

THE USAGE OF TENSE FORMS OF ENGLISH

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the text characteristic of expression of tenses in English language. The special attention is allocated with the contextual use of present in the meaning of the future and its synonym use with other tenses

Key words

present tense, past tense, subordinate clause, semantic, direct speech, reported speech

According to Bybee, "the present tense has no express meaning; it alludes to the baseline state from which the other tenses indicate variations." They suggest that the present tense can "absorb the meaning inherent to regular social and physical phenomena, and this meaning, if stated and broken down clearly, comprises of habitual occurrence and action as well as ongoing states". The research generates more questions than answers. To begin with, why should continuous states be considered more "natural" than continuous events? Second, why should a meaningless construction necessitate a disjunctive definition that takes into account both continuing situations and habituals? Even putting these difficulties aside, it is clear that the present tense's aspectual limitations and coercion effects would be impossible to articulate if it did not have meaning. The present tense, as mentioned in the introduction, can be thought of as an aspectually sensitive tense operator that picks for a class of states. As we've seen, this selection behavior stems from the logical relationship between time depth and verification constraints for event reports. This selection behavior produces habitual and gnomic constructs of sentences that combine present tense inflection with a verb that is essentially dynamic, such as read or float, as seen in below, respectively:

1. I read in bed
2. Oil floats on water

Generic sentences are a term used by many aspectual theorists, including Krifka, to group together habitual and gnomic sentences (statements of general principles). According to Krifka and Bybee, the distinctions between habitual sentences (which Krifka refers to as characterizing sentences) and gnomic sentences (which Krifka et al. call to as reference to types) can be related to nominal reference's unique features. In gnomic sentences, nominal expressions have attributive reference, resulting in contingency readings. For example, one can use a conditional statement to say that if there is something that qualifies as oil, it will float on whatever qualifies as water. Because they attach attributes to specific individuals, common statements like do not have contingent readings. Habitual and generic sentences, on the other hand, vary from episodic phrases in that they both involve iteration of the indicated event and reflect non-coincidental truths about the world.

Dahl claims that while all languages have grammatical markers to discriminate between generic and episodic sentences, no language devotes grammatical resources completely to this function. When using English data, one can get an even stronger result because there does not appear to be any grammatical marking of the generic-episodic split in English. Dahl has assumed that each of the languages in his study has a single generic marker, with the present tense serving as the "generic marker" for English. However, this appears to be a mistake, as generic assertions can be conveyed using a variety of different tense-aspect combinations. These include the simple past and past progressive, as exemplified in below, respectively:

1. Dogs chased cars in those days
2. During that summer parents were keeping their children indoors.

As Langacker points out, generic predications can refer to situations that exist "for either a restricted or an unbounded span of time, that is, their validity has a temporal scope" [emphasis added]. As a result, we can't classify generic sentences as either a type of state sentence or a type of present tense sentence, because, as shown in, past tense and progressive sentences can also be used to make generic claims. However, we can state that generic sentences are very likely to be articulated in the present tense, and that when asked to construct a generic sentence, speakers are very likely to choose the present tense.

This relationship shows that genericity is not just a contextual inference but also a semantic prototype-based inference. Because it is based on judgments about the magnitude of the relevant time scales, the generic-episodic difference is contextual. The predication will be deemed episodic if the intervals separating instances of the iterated event are judged to be tiny, generic if the iterated events are judged to be widely spread through time.

1. The light flashed.
2. The catholic mass was recited in Latin.

However, because the scenario mentioned is not continuing at the moment of speaking, it is not a "real" generic statement. This intuition leads us to believe that genericity is a concept based on prototypes. The best examples of generic phrases not only refer to long time periods, but also to circumstances that occur during speaking. Why is this case? Nothing prevents the inference that this situation also exists previous to and after the reference time when a situation is reported as encompassing the reference time, as states are. As a result, an interpreter who is placed "within" a situation in this way is free to come to their own conclusions. This is a fact about the world rather than merely coincidental. Now, because the situation it denotes may be considered to involve an already evoked reference period, it could surely be construed as a state sentence (e.g., the sixteenth century). It also has a "closed," episodic meaning, in which the Catholic mass was exclusively recited in Latin prior to the Second Vatican Council, for example. This is due to the fact that the past tense is aspectually neutral: as we saw in the previous section, past tense phrases can have ambiguous event and state readings. The following is a past tense sentence that is unclear in the same way:

1. Sue was in Cleveland yesterday.

However, the present tense is not aspectually neutral. Because present tense sentences are intrinsically state sentences, they are more strongly connected with the generic construal than past tense sentences. Take, for example, which just has a generic meaning:

1. The Catholic mass is recited in Latin.

Generic sentences, as previously said, describe several instances of a single event, such as the reciting of the Catholic mass. But, as we saw above, present tense sentences denote states, so how can a present tense sentence denote an event, repeated or otherwise? It is true that a repeated event does not always qualify as a state: iterated event phrases like (21) are event sentences, not state sentences. If the present tense is a state selector, it must find a state inside the semantic representation of the tenseless statement with which it is combined.

This tenseless proposal, for example, is that the Catholic liturgy be recited in Latin. An event sequence must, by definition, contain periods of stasis, or, equivalently, **RESTS**, which hold between consecutive sub events. This is the same as saying that every transition has an anterior (onset) and a posterior (offset) phase. As a state selector, the present tense might choose the rest that contains the reference time (i.e., speech time).

Of course, any event, whether iterated or not, has an anterior state (the state that exists before the event) and a posterior state (the state that exists after the event) (the state that holds after the event has occurred). This insight naturally leads to a coercion-based account of English's so-called future present. This is exemplified in, which is replicated here as:

1. The flight arrives at noon.

Because arrival has a longer temporal profile than can be contained inside the present moment, it must be "flipped" onto one side or the other of the present partition to reconcile the semantic contradiction between the tense inflection and the verb. As a result, it refers to the state that existed prior to the arrival. While the equivalent of can be understood as a flawless prediction in many languages, coercion selects the state phase that precedes the signified event as a matter of linguistic convention. These findings suggest that while the precise coercive effects elicited by a given aspectually sensitive form, such as the present tense, may differ from language to language, the aspectual selection features of that form do not.

We can solve a long-standing issue about temporal reference in English by understanding the present tense as a state selector: why isn't the English present tense employed for event reporting? Consider the following examples, which are ungrammatical if interpreted as reports of ongoing events at the time of speech:

1. Look! Harry runs by the house!
2. They finally fix the sidewalk!

Consider how comparable effects occur in reported speech, in which a matrix verb of cognition or speaking supplies a surrogate speech time for the subordinate clause predication, as proof that the ungrammaticality of those sentences is due to the difficulty of overlap with the moment of speech. The sentence is ambiguous if the subordinate clause contains a stative verb: we don't know if the speaking act in question was originally in the present or past tense. This ambiguity is demonstrated in the sentence below:

1. Sue said that she preferred white wine.

If Sue's speech act is to be reconstructed as a stative prediction, it must include the moment at when she stated it, i.e., I prefer white wine. If Sue's speech act is to be rebuilt as an event prediction, i.e., I prefer white wine, the circumstance Sue describes must occur prior to the time of her speech act. Sue's original speech act, however, could only be reconstructed as

a past tense prediction if the subordinate clause verb favored was replaced with an event verb, such as drank. An event cannot be construed as overlapping speech time, whether speech time refers to the speaker's actual speaking time or a surrogate speech time—the period when someone is depicted as speaking.

In conclusion, The progressive replaced tense-based coercion as the means of denoting overlap between an event and the currently active reference time.

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