

# Is the present tense vacuous?

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In this poster<sup>1</sup>, I propose a counter-argument to Sauerland's (2002) proposal that the present tense is vacuous. Sauerland's argument is based on the observation that (1) can be felicitously uttered only after the last Tuesday of the month of utterance, while (2) can be felicitously uttered only until and including the last Tuesday of that month. He shows that the presuppositional analysis of the past in (3), together with the assumption that the adverbial quantifier binds tense, derives the felicity conditions of (1) as a case of presupposition projection. However, he argues that a deictic analysis of the present tense cannot account for the felicity conditions of (2). Consequently, Sauerland proposes that the present is a temporal pronoun without presupposition, and that the felicity conditions of (2) are obtained by anti-presupposition: a present tense sentence is felicitous only in contexts where its past tense alternative is not.

(1) Every Tuesday this month, I fasted. (2) Every Tuesday this month, I fast.

(3)  $\llbracket \text{PAST}_i \rrbracket^{M,c,w}$  is defined only if  $g_c(i) < TU$ . If defined,  $\llbracket \text{PAST}_i \rrbracket^{M,c,w} = g_c(i)$ .

In a first step of the counter-argument, I show that sentences like (2) should be analyzed as futurates or as habituals. If one does so, one can account for their truth and felicity conditions without assuming that the present tense is vacuous. More precisely, following Copley (2002) and Ferreira (2005), I argue that futurity and habituality are conveyed by silent modal operators. I show how to derive their temporal orientation from Condoravdi's (2002) diversity condition on metaphysical modals, which I extend to circumstantial modals in the case of habituals. This makes invoking a vacuous present tense unnecessary to analyze the relevant examples.

In a second step of the counter-argument, I show that the hypothesis that the meaning of the present tense is derived by anti-presupposition makes incorrect predictions. To wit, I show that the meaning of 'presentness' is attested in contexts where it shouldn't be if it arose by anti-presupposition. A non-vacuous analysis of the present derives the attested interpretation of present sentences in these contexts.

## References

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<sup>1</sup>This is not the original abstract but a shorter version for the conference website.