



ABSTRACT

English *just* is highly polysemous (e.g., Cohen 1969, Lee 1987, Lee 1991, Kishner & Gibbs 1996, Aijmer 2005). The temporal use of *just* has been studied less, particularly its context-sensitivity, and has not been formalized. Here I present a unified approach to the semantics of temporal *just*, drawing on Lappin's (2000) intensional semantics for vague quantifiers.

MOTIVATION

- Previous approaches to temporal *just* tend to characterize it in terms of temporal immediacy
- As with some analyses of similar lexical items in other languages, e.g., Aonuki's (2021) analysis of Gitksan
- Typically operationalized by having *just* locate the eventuality (time) immediately prior to evaluation, reference, or utterance time.
- **This type of analysis does not account for the vagueness or context-dependence seen in temporal *just***
- Bourdin (2017) has probably the most extensive discussion of temporal *just*
 - An interval associated with the event partially overlaps one associated with the RT
 - Includes the concept of relevance of the eventuality to the discourse (but not formalized)
- Bochnak & Klecha (2018): Temporal remoteness morphemes in Luganda
 - Presupposition that involves a contextual standard
 - Similar in spirit to the current analysis but less detailed
- **Take-away from this analysis:**
 - The semantic contribution is indeed temporal recency, but what constitutes recency is determined relative to a norm
 - Formalized with normative situations (after Lappin (2000))

DATA

- Temporal *just* with the simple past is seen in situations where the containing sentence is being used as an explanation, as in (1-3):
 - (1) No thank you, I **just** ate. [As a response to an offer of food]
 - (2) Don't get on his case about not having a job yet, he **just** graduated.
 - (3) She **just** had the baby; you can't expect her to be back to work yet.
- Temporal *just* also appears in situations that may be less explanatory, but have some sort of newsworthy quality (and share the "relevantly recent" characteristic)

- (4) [At a surprise party] She **just** pulled up!
- (5) [On the phone] I **just** totaled my car, can you come get me?
- (6) [Sitting down with a friend at coffee] I **just** saw the best movie.

- Previous analyses predict that the recency in these cases will be uniform, or do not specify how the lack of uniformity is determined
- As is clear from (1-6), the recency encoded with *just* is not absolute
 - Trying to capture this with literal immediacy (ET abutting RT/now) will fail in all but a very small number of cases
 - These situations involve **norms** specific to the situation (post-eating, post-graduation, post-baby)

FORMALIZING TEMPORAL *JUST*

- First, the temporal part of the denotation of temporal *just*:

$$(7) = [t'_{\text{init}} - \tau(\epsilon)_{\text{final}}] \leq \epsilon_c$$

- Where t' is reference time and ϵ_c is a small quantity whose value is determined by the context. How?
- We need a way to reference not just world knowledge (an unspecified norm) but a set of normative situations—a comparison set

- Lappin (2000) provides an intensional parametric account of quantifiers that captures the kinds of situation-dependent meaning present in words like *few* and *many*
- Lappin arrives at the meaning of e.g. *many* by comparing the 'actual situation' sa to the set of normative situations (sn), S

- Let ϵ_c be defined (where i is an interval of time) as follows:

$$(8) |i^{sa}| \leq \epsilon_c \text{ iff } S \neq \emptyset, \text{ and for every } sn \in S, |i^{sa}| \leq |i^{sn}|$$

- That is: an actual interval is shorter than ϵ_c if and only if its value is less than or equal to the size of the interval in any normative situation in the set of relevant normative situations

- We can follow Lappin and define the normative interval with respect to an average, taking the average to be a standard of expectation.

$$(9) sn_{xy}: |t_y^{sn} - t_x^{sn}| \cong k, \text{ where } k = \text{average} \{ |t_y^s - t_x^s| \}$$

- That is, the normative x-y situation is that the length of time between doing x and doing y is approximately equal to the average length of time between doing x and doing y in the set of relevant normative situations.
- So e.g., the normative situation for getting a job after graduation is that it takes about an average amount of time to do so

- The selection of the set of normative situations allows us to account for both the explanatory and the more "newsworthy" uses
 - In (1), S contains pairs of eating and getting hungry again
 - In (4), S contains pairs of someone arriving and entering a house

- (10) [Colleagues approach each other] A: Did you hear? Jack got fired.
B: What? He just won that huge account!

- Here, the normative set contains intervals between someone doing something positive at work and getting fired (typically long). Surprise is expressed here using *just* because $|i^{sa}|$ is far less than the average.
- Other cases may involve a default average conversational interval of "within a few minutes prior to RT":

- (11) [Speaker walks up to a friend] Hey, I just saw Giulia.

- The comparative normative interval(s) here involve the basic expectations surrounding new mention of an event in an out-of-the-blue context. In such cases, the hearer infers from the use of *just* that the eventuality occurred recently enough to apply to the topic at hand (e.g., the hearer was looking for Giulia, or we were just wondering where she was, etc.)

DISCUSSION

- In contrast to the English perfect, which may get its "present relevance" via a modal presupposition (Portner 2003), the apparent particular relevance to the QUD that appears with *just* falls out of the normative analysis: making a statement with *just* says "and this was recent enough to be relevant" by virtue of its assertion that the eventuality happened a comparatively short time ago
- Furthermore, this analysis predicts
 - Possible differences in speakers' acceptance of *just* in a given situation ('you didn't *just* eat, that was 5 hours ago!' 'I only eat twice a day!')
 - The influence of the length or significance of the event on the length of ϵ_c ($\#$ just ate a year ago vs. $\sqrt{}$ I just moved here a year ago)

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Further comparison to other languages' proximal temporal adverbs/morphemes
- Application of this analysis to other related uses of temporal *just*, e.g., with the progressive, *going to*, *about to*, perfect

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