24.979 Topics in Semantics
“The Morphosemantics of Tense, Mood, and Aspect”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructors:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sabine Iatridou (<a href="mailto:iatridou@mit.edu">iatridou@mit.edu</a>, E39-236, 3-2640)</td>
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<td>Day &amp; Time:</td>
<td>Mondays, 2:05 – 4:55 (with a 15 minute break in the middle)</td>
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<td>Room:</td>
<td>1-132 (NOTE THE CHANGE!!)</td>
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In this seminar, we will explore the morphosemantics of the verbal system, in particular the categories of Tense, Mood, and Aspect.

Two general issues will guide our discussion:

(i) There are many suggested and suggestive parallels between the verbal and nominal domains. For example, people often apply the definite/indefinite distinction to various verbal phenomena, e.g. the subjunctive is a marker of “indefinite clauses” and factive complements are (like) definites. Whatever that means. What we will try to do is illuminate to what extent such parallels are fruitful to pursue.

(ii) Often, there are indications that certain morphemes are not themselves semantically active but are mere “agreement” reflexes dependent on other elements. For example, one could see (at least some occurrences of) the past tense morpheme not as introducing a past operator but as reflecting the fact that somewhere higher up in the structure there is a real past operator (perhaps, a past tense adverbial).

We will not be able to survey the entire field, of course. What we will do is to examine a few topics that are of particular interest to us and we will attempt to combine this with enough background material to give students a foundation from which to pursue their own interests. Our time this semester will be particularly constrained since we only have 11 class meetings. Let’s try to make the best possible use of this time.

Synergies

Students attending this class should also try to attend the seminar on TMA Syntax offered this semester by David and Sabine. We have not matched the syllabi, but there will be lots of interesting overlaps and opportunities to compare and contrast. This is intentional.
Course Requirements

1. Approximately halfway through the semester, students submit a squib. The squib has to present a critical evaluation/exploration of a particular aspect of one of the two general hypotheses listed above, drawing on a subset of the relevant papers or on a data set that you have found yourself.

2. The last session of the seminar is devoted to student presentations. Students will give short talks about a topic of relevance to the course. This can be related to the squib, but if so, there must have been some further substantial development since the squib was submitted.

Tentative Syllabus

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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| 1    | September 10 | Introduction  
Basic architectural questions. Instants vs. intervals. Tense as operator vs. tense as referential item. Time arguments vs. evaluation parameter. Events? |
| 2    | September 24 | The Perfect (Iatridou et al. 2001) |
| 3    | October 1 | “Simultaneous Readings” (Musan 2001, von Fintel & Iatridou 2001)  
Presenting the material we’ll be talking about at “Sinn und Bedeutung” |
| 4    | October 15 | Tense/Aspect/Adverbials (von Stechow 2001 et al.) |
| 5    | October 22 | Aspect – Perfective/Imperfective |
| 6    | October 29 | Aspect/Aktionsart – (Im)perfectivity vs. (A)telicity |
| 7    | November 5 | Mood and Complementation |
| 8    | November 19 | Mood – Subjunctive Conditionals |
| 9    | November 26 | Mood – Subjunctive Complements |
| 10   | December 3 | Factive Complements |
| 11   | December 10 | Student Presentations |
Some Relevant Literature

We will assign particular readings for particular meetings as we go along. For now, here is an alphabetical list of some of the works we will draw on, with an emphasis on more recent work or extremely important older work. Many more references to come, but you can also get going by following up on the stuff cited in these works.


