Tense, Aspect, Mood and Evidentiality (TAME)

Lecture 1:

Introduction

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Lectures

1. Introduction
2. How telicity creates time
3. TAME systems of the world
4. The diachronic perspective
5. TAME and memory
6. Studying TAME systems by questionnaires and parallel corpora

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1. Introduction

- In this lecture, an outline of the course will be given. Some traditional notions of temporal semantics will be introduced and discussed.

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2. How telicity creates time

- This lecture explores how time can be seen as emerging from the construction of representations of reality in which the basic building blocks are static—i.e., timeless—representations, which are connected to each other by events that are transitions between them and that create an ordering which can be understood as temporal.

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3. TAME systems of the world

- This lecture will give an overview of the typology of TAME systems and TAME gram types with a particular focus on areal tendencies.

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4. The diachronic perspective

- This lecture will discuss how TAME systems evolve and change in the perspective of a general theory of grammaticalization and grammatical maturation.

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5. TAME and memory

- This lecture will discuss possible connections between distinctions made in the TAME systems of human languages and the organization of human memory. The focus will be on the potential significance of the process by which an event goes from being perceived or inferred to being integrated in episodic memory for the explanation of the pervasive phenomenon of differential past marking in languages.

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6. Studying TAME systems by questionnaires and parallel corpora

- In this lecture, it will be shown how TAME systems can be studied cross-linguistically with the help of questionnaires and parallel corpora, using the perfect in the languages of the world as a concrete example.

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Practical matters

- PowerPoint presentations will be posted on Google Drive after each lecture.
- There will also be PDF versions of the presentations (but these will not contain animations).
- Posted presentations will contain ”bonus materials”.
- A list of recommended readings for the lectures is also found on Google Drive

The acronym

- TAME is short for
  - Tense
  - Aspect
  - Mood
  - Evidentiality
- This is an extension of traditional labels such as
  - Tense
  - Aspect
  - Mood = TAM

Tense
Mood
Aspect = TMA

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What is it all about?

- So what is TAME about?
- TAME is essentially a grammatical phenomenon
- This is important to state because if you choose to see TAME as a semantic phenomenon, it will be a much wider topic than what will be covered here
- This is also one reason why I take ”M” in TAME to stand for ”mood” rather than ”modality”

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Two events

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Speaking and time

- Almost everything that we speak about in language involves time…
- …and speaking itself takes place in time
- My saying *A bomb exploded* involves two temporal entities or events: the bomb explosion and the speech event.
- Moreover, these events are temporally ordered: the bomb explosion precedes the speech event.

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Enter TAME

- Crucially for our topic: other temporal relationships between the two events would entail changes in the form of the English expression used:

A bomb will explode

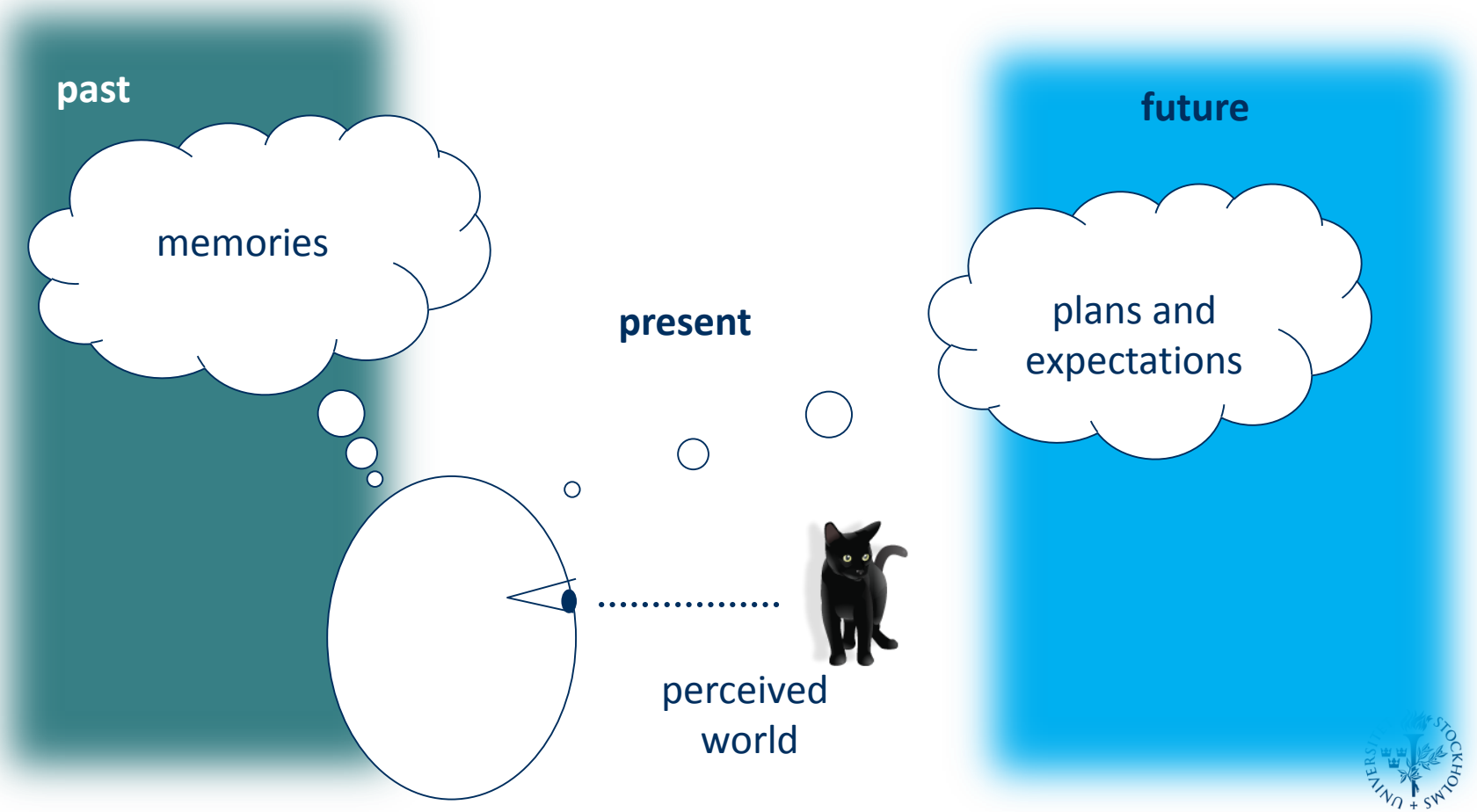
A bomb was exploding

A bomb is exploding

A bomb has exploded

- These changes exemplify the grammatical phenomena of TAME.

”Embodied time”



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Some characteristics of TAME as a grammatical phenomenon

- TAME is mainly clause-level or sentence-level
- It tends to show up as inflections on the finite verb or on an auxiliary – or by periphrastic constructions involving auxiliaries and/or particles
- TAME tends to be obligatory
- It is absent or reduced in non-finite clauses
- It occurs together with and is often fused with subject and object marking and negation
- It may consist of a single marking/marker or of several, which may be more or less separate from each other

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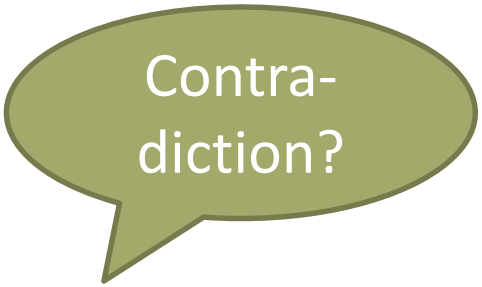
Wikipedia quotations

- "In linguistics, the grammatical aspect (sometimes called viewpoint aspect) of a verb defines the temporal flow (or lack thereof) in the described event or state. … The related concept of tense or the temporal situation indicated by an utterance, is typically distinguished from aspect."
- "In most dialects of Ancient Greek, aspect is indicated uniquely by tense."

- From Wikipedia (English), "Grammatical aspect"



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”Grammatical categories”

- Traditionally, TAME is thought of as a set of grammatical categories
- However, the notion of a grammatical category conflates two different things:
  - a dimension of a grammatical paradigm
  - the semantic domain from which the content of a grammatical item is taken
- These two notions seldom coincide totally in TAME

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Reasonably neat categories: number and person

- Number and person are examples of (seemingly) unproblematic inflectional categories in verbs

A Spanish paradigm

***amar* 'love'**

number

person

	Sg	**Pl**
1	amo	amamos
2	amas	amáis
3	ama	aman

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Not so neat: tense and aspect

traditional view:
all tense

Present	amo
Imperfect	amaba
Preterit	amé
Future	amaré

	Imperfective	**Perfective**
Present	amo	
Past	amaba	amé
Future	amaré	

modern view:
tense and aspect

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Semantic criteria are assumed to have precedence

- Traditional grammar subsumed all verb forms that express tense and aspect under “tense”
- Modern grammarians tend to insist on separating tense and aspect
- … tacitly assuming that semantic criteria have precedence in defining what is a grammatical category
- This leads to an uneasiness with cases where the structure of paradigms doesn’t seem to reflect the postulated semantically defined categories in a neat way

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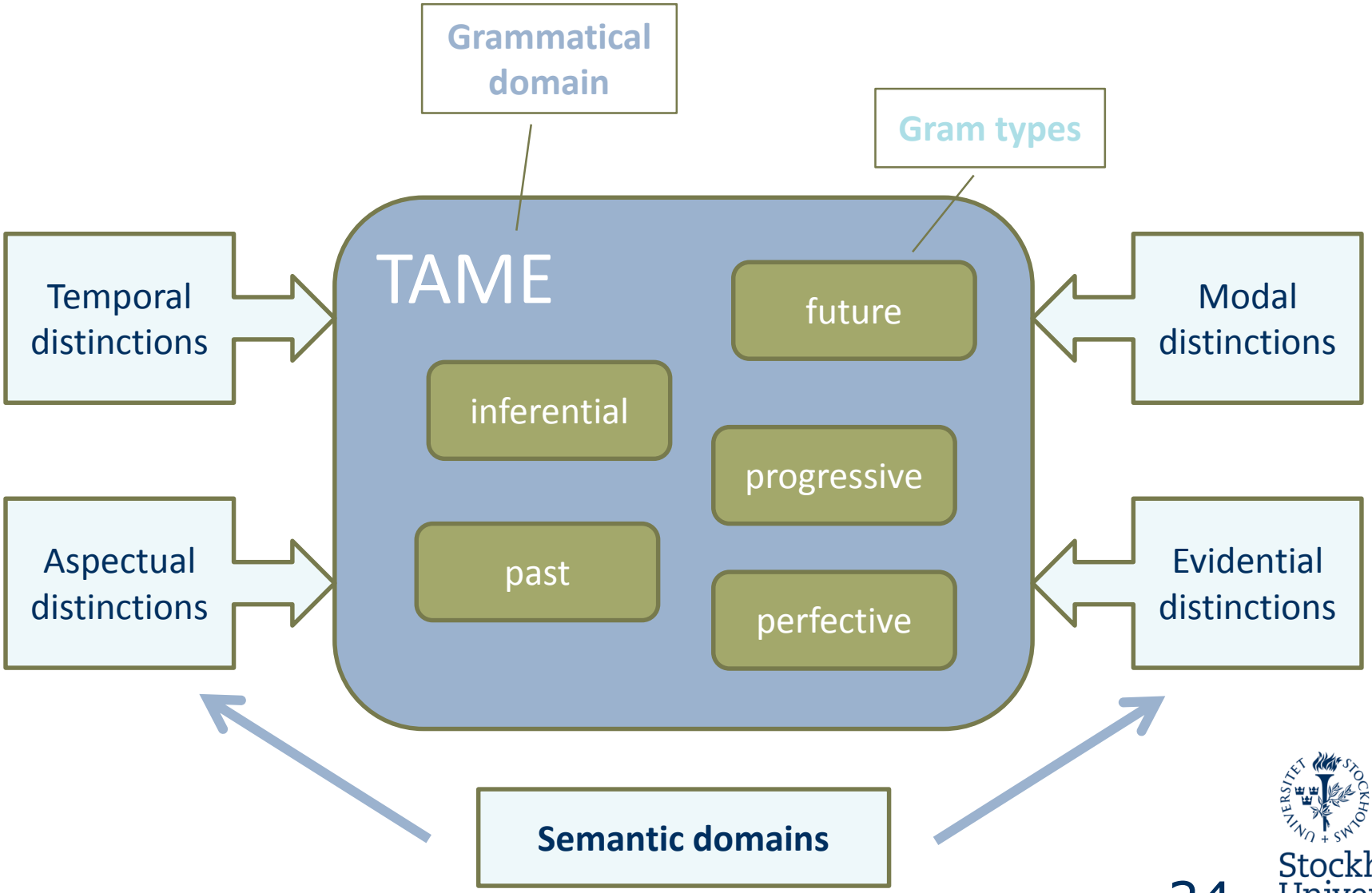
Intertwining is the normal case

- What is important to see is that those cases are not anomalies but rather the normal state of affairs in human languages
- .. and that the ways in which e.g. temporal and aspectual notions are intertwined and integrated in morphological systems show strong similarities across languages
- – similarities that are ultimately motivated by semantic and pragmatic affinities between those notions

Gram types

- Bybee and Dahl (1989) argue that tense, mood, and aspect are most appropriately seen as broad domains representing possible semantic content of grammatical entities…
- …and that cross-linguistic generalizations are to be looked for at the level of ”gram types” such as past, future, progressive etc.
- … which would be manifested as ”grams” in individual languages

The general picture



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TAME as a grammatical domain

- I will treat TAME as one grammatical domain…
- …consisting of a set of cross-linguistic gram types…
- …which get their semantic content from one or more semantic domains
- I will now give some traditional definitions of these semantic domains (none of them is unproblematic)

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Traditional definitions of the semantic content of TAME categories

- Tense: ”(the grammaticalisation of) location in time” (Comrie)
- Aspect: ”view of the internal temporal constituency of the situation” (Comrie)
- Mood: ”(verb inflections that express) how the action or state is conceived by the speaker” (WordNet)
- Evidentiality: ”(grammatical means of expressing) information source” (Aikhenvald)

Is there a common semantic core to TAME?

- Intuitively, there seems to be something that TAME grams have in common from the semantic (or pragmatic) point of view
- It is good to have a label for that common core, even if we cannot give a precise definition that will satisfy everyone

Purported reality status

- Tentatively expressed, TAME grams reflect what could be called the
  - purported reality status (PRS)

  of the content of the sentence.
- I am deliberately saying ”reflect” rather than ”express”, because the PRS is normally only partially identifiable from the TAME markings
- I am also using ”reality status” in a wider sense than is common in the literature

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The classics: Reichenbach and Vendler

- Two short texts have been highly influential in the discussion of TAME, more specifically of temporal and aspectual notions.
- Remarkably, the authors of both texts were philosophers rather than linguists.
- They also both were European-born scholars who emigrated to the United States.

Reichenbach, Hans. 1947. 'The Tenses of Verbs'. In Reichenbach, Hans, Elements of Symbolic Logic, 287–98. New York: Macmillan.

Vendler, Zeno. 1957. 'Verbs and Times'. The Philosophical Review, 66:2, 143-160

Links available on Google Drive (TAME\Links to papers)

Explicit and implicit reference to time

- When speaking we refer to time either explicitly or implicitly.
- Implicit time reference:
  - *Finished?* 'Have you finished at this moment?'
  - *My father was strict to me* (during my childhood)

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Deixis: some definitions

- The phenomenon whereby grammatical features relate an utterance to its particular location in time, space, etc. as expressed in deictic terms, i.e., here, *now, we, these*, etc.; (the term is derived from a Greek verb meaning 'show' or 'point').
  - Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics

- the function of [various expressions] … which relate utterances to the spatio-temporal co-ordinates of the act of utterance
  - John Lyons, Semantics

deixis proper

- the phenomenon wherein understanding the meaning of certain words and phrases in an utterance requires contextual information
  - Wikipedia

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Deixis

- Other terms for ”deictic”:
  - indexical
  - token-reflexive
  - egocentric

- Some properly deictic expressions:
  - personal pronouns: *I, we, you*
  - demonstratives: *this*
  - adverbs: *here*, *now, yesterday*

Many expressions have both deictic and non-deictic uses

Greek δείκνυμι (deiknumi, “I show”)
Latin indicō (“point out, show”)
Proto-Indo-European root ***deik-** (to show, to pronounce solemnly; to throw)
(English *teach*, *token*)

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Temporal expressions

- No implicit reference point:
  - *the year World War II ended*

- Properly deictic
  - *now*, *before, two hours ago*
- Deictic-cyclic
  - *last year, this morning*
- Relative
  - *two hours earlier*
  - *the morning before*
- Calendric
  - *1 January 1815*

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Reference points

- Temporal reference is often relative to a reference point
- In deixis proper, the reference point is equal to the time of utterance
- The reference point may also be
  - established in the discourse context (most often in a narrative):
    - *We arrived late. The sun had set two hours earlier*.
  - determined by a higher clause:
    - *He always says he was ill the day before*.

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Tense and reference points

- Such reference points are important in the description of tenses in human languages
- The most popular account is that of Reichenbach

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About Hans Reichenbach

- The philosopher Hans Reichenbach was born in 1891 in Hamburg and died in Los Angeles in 1953
- He worked on topics such as quantum mechanics, time, probability, and the philosophy of science
- Being of Jewish descent on his father's side, he lost his job in 1933 and had to flee to to Turkey in 1933 where he worked until moving to the US in 1938
- One chapter in his Elements of Symbolic Logic (1947) treats tense in natural language

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Reichenbach's three point model

- According to Reichenbach, we need three points to explain tenses:
  - the point of speech (S)
  - the point of event (E)
  - the point of reference (R)

'John had gone'

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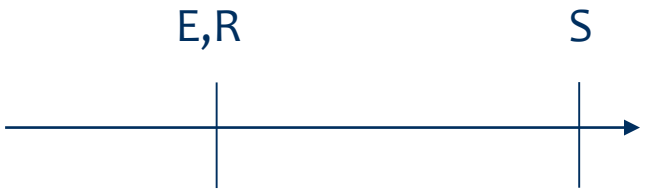
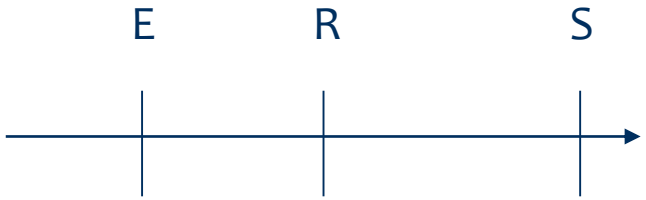
Past, perfect, and pluperfect according to Reichenbach



'John went'

'John has gone'



'John had gone'

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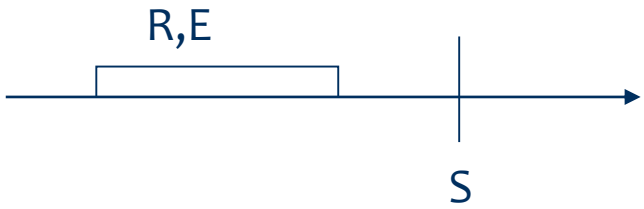
’Extended tenses’ according to Reichenbach

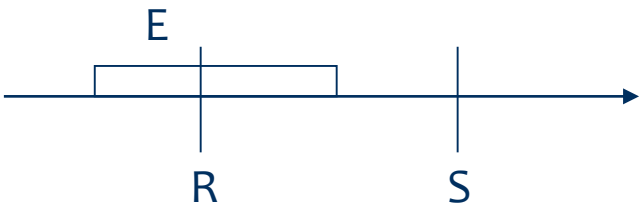
’I am seeing John’



’I was seeing John’

see is not a good choice of verb for this example. The natural interpretation is ’I was dating John’ which is hardly what Reichenbach intended.

An alternative analysis (not Reichenbach’s):



’I was seeing John’

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Inspiration from Hermann Paul?

- “Die Kategorie des Tempus beruht, wenn wir zunächst die Aktionsart bei Seite lassen, auf dem zeitlichen Verhältnis, in dem ein Vorgang zu einem bestimmten Zeitpunkt steht. Als solcher kann zunächst der Augenblick genommen werden, in dem sich der Sprechende befindet, und so entsteht der Unterschied zwischen Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft, welchem die grammatischen Kategorieen Perfektum, Präsens, Futurum entsprechen. Ich setze das Perfektum als den eigentlichen Ausdruck für dieses Verhältnis, nicht den Aorist, der allerdings auch in dieser Funktion vorkommt. Die gewöhnliche Definition, dass das Perf. die vollendete, der Aor. die vergangene Handlung bezeichne, ist eine blosse Worterklärung, mit der sich kein klarer Begriff verbinden lässt. Das Charakteristische des Perf. im Gegensatz zu Aor. und Imperf. liegt darin, dass es das Verhältnis eines Vorganges zur Gegenwart ausdrückt.”
  - (Paul, Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte, § 189.)

- "The category of tense is based, if we leave the Aktionsart alone for the time being, the temporal relationship which a process has to a given time. As such a time, the first moment to be considered is the one at which the speaker is, and this creates the difference between past, present and future, which correspond to the grammatical categories Perfect, Present, Future. I put in the perfect as the proper term for this relationship, not the aorist, which admittedly also occurs in this function. The usual definition -- that the Perfect denotes an accomplished action, the Aorist a past action -- is a mere verbal explanation with no clear concept associated. The characteristic of Perfect unlike the Aorist and Imperfect is that expresses the relationship of a process to the present."

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Relative vs. absolute tenses

- All tenses are really relative in the ordinary sense of ”relative”
- …but ”absolute tense” is used to denote a ”properly deictic” tense, i.e. one that relates to the point of speech
- …and relative tense relates to anything else
- Comrie’s example:
  - The passengers awaiting flight 26 proceeded to departure gate 5

awaiting is simultaneous to *proceeded*

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Comrie's (1985) explication of Reichenbach

- present — E simul S
- past — E before S
- future — E after S
- relative present — E simul R
- relative past — E before R
- relative future — E after R
- pluperfect — E before R before S

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Some alternatives to "point of reference"

- evaluation time – the time at which the truth of the "sentence radical" is evaluated
  - It was raining means that for some time t in the past, [it be raining] was true at t
- observation time (perception time) – the time at which the state of affairs described is observed
  - John went out into the street. It was raining.

- topic time – the time talked about

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Reference time vs. ”topic time”

- Klein (Time in Language, p. 40):
  - What did you notice when you entered the room?
  - A man was lying on the floor.

- …”we say *was lying* rather than *is lying* even if the man is still lying on the floor, since the moment we are talking about is in the past.”
- Thus, ”TENSE DOES NOT EXPRESS A TEMPORAL RELATION BETWEEN THE TIME OF SITUATION AND THE TIME OF UTTERANCE; rather, it expresses a relation between the time of utterance and some time for which the speaker wants to make an assertion – the ’topic time” (p.24)

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Is there always a ”topic time”?

- While sentences describing states and on-going activities are usually ”about” a specific time, sentences about telic/bounded events often have no identifiable topic time

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