A formal approach to tense and aspect (23 March)

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This paper outlines a formally oriented approach to the study of tense and aspect in natural language and in particular how these two sets of notions interact with event structure and contextual information. It is based on the following general assumptions:

- Sentences implicitly refer to four different temporal parameters, *speech time* or the time of the utterance, *event time* or the run time of the situation, *reference time* or the time spoken about and *evaluation time* or the temporal perspective of the speaker. Note that evaluation time and speech time normally coincide by default but that they can be shifted by various morphosyntactic strategies
- The basic values of the parameters are intervals, points being taken as minimal intervals
- Various relations may hold between the various parameters, e.g. precedence, inclusion or overlap.
- Different aspect operators predicate different relations between reference time and event time; tense operators predicate different relations between reference time and evaluation time.
- Universal Grammar provides a limited set of tense/aspect categories that have an invariable basic general meaning. Each of these categories is associated with a unique set of contextually and lexically determined readings.
- Morphosyntactic blocking plays an important role in the organization of language-specific tense/aspect systems

The paper explores the explanatory potential of these basic assumptions, showing that they are able to account for a broad range of data across languages.

A formal model of diachronic verbal semantics (30 March)

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This paper represents an attempt to reconcile the insights of two largely independent traditions, formally oriented semantics and functionally oriented grammaticalization research. Drawing on the model outlined in my previous paper, I explore how this basically synchronic framework can be applied to diachronic data, in particular to account for the development of verbal tense/aspect categories in different Indo-European languages. The issues this paper sets out to discuss include the following:

- To what extent can the usage-based approach to semantic change be incorporated in a formally oriented framework?
- To what extent does the formal approach to verbal semantics advocated in the present work contribute to clarifying the notoriously controversial role of Unidirectionality in semantic change?
- How do semantic and systemic factors interact in semantic change?
- What is the role of lexical semantic factors and event structure in grammatical change?