

# Tense and Semantic Composition in NSM

Avery D Andrews

ANU

Avery.Andrews@anu.edu.au

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Andrews (2005) made some initial proposals for equipping the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach to semantics of Wierzbicka and her associates (Wierzbicka and Goddard (2002) and many other works) with an account of semantic composition, but entirely ignored problems created by the behavior of tense-marking in the explications.

In this paper I will begin to address this issue. The background assumption is that the NSM metalanguages (one for each natural language) should be formalized by setting up a universal formalized NSM syntax (UFNSM), with, for each natural language NSM, a language-specific ‘rendering component’ that translates UFNSM formulas (similar in appearance but not in explanatory role to the traditional ‘logical forms’ of formal semantics) into NL explications. This allows the UFNSM to be a typed lambda calculus, so that explications of individual words can be ‘schemata’ into which other explications can be substituted, without concern for the details of case-marking, agreement and other surface grammatical phenomena, which are handled by the rendering components.

For tense, the proposal is that ordinary tensed propositions are of a type  $p$  (following Pollard 2004), while predicates typically take arguments of various types to produce a result of ‘tenseless situation-type’, here designated  $s$ . Tense-markers are then of type  $s \rightarrow p$ . Tense-explications are of the form suggested by Goddard (1997) and refined by Wierzbicka (2003), whereby an independent sentence has an explication component *I say this now*, and a tense-marker introduces components of the form *this happen (a (very) short time) before/after now*.

We work through the examples considered in Andrews (2005) (monovalent *go* (and *leave*) and *warn*), and show how the proposal accounts for certain restrictions on the nature of the *warn*-complement in terms of semantic filtering, and accomodates accident phenomena in the English versions of the explications via rules of tense-distribution and agreement in the English rendering component.

## Bibliography

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