The Department of Linguistics
is pleased to present

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speaking on

Temporal interpretation without tense

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Abstract:
Languages without overt tense morphemes have typically been analyzed as having semantic tense, either contributed by a phonologically covert lexical item or supplied by a post-syntactic semantic rule. From a neo-Reichenbachian perspective, having semantic tense means having a linguistic device (a lexical item or a rule) dedicated to envoking a reference time in relation to the local evaluation time. The two types of tense accounts have also been offered for the closely related languages Mbya Guaraní and Paraguayan Guaraní (Tonhauser 2011a,b; Thomas 2014). We propose a truly tenseless account of Paraguayan Guaraní. A pronoun at the left edge of the clause, denoting the local evaluation time, directly binds the time variable of viewpoint aspect. In a matrix clause the evaluation time is speech time by default, resulting in present temporal reference, and with the help of a prospective morpheme, in future reference. The evaluation time may shift, as happens in restricted contexts in languages with tense (e.g., the historical present), but here more freely. The mechanism of evaluation time shift underlies past interpretation. The main consequence of this analysis is that tense is not a semantic universal.

(Joint work with Maria Luisa Zubizarreta, USC)