

Review of:

Declerck, Renaat. *When-Clauses and Temporal Structure*. Routledge Studies in Germanic Linguistics 2. London & New York: Routledge, 1997. [ISBN 0-415-15488-X; pp. xiv + 283]

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There are two main ideas guiding the study: On the one hand the author argues that the traditionally so-called 'conjunction' *when* is a free relative adverb and, accordingly, *when*-clauses are best analysed as relative clauses. On the other hand Declerck uses *when*-sentences to test his descriptive model of the English tense system developed in his 1991 monograph *Tense in English: Its Structure and Use in Discourse* (London: Routledge). These two ideas are connected in that the former "leads to the hypothesis that the use of tenses in canonical WCs [i.e. *when*-clauses such as in *John will leave when I arrive*] is exactly the same as that in relative clauses depending on phrases like *at the time when/that* – a hypothesis [...] found to be correct" (p. 265). The elaboration of these aspects leads to a descriptively rich and, as regards the tense model, theoretically intricate investigation. The example sentences supporting or illustrating the theoretical claims are partly constructed, which I find in no way objectionable, and partly – as much as possible, I presume – taken from a wide range of corpus material (computerised and non-computerised), which makes the investigation attractive to the descriptively oriented reader.

After the introduction in chap. 1, a very fine grained typology of *when*-clauses based on "syntactic, semantic and functional characteristics" (p. 1) is presented in chap. 2. This typology comprises the following groups (with a number of sub-types distinguished within groups c, e, f, h):

- a) *when*-clauses used as direct (independent) questions (e.g. *When did it happen?*)
- b) *when*-clauses used as indirect (dependent) questions (e.g. *I asked him when it had happened.*)
- c) *when*-clauses used as relative clauses modifying a temporal noun phrase (e.g. *The time came when I had to change my mind.*)
- d) *when*-clauses as nonrestrictive relative clauses without overt antecedent (e.g. *She wore slacks and a jumper, and went to bed by simply undoing one button, when the whole caboodle fell off on the floor.*)
- e) *when*-clauses as free relative noun clauses (e.g. *My proudest moment was when I married you.*)
- f) *when*-clauses used as adverbial time clauses (e.g. *John will leave when I arrive.*)
- g) narrative *when*-clauses (e.g. *I was sitting quietly in the kitchen when suddenly a stranger entered the room.*)
- h) atemporal *when*-clauses (e.g. *That is what usually happens in cases when the divorced woman has no income of her own.*)

While it is certainly descriptively illuminating to see how varied the meanings and uses and syntactic functions of *when*-clauses are, the reader would wish for a typology in which the category-defining criteria are more clearly separated according to their being syntactic, semantic or 'functional' (with an indication of what is meant especially by the latter). However, this point of criticism does not affect the core of the investigation, for it does not invalidate (as far as I can see) the argumentation concerning the main aims and ideas of the study.

While the existence of relative *when*-clauses (such as in c above) is undoubted, Declerck's claim is that also those *when*-clauses that are commonly called 'adverbial' are to be analysed as free relative clauses (in adverbial function): "*when* introducing adverbial time clauses is really a free relative, which is interpreted as 'at a/the time at which'." (p. 56)<sup>1</sup> Chap. 3 offers synchronic and diachronic arguments (including some from the generative grammar paradigm) for this thesis. Declerck points out (p. 56f.) that

[t]here are two reasons why this conclusion is relevant. First, it helps to explain why there are so many different types of WC. Since *when* is a free relative and has developed from a question word, it should come as no surprise that WCs can be used as direct or indirect questions, as relative clauses (either [restrictive] or [nonrestrictive] and either with or without an overt antecedent), and as free relative clauses in adverbial function [...].

A recapitulation of Declerck's tense model (see above) restricted to those aspects that are relevant for the use of tense in *when*-sentences is given in chap. 4. The main features of the model are these: English divides time into four time sectors (past, pre-present, present, post-present); tenses express temporal relations by locating situations in a time sector, i.e. relating them to a "time of orientation" which may be either the "temporal zero-point" (mostly the time of utterance) or some other point itself located in one of the sectors; the "absolute tenses" (preterite, present perfect, present tense, future tense) locate a situation relative to the zero-point, the "relative tenses" (e.g. past perfect, 'conditional tense') locate a situation relative to a point different from the zero-point.

The notion 'temporal structure' in the title of the book refers to the time intervals that are explicitly or implicitly established and related within sentences by tense (being the central factor contributing to temporal structure) and time adverbials in combination with other factors such as context, aspectual properties of the verb forms, order of clauses etc. Temporal structure underlies the possible interpretation(s) of how the situations expressed in a sentence are temporally located and related. The way temporal structure is established by tense in connection with time adverbials is surveyed in chap.

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<sup>1</sup> Declerck mentions other authors taking this view (p. 45, fn. 1), but adds that "none of these actually adduce evidence supporting this analysis."

5 (the influence of the other factors mentioned above being treated in more detail in chap. 9).

Chaps. 6-11 are devoted to the detailed investigation of the tense properties of *when*-clauses within the framework of the tense model described in chap. 4. Chaps. 6-9 treat canonical *when*-clauses (see f above). It is here (chap. 6) that the claim about the identity of the tense systems in sentences involving canonical *when*-clauses and those involving (overtly) restrictive relative clauses of the type '*... at the time that ...*' is verified. Chap. 10 studies narrative *when*-clauses and chap. 11 is concerned with the other types.

The book contains a great number of specific claims about the meaning of *when*-sentences and about what is possible and not possible as concerns the use of tenses in those sentences. Most of these claims I find plausible. In order to give an example of the explanatory power of Declerck's tense model applied to *when*-sentences, I wish to quote the following passage from chap. 5 (p. 113):

The analysis explains why canonical WCs [*when*-clauses] referring to the post-present use the Present Perspective System rather than the Future Perspective System. The use of the present tense in *I will do it when I {have / \*will have} time* is usually treated as a kind of anomaly.<sup>[...]</sup> The observation that the WC-situation is interpreted as lying in the post-present has induced most scholars to claim that a verb form expressing futurity would be a more logical choice. [...] However, the use of a simultaneity form [i.e. the present tense] appears quite logical once it is seen that the WC-STO [see below] is not related to  $t_0$  but rather to the WC-ITO [see below], with which it is simultaneous.

In other words: The present tense expresses simultaneity of the time of the situation described in the *when*-clause (WC-STO) not with the temporal zero-point ( $t_0$ ), but with a time that is implicitly established by the (implicit) '*at the time*'-part of the meaning of *when* ('*at the time when*'). And this implicitly established time is itself included by a time interval lying in the post-present. (This included time is the WC-ITO.)

There are, however, also points which are less convincing. For example, with respect to the sentence

- (1) 'John said that he was tired because he had worked hard and that he would go to sleep early.' (see p. 65)

Declerck represents the 'time'<sup>2</sup> of John's going to sleep, i.e. of the (projected) situation posterior to John's saying-that-..., as having to lie within the past domain: "The reference here is to a 'past domain', i.e. a time interval which lies in the past time-sphere and which comprises the [times] of the four situations referred to." (p. 66; see also the corresponding fig. 4.2, p. 68; see also p. 75) It seems more appropriate here to treat John's going to sleep early as an intention – certainly formed in the past and insofar related to the past time-sphere – whose potential actualisation however is not at all confined to

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<sup>2</sup> I doubt that it is appropriate to speak of the 'time of the situation' if the situation is projected and not a fact (and possibly never becomes a fact). Cf. Declerck's reference to R.L. Allen (p. 67).

the time before  $t_0$ , i.e. the time before uttering (1), i.e. the past time-sphere. If, for example, (1) is uttered at 7.00 pm, the addressee may very well imagine John going to sleep at 8.00 pm.

Another point of criticism concerns the syntactic conception (never expressly stated) underlying the study. One reads: "'HC' ['head clause'] is to be understood here as the clause into which a WC is syntactically embedded, irrespective of whether it is a subordinate clause or an independent one." (p. 2; similarly p. 111, fn. 11) To allow for a clause to be syntactically embedded and independent at the same time seems to point to a theoretical weakness of the underlying syntactic theory.

The purpose of the book, to fill the gap of a "detailed and systematic study of WCs paying special attention to the use of tenses" (p. 3), has certainly been answered. For the student of *when*-clauses it is an important and helpful source, and it provides interesting material for any theory of tense. Personally, I would have preferred if a more rigorous, theoretically more unified treatment of the syntactic aspects of *when*-clauses had been included.