

On the nature of the Present tense in English: evidence from VP-fronting constructions

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In this talk, I explore the temporal interpretation of attitude reports in English. It is well-known that Present-under-Past attitude reports like “John said that Mary is in New York” only allow for a so-called double-access interpretation. The main focus of this talk is on VP-fronting versions of such attitude reports, i.e. on sentences like “Say that Mary is in New York, John did”. Native speakers of English report that in addition to the double-access interpretation such sentences also allow for a so-called simultaneous interpretation, which is not available in their non-fronting versions. A simultaneous interpretation of a Present-under-Past attitude report is theoretically unexpected. I show that it requires a temporal *de re* analysis and develop such an analysis in terms of a restricted theory of temporal concept generators. Finally, I discuss some further lessons that can be learned from VP-fronting constructions about the nature of embedded tense in English.