



States vs. Events and the Semantics of Tense

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Date: November 24, 2020 (Tuesday)

Time: 4:30pm - 6:15pm (Hong Kong Time, UTC +8)

***Seminar will be conducted via ZOOM**

Registration Deadline:

12:00nn of 22 November 2020 (Sunday) – Hong Kong Time

The Zoom Meeting details will be provided on 23 November 2020



Prior registration is required

Abstract

The stative vs. eventive distinction is a fundamental one in the typology of aktionsart types (Vendler 1965, Taylor 1977, Dowty 1979) but its role in tense anchoring has been underappreciated. English shows pervasive effects of the stative-eventive distinction in its tense aspect system, while in Russian, for example, semantic distributional effects reflect a division along the lines of homogeneity (cf. also Bohnemeyer and Swift 2004). In this talk I make a proposal about the compositional ingredients of temporal anchoring that opens up a space for understanding how languages can differ so systematically in their tense systems, while still essentially performing the basic desideratum of anchoring to the context. Why are states special in some languages? The primary contrast will be between Russian and English (and I will report on some recent research on eye tracking in Russian and English to support the contrasts here), but in the second half of the talk, I will turn to new work (Paul and Ramchand, in progress) where we turn the spotlight on Chinese, a language that does not explicitly mark tense, but where aktionsart and aspectual particles affect the space of possible temporal interpretations in systematic ways. What does the new system predict for a language like Chinese? In this part of the talk I promise more questions than answers and I look forward to a productive discussion that will help us move forward in our project of understanding the typological space for the syntax and semantics of tense.

Speaker

Gillian Ramchand received her PhD in Linguistics from Stanford University in 1993, after completing Bachelors degrees in Mathematics and Philosophy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She was University Lecturer at Oxford University, before moving to the University of Tromsø in 2004 where she is currently professor of Linguistics. Ramchand is interested in the phenomenon of creative and compositional meaning building, and her research has always focused on topics at the syntax-semantics interface, exploring how form and meaning are correlated in the world's languages. She has worked on Scottish Gaelic and Bengali in addition to English. More recently, she has begun to use experimental techniques to investigate questions of sentence internal compositionality in these domains. In addition to her articles in journals and handbooks, she has written three monographs on the topic of verb syntax and event semantics. Her most recent book *Situations and Syntactic Structures* (MIT Press) explores the syntax and semantics of the auxiliary system of English and makes a proposal for why the hierarchical ordering is the way it is.

All are Welcome

Enquiries

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