ENG 236: Semantics and Pragmatics ❖ Spring 2006: TUE & FRI 9.00-10.30 @ E 002
Linguistics Section ❖ Department of English Studies ❖ University of Cyprus
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CLASS 15: TENSE

OVERVIEW

- use of tenses in English (morphosyntactic vs. semantic)
- framework for the semantics of tense

TIMES

Events (e1, e2…) are tied to time (t_n), in most cases certainly to utterance time (u_S).

(1) *past tense*
  a. e1 < e2
  b. e1 < u_S

(2) a. Miss Emma ate tuna yesterday.
  b. ∃*e*[Eating(*e*) ∧ Agent(*e*, *Miss Emma*) ∧ Patient(*e*, *tuna*)∧ Time(*e*, *yesterday*)]

(3) a. Miss Emma ate tuna.
  b. ∃*e*[Eating(*e*) ∧ Agent(*e*, *Miss Emma*) ∧ Patient(*e*, *tuna*)∧ Time(*e*, *e1* < u_S)]

- for simple illustration, time can be diagrammed on a scale

But (past) tense is more than expressing some event at some time (in the past).

(4) a. I didn't turn off the stove.
  b. Whenever you were late for work, you didn't turn off the stove.
  c. Last month, I went for a hike.
  d. I have several Masters students. ??He got an A.

Reichenbachian approach: *speech time* (S), *event time* (E), *reference time* (R).

(5) English past tense: R < S, R = E

- but what exactly is R? ⇨ Klein: *topic time* (T): T < S, *T = E but E ⊆ T

(6) a. English past tense relations: T < S and E_e ⊆ T or E_S ⊆ T or T ⊆ E_S
  b. English simple present: T = S and T ⊆ E

- more to say about (morphosyntactic) present tense and uses (= semantic present)