

# Temporal Prepositional Phrases, Presupposition and Compositional Semantics

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In this talk, I shall discuss several alternative ways of accounting for the behavior of temporal prepositional phrases and argue for a proposal in which a covert or overt adverbial of the form *in the past* or *some time in the past* carries the meaning traditionally associated with the past tense morpheme. In addition to English data, some Japanese data will also be discussed.

The problem associated with quantified temporal prepositional phrases (tPPs) is exemplified by (1).

(1) Mary kissed John during every meeting.

It is intuitively clear what (1) has to mean: Mary kissed during every meeting that is somehow restricted to a set of those meetings that took place in the past. However, it is not easy to obtain this reading compositionally. To be more specific, it is not clear how to restrict the reading of the quantified tPP (i.e. *every meeting*) in the required way. Pratt and Francez (2001) and von Stechow (2002) argue for the proposal in which all time sensitive predicate (verbs and nouns) have a temporal argument that restricts the temporal location of the event in question as in (2).

(2)  $\llbracket \text{meeting} \rrbracket = \lambda x . [\lambda i . x \text{ is a meeting and } \text{time}(x) \subseteq i]$        $i$  = a variable over intervals

The temporal variable is there to make room for a contextually salient past time associated with the past tense. This proposal makes the right empirical prediction. However, to say that the lexical meaning of a simple event noun obligatorily contains the inclusive relation  $\subseteq$  between the event time and the "reference time" is undesirable from the intuitive point of view. To correct this problem, I

propose that a past tense morpheme (or a feature such as [+past]) require that there be a tPP of the form *in the past* or *some time in the past* within the same minimal clause. This enables us to forego the unnatural assumption that each noun or verb has as part of its lexical meaning the inclusive relation  $\subseteq$  between the event time and the "reference time".

I will discuss and reject two additional alternative proposals about temporal prepositional phrases: (i) Heim's (1997) idea that the presupposition imposed upon a time argument by a semantic tense is projected to a time argument occurring in the restriction of a temporal quantifier that binds this variable; (ii) the idea that the interpretation of nouns is restricted by the context of use is sufficient to obtain the correct interpretation.

I will then turn to some Japanese examples of tPPs and discuss whether the proposal made about the English data takes care of the Japanese data as well.

### **Selected Bibliography**

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- Stechow, Arnim von. 2002. Temporal Prepositional Phrases with Quantifiers: Some Additions to Pratt and Francez (2001), *Linguistics and Philosophy* 25, 755–800.