The Present Mode*

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Abstract

I propose an analysis of the present tense which accounts for its use to talk about the time of utterance and its use to report past events (historical present). I show how this analysis accounts for the aspectual properties of the historical present as well as for its interaction with Italian tenses. If the proposal is correct, it leads us to recognize at least three types of tenses: absolute tenses, which anchor the speech time to the time of utterance, relative non-deictic tenses, which leave the speech time unanchored and do not locate the event time relative to the time of utterance, and relative deictic tenses, which leave the speech time unanchored and locate the event time relative to the time of utterance.

1 Present for past

It is well known that the simple present tense, besides being used to indicate simultaneity with the time of utterance, may also be used to report past events. Italian sentence (1) illustrates the former use, while discourse (2) illustrates the latter:

(1) Gianni è a casa.
   Gianni is at home.

(2) Stavamo aspettando il treno. All’improvviso, giunge trafelato Enrico. Ha appena parlato con il capostazione e dice che il rapido arriverà con molto ritardo. Fu così che decidemmo di prendere l’espresso.

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We were waiting for the train. Suddenly, Enrico arrives in a hurry. He has just spoken to the station master and says that the rapido will arrive with a long delay. That was how we decided to take the express train. [Bertinetto 1991]

The use of the present tense to report past events is not restricted to Italian. Here are some examples of the same use from Latin and English:

(3) Caesari cum id numtiantum esset, eos iter per provinciam facere conari, maturat ab Urbe proficisci et quam maximis potest itineribus in Galliam ulteriorum contendit et ad Genavam pervenit.

Having been told that the they [the Helvetii] were trying to go through the province, Caesar hastens to leave Rome and, marching as fast as possible, heads for Transalpine Gallia and reaches Geneva. [Caesar 51 B.C.]

(4) In 1837, Dickens completes the Pickwick papers. They are enthusiastically received by many critics. He moves to York and marries his grand-niece Joan. In 1838, they are divorced again. [Klein 1994]

Although the use of present tense to report past events (sometimes referred to as historical present) is acknowledged in the semantic literature, it is usually labeled as non standard and left unaccounted for in formal analyses of tenses (as it happens, it’s one of the few issues about tense not tackled in Bennett and Partee 1972). The feeling that there is something special about this use is also supported by the fact that certain restrictions to which the present tense is subject when it’s anchored to the utterance time are no longer in force when the present tense is used in the historical mode. As (4)-(5) show, while non stative predicates are awkward in the English simple present if this tense is used to express simultaneity with the time of utterance, these predicates become acceptable if the simple present is used to report past events:

(5) #John attends the Tense Colloquium in Paris.

Moreover, certain combinations of morphological tenses that are allowed if the simple present is used to convey simultaneity with the time of utterance are awkward if the simple present is used to report past events. Italian examples (6)-(7) illustrate this fact:

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1The term ‘historical present’ is used by some authors to refer to a particular subclass of the cases in which the present tense is used to report past events. Here, I'll use ‘historical present’ as a cover term for any such case.
In (6), the simple present in the first sentence refers to the time of utterance, and the passato remoto and the simple future in the second and third sentence are acceptable. In (7), on the other hand, the simple present in the first sentence locates the event at some past time included in 44 B.C. and the passato remoto in the second sentence is anomalous. A satisfactory analysis of the use of the present tense to report past events, in addition to explaining why this use arises, should account for these aspectual and temporal properties.

I’ll proceed as follows. In section 2, I’ll sketch the formal system on which my proposal is based. In section 3, I’ll present an analysis of the present tense which accounts for its use to talk about the time of utterance and its use to report past events. In sections 4–5, I’ll show how this analysis accounts for the aspectual properties of the historical present as well as for its interaction with other Italian tenses.

2 Preparing the ground

Following von Stechow (1999) and others, I’ll assume that tenses are represented in this way at LF:

(8) \[ TP \]

\[ T \]
\[ (tense) \]
\[ VP \]

\[ Gianni è a casa \]

For the purpose of interpreting tenses, I’ll introduce two operators: PAST and PRES. These operators will play a role in spelling out the interpretations of morphological tenses of a given language, but morphological tenses need not coincide with these operators, as we will see in a moment. Re-
ichenbach (1947) suggested that natural language tenses express relations between three temporal parameters: the speech point, the event point, and the reference point. In particular, the relations expressed by English simple past and simple present tenses are represented by Reichenbach in this way (precedence on the line indicates temporal precedence and the comma indicates temporal coincidence):

Simple past: r,e,s
Simple present: r,e,s

Here, I’ll assume that the operators PAST and PRES express the relations that Reichenbach assigned to the English simple present and simple past tenses. To implement these assumptions, I’ll adopt a semantics in which the sentences of the translation language are evaluated with respect to three time intervals $r$, $s$, $e$, corresponding, respectively, to Reichenbach’s reference point, speech point and event point.\textsuperscript{2}

The term speech point for the temporal parameter $s$ needs to be qualified. In the simple case, this time interval is identified with the time of utterance, but, in general, it need not coincide with it. In the analysis I’ll propose, the speech point may be shifted with respect to the time of utterance and this will account for the use of the present tense to report past events.\textsuperscript{3} To represent this distinction between speech time and time of utterance in the formal system, I’ll assume with Kaplan (1977) that sentences are evaluated with respect to a context. Each context $c$ supplies, among other things, a contextual parameter $c_T$, which I’ll use to represent the time of utterance of the discourse. We will thus have two related parameters in the formal system: the speech time $s$ and the time of utterance $c_T$. They may coincide in some cases and may diverge in other cases.

If $c_T$ is used to represent the time of utterance of the discourse, we need moreover to distinguish some selected subintervals of $c_T$ to represent the

\textsuperscript{2}Formally, this system may be seen as extending the one proposed in Dowty (1982), in which sentences are evaluated relative to a time interval pair corresponding intuitively to Reichenbach’s reference point and speech point. Other treatments of the facts described here are also possible. In Zucchi (2001), I present an analysis of historical present and Italian tenses based on Heim’s (1997) account of tense. According to this account, tenses introduce a time variable at LF whose value is ordered with respect to the time denoted by temporal argument of the verb.

\textsuperscript{3}The idea that the speech point may be distinct from the time of utterance is not new. In Dowty (1982), the speech time may be shifted in the scope of certain tense operators. Hornstein (1990) suggests that the possibility of anchoring the speech point to times other than the time of utterance may account for the historical present. The analysis I’ll propose here may be seen as a way of developing this suggestion by Hornstein.
times of utterance of the individual sentences that make up the discourse. To understand why we need to distinguish these subintervals, consider, for instance, the following discourse involving the reportive present:

(9) Now Pires makes a pass at Trezeguet... Trezeguet now hits the ball in mid-air ... France is now European champion!

Each occurrence of now in this discourse refers to a subinterval of the time at which the whole discourse is uttered, in particular it refers to the subinterval at which the sentence that contains the occurrence of now is uttered. To fix the references of these occurrences of now, we must be able to refer to the times of utterance of the sentences to which now applies. A context c, in addition to specify the time of utterance cT, will thus specify an n-tuple cT1, ..., cTn that will fix the references of now in discourses like (9).

A model M for the translation language will thus include these ingredients:

- U, a non-empty set of individuals
- W, a non-empty set of possible worlds
- T, a non-empty set of intervals ordered by the precedence relation <
- C, a non-empty set of contexts such that,
  - if c ∈ C, then cT ∈ T
  - if c ∈ C, then cT = cT1 ∪ ... ∪ cTn
- F, a function that, for each context c and interval t, assigns (i) an individual to the names of the language and (ii) a function from n-tuples of individuals to truth-values to the predicates of the language

The function F tells us, for each context, world, and interval, which properties hold of the individuals in that context, at that world, during that interval. For example, Fc(run)(w)(t) tells us which individuals run in c at w during t. I will use the notation

\[[\alpha]_{M,g,c}(w)(e)(r)(s)\]

as short for “the denotation of α in the context c relative to the world w and the intervals e, r, s (in the model M, relative to the assignment g).” The denotations of the expressions of the translation language are defined as follows. For every model M, assignment g, context c, intervals e, r, s, and world w:
1. If P is a predicate, \([P]_{M,g,c}(w)(e)(r)(s) = F_c(P)(w)(e)\)

2. If a is a name, \([a]_{M,g,c}(w)(e)(r)(s) = F_c(a)(w)(e)\)

3. If v is a variable, \([v]_{M,g,c}(w)(e)(r)(s) = g(v)\)

4. If \(\tau_1, ..., \tau_n\) are terms (variables or names) and \(P^n\) is a predicate, 
   \([P^n(\tau_1, ..., \tau_n)]_{M,g,c}(w)(e)(r)(s) = [P^n]_{M,g,c}(w)(e)(r)(s)\)
   \([\tau_1]_{M,g,c}(w)(e)(r)(s), ..., [\tau_n]_{M,g,c}(w)(e)(r)(s)\)

5. \([\varphi_1 \land ... \land \varphi_n]_{M,g,c}(w)(e)(r)(s) = 1\) iff \(\exists e_1 ... e_n\) such that \(e = e_1 \cup ... \cup e_n\) and \(\exists r_1 ... r_n\) such that \(r = r_1 \cup ... \cup r_n\) and \(\exists s_1 ... s_n\) such that \(s = s_1 \cup ... \cup s_n\), and 
   \([\varphi_1]_{M,g,c}(w)(e_1)(r_1)(s_1) = 1\) and 
   ... \([\varphi_n]_{M,g,c}(w)(e_n)(r_n)(s_n) = 1\)

6. \([\exists v \varphi]_{M,g,c}(w)(e)(r)(s) = 1\) iff \([\varphi]_{M,g,c',g}(w)(e)(r)(s) = 1\)
   for some \(g'\) identical to \(g\) except possibly for the value assigned to \(v\)

7. \([\text{PRES } \varphi]_{M,g,c}(w)(e)(r)(s) = 1\) iff \([\varphi]_{M,g,c}(w)(e)(r)(s) = 1\), 
   \(r = e, r = s\)

8. \([\text{PAST } \varphi]_{M,g,c}(w)(e)(r)(s) = 1\) iff \([\varphi]_{M,g,c}(w)(e)(r)(s) = 1\), 
   \(r = e, r < s\)

9. \([\land \varphi]_{M,g,c}(w)(e)(r)(s) = 1\) iff \([\varphi]_{M,g,c}(w)(e)(r)(c_T) = 1\)

Truth in a context is defined thus:

\((T)\) A sentence \(\varphi\) of the translation language is true in a context \(c\) in a model \(M\) if and only if for every assignment \(g, \exists e, r\) such that 
\([\varphi]_{M,g,c}(cW)(e)(r)(c_T) = 1\)

The clause for conjunction in 5 incorporates in the semantics with three temporal coordinates the truth-conditions for conjunction proposed in van Benthem (1983). Clause 9 spells out the meaning of the anchor operator \(\land\), whose function is to hook the speech time of a sentence to its utterance time in context.

### 3 The historical mode

I’ll assume that, in principle, a morphological tense may be represented at LF as an absolute tense (a-tense) or as a relative tense (r-tense). The interpretation of absolute tenses involves the \(\land\) operator, which anchors the
speech point (the point to which tenses relate the event point and the reference point) to the time of utterance. For relative tenses, on the other hand, the speech point is not anchored to the utterance point.

In some cases, the same morphological tense may be realized at LF as an r-tense or as an a-tense, but a language may also have some tense forms that are specialized for the absolute or the relative interpretation.

I'll assume that the relative interpretations of tenses, whenever a language makes them available, must be licensed by the presence of some operator that indicates that the speech time is not anchored to the utterance time; otherwise the absolute interpretation must be chosen.

Let's see some examples of how absolute and relative tenses work. If the simple present in (1) is absolute, the TP will be represented at LF as (1)', and will be translated by means of the \( \lambda \) operator (I use English words for the translation language):

(1) Gianni è a casa.

\( \text{Gianni is at home} \)

(1)'

\[ \lambda (\text{ PRES at-home(g)}) ]\]

\( \text{T} \)

\( \text{a-pres} \)

\( \text{VP} \)

\( \text{Gianni è a casa} \)

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4 A distinction between relative and absolute tenses is also present in Comrie (1985), vonStechow (1995a, 1995b), but their way of analyzing the distinction differs from mine. According to Comrie, an absolute tense relates the event time to the speech time, while a relative tense relates the event time to the reference time. In von Stechow's system, tenses are represented as time variables whose assignments have to fulfill certain presuppositions, relative tenses are treated as instances of binding.

5 Comrie (1985) reports that suffixes for absolute and relative tenses are distinct in Imbabura Quechua, an Ecuadorian language. Chung and Timberlake (1985) report from Sapir (1930) the existence of morphological expressions for relative tenses in Southern Paiute.
The index $i$ carried by the TP node in LF (1)' has the function of identifying utterance time of the LF in $c$. According to the interpretations of $PRES$ and $\lambda$, formula (a) translating the TP node is true in a context $c$ if and only if Gianni is at home at the time $cT_i$, namely at the time when sentence (1) is uttered in $c$.

(a) \( \lambda(PRES \, at-\, home(g))i \)

The interpretation of the relative present is fully described instead by means of the operator $PRES$. The TP constituent in this case will be translated as follows:

(1)"

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{T} \\
\text{r-pres} \\
\text{VP} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\text{TP}_i^{PRES \, at-\, home(g)}
\]

Gianni è a casa

The truth-value of formula (b) in a context depends on how the speech time parameter is specified in the discourse to which (1)" belongs in that context:

(b) \( PRES \, at-\, home(g) \)

If the speech time is shifted to a time preceding the time of utterance, (b) will be true if Gianni is at home at that time. Indeed, I suggest that this is what happens when the present tense is used to report past events. Intuitively, in this use of the present tense, the speech time $s$ is no longer anchored to the time of utterance $cT_i$, but is shifted to an interval that precedes $cT_i$. For example, in discourse (4) the speech time of the discourse is shifted to a past interval including the years 1837 and 1838, during which Dickens completes the *Pickwick Papers*, gets married to Joan, moves to York, and divorces her:

(4) In 1837, Dickens completes the *Pickwick Papers*. They are enthusiastically received by many critics. He moves to York and marries his grand-niece Joan. In 1838, they are divorced again.

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6 I'll assume that at LF this index percolates up from the TP node to the CP node.

7 Indeed, (1)’ is true in $c$ iff for some times $e, r$,

\[
\begin{align*}
\lambda(PRES \, at-\, home(g))i_{M,g,c}^T & (cW)(e)(r)(cT_i) = 1 \\
\lambda(PRES \, at-\, home(g))i_{M,g,c}^{\lambda} & (cW)(e)(r)(cT_i) = 1 \\
\lambda(PRES \, at-\, home(g))i_{M,g,c}^{\lambda} & (cW)(e)(r)(cT_i) = 1, \text{ where } e = r = cT_i \\
\lambda(PRES \, at-\, home(g))i_{M,g,c}^{\lambda} & (cW)(e)(r)(cT_i) = 1, \text{ where } e = r = cT_i
\end{align*}
\]

8
Notice that in (4) the use of the present to report past events seems to characterize a whole discourse segment. Moreover, as Italian discourses (2) and (11) show, this shift of the speech time may involve not only the presente, but other morphological tenses as well, like the passato prossimo, the imperfetto, the piu che perfetto, and the futuro:

(2) Stavamo aspettando il treno. All'improvviso, giunge trafelato Enrico. Ha appena parlato con il capostazione e dice che il rapido arriverà con molto ritardo. Fu così che decidemmo di prendere l'espresso.

We were waiting for the train. Suddenly, Enrico arrivespres. in a hurry. He has just spokenpass.pross. to the station master and says that the rapido will arrivefut. with a long delay. That was how we decided to take the express train.


In January 44 B.C. Caesar is dictator for life. In 49 B.C. he crossedimp. the Rubicon. In March 44 B.C. he will be killed in the Senate.


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Indeed, in (2) presente, passato prossimo, and futuro indicate, respectively, that the event time coincides, precedes, and follows 44 a.C.; and in (10)-(11) the imperfetto and the piu che perfetto indicate precedence with respect to 44 a.C.

These observations suggest that, despite its name, the so-called historical present should not be linked to the semantics of any particular tense, but it should be analyzed instead as a speech time shift that may affect whole sentences and even whole discourse segments independently of the particular tenses they contain (although the shift may interact in different ways with the semantics of particular tenses). To stress this independence from tense,

\[\text{In view of the examples seen so far, one might be tempted to assume that the historical present is essentially a discourse level phenomenon. However, the acceptability of texts like (i) below shows that the speech time shift involved in the historical present cannot be restricted to the D-level, as it may affect a constituent sentence without affecting the sentence that properly includes it as a constituent.}\]
I introduce the term *present historical mode* and I’ll say of sentences, or discourse segments like the ones above, in which the speech time is shifted to the past, that they are in this mode.

In order to logically represent texts in the historical mode, I assume that the speech time of a sentence or of a whole discourse segment may be freely shifted (modulo considerations of discourse coherence, etc.) by applying the operator \( \Leftarrow \) to the translation of the sentence or of the segment. The interpretation of \( \Leftarrow \) is specified as follows:

10. \[ \Leftarrow \varphi \] \( M,g,c(w)(e)(r)(s) = 1 \) iff \( \exists t \) such that \( t < s \)
and \[ \varphi \] \( M,g,c(w)(e)(r)(t) = 1 \)

Let’s see some examples of how this operator works. Sentence (12) will have LF (12): 9

(12) Nel gennaio del 44 a.C. Cesare è dittatore a vita

*In January 44 B.C. Caesar is dictator for life.*

(12)’

\[
\text{CP} \Leftarrow \text{PRES jan}\text{44 B.C. life—dictator(Caesar)}
\]

\[
\text{C} \quad \text{AgrPRES}
\]

\[
\text{Agr} \quad \text{T}\text{PRES jan\text{44 B.C. life—dictator(Caesar)}}
\]

\[
\text{T} \quad \text{VP}
\]

\[
\text{VP}\text{r-pres Nel gennaio del 44 a.C. Cesare è dittatore a vita}
\]

(i) Stavamo aspettando il treno e, all'improvviso, giunse trafelato Enrico. Ha appena parlato con il capostazione . . .

We were waiting for the train and, suddenly, Enrico arrives in a hurry. He has just spoken to the station master . . .

As we are only dealing with the relative present here, we may omit the index that relates the sentence to its utterance time (according to the semantics given above, this index only plays a role in the interpretation when an absolute tense is involved). From now on, I’ll adopt the convention of omitting these indices whenever I’ll be dealing with relative tenses.
The truth conditions of formula (13), translating (12)’, are computed in this way:

\[(13) \iff \text{PRES jan 44b.C life-dictator(Caesar)}\]

Let’s assume that the adverb In January 44 B.C. constrains the reference time of sentence (12).\(^\text{10}\) Formula (13) is true iff for some times \(e, r\),

\[\llbracket \text{PRES jan 44b.C life-dictator(Caesar)} \rrbracket_{M, g, c}(cW)(e)(r)(cT) = 1\]

iff there is a time \(t\) such that \(t < cT\) and

\[\llbracket \text{PRES jan 44b.C life-dictator(Caesar)} \rrbracket_{M, g, c}(cW)(e)(r)(t) = 1\]

iff there is a a time \(t\) such that \(t < cT\) and

\[\llbracket \text{jan 44b.C life-dictator(Caesar)} \rrbracket_{M, g, c}(cW)(e)(r)(t) = 1\]

and \(e = r = t\)

iff there is a time \(t\) preceding the time of utterance of (12) and included in January 44 B.C.

iff there is a a time \(t\) preceding the time of utterance of (12) and included in January 44 B.C. at which Caesar is life dictator.

Now, let’s see an example of how the operator \(\iff\) works when applied to a discourse segment that consists of more than one sentence. Let’s assume that sentence concatenation is translated by a conjunction. Discourse (4) will thus be represented as (4)’ at LF:

\[(4)’\]

The truth-conditions of formula (14) that translates the upper D node are computed in the following way:

\[(14) \iff (\text{PRES 1837 complete(Pickwick,d)} \land \text{PRES...\land...})\]

\(^{10}\)See, however, section 5.3, footnote 21 on this.
Formula (14) is true in c iff for some times e, r,
\[
(\Leftrightarrow(\text{PRES } 1837 \text{ complete}(\text{Pickwick}, d) \wedge \ldots))_{M,g,c}(e)(r)(c_T) = 1
\]
iff there is a time t such that t < c_T and
\[
(\text{PRES } 1837 \text{ complete}(\text{Pickwick}, d) \wedge \ldots)_{M,g,c}(e)(r)(t) = 1
\]
iff r includes times r', ..., r'''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''
(15) Giannimangia una ciliegia.
(16) #John eats a cherry.

I take it that this depends on the fact that in (15) the simple present is interpreted as conveying progressive meaning, as in English sentence (17), which is acceptable in the simple present.\textsuperscript{12}

(17) John is eating a cherry.

Indeed, Italian sentence (15) is perfectly acceptable as an answer to the progressive question in (18):

(18) Cosa sta facendo Gianni?
    \textit{What is Gianni doing?}

What needs to be explained then is the contrast between English sentences (16) and (17), and why this contrast no longer obtains when the present is used in the historical mode.

Parsons (1990) has suggested that contrast (16)-(17) depends on the fact that simple present event sentences like (16), unlike their present progressive counterparts, are perfective in nature, namely they describe culminated events. As the present tense, in its absolute interpretation, requires that the event described by the sentence coincide with the time of utterance, an event sentence in the simple present can be uttered truly, on any given occasion, only at the time when the event culminates. As Parsons observes, “Such a sentence, then, can be used truly only in certain very special circumstances: the speaker must usually be observing the scene in order to be sure of getting the time right, and the sentence cannot be used in anticipation of the culmination or in the recapitulation-it must be used exactly once and exactly at the right time. Such uses are rare.” When simple present event sentences are used in this way, we get the so-called reportive use of the simple present, one example of which was given in (9):

(9) Now Pires makes a pass at Trezeguet... Trezeguet now hits the ball in mid-air... France is now European champion!

On the other hand, progressive sentences like (17) and stative sentences like (19) do not report culminated events.

\textsuperscript{12}See, however, Giorgi and Pianesi (1997) for discussion of some differences between the present periphrastic progressive and the Italian simple present in the progressive interpretation.
(17) John is eating a cherry.
(19) John is at home.

Thus, they can be uttered truly at any time belonging to an interval during which John is eating a cherry or he is at home. The speaker doesn’t have to wait for the unique time at which the event culminates to utter the sentence. According to Parsons’ reasoning, this means that we should not expect them to be restricted in their use as event sentences in the simple present are.\(^\text{13}\)

The analysis proposed by Parsons to account for the aspectual constraints on the English simple present may also be adopted here. Sentence (16), when used to talk about the time of utterance, will have translation (16)’:

(16) #John eats a cherry
(16)’ \(\wedge (PRES \text{ eat}(a \text{ cherry}, j))\),

Assuming that the formula \(\text{eat}(a \text{ cherry}, j)\) is true at an interval \(t\) only if an event of John’s eating a cherry begins at the initial point of \(t\) and culminates at the final point of \(t\), it follows that formula (16)’ can be truly uttered only at the time when the culmination of the event of eating the cherry takes place. Namely, (16) is correctly predicted only to be used reportively.

Moreover, if this account of the prohibition against non stative sentences with the English simple present is correct, we should also expect that the prohibition should no longer be in force when the simple present is used in the historical mode as in (4).

(4) In 1837, Dickens completes the Pickwick Papers. They are enthusiastically received by many critics. He moves to York and marries his grand-niece Joan. In 1838, they are divorced again.

Indeed, recall that, according to the semantics we assumed, translation (14) of discourse (4) is true in a context \(c\) if and only if the events described by (4) all happen in the past relative to the time of utterance of \(c\) at the times indicated by the time adverbs.

\(^{13}\)Parsons does not explicitly discuss the reason why process sentences are also normally excluded in the simple present. According to his analysis, however, process predicates are simply event predicates that may have in their denotations culminated events that stand in the proper part relation. Parsons suggests that there is a usage principle by which ‘when we use a process sentence we implicitly limit our quantifiers to maximal processes.’ This principle will have the consequence that simple present process sentences, like other simple present event sentences, may be uttered exactly once on any given occasion.
\[ (14) \quad \leftarrow (\text{PRES} \ 1837 \ \text{complete}(\text{Pickwick},d) \land \text{PRES} \ \text{enthusiastically receive}(\text{Pickwick},\text{many critics}) \land \text{moves to}(\text{York},d) \land \text{PRES marry}(j,d) \land \text{PRES} \ 1837 \ \text{divorce again}(d+j) ) \]

This means that, while (16) above can be uttered truly only at the time when the event of eating the cherry culminates, (4) may be uttered truly at any time after the events it describes happened. Thus, there is no reason to expect that (4) should only be used in special circumstances (exactly once at the time when the events culminate).\[^{14}\]

5 Italian tenses in the historical mode

5.1 Passato prossimo and futuro

Let's now turn to the occurrence in the historical mode of Italian tenses other than the simple present. As we have seen in section 3, the passato prossimo (present perfect) and the futuro are both acceptable in the historical mode, namely they may locate the event before and after the shifted speech time referred to by the simple present. Here’s another instance of this fact (I boldfaced the occurrences of the relevant forms):

\[ (20) \quad \text{Nel gennaio del 44 a.C. Cesare è dittatore a vita. Ha ormai acquistato un potere assoluto. Nel marzo del 44 a.C. verrà ucciso in Senato.} \]

\text{In January 44 B.C. Caesar is dictator for life. He has nearly obtained absolute power. In March 44 B.C. he will be killed in the Senate.} \]

\[^{14}\]The account proposed here for the historical mode is also compatible with the account of the aspectual restrictions on the English simple present proposed in Dowty (1979). According to Dowty, the simple present is barred with non stative sentences since the time of utterance is an instant and only stative sentences can be true at instants. According to this explanation, we may still expect non stative sentences to be acceptable in the historical mode, as in this mode the time of speech is no longer identified with the time of utterance, but with some past interval which need not be instantaneous. One advantage of Parsons's analysis over Dowty’s is that the former accounts for the reportive present, while the latter requires a separate account for it.
suggested in Abusch (1997):

(21) John will sleep
(22) John has slept

(23) (a) TP
    T
    present
    FutP
    will John sleep (b) TP
    T
    present
    PerfP
    has John slept

Here, I’ll assume that the passato prossimo and the futuro in Italian have similar syntactic analyses. Given the treatment of the present tense in section 3, this amounts to assuming the following LF representations:

(24) Gianni dormirà
(25) Gianni ha dormito

(26) (a) TP
    T
    a/r-pres
    FutP
    Gianni dormirà (b) TP
    T
    a/r-pres
    PerfP
    Gianni dormito

The future and perfect nodes are translated by means of the operators HAVE and WILL. An interpretation of HAVE in the spirit of Reichenbach is one that shifts the event time back while letting the reference time bear the relation to the speech time determined by the tense. For the WILL operator, I’ll assume instead that the reference time and the event time are both

\footnote{The fact that the auxiliaries \textit{werden} and \textit{haben/have} occur in the present tense is evidence for this analysis.}

\footnote{My account of Italian tenses in the historical mode is also compatible with representing the futuro without a present tense operator. In absence of reasons to the contrary, however, I’ll assume that the representation of future and perfect forms is the same across English, German and Italian in this respect.}
shifted forward.\textsuperscript{17,18}

11. $\llbracket \text{HAVE } \varphi \rrbracket_{M,g}(w)(e)(r)(s) = 1$ if and only if $\exists t$ such that $t < e$ and $\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket_{M,g}(w)(t)(r)(s) = 1$

12. $\llbracket \text{WILL } \varphi \rrbracket_{M,g}(w)(e)(r)(s) = 1$ if and only if $\exists t$ such that $t > e$ and $\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket_{M,g}(w)(t)(t)(s) = 1$

There is one more thing that needs to be settled before we can show how these forms work in the historical mode. Recall that, according to the semantics for conjunction given in 5 above, each conjunct is evaluated at a speech time included in the speech time for the discourse. Since we are translating the concatenation of sentences in discourse as a conjunction, this means that the speech time may be different for different sentences in the discourse. The option of updating the speech time parameter is a welcome one, since we need it, for example, to account for discourses like (4):

(4) In 1837, Dickens completes the \textit{Pickwick Papers}. They are enthusiastically received by many critics. He moves to York and marries his grand-niece Joan. In 1838, they are divorced again.

In this discourse, the present tense requires that each event coincide with the speech time, but the events that the discourse describes are understood as occurring at different times, which means that we must allow these events to coincide with different (past) speech times. So far so good. But there is a problem. The semantics adopted here, while it allows correctly for the times of the events described in (4) to differ, makes no prediction concerning the relative order of these events. Yet, the events (4) describes are understood as occurring in a sequence: first Dickens completes the \textit{Pickwick Papers}, then the critics enthusiastically receive them, then he moves to York, and so on. How should we account for this fact?

On the basis of (4), one might suppose that the different speech times introduced by the semantics of conjunction should be ordered in a way that corresponds to the order of the sentences of the discourse. However, this won’t do in some cases. In discourse (27) below, the \textit{passato prossimo} and the \textit{futuro} are naturally understood as expressing pastness and futurity relative to the event described by the simple present sentence:

\textsuperscript{17}See von Stechow (1999) for alternative interpretations of these operators and for discussion of the problems involved with different proposals.

\textsuperscript{18}It is important here that we introduce novel event times and reference times for interpreting \text{HAVE} and \text{WILL}. Introducing the requirement $e < s$ for \text{HAVE} and $e > s$ for \text{WILL} would predict incorrectly that these operators are incompatible with the present tense.
Indeed, discourse (27) lacks a reading in which Caesar brings Cleopatra to Rome after he becomes life dictator or after he appears in the Senate. This means that in (27) the speech time must remain the same for each sentence. In yet other concatenations of the form $S_{\text{presente}} \cdot S_{\text{passato prossimo}}$, the adverb may force us to update the speech time. For example, in discourse (28) below, the event of leaving the capital is understood as being after Cleopatra’s stay in Rome:

(28) Nel 44 a.C. Cleopatra è a Roma. Due mesi dopo, ha lasciato la capitale in seguito all’uccisione di Cesare.

In 44 B.C. Cleopatra is in Rome. Two months later, she has left the capital following Caesar’s murder.

This means that the sentence “she has left the capital following Caesar’s murder” must be evaluated relative to a speech time that follows the speech time of the sentence “In 44 B.C. Cleopatra is in Rome.”

What these observations show is that the semantics presented here needs to be supplemented with principles of events ordering in discourse. How to formulate these principles is beyond the scope of this paper, so I won’t try to state them here.\(^\text{19}\) I’ll trust that a satisfactory theory of event ordering in discourse will yield an appropriate choice of the temporal parameters at stake in interpreting discourses like (4), (27), and (28) as well as for discourses that do not involve the historical mode.

Let’s now come back to discourse (20):


In January 44 B.C. Caesar is dictator for life. He has nearly obtained absolute power. In March 44 B.C. he will be killed in the Senate.

By the semantics I assumed for the passato prossimo and the futuro, the occurrence of these tenses in the historical mode is expected, as they are

\(^{19}\text{Principles of this sort are discussed at length for discourses that do not involve the historical mode in Kamp and Reyle (1993). See also Reinhart (1984), Lascarides and Asher (1993), ter Meulen (1995) for further discussion.}\)
instances of the relative present. Indeed, (20) will have the following LF (where $\phi$, $\psi$, and $\chi$ translate the untensed forms of the sentences that make up the discourse):

\[
D \equiv (\text{PRES } \phi \land \text{PRES HAVE } \psi \land \text{PRES WILL } \chi)
\]

The truth-conditions of formula (30), which translates the upper discourse node in (29), are computed in this way:

\[
\Leftrightarrow (\text{PRES jan44B.C. life-dictator}(c) \land \text{PRES HAVE nearly-got}(\text{absolutepower}, c) \land \text{PRES WILL march44B.C. killed-in-senate}(c))
\]

Formula (30) is true in $c$ if for some times $e, r,$
\[
[[\Leftrightarrow (\text{PRES jan44B.C. life-dictator}(c) \land \ldots)]_{M,g,c}(cw)(e)(r)(ct) = 1
\]
if there is a time $t$ such that $t < ct$ and
\[
[[\text{PRES jan44B.C. life-dictator}(c) \land \ldots]_{M,g,c}(cw)(e)(r)(t) = 1
\]
if $r$ includes times $r', \ldots, r''$, $e$ includes times $e', \ldots, e''$, and $t$ includes times $s', \ldots, s''$ such that
\[
[[\text{PRES jan44B.C. life-dictator}(c)]_{M,g,c}(cw)(e')(r')(s') = 1 \land
[[\text{PRES HAVE nearly-got}(\text{abs.pow.}, c)]_{M,g,c}(cw)(e'')(r'')(s'') = 1 \land
[[\text{PRES WILL march44B.C. killed-in-senate}(c)]_{M,g,c}(cw)(e''')(r''')(s''') = 1 \land
\]
iff $[[\text{jan44B.C. life-dictator}(c)]_{M,g,c}(cw)(e')(r')(s') = 1 \land e' = r'$, and $r' = s'$ and $[[\text{HAVE nearly-got}(\text{absolute power}, c)]_{M,g,c}(cw)(e'')(r'')(s'') = 1 \land e'' = r''$ and $r'' = s''$ and
\[
[[\text{WILL march44B.C. killed-in-senate}(c)]_{M,g,c}(cw)(e''')(r''')(s''') = 1 \land e''' = r'''$ and $r''' = s'''
\]
iff $r'$ is included in January 44 B.C., Caesar is dictator for life at $e'$, $e' = r'$, $r' = s'$, and there is a time $t'$ such that $t' < e''$ and
\[
[[\text{nearly-got}(\text{absolute power}, c)]_{M,g,c}(cw)(t')(r')(s') = 1, e'' = r'', r'' = s''
\]
and there is a time \( t'' \) such that \( t'' > e''' \), \( e''' = r''' \) and \( r''' = s''' \) and
\[
\begin{bmatrix}
\text{march} \ 44 \text{B.C. killed—in—senate}(c) \\
M, g, c(cW)(t')(t')(s'') = 1.
\end{bmatrix}
\]
Assuming that \( s' = s'' = s''' \) (as required by appropriate discourse principles), it follows, what is intuitively correct, that formula (30) is true in \( c \) iff Caesar is dictator for life at some time preceding the time of utterance of discourse (20) in \( c \) and included in January 44 B.C, he nearly got absolute power at some earlier time, and he got killed in the senate at some later time included in March 44 B.C.

5.2 *Passato remoto*

Let’s now turn to analyze some restrictions on the tenses occurring in the historical mode. Discourse (7) shows that the *passato remoto* is anomalous in the middle of discourse segments using the historical mode:


*In January 44 B.C. Caesar is dictator for life. In 49 B.C. he crossed the Rubicon. In March 44 B.C. he will be killed in the Senate.*

Informally, the anomaly of (7) may be explained in this way. In (7), the *passato remoto* sentence appears between a present tense sentence and a future tense sentence that are both used to talk about the past. In our terms, this means that the *presente* and the *futuro* in (7) are relative tenses: the *presente* expresses coincidence with a past speech time included in January 44 B.C. and the *futuro* is understood as future with respect to that past speech time. However, the *passato remoto* in (7) cannot be understood as relative in this way, it cannot convey pastness relative to the event of Caesar’s being life dictator in 44 B.C. It can only be understood as expressing pastness relative to the time of utterance. The occurrence of the *passato remoto* sentence is thus at odds with the discourse segment in which it is embedded, and, as a consequence, the discourse is incoherent. Indeed, it may be observed that it becomes acceptable to use the *passato remoto* next to tenses in the historical mode if the discourse, explicitly or implicitly, gives a reason for shifting the mode of narration. For example, in (2) we can take the last sentence as a comment from the speaker’s present perspective on the events narrated by the previous sentences. This motivates using an absolute past tense like the *passato remoto* and the discourse is acceptable.
We were waiting for the train. Suddenly, Enrico arrives in a hurry. He has just spoken to the station master and says that the rapido will arrive with a long delay. That was how we decided to take the express train.

According to these observations, then the hypothesis that accounts for the behavior of the passato remoto in the historical mode is this: the passato remoto is an absolute tense. This hypothesis amounts to using the $\lambda$ operator in translating this form:

\[
(31) \quad TP^{\lambda(PAST \ cross(\text{the Rubicon},c))}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
T \\
a-past \\
\text{VP} \\
\text{Cesare passò il Rubicone}
\end{array}
\]

If the passato remoto is translated in this way, we expect that it can only convey pastness relative to the time of utterance, thus accounting for its oddness in (7).

The absolute nature of the passato remoto has also been maintained in Bertinetto (1991, p. 96) and Vanelli (1991), who claim that the passato remoto always expresses anteriority relative to the time of utterance, even if it is found in an embedded position. The behavior of the passato remoto in the scope of the future tense in relative clauses seems to provide support for this view, as the passato remoto is unable to express pastness relative to the future. For example, sentence (32) below can only be understood as saying that Mario will marry a woman that won the lottery before the time of utterance of (32) (as shown by the awkwardness of (33)):

(32) Mario passerà la donna che vinse la lotteria.  
Mario will marry the woman who won the lottery.

(33) (La settimana prossima una donna vincerà la lotteria). #Mario passerà la donna che vinse la lotteria.  
(Next week a woman will win the lottery). Mario will marry the woman who won the lottery.
On the other hand, as has been pointed out by Bertinetto and Vanelli, tenses like the *presente* and the *passato prossimo* behave quite differently in this respect:

(34) (La settimana prossima una donna vincerà la lotteria). Mario sposerà la donna che ha vinto la lotteria.

>(Next week a woman will win the lottery). Mario will marry the woman who has won the lottery.

(35) (La settimana prossima qualcuno mi presterà l’ultimo romanzo di McEwan). Restituirò il libro alla persona che me lo ha prestato.

>Next week someone will lend me McEwan last novel. I’ll return the book to the person who has lent it to me.

(36) Saranno ammessi all’esame quelli che sono presenti all’appello.

>Those that are present at the call will be admitted at the exam.

(37) Faremo uno scherzo a quelli che dormono.

>We’ll play a practical joke on those that are sleeping.

In (34)-(37), the *presente* and the *passato prossimo* can be understood as expressing, respectively, coincidence and anteriority relative to the future time introduced by the matrix clause tense. These data provide independent evidence for the assumption that the *presente* and the *passato prossimo*, unlike the *passato remoto*, may be relative tenses.

### 5.3 Imperfetto and piuccheperefetto

The historical mode suggests that *piuccheperefetto* and *imperfetto* can be relative tenses. Indeed, we have seen that in discourses (10)-(11) the *piuccheperefetto* and the *imperfetto* are able to express pastness relative to a past speech time.


>In January 44 B.C. Caesar is dictator for life. In 49 B.C. he had crossed the Rubicon. In March 44 B.C. he will be killed in the Senate.


>In January 44 B.C. Caesar is dictator for life. In 49 B.C. he crossed the Rubicon. In March 44 B.C. he will be killed in the Senate.
This suggests that the *imperfetto* should be translated by the relative \( PAST \) operator, without \( \lambda \), and the *piuccheperfetto* as a combination of \( PAST \) and \( HAVE \).\(^{20}\)

\[
(38)
\]

\[
(39)
\]

If the *piuccheperfetto* and the *imperfetto* did not have relative interpretations of this sort, in hearing (10)-(11) we should have the odd feeling that we are introducing a tense that identifies the speech time with the time of utterance in a discourse segment in which the speech time has been shifted back with respect to the time of utterance.

However, there is a problem with these translations. *Piuccheperfetto* and *imperfetto* behave like deictic tenses in relative clauses, in the sense that they can never describe events which occur after the time of utterance. Indeed, discourse (40) below is awkward, precisely because it tries to locate the event described by the *piuccheperfetto* sentence \( che \ aveva \ vinto \ la \ lotteria \) in the future with respect to the time of utterance. And (41) can only mean that the man Camilla will marry went to Harvard some time before the time of utterance.

\[
(40)
\]

\[
(41)
\]

\(^{20}\)For sake of simplicity, I’m ignoring the aspektual features carried by the *imperfetto*.
Camilla sposerà un uomo che andava all’università di Harvard
Camilla will marry a man who went imp. to Harvard

These facts seem to be at odds with the facts in (10)-(11). On the one hand, (10)-(11) show that imperfetto and piuccheperfetto are relative tenses, namely they can express pastness relative to a speech time that does not coincide with the time of utterance. On the other hand, (40)-(41) show that these tenses cannot express pastness relative to a future time. Why? If we adopt translations (38)-(39), the data in (10)-(11) are expected, but the data in (40)-(41) are not.

The solution I suggest accounts for the deictic nature of the imperfetto and the piuccheperfetto, the fact that they locate events before the time of utterance, compatibly with the assumption that these forms are relative tenses, namely that they do not anchor the speech time to the time of utterance. Indeed, the three-dimensional system I adopt allows us to locate the events described by imperfetto and piuccheperfetto sentences before the time of utterance without anchoring s. Let’s assume that imperfetto morphology, beside introducing the PAST operator, contributes the information that the reference time precedes the time of utterance. Let \( r^* \) and \( c_{T^*} \) be distinguished constants that, in a context \( c \), at the coordinates \( (w)(e)(r)(s) \), denote, respectively, \( r \) and \( c_{T^*} \). Moreover, let the meaning of and be specified as in 13 below:

13. \[ [\varphi \text{ and } \psi]_{M,g}(w)(e)(r)(s) = 1 \text{ if and only if } [\varphi]_{M,g}(w)(e)(r)(s) = 1 \text{ and } [\psi]_{M,g}(w)(e)(r)(s) = 1 \]

According to 13, and differs from the conjunction \( \land \) since it does not update \( e \), \( r \), and \( s \) for each conjunct. The translation for the imperfetto and piuccheperfetto may now be given thus:

\[
\text{TP}_1^i (PAST \text{ cross(} \text{the Rubicon}, c) \text{ and } rs < c_{T^*})
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{T} \\
\text{r-past}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\text{VP} \\
\text{Cesare passava il Rubicone}
\]
According to our characterization of relative tenses, these translations still qualify the *imperfetto* and the *piuccheperfetto* as relative tense forms. Indeed, since the interpretations of these forms are specified by means of the operators PAST and HAVE, without using the $\land$ operator, the speech time is left unordered with respect to the utterance time. This means that we should expect the *imperfetto* and the *piuccheperfetto* to be compatible with the historical mode. However, clause $r^* < c_T^i$ in the translation requires that the reference time precede the time of utterance, with the result of locating the event time before the time of utterance. This means that the *imperfetto* and the *piuccheperfetto* cannot be used to locate events in the future.

We may now show how the meanings of (10) and (11) are correctly derived by these translations. Discourse (10) is translated as (44):

\[(10) \quad \text{Nel gennaio del 44 a.C. Cesare dittatore vivia. Nel 49 a.C. passava il Rubicone. Nel marzo del 44 a.C. verrà ucciso in Senato.}\]

\[\text{In January 44 B.C. Caesar is dictator for life. In 49 B.C. he crossed the Rubicon. In March 44 B.C. he will be killed in the Senate.}\]

\[(44) \quad \iff (\text{PRES jan44B.C. life-\text{-}dictator(c) \land PAST(49B.C. cross(the Rubicon,c) and r^* < c_T^i) \land PRES WILL march44B.C. killed-in-senate(c)})\]

Formula (44) is true in $c$ iff for some times $e, r$, 
\[
\begin{align*}
&[\iff (\text{PRES jan44B.C. life-\text{-}dictator(c) \land \ldots})]_{M,g,c}(c_W)(e)(r)(c_T) = 1 \\
&\text{iff there is a time } t \text{ such that } t < c_T \text{ and } \\
&[\text{PRES jan44B.C. life-\text{-}dictator(c) \land \ldots}]_{M,g,c}(c_W)(e)(r)(t) = 1 \\
&\text{iff } r \text{ includes times } r', \ldots, r''', \text{ e includes times } e', \ldots, e'''', \text{ and } t \text{ includes times } s', \ldots, s''\text{ such that } \\
&[\text{PRES jan44B.C. life-\text{-}dictator(c)}]_{M,g,c}(c_W)(e')(r')(s') = 1 \text{ and } \\
&[\text{PAST(49B.C. cross(the Rubicon,c) and r^* < c_T^i)}]_{M,g,c}(c_W)(e'')(r'')(s'') =
\end{align*}
\]
1 and

\[ [PRES \text{ WILL} \text{ march44B.C. kill.} - \text{in} - \text{sen.}(c)]_{M,g,c}(cW)(e''')(r''')(s''') = 1 \]

iff \[ [jan44B.C. \text{ life} - \text{dictator}(c)]_{M,g,c}(cW)(e')'(r')'(s')' = 1, \]

and \[ [49B.C. \text{ cross(the Rubicon, c)} \text{ and} r^* < cT_i^*]_{M,g,c}(cW)(e''')(r''')(s''') = 1, \]

\( e'' = r'', \quad r'' < s'' \)

and

\[ [WILL \text{ march44B.C. kill.} - \text{in} - \text{sen.}(c)]_{M,g,c}(cW)(e''')(r''')(s''') = 1, \]

\( e''' = r''' \)

iff \( r' \) is included in January 44 B.C., Caesar is dictator for life at \( e', e' = r' \), \( r' = s' \), and Caesar crosses the Rubicon at a time \( e'' \), where \( e'' = r'' \), \( r'' \) is included in 49 B.C., \( r'' < s'' \) and \( r'' < cT_i \), and there is a time \( t' \) such that \( t' > e''' \) and \[ [\text{cross44B.C. killed} - \text{in} - \text{senate}(c)]_{M,g,c}(cW)(t')'(t')'(s'')' = 1, \]

\( e''' = r''' \)

iff \( r' \) is included in January 44 B.C., Caesar is dictator for life at \( e', e' = r' \), \( r' = s' \), and Caesar crosses the Rubicon at a time \( e'' \), where \( e'' = r'' \), \( r'' \) is included in 49 B.C., \( r'' < s'' \) and \( r'' < cT_i \), and there is a time \( t' \) such that \( t' > e''' \) and Caesar gets killed in the senate at a time \( t' \) included in March 44 B.C. such that \( t' \) follows \( e''' \), \( e''' = r''' \), \( r''' = s''' \).

Assuming that \( s' = s'' = s''' \) (as required by appropriate discourse principles), it follows, what is intuitively correct, that formula (44) is true in c iff Caesar is dictator for life at some time preceding the time of utterance of discourse (10) in c and included in January 44 B.C., he crossed the Rubicon at an earlier time included in 49 B.C. and he got killed in the senate at some later time included in March 44 B.C.

Finally, let’s see how the interpretation of discourse (11) is obtained. The translation of (11) is given in (45):

\[ \text{Nel gennaio del 44 a.C. Cesare è dittatore a vita. Nel 49 a.C. Roma aveva sottosopra} \]

\[ \text{presso una parte del mondo conosciuto. Nel marzo del 44 a.C. verrà ucciso in} \]

\[ \text{Senato.} \]

\[ \text{In January 44 B.C. Caesar is dictator for life. In 49 B.C. Rome had submitted most of the known world. In March 44 B.C. he will be killed in the Senate.} \]

The analysis of the past perfect proposed by Reichenbach was motivated by examples like (i), as they require the adverb to impose a condition on a reference time distinct from the event time. Comrie (1981) and Bertinetto (1986), in response to facts similar to those illustrated by (11) and (i), suggest that temporal adverbs may refer to the event time or the reference time, an assumption that I’m also adopting for the time being. Mittwoch (1995) argues that these facts should be dealt with by assuming that the past perfect is

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21I assume that the time adverb in 49 B.C. in (11) specifies the time of the event of crossing the Rubicon. In other occurrences of the piu cce perfetto, as in (i) below, the time adverb specifies the reference time (49 B.C. is not the time at which the event of submitting most of the whole known world takes place, but the time at which the state resulting from this event starts):
In January 44 B.C. Caesar is dictator for life. In 49 B.C. he had crossed the Rubicon. In March 44 B.C. he will be killed in the Senate.

\[ (45) \Leftarrow (\text{PRES} \text{jan}44\text{B.C. life} - \text{dictator}(c) \land \text{PAST HAVE}(49\text{B.C. cross (the Rubicon, c)}) \land r^* < c_{T,*}) \land \text{PRES} \text{WILL} \text{march}44\text{B.C. killed} - \text{in} - \text{senate}(c) \]

Formula (45) is true in c iff for some times \( e, r \),

\[ [\Leftarrow (\text{PRES} \text{jan}44\text{B.C. life} - \text{dictator}(c) \land ...)]_{M,g,c}(e)(r)(c_T) = 1 \]

iff there is a time \( t \) such that \( t < c_T \) and

\[ [\text{PRES} \text{jan}44\text{B.C. life} - \text{dictator}(c) \land ...]_{M,g,c}(e)(r)(t) = 1 \]

iff \( r \) includes times \( r', ..., r'' \), \( e \) includes times \( e', ..., e''' \), and \( t \) includes times \( s', ..., s'' \) such that

\[ [\text{PRES} \text{jan}44\text{B.C. life} - \text{dictator}(c)]_{M,g,c}(e')(r')(s') = 1 \text{ and} \]

\[ [\text{PAST HAVE}(49\text{B.C. cross (R., c)}) \land r^* < c_{T,*}]_{M,g,c}(e')(r'')(s'') = 1 \text{ and} \]

\[ [\text{WILL march}44\text{B.C. kill} - \text{in} - \text{senate}(c)]_{M,g,c}(e'')(r'')(s'') = 1, \]

\( e'' = r'', r'' < s'' \) and

\[ \text{if } r' \text{ is included in January 44 B.C., Caesar is dictator for life at } e', e' = r', \]

\( r' = s' \), and there is a time \( t' \) such that \( t' < e'' \) and

\[ [49\text{B.C. cross (the Rubicon, c)} \land r^* < c_{T,*}]_{M,g,c}(e')(r'')(s'') = 1, e'' = r'', r'' < s'' \text{ and} \]

there is a time \( t'' \) such that \( t'' > e''' \) and

\[ [\text{marc}44\text{B.C. kill} - \text{in} - \text{senate}(c)]_{M,g,c}(t')(t'')(s'') = 1, e''' = r''' \text{, } r''' = s''' \text{ if } r' \text{ is included in January 44 B.C., Caesar is dictator for life at } e', e' = r', \]

\( r' = s' \), and there is a time \( t' \) such that \( t' < e''' \) and Caesar crosses the Rubicon at a time \( t' \) included in 49 B.C., \( e''' = r''' \text{, } r''' < s''' \text{, } r''' < c_{T}, \) and there is a time \( t'' \) such that \( t'' > e''' \), Caesar gets killed in the senate at \( t'' \) included in March 44 B.C., and \( e''' = r''' \text{, } r''' = s''' \text{.} \]

ambiguous. As I’m not focusing on the behavior of time adverbs, I’ll leave open the issue of which treatment may best account for these facts.
Again, assuming that appropriate discourse principles require $s' = s'' = s'''$, it follows, what is intuitively correct, that formula (45) is true in $c$ if and only Caesar is dictator for life at some time preceding the time of utterance of discourse (11) in $c$ and included in 44 B.C., he crossed the Rubicon at an earlier time included in 49 B.C., and he got killed in the senate at some later time included in March 44 B.C.

6 Conclusions

In this paper, I proposed an account of a well-known phenomenon: the use of the present tense to describe past events. I showed how this account may be combined with current analyses of the aspectual restrictions on the English simple present to explain why these restrictions no longer hold when the simple present is used historically. Finally, I proposed an account of the behavior of Italian tenses in discourse segments in the historical present mode. If I’m right, we should recognize at least three types of Italian tenses: absolute tenses (like the passato remoto), which anchor the speech time to the time of utterance, relative non-deictic tenses (like the passato prossimo and the futuro), which leave the speech time unanchored and do not locate the event time relative to the time of utterance, and relative deictic tenses (like the imperfetto and the piu che perfetto), which leave the speech time unanchored and locate the event time relative to the time of utterance.

References


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