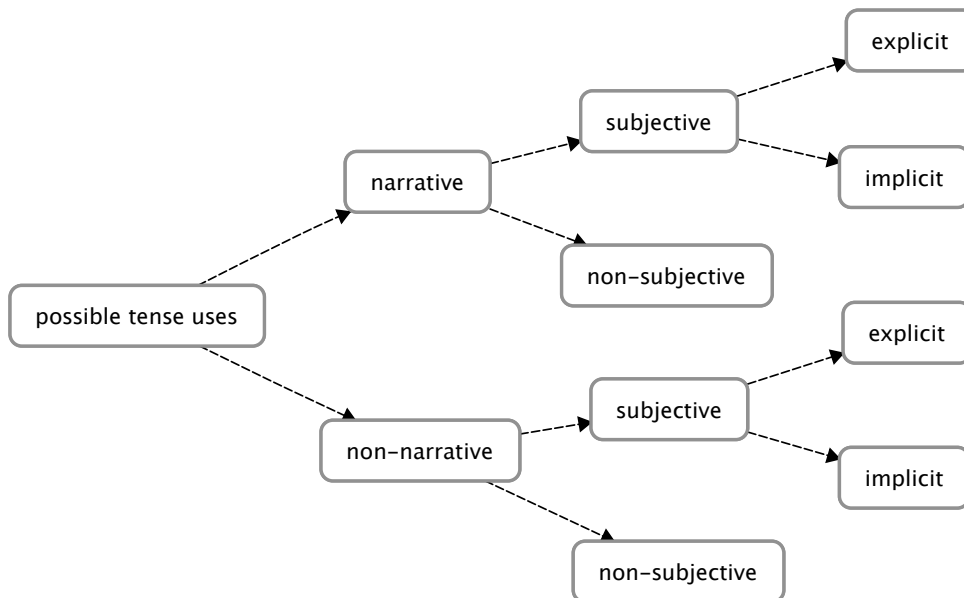


## French Historical present, narration and subjectivity: A pragmatic account

Historical present (HP), as well as free indirect style (FIS), has long been recognized to be connected to subjectivity. The presence of essential indexicals (as *maintenant*, *aujourd'hui* in French) co-occurring with HP and SIL is a well-known fact (Banfield 1982, Reboul 1992, Schlenker 2004). Whereas little attention has been paid to HP and more works devoted to FIS (Schlenker 2004 being the exception, by proposing an integrated account distinguishing between context of utterance and context of thought), this communication focuses on HP within a semantic-pragmatic framework, joining a robust tense semantics and a feature-based flexible pragmatics. Moreover, it argues in favor of a general template of the contribution of verb tenses to meaning, without ad hoc solution for fictitious uses of tenses. With regards to HP, our model is compatible with both non-literary fictitious uses, as those in jokes and *mots d'esprit*, and also with non-fictitious uses (newspapers headers for instance).

The main-stream approaches in cognitive pragmatics (Amenos-Pons 2011, Saussure 2011 among others) make two main claims: (a) pragmatic procedural meaning is robust while conceptual meaning is flexible; (b) tenses trigger procedural instructions for the ascription of temporal reference. My proposal goes in the opposite direction and claims that (a) tense semantics is robust and based on Reichenbach's temporal coordinates (S, R, E); (b) flexible pragmatic features ([± narrative], [±subjective] and [±explicit]) complete the robust semantics. The combination of the two types of contents results in six possible uses of tenses:



The case of French HP is crucial for the semantics and pragmatics of tenses. First, its semantics rules out traditional Reichenbachian semantics, as S is temporally disconnected from E and R. Second, in spite of this discrepancy, any model for HP should be able to explain how to trigger narration and subjectivity. In our model, the interpretation of HP results from the combination of the simultaneity between E and R [E=R] and the selection of pragmatic features. Hence, HP is not linguistically encoded, but is inferred as an explicature.

Based on a corpus of French HP (Cendras, *Rhum*), I claim that among the six possible combinations of pragmatic features, only five occur in fictitious discourses. What is lacking in fiction is the [-narrative][-subjective] use, which is illustrated by newspapers titles: *Drame dans les Alpes: un père tue sa femme et ses enfants* ('Tragedy in the Alps: a father kills his wife and children').

In sum, our tense model combines semantic and pragmatic information. Semantic content is represented by conceptual information encoded in tenses, which is robust and constant. Being conceptual in nature, this information shares a basic property of conceptual information, i.e. it has an easy access to consciousness (Wilson 2011). On the other hand, pragmatic content, while combining semantic temporal coordinates and

pragmatics features is more flexible and less accessible to consciousness, as Grisot & Moeschler (2014) show based on corpus and experimental data for the English preterit.

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