

Aspectual Entities and Tense in Discourse

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In this talk I discuss the aspectual entities introduced in discourse passages. Different types of entities correlate with intuitions about the mode of a discourse. In addition to the familiar Eventualities (events and states), I distinguish Generalizing statives (generics and general statives) and Abstract entities (facts and propositions). The classes predominate in different discourse modes; I introduce the notion of 'Discourse Modes' as a level of local text structure. There are five modes: Narrative, Description, Report, Informative, Commentary (ignoring conversation). Each mode introduces classes of aspectual entities into the universe of discourse, and has a particular type of semantic text progression. Tense interpretation differs according to discourse mode. Three principles of tense interpretation account for the contribution of tense to discourse.