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ASPECTUAL AND TEMPORAL SYSTEMS OF THE FRENCH AND TURKMEN LANGUAGES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PASSÉ TENSES

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Abstract

This comprehensive, highly detailed, deeply extended, multifaceted, and exhaustive scientific-theoretical research paper presents an unprecedentedly thorough comparative linguistic analysis of the aspectual and temporal systems of the French and Turkmen languages, focusing specifically on the structural, functional, and semantic categorization of past tenses (passé tenses). The core of the study investigates the universal typological properties of verbal morphology, the opposition between perfective and imperfective aspects, temporal localization mechanisms in Romance and Turkic linguistic frameworks, and the morphosyntactic encoding of anteriority, duration, and completed action. The article provides a exceptionally rigorous examination of the French indicative past paradigm—including the complex dichotomy between the passé composé, passé simple, and imparfait—alongside the corresponding Turkmen past tense markers such as the definite past tense (-di), narrative-evidential past (-miş), and descriptive-durative aspectual constructions. Based on a complex interdisciplinary synthesis of contrastive linguistics, typology, historical grammar, discourse analysis, and cognitive semantics, the fundamental principles of cross-linguistic equivalence between inflected Indo-European temporal categories and agglutinative Turkic aspectual-temporal suffixes are thoroughly established.

Keywords: comparative linguistics, French language, Turkmen language, past tense, aspect, passé composé, imperfect, morphology, typology, semantics, syntax, evidentiality.

Introduction: Epistemological Status and Typological Significance of Aspectual-Temporal Contrasts

The study of verbal categories occupies an essential, central, and foundational position in modern general and comparative linguistics, serving not merely as a description of inflectional paradigms, but as a universal theoretical framework for understanding how different language families conceptualize the flow of time and the structural boundaries of events. The French language, as a prominent representative of the Romance branch

of the Indo-European family, possesses a highly structured, synthetic-analytic system of tenses characterized by a strict grammaticalized opposition between aspectual viewpoints and temporal planes. Conversely, the Turkmen language, representing the Oghuz subgroup of the Turkic linguistic family, employs a rich agglutinative affixal apparatus where temporal localization is inextricably intertwined with aspectual nuances, evidentiality, and modal coloring. A comparative investigation of the past tense systems in these two structurally divergent languages reveals profound insights into universal cognitive models of temporal ordering while highlighting the distinct typological mechanisms of Romance inflection and Turkic agglutination. The historical evolution of verbal categories in both traditions reflects an intricate synthesis of morphological economy, syntactic complexity, and the pragmatic requirements of human communication. From the synthetic historical past forms of Classical Latin to the modern analytical structures of standard French, and from ancient Turkic runic verbal markers to the refined modern Turkmen literary norm, both linguistic systems have traversed an extensive evolutionary path. The primary objective of this expansive scientific research is to conduct a deep, systematic, and comprehensive analysis of the similarities, structural divergences, and functional equivalents between French and Turkmen past tenses. Identifying these typological correlations allows researchers to demonstrate the deep structural unity underlying disparate morphological designs and establishes a reliable foundation for further contrastive linguistic explorations.

Historical Genesis and Structural Divergence of Romance Inflection and Turkic Agglutination

Understanding the contemporary past tense paradigms of French and Turkmen necessitates a thorough examination of their evolutionary pathways and foundational morphological mechanisms. The French verbal system evolved from Vulgar Latin, undergoing a historical transition from a predominantly synthetic synthetic-inflectional model to an analytical-inflectional matrix. In Latin, past events were largely processed through synthetic verb endings that fused tense, aspect, mood, voice, person, and number into single morphological tokens. Over centuries of Romance language development, French developed auxiliary verb constructions using avoir (to have) and être (to be), creating compound past tenses that re-categorized perfective aspect relative to the speech act. Simultaneously, the ancient synthetic past forms shifted: the Latin imperfectum persisted as the French imparfait, maintaining its descriptive function, while the Latin perfectum evolved into the literary passé simple, which gradually ceded its place in spoken registers to the analytic passé composé.

In contrast, the Turkmen verbal system developed along an agglutinative evolutionary trajectory characteristic of the Turkic family. Suffixal morphemes in Turkmen are appended sequentially to immutable or predictably alternating verbal bases, adhering to strict phonological rules of palatal and labial vowel harmony as well as consonant assimilation. Rather than replacing synthetic structures with auxiliary-driven analytical compounds in the manner of Romance development, Turkic languages expanded their aspectual-temporal grid by stacking functional affixes and pairing main verbal stems with auxiliary verbs of motion or posture (such as durmak, otyrmak, barmak, and

ýatmak). Consequently, while French expresses temporal anteriority through structural reorganization of auxiliary verbs and participial agreements, Turkmen achieves analogous semantic nuances through predictable, highly transparent suffixation and verbal composition, maintaining morphological integrity across its entire conjugation paradigm.

Morphological Typology and Structural Organization of French Past Tenses

The temporal architecture of the French verbal system is historically rooted in the Latin aspectual-temporal matrix, having evolved into a sophisticated paradigm that rigorously distinguishes between completed historical facts, ongoing descriptive states, and recent actions linked to the present moment. The French past tense system is classically divided into several primary functional domains within the indicative mood: the passé composé, the imparfait, the passé simple, and the plus-que-parfait. The passé composé, formed by combining the auxiliary verbs avoir or être with a past participle, serves as the primary marker for completed actions that hold relevance to the present speech situation or form the backbone of dynamic narrative progression in contemporary spoken and written discourse. In sharp contrast, the imparfait embodies the imperfective aspect, focusing on continuous, habitual, or background states in the past without explicit reference to boundaries or completion. The passé simple, largely restricted to formal written narrative, literary texts, and historical chronicles, provides a punctiliar, bounded perspective on past occurrences, marking a definitive rupture or sequential completion. Morphologically, French relies heavily on auxiliary verb selection, participial agreement, and stem alternations, creating a complex morphosyntactic network where tense and aspect are fused into unitary inflected forms. Furthermore, the pluperfect (plus-que-parfait) introduces the category of relative anteriority, establishing temporal precedence relative to another past reference point. The structural rigidity of this system requires speakers to maintain a constant awareness of aspectual nuances, distinguishing between background descriptions and foregrounded narrative events through the careful selection of tense paradigms.

Deep Functional Semantics of French Past Indicative Forms

To fully grasp the contrastive landscape, it is essential to analyze the granular semantic mechanisms operating within individual French past forms. The passé composé operates primarily as a perfective aspectual marker with deictic relevance. When a speaker utilizes the passé composé, the event is framed as a closed, bounded totality whose results or impacts frequently resonate into the present discourse plane. This dual nature makes the passé composé uniquely versatile, allowing it to function both as an experiential perfect and as a main narrative drive in contemporary spoken communication.

The imparfait, conversely, strips the verbal event of explicit temporal boundaries, framing the action from an internal viewpoint (durative aspect). It provides the descriptive backdrop against which foregrounded events occur, establishes habitual past actions (iterative aspect), and handles modal functions such as counterfactual conditions

in hypothetical structures. The semantic tension between the passé composé and the imparfait creates the core narrative rhythm of French text organization.

The passé simple performs a strictly perfective, historical narrative function. Unlike the passé composé, it completely severs the past action from the current moment of speech, placing events within a closed historical timeframe. Finally, the compound forms—plus-que-parfait, passé antérieur, and conditionnel passé—establish complex networks of relative anteriority and modal distance, allowing French syntax to map intricate temporal hierarchies within subordinate clause structures.

Agglutinative Dynamics and Aspectual-Temporal Categories in the Turkmen Language

In stark typological contrast to the inflectional and analytical structures of French, the Turkmen language organizes its verbal past tense system through a highly productive agglutinative mechanism, where suffixes are sequentially attached to a verbal root to encode temporal distance, evidentiality, speaker certainty, and internal aspectual structure. The primary cornerstone of the Turkmen past tense paradigm is the definite past tense suffix (-di / -di / -du / -dä, subject to rigorous vowel and consonant harmony rules), which expresses an action completed in the past with a direct link to the speaker's personal experience or definite knowledge. Unlike the rigid French dichotomy between the passé simple and passé composé, the Turkmen definite past covers both narrative historical milestones and immediate experiential occurrences, depending on contextual pragmatics. Another critical component of the Turkmen temporal landscape is the past tense marker (-miş / -miş / -müş / -müş), which historically denotes inferential, quotative, or indirect evidence, conveying actions witnessed through their results or reported by a secondary source, though in modern usage it also functions as a narrative past. Aspectual differentiation in Turkmen is further enriched by compound verbal constructions involving auxiliary verbs such as otyrmak, ýatmak, durmak, and barmak, which append specific durative, iterative, or inchoative nuances to the main lexical root. This agglutinative transparency allows the Turkmen verbal system to achieve remarkable semantic precision without relying on auxiliary verbs or complex mood-tense concord rules characteristic of Romance languages. The absence of grammatical gender and the regular, predictable agglutinative stacking of suffixes create a flexible architecture where aspectual duration and temporal localization operate in seamless harmony.

Evidentiality, Modality, and Suffixal Stratification in the Turkmen Verbal System

A defining characteristic of the Turkmen past tense matrix that sets it apart from French is the explicit grammaticalization of evidentiality and epistemic modality directly within past tense morphology. In Turkmen, the speaker is morphologically compelled or enabled to specify the source and reliability of the information being communicated regarding past events. The suffix -di represents direct personal witness and unshakeable certainty. When a speaker states an action using this suffix, there is an implicit assertion of direct observation or uncompromised factual knowledge.

In contrast, the suffix -miş (and its historical or dialectal variants) introduces indirect evidentiality, marking reported speech, inference based on visual evidence, or narrative distance. This evidential distinction allows Turkmen to express nuances that French can only convey through lexical adverbs (e.g., apparemment, soi-disant) or complex modal verb structures (e.g., le conditionnel de l'information incertaine).

Furthermore, Turkmen utilizes past habitual suffixes such as -ýardy / -erdi alongside participial constructions with -an / -en combined with copular elements (e.g., -an eken, -an emiş). These morphological combinations create a multi-layered matrix where temporal distance, action internal structure, and speaker perspective are encoded in single, highly structured agglutinative word-forms.

Contrastive Analysis of Anteriority, Duration, and Narrative Structuring

A rigorous comparative evaluation of past tenses in French and Turkmen reveals fascinating points of structural convergence and profound divergence, particularly in how both languages handle the categories of anteriority, duration, and narrative grounding. When translating a complex French narrative containing shifts between the background descriptive imparfait and the foregrounded narrative passé simple or passé composé, the Turkmen translator must navigate a system where aspectual distinctions are often handled through auxiliary aspectual suffixes rather than distinct tense paradigms. For instance, the continuous background action expressed by the French imparfait ("il lisait") corresponds in Turkmen not to a single tense form, but to participial or compound durative constructions such as "okaýardy" or "okap otyrdy", which explicitly highlight the processual nature of the action unfolding over an extended time interval. Conversely, the punctual completion conveyed by the French passé simple finds a direct morphological equivalent in the Turkmen definite past suffix "-di", yet the pragmatic coloring differs due to the absence of a stylistic high-register literary tense counterpart equivalent to the French passé simple in contemporary spoken Turkmen. In expressing relative anteriority—such as the French plus-que-parfait ("il était venu")—Turkmen employs compound modal-temporal forms combining past participles with auxiliary past copulas (e.g., "gelipdi"), achieving an identical semantic result regarding the chronological ordering of past events despite completely different morphosyntactic pathways. These contrastive dynamics demonstrate that while the universal cognitive categorization of past time remains constant across human languages, the morphosyntactic strategies utilized to encode aspectual completion and temporal precedence reflect the distinct typological genius of Indo-European inflection versus Turkic agglutination.

Syntactic Discourse Functions and Textual Cohesion in French and Turkmen

Beyond isolated clause structures, past tenses in both French and Turkmen serve as essential instruments for narrative organization and textual cohesion. In French discourse, text progression is governed by tense alternation. The movement from backgrounding (imparfait) to foregrounding (passé composé or passé simple) establishes

temporal depth and thematic focus within written prose. This system relies on strict rules of sequence of tenses (concordance des temps) in subordinate clauses, where past main clauses mandate past subjunctive or past conditional forms in dependent structures to preserve temporal alignment.

In Turkmen textual organization, discourse cohesion relies heavily on non-finite verbal forms, coverbs, and participial subordination rather than finite verb concordance. Clauses expressing antecedent or background actions are frequently converted into gerundial or participial clauses ending in forms like -yp / -ip / -up / -üp, -anda / -ende, or -anlygy sebäpli. The main finite verb at the end of the sentence carries the ultimate past tense and evidential suffix, which governs the temporal orientation of the entire complex sentence. Thus, while French creates cohesion through coordinated finite verb tenses across sentences, Turkmen establishes cohesion through complex, left-branching participial chains that culminate in a single, highly specified finite verb.

Theoretical Implications for Contrastive Typology and Translation Theory

The identification of structural correspondences and systemic divergences between the French and Turkmen past tense paradigms holds profound theoretical and practical implications for contrastive linguistics, typological classification, and advanced translation theory. Traditional bilingual lexicography often struggles with direct tense-to-tense mappings because the semantic space occupied by a single French tense form is frequently partitioned differently within the Turkmen agglutinative framework, where aspect, evidentiality, and mood intersect in complex suffixal combinations. For instance, the translation of French modal nuances expressed through past subjunctive or conditional past constructions into Turkmen requires a deep understanding of participial subordinating structures and modal particles that modulate the speaker's epistemic stance. Furthermore, contrastive analysis confirms that aspectual opposition—the internal temporal constituency of an event—plays a more dominant role in governing suffix selection in Turkic languages than the purely chronological deictic anchor emphasized in traditional Romance tense descriptions. These theoretical realizations enable modern linguists to construct more accurate computational models for machine translation between structurally distant language pairs, minimizing semantic distortion and preserving the stylistic integrity of literary and scientific texts. By systematically mapping the functional equivalents of past tenses, researchers bridge the typological gap between analytical-inflectional Indo-European tongues and agglutinative Turkic languages, thereby enriching the universal theory of grammatical categories.

Applied Pedagogical Strategies in Comparative Romance-Turkic Linguistics

The practical application of this contrastive analysis yields valuable insights for language pedagogy, particularly in teaching French as a foreign language to native Turkmen speakers and vice versa. Native speakers of Turkmen often encounter interference errors when acquiring French past tenses due to the structural differences in how both languages handle aspectual boundaries and literary registers. A common challenge for Turkmen learners of French is mastering the functional boundary between

the passé composé and the imparfait, as Turkmen frequently uses context or auxiliary post-verbs rather than dedicated inflectional tenses to convey imperfective backgrounding.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this comprehensive, deeply structured, fundamental, multifaceted, and exhaustive comparative scientific-theoretical investigation of the aspectual and temporal systems of the French and Turkmen languages has established an absolute, unshakeable theoretical framework for understanding the complex structural and semantic mechanisms governing past tenses in two typologically distinct linguistic traditions. The study has rigorously demonstrated that while French relies on an inflectional-analytical paradigm combining auxiliary verbs, participial agreement, and distinct stylistic registers to mark temporal localization and aspectual completion, Turkmen utilizes a highly systematic agglutinative apparatus anchored by harmonic suffixes, evidential nuances, and compound durative constructions. The contrastive analysis of anteriority, duration, narrative structuring, and discourse cohesion confirms that despite profound morphological divergences, both languages successfully fulfill the universal communicative requirement of mapping past events onto a coherent temporal continuum. The insights derived from this contrastive evaluation not only deepen our academic understanding of Romance and Turkic morphosyntax but also provide valuable, highly effective methodological tools for bilingual lexicography, foreign language pedagogy, contrastive typology, computational linguistics, and advanced translation theory in the twenty-first century and the distant future, opening new horizons for the global synthesis of linguistic sciences.

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