

## Tenses, dates and times\*

Kepa Korta (Institute for Logic, Cognition, Language and Information;  
University of the Basque Country)

María Ponte (Department of Philosophy, Logic and Philosophy of Science;  
University of Seville)

### 1. Introduction

Utterances of temporally unspecific present-tensed sentences seem to express the same proposition as utterances of temporally specific present-tensed sentences, when both are uttered at the same time. That is, an utterance like “Mary is laughing (now)”,<sup>1</sup> uttered at 4 p.m. on Monday October 21, 2013 certainly seems to express the same proposition as “Mary is laughing at 4p.m. on Monday October 21, 2013” (uttered at that time and date). The speaker would say the same thing. But then, the utterances clearly differ in what is usually known as cognitive significance: the hearer can rationally accept one and reject the other. From the point of view of the speaker, depending on the circumstances and her intentions she will choose one instead of the other. The utterances differ in cognitive motivation and cognitive impact.

We seem to face a dilemma here. If we focus on intuitions on same-saying, we conclude that both utterances express the same proposition. If we focus on intuitions on cognitive motivation and impact, we conclude that their contents are different, that they express different propositions. The two positions look incompatible.

Elaborating on some ideas from Korta & Perry (2011), we defend a proposal according to which utterances of both temporally unspecific and temporally specific sentences have a systematic variety of contents from reflexive or utterance-bound contents to incremental or referential contents. We will combine this with a classification of utterances that make reference to tense. With all this settled, we shall present an account that can explain both the similarities among these utterances – claiming that the referential content<sup>2</sup> of all of them is a proposition that does not include tense or any indexical element– and their differences in cognitive significance –placing these differences in their respective utterance-bound contents.

---

\* This work has been partially supported by grants of the Basque Government (IT780-13) and the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (FFI2012-37726). We would like to thank Eros Corazza, Joana Garmendia and Larraitz Zubeldia for helpful comments.

<sup>1</sup> Below we will distinguish between utterances containing the indexical ‘now’ (*indexical* utterances) and indexical-free utterances (*bare* utterances).

<sup>2</sup> Following Perry (2001), ‘referential content’ typically corresponds to philosophers’ traditional notion of *what is said* or *the proposition expressed* by the utterance.

Our plan is as follows. In section 2 we introduce a classification of utterances with respect to the way they refer to time and we present the problems in a more detailed way, by means of some examples. In section 3 we introduce some further conceptual clarifications, and in section 4 we present the basics of the content-pluralistic account as it is developed in *Critical Pragmatics* (Korta & Perry, 2011). In section 5 we sketch our view concerning ‘now’ in utterances of sentences in the present tense. We conclude, in section 6, with some considerations on the philosophy of time and tense.

## **2. Utterances: bare, indexical and dated**

The relation between utterances and tense is not a simple one. We will consider here three possible cases. First, there are utterances of temporally unspecific sentences, such as

1. It is sunny.

Second, utterances of sentences that include a temporal indexical, such as

2. It is sunny today,

or

3. It is sunny now.

And, finally, there are utterances of sentences that have the time (and date) fully articulated, for instance,

4. It is sunny at 10:30 a.m.

or, being more specific,

5. It is sunny at 10:30 a.m. on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

These are all quite ordinary utterances, used in everyday situations to communicate clear messages and to attain simple communicative goals. However, because of the apparent incompatibility between intuitions about same-saying and about cognitive significance, their analysis turns out to be quite tricky. We say “apparent incompatibility” because we aim to prove these intuitions to be entirely compatible. To emphasize, our argument will be twofold. On the one hand, we will claim that a temporally unspecific utterance like (1), uttered at 3.00 p.m. on a given day, seems to have the same (referential) content as a temporally specific utterance like (4) on the same day and time. On the other hand, we will claim that both utterances present clear differences in cognitive significance and that these differences are to be located in the utterance-bound content.

To face these and other issues, we start by proposing a classification of utterances with respect to the way they refer to time. We call them

a. *Bare* utterances, in which the only reference to time is done via verbal inflection (e.g. (1))

b. *Indexical* utterances, which include a temporal indexical like ‘now’, ‘today’, ‘tomorrow’ or ‘yesterday’ (e.g. (2) and (3))

c. *Dated* utterances, which include explicit dates or times (e.g. (4) and (5)).

In any given situation, a speaker usually has to choose among these three types of utterances to communicate whatever she wants to, and to accomplish whatever goals she aims at. There are two different ways to assess an utterance in a situation.

The first way focuses on whether an utterance is true or false. The second way includes considerations of how communicatively apt an utterance is. An utterance is communicatively apt, in a given situation, if the speaker, by means of it, achieves her communicative goals, that is, if the speaker fulfills her communicative intentions and obtains the desired effect(s) on the hearer. Conversely, an utterance is not communicatively apt if it does not help in attaining the speaker’s communicative goals, either because it somehow complicates them or because it prevents them. Of course, this will be a matter of degree. An utterance will rarely be deemed totally apt or inapt, but rather more or less communicatively apt, depending on the degree of fulfillment of the speaker’s intentions, which will depend on the degree of understanding on the part of the hearer.

Let us illustrate these distinctions. Imagine that, on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013 Jane and Paul are taking a nice walk by the coast and, at 3 p.m. Jane sees their boat, *Menudo*, sinking while anchored in the port. Consider three possible scenarios or situations.

## SITUATION A

Jane, alarmed by the sight of their boat sinking, wants to call Paul’s attention to it, to decide together what to do: call the maritime rescue, try to save it or at least some of their belongings, sit and cry... With that aim, she utters

6. *Menudo* is sinking.

This is a *bare* utterance, a simple assertive utterance of a sentence in present tense that, in those circumstances, will make Paul aware of the fact that their boat is in sight and that she is sinking at that precise moment.<sup>3</sup> At the very least, he would look toward it and perhaps he would comment on their possible course of action, satisfying Jane’s intentions.

---

<sup>3</sup> Note that Jane could have emphasized this by adding ‘now’. We consider this possibility in situation C.

In situation A, then, the *bare* utterance (6) would be both true and communicatively apt: it is true in situation A and with it Jane accomplishes her communicative intentions.

But suppose that Jane, in that very same scenario A, had opted for a *dated* utterance such as,

7. *Menudo* is sinking on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013 at 3 p.m.

This is, to repeat, an assertive utterance of a sentence in the present tense that, contrary to (6), has the date and time articulated in the sentence used. This introduces a key difference. In terms of its truth-value, if Jane had chosen (7) in situation A, she would have done nothing wrong, in the sense that she would not have said something false. Both (6) and (7) are true in situation A. Indeed, (6) and (7) seem to have the same truth-conditions, namely,

(6) and (7) are true, at t, if and only if **MENUDO BE SINKING ON FRIDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2013 AT 3 P.M.**

Or, to put it differently, the content associated with both utterances is the same, that

6/7r. **MENUDO BE SINKING ON FRIDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2013 AT 3 P.M.**<sup>4</sup>

However, taking into consideration Jane's intentions when uttering (7) in situation A, we would conclude that the utterance is not communicatively apt because, most likely, (7) will not call Paul's attention to the fact that their boat is sinking *as they talk*.

Anchoring –to follow with the naval example– the utterance to a particular moment of time with the use of a date has as a consequence the loss of a certain temporal element or, rather, the loss of a certain cognitive aspect of temporality and time. Dates permanently tie together moments of time and events, and this complicates perceiving those events as happening *now* or having *already* happened or not *yet* happened.

In other words, in a situation like A, the speaker sets a higher burden on the hearer by specifying the time and date in the sentence uttered, because the hearer needs to know the time and date to realize that the event referred to is happening when the

---

<sup>4</sup> We use small capitals to distinguish propositions (i.e., truth-conditions or contents) from the utterances of natural language sentences. We write “be”, instead of “is”, to stress the tense neutrality of the proposition, even though the present is usually considered to be a neutral tense itself. Following Perry (2001), we use roman boldface to mark that it is the referent, and not any of its identifying conditions, which is the constituent of the content. Thus, 6/7r is a singular proposition about a particular boat and a particular time, no matter how we refer to them. For simplicity's sake, we will omit all references to worlds and locations in our statements of truth conditions, as well as considerations of differences in time zones (we will be assuming the Coordinated Universal Time, whose international abbreviation –UTC– came from a compromise between the English CUT and the French TUC).

utterance is taking place, i.e. at the present. Consequently, articulating the date and time in situation A would not only be superfluous but also potentially counterproductive. For one, Paul might not know what time or date it is, hence he would be confused upon hearing (7). For another, the present or immediate happening of the event is somehow hidden under the explicit inclusion of a date and time, thus requiring a bigger effort by Paul to fulfil Jane's intention (i.e. to be aware that the boat is sinking *now* and act accordingly).

## SITUATION B

Suppose now that Paul and Jane were naval engineers, trying to calculate how long an average boat like *Menudo* would stay afloat in the open sea with a hole in her hull. In situation B, a *dated* utterance like (7) would be the most sensible choice for Jane, because Paul needs to be informed of the exact time and date of the sinking. Of course, as in situation A, (6) would have also been true. But it would not be communicatively apt, since it would complicate or even prevent fulfilling Jane's intentions (i.e. making Paul aware of the time and date of the sinking). In situation B, contrary to what happened in situation A, by choosing (6) instead of (7) the speaker sets a higher burden on the hearer, because here Paul would need to know, or to check, the time and date to access the desired information: that the boat is sinking on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013 at 3 p.m.

## SITUATION C

The use of a *bare* utterance thus allows the speaker to call the hearer's attention to the present character of the event in question. This is lost, or at least very much mitigated, by making explicit the date and time of the event. However, there are situations where further emphasis might be desirable or even necessary. These are situations where the speaker needs to make clear that the event is happening at the precise moment at which she is talking and not at an interval of time that includes the moment in which she is speaking.

Suppose, for example, that Paul knows *Menudo* has a hole in her hull and that she is sinking but, optimistic as he is, he firmly believes that she will hold on for a couple of hours more, giving them time to look for help or to evacuate their belongings. Jane, who knows Paul and who thinks that *Menudo* is irremediably lost, wants to make Paul understand it and also, she wants to prevent him from running onto the boat, because she knows there is nothing to do (and it might be dangerous). In other words, she wants Paul to understand that the boat is sinking as they speak and, thereby, that there is no time left to do anything or call anyone.

In this scenario, Jane will need to emphasize the *presentness* of the sinking and therefore, a *bare* utterance in the present tense like (6) might not be enough. With (6) there is the danger that optimistic Paul might understand that *Menudo* is indeed sinking but will continue to do so until later that day, or that the sinking will last for a long enough interval of time. That is to say, (6) does not guarantee the attainment of her goals in situation C: waking Paul up to the fact that *Menudo* is “lost” and preventing him from running onto the boat.

A *bare* utterance will not do the trick here, at least not by itself. A better option for Jane is an *indexical* utterance that includes the indexical ‘now’. So she utters

8. *Menudo* is sinking now

This is an assertive utterance of a sentence in the present tense that includes an indexical. Notice once more that (8) is true in situation C. Actually, (8) has the same truth-conditions as (6) and (7),

6/7/8r. **MENUDO BE SINKING ON FRIDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2013 AT 3 P.M.**

However, again, there seem to be important differences to take into account when it comes to communicative aptness. With regard to (7) the difference is clear: whereas in (8) it is obvious that the event is simultaneous with the uttering, in (7) this information is lost with the explicit mention of the date. With regard to (6) the difference is not so easy to specify. Indeed, (6) is also communicatively apt in situation C, that is, more apt than (7). It might not be the best option for Jane, considering what she knows about Paul’s temperament, but it certainly conveys the desired message: the boat is sinking when she says that it is sinking. The difference seems to be that whereas (6) does not prevent Paul from grasping it, (8) makes it more likely that he does grasp it. As a result, (8), in this situation, is communicatively more apt than (6).

The role of ‘now’ in *indexical* utterances such as (8) is theoretically problematic, as it is the present tense which seems to define *bare* utterance (6) but which is also part of (7) and (8). We will say a bit more about this in section 5, but for the time being it suffices to say that the role of ‘now’, in cases like (8), is to emphasize the *presentness* of the event, increasing its communicative aptness.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Accommodating the intuitions

The situations described above don’t introduce any new or particularly surprising issue. They are examples of the traditional problem of determining what is said by an utterance. They are examples, also, of the different roles that two utterances with, seemingly, the same truth-conditions can play in communication (Perry, 1979). The

---

<sup>5</sup> Admitting that ‘now’ plays *only* the role of emphasizing the present character of the event carries the assumption that it is *redundant*, namely, that it does not make any substantial contribution to the meaning of the sentence used or to the utterance’s truth-conditions. See section 5 for further discussion on this.

reasons why Jane utters (6), (7) or (8) in the described situations seem pretty obvious. We all constantly go through similar situations and we are all pretty good in choosing suitable utterances to achieve our communicative goals (at any rate most of us and most of the time). Still, giving an adequate account of this phenomenon turns out to be not that simple, especially when dealing with time and tense.

Basically, we are facing an instance of the classical debate about what is said by an utterance and, initially at least, this seems to be related to the position one adopts about the bearer of truth-conditions and truth-values. Following the semantic tradition, one can assume that the bearers of truth-conditions and truth-values are sentences of natural language; that sentences express propositions or have contents. Certainly, one would accept that for indexical sentences (that is, sentences containing pure indexicals like ‘I’, ‘here’, ‘now’ or demonstratives like ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘it’, ‘this’ or ‘that’) the truth-value of the sentence is relative to a context, which is taken as a tuple of speaker, time, space and world. And, thus, including tense morphemes among the indexical expressions would be a natural follow-up (Bar-Hillel, 1954).

For a traditional semanticist, then, a (bare) sentence like (1) “It is sunny” would change its truth-value from context to context, both through time and as applied to different locations. That is, it might be true at 8 a.m. but not at 9 a.m. on a given day and at a given location. The sentence says the same thing (it expresses the same proposition), but its truth-value changes through time.

The traditional semantic view that takes sentences as bearers of contents, truth-conditions and truth-values leads naturally to a temporalist<sup>6</sup> view of tensed utterances like (6), according to which the truth-value of the proposition expressed by (6) is context-relative; relative to the time in the context of the utterance.<sup>7</sup>

Now, if one adopts a pragmatic stand, and takes the utterance as the bearer of content or truth-conditions and the speaker as the agent who says things and expresses propositions, the intuitions might be different. For simplicity’s sake, let us leave aside for the time being, *indexical* utterances and focus on the differences between *bare* and *dated* ones. That is, let us focus now on

6. *Menudo* is sinking (uttered by Jane at 3 p.m.; Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013);
7. *Menudo* is sinking on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013 at 3 p.m. (uttered by Jane at the very same date and time).

---

<sup>6</sup> In this paper we take eternalism and temporalism to be views concerning the semantic status of tense. Temporalists defend that a proposition might be true at some times and false at others. Consequently, according to them, in utterances where time is not articulated, i.e. *bare* utterances, time is not part of the content. So, in utterances where time is not explicitly articulated, time is not part of the proposition expressed, but rather part of the circumstances of evaluation. See for instance, Kaplan (1989), Prior (1967) and, more recently, Recanati (2007).

<sup>7</sup> Needless to say, even if the traditional semantic view can be seen to naturally lead to temporalism, there is no necessary connection between these two positions, as is clearly shown by Frege’s case: the founder of semantics clearly rejected this idea.

Would Jane *say the same thing*? There is a clear sense in which we want to say that Jane would indeed *say the same thing*; that an utterance, in order to *say* something at all, must say something involving a moment of time. This is basically what eternalism claims, that the proposition expressed by any utterance is not context-relative, i.e., that its truth value, once settled, remains invariant, regardless of further possible changes in the context and, thus, that the moment of time —as in our example— is part of the proposition expressed, even if it is not explicitly included in the sentence expressed, as in (6).<sup>8</sup>

Eternalism has in its favor the fact that it is able to account for widespread intuitions on same-saying. Besides, and as a direct consequence of this, a further argument has been developed in favor of eternalism and against the temporalist idea of there being temporally neutral propositions. The argument is, briefly, the alleged inability of temporalism to account for belief ascriptions in time and, thus, for diachronic disagreements. In a nutshell,

The evidence against temporally neuter objects is simply that diachronic agreement or disagreement seems to be, of necessity, a matter of agreement or disagreement about something temporally specific. (Richard, 2003: 40)<sup>9</sup>

But eternalism gets into trouble when it tries to explain Jane's choices of utterances in different situations. Temporalism, it would seem, is better positioned to do so. That is, temporalists can easily account for the differences in cognitive significance between (6) and (7), because, according to them, these utterances express two propositions with an important difference: (6) expresses a temporally neutral proposition and (7) a temporally specified one. (6) expresses a proposition that might be true in some contexts and false in others, whereas (7) expresses a proposition that, if it is true, remains so across all contexts.

We claim that by modifying some basic assumptions about the content of utterances, the apparent conflict dissolves and we can explain the difference in cognitive significance between utterances like (6), (7) and (8), while at the same time keeping the stable nature of utterance-truth, i.e. respecting the fact that both utterances, in some – fully truth-conditional– sense, say the same thing. Hence, our proposal is a sort of enhanced eternalism, in so far as it keeps the basic theses of this view while, at the same time, it accommodates some of the insights of temporalist positions.

#### 4. Content-pluralism

---

<sup>8</sup> According to eternalism, every proposition, for the sake of being so, is 'eternal', that is, it has a fixed truth-value that does not change. A proposition is true or false, and never ceases to be so. Time is thus considered as part of the proposition expressed. See Frege (1918) for a classic account of the view and Richard (2003) for a more recent defense.

<sup>9</sup> The argument has been forcefully defended by Mark Richard (2003) and discussed by, among others, Higginbotham (2003).



At least three questions arise when considering utterances that make reference to time:

- a. Why does the cognitive significance differ so much from a *bare* (or *indexical*) utterance (say, (6) or (8)) to a *dated* utterance (say, (7)) and how can we account for this?
- b. How is this difference possible when the three utterances (6), (7) and (8) have the same truth-conditions?
- c. Finally, is it possible to maintain that what it is said by these three utterances is the same without jeopardizing the differences in cognitive significance? In other words, can we have our cake and eat it too?

We believe we can indeed have it all, and the theoretical apparatus for it is already offered by the treatment of utterances containing indexicals given by Critical Pragmatics (CP from now on) (Korta & Perry, 2006, 2007, 2011, 2013).

Generally speaking, traditional approaches to utterances share a common assumption that we can call ‘content-singularism’ or ‘mono-propositionalism’, according to which each utterance is associated with one single proposition or content (setting presuppositions and implicatures aside). This content is taken to be the bearer of truth-value and cognitive significance and also ‘what is said’ by the utterance, among other things.

In contrast, CP proposes a content-pluralism, according to which every utterance has a variety of contents that derive from a combination of three kinds of elements: the circumstances of the utterance –time, in this case– being one of them, but also the intentions and beliefs of the speaker and the conventions –sentence meaning– exploited.

CP distinguishes several kinds of contents. The reflexive or utterance-bound content, which is determined by the meaning of the uttered sentence and the fact the utterance has been produced, is one of them. This is the minimal content that any hearer would grasp with no other information than the fact that a particular utterance has occurred and knowledge of the language of the utterance, the syntax of the sentence used and the meaning of its words.

Building from this, there are various ‘intermediate’ contents, each incrementally including a further element and, thus, requiring the hearer to have a certain further piece of knowledge to grasp them.<sup>10</sup> On the other side of the spectrum, so to speak, we find the referential content. This is basically what traditionally has been taken to be the proposition expressed by the utterance, what is said, constituted by sentence meaning, the speaker’s intentions and the circumstances of the utterance.

Now, to see how this content pluralism works let’s go back to our examples, starting with situation A.<sup>11</sup> Remember, in situation A Jane sees *Menudo* sinking and wants Paul to see it too, say, to call for help. We said that, in this situation and with this intention, (6) (“*Menudo* is sinking”) would be both true and communicatively apt,

---

<sup>10</sup> See Korta & Perry (2011, ch. 7) for an account of the several intermediate contents.

<sup>11</sup> Again, we leave aside the indexical utterance (8) for the moment.

whereas (7) (“*Menudo* is sinking on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013 at 3pm”) would be true but not communicatively apt, or not so apt as (6) by far.

The reason for this is clear. (7) requires Paul to have more information about the context to realize that the boat is sinking at the precise moment when the utterance is taking place. That is, he needs to know that the time of the utterance is 3 p.m. on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013. He might not know it, in which case he will either ignore Jane’s remark or, perhaps, ask her to explain herself. In either case, the utterance will not play the role it was supposed to play (i.e., alerting Paul of the sinking). However, even if he knew the time and date, (7) would not be Jane’s natural way to call Paul’s attention. It would be a bizarre way of stating the presentness of the event.

Indeed, choosing (7) to talk about something that is happening now would be as weird as Jane referring to herself in the third person, when talking to Paul,

9. Jane wants you to look at the boat (said by Jane to Paul).<sup>12</sup>

To be sure, both Paul and Jane know that Jane is called Jane, but using her name instead of the indexical ‘I’, as in

10. I want you to look at the boat,

is not only weird but also potentially confusing (Korta & Perry 2011: 63-69). Jane puts an extra cognitive burden on Paul by using her name instead of the first-person singular pronoun.

In (7) and (10) the speaker eliminates the indexical or the temporal element by *naming* the speaker or *making* the time and date of the utterance *explicit*. Notice that in (7) the speaker eliminates the temporal aspect but cannot eliminate the tense, because, as we said, tense is mandatory in English. However, whereas in (6) the tense indicates that the event is taking place in the present (in an interval of time that includes the time of the utterance), in (7) the tense merely points out that it happens at the date and time indicated. In this sense, it loses the *presentness* character of the event.<sup>13</sup>

To put it differently, the *presentness* element is contained in the verb tense (present), which both utterances have. But whereas in (6), being a *bare* utterance, the only “time-related” element explicitly included in the utterance is the tense inflection, in (7) the time of the event is also articulated. A *dated* utterance like (7), by fixing the tense to a moment, eliminates the *presentness* element because it reduces it to being co-temporal with that specific and fixed moment of time. So, even though we still have the verb tense, it is tied to the time and date: Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013 at 3pm.

So far so good; all this explains their different cognitive significance or, in our terms, why in situation A (6) is communicatively apt and (7) is not. However, we still

---

<sup>12</sup> Of course, it would be the natural way when talking to Tarzan, but we all agree that Tarzan had a weird way of using names, indexicals and verbs (at least in the movies interpreted by Johnny Weissmuller).

<sup>13</sup> In this sense, an utterance like (7) would be considered a de-tensed version of (6) (uttered at Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013 at 3pm).

need to account for the fact that in situation A they are both true and, consequently, they both seem to say the same thing or to express the same proposition, i.e.,

(6)/(7) **MENUDO** BE SINKING ON **FRIDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2013 AT 3PM**

The proposition expressed by (6) is, like the one expressed by (7), a “tenseless” one, that is, one where tense, or the *presentness* of the utterance, is identified with a specific moment of time. But if both utterances express the same tenseless proposition, how do they come to have a different cognitive significance? How can we account for the *presentness* element portrayed in (6) but not in (7)? Moreover, if both utterances express the same tenseless proposition, does it mean that the *presentness* element contained in (6) somehow disappears when we account for what is said?

We can easily solve this puzzle. (6) and (7) express the same proposition, which is their referential content, but they diverge when it comes to the other contents. Both utterances are true in situations A, B and C, because they have the same referential truth-conditions. But they differ in their communicative-aptness, or in their cognitive significance, because they have different utterance-bound contents. And, in fact, it is in this kind of content where the *presentness* element resides. Our basic underlying idea here is that articulating or making explicit the temporal (non-indexical) element in a *dated* utterance like (7) does not affect the referential content of the utterance, but it affects the reflexive or utterance-bound content. The choice between (6) or (7) depends on the intentions of the speaker, on what contents she wants her utterance to have, with the aim that the hearer grasps them, and on the actions she wants to elicit in the hearer.

Adopting CP’s content pluralism, we see that utterances differ in their utterance-bound truth-conditions –that is, the truth-conditions that any hearer who knows the facts that fix the language of the utterance, the words involved, their syntax and their meaning, would grasp. Accordingly, upon hearing (6) such hearer would grasp:

6x. **MENUDO** BE SINKING AT *THE TIME OF (6)*<sup>14</sup>

Whereas upon hearing (7) he would grasp

7x. **MENUDO** BE SINKING ON *FRIDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2013 AT 3PM.*<sup>15</sup>

The utterance-bound contents of (6) and (7) differ because the sentences expressed differ. That is, what a hearer who knows only the facts that fix the language of the utterance would grasp differs. In (7) the time and date are explicitly articulated in the sentence expressed and, thus, any competent hearer would grasp them, even if he didn’t

---

<sup>14</sup> Things are a bit more complicated though; fixing the referent of Jane’s use of the name “*Menudo*” requires from the hearer more than just linguistic knowledge. For simplicity’s sake, we are leaving aside this issue (see Korta & Perry, 2011, Chapter 7). Following Perry (2001), with italic boldface, we indicate that it is the identifying condition that enters into the truth-conditions and not the object it designates. So, (6x) is a singular proposition with the utterance itself as a constituent, but a general proposition with regard to the time of the utterance.

<sup>15</sup> For the sake of simplicity, we ignore issues of time zones, calendars, and other *unarticulated constituents* of the referential truth-conditions.

have any further knowledge about the context of utterance or the speaker and her intentions.

(6x) and (7x) both contain an identifying description of the time referred to by Jane. The *bare* present tense in (6) identifies the time referred to with the time of the utterance (or a period of time including the time of the utterance). Dates and clock times are descriptions we use to pick out days and times, and to refer to them.<sup>16</sup> Jane's utterance (7) provides such an identifying description at its minimal semantic level. But it will not fit Jane's communicative aim in this situation, if Paul does not identify it with the time of the utterance, as he may not.

(6x) and (7x) do not constitute what Jane says by uttering (6) and (7), or what philosophers usually call the 'proposition expressed'. She is saying something about a particular time, not about any identifying condition of it, like being the time of the utterance or being such-and-such date and time (according to such-and-such time zone and such-and-such calendar). Rather, (6x) and (7x) represent contents of the utterances, made available by the speaker in those contexts, that will guide the hearer in understanding the utterance's referential contents and her communicative aims. The referential content of (6) is something like:

6r. **MENUDO BE SINKING NOW,**

which would be just the same as the referential content of (7), even if we may want to formulate it as

7r. **MENUDO BE SINKING ON FRIDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2013 AT 3PM.**

Both utterances would be true only when a certain boat is sinking at a particular date and time.<sup>17</sup>

With (6x), Paul's route to the referential content of (6) is pretty straightforward: the time of (6) is just now, so *Menudo* is sinking just now. In contrast, the utterance-bound (or, strictly speaking, the *date*-bound) content of (7) offers no such straightforward way. What is lost here is the reflexive component, the fact that the boat is sinking *at the time of the utterance*. According to Korta & Perry,

The level of utterance-bound content is crucial, because many of the effects that a speaker will intend for his utterance to have will depend on the hearer's recognition of the utterance-bound (...) content. (Korta & Perry, 2011: 122)

So, in this case, it is the *presentness* element that is crucial, and it is in the utterance-bound content of (6) where the *presentness* element resides. Jane needs Paul to recognize that *Menudo*'s sinking is contemporaneous with her utterance and he will easily do so just by grasping (6x). Of course, Paul could have known the date and time of the utterance, but this is quite irrelevant for Jane's intentions. The fact that he grasps (6x) is independent of his knowing the particular time of the utterance. Even if he

---

<sup>16</sup> See Perry (2013).

<sup>17</sup> Remember that roman boldface indicates that it is the referent and not any of its identifying descriptions which enters into the truth-conditions of the utterance.

knows that the time of the utterance is precisely Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013 at 3 p.m., he would understand the *presentness* element expressed by tense via grasping (6x).

But the same cannot be said with (7). As we said, in this case, the *presentness* element disappears once it gets tied to a date or a fixed moment of time. Upon hearing (7), Paul would only be able to grasp (7x). Consequently, he will not directly capture the message that *Menudo* is actually sinking as they speak. This is why Jane would opt for a *bare* utterance like (6) in situation A. By using a *bare* utterance and making available to Paul its utterance-bound content, she would easily attain her goals.

In situation B, Jane's communicative intention varies; she now wants Paul to grasp the exact time and date of the sinking. Thus, she chooses (7), making sure that Paul gets the message regardless of his identification with the time of the utterance. (7) is, then, both true and communicatively apt.

## 5. Short detour. Now and the present

We've presented so far an account for *bare* and *dated* utterances, let's stop now for a moment to analyze the *indexical* utterance (8). The differences between situation A and situation C, as we commented, are not as clear as the differences between situations A and B and, consequently, the difference that might exist in cognitive significance between (6) and (8) is also thinner. Indeed, the role of 'now', in a present tense utterance like (8), is questionable and, we claim, is reduced to emphasizing the immediacy of the event, without having any effect on any of the contents expressed. In other words, we believe that 'now' in (8) is redundant or vacuous.

The relevant contents –for us here– of (8) in situation C would be similar<sup>18</sup> to those of (6):

8x. **MENUDO BE SINKING AT *THE TIME OF* (8)**

8r. **MENUDO BE SINKING NOW.**

This has as an immediate consequence that both (6) and (8) are good candidates for situations A and C, that is, both are true and communicatively apt. However, there is a sense in which (8) is more appropriate for situation C than (6), and that is due to the emphasis introduced by 'now'. With (8), as we said, it is more likely that Paul grasps the message: *Menudo* is sinking at the precise moment when Jane is talking. With (6) Jane does not complicate things for Paul, but she does not ensure that he gets the correct message either. The difference is one of nuance, but an important nuance. Although with (6) Paul would surely understand that the sinking is indeed taking place as they

---

<sup>18</sup> The referential content would be the same but the utterance-bound content would differ, because, even if they have the same conventional meaning and refer to the very same boat, they are about different utterances, (6) and (8), respectively.

speaking, he might think that it will take some time before she gets lost under the water. With (8) that possibility is minimized.

Emphasizing the *presentness* of an event can be done in different ways, of course. Jane could have shouted (6), or she could have made clear gestures towards the boat, or she could have shaken Paul until he understood the seriousness of the event. We are not trying to claim that the role of the indexical ‘now’ in communication is similar to, or that it can be reduced to, that of shouting or gesturing. However, we do believe, with Prior (1968) and Kamp (1971), that when included in many present tensed sentences, ‘now’ turns out to be redundant, i.e., it does not alter the truth-conditions of the utterance. These are paradigmatic cases, where the use of ‘now’ is perfectly coherent with its indexical and reflexive character. All the same, they are not illustrative of the many roles ‘now’ plays in communication.

The idiomatic ‘now’ is plagued with complications, from its many and very much discussed “non-indexical” uses (in delayed communication, for instance, in written discourse or recorded messages) to its indeterminacy (uses of ‘now’ to refer both to a very short period of time and to a huge one). Whether these are or are not indexical uses of ‘now’ or to what extent there is an essential difference between uses of the indexical in face-to-face or in delayed communication are complex topics. Certainly they go beyond the limits of this paper. We believe in any case that we can safely ignore these complications for our purposes and just focus here on “standard” face-to-face communication using utterances of sentences in the present tense.

For these cases, we are defending a position similar to that of Arthur Prior and Hans Kamp. Prior (1967) initially advocated what has been called a “no-present” theory, according to which,

‘He is eating his breakfast now’ and ‘He is eating his breakfast at present’, seem to say no more and no less, apart from nuances of emphasis, than the plain ‘He is eating his breakfast’. We can do without ‘now’, we can do without a present-tense copula ‘is’, we can do without even a special present-tense inflexion on the main verb. (Prior, 1967: 32)

Kamp (1971) agreed with Prior that, on many occasions, ‘now’ can be eliminated without loss. More precisely he claimed that occurrences of ‘now’ in sentences in the present tense are vacuous, as in “it is raining” and “it is raining now”, because, Kamp claimed, “it is raining” is understood to refer to the time of utterance anyway. These are cases where, to put it crudely, the present tense is the only possible interpretation.

Similarly, in (6) the present tense of the sentence expressed is indeed the only possible interpretation. Paul, upon hearing (6) (“*Menudo* is sinking”), will immediately grasp that the sinking is taking place as they speak. He might not know for how long the sinking will last, or for how long the boat has been sinking, but he will know that “at the present” it is sinking. The introduction of ‘now’ in (8) is redundant, because it is not needed to single out the presentness of the event.

However, and despite the redundant nature of ‘now’ in utterances of sentences in the present tense, it is clear that there are some other cases where ‘now’ plays an

essential –non-redundant– role. Prior himself acknowledged this, and although he kept his views about the present throughout his writings, he modified his opinions concerning ‘now’. In later works, mostly Prior (1968), due to the influence of Castañeda’s analysis of indexicals and his proposal to treat ‘now’ as an adverbial analogue of the pronoun ‘I’ (Castañeda, 1968), he defended the need to introduce ‘now’ in the logical analysis of language and he acknowledged the importance of the “reflexive” element of ‘now’, of its “pointing” role. Consider for instance his classic example (Prior, 1968: 102):

11. It will be the case that I am sitting down.

As Prior indicates, it would be natural to understand (11) as (12), rather than as (13).

12. It will be the case that it is then the case that I am sitting down.

13. It will be the case that it is now the case that I am sitting down.

That is to say, the most salient interpretation of (11) is not the same as the most salient interpretation of (13). In (11), unlike the examples discussed so far, the *presentness* of the event is not the only possible interpretation. Actually, it is not even the most probable one. Upon hearing (11), the *presentness* of the event (“sitting down”) is not at all clear, i.e. the hearer will not grasp that the speaker *is* sitting down as she speaks. Rather, it seems, he would conclude that the speaker *will be* sitting down sometime in the future. This later interpretation is left out in (13). The role ‘now’ plays in (13) is, briefly, that of reflexively pointing to the time of utterance and, as a result, unavoidably linking the event to the present. ‘Now’ is then an essential *pointing* tool, an indexical that univocally and reflexively points to the time of the utterance. Clearly then, in (13), ‘now’ is playing a fundamental role, and certainly not only one of emphasizing.

But then again, both (11) and (13) are quite complex sentences. As Kamp claimed, “an occurrence of ‘now’ can be only non-vacuous if it occurs within the scope of another temporal modifier” (Kamp, 1971: 229). The *presentness* of the event in (11) is lost because it is embedded within the modifier “it will be the case”. We could add to this that an occurrence of ‘now’ also seems to be non-vacuous when it occurs in delayed communication, that is, when it occurs in written or recorded utterances.

How to deal with these two cases is, again, a complex issue far beyond the scope of this paper. With regard to the introduction of ‘now’, our claim is that in utterances of present tense sentences like (6) and (8), which include no temporal modifiers and are used in face-to-face communication, the use of ‘now’ is vacuous, being only a tool to emphasize the *presentness* of the event.

## 6. Some concluding thoughts on time and tense

To conclude, we will briefly consider where our proposal stands with regard to some of the main trends in philosophy of time and tense. Tense might designate both a linguistic or mental phenomenon and a metaphysical one. On the first sense, tense designates those linguistic expressions, or mental states, that are sensitive to the time of

their occurrence. These include temporal indexicals, temporal operators, verbal tenses, etc., and their mental counterparts. On the second sense, tense designates features of reality, that is, the fact, or alleged fact, that, for instance, a certain event is future or past. The philosophical discussions in both areas are, thus, closely related but significantly different. Disputes about tense in the philosophy of language have focused on whether or not tensed expressions can be reduced to tenseless ones, that is, whether or not tense expressions, like verb inflections or temporal indexicals, can be reduced to tenseless expressions, like dates or token-reflexive ones (i.e. “at the time of the utterance”). Conversely, disputes on the metaphysics of time have traditionally addressed the issue of whether the world is tensed or tenseless, that is, whether moments in time are ordered by their possession of the properties of being past, present or future (tensed facts, the so-called “A series”) or whether they are ordered by relations of later than/earlier than (tenseless facts, the so-called “B series”).

It doesn't take much to realize that conclusions in the philosophy of language will potentially have consequences in the metaphysics of time (and, although perhaps more problematically, the other way round). However, the two debates are not strictly parallel. The claim that there are tensed facts is a highly controversial one. Pace McTaggart (1908), this metaphysical discussion can be safely ignored when analyzing language. The existence of tensed expressions and tensed thoughts and the impossibility of reducing them to tenseless ones, that is, of eliminating them from our discourse, is pretty much accepted by all. Even those who want to claim that there are no tensed facts have accepted the evidence in favor of tensed expressions.

All this was brought about by work in the semantics of indexical expressions. Arguments by Prior (1967), Castañeda (1968), Perry (1979) and others showed that certain thoughts are essentially tensed, and that, as a result, they cannot be adequately characterized in tenseless terms. Certainly, that does not entail that there must be (irreducible) tensed facts, but rather that some kind of explanation of the role of tensed talk and tensed thought is in order.

In other words, the original project of reducing all tensed or A-expressions to tenseless or B-expressions, eliminating tense completely from language and thought, has been replaced by the so-called “new B-theory”, according to which there are tensed linguistic expressions and thoughts, but not tensed facts. The “new B-theorists” avoid ontological commitments to tense, not by attempting to translate –without any loss of meaning– all tensed sentences into tenseless ones, as the “old B-theorists” claimed could be done; rather, they aim at giving a tenseless or token-reflexive analysis of the truth-conditions of tensed sentences.<sup>19</sup>

We like to consider our proposal as a version of the “new B-theory”. We believe tensed utterances (or rather, utterances of tensed sentences) ultimately express tenseless propositions or, better, have tenseless referential truth-conditions.

---

<sup>19</sup> Defenders of the “old B-theory” include Reichenbach (1947) and Russell (1938, ch. 54). Defenders of the “new B-theory” include Mellor (1981) and Oaklander (1991).



What differentiates us from the “old B-theorists” and the “new B-theorists”, again, is our adoption of an account that makes room for a variety of contents or truth-conditions. This, of course, will also differentiate our proposal from traditional eternalism, which only admits one single content. Our contents are also “eternal” but we accept a variety of them. And this is what is needed to overcome the much criticized limitation of B-theorists and eternalists alike: their inability to account for the cognitive significance of tense.

What differentiates us from the A-theorists and temporalists is that *bare* utterances, *indexical* utterances and *dated* utterances have, in our account, eternal or tenseless truth-conditions. We agree with eternalists that what is said corresponds to an eternal proposition, our referential content. This allows our proposal to overcome the limitations of temporalists and A-theorists: their inability to account for our intuitions regarding same-saying.

To sum up, the basic idea of the paper is that the differences between a *bare* utterance like (6) and a *dated* utterance like (7) lie not in the referential content but in the utterance-bound content, that is, in the truth-conditions determined by the words involved, their syntax and their meaning. It is the level of utterance-bound content that gives us an account of the cognitive significance of the utterance. However, it is the referential one that keeps the eternalist constraint, and respects the intuition that, uttered on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013 at 3 p.m., both (6) and (7) (and (8)) say the same thing.

To conclude, a few remarks about the possible implications of our view are in order. Very briefly, we believe that it is not only not necessary, but also a bad idea, to claim that tensed facts are necessary in order to explain the differences in cognitive significance between a temporally specific or *dated* utterance and a temporally unspecific or *bare* one. The only things we need, we have argued, are tensed thoughts, and not tensed facts. This idea is not new, of course; as we already said, whereas the existence of tensed facts is very controversial, the existence of tensed thoughts is not. Almost everybody accepts the need to include them in any reasonable explanation of tense, time and language. But this inclusion has proven not to be simple.

We believe part of the problem comes from a confusion between tensed thoughts and tensed facts. This would require further elaboration to constitute an argument but, granting that needless ontological proliferation is to be avoided, it should suffice to prefer the so-called B-theory regarding tensed facts over the A-theory, and reject the existence of tensed facts. At least as a starting point. And at least on the basis of arguments concerning tensed expressions and thoughts, like the ones we have considered in this paper.

## References

- Bar-Hillel, Y. (1954), “Indexical expressions”. *Mind*, 63, pp. 359-379.

- Castañeda, Hector Neri (1968), “On the logic of attributions of self-knowledge to others”. *Journal of Philosophy* 65 (15), pp. 439-456.
- Frege, Glotob (1918), “Der Gedanke. Eine Logische Untersuchung”. In *Beiträge zur Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus I* (1918–1919), pp. 58–77. (English translation) (1956), “The Thought: a logical inquiry”. *Mind* 65 (259), pp. 289-311.
- Higginbotham, James (2003), “Tensed Second Thoughts: Comments on Richard”. In Aleksander Jokic and Quentin Smith (eds.), *Time, Tense, and Reference*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003. pp. 191-197.
- Kamp, Hans (1971), “Formal properties of ‘now’”. *Theoria* 37: 227-274.
- Kaplan, David (1989), “Demonstratives”. In J. Almog, J. Perry and H. Wettstein (eds.), *Themes on Kaplan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 481- 614.
- Korta, Kepa & John Perry (2006), “Varieties of Minimalist Semantics”. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* LXXIII, No. 2, pp. 451-459.
- Korta, Kepa & John Perry (2007), “How to Say Things with Words”. In Savas L. Tsohatzidis (ed), *John Searle’s Philosophy of Language: Force, Meaning, and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 169-189.
- Korta, Kepa & John Perry (2011), *Critical Pragmatics. An Inquiry into Reference and Communication*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Korta, Kepa & John Perry (2013), “Highlights of *Critical Pragmatics*: reference and the contents of the utterance”. *Intercultural Pragmatics* 10 (1): 161-182.
- McTaggart, John M.E (1908), “The unreality of time”. *Mind* 17, pp. 457-474.
- Mellor, D. Hugh (1981), *Real Time*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oaklander, Natham (1991), “A defense of the new tenseless theory of time”. *Philosophical Quarterly* 41, pp. 26-38.
- Perry, John (1979), “The problem of the essential indexical”. *Nôus* 13, pp. 3-11.
- Perry, John (2001), *Reference and Reflexivity*. Stanford: CSLI Publications. Expanded and revised 2nd edition, (2012).
- Perry, John (2013), “Temporal Indexicals”. In H. Dyke and A. Bardon (eds.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Time*, Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, pp. 486-506.
- Prior, Arthur N. (1967), *Past, Present and Future*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Prior, Arthur N. (1968), “Now”. *Noûs* 2 (2), pp.101-119.
- Recanati, François (2007), *Perspectival Thought. A Plea for (Moderate) Relativism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Reichenbach, Hans (1947), *Elements of Symbolic Logic*. New York: Macmillan Company
- Richard, Mark (2003), “Objects of relief”. In A. Jokic and Q. Smith (eds.), *Time, Tense and Reference*. Cambridge, Mas.: MIT Press/Bradford Books. Pp. 157-189.
- Russell, Bertrand (1938), *Principles of Mathematics*. New York: W. W. Norton.