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## ASPECT, TENSE AND THE EVENT ICM METONYMY IN NARRATIVE PROSE: TWO EPISODES FROM URSULA HEGI'S "FLOATING IN MY MOTHER'S PALM"

The paper offers an analysis which aims at explaining the role that the choice of particular verbs, their grammatical tense and their aspectual form plays in the construal of an episode in narrative prose. Two sample passages from Ursula Hegi's novel *Floating in my Mother's Palm* will be analysed, focusing upon the textual function of the opposition between "perfectivity" and "imperfectivity" as revealed in the use of English verbs. The theoretical framework for the discussion is provided by the cognitive model developed by Ronald W. Langacker, with the principle of metonymical reference to events (as proposed by Radden and Kovecses) supplementing the strictly grammatical discussion. In conclusion, it is claimed that it is unconventional construals that are markers of what is commonly called "literary style". The principles that underlie such construals, when analysed in linguistic terms, reveal at least some of the workings of the complicated mechanism to which this vague label is commonly meant to refer.

### 1. The aims

The analysis presented in this paper aims at explaining the role that a writer's choice of particular verbs, their grammatical tense and their aspectual forms plays in the construal of an episode in narrative prose. In agreement with literary theory, an "episode" will be defined as a "series of connected incidents or scenes". Described in terms of cognitive grammar, they are "events" or chains of "events". An event is defined as a temporary occurrence, whose degree of complexity may vary from relatively simple ("John came in") to quite complex ("John built a house"). Simple events are individuated linguistically by separate names, which means that they are labelled with particular lexical verbs; complex events may also be given "gestalt" names (e.g. "build"), and they can be easily reduced to sets of subevents, each with its own name on a lower level of categorization. Therefore, the two terms, episode and event, are often used interchangeably.

The two sample passages analysed below will be taken from the novel *Floating in my Mother's Palm* by Ursula Hegi (Hegi 1991). In discussions like the present one, texts usually serve as sources of examples, and the choice of particular material for analysis depends mainly on what the analyst happens to be reading at the time when his theoretical ideas are taking shape. In this particular case, however, theoretical thought was actually provoked by the reading. As the critics wrote in their reviews quoted on the cover, the book is “the memory of particular people and place transformed into a song”, and throughout the narrative the protagonist, Hanna, “conjures up the events of her youth”. These conjured-up events – or episodes – are like individual hermetic capsules, or air bubbles, or beads on a string. It seems that this particular (although by no means unique) quality comes from their special construal. Thus, although similar “literary devices” could be certainly found in many other narratives, it is this particular narrative that has inspired the following discussion.

My purpose will be to describe the textual function of the opposition between “imperfectivity” and “perfectivity” as revealed in the use of English verbs (Langacker 1991, 2008). I will also try to show how the concept of (im)perfectivity relates to the principle of metonymical reference to events (Radden and Kovecses, 1996). I will claim that a strictly linguistic analysis of the kind proposed in this paper might help to explain a particular choice of words and word forms that literary critics refer to vaguely as a “stylistic quality” or “literary devices”. Finally, I will argue that event metonymy is motivated by perceptual selectivity, and that it underlies “iconic text interpretation”, defined (e.g. in Posner 1986: 306) as the procedure carried out by the reader, who assumes for the actions presented in a text features analogous to those present in the actual (i.e. extratextual) scene construal. In cognitive linguistics, as well as in literary theory, the strategy has been known as the Iconicity Principle (Paprotté 1988: 463 ff.).

## 2. Aspect and Tense

The linguistic structure of an event comes as the effect of particular scene construal, which is defined in cognitive grammar as resulting from the relationship between a speaker (writer) and the situation that he conceptualizes and portrays (Langacker 1987: 128 ff.). Seen from the “literary” perspective, this refers to what theorists of literature describe as point of view in narration; discussed in “linguistic” terms, it involves the sum total of linguistic (grammatical) devices that are selected to construe the vantage point from which the events are related.

For obvious reasons, the construal of an event crucially depends on particular combinations of verbal aspect and grammatical tense. Unlike other languages (notably Slavonic), English necessarily combines the location of events in time, relative to the moment of speaking (i.e. tense), with the characterisation of their internal structure (i.e. aspectual properties). In the theoretical model of Langacker’s Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1987, 1991, 2008), the grammatical categories of Aspect and Tense are discussed in relation to a fundamental distinction between **imperfective** and **perfective** processes. The concept of process itself involves what is called sequential scan-

ning, that is the way of cognitive processing whereby consecutive component stages of an activity are conceptualized as successions of subsequent states. The component states of a process may be conceptualized as differing in quality. For instance, the English verb “fell” refers to a process consisting of a series of states – each corresponding to a phase which can be conceived of as different from both the preceding and the following stage. In the sentence “the bomb fell” overall summary reference is made to the initial phase of the process (which can be specified by adding, e.g., “off the plane”), the middle phases (“through the air”) and the final phase (e.g. “to the ground”). The number of successive states that are actually differentiated depends on the communicative need of the speaker, and – should such a need arise – each one can be made explicit; for instance, by adding appropriate adverbials, as above: “the bomb fell off the plane”, “the bomb fell through the air”, “the bomb fell to the ground”<sup>1</sup>. Such internally **heterogenic** processes are called perfective.

However, the component states of a process need not be conceptualized as being qualitatively different from one another. When the speaker does not (intend to) conceptualize any perceivable changes through time, those individual states may be conceived of as being identical. For instance, the English verb “know” implies duration in conceived time, but no “process-internal” qualitative changes. Processes conceptualized as **homogeneous** are called imperfective.

Perfective processes are what grammars of English traditionally define as achievements, activities or accomplishments, while imperfective processes are defined as states. Particular conceptualizations of processes as either perfective or imperfective depend upon their semantic properties and become subject to linguistic conventions. Thus, such processes as “eating a cake” or “catching a rope” lend themselves naturally to heterogeneous conceptualizations, while “resembling” or “knowing” are just as naturally conceptualized as homogeneous states. Processes represented by such English verbs as “sit” or “swim” are – conceptually – situated somewhere in the middle: although internally homogeneous, they are conceptualized as filling in (logically) limited spans of time, i.e. occurring in what Langacker defines as “bounded episodes” (1991: 93). In other words, the speaker’s choice of aspect crucially depends on the type of event. However, although the distribution is basically governed by conventional interpretation of individual verbs, for many verbs both types of construal are possible; one can say both “John ate two apples yesterday”, and “John eats two apples a day”. Although in both cases there are obvious process-internal changes to be observed, in the second case the differences between individual states are conceptually neutralized.

Thus the first crucial function of verbal aspect is the expression of the (temporal) structure of an event in terms of its internal homogeneity or heterogeneity. The other crucial element of the semantics of aspectual forms is what Cognitive Grammar defines as **boundedness**, that is a certain limit, imposed either by internal configuration

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<sup>1</sup> I owe this example to Guenter Radden (personal communication).

of constituent elements or by contrast with the surroundings. Like things, processes may be conceptualized as limited sets of elements. Just as “a bomb” is conceptualized as a set of interconnecting entities (the shell, the explosive, the detonator, etc.), “falling” in “the bomb fell” is conceptualized as a sequence of states, e.g. from leaving the plane through travelling through the air to hitting the target. And just as the thing called “the clearing” is conceptualized as being limited by the surrounding forest, “swimming” in “they swam” is conceptualized as limited because of the contrast with the surrounding processes (i.e. processes other than swimming). This explains the use of imperfective verbs in bounded episodes: the processes they refer to are homogeneous (and thus imperfective), but at the same time bounded (and thus endowed with the perfective conceptualization).

These conceptual properties underlie the basic aspectual division of English verbs into **completive** and **progressive**. While the completive aspect portrays events construed as heterogeneous and bounded (“John ate two apples yesterday”), the progressive aspect typically shows them as homogeneous and unbounded. In “John is eating an apple” the event is being seen “internally”, and the boundaries, although conceptually present – are not in focus. In other words, the speaker who says “John is eating an apple” implies – but does not say – that John began eating an apple at some point in the past and he will finish eating the apple at some point in the future – the explanation found in any textbook for foreign learners of English. The progressive construal of a perfective process focuses on a particular (middle) phase of the event, and therefore it obliterates its internal heterogeneity; in other words it has an “imperfectivizing” effect.

English tenses are always either progressive or completive; tense always combines with aspect, which shows the speaker’s particular perspective of the nature of an event, and it grounds the event in time, relative to the time of speaking. Although in grammar books the discussion of aspect and tense is usually limited to single lexical verbs, the same principles hold for sequences of verbs building up complex events that were defined above as episodes.

### 3. Idealized Cognitive Models of Events (Event ICMs)

An ICM model is a cognitive structure related to human experience (hence “cognitive”), which represents not the world as it is, but the way in which human beings see it; therefore such a model does not necessarily correspond to the “real” world (hence it is “idealized”). (For details, see e.g. Lakoff 1987: 68ff.). Following Croft (1990: 51), I believe that “the conceptualization of events, as manifested in the semantics of verbs, is best represented as an ICM”. On the level of general schemas, Event ICMs for those events that are conceptualized as perfective correspond to traditional taxonomies of action verbs, made according to semantic criteria: people have “a general image” of “an achievement”, “an accomplishment”, “a point event”, “a habitual activity”, etc. Such Event ICMs are structured scenarios, where consecutive stages correspond to

subsequent states of the entire process. In events conceptualized as perfective none of the phases can be identified with the whole event. Events are viewed as entities consisting of consecutive parts, and they make up a hierarchy where more general classes of events contain those that are more specific (cf. “eat” vs. “chew”). However, the subevents that build an event are not always seen as successive: they may also be conceptualized as co-occurrent. Then they make up a collection rather than a hierarchy or sequence; for instance, “turning over the pages” is part (but not a subcategory) of “reading a book”.

This refers to all types of processes. Events conceptualized as inherently imperfective are not naturally reduced to structured scenarios, but they clearly consist of co-occurrent subevents. For instance, “swimming” involves moving one’s hands and legs, changing position in water, etc. Similarly, “turning over the pages” is present both in “he is reading a book” (progressive) and in “he read this book twice” (completive).

Thus all relations between events and subevents involve the part-whole relationship, i.e. what is defined as (cognitive) metonymy<sup>2</sup>.

#### 4. Metonymy

Traditionally, metonymy was considered as a purely linguistic phenomenon, although conceptual notions (e.g. “cause for effect”) appeared in classical descriptions. It was also believed to be entirely a matter of nominal reference, where the name of one thing was applied to another thing with which it was considered to be associated in the “real” world; for instance, “the White House” can be used metonymically to stand for “the American government”. Modern approaches, notably those developed within the cognitive theory of language, emphasise the basically notional character of metonymic relationships. In consequence, contiguity of entities that enter such relationships is no longer seen as involving the real world. Rather, it is located at a conceptual level: according to a cognitivist definition (Radden, Kovecses 1996), metonymy is “a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity provides mental access to another, within the same pattern of experience”.

The metonymic shift always involves a part that the speaker considers as salient; it is to such a part (of either a thing or a process) that Langacker (1991: 190) gave the metaphorical name of “active zone”, with reference to the element that “directly participates” in a given relationship. In the case of an event, the active zone is the salient constitutive element of an ICM. Seen in those terms, metonymy is no longer exclusively a matter of (nominal) reference. It also crucially involves events.

The notion of contiguity between entire ICMs and their parts regularly produces such metonymies as “whole event for subevent”; this type of metonymy is in fact so frequent that it is not even easily noticeable. Thus we say, for instance, “She bought

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion, see e.g. Mandler 1984 (14ff.)

some apples”, and, depending on context, the utterance may refer to any of the (non-identical) phases, i.e. “she went to the grocery shop”, “she asked for some apples”, “she had the apples picked up and weighted”, “she was told the price”, “she took out her purse and produced the money”, “she paid,” etc.<sup>3</sup>. These are hardly noticed as metonymic, since they give rise to basic level terms that are then conventionally used to refer to events as conceptual *gestalts*.

As was said, the speakers may also choose a subevent to stand for the whole event. For instance, people usually say, e.g., “The teacher marked twenty seminar papers” to refer to what is clearly a succession of subevents: “he read them”, “he corrected the mistakes”, “he assessed the contents”, “he gave the marks”, etc. (example from Radden and Kovecses 1996).

## 5. Event ICM Metonymy

With event ICMs the metonymic shift to a salient part involves either metonymic highlighting of one of the temporal phases or an element of a co-occurrent cluster of parts that make up a notionally complex event. Conventionally speakers focus on end phases of processes (as normally completion is the purpose of an activity, and therefore becomes most salient). But this need not be the case. When we say in English “she never opened her mouth”, and (metonymically) mean that “she did not speak”; we activate the initial phase of the process and thus imply that not even the precondition for the event (or the pre-initial stage of the ICM for “speak”) materialized. Similarly, when the speaker says “they sat at table”, he highlights what is a co-occurrent element of the ICM “eat a meal”. When reinforced by recurrence, such cases of metonymic expressions ultimately get the status of units, and then they begin to stand conventionally for particular types of events. This means that the speaker’s reference to a part automatically evokes the entire ICM as an integrated whole. For instance, “sitting at the table” automatically evokes being served some food, eating, drinking, etc. This is to say that like “dead metaphors”, metonymic conceptualizations may become conventionalized (cf. again “she bought some apples” or “he marked the papers”), and then they automatically evoke their targets.

So far the discussion of event ICM metonymy was limited to prototypical cases, i.e. to perfective verbs. However, the general cognitive principle of metonymic reference is operative even with prototypical imperfectives, where a phase of a state may be chosen to represent the entire state. The example usually given in this connection is Lakoff’s account for sentences like “I am living on Pearl Street” (quoted in Radden and Kovecses 1996: 8). This last example, an apparent exception from rules of the English grammar, illustrates the basic assumption underlying the cognitive approach

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<sup>3</sup> “Shopping at a grocery store” is, in fact, one of the classical “typical scripts” (or, in our terminology, ICMs) listed in the literature on artificial intelligence (for discussion, see e.g. Schank and Abelson 1977).

to language: grammar only captures general conventions, but it can also accommodate less conventional conceptualizations. Ultimately, the choice belongs to the speaker, or – as in the case under discussion – to the writer. In qualitative terms, the produce of “common language users” does not qualitatively differ from what is defined as verbal art.

## 6. Iconicity

Traditionally, iconicity is defined as the relationship of similarity that holds between the form and the meaning of linguistic structures. Within the cognitive framework, the relationship is not seen as objective (i.e. holding between elements of the “real” world) but rather as the conceived similarity between conceptual structures and linguistic forms. Ultimately then, like all other aspects of conceptualization, iconicity lies in the mind of the beholder. It is the speaker’s recognition of the motivated relations of form and content that underlies his perception of relevant similarities.

At least some metonymic relations involved in event ICMs are obviously iconic in that they are governed by the same basic cognitive principles: perceptual selectivity (what “meets the speaker’s eye” becomes actually expressed, and hence focus on co-occurrent parts of event gestalts) and order (the order of presentation mirrors the order of perception, and hence the focus on ordering of subsequent phases of events), or cultural preferences (salience of “sitting at the table” for the “eating a meal” ICM; cf. also the discussion in Radden and Kovecses 1996). As the result, conceptual contiguity of events and subevents gives rise to expressions which directly mirror such relations, and are thus diagrammatically iconic. Originally iconic models become conventionalized, which means that with time the users of language begin to assume the obvious. And that their attention is automatically directed to the unusual. It is precisely the interplay between the assumed and the unusual that verbal art seems to be about.

## 7. Event ICM, metonymy and scene construal

In the following analysis I will examine Ursula Hegi’s use of aspectual verbs in two narrative episodes. The above discussion has provided the tools for the analysis, and the synopsis of the theoretical framework adopted is as follows.

Events may be conceptualized as either internally heterogenic and bounded (perfective processes) or homogenic and unbounded (imperfective processes). They are represented as ICMs, and many of them may be conceptualized as either perfective or imperfective, as the features of heterogeneity/homogeneity and boundedness/unboundedness are largely the matter of subjective judgement.

The individuation of events itself is a cognitive process; some events are “naturally” perfective or “naturally” imperfective. The “naturalness” underlies the process of conventionalization, resulting in common usage which gives rise to grammatical

rules. While certain ICMs impose perfective interpretation, others suggest imperfective structuring of their events. The use of individual lexical verbs and the choice of aspectual and tense forms reflect the nature of the cognitive process, which crucially involves metonymy, or motivated selection of salient parts (either sequential or co-occurrent). The selection, although largely subject to conventionalization, ultimately becomes the individual creation of the speaker. The cognitively conditioned scene construal reflects a particular point of view. Each scene – or episode – is a complex network of things and relations. It is the latter that are put in focus in the following analysis.

## 8. Sample analysis

The two episodes are complex events: they consist of subevents, each named with a lexical verb. Each of the episodes corresponds to one of Hanna's memories, and the event time (i.e. the time of the episode) is prior to speech act time (i.e. the time of narration). The "cake episode" employs solely the "simple past tense", which implies that "a full instantiation of the profiled process occurs prior to the time of speaking" (Langacker 1991: 89); in the "Rhine episode" the completive is significantly contrasted with the progressive (past continuous tense; cf. 8.2.).

### 8.1. *The cake episode*

The cake episode appears in the chapter called "Veronika", which is the story of a friend of Hanna's mother. Mother and daughter used to visit Veronika in what the girl was told was a "sanatorium"; the reader easily identifies the place as a mental asylum. As Hanna's mother explains, "even since she was a child, Veronika has seen things that don't happen" – like poison coming down from the air to contaminate the food on people's tables. The episode in question describes an onset of one of Veronika's obsessive fits: she devours all food on the table to save her friend from imaginary poisoning:

*I went* ahead of them into the dining room. Earlier, *I'd helped* my mother *set* the table with the hand-painted china that had belonged to her grandmother. In the middle of the white tablecloth *sat* a silver tray with six pieces of pastry, each of them different, with whipped cream and fruit.

...[My mother] *held out* the pastry tray to Veronika. 'You get first choice today'.

Veronika *lifted a piece to her plate*. *I ate* slowly... Their heads close together, Veronika and my mother *talked* and *laughed*, one voice soft, the other clear and just a bit louder.

When the phone *rang* in the kitchen, my mother *got up* to answer it. *I separated* my last layer of pastry with my fork. Suddenly *I heard* a choking sound. Veronika – her lower lip sucked in, her cheeks hollow, she *took ragged breaths* as she *stared* at the pastry tray.

...'Would you like another piece?' *I didn't know* what else to say.

... As I *reached* for a piece with chocolate shavings, Veronika's left hand *shot out* and her thin fingers *dug themselves* into my wrist. With her other hand she *grasped* the pastry I *was about to give* her, *opened* her mouth wide, and *rammed* all of it *in* at once.

Whipped cream *covered* her chin; cherry filling *ran* down her neck and onto her lace collar. I couldn't *look away* as she *shoved* the other two pastries and the half-eaten piece from my mother's plate into her mouth, *swallowing* so hard that the skin on her neck *stretched*.

When she *was finished*, her mouth *pushed into* a smile. (Hegi 1991: 129–131; italics added.)

The perfective “went” in the opening sentence stands for the first in the series of events that make up this episode. “Going” is conventionally conceptualized as homogeneous: normally, the subevents are not salient enough to require differentiation, and the basic level verb refers to a bounded episode in the holistic way. The same stands for such conceptually imperfective verbs as “sat” or “stared”. Their “bounded episode” use actually goes counter grammar textbook prototypes: conventionally, the events that make up the first part of the episode should be based upon the perfective – imperfective contrast. When Hanna entered the dining room, the silver tray *was* already *sitting* on the table, and when she heard the choking noise, Veronika *was* already *staring* at it. Conventionally, unbounded imperfectives fill in the entire conceptual frame (which delimit an event), providing a homogeneous background for the ongoing events. But the cake episode does not have a background; it is a mosaic rather than a picture painted in watercolours. It is made entirely of figures: bounded events, each on a par with the others.

In the first part, all the inherently perfective verbs used in the text – “helped to set the table”, “held out the tray”, “ate a cake”, “talked”, “laughed”, “rang”, “got up”, “separated” – are basic level expressions, and they conventionally refer to common gestalt events. They express well-established ICMs, to which they refer via the “whole-for-part” metonymic relation. This is exactly how Hanna remembers the successive subevents: she helped her mother to set the table, she saw the cakes on the tray, she went into the dining room, she ate her cake, the two women talked and laughed. In this last case, the holistic, completive construal is reinforced by the fact that Hanna is said to have remembered the quality of the two voices (“one soft, the other clear and just a bit louder”) rather than the (conventionally more salient) subject matter of the conversation. On the other hand, the whole-for-parts construal demotes the internal heterogeneity of these events, which thus – conventionally – should provide the background for those which are more varied: “the two women *were talking* and *laughing* and the girl *was eating* her cake and *thinking* about her diary when the phone *rang* in the kitchen” is, after all, a prototypical grammar book construal. But as we said this episode has no background: the eating, the talking, the laughing – these all individual (bounded) little stones making up the mosaic of the entire episode.

The bounded events measure out their consecutive “time units”, and they are delimited by point events, which are dissociated from those time units (cf. Radden & Dirven 2007: 201 ff.): “(the phone) *rang*”, “(I) heard (a choking sound)”, “(her hand) *shot out*”, “(her fingers) *dug themselves*”. These are all subevents, and they all refer to

punctual sensory experiences: Hanna first *hears* the phone (and the sound sets a boundary upon the events of “eating”, “trying to think”, “talking” and “laughing”) and then the choking sound (which marks the onset of the central “cake eating” event); she *sees* the rapid movement of Veronika’s hand and finally she *feels* the pain of Veronika’s fingers digging into her flesh.

The overall structure established by the opening events of the episode disambiguates the potentially ambiguous perfective “separated (my last layer of pastry)” as standing (metonymously) for the whole internally homogeneous event rather than merely for its end point. In “she took ragged breaths” the perfective interpretation is enforced by the plural of the object noun: taking each ragged breath is conceptualized as an individual perfective process. Hanna remembers having heard exactly this: a series of repeated breaths, each one a separate event, which made her increasingly perplexed. Again, an alternate construal, e.g. “she breathed raggedly” (a bounded episode conceptualized as internally homogeneous) would produce a different image.

However, what is most crucial for the episode is what might be called “eating a cake ICM metonymy”. “Eating cakes” is, in fact, what the entire episode is about. The typical scenario for this event ICM may be found in any dictionary, and it involves four main stages: biting off a piece – putting it into the mouth – masticating – swallowing. For “eating a cream cake” the ICM may also include such co-occurrent subevents as “putting a cake on a plate – cutting it with a fork – taking it into the mouth piece by piece”. The activity is described as being performed three times: once by Hanna, and twice by Veronika. The first act is “normal”; Hanna remembers only that “she ate her cake slowly”, and the use of the basic level gestalt verb makes us assume the obvious; it must have been the obvious, since Hanna does not seem to have remembered anything more specific. There is just one of the subsequent states that she did remember: her separating the last layer of pastry with her fork; it was to this (sub)event that the choking sound she heard put a rapid end.

Veronika’s cake-eating also began in the normal way, with the (culturally) conventional precondition: Veronika “lifted a piece [of cake] to her plate”. Hanna’s memory registered the normal onset of the ICM, and took it to stand for the entire assumed pattern; Veronika’s lifting of a cake to her plate represents the whole event, which Hanna (and Hegi’s reader) assumes to have happened. Then follows the unusual. The scenario departs from the typical event ICM:

Veronika “*grasped* the pastry”

Veronika “*opened* her mouth *wide*”

Veronika “*rammed* all of [the pastry] in at once”

Veronika “*shoved* [more pastry] into her mouth”

Veronika *swallowed* “so hard that the skin on her neck *stretched*”

There are a few things to be noticed here. First, the expressions “grasped” (vs. “took”), “(opened) wide” (vs. “opened”), “rammed” (vs. “put”) and “shoved” (vs. “push”) are more specific than their basic level counterparts, as given in brackets. It is precisely this departure that makes them unusual; they cannot be automatically assumed; there-

fore, they must have drawn the observer's attention, and as such – were remembered. Each of those subevents becomes a subevent in its own right, building up a new scenario that emerges gradually, something like “devouring cakes in panic”. Characteristically, not all the assumed (normal) parts of the ICM are mentioned: there is no chewing (the point is that Veronika did not chew!), and swallowing hard (conceptualized as imperfective and progressive) appears only as the reason for another unusual co-occurrent subevent: the skin on Veronika's throat stretching.

In agreement with conventional rules of the English grammar, one would expect the two co-occurrent subevents (whipped cream covering Veronika's chin and the filling running down her neck and onto her collar) to serve as the background for the act of Veronika's devouring the pastries (cf. the conventional construal: “whipped *cream* was *covering* her chin; cherry filling was *running* down her neck and onto her lace collar”). But this, once again, would result in a different image. The ground gets less attention from the observer than the figure, while what Hanna remembered were two more separate bounded events: the “covering” and the “running” are conceptualized (and remembered) as completive and perfective: from Hanna's perspective of a child taught about good manners, the image of cream actually covering up a lady's chin and cherry filling reaching her lace collar must have been shocking enough to imprint itself upon her memory.

The “cake episode” ends when Veronika “is finished”; the aspectual structure with the past participle metonymically sets off the final state of the process of “finishing” (which is in itself a part of the “cake eating event”; cf. Langacker 1991: 129). The last unusual expression, “her mouth pushed into a smile” (a metonymical alternative for “Veronika smiled”) emphasises the overall iconic selectivity of the image: it is only Veronika's mouth making the grimace (again, perfectly and completely, from beginning to end) that Hanna remembered.

To sum up, Hegi's choice of “bounded episode” and perfective structures over progressives and imperfectives builds up an episode whose construction is comparable to that of a mosaic composed of individual stones which – only when seen from a distance – appear to make visible an overall pattern. Such, indeed, seems to be the texture of human memory. Due to the linguistic structure of the episode, it becomes iconically present in the text. It might provide a visual artist with a ready-to-be-used scenario. But a series of individual photographs would probably come closer to the original than a motion picture.

## 8.2. *The Rhine episode*

The Rhine episode consists of two parts. On seeing “two barges in the middle of the Rhein” straining upstream “connected by a long cable”, Hanna plans an activity which is actually performed in the second part of the episode:

“I imagined myself *swimming* out there, *holding* on to the cable, and *letting* the barges pull me upriver. ... Then I'd be able to *drift back* here without *having to walk*.”

Then she executes the plan:

Waves *splashed* around me as I *swam out* to where the barges *approached*. ...I *felt* strong.

... I *waited* for the freighters at a safe distance, *treading* water with my legs. After the stern of the first barge *passed* me, I *swam out* to find a good spot where I *could grasp* the cable. I *reached for it* about one meter before it *dipped* underwater.

The pain was incredible as the skin *was torn* off my palms. .. My hands *slipped* to where the frying cable *disappeared* in the current, and I *was thrust* beneath it. I *fought* to get away, but the cable *cut across* my stomach and *pulled* my head underwater.

Somewhere I'd heard your entire life flashes in front of you before you die. Oddly calm, I found myself *waiting* for that moment...For an instant I *considered* giving in – it would be so easy – but then I *thought* of my mother on that empty stretch of highway, *driving* too fast, too close to the concrete divider. Something within me *protested*, and I *fought* once more against the cable.

But it only *cut deeper* into my stomach, my arms. ..I *pushed* down and away, arms and legs *kicking*, *freeing* myself from the cable, then up, up. I *stretched* for air. *Was blinded* by yellow dots. My eyes *ached*. A deep, hollow sound, then voices, all at once, loud and angry. And the barge, the second barge – blurred at first – *was* less than ten meters from me, *advancing*. Aboard two men and a woman *shouted*. *Waved* me away.

As fast as I could, I *swam* toward the embankment and *pulled myself* out of the river. I *crawled* on my hands and knees, *fell onto* the hard pebbles. My *hands were bleeding*... My bathing suit *was ripped*. Bleeding welts *had sprung* on my tights and stomach. (Hegi 1991: 184–6; italics added.).

The plan consists of three consecutive stages: swimming out to the middle of the river, holding on to the cable and being pulled upriver. Each stage is conceptualized as a progressive, unbounded and homogeneous imperfectivized process: Hanna does not visualise any of the three activities in its entirety, and instead focuses on a homogeneous middle phase, which stands for an entire ICM. The initial and the final phases are “taken for granted”, which accounts for the dramatic events that follow: it appears that the assumed scenarios do not work. The planned outcome is “being drifted back here without having to walk”, and the perfective construal suggests conventional, metonymical focus on the final state (i.e. “being back here”).

The second part, the execution of the plan, has a different construal. Bounded events (either internally homogeneous: “I waited”, “I swam”, etc. or internally heterogeneous: “passed”, “grasped”, “reached”, etc.) are presented against the background of unbounded imperfectives (“treading water”, “driving”, “kicking”, “freeing myself”, “bleeding”). The interplay provides the many layered structure of the episode. What Hanna actually remembers is the initial stages of the first two of the three scenarios she had planned: “I swam out to where the barges approached” and “(After the stern of the first barge passed me), I swam out (to find a good spot where I could grasp the cable)” mark the beginning of the first one, and “I reached (for the cable)” the beginning of the second one. Metonymically, they stand for the entire events which we assume must have happened. But the final states (getting near the two barges and getting

hold of the cable) are not verbalized – they were obliterated by the sudden dramatic change in the second scenario.

Because of the turn, the last scenario (being pulled by the barges) had to only emerge – stage by stage. We get a selection of events, as they imprinted themselves on Hanna's memory. They are either point events ("I was thrust", "I stretched") or events that are inherently bounded due to their internal heterogeneity ("was torn", "slipped", "disappeared", "fought", "cut across", "pulled", "protested", "pushed"). Others are "bounded episodes", set off either by other surrounding events or by explicitly marked time limits ("(then) I thought", "(for an instant) I considered", "my eyes ached").

Unlike in the "cake episode", in the "Rhine episode" the successive pictures are painted against their backgrounds. The perfective events come to the fore and make up the foreground memory, but Hanna remembers something more: she remembers realizing, at some points, that the events happen against the background of her "arms and legs kicking" and her "freeing herself from the cable". There are two more processes that are given the internal perspective construal. At some point Hanna realizes that she has been waiting for the moment when her "entire life flashes in front of her", and is astonished to realize that she is actually somehow in the middle phase of that waiting. Then, she thinks of her mother "driving too fast". We know that the mother had been killed in a driving accident, but her driving is for Hanna like her own fighting with the rope – the ongoing middle phase standing for the whole event, with the onset insignificant, and the end yet unknown.

Significantly, she remembers the imperfective, homogeneous, unbounded "middle stage" of the process of freeing herself, but not its crucial completion: the actual moment of getting free. What dominates now is just the direction of movement: "up, up". It is at this point that real time disappears altogether, and tense and aspect disappear with it; the sounds as Hanna recalls them have no duration – just a quality. The sight she remembers needs some time to regain its temporal dimension: there is "the barge", then identified as "the second barge – blurred at first –", and only then located in space: "less than ten meters from Hanna". When time reappears, the boundaries of events seem to have been lost: the barge "was advancing". The progressive middle phase is crucial: the barge will go on advancing, threatening Hanna again.

What follows is a quick succession of complete events: Hanna remembers that the people on the barge "shouted" and "waved her away", and then come her own actions, which are described by iconically ordered perfectives: "I swam towards the embankment" (bounded episode), "I pulled myself out of the river" (focus on completion), "I crawled" (bounded episode), "I fell onto the hard pebbles" (focus on completion). It is only then that she discovered that her hands "were bleeding" (beginning and end of the event out of focus), her bathing suit "was ripped" (focus on the final state of the event), and "bleeding welts had sprung up" on her body ("double distancing": event time prior to reference time, which is prior to the time of the narration). The verb forms provide a sequencing of events which is obviously iconic: Hanna's memory reconstructs the events as she registered them at the time of the episode (different from the time at which the episode is narrated). As with the "cake episode", all these events

could have been construed, alternatively, as progressive imperfectives – but then, it would have been a different episode.

## 9. Conclusion

Verbal art is the art of both following and breaking linguistic conventions (which are alternatively called “grammatical rules”). Like the flouting of Gricean maxims of conversation, the breach of a convention ultimately becomes itself part of the rule. Literature is about individuals, about unique ways of looking at things, and thus it is bound to differ from the outlook of the “generalized average observer”. It is departures from conventional towards unconventional construals that are markers of what is called “literary style”. It seems that a linguistic analysis of the kind exemplified above may help to explain the workings of the complicated mechanism that rests hidden behind this vague label.

Another of Hegi’s protagonists, the story-maker and story-teller Trudi Montag, provides what seems to me the best possible resume of the above discussion. Imagining a story “that would tell itself through her”, Trudi decides that “[telling the story] had to do with what to tell first – though it had not happened first – and what to end the story with. It had to do with what to enhance and what to relinquish. And what to embrace”. (Hegi 1995: 525). Precisely.

An interested reader might ask at this point, for instance, whether the linguist could perhaps offer some help to a prospective translator, wishing to render the two episodes into some language which organizes the aspectual and tense meaning of its verbs in an entirely different way ( a language like Polish might be a case in point). I claim that the linguist should be able to answer this question in the affirmative, but an attempt at substantiating this claim would mean going beyond the limits of this paper.

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