

Prose

Lecture 12

Time

Ability to identify Tense in Narrative

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Contents

- Time:
- Tense switch
- Gnomonic present
- Story-time
- Discourse-time
- Duration
- Order
- Frequency

Time

When did it happen?
What happened?
Who's done it?
Who will be responsible?

Verb tenses are used to express when something happens in respect to the present.

The order and manner in which events are conveyed to the reader in a story are referred to as **the arrangement and presentation of time sequences.**

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003, p. 75)

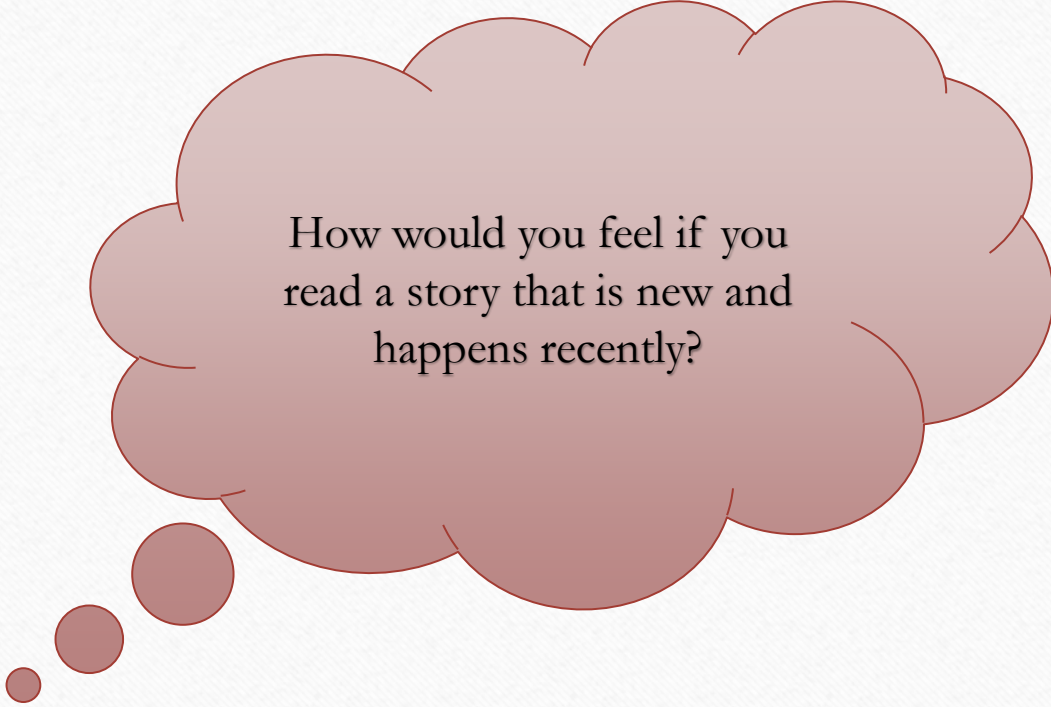
Narrative past

“Luigi was a man full of passion for life, as shown by the agility of his hands and feet. He was a diligent worker who was also intelligent and full of hope. He struggled throughout his life with his family.”

Narrative present

“There is nothing in this room. Usually, they work while sitting here. However, nobody wants to be in this room right now, therefore it is vacant. To serve as a memento of that day, they leave this room unoccupied. The day on which silence is required from everyone. Everybody has to hide their eyes and even their mouths. All should be in its proper place.”

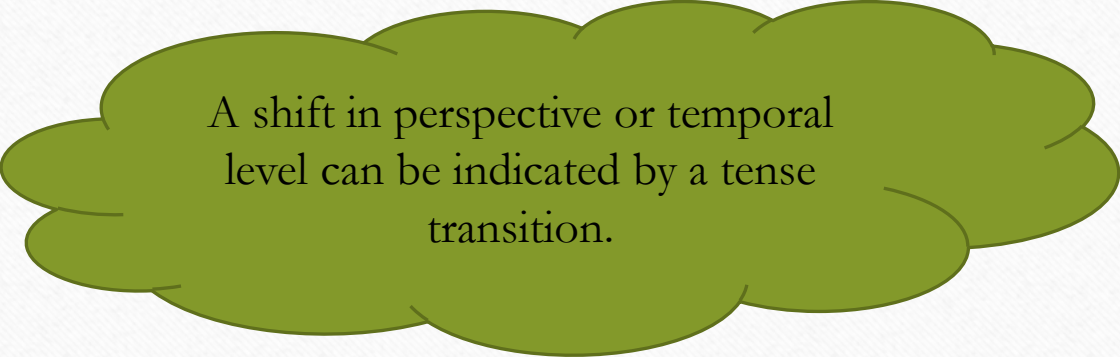
Present & Past



How would you feel if you
read a story that is new and
happens recently?

Tense switch

“He walked out of this room with disappointment clouding his eyes. He looked so desperate and so frustrated. I know it's not easy with the problems so complex in this place. He has to learn to accept it.”



A shift in perspective or temporal level can be indicated by a tense transition.

Gnomic present

- Present tense
- Grammatically speaking no different from the narrative present
- It does not represent a tense switch in the same sense.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003, p. 76)

Gnomic present

- In both cases it is the narrator who speaks.

When any two young people take it into their heads to marry, they are pretty sure by perseverance to carry their point, be they ever so poor, or ever so imprudent, or ever so little likely to be necessary to each other's ultimate comfort. This may be bad morality to conclude with, but I believe it to be truth; and if such parties succeed, how should a Captain Wentworth and an Anne Elliot, with the advantage of maturity of mind, consciousness of right and one independent fortune between them, fail of bearing down every opposition? [...] Sir Walter made no objection, and Elizabeth did nothing worse than look cold and unconcerned. (Austen, *Persuasion*, ch. 24)

- Notice the change of tense from the general observation (“When any two young people take it into their heads [...]”) to narrative past in the specific case of the story (“Sir Walter made no objection [...]”).

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003, p. 76)

SO WHAT?

The way the story is told and how the reader interprets it are greatly impacted by these temporal elements.

Time Analysis

- **Story-time**
- **Discourse-time**

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003, p. 77)

Time Analysis

- **Story-time** refers to the events and duration of time within a story.
- Story-time is concerned with the story itself, as well as the things that happen and the amount of time that passes.

Time Analysis

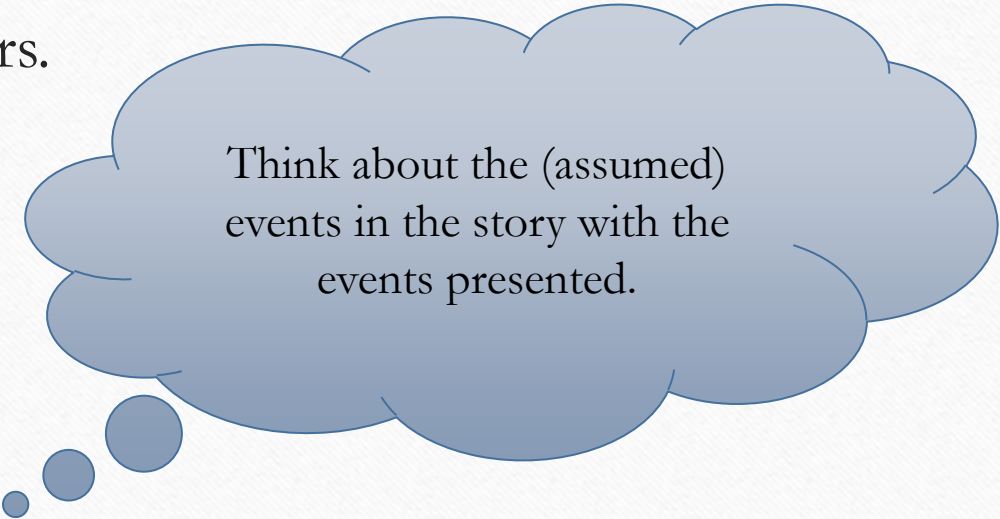
- **Discourse-time** refers to the time it takes to tell or read the story and the order in which events are presented.
- Discourse-time, on the other hand, focuses on how events are arranged as they are presented and how long it takes to tell the story, whether orally or in writing.

Duration

- Are these events really important?
- Why do we need to know these all?

Duration

- A hero who fought for decades of his life.
- An adventurer who spent 10 years traveling around a country.
- A patient who waits in line for hours.



Think about the (assumed) events in the story with the events presented.

Think about relations between story-time and
discourse-time

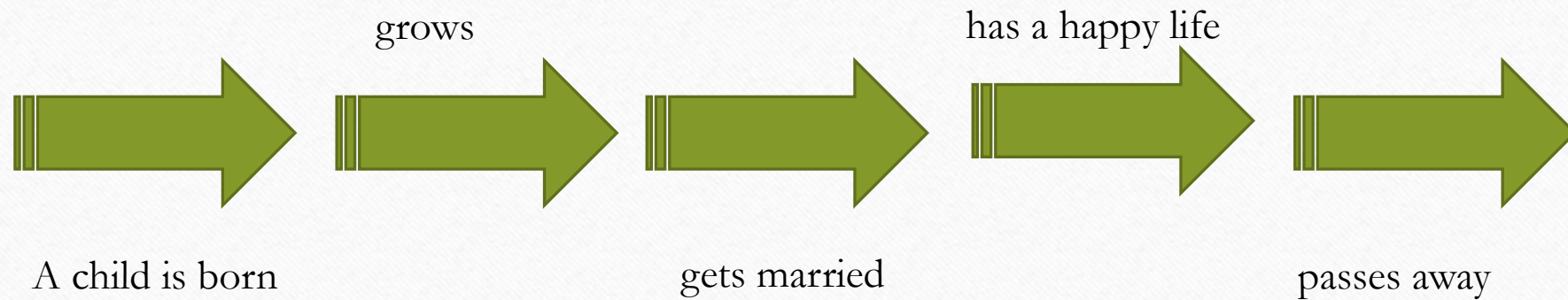
Term	Definition	Example
scene/real-time	story time and discourse time are equal (this is usually the case in dialogue)	-When did you last see her? -On the bridge. -Alone? -No, with a man.
summary/speed-up	story-time is longer than discourse time	So they lived contentedly the next 20 years.
stretch/slow-down	discourse time exceeds story time	She suddenly realised how very much alone she was with her favourable opinion of the young visitor and how much opposition she would have to content with later from her querulous aunt. All this took no more than a split second and there was no hesitation in her movement as she came forward to welcome him.
ellipsis	discourse-time skips to a later part in story time	Ten years later we meet the little girl again, now grown into a handsome woman.
pause	story-time comes to a standstill while discourse time continues	This usually involves a description or narrator comment: Cecilia entered the library with a heavy heart. But before we follow her and enter upon the events which were to follow, let us consider her position in life. Cecilia had grown up an orphan under the care of a retiring uncle very much preoccupied with his studies. As soon as she was able to deal with them, the cares of the household had fallen to her and had curtailed the freedoms of her childhood. This information imparted to the interested reader, let us return to Cecilia on the threshold of the library.

Each of these affects how quickly a reader perceives a story to be moving. Notably, a lot of stretches and pauses make the action seem to move swiftly, whereas scenes and ellipses slow things down significantly.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003, p. 78)

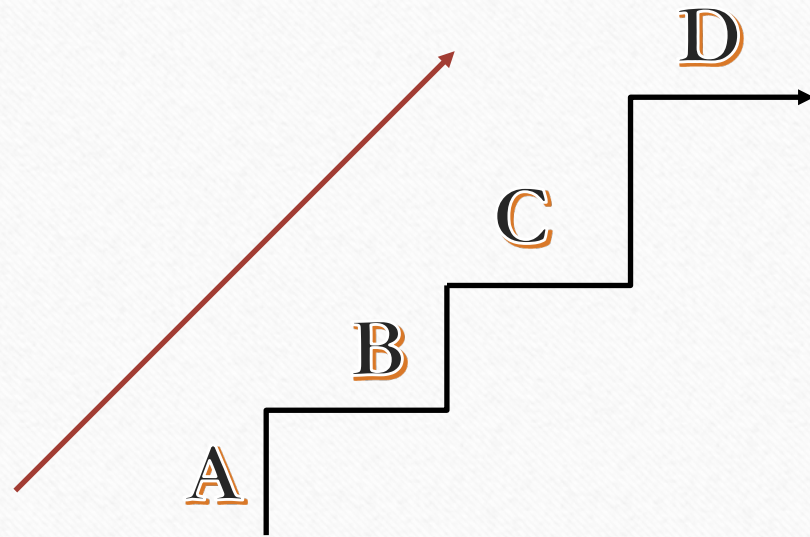
Order

- How is the story structured?



Order

- The chronological events



Order

- Author designs the order
- EABCD
- CABDE
- etc

Order

“Discourse could deviate from chronology more radically and present events in orders such as CABED or ACDEB and so on. In such cases events are not told in **chronological** order, they are **anachronological**.”

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003, p. 78)

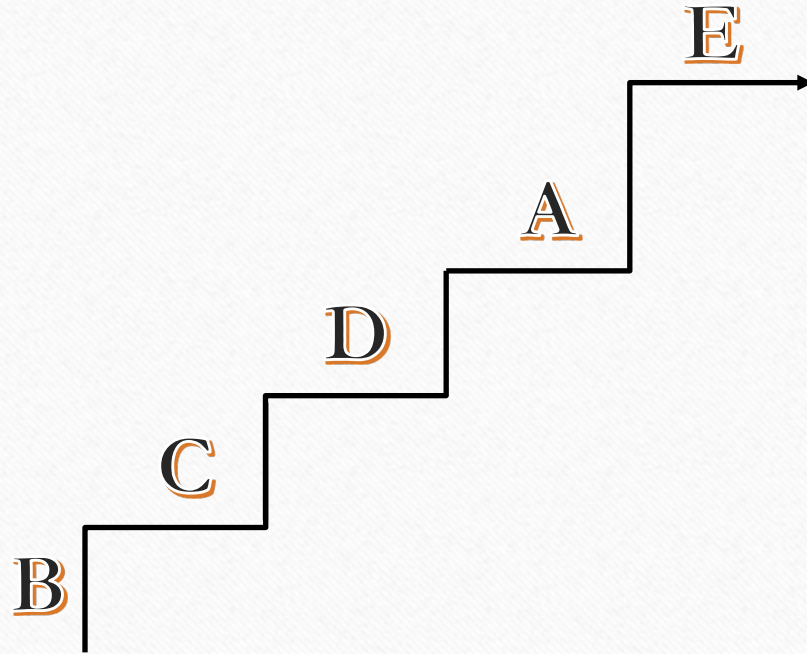
Order- flashback

- The most common of these techniques are **flashforward** (prolepsis) and **flashback** (analepsis).

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003, p. 78)

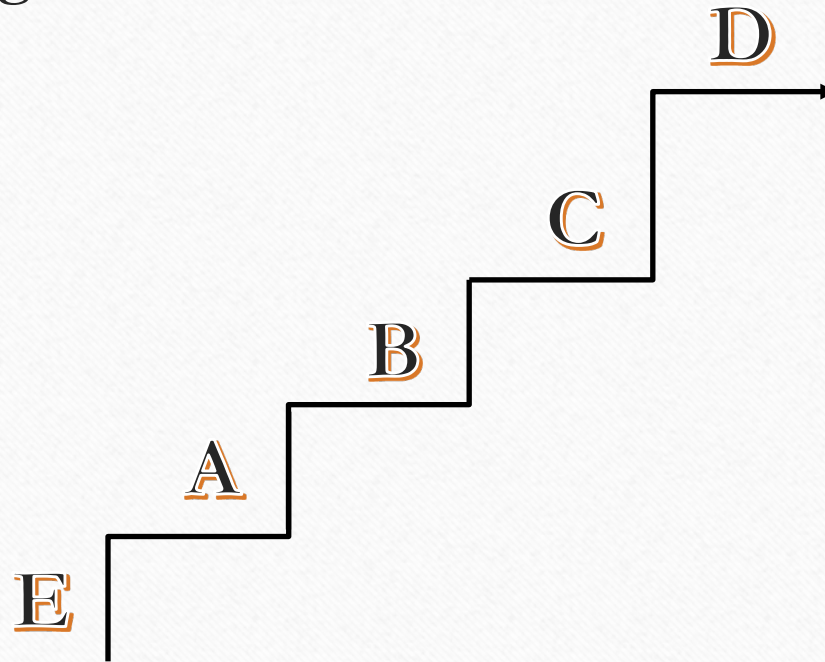
Flashback

- A → Something in the past



Flashforward

- E → Something in the future



Beginnings and Endings

What's the
importance?

Dealing with the
information flow in a
narrative

Beginnings and Endings

- The place in the story at which a narrative's discourse begins is the **point of attack**.
- A story is said to start **ab ovo** when its point of attack appears at the beginning of the story.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003, p. 79)

Beginnings and Endings

- The story typically opens by providing all the background details about the characters, the setting, and the initial commencement of the events that would eventually become the story's storyline.
- This preliminary information is usually given by a narrator before any action has properly started; it functions as an exposition.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003, p. 79)

Beginnings and Endings

- Charles Dickens, for example, often uses ab ovo beginnings:

My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip. I gave Pirrip as my father's family name, on the authority of his tombstone and my sister – Mrs Joe Gargery, who married the blacksmith. [...] Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea. My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things, seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. (Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ch. 1)

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003, p. 79)

Beginnings and Endings

- Starting **in medias res**—that is, launching the reader right into the action while providing essential background information about previous developments through a variety of flashbacks or as part of the story's events—is frequently thought to be a more engaging opening.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003, p. 80)

"I have to leave this place immediately. This place hurts me," said my soulmate. "Can you wait a little longer? This isn't over yet" I answered while holding his hand. "Why do I have to be here? This is painful enough; he has betrayed many people's trust, he is a liar, he lied to many people to fulfill his satisfaction."

Beginnings and Endings

- Some narratives carry their main theme through to the very end; they begin **in ultimas res** and then progressively reveal the majority of the story through a sequence of flashbacks that explain how things had come to be.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003, p. 80)

Beginnings and Endings

- Results in different forms of **suspense**

Ending

- Open
- Closed

So what?

- Think about **detective stories** offering an intriguing blend of beginnings—both ab ovo and in ultimas res. The narrative of the crime starts in ultimas res, with the crime's discovery—for example, the victim's body—and is progressively revealed.

So what?

- On the other hand, the detective's narrative starts from scratch (*ab ovo*) and continues through the course of the inquiry until the criminal's identity and the specifics of the crime are revealed.

So what?

- While the detective's story is typically told chronologically, the crime story is pieced together gradually, and its chronology is only revealed gradually. In fact, the identification of the criminal frequently depends on determining the accurate chronology of the crime story—especially when there are cases of fabricated alibis.

Frequency

- About an event in a story and the frequency with which it is told in a discourse.
 - Singulative: A typical narrative is the account of an event given only once
 - Repetitive: There are two or more accounts of the same incident.
 - Iterative: An event is mentioned only once yet occurs multiple times.

(Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J., 2003, p. 81)

Let's conclude

- What have we learnt?
- Why do we need this?

Reference

- Lethbridge, S., & Mildorf, J. (2003). Basics of English Studies: An introductory course for students of literary studies in English. Freiburg University, Freiburg im Breisgau.

Thank you

See you in the next meeting!