

The attention-coherence model of prominence: A look at "now"

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According to the simple hypothesis, dating back to Kaplan (1989) and Kamp (1971), *now*, like *I*, is a *pure indexical*—an expression whose linguistic meaning fully determines the referent on an occasion of use. Where the two expressions differ is in their linguistic meaning: *I* picks out the speaker, whereas *now* picks out the utterance time. The simple hypothesis is motivated by the following data:

1. Anne is happy now.
2. I learned last week that there would now be an earthquake. (Kamp 1971)
3. #The sun now stood above the hippodrome.

The simple hypothesis cannot, however, account for the following discourses:

4. *Victoria began to look nervous, thought Jenya. She was shaking and paced back and forth. Apparently, she learned last week that there would now be an earthquake* (Altshuler 2009).
5. *Pilate raised his martyred eyes to the prisoner and saw how high the sun now stood above the hippodrome, how a ray had penetrated the arcade ...*(*The Master and Margarita*).
6. *John came home. #Now he wrote a letter.* (Kamp & Reyle 1993).
7. *I like to think back on the summer of '97. #I was so happy now.* (Hunter 2012).

In (4)-(5), *now* co-occurs with the past tense and does not pick out the utterance time. (6)-(7) show past reference with *now* is not always possible when embedded in a discourse. As argued by Dry (1979) and Hunter (2010), *now*'s past reference is not due to context shifting or literary devices such as *Free Indirect Discourse*.

In our talk, we argue that while the simple hypothesis gets the main insight right – *now* really is a pure indexical – it posits the wrong linguistic meaning. The meaning of *now* is not linked to a time, but rather to the *most prominent state*, e.g. the ongoing state of the conversation in (1)-(2), and the post-state of an event in (4)-(5). Of course, to provide testable predictions, and explain the infelicity of (6)-(7), we need an account of *prominence*.

Stojnic et al. (2014) provide such an account, which we refer to as *the attention-coherence model*. They consider how the context gets antecedently set up in order for the interpretation of demonstrative pronouns (like *he*) to work in an automatic fashion. Key to their analysis is the idea that the context-setting is done by a range of linguistic mechanisms affecting (among other things) the relative prominence of candidate referents at a given point in a discourse. This allows Stojnic et al. to treat demonstrative pronouns as pure indexicals.

In the talk, we show how Stojnic et al.'s analysis can account for the *now* data above. Crucial to our analysis is treating coherence relations as linguistic conventions (treated as updates) and not pragmatic principles; the choice of the coherence relation determines the resolution of a context sensitive expression (such as *now*) by affecting the prominence ranking of candidate referents. In a nutshell, we propose that (a) the interpretation of *now* is fully determined by its linguistic meaning as a function of context, where (b) *now* refers to the most prominent state, and (c) prominence is determined by *the attention-coherence model*. The punch line is that an insightful account of prominence can be given by appealing to a set of linguistic conventions and not as a byproduct of pragmatic reasoning.