cum-purpose (teleological motion) construction *venir (pour) INF* ('come in order to INF', i.e., it is a deictic variant of English 'go and V'), and a class of verbs and constructions involving various means of communication (e.g., *écrire* ('write') *pour INF*, *téléphoner* ('give a call') *pour INF*) with a performative dimension.<sup>13</sup>

- (14) Excusez-moi, je voulais vous parler.  
 Excuse me, I want-IMPF.1sg you talk-INF.  
 'Excuse me, I wanted [= would like to] to talk to you'.

According to (Caudal 2017), earliest members of this relatively small constructional-lexical network emerged in Old/Middle French, beginning with *vouloir+INF*; the network then recruited new members among other bouletic constructions (*désirer INF*, *souhaiter INF*). The motion-cum-purpose, teleological *venir pour INF* construction and 'communication-cum-purpose' teleological constructions (*appeler/écrire pour INF*) were incorporated into the network at a later period. (Caudal 2017) notes that not all bouletic/teleological or motion-cum-purpose constructions are capable of attenuative modal readings with the *imparfait*. Thus *#avoir<sub>IMPF</sub> l'intention de INF* ('intend to INF') or *#aller<sub>IMPF</sub> INF* ('go INF/go and V') cannot give rise to attenuated modal meanings, which suggests that the observed form-meaning pairings are lexicalized/constructionalized, cf. (15)-(16). Such facts seem to disqualify theories attempting to construe the interpretation of these structures solely from a compositional semantic approach, and/or pragmatic contextual enrichment mechanisms tapping into the semantics of the *imparfait*.

- (15) #J' avais l'intention de vous parler. (past desire)  
 I have-IMPF.1sg the.intention of you talk-INF  
 'I intended to talk to you.'
- (16) #J' allais vous parler. (past counterfactual)  
 I go-IMPF.1sg you talk-INF.  
 'I was about to talk to you'.

<sup>11</sup> Accounts based on meaning expansion can be found in e.g. (Patard 2007; Bres 2009a).

<sup>12</sup> For want of space I will leave aside attenuative structures comprising declarative and interrogative verbs (*dire* 'say', *demander* 'ask'); I believe the analysis I will develop here can be *mutatis mutandis* applied to those structures as well – for the most part. See note 16 below.

<sup>13</sup> See (Caudal 2018) for a detailed demonstration of the lexicalized, constructionalized nature of these structures; it cannot be fully repeated here for want of space. While the last class listed here looks semantically productive at first sight, its obligatory *pour INF* element proves it is also conventionalized—these constructions come across as conveying an attenuated request, whereas they should compositionally convey an attenuated teleological modal; and their temporal meaning too is non-compositional).

But how did this conventionalized meaning arise? As was independently proposed in a number of works, cf. e.g. (Hogeweg 2009; Patard 2014), many so-called tense uses appear to derive from former conversational implicatures – thereby illustrating a commonly proposed semantic change pattern, cf. e.g. (Traugott 1988; Palmer 2001). Following (Caudal 2017) (see this reference for further details), I will hypothesize that attenuative structures in the *imparfait* appear also fit this development path.

Very sketchily, what allowed such constructions to come into existence was the so-called ‘super-interval property’ of imperfective tenses, first identified by (Bennett & Partee 1978) about the English past progressive, cf. (17). Although this exact formulation leads to a number of undesirable correlates, it does capture correct and important intuition that some classes of past, imperfectively viewed events (i.e., atelic and durative events) *may* extend up to the present time.

(17) [Imperfective  $\phi$ ] is true at interval  $I$  iff there exists an interval  $I'$  such that  $I \subset I'$ ,  $I$  is not a final subinterval of  $I'$ , and  $\phi$  is true at  $I'$ .

If a similar property holds true for a stative verb marked in the *imparfait*, then it follows from (17) that (18) describes a state of a baby being sick which although past, can extend up to the present interval. If we assume a neo-Reichenbachian approach to tense along with event reification, the crude Lewis/Klein-style representation of (18) given in (19) says that the topic time<sup>14</sup> interval  $t$  is anterior to the ‘now’ utterance interval, and is included in the temporal trace of  $e$  (here noted  $\tau(e)$ ). Such a strict inclusion relation entails that  $\tau(e)$  outlasts  $t$ , and even to extend up to say, the *now* interval.

(18) Le bébé était malade.

(19)  $\exists e$  [sick( $e$ ,baby)  $\wedge$   $t < \text{now} \wedge t \subset \tau(e)$ ]

This fact intuitively explains why (18) can be used to imply that the baby is still sick, cf. (20), where speaker B uses this very *imparfait* utterance to tentatively suggest that the baby might well be sick now. As a matter of fact, in the absence of specific information to the contrary, (18)/(19) can be associated with a conversational implicature that  $\tau(e)$  possibly extends up to *now*.

(20) A : Est-ce que le bébé va mieux ?

A : ‘Is the baby doing<sub>PR</sub> better?’

(21) B : Je ne sais pas, mais il y a deux heures il était (encore) malade.

B : ‘I don’t know, but two hours ago, he was<sub>IMPF</sub> (still) sick.’

I will here assume that such a temporal conversational implicature lies at the diachronic root of the so-called attenuative uses of the *imparfait*, but applied to a bouletic construction. Except that I will propose that it applied not just to the bouletic state itself, but also to an implicated directive meaning.

As we seen in §2.1, directive meanings can be implicated by priority modals. This also applies to bouletic modals; the present-marked counterpart (22) of (14) is also naturally interpreted as a endowed with a (non-attenuated) directive interpretation (Condoravdi & Lauer 2011; Condoravdi & Lauer 2012); all priority modals can indirectly convey a non-attenuated request through a pragmatic enrichment process (cf. (23)). But this does not come across as polite, and the speaker believes that her desire cannot be

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<sup>14</sup> (Klein 1994)’s topic time will play an even more important role in my analysis of the narrative *imparfait*. But it is worthwhile noting that it was also instrumental in the development of the so-called ‘attenuative *imparfait*’ – this demonstrates how central the notion is in the study of ‘tense uses’.

easily denied by the addressee, i.e., that she is in position of authority; it is not an attenuated directive. This is confirmed by the fact that (22) cannot really combine with a polite address expression such as ‘excusez-moi’ (such indirect requests are unattenuated, unlike (14)).

- (22) ( ??Excusez-moi), je veux vous parler.  
 (Excuse me) I want-PR.1sg you talk-INF.  
 ‘(Excuse me) I want to talk to you’.

- (23) ‘I want you to P.’     *implicates*                     ‘Do P!’

Similarly to attenuative COND structures, attenuative *imparfait* structures synchronically present the realization of the speaker’s priority as negotiable (it can be dismissed at no cost too), and give the addressee full authority to grant or reject said request. Since (22) is not a negotiable request, this indicates that the negotiability of (14) must have originated in the past temporal meaning of the *imparfait*. This idea is further supported by the fact that crosslinguistically similar attenuated patterns are often diachronically derived from former past imperfectively viewed bouletic expressions (cf. e.g. English *would*, originally the past of the *will* ‘want’ verb, or Romance conditionals, which derive from imperfective/underspecified past-marked priority modal constructions).<sup>15</sup>

I will propose that the originally defeasible status of the temporal implicature associated with stative utterances in the *imparfait* (cf. (20)) is the source of the modal attenuation here. But why? Because this defeasibility did not only bear only on the present validity of the volitional state itself; it came to affect as well the secondary, indirect directive meaning, implicated by the bouletic, ‘preference’ state (cf. (23) and (Condoravdi & Lauer 2011; Condoravdi & Lauer 2012)), similar to the implicated directive reading of (22). In other words, since the present validity of the bouletic state was given as (possibly) present *but* deniable by the speaker, the indirect directive meaning which inevitably came to be associated with such a present bouletic state was *also* construed as deniable, i.e. negotiable, when it became conventionalized as a secondary, non-at issue meaning – with negotiability of a directive meaning being the very definition I gave for attenuated COND bouletic constructions in §2.1 and §2.2. Later on, this implicated attenuate directive meaning became the main meaning of such utterances, and as such, became performative – like an imperative – and its older bouletic content lingered on as a merely implicated meaning. Such, I think, is the diachronic process which led *je voulais<sub>IMPF</sub> INF* to mean ‘I would like to INF’.

Note that unlike ‘interrogative’ conventionalized requests (cf. (Sadock 1974)’s concept of *whimperatives*) such as (24), attenuative *imparfait* requests (must) have a declarative form. They do not necessitate an explicit move to grant or accept a question – but like the conventionalized interrogative request (24), they are expected to be followed by either a polite rejection or an acceptance utterance; this indicates they have performative force, i.e., are at issue directives, like imperatives. But unlike imperatives, their directive effect can be easily rejected by the addressee – an addressee needs to make some special verbal effort (and take a certain social risk, a risk that is clearly non-existent

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<sup>15</sup> Those developments obtain not only with monosemous past imperfective tenses, but with aspectually underspecified past tenses, such as ‘simple past’ tenses in Germanic languages, including with the English or Dutch simple past, or the German *Präteritum*. With stative verbs, such tenses typically receive an imperfective viewpoint reading (*pace* what an anonymous reviewer suggested), unless the verb contextually has an inchoative/change-of-state coerced reading. It should not therefore come as a surprise that Modern English has developed a similar attenuative bouletic verb-based construction in the simple past (cf. ‘Excuse me, I wanted to k now if...’).

in (14)) to challenge the speaker's authority, and reject the directive conveyed. One can therefore conclude that attenuative *imparfait* structures convey *performative attenuated* directives, clearly subordinated to the addressee's willingness to ratify an update of her TO-DO LIST – i.e. they express negotiable requests, and their performative nature does not take away their attenuated meaning (the two parameters are orthogonal, of course).

(24) Puis- je vous parler?  
 CAN-PR.1sg I you talk-INF?  
 'May I speak to you?'

There is no doubt that the formerly indirect, pragmatically performative directive content of attenuative *imparfait* structures is now fully conventionalized. Proof of this is can be found in the observation that the sincerity of utterances like (14) cannot be challenged as in e.g., (25). I take this to indicate that they are performative (attenuated) directives, not unlike imperative utterances (Condoravdi & Lauer 2011; Condoravdi & Lauer 2012), as the sincerity of the latter cannot be challenged either. At-issue directive expressions are performatives in the sense that by uttering them, a speaker effectively prompts someone else to act according to an implicated, priority state (i.e. a desire) grounding the performative directive, cf. (26) – and such a directive update of somebody's commitments cannot be denied (Condoravdi & Lauer 2011; Condoravdi & Lauer 2012).

(25) No, you're lying. You do not want to talk to me, actually.

(26) 'Do P!' *implicates* 'I want you to do P.'

To put it simply, these observations strongly suggest that attenuative *imparfait* structures are very similar to directive structures like imperatives in three important respects. (a) Their sincerity cannot be challenged, so both types of expressions denote a performative directive. (b) Like them, they associate a priority state (a desire), with said performative directive meaning – the priority state *grounding* the directive content. For imperatives and in fact all conventionalized directive expressions, this priority, bouletic state is not directly conveyed, it is merely implicated, (26). And there emerges a third similarity (c) with attenuative IMPF structures: as synchronically they both convey a conventionalized performative directive, this entails that the original bouletic meaning of 'attenuative *imparfait*' structures was reanalyzed as a secondary meaning grounding their now mainly directive content. Therefore, from an interpretative structure like (23), 'attenuative *imparfait*' structure came to have one similar to (26) – that of an imperative. I believe that the – obviously late – recruitment of communication verbs *téléphoner* 'give a ring' etc. strongly support such an assumption: indeed, they can have an obvious performative meaning when used in the 1<sup>st</sup> person; in combination with teleological preposition *pour*, they even have an obvious performative directive meaning.<sup>16</sup>

Independent evidence supporting idea (c) can also be found in some peculiar temporal properties of attenuative IMP structures. As was noted in (Anscombe 2004), it is obvious that at least some elements of the original past at issue meaning of these

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<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that *vouloir*<sub>IMPF</sub> *INF* constructions also often crop up with with *verba dicendi* or interrogative verbs to express an 'attenuated assertion' or 'attenuated question' rather than an 'attenuated directive' (cf. *A propos, je voulais*<sub>IMPF</sub> *te dire/te demander...* 'By the way, I wanted to tell/Ask you...') – whereby the speaker indicates that although this is a performative speech act, the addressee is entitled not to accept the normally associated assertoric or interrogative update ('you can disregard what I'm saying/asking, but I'm saying/asking it nevertheless'). This further confirms the prominence of a performative component in the denotation of attenuative *imparfait* constructions – not just in their priority subtype. For want of space though, I am leaving this question to future investigations.

structures is still available – but only as a lingering, non-at-issue content. Namely, although this not semantically prominent, (14) requires a context in which the speaker’s desire must be anterior to the *now* interval. (Caudal 2017) observes a sharp difference between the so-called ‘attenuative *conditionnel*’ and ‘attenuative *imparfait*’ in this respect. The former can be used to express a novel desire – i.e., one which the speaker just acquired, e.g., as a result of some commitment update – while the latter cannot, cf. (27) vs. (28).

(27) [Context: speaker has just been rebuked by a retail employee]  
 Puisque c’est comme ça, je voudrais parler à votre supérieur.  
 ‘Given the way you’re handling this, I’d like<sub>COND</sub> to talk to your supervisor.’

(28) Puisque c’est comme ça, \*je voulais parler à votre supérieur.  
 ‘Given the way you’re handling this, \*I wanted<sub>IMPF</sub> to talk to your supervisor.’

But even more interestingly, as was shown in (Caudal 2017), not only are attenuative *imparfait* structures incompatible with temporal modifiers referring to the present (29), they also seem to lose their constructionalized nature and request-conveying function when combined with a past temporal modifier in their left periphery. The only reading possibly obtaining in (30) is a plain (and compositional) past bouletic reading, and (31) makes little aspectual sense, as only its priority meaning is stative (it describes a punctual achievement otherwise, for which it is contextually difficult to accommodate an imperfective reading). Finally, attenuative *imparfait* constructions cannot combine with negation (contrary to e.g. *vouloir*<sub>COND</sub> attenuated requests, and other request utterances in the *conditionnel*).

(29) (Excusez-moi,) \*maintenant, je voulais vous parler.  
 Excuse me, now I want-IMPF.1sg you talk-INF.  
 ‘Excuse me, \*now I wanted to talk to you’.

(30) (Excusez-moi,) #hier, je voulais vous parler.  
 Excuse me, yesterday I want-IMPF.1sg you talk-INF.  
 ‘Excuse me, I wanted to talk to you #yesterday’.

(31) (Excusez-moi,) hier, ??je venais chercher ma mère.  
 Excuse me, yesterday I come-IMPF.1sg fetch-INF my mother.  
 ‘Excuse-me, yesterday I was coming (litt.) to fetch my mother.’

All these facts, combined with the arbitrarily restricted set of bouletic verbs and bouletic/purpose constructions capable of entering so-called attenuative *imparfait* structures, very strongly suggest these are conventionalized constructions, derived from a former conversational implicature; their dual temporal dimension (i.e., both past and present) seems to be utterly entrenched, and the *imparfait* does behave compositionally in them. I.e., it is just as irrelevant to ascribe a meaning to the *imparfait* alone in such structures, as it is irrelevant to treat the verb in a light verb construction (e.g., ‘make a decision’) like an event description-denoting expression. Therefore, there is in fact no such a thing as an attenuative *use* of the *imparfait* – the attenuative meaning is attached to the overall *imparfait*-inflected attenuative structure, not to the tense itself.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> As we will see in section §3, this sets them apart from so-called narrative uses of the *imparfait* in a lexico-syntactic manner: while there exists a conventionally separate (homonymous) narrative use of the *imparfait*, there is no such a thing as an ‘attenuative’ use of the *imparfait* – the locus of the conventionalized attenuative meaning is not the tense, but the overall ‘verb+tense’ construction.

## 2.4 A multidimensional semantics and dynamic pragmatics-based analysis

I will now sketch a formalized theoretical analysis of the interpretation of attenuative *imparfait* structures. How should we represent their semantic (especially temporal) complexity, bearing in mind they originated in conversational implicatures attached to (now conventionalized) essentially bouletic constructions in the *imparfait*? Following (Caudal 2017), I will assign to attenuative *imparfait* constructions a multi-dimensional semantics in the spirit of (Potts 2005; Gutzmann 2015). I will argue that this allows us to capture how the initially implicated, indirect (non-attenuated) performative directive meaning associated with *je voulais*<sub>IMPF</sub> INF, became a (constructionalized) conventionalized implicature, combining an at-issue directive meaning (a request) with an implicated bouletic state meaning. Given the discussion in §2.3, it seems reasonably well established that the original at-issue bouletic state meaning of the construction has been demoted to backgrounded/secondary/non-at-issue status, while the novel, attenuated performative directive meaning has been promoted to foregrounded/primary/at-issue status.

However, *contra* (Caudal 2017), I will not assume that said secondary dimension of meaning should incorporate something as straightforward as the normal, past imperfective lexical meaning of the original construction they derive from. The main reason behind this is the complexity of the temporal properties of attenuative *imparfait* structures, already revealed in (29)/(30)/(31), but which turns out to be even more marked for motion cum purpose structures in the *imparfait*. Thus, the attenuative *imparfait* structure (32) comes across as conveying in its secondary dimension a bouletic state *grounding* a (now accomplished) teleological motion event (similarly in English ‘I’ve come to tell you...’ roughly means ‘I’ve come as I want to tell you...’). This contrasts with the contribution of ‘standard’ motion cum purpose constructions in the *imparfait* in (33), where the subject did not reach his destination and/or did not achieve his purpose, and the underlying, grounding bouletic state is univocally past. And coming back to bouletic attenuative IMPF constructions such as (14), or communication cum purpose attenuative IMPF constructions such as (34), their secondary backgrounded meaning describes an atelic event predicate extending up to the present time (a desire, or a call, in these examples), which also contrasts with standard *imparfait* uses of similar constructions in (35) and (15) – the latter describe events which do not conventionally extend up to the utterance interval. It differs from the temporal meaning of a merely past imperfective reading of equivalent *imparfait*-marked structures.

- (32) Veuillez m’excuser, chef, de la liberté... Je venais vous demander un petit service...  
(P. Segonzac, *Mademoiselle*, in *La Presse*, 10-09-1900, p.4)  
‘Chief, please forgive me for taking the liberty... I’ve come<sub>IMPF</sub> to ask you to do me a wee favour...’
- (33) L’avocat du chercheur français Roland Marchal, [a été] arrêté alors qu’il venait rendre visite à la chercheuse Fariba Adelhah... (*Ouest France*, 28/10/2019)  
‘The lawyer of the French researcher Roland Marchal, [was] arrested when he came<sub>IMPF</sub> to visit the researcher Fariba Adelhah.’
- (34) J’espère que je ne vous dérange pas. Je vous appelais pour voir si mon rendez-vous de 16 heures pouvait me rendre admissible à la clinique dès aujourd’hui... (Cl. Schalck, *Accompagner la naissance pour l’adoption*, Érés, Toulouse, 2011, p.175)  
‘I hope I’m not disturbing you. I was calling<sub>IMPF</sub> to see if my 4:00 p.m. appointment could make me eligible for entering the clinic today?’

- (35) (...) d'un geste las [il] lui désigna un siège pendant qu'il appelait quelqu'un au téléphone. (J.-L. Lambert, *Témoins à charge*, De Borée, Clermont-Ferrand, 2017)  
 '(...) with a weary gesture he pointed to a seat while he was calling<sub>IMPF</sub> someone on the telephone.'

It follows from the above observations that the original aspectuo-temporal meaning of such constructions has been altered during the conventionalization process they underwent; furthermore given (32)-(35), it is clear that distinct lexical entries are required for the denotation of motion cum purpose and communication-verb based attenuative IMPF constructions – their at issue dimension does not only comprise a bouletic stative predicate, but also another event predicate.

To formulate a precise formal treatment of my analysis, I will resort to (Gutzmann 2015)'s multi-dimensional logic for hybrid semantics  $\mathcal{L}_{TU}$ . According to the present analysis, the denotation of attenuative *imparfait* constructions associates (a) an at-issue, directive meaning with (b) an underlying, non-at-issue implicated bouletic state meaning – in effect a conversational implicature, or CI-type of meaning – which I will call a 'preference state', inspired by (Condoravdi & Lauer 2011)'s notion of preference.<sup>18</sup>

Like all current multi-dimensional logics inspired by (Potts 2005), (Gutzmann 2015)'s  $\mathcal{L}_{TU}$  posits an essential distinction between *truth-conditional content* vs. *use-conditional content* (abbreviated to TCC vs. UCC), with the latter having an expressive/evaluative contribution, rather than a plain truth-conditional contribution. Originally, it had been assumed by Potts that TCC and UCC needed to be encoded in separate dimensions, with UCC typically expressing connotations or implied meaning; the notation typically used a metalogical 'bullet' operator ( $\bullet$ ) to construe a mixed type expression from them. However, such a view soon proved to be difficult to maintain (McCready 2010), in the light of there existing at-issue evaluative, UCC meanings, or at-issue combinations of evaluative and expressive meanings, i.e., with a *hybrid type* UCC $\times$ TCC meaning – see e.g. 'gawk'. As  $\mathcal{L}_{TU}$  was specifically designed to allow for hybrid type expressions *within* in either the at-issue or the non-at-issue dimensions,<sup>19</sup> I will propose that the denotation of attenuative IMPF structures have  $\mathcal{L}_{TU}$  type (36), where  $\blacklozenge$  is an inter-dimensional metalogical, complex-type making operator, <sup>c</sup> marks a UCC (performative directive<sup>20</sup>) semantic type, and <sup>a</sup> marks a TCC type. In other words, their denotation has a hybrid type UCC $\times$ TCC primary/at-issue dimension (since they express a present (TCC) performative directive (UCC)), while its CI/secondary/non-at-issue dimension has a purely TCC type (a TCC $\times$ TCC type); see (Gutzmann 2015: 126 sqq.) for further details on the  $\mathcal{L}_{TU}$  type system).

$$(36) \langle \alpha: \sigma^c, \tau^a \rangle \blacklozenge \langle \beta: \sigma^a, \nu^a \rangle$$

<sup>18</sup> Note that the implicated, preference state meaning of imperative does not appear to be presuppositional, as it is affected by negation, cf. :

Sit down!	<i>Implicates</i>	'It is a preference of mine that you sit down'
Don't sit down!	<i>Implicates</i>	'It is a preference of mine that you don't sit down'

However, since negation cannot apply to attenuative IMPF structures, one cannot use this argument to demonstrate that their implicated, preference state meaning is not presuppositional.

<sup>19</sup> In other words, the sort of 'type mixity' combining at-issue and CI meanings, must be distinguished from the 'type mixity' combining UCCs and TCCs.

<sup>20</sup> That performative directives can be seen as having a UCC content follows from their very performativity – this performative component (i.e., the speaker's sincerity) cannot be denied (challenged).

(37) provides a tentative lexical representation for the meaning of bouletic attenuative IMPF structures in  $\mathcal{L}_{TU}$ ,<sup>21</sup> as combining an at-issue (UCC×TCC type) performative directive meaning, akin to a polite request such as (13), with a CI/secondary bouletic meaning grounding their at-issue directive content. Crucially, this construction is lexically inflected, i.e., has entrenched tense-aspect information – therefore its event variables are existentially bound in the lexical semantic entry; this aspectuo-temporal entrenchment might explain why modification by temporal adverbials is not allowed (but see note 21).

(37) Lexical semantic entry for attenuative IMPF<sub>BouleticV</sub> constructions:

$$\lambda\phi\lambda x.\exists e_1[\text{AttenDirective}(e_1)(x)(\phi)\wedge\text{Speaker}(x)\wedge t\subset\tau(e_1)\wedge t=\text{now}] \quad [\textit{at-issue UCC}\times\textit{TCC}]$$

$$\blacklozenge\lambda\phi\lambda x.\exists e_2[\text{Intend}(e_2)(x)(\phi)\wedge\text{Speaker}(x)\wedge\tau(e_2)<{}^{\circ}\text{now}] \quad [\textit{non-at-issue TCC}\times\textit{TCC}]$$

The above representation can be rendered in plain English as follows.

- In the secondary, non-at issue purely truth-conditional dimension, preference state meaning  $\text{Intend}(e_2)(x)(\phi)$  corresponds to a partially past, partially present bouletic state, as its run-trace while left-overlaps with the utterance interval ( $\tau(e_2)<{}^{\circ}\text{now}$ ), i.e., (slightly) overlaps with its left-most part. This state anchors a preference to which some agent is committed, i.e., it is part of her preference structure in the sense of (Condoravi & Lauer, 2011, 2012). I will therefore call it a *preference state*.
- In the primary, at-issue dimension with a hybrid UCC×TCC directive meaning, directive predicate  $\text{AttenDirective}(e_1)(x)(\phi)$  describes a ‘polite’, attenuated directive event (in fact, a performative directive speech act event) controlled by the speaker; it is indirectly grounded in the preference state described by the *Intend* predicate<sup>22</sup> contained in the secondary, non-at-issue dimension.  $t$  is the reference time interval temporally anchoring directive event  $e_1$  into the present, and is used to add truth-conditional, temporal conditions (presentness) on  $e_1$ .

Unlike (Caudal 2017), and capitalizing on §2.3, I will hypothesize that (37) emerged in three diachronic steps:

1. A temporal implicature (‘past imperfective states can extend up to the utterance time’) prompted the original past bouletic state of the construction to be seen as possibly (but deniably) valid at speech time, e.g., something like

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<sup>21</sup> It is unclear to me whether e.g., (Gutzmann & McCready 2016)’s simpler  $\mathcal{L}_{CI}^*$  logic could have been used instead. But the compositionality mechanisms of  $\mathcal{L}_{TU}$  could also be useful in order to explain the impossibility of say fronted, framing temporal adverbials to attenuative IMPF constructions – as these are not VP-modifiers, the temporal entrenchment argument put forth above may not be sufficient. Indeed, assuming that fronted (framing) adverbials convey discourse topics (see section §3.4 below), and given that both dimensions of meaning of (37) have truth-conditional types, we could theoretically integrate the temporal conditions of the primary and secondary dimensions into that of the truth-conditional content of such topics at the discourse semantic level. But such a combination would fail with either past and present framing, fronted temporal adverbials: given the ‘presentness’ of the at-issue dimension, straightforward past temporal interpretations are ruled out, and given the (partial) ‘pastness’ of the secondary dimension, straightforward present temporal interpretations are also ruled out. I believe this correctly predicts that examples (29)(30)-(31) are problematic.

<sup>22</sup> The semantic type of these modals is identical to that of a modal auxiliary seen as a stative verbal predicate with a propositional complement (it requires an event variable for the relevant speech act – directive or not).



$Intend(e_2)(x)(\phi) \wedge t \subset \tau(e) \wedge t <^{\circ} now$  was conventionalized as a slightly enriched, locally implicated meaning – not a CI type of meaning

2. In turn, this deniable bouletic state implication gave rise to another, also deniable, implicated, indirect performative directive meaning (cf. ‘Do P!’ in (23)), due to axiom (38), and these two meanings were re-analyzed as a two-dimensional CI structure, with the ‘older’ implicated, past+present bouletic meaning becoming at-issue, and the newer directive meaning becoming a CI/non-at-issue type of meaning.
3. Finally, the indirect/implicated attenuated request became a conventionalized performative directive meaning; it was therefore promoted to at-issue status, while the (older) bouletic state meaning was reanalyzed as the preference state grounding the performative directive, and demoted to non-at-issue status (the grounding information of a conventional directive must be secondary information (cf. (26)). This primary/secondary dimension reversal in a CI structure constitutes an instance of what (Caudal 2017) a *pragmatic inversion*.

**(38) Pragmatic axiom on deniable/negotiable preference states as sources for indirect performative (attenuated) directives:**

Given a deniable/negotiable preference state predicate *Intend*, a speaker  $x$  and a preference  $\phi$  such that  $Intend(e)(x)(\phi)$  holds in the present, then an implicated attenuated directive event  $e'$  is accessible in the current context, such that  $AttenDirective(e')(x)(\phi)$ . Preference state  $e$  grounds the implicated attenuated directive event  $e'$ ,  $\tau(e) <^{\circ} \tau(e')$  and  $t \subset \tau(e')$  with  $t = now$  – i.e.,  $e$  is the (both past and still presently valid) source of (present)  $e'$  performative directive.

The lexical entries for motion cum purpose (39) and communication cum purpose (40) attenuative IMPF construction only differ w.r.t. their mixed non-at-issue, secondary dimension.<sup>23</sup> They essentially add a third event description, respectively a (past) itive motion event, or a (past and still ongoing) communication event – but they retain the same preference state element of meaning found with *bona fide* bouletic attenuative IMPF structures, i.e. have an underlying bouletic content.

(39) ...  $\blacklozenge \lambda \phi \lambda x. \exists e_2, e_3 [Intend(e_2)(x)(\phi) \wedge Speaker(x) \wedge Alive.Motion(e_3)(x) \wedge \tau(e_2) <^{\circ} now \wedge \tau(e_3) < now]$

(40) ...  $\blacklozenge \lambda \phi \lambda x. \exists e_2, e_3 [Intend(e_2)(x)(\phi) \wedge Speaker(x) \wedge Communication(e_3)(y) \wedge \tau(e_2) <^{\circ} now \wedge \tau(e_3) <^{\circ} now]$

## 2.5 Interpretation of attenuative IMPF constructions within a dynamic pragmatics

We must now address the question of the dynamic dimension of attenuated *imparfait* structures. Specifically, what is the dynamic pragmatic role of *AttenDirective* in (37). How can it get the addressee’s to-do-list (*tdl*) updated – or not? What can be said of the

<sup>23</sup> I believe these were recruited as novel patterns after bouletic IMPF constructions had already evolved full attenuative conventionalization; although I was able to find clear instances of *vouloir*<sub>IMPF</sub> constructions in the Frantext corpus as soon as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, whereas I could not find clear instances with *venir*<sub>IMPF</sub> could before the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

‘Mon bel prieur, je suis bien prest/De mon trespas et finement :/Je vouloie mon testament/Ordonner en vostre presence.’ (*Le Mystère de S. Bernard de Menthon*, 1450, Anon.)

‘My beautiful prior, death and the end of my life are looming close; I would like to draw my will in your presence.’

grounding function of *Intend*? Given the lack of authority of the speaker in these structures, she leaves room for the addressee not to ratify the priorities she is committed to, but we need to clarify the manner in which an attenuated directive and the underlying preference are contextually managed in terms of the relationship between the speaker's commitment of a preference, and the addressee's (shared) commitments (intuitively, negotiability is about the speaker giving the addressee substantial freedom about this connection).

In order to account for a comparable phenomenon w.r.t. the management of commitment to preferences, namely weak vs. strong imperatives, (Portner 2018: 305) introduces a novel definition of dynamic pragmatic context, centrally based on the distinction between individual commitments (*IC*) (a function from individuals to information as commitment slates (*cs*) and preferences (as encoded in a to-do list (*tdl*) (Portner 2007)), mutual commitments (*MC*), and projected commitments (*PC*) – projected commitments being the projected extensions of mutual commitments, i.e., anticipated future developments of the conversation. He defines context as follows (cg standing for *common ground*, and cs for *commitment slate*<sup>24</sup>):

(41) A context is a tuple  $\langle MC, IC, PC \rangle$ , where:

1.  $MC = \langle cg, tdl \rangle$
2. For each participant  $p$ ,  $IC(p) = \langle csp, tdlp \rangle$
3.  $PC = \langle pccg, pctdl \rangle$
- 4.

Portner uses the distinction between the speaker's and addressee's committed preferences in his novel context model to capture the variation in strength between two uses of imperatives, namely so-called *weak* vs. *strong* imperatives, respectively with raising (42) vs. falling intonation (43).

(42) Have a seat!↑ (weak, polite imperative, of the 'have a cookie' type)

(43) Have a seat!↓ (strong imperative ; speaker does not care whether addressee wants to sit or not)

(Portner 2018) argues that both types of imperatives add an expectation to the projected to-do-list ( $p_{C_{tdl}}$ ) of the addressee, that the imperative's underlying preference will be added to the addressee's *tdl*, i.e., an expectation that the interlocutors will come to a shared, mutual commitment about how to judge the addressee's actions (i.e., that the speaker's higher ranking of the worlds in which the addressee sits down, will become mutual). In addition to this, Portner argues that falling (strong) imperatives add the imperative's content to  $tdl_{speaker}(addressee)$ , while rising imperatives add it to  $tdl_{addressee}(addressee)$  – with the former conveying that it is the *speaker's preference* which serves as a basis for establishing a novel shared commitment, whereas the latter convey it is the *addressee's preference* on which this novel shared commitment should rest.

I will here adopt Portner's dynamic pragmatic approach and claim that the at-issue meaning of attenuative IMPF structures has a dynamic pragmatic effect akin to that of rising, 'weak' imperatives, i.e. it is a type of directive meaning updating  $tdl_{addressee}(addressee)$  rather than  $tdl_{speaker}(addressee)$ ; cf. (44). Indeed, they leave it to the addressee to accept  $\phi$  as a mutually shared preference with the speaker.

(44) The conventional effect of an attenuated directive trying to bring about some preference  $\phi$  in context  $C$  is:  $C + \phi = C'$ , where:

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<sup>24</sup> A commitment slate is essentially a set of commitments (assertions) and priorities (i.e., preferences, cf. (Condoravdi & Lauer 2011)).

1.  $\text{tdl}'_{\text{addressee}}(\text{addressee}) = \text{tdl}_{\text{addressee}}(\text{addressee}) \cup \{\phi\}$
2.  $\text{pc}'_{\text{ddl}}(\text{addressee}) = \{c \cup \text{tdl}(\text{addressee}) \cup \{\phi\} \mid c \in \text{pc}_{\text{tdl}}(\text{addressee})\}$

It should be noted that this type of request does not require an overt ratification by the addressee – contrary to e.g., (24). As (Portner 2018) suggests, the update of the addressee’s commitment is therefore backgrounded/implicated in some sense; the ratification process is not ‘put on the table’ as in (24).

Though perfectly legitimate and useful, (Portner 2018)’s analysis is probably not sufficient to capture all the relevant properties of attenuated directives – and Portner himself acknowledges that his analysis does not preclude additional, complementary developments. I have highlighted above that all directives have an intrinsic (implicated, secondary) volitional dimension, and must be grounded by an associated preference state. In a Kratzerian theory of modality, an agent’s desires provide the relevant ordering sources for a priority modal; i.e., possible worlds will be ranked w.r.t. to their desirability. And crucially, it seems to me that non-attenuated directives vs. attenuated directives differ in an essential manner with respect to this ranking property. If one considers (45), the *conditionnel* marking clearly conveys that the ‘target’, desired worlds, are not absolutely desirable; they are mildly superior to worlds where the speaker’s preference is not ratified. The set of worlds where the speaker’s preference is ratified, and the complementary, alternative set of worlds where it is not, are not at odds w.r.t. this desirability property (i.e., desirable worlds are only mildly desirable, and undesirable worlds are only mildly undesirable). This is not so with the present-marked *devoir* in (46), where alternative worlds<sup>25</sup> are decidedly worse than the preferred, target worlds. A scalar model of modality such as (Lassiter 2014; Lassiter 2017) is obviously well-adapted to capturing such intricacies, and would be necessary in order to account for all the semantic properties of attenuated priority modals, or attenuated directive expressions in general. But for want of space to elaborate on it here, I must set this issue aside for the time being.

(45) Tu devrais partir.  
 ‘You should<sub>COND</sub> go/I’m urging<sub>COND</sub> you to go’

(46) Tu dois partir.  
 ‘You have<sub>PR</sub> to/need<sub>PR</sub> to/have<sub>PR</sub> to go’.

### 3 On so-called ‘narrative’ uses of the *imparfait*

#### 3.1 Let us move now to the study of the so-called ‘narrative uses’ of the *imparfait*.

As for the so-called ‘attenuative *imparfait*’, two main types of concurrent approaches are currently found in the literature. A classic, meaning enrichment approach argues that these uses can be derived from the standard past imperfective meaning of the *imparfait*; cf. e.g. (Gosselin 1999; Bres 1999; Caudal & Vetters 2003; Patard 2007), and offer an essentially aspectual viewpoint-based analysis, where the aspectual meaning of the *imparfait* is analyzed as flexible enough to accommodate such contextual variations. In contrast to those, (Tasmowski-De Rijck 1985; Berthonneau & Kleiber 1993; Berthonneau & Kleiber 1999; Kleiber 2003) rather highlight that narrative *imparfait* sequences are very sensitive to what can be described as discourse structural parameters, and require

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<sup>25</sup> Following an intuition formulated in (Ramchand 2014), I consider that modals crucially involve an *alternative set* in order to capture what is generally seen as a quantificational phenomenon.

some kind framing or temporal anchoring adverbial, or a temporal succession adverbial or a connective, cf. (47)-(48), or some other sort of temporal-ordering/framing, or sequence-inducing additional material. In short, that they need markers serving to manage what has been compared to ‘anaphoric chains’ w.r.t. events in discourse. As the *imparfait* is strongly anaphoric, and discursively much less autonomous than perfective tenses, it only ever arises in contexts making up for its ‘anaphoricity’.<sup>26</sup>

(47) Quelques instants plus tard, Maigret descendait l’escalier, traversait le salon aux meubles disparates, gagnait la terrasse ruisselante des rayons déjà chauds du soleil. (Simenon, *La nuit du carrefour*, LdP 2908, p. 61; in (Caudal & Vettors 2005)) ‘A few moments later, Maigret descended<sub>IMPF</sub> the stairs, crossed<sub>IMPF</sub> the living room with its disparate furniture, and reached<sub>IMPF</sub> the terrace dripping with the already warm rays of the sun.’

(48) Deux semaines après, on lui coupait les deux jambes (...). (M. Rolland, *La pipe en sucre*, Edmond Nalis, p. 200, *ibid.*) ‘Two weeks later, both her legs were cut<sub>IMPF</sub> off (...).’

Furthering their opposition to the aspectual approach proposed in many other works, (Berthonneau & Kleiber 1999; Kleiber 2003) argued that the narrative *imparfait* is in fact a separate homonymous tense from the ‘standard’ imperfective viewpoint *imparfait*, and that it contributes a perfective viewpoint. The analysis I will defend here will be largely influenced by this *de facto* weakly constructional view; it will essentially attempt at providing a novel, more theoretically precise discourse-structural account of the ‘anaphoric’ properties of the *narrative imparfait*, additionally claiming that they relate to an ongoing, aspectual semantic change this homonym is undergoing, rendering it partly (but not completely) similar to a perfective tense (in other words, I will add an aspectual twist to the Kleiber/Berthonneau analysis).

### 3.2 Identifying support expressions and the *imparfait narratif*

In this critique of the anaphoric view, (Bres 1999) tried to demonstrate that discourse structural markers, temporal adverbials etc. – i.e. what I will call *support expressions* – are optional in narrative *imparfait* sequences, and only play a reinforcing role – whereas Kleiber & Berthonneau are adamant such markers are necessary (though not sufficient) to licence narrative *imparfait* readings. After examining a corpus of 700 examples of *narrative imparfait* sequences, (Bres 1999) concluded that they can perfectly arise without any temporal adverbial or connective, claiming 74% of the occurrences he studied did not comprise such markers – which seems to give credit to his non-anaphoric, aspectual approach.

However, if we carefully review Bres’s list of counter-examples, we are forced to draw a fairly different conclusion, as this list comprises four distinct syntactic types of structures, all playing the part of overt support material with at least some kind of discourse structural contribution or effect – which suggests that discourse structure-inducing support expressions are in fact required by the narrative *imparfait*, and rather gives additional credit to the anaphoric view.

A first type of support expressions (49)-(50) consists of ‘sequential narrative clauses’ in the *imparfait* – a well-known type of syntactic structure enforcing strict

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<sup>26</sup> The later empirical generalization might also *prima facie* seem to favor a strong constructional approach akin to that developed above for attenuative *imparfait* structures. However, I will suggest below that such an approach should be eschewed in this case, as so-called ‘narrative *imparfait*’ uses cannot be strongly constructional.

temporal ordering, provided a *Narration, Occasion* or *Result* discourse relation attaches the relative clause discourse referent to the matrix clause discourse referent – I am here adopting an SDRT-based analysis of the interaction of tenses with discourse structural parameters; see (Caudal 2012) for a detailed discussion.

- (49) Il se jeta à ses genoux qu'il baisait éperdument à travers la robe de nuit (Maupassant, «Un Coq chanta», in (Bres 1999:6))  
 'He threw himself on his knees, which he kissed<sub>IMPF</sub> desperately through the nightgown.'
- (50) Rosalie approcha son front où Numa posait timidement les lèvres (Daudet, *Numa Roumestan*, in (Bres 1999:6)).  
 'Rosalie approached her forehead where Numa shyly placed<sub>IMPF</sub> her lips.'

The second type of structure identified by Bres are *bona fide* causo-temporal subordinate clauses, also encoding overt temporal succession in (51)-(54).

- (51) La course était achevée depuis 6 heures, lorsque le tour de France entamait l'étape la plus difficile de sa riche histoire (*Le Monde*, in (Bres 1999:6)).  
 'The race had been over for 6 hours when the Tour de France began<sub>IMPF</sub> the most difficult stage of its rich history.'
- (52) La malle de Saint-Omérois n'était pas au bout de la rue qu'Anatole sautait rue Lafayette (Goncourt, *Manette Salomon*, in (Bres 1999:6)).  
 'Anatole jumped<sub>IMPF</sub> onto Lafayette street even before the Saint-Omérois stage coach reached<sub>IMPF</sub> the end of the street.'
- (53) A peine venaient-ils de frapper à la porte du véhicule que des coups de feu claquaient (*Midi Libre*, in (Bres 1999:6)).  
 'No sooner had they knocked<sub>IMPF</sub> on the door of the vehicle than shots were fired<sub>IMPF</sub>.'
- (54) « Oh! il n'y a pas de danger ! » s'écriait avec une telle conviction le futur auteur dramatique que Bertrand faiblissait, lui accordait sa demande (Goncourt, *Journal*, in (Bres 1999:7))  
 "Oh, there is no danger!" the future playwright cried<sub>IMPF</sub> out with such conviction that Bertrand weakened<sub>IMPF</sub>, granted<sub>IMPF</sub> him his request

The third type involves temporal duration modifiers, entailing a perfective-like interpretation, and a strict ordering of events when combined with the *Narration, Occasion* or *Result* discourse relations (as is the case in (55)-(56)).

- (55) La jeune fille marchait ainsi pendant une bonne heure, peut-être plus (Souvestre & Allain, *Le train perdu*, in (Gosselin 1999:109))  
 'The girl walked<sub>IMPF</sub> this way for a good hour or more.'
- (56) Les deux hommes erraient ainsi quelques instants, gênés, bousculés. (Souvestre & Allain, *Le train perdu*, in (Gosselin 1999:68))  
 'The two men wandered<sub>IMPF</sub> around for a few moments, embarrassed, and jostled [by the crowd].'

The fourth and final type of *narrative imparfait* structure involves framing adverbials and temporal ordering adverbials and connectives – it is the most common type used in Bres's corpus with 26% of overall occurrences. It also was the only type mentioned in (Tasmowski-De Rijck 1985; Berthonneau & Kleiber 1999), cf. (47)-(48).

But what should we make of these four different patterns? It is crucial to note that (Bres 1999) does not offer a single example of *narrative imparfait* without those various syntactic types of support material. Two structure types he lists involve multi-clausal constructions, and two involve clause-level modifiers; given their syntactic coherence, a first plausible solution to this puzzle that comes to mind, would be to treat these datapoints as simple instances conventionalized associations, i.e. collocations (Stefanowitsch & Gries 2003). But this is not totally satisfying, as the support material seems to behave compositionally.<sup>27</sup>

I will instead explore a different solution in the remainder of this section, based on what I will call *discourse-structure sensitive constructions*. But let us first take a closer look at the type of semantic contribution one can ascribe to the support material in (Bres 1999)'s inventory.

### 3.3 Semantic variation among support expressions, and contextual or discourse structural parameters at play in narrative *imparfait* patterns

Semantically speaking, I will argue here that the various classes of support expressions identified in §3.2 have some significant semantic differences, but also overlap in three important respects: (i) some semantically encode a 'forward moving' temporal function, while others contextually come to have such a temporal shift function<sup>28</sup>, (ii) they all prompt or associate with a perfective viewpoint interpretation of the *imparfait* inflection, and (iii) they are endowed with a temporal framing / temporal topic introducing function in discourse, at least by enforcing a perfective viewpoint reading – we will come back to this later). I will first focus on (i) and (ii) here, and make some important observations about semantic differences among support expressions.

Concerning (ii), I believe it is obvious that narrative *imparfait* utterances do not describe imperfectively-viewed, i.e., 'partial' sections of a certain event: thus in (57) the described fall of Barzum's body is complete (it cannot consist of a mere 'slice' of Barzum's body falling, if you will), and the corresponding utterance cannot be complexified with a periphrastic progressive as *être en train de* ('be in the process of') – this shows that we are not here dealing with a 'part-of' aspectual operator reading in the spirit of e.g. (Jayez 1999) – or any other analysis of the semantics of imperfective viewpoints;<sup>29</sup> see e.g., (Berthonneau & Kleiber 1999) for a detailed critique of what can be called the 'imperfective view'.

(57) Il y eut un choc sourd, un cri plaintif, puis le corps de Barzum s'écroulait en arrière.  
(Souvestre & Alain, *Le train perdu*, éd. R. Laffont, Paris, p. 264)  
'There was a dull shock, a plaintive cry, and then Barzum's body collapsed<sub>IMPF</sub> backwards.'

<sup>27</sup> I must thank an anonymous reviewer again for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>28</sup> This empirical generalization was most clearly established in (Berthonneau & Kleiber 1994; Berthonneau & Kleiber 1999) – hence the label *imparfait de rupture* 'disruption *imparfait*' in the literature; see also (Tasmowski-De Rijck 1985)

<sup>29</sup> However, this does not mean that the type of perfective meaning attached to the *imparfait* in such contexts, comes with all the usual semantic bells and whistles usually coming with *bona fide* perfective viewpoints. Its coercion ability is thus very limited with e.g., stative verbs – it hardly ever occurs with stative predicates. This is perfectly expected, given (Caudal 2020)'s findings about the slow historical pace at which inchoative readings have developed with other tenses endowed with a perfective viewpoint semantic content, such as e.g. the *passé composé*; I will leave this as an open issue for future research, though.

Turning to (i), I will argue that the (semantically encoded and/or contextually acquired) forward-moving function of narrative *imparfait* support expressions comes in different flavors. A first broad set of support expressions have an inherent, obligatory temporal forward shifting function, and will trigger narrative *imparfait* reading sometimes regardless of contextual factors – this point is important. It contains multi-clausal structures such as (52)-(54), and caudo-temporal connectives and adverbials such as <duration> *plus tard* ('<some time> later'), or *puis* ('then'). Among them, some expressions only encode a strict caudo-temporal ordering (alongside with either *Narration*, *Occasion* or *Result*), and require a perfective viewpoint interpretation; this the case of e.g., *puis*, *à peine*-constructions; when combined with an *imparfait* marking, they monotonically trigger a narrative *imparfait* reading (this does not hinge on contextual parameters).

A second broad class contains aspectually ambiguous expressions, and can give rise both to narrative/perfective readings of the *imparfait*, and to ordinary imperfective readings of that tense. Adverbials rigidly encoding temporal shifts are certainly the most prominent elements of that class, cf. e.g., <duration> *plus tard* ('<duration> later'). Contextual parameters (especially world-knowledge about causal chains/event ordering) will play a crucial role in determining which reading (perfective/sequence-of-events vs. imperfective/event overlap) should prevail. To illustrate this, compare (47) with (58): common sense entailment reasoning indicates that the run trace of the shouting event is temporally 'encapsulated' and surrounded by that of the motion event in (58), but not in (47), so that *descendait* receives a standard imperfective viewpoint reading only in (58).<sup>30</sup> (Causo-)temporal subordinates introduced by e.g. *lorsque* or *quand* are the second most prominent members of this class; they too are ambiguous between a sequence of event, temporal shift/perfective reading, and a temporal overlap/imperfective reading (I will get back to this below).

(58) Quelques instants plus tard, Maigret descendait l'escalier, quand un cri retentit.

'A few moments later, Maigret was coming<sub>IMPF</sub> down the stairs when a shout was heard.'

Absolute temporal adverbials such as *à X heure* ('at X o'clock') also pattern with <duration> *plus tard* adverbials and *lorsque/quand* biclausal structures, i.e., are aspectually ambiguous expressions. They only differ in that knowledge about temporal ordering of intervals plays a particularly salient role here (and causal chains, a minor role at best) in determining which of the temporal shift/sequence of events/perfective vs. temporal overlap/imperfective reading prevails.

Finally, duration adverbials constitute the third semantic class of support material for narrative *imparfait* patterns. They are not naturally endowed with an event ordering capability (i.e., they do not have a temporal anchoring, forward-shifting function *per se*). Rather, they semantically enforce a perfective viewpoint reading of the *imparfait*, and so that when combined with an appropriate context, they can contribute to licensing a sequence-of-event/perfective (typically realized through the contextual establishment of *Narration*). The degree of acceptability of such sequences is far more dependent on contextual factors than any of the other type of support material (speakers are often

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<sup>30</sup> To take another example, assuming an SDRT-based approach (Asher & Lascarides 2003), the Glue Logic component of SDRT, a discourse structural pragmatic principle such as the MDC (*Maximize Discourse Coherence*), dictates that the relative clause in e.g. (49) is interpreted as conveying temporal succession, so that a narrative *imparfait* reading must arise: world knowledge imposes that the kissing event should follow the kneeling event; this disambiguates the temporal contribution of the relative clause structure.

reluctant to accept such utterances for this very reason, I believe). Without such a narrative (or iterative/habitual) context, duration adverbials are known to reject the *imparfait* (cf. e.g. (Berthonneau & Kleiber 1999: 127)). I will argue that this indicates that this is due to the temporal forward shift content seemingly required by the narrative *imparfait*. As duration markers do not possess such a meaning, it will have to be independently established in the context – and indeed, an attested example like (55) is in fact impossible to process without its original context, i.e., it must be inserted within a well-established, coherent sequence-of-event structure to be felicitous.

### 3.4 Introducing topics as key discourse structural parameters in the semantics of the narrative *imparfait*

I would now like to stress that in addition to discourse relations, a proper contextual interpretation of narrative *imparfait* sequences (esp. *Occasion*, *Narration* and *Result*) requires another essential discourse structural parameter, namely an encompassing, coherent *discourse topic* (Asher, Prévot & Vieu 2007), such that a narrative *imparfait* enters a sequence-of-event chain. Thus, in (59), the discourse topic of the narrative *imparfait* sequence is the character's careful approach, and it involves *Occasion* and *Narration* (i.e., it is a sequence-of-event-structured discourse). Furthermore, in this example – like in many narrative *imparfait* patterns (see e.g. (58)) – the narrative sequence involves elliptic VPs sharing a subject NP, rather than e.g. 'full' juxtaposed or coordinated clauses, all arrayed in temporal sequence – this is a strong syntactic signal for topic coherence, and highlights the key role played that of narrative *imparfait* patterns.

(59) Dans l'alignement de la hampe en pin, il vit le chapeau du Navajo apparaître tandis qu'il progressait lentement sur la pente. Puis ses épaules, sa ceinture. Il s'arrêtait. Regardait l'arbre abattu, la touffe de jeunes pins. (Hillerman, *La voie de l'ennemi*, Rivages/Noir, p. 205)

'[Looking] in-line with the pine shaft, he saw the Navajo's hat appear as he slowly progressed<sub>IMPF</sub> down the slope. Then his shoulders, his belt. He stopped<sub>IMPF</sub>. He looked<sub>IMPF</sub> at the felled tree, the clump of young pine trees.'

Topic coherence is a well-known structural property of narrative discourses, as was shown by several analyses of such phenomena within the SDRT framework, cf. e.g. (Asher & Lascarides 2003: 163), including 'narrative' discourse relations. (60) gives the LIC (Logic of Information Content) SDRT axiom associated with the *Narration* relation, where  $\sqcap$  calculates the common content of two formulas; this condition roughly says that discourse segments  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  have a contingent common content, i.e., that they should share a topic. The richer this common content is, the more coherent the topic thus formed will be; I will call *narrative topics* the kind of discourse topic referents furthered by (coordinating) narrative relations such as *Narration*, *Occasion* and *Result*.<sup>31</sup> (Bras, Le Draoulec & Vieu 2003) convey a slightly different view in (61), proposing instead that topic referents are monotonically (and therefore, necessarily) introduced by the *Narration* relation; their representation has the form of a LIP axiom (Logic of Information

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<sup>31</sup> See (Asher & Vieu 2005; Asher, Prévot & Vieu 2007) for a discussion of coordinating vs. subordinating relations in SDRT; for want of space. I cannot offer a definition of these concepts here. But obviously, only coordinating narrative discourse relations can further a narrative topic, in the sense of 'adding up' segments contributing to a temporally ordered, topically coherent growth on the right edge of the topic – subordinating relations will only add information *layers* to a narrative topic – not extend it as a sequence of events (i.e., add overlapping, or temporally included events, or add causally-reversed appendices to some segment under the narrative topic (by *Explanation*), etc.).



Processing – the semantics/pragmatics interface component of the theory where discourse relations are established in a discourse context  $\tau$ ).

$$(60) \quad \phi_{Narration(\alpha,\beta)} \Rightarrow \neg \Box (K_\alpha \sqcap K_\beta)$$

$$(61) \quad \langle \tau, \alpha, \beta \rangle \wedge Narration(\alpha, \beta) \rightarrow \exists \gamma (Topic(\gamma, \alpha) \wedge Topic(\gamma, \beta)) \text{ (Bras, Le Draoulec \& Vieu 2003)}$$

I will adhere here to the latter, stronger view, observing that in the absence of a coherent narrative topic supporting a sequence of event reading, narrative *imparfait* readings cannot arise, as was abundantly made clear in e.g. (Berthonneau & Kleiber 1999). This is illustrated in (62), where given an empty context, it is impossible to find a contextually coherent narrative topic bringing together the sun rising and the weather deteriorating events, so that only *Background*( $\alpha, \beta$ ) can be established – not *Narration*( $\alpha, \beta$ ); in other words  $\beta$  cannot further the ‘sequence-of-event’ discursive potential of  $\alpha$ . We cannot attach it to  $\alpha$  as another subsequent change-of-state event segment, and *Narration* cannot be established –  $\beta$  can only be subordinated to  $\alpha$ , as *Background* conveys a subordinating discourse relation).

(62) #Le temps se dégradait ( $\alpha$ ) quand le soleil se levait ( $\beta$ ).

‘The weather deteriorated as the sun was rising’ (and not: ‘when the sun rose.’)

In view of this empirical generalization, it is hardly surprising that framing adverbials are so frequent with narrative *imparfait* sequences in Bres’s corpus (an observation also central to Tasmowski’s and Kleiber & Berthonneau’s accounts). Now following (Vieu et al. 2005; Asher, Prévot & Vieu 2007), who convincingly argue that, especially in an IP-adjunct position, the primary function of framing adverbials is to introduce a topic referent, I will hypothesize in what follows that introducing such a discourse topic is a key semantic function shared by all the support expressions associated with narrative *imparfait* sequences – including duration adverbials (these impose a full-fledged perfective viewpoint meaning, which I take to associate with a narrative topic – see below). This hypothesis should be complemented with the idea that in case several topic referents are introduced within the same segment or set of segments, they must unify as long as they further the current, already established narrative (and the corresponding narrative topic referent ensuring its coherence).

Taking into account such discourse structural constraints should be a major concern for any theory of the narrative *imparfait*, regardless of its nature. Consider (63); like (62), this example does not have a narrative *imparfait* reading, as it lacks a narrative topic, i.e., one associated with a temporal ordering between the two events it encompasses (in an empty context, one assumes that Monique’s departure is prompted by Jean being on his way). And adding a framing adverbial would immediately license a narrative *imparfait* reading of (63), as it semantically denotes a temporal shift, and therefore must contribute a topic ensuring the coherence of a narrative sequence (64). This strongly suggests that the very function of support material is to provide, or at least facilitate the introduction of such a discourse topic. Therefore, unless a theory makes the successful advent of narrative *imparfait* reading dependent on the advent of a narrative topic, and connects this with the addition of support material, it runs the risk of predicting a narrative *imparfait* where none obtains, thus over-generating.

(63) Monique quitta la ferme. #Jean gagnait les alpages. (no narrative *imparfait* reading)

‘Monique left the farm. Jean was going<sub>IMPF</sub> to the mountain pastures’.

(64) Monique quitta la ferme. Le soir même, Jean gagnait les alpages.

'Monique left the farm. That very evening, Jean went<sub>t<sub>IMPF</sub></sub> to the mountain pastures'.

But turning now to (65), it appears that the theory should also predict that support material is only absolutely required on the first segment of a narrative *imparfait* sequence. Otherwise, it runs the risk of actually under-generating by requiring all utterances (or at least VPs) in the narrative *imparfait* pattern to have support material triggering/introducing a narrative framing topic, while it is only required on the first segment (tensed utterance, or VP) in the pattern.<sup>32</sup>

(65) A 18h42, Soper regagnait son stand. La voiture était poussée à l'intérieur de son box et toute l'équipe s'empressait d'enlever les éléments arrière de la carrosserie (*Auto-Hebdo*, 18.6.97, in (de Saussure & Sthioul 1999))

'At 18:42, Soper returned<sub>IMPF</sub> to his pit. The car was pushed<sub>IMPF</sub> into its box and the whole team rushed<sub>IMPF</sub> to remove the rear bodywork'

### 3.5 A key theoretical proposal: imperfective vs. perfective tenses denote different types of *discourse topics* (or why discourse-structural meaning must be incorporated in the denotation of tense-aspect forms, including that of the narrative *imparfait*)

Let us now turn to the core theoretical part of my account of the narrative *imparfait*. I will offer to view the latter as a *discourse structure-sensitive construction* (and as a 'weak' construction). This analysis rests upon a fundamental theoretical hypothesis I suggest we should make, namely that the semantic denotation of tense-aspect inflections should incorporate discourse structural conditions. More specifically, the idea I would like to explore here is that the special, and in fact slightly deficient, perfective viewpoint interpretation I will ascribe to the *imparfait* in narrative patterns, is paired up with explicit discourse structural conditions in its denotation. (And that said denotation constitutes a separate, homonymous, conventionalized sense of the *imparfait*.)

I will here concentrate on the discourse structural semantic conditions conveyed by the narrative *imparfait*, proposing that they differ from both the discourse structural conditions found in the denotation of 'normal' imperfective tenses (including the homophonous, past imperfective viewpoint entry for the *imparfait*), and from the discourse structural conditions found in the denotation of *bona fide*, full-fledged perfective tenses. In other words, I will put forth an account suggesting that those special discourse structural properties originate in also special aspectual properties, and will claim that variations in aspectual viewpoint meanings must correlate with (and determine) variations in discourse structural meanings. As the main focus of this paper is on context sensitivity, I will not attempt to provide a narrowly sentence-level truth conditional semantics for the hybrid aspectual viewpoint I assume is contributed by the narrative *imparfait*; this would lead us too far astray; but this is certainly an important issue to investigate in future research (and a necessary defect of this paper!).

Directly associating discourse-structural effects with adverbials, connectives and even temporal subordinators was early pioneered by the Toulouse SDRT group, cf. e.g. (Bras, Le Draoulec & Vieu 2001). The following representation of the discourse structural role of the *quand* ('when') temporal subordinator in French formulates this view as an

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<sup>32</sup> Note that (59), a very literary and exceptional example by its 'discontinuous syntax' nature, is unproblematic in this regard, in that the first segment of this narrative sequence in the *imparfait* is verbless – so it can be assumed to have an underlying, silent *imparfait* verb form.

inference rule incorporated in the LIP i.e., not as an element of the denotation of *quand* itself:

$$(66) \text{ Quand: } [?R(\lambda, \alpha, \beta) \wedge \text{quand}(\alpha, \beta) \wedge \text{cause}(e_\alpha, e_\beta)] \rightarrow [\text{Narration}(\alpha, \beta) \wedge [(e_\alpha < e_\beta) \vee (e_\alpha < e_\beta)]] \quad (\text{Caudal 2015: 191})$$

The approach I will pursue here is at once simpler and more radical, as I will propose that discourse structural conditions should be part of the at-issue denotation of most (if not all) aspectuo-temporal expressions, including tenses. This is in line with the now widely held view that many linguistic expressions, and certainly most tense-aspect expressions (not just a handful of prominently discursive items such as connectives or causo-temporal complementizers), should be credited with playing a much more direct role in the determination of discourse structure than was assumed in previous SDRT works on tense-aspect – this function was then centrally devoted to the Glue Logic *via* general pragmatic principles such as e.g. ‘Maximise Discourse Coherence’ (Asher & Lascarides 2003).<sup>33</sup>

Let us consider the discourse structural meaning of *quand* again. As we have already noted in section §3.3, *quand* biclausal structures are (causo-)temporally ambiguous. They can either convey (causo-)temporal succession with a perfective viewpoint event reading, or temporal simultaneity with an imperfective viewpoint event reading. As a result, *quand* should receive two aspectuo-temporally and discourse structurally distinct lexical semantic entries.<sup>34</sup> And as we have seen above too, this also means that the LIP/Glue Logic will play a decisive role in determining which of these two readings of *quand* should prevail, including in *imparfait*-marked sequences; but it operates on a pre-existing, decidedly semantic discourse structural space.

I believe that treating complementizers, tenses, aspectuo-temporal modifiers, causo-temporal constructions, etc. as denoting discursive structural conditions offers enormous theoretical advantages,<sup>35</sup> as it makes it possible to capture semantic discourse structural differences between linguistic expressions. I will here assume that tenses can combine two types of discourse structural information in their semantic denotation:

1. Conditions relating to discourse relations proper: tenses denote an underspecified, but semantically constrained discourse relation  $Rel(\alpha, \beta)$  (verbal inflections tend to restrict the kind of discourse relation they can enter, notably in relation to their aspectual meaning), with the novel discourse referent  $\beta$  being integrated in the discourse context by existential quantification (this is an extension of the classic Lewis-Kratzer view that tenses existentially bind event referents), and – most importantly for the matter at stake
2. Conditions relating to discourse topics (which are also binary rhetorical functions) – the most significant question investigated here will be whether or not tenses can bind a discourse topic referent (though how they structurally relate to discourse topics should obviously matter too)

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<sup>33</sup> This reflects on an attempt at giving the discursive dimension of the SDRT framework a decisive grammatical turn, and capitalizes on recent developments (especially (Asher 2011)) about lexical semantic meanings – those were notably inspired by (Danlos 2007).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. (Traugott & Dasher 2002) for an account of this type of ambiguity in a grammaticalization-theory perspective, which strongly suggests these are indeed *homonymous* meanings.

<sup>35</sup> Note that early, partial precursors of this idea can be found in (Caudal & Vetter 2006)’s view that tenses and connectives are extremely similar w.r.t. their discourse structural functions, and in (Caudal & Roussarie 2005)’s intuition that tenses can only be associated with specific sets of discourse relations, albeit without the substantial theoretical and technical moves made here.

To avoid needlessly listing many different kinds of discourse structural meanings in the semantics of tenses, I will assume that discourse structural semantic functions are part of a multiple-inheritance-based hierarchy of semantic types, as in e.g. the *Type Composition Logic* framework (Asher 2011)<sup>36</sup>; to give an example, this means that e.g. the semantic functions corresponding to *Narration*, *Occasion* and *Result* can be subsumed under a common super-type in such a hierarchy, as they all appear in sequence-of-event discourse structural contexts.

I will here generalize (Vieu et al. 2005; Asher, Prévot & Vieu 2007)'s hypothesis that the semantics of certain aspectuo-temporal adverbials should relate to discourse topic referents (these authors argue that IP-adjunct adverbials contribute framing topics). More specifically, I will propose that past imperfective and past perfective viewpoint tenses essentially differ by how they relate to discourse topics – and in particular, w.r.t. whether or not various types of aspectual viewpoints can introduce them in the discourse context, or merely convey discourse structural conditions about them. This move can be seen as giving discourse structural flesh to the well-known neo-Reichenbachian analysis of past perfective vs. past imperfective tenses à la (Klein 1994) using so-called 'topic times' – which, I argue, directly relate to discourse topics.

I will first hypothesize that the Kleinian/neo-Reichenbachian intuition according to which past perfective tenses denote a past topic time interval in which the run trace of the described event is included (i.e.  $t < now \wedge t \subset \tau(e)$ ), should be rendered by giving to past perfective viewpoint tenses the ability to introduce *via* existential quantification a *framing* topic (or FramingT) referent in the current discourse context – i.e. a topic discursively (and temporally) *encompassing* a complex, discursively coherent narrative; intuitively, semantic dominance is what being a framing topic is about.

Furthermore, I will hypothesize that the Kleinian/neo-Reichenbachian tenet according to which the topic time interval is temporally included *within* the run trace of the event described by an imperfective tense-marked verb, should be rendered by ascribing to imperfective viewpoints-marked discourse segments, the mere ability to relate to an independently introduced topic referent, and therefore that they require 'topic triggering' support expressions in the context. I believe that this naturally follows from the fact that *Background* and *Explanation* (two prominent narrative discourse relations associated with imperfective segments) are subordinating discourse relations (Fabricius-Hansen et al. 2005; Asher, Prévot & Vieu 2007), therefore are dependent on another, independently introduced discourse referent to gain topic coherence (it can be a framing topic itself, or a discourse segment introducing a framing topic). By definition, *Background* must relate a novel imperfective segment to an independently established perfective segment<sup>37</sup> – which, according to my previous hypothesis about perfective viewpoints, triggers a *FramingT* topic referent per se.<sup>38</sup> I will argue that as the *Background* segment is discursively subordinated to the perfective segment it attaches to, it must also be dominated by the *FramingT* topic referent introduced by the latter, while still temporally encapsulating the associated perfective event description. This is visible in example like (67), where  $\pi_2$  is discursively subordinated to segment  $\pi_1$ , that is, to the 'main event' segment in the overall narrative topic associated with this discourse. Yet the

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<sup>36</sup> Such an an 'IS-A' semantic type hierarchy for discourse relations *qua* (relational) functions over speech act type was proposed in (Caudal & Roussarie 2005: 276) on comparable grounds.

<sup>37</sup> This phenomenon also lies at the foundation of the so-called 'anaphoric' theory of imperfectivity.

<sup>38</sup> See also (Asher, Prévot & Vieu 2007: 22), who similarly claim that 'as far as Background<sub>forward</sub> is concerned (...), introduction of the FT [framing topic] is triggered by the attachment of the eventive clause to the stative one.'

run trace of of  $e-\pi_2$  temporally encapsulates those of  $e-\pi_1$ ,  $e-\pi_3$  and  $e-\pi_4$  (all associated with ‘foregrounded’, perfective segments)– though not those of  $e-\pi_5$  and  $e-\pi_6$ , the corresponding foregrounded segments furthering the *FramingT*, narrative topic introduced by  $\pi_1$  (while each perfective-marked segment contributes a *FramingT* topic referent in (67), these are ‘merged’ with the initial topic referent introduced by  $\pi_1$ ; see (Asher, Prévot & Vieu 2007) for more on the SDRT management of framing topics).

- (67) Marie sortit se promener ( $\pi_1$ ). Il pleuvait ( $\pi_2$ ). Elle sortit son parapluie ( $\pi_3$ ). Elle marcha longtemps ( $\pi_4$ ). L’averse s’arrêta ( $\pi_5$ ). Marie rangea son parapluie ( $\pi_6$ ).  
 ‘Mary went<sub>PERF</sub> for a walk. It was raining<sub>IMPF</sub> She took<sub>PERF</sub> out her umbrella. She walked<sub>PERF</sub> for a long time. The rain stopped<sub>PERF</sub> Mary put<sub>PERF</sub> her umbrella away.’

To put it short, though temporally encapsulating, *Background* imperfective segments are discursively dominated by, and dependent from, a framing topic referent, typically introduced in the context by a perfective-marked utterance, or by an overt temporal adverbial; for they can attach to both perfective segment, or to temporal adverbials – and unsurprisingly, the latter have been claimed to introduce framing topic referents, especially in an IP-adjunct position (Asher, Prévot & Vieu 2007: 20); cf. (68), where *ce jour-là* ‘on that day’ introduces such a framing topic referent to which a *Background* segment attaches (and is subordinated),<sup>39</sup> with subsequent perfective segments further elaborating it. Technically, this entails that imperfective viewpoint tense do not existentially bind framing topics, although they must relate to one.

- (68) Ce jour-là, il pleuvait. Marie prit son parapluie, et sortit se promener.  
 ‘On that day, it was raining<sub>IMPF</sub> Marie took<sub>PERF</sub> her umbrella, and went<sub>PERF</sub> for a walk.’

Drawing on the above reasoning, and on the additional, diachronic assumption that narrative *imparfait* utterances involve a type of viewpoint meaning currently evolving towards perfectivity, (69) offers a tentative lexical semantic entry for the narrative reading of the *imparfait*. Given a discourse context  $\tau$  containing two segments  $\beta$ ,  $\alpha$  and a topic  $\gamma$ ,  $\beta:[...V...]$  indicates that  $V$  is the event predicate underlying segment  $\beta$ . Viewpoint function *Impf\_Perf(V)* states that the event predicate denoted by the underlying verb receives a hybrid, (partially) perfective-like/imperfective-like viewpoint meaning<sup>40</sup> specific to the narrative *imparfait*. *Sequence\_of\_Event\_Rel* notes the super-type for all sequence-of-event discourse relations capable of furthering a narrative topic (*Narration*, *Occasion*, *Result* – a narrative *imparfait* reading requires a forward temporal shift.<sup>41</sup> Condition *Narrative\_FramingT*( $\beta,\gamma$ ) specifies that  $\beta$  must be subordinated to/dominated by an independently introduced (framing) narrative topic  $\gamma$  in discourse context  $\tau$  (I am assuming that a narrative framing topic must involve at least one sequence of events). Finally, conditions  $\alpha=? \wedge \gamma=?$  indicate that these discourse referents are still unbound.  $\alpha$  is a free variable because *Narrative\_Rel* is still in need of an attachment segment  $\alpha$  (yet to be provided by the context in which  $\beta$  will be incorporated), whereas – and this is crucial –  $\beta$  is free because the denotation of the narrative *imparfait* cannot introduce/existentially

<sup>39</sup> The ‘attachment site’ function of such fronted adverbials was of course well-known from earlier works, cf. e.g. (Berthonneau & Kleiber 1999: 128).

<sup>40</sup> See note 29 for some speculations concerning the actual semantics of this ‘hybrid’ aspectual. I will not say more here though, as this issue has (complex) ramifications not entirely relevant to the discourse structural focus of this paper.

<sup>41</sup> Hence the decriptive term ‘*imparfait de rupture*’ used by Tasmowski, Kleiber/Berthonneau etc.

bind the framing topic to which it relates (i.e., is subordinated to): it is not (or not yet, at least) a ‘topically’ autonomous tense, unlike full-fledged perfective viewpoint tenses.<sup>42</sup>

(69) Lexical semantic denotation of the narrative *imparfait* (NARR.IMPF) in context  $\tau$ :  

$$\text{NARR.IMPF} =_{\text{def}} \exists\beta([\beta:[\dots V\dots]\wedge\text{Impf\_Perf}(V)] \rightarrow [\text{Sequence\_of\_Event\_Rel}(\alpha, \beta) \wedge \text{Narrative\_FramingT}(\beta, \gamma) \wedge \alpha=? \wedge \gamma=?])$$

Assuming that the felicity of a narrative *imparfait* crucially depends on  $\gamma$  receiving a contextual value has, I think, the advantage of predicting that agrammatical readings only arise if an imperfective reading of the *imparfait* cannot be alternatively established (e.g., a precise duration adverbial, as in (55), is not enough to warrant a narrative *imparfait* reading). Otherwise, failures to assign a contextual value to  $\gamma$  or to establish a discourse relation will simply result in an incoherent (not infelicitous) discourse, in line with recurrent observations at least since (Tasmowski-De Rijck 1985).<sup>43</sup>

Let us summarize. My analysis involves two key ingredients, in addition to the general idea that tenses denote discourse structural conditions, and the hypothesis that the Kleinian, topic time-approach to aspect actually has a strong discourse structural basis as well. I argue that the special lexical entry attached to the narrative reading of the *imparfait* denotes a *deficient* (not full-fledged) perfective viewpoint content, because its discourse structural conditions are intermediary between those of imperfective and perfective viewpoint tenses. Specifically, I argue that the meaning of the narrative *imparfait* requires independent triggers for introducing the narrative framing topic it relates to. Unlike a perfective tense, and like an imperfective tense, its semantics cannot introduce (i.e., existentially bind) a framing topic referent in context  $\tau$ . These independent triggers need to be provided by the various types of support expressions identified in §3.2 and §3.3 – provided context coherence, world-knowledge etc. does not stand in the way.<sup>44</sup> Last but not least, note that (69) correctly predicts that such framing topic triggers (i.e. support expressions) are only needed on the first segment of a narrative *imparfait* sequence, as shown in e.g. (65). Indeed, once a topic referent has been introduced in context  $\tau$ , additional applications of (69) because of additional, subsequent *imparfait* forms will be able access said topic referent in  $\tau$ , provided narrative coherence is preserved - thereby ensuring that topic variable  $\gamma$  in (69) receives a value.

<sup>42</sup> (69) also sharply differs from the axiom on *Narration* formulated in (61), where  $\exists\gamma$  existentially binds topic referent  $\gamma$ . I will assume for my part that semantic axioms related to *Narration*, *Occasion* and *Result* should not introduce any topic referent, in spite of their sequence-of-effect nature. I believe that the introduction of narrative topic referents should be strictly controlled by overt grammatical or lexical material, and cannot be essentially triggered by discourse relations.

<sup>43</sup> I must confess that it is still unclear to me whether or not the effect of support material is always absolutely categorical. (Berthonneau & Kleiber 1999) offer numerous examples suggesting that removing support material blocks narrative *imparfait* readings, so it seems to be at least near-categorical; but establishing a proper, coherent narrative topic depends on a host of contextual factors. Therefore, while the presence of support expressions is very probably necessary, one should bear in mind that it is by no means sufficient.

<sup>44</sup> For instance, when supporting markers possess aspectually ambiguous lexical entries (cf. *lorsque* or *quand*), only their perfective viewpoint, sequence-of-event readings will have the ability to bind a topic referent. If due to e.g., the integration of linguistic information and world-knowledge in the Glue Logic (cf. (de Saussure & Sthioul 1999) for a related, relevance-theory based investigation of such issues), the MDC principle does not favor a perfective-viewpoint, sequence of event reading of the support expression, then a framing topic referent cannot be introduced, and a narrative *imparfait* reading is ruled out. I believe this can explain why even attested instances of narrative *imparfait* may sound odd or are difficult to process, especially when considered out of a somewhat extended context.

Finally, note that in the Kleiber/Berthonneau account, the ‘anaphoric’ nature of the narrative *imparfait* is deprived of any aspectual import; this is where my analysis mostly differs from theirs – I am claiming the context-sensitivity is grounded in an ongoing aspectual change, and has to do with the narrative *imparfait* having retained some key discourse structural properties of an imperfective viewpoint tense (hence its ‘anaphoricity’), while having partially acquired the truth-conditional sentence-level aspectual semantics of a perfective tense.

## 4 Conclusion

By sequentially analyzing here two different so-called ‘uses’ of the *imparfait*, I hope to have established that there is no principled reason to even consider believing that context-sensitivity and constructionalization (or conventionalized form-meaning pairings) are mutually exclusive, water-tight form-meaning pairing mechanisms, and that many so-called ‘tense uses’ probably associate both mechanisms.

With respect to the study of the conventionalized meanings of tenses (or if you will, the lexicon-morphosyntax to semantics interface for inflected utterances), I think we can safely conclude from this comparative analysis that at least two lexico-syntactic subtypes of form-meaning pairings with an at least partially conventionalized basis should be distinguished:

- (i) *bona fide* ‘strong’ complex constructions involving a complex tensed form, as illustrated by the set of inflected bouletic constructions (either purely bouletic, or combining bouletic and motion/communication cum purpose meanings) found in attenuative *imparfait* structures (in effect, inherently inflected discontinuous lexicalized verbal roots), and
- (ii) separate conventionalized meanings directly attached to a tense morpheme, which can be branded constructions only in the weaker sense of (Michaelis 2000; Michaelis 2004; Michaelis 2011), and are clear cases of morphological homonymy. If one assumes a lexicalized grammatical framework à la LFG or HPSG, the narrative *imparfait* would be encoded in a separate lexical entry from the standard, straightforwardly past imperfective *imparfait*; not so for the so-called ‘attenuative *imparfait*’ – which is not a ‘tense use’ at all, as it involves conventionalized inflected constructions.

I have shown that while both attenuative and narrative *imparfait* patterns involved a conventionalized form/meaning pairing, their respective interpretation remains context-sensitive in an essential manner, in the sense that their construal as a saturated interpretation, requires complex contextual parameters. These often play the part of ‘licensing’, enabling parameters, by contributing to bind so far unbounded variables, etc. – they do not lead to what could be described as polysemy *qua* contextual variability. (Although some variability was uncovered for attenuative *imparfait* structures, they rather point to sub-types of conventionalized constructions, with ‘plain’ bouletic constructions differing from motion/communication cum purpose constructions in their respective coded meanings. Otherwise, the contextualization of those ‘uses’ boils down to that of run-of-the-mill semantic compositionality, discourse structure construal or other dynamic pragmatic processes.

Due to their context-sensitivity, so-called ‘tense uses’ cannot be analyzed in simple static semantic terms, as constructions with a ‘rigid’ denotation. They need to be treated using e.g., a dynamic pragmatic approach, and/or a SDRT-style discourse structural

approach at the semantics/pragmatics interface. Or to put things the other around, in spite of their (weak or strong) constructional nature, their interpretation must mobilize a variety of context-sensitive mechanisms – see for instance the role played by Portner’s dynamic pragmatic theory of commitment slates in my analysis of attenuative *imparfait* structures (§2), or that of framing topics and discourse relations in my analysis of the narrative *imparfait* sequences (§3) (the narrative *imparfait* conventionalized meaning constituting what I have called a ‘discourse structure-sensitive construction’). While this paper has focused on contemporary French data, I believe similar phenomena can easily be identified both diachronically and crosslinguistically – and can probably be analyzed along the same lines. Attenuative meanings are thus not typologically rare, and often seem to evolve in connection with categories not unrelated to past volitionals, e.g., proximative volitionals,<sup>45</sup> and volitionals combined with an otherwise avertive-decessive particle;<sup>46</sup> but all of these categories point to a possible ‘presently invalid’, ‘contrary to fact’ expression based on a bouletic verbal root combined with a past temporal element or past inflection, having developed into a ‘presently relevant’ use in order to achieve an attenuation function.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, I believe that the diachronically and crosslinguistically common interaction between discourse-sensitive particles (or causo-temporal markers in general) and tense uses offers a very promising empirical domain for identifying other conventionalized, discourse-structural sensitive meanings for tenses.<sup>48</sup>

The above investigation has also shed light on the existence of very different manners in which semantic vs. pragmatic contents can relate to conventionalization. I have thus proposed that attenuative *imparfait* structures should be modelled as *conventionalized implicatures* in a multi-dimensional semantic framework (Gutzmann 2015), so as to reflect on the semanticization of a former defeasible, contextual implicature from which I believe they stem. In contrast, narrative *imparfait* patterns require highly elaborate discourse structural conditions, jointly determined by of explicit semantic content encoded by the conventionalized meaning of the narrative *imparfait* itself (plus some supporting material) and by the integration of linguistic information and world-knowledge at the semantics/pragmatics interface (*via* the so-called SDRT Glue Logic).

Before closing this paper, I believe it is important to highlight that it potentially has far reaching theoretical consequences for the study of tense-aspect phenomena in

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<sup>45</sup> E.g. *nguwan-ampa*-('almost-want') + V patterns in Yankuntjatjara, meaning ‘I would rather like to V [attenuated]’ (Goddard 1992: 102).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. the Papago avertive particle /čim/ combined with a past volitional (‘I wanted to V’), which means something like Eng. ‘I wanted to V’, i.e. has an attenuated requested meaning – with /čim/ + V-past normally receiving a decessive past (‘used to V’) or avertive meaning (‘was going to V but didn’t’) (Hale 1969: 206), not a plain past meaning.

<sup>47</sup> It should be noted that past volitionals, proximatives, counterfactuals and avertives often have connected development paths, crosslinguistically speaking; cf. e.g. (Caudal 2022) – this is not accidental, of course.

<sup>48</sup> To give an example, consider my own account of the evolution of the *passé composé* in Old French (Caudal 2015), where I observed that narrative uses of this tense were initially restricted to a variety of syntactic patterns all related to causo-temporal ordering (e.g., causo-temporal *quand* biclausal structures). This is strikingly reminiscent of the narrative *imparfait* being dependent on (semantically similar) supporting material. I now believe this stems from the fact that the *passé composé* had retained certain key properties of resultative tenses, i.e., perfects: these are essentially derived from *imperfective* resultative constructions, and therefore do not inherently possess the ability to introduce a narrative framing topic. This explains why framing topic referent introducing supporting material was required to license those early narrative uses in Old French – the requirement was relaxed when the *passé composé* was later reanalyzed as possessing a full-fledged perfective component of meaning, i.e., when it became capable of introducing a narrative framing topic by itself.



discourse, and in general for our understanding of the interaction between discourse structure and the grammar (as well as lexicon) of tense-aspect. A significant portion of formal works dedicated to tense-aspect phenomena in discourse were couched using the SDRT framework a decade or two ago – see (Caudal 2012) for a review – and logically embraced the then prevalent view that the Glue Logic should be given the upper hand in computing discourse structural questions, including for tense-aspect inflections. Only comparatively minor changes to this view have been generally introduced in those SDRT analyses of tense-aspect phenomena, and on a purely lexical basis, with e.g., the meaning of certain discourse connectives being used as ‘triggers’ for inferring discourse relations. More recently, the importance of the Glue Logic in the construal of discourse structural interpretation was *de facto* downplayed in proposals ascribing a discourse structural denotation to various types of (non-tense-aspect) lexical or lexico-grammatical expressions.<sup>49</sup> Inspired by those developments, I have attempted here to lay partial, preliminary foundations towards a substantially *grammatical* SDRT approach to the discourse structural properties of tenses, striving to turn the tables on the old SDRT ‘information flow’ from tense-aspect forms to their contextual interpretation in the LIP,<sup>50</sup> by claiming that:

- many tense-aspect expressions, including purely grammatical expressions (and first and foremost, tenses), should incorporate discourse structural conditions in their denotation
- when it comes to the determination of event ordering and aspectuo-temporal meaning in discourse, special attention should be paid to the aspectual content of tenses,<sup>51</sup> because aspectual viewpoint plays a fundamental role in the construal of *topic structures* – the latter being fundamentally related to ‘topic time’ in a theory of viewpoint aspect à la (Klein 1994)<sup>52</sup>
- the role of ‘common sense entailment’ reasoning in the LIP is essentially to narrow down, and/or enrich, the interpretative, discursive space thus initially shaped by grammatical means (by ‘filtering out’ unwanted semantic possibilities, and/or by specifying incomplete or missing information, i.e., enriching semantically encoded information). It results from this that the importance of the part played by dynamic processes in the pragmatics or semantics/pragmatics interface is variable. For instance, the importance of LIP processes is relative to, and dependent on, the specificity of the discourse structural semantic contribution of certain linguistic items (some leave open a large number of discursive possibilities, while others can be quite specific and do not require additional interpretative processes at the semantics/pragmatics interface).

The above claims (especially the second) can be seen as bringing to fruition a line of analysis structuring much of my earlier work on tenses, notably collaborative work with Laurent Roussarie and Carl Vetter – see in particular the notion of tenses being *illocutionary viewpoint functions* put forth in (Caudal & Roussarie 2005), and the idea

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<sup>49</sup> See for instance the use of discourse structural meaning in the lexical semantic representations of aspectual light verbs in (Asher 2011: 240–245), or in the lexical semantic treatment of so-called ‘discourse verbs’ (e.g. *precede, cause, follow..*) and ‘discourse prepositions’ (cf. e.g. *John died of cancer*) in (Danlos 2007).

<sup>50</sup> Including in my own work, even in my (modest) attempt (Caudal 2012) at improving on the classic SDRT information-flow in the analysis of tenses in discourse – in many respects, the latter has remained fundamentally unchanged since (Lascares & Asher 1993)’s seminal proposal.

<sup>51</sup> And aspectual particles/modifiers in a tenseless language, or for underspecified tenses.

defended in (Caudal & Vetters 2006) that tenses and connectives should be treated on a par w.r.t. their discourse structural function. But of course, these hypotheses remain in need being confronted with additional phenomena, and must await future work to prove their mettle (or not!).

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