

**The Department of Linguistics  
is pleased to present**

***Roumyana Pancheva***

**University of Southern California**

**speaking on**

**Temporal reference without tense**

joint work with Maria Luisa Zubizarreta

**Friday, May 21, 2021**

**1:20PM (PST) via Zoom**

Zoom Information: Will be emailed on Thursday, May 20, 2021

**Abstract:**

Tense is one of the key means of grammatically encoding the concept of time in language. Given the cognitive importance of time, it might be expected that tense is part of the grammar of all languages. Many languages indeed have tense morphemes and cross-linguistic research has uncovered remarkable similarity in the types of meanings that they express, giving support for the view that tense is universal.

Yet, there are also languages that do not have to mark tense overtly: they either do not have overt tense morphemes or the tense morphemes are optional. Such languages come from a number of different families, suggesting the lack of overt tense is widely attested. Can tense be still considered a linguistic universal? The answer, within formal semantics, has so far been "yes". The formally explicit semantic analyses that have been proposed for languages without obligatory overt tense morphemes all posit tense in one form or another. Within syntax, on the other hand, there have been suggestions that tense need not be universally present, even in main clauses, yet such accounts have not explained how temporal reference is achieved in the absence of tense.

We develop an account that does not rely on tense to derive temporal reference. We propose that evaluation time shift, a mechanism independently attested in the narrative present in languages with tense, can be more widely used for encoding temporal meaning in the absence of tense. We illustrate this account for Paraguayan Guarani, and identify several empirical advantages over accounts that employ tense. The broader consequence of our proposal is an enriched typology of temporal systems. Tense is revealed to not be a linguistic universal.