"ASPECT IN LANGUAGES AND THEORIES: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES"

International conference at the University of Tartu

17 - 18 November 2006

Call for papers

The idea for this conference grew out of a series of seminars which took place as part of a target-financed project on contrastive linguistics in the philosophy department of the University of Tartu in 2005-2006. Researchers of different languages and general linguists took part in the seminars. The main emphasis was on comparing the forms in which aspect manifests itself in different languages: Slavonic, Germanic, Romance and Fenno-Ugric languages as well as Ancient Greek and Latin were covered in presentations and discussions. The contrastive approach also brought about the general question of whether aspect theory and its concepts can be universal or whether they are always related to explaining the phenomena of one language or language group. As became obvious in the seminars, in many languages it is difficult to distinguish aspect from other categories, for example the category of tense in Romance languages and definiteness in Estonian. Aspectual meaning often forms secondarily or 'epi-phenomenally' as a result of the combined influence of some other factors or categories and the means of expression of aspect often have other functions.

Papers submitted for the conference could approach the subject of aspectuality from three different perspectives:

1) **Contrastive approach.** Aspect theory was first developed for Slavonic languages, then expanded to other language groups. Thus aspect was thought of (e.g. by Bondarko 1971, Comrie 1976 and Dahl 1985) as a universal semantic category which appears in different languages on different levels (lexical, morphological, syntactical). Will contrastive analysis identify such functional equivalencies between different ways in which aspect shows itself in different

languages? What remains and what changes? Or can aspectual phenomena rather be explained in terms used for general language-specific qualities?

Some of the conference papers could take translation as their subject of analysis (for example Romance-Estonian or Estonian-Romance, Estonian-Russian or Russian Estonian, Russian-Romance or Romance-Russian) discussing to what extent the transition in terms of expressing aspect when moving from one language to another preserves, loses or shifts the original meaning.

2) **The general theoretical framework.** This question is directly related to the need to apply the theory of aspect to different languages and to develop concepts which would help in the comparison of different languages to one another. The first problem here has to do with the definition of aspect. If it was to be linked with particular forms in which it manifested itself, the theory would immediately become language-specific. In broader semantic definitions, linguists often use concepts as 'primitives' which call for explanation. What is a situation or an action or a process? How should definiteness or indefiniteness be understood? A related problem has to do with mixing, distinguishing and relating the concepts of aspect and *Aktionsart* in theory. Emphasizing one concept or the other seems on the one hand to be connected with the qualities of the language analysed. On the other hand, theorists often propose universal typologies (for example the fundamental work of Vendler 1967).

3) **Aspect and definiteness.** This could be the most experimental section of the conference. The idea of a possible relationship between aspect and definiteness originally came about in seminars concerned with analysing the forms in which aspect manifests itself in Estonian. Aspect in Estonian appears primarily at the syntactic level and in the verb phrase in the case of transitive verbs the function of identifying aspect is carried by the object, which either defines activity (a definite or full object) or leaves it undefined (the indefinite or partitive object). So far, aspect and definiteness have been distinguished as qualities of a verb and a noun respectively, but one could ask whether a more general mechanism of definition

does not come up in those and how their influence defines the type of situation. What are the possible combinations of aspect and definiteness? While in the case of Estonian the effect is obvious, how does this work in languages in which aspect manifests itself lexico-grammatically (Slavonic languages) or morphologically (Romance languages)?

A collected volume of papers from the conference will be published.

Organisers: the French language section of the Department of Germanic and Romance Philology of the University of Tartu with the support of target-financed topic number SF0182568s03 and the Tallinn French Cultural Centre.

Organising team:

Helle Metslang, Stefano Montes, Daniele Monticelli, Jean Pascal Ollivry, Renate Pajusalu, Heete Sahkai, Anu Treikelder

Practical information:
DUE DATE FOR ABSTRACTS: 15 September 2006*
Length of abstracts: 250-300 words
Working languages of the conference: Estonian, French, English
A service of translation (French-Estonian and Estonian-French) will work during the conference
Length of presentations: 20 minutes.

Send abstracts or ask for more information:
Daniele Monticelli (daniel@ehi.ee**) and Anu Treikelder (**anu.treikelder@ut.ee**)**
Web page: http://www.fl.ut.ee/aspektikonverents

* Please send us your name, place of work/educational institution, e-mail address