



# Comments on 'A critique of "A re-evaluation of tense in isiZulu"' by Lionel Posthumus



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Firstly, I would like to note that Posthumus (2016) could have given a bit more recognition to the fact that the Reichenbach model is not the only model that can yield acceptable results. The Reichenbach/Comrie model has certainly been the most influential model so far; other models also deserve, in my view, attention. In addition to the approaches dealt with by Boogaart and Janssen (2007:803), there is an educational need for an alternative, albeit a simpler, system of tense description. Most of the students in the departments of African languages in South Africa take an African language for vocational purposes – most of these students will become teachers. While students who are enrolled in foundational and intermediate modules may not have to teach tenses in their classes, FET (Further Education and Training), isiZulu two and isiZulu three students will find themselves in the situation where they have to explain the tenses of Zulu. The question then arises: Have these students been exposed to more than one model of description so that they can choose which model is more appropriate to school learners?

I acknowledge that, according to the Reichenbach/Comrie model, tense is a deictic or grounding category and that according to this model, '[T]ense refers to the absolute location of an event or action in time [...] (The Internet Grammar of English, n.d.:6)'. There is however justification for the fact that I did not describe the tenses in deictic terms when working with narrative texts; see the following remarks in Smith:

Tense is interpreted differently in the discourse modes of Narrative, Report and Description. (2004:603)

The essence of Narrative is dynamism, in which the events and states are related to each other. After the first sentence of a narrative, the times are sequential or simultaneous with previous times in the text. *They are not related to SpT.* [speech time] (2004:603 [author's own emphasis])

The interpretation of tense for non-first sentences of passages in the Narrative and Description modes requires a departure from the deictic pattern. (2004:611 [author's own emphasis])

A few minor corrections need to be made.

He notes on page 1: 'He maintains that the remote past tense does not denote remoteness'. In my article, I made the following remark:

In the context of the narration, the verbs, all in the so-called remote past tense, clearly do not refer to events that occurred in the remote past. *The remote past can of course be a vehicle to refer to events in the remote and relatively remote past when it is necessary to indicate a remote time frame.* (Groenewald 2014:3 [author's own emphasis])

On page 2, Posthumus says: 'The notion that tenses in Zulu are marked by a (single) morpheme is inaccurate'. I agree; I stated as follows with regard to the morphology of Zulu tenses in general: 'Tenses in isiZulu are recognised through morphemic interventions in the clause, whether these interventions are prefixal, infixal, suffixal, or a combination of these' (2016:2).

Posthumus notes the following on page 4: '[t]hey [relative time adverbials] do not constitute a prerequisite for the employment of the *be*-relative tenses as suggested by Groenewald (2014:6)'. On the same page, there is the following remark '[...] his own misconception that Comrie maintains that a relative adverb is a prerequisite for the use of the relative tense'. I could not find this 'suggestion and/or misconception' in my article.

**Note:** The aim of this article was to respond to the article: Posthumus, L., 2016, 'A critique of "A re-evaluation of tense in isiZulu"', *Literator* 37(1), a1349. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/lit.v37i1.1349>

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On the question of the semantic value of – *ile*, Posthumus comments as follows:

In the example that Groenewald supplies as illustration of the function of the long form of the past tense, the pronouncement that Shumi's girlfriend makes, clearly highlights that she emphasises her act of 'bóóking in at the hotel'. Had she used the short form in this context, the focus would then have been on the adverbial description *lapha ehhotela* and no longer on the verb. What is in focus in example 23 is her action of booking herself in and not where she has booked in. (2016:9)

This is in fact what I tried to show. The suffix –*ile* draws attention to the action in the example under discussion.

Posthumus and I differ in the identification of tense or mood in examples where subject morpheme and formative – *a* – constitute either a past tense or consecutive mood, as for instance the following example (see the bold parts): *Lagqagqamuka ihhashi. Wasondela umfula. Lwakhula uvalo kuSishebo. Wajuluka. Ukuba ubengabambile isikhuni ngalesi esinye isandla, ubezowesula umjuluko.* [The horse reared up. The river approached. (= The river came closer and closer.) Sishebo's fear grew. He broke out in a sweat. If he had not been holding a torch in the other hand he would have wiped the sweat off] (Makhambeni 2006:14)

Readings by mother-tongue speakers as well as acoustic analysis will have to provide the final verdict on this point of dispute.

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### Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

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