

On nominal tense and aspect

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Abstract

Nominals contribute temporal information which may be independent from that of the verb phrase. Some languages, such as Paraguayan Guaraní, offer an inventory of morphological markers on argument nouns which encode a temporal meaning that affect the temporal interpretation of the noun phrase with which they appear. This gives rise to the question whether there are instances of tense or aspect within the nominal domain. Previous research states that nominal aspect markers exist in Paraguayan Guaraní as well as English; although, the degree of grammaticalization varies between the languages. In contrast, it has been claimed that, to date, no reliable evidence for the existence of a nominal tense has been provided. In this talk, I will contribute to the debate by arguing that German is an (optional) nominal tense language. First, it will be established that German has dedicated tense and aspect markers grammaticalized as adjectives. As such, the tenses serve to restrict the time at which the noun phrase is interpreted, while the aspects modify the time at which the nominal property is true. Then, I will show that nominals may independently locate the time at which they are interpreted depending on context and their aspectual class, despite the NPs occurring without overt tense markings. This suggests parallels to less common verbal tense varieties, such as optional tense or superficial tenselessness, and aims to offer a holistic theory on the temporality in the nominal domain.