Abstract. I distinguish between sentences like

(1) Last Thursday we drove from Wellington to Waikanae
and

(2) Last Thursday my copy of Aspects of the Theory of Syntax remained on
my bookshelf.

Sentence (2) has the subinterval property. If it is true at an interval \( t \) it is true at every subinterval of \( t \). (1) lacks this property. (1) reports an event. (2) reports a state. Events do not have the subinterval property but states do have it, and so do objects. If something is a linguist at an interval \( t \) then that person is a linguist at all subintervals of \( t \). I argue that 'exists' applies to things which have the subinterval property, and 'occurs' applies to things which lack it.

There was a recent article in *Mind*\(^1\) which tried to draw certain metaphysical consequences about the difference between objects and events from the fact that, while objects can sensibly be said to exist, they cannot sensibly be said to occur or not to occur. Events on the other hand do or do not occur, they are not said to exist or not to exist. The tendency to use linguistic facts to support philosophical conclusions was very popular, in a dilettantish way, in the heyday of 'ordinary-language philosophy', typified by the work of people like John Austin and Gilbert Ryle.

One thing, if nothing else, that the work of Noam Chomsky did for philosophy was make it apparent that the underlying structure of ordinary language was nothing like what the ordinary-language philosophers said it was—if anything it was much more like the structure of the languages of symbolic logic, which had always been opposed to ordinary language by most philosophers.

What I want to do in this paper is to use some insights that have come from the development of the logic of tense to shew how to give a plausible semantic account of the difference between existing and occurring. Let's begin with

(1) Last Thursday we drove from Wellington to Waikanae

If we ask for a more precise time at which (1) happened we might say: Well we left Wellington at 4.15 and we got to Waikanae at 5.21, so (1)

happened between 4.15 and 5.21. Assume that is right. Suppose the questioner goes on: That is not good enough, I want to know the precise moment of time at which (1) happened. The answer surely is: precision 'does not enter into it'. (1) happened at the interval (4.15, 5.21). It is just not true that we drove from Wellington to Waikanae at 4.36. Say if you like that we were driving to Waikanae at 4.36. Very likely that is true. In fact one semantic analysis recently given for the progressive tense claims that 'x was V-ing at t' is true iff t is part of a larger interval t⁺ for which 'x V-ed at t⁺' is true. (Actually it is somewhat more complicated than that, and I refer you to the articles cited.)

In saying that (1) is true at (4.15, 5.21) we are of course speaking slightly inaccurately, for strictly speaking (1) is true now on the ground that some such sentence as

\[(1') \text{ We drive from Wellington to Waikanae} \]

is true at (4.15, 5.21) last Thursday. When I say that (1) is true then, that is what I really mean. Speaking in this way we can show that sentence (1) lacks what has been called in some recent literature the sub-interval property. A sentence α has the sub-interval property iff:

If α is true at an interval t and t' is a sub-interval of t then

α is also true at t'.

To see that (1) does not have the sub-interval property imagine the interval (5.10, 5.15). For the reasons I gave before (1) is not true at (5.10, 5.15); for we did not drive from Wellington to Waikanae between 5.10 and 5.15. (Thank goodness.) So there is a subinterval of (4.15, 5.21) at which (1) was not true.

Contrast (1) with

\[(2) \text{ Last Thursday my copy of Aspects of the Theory of Syntax remained on my bookshelf.} \]

Let us suppose that, when asked for more precision we offer again the interval (4.15, 5.21) and say:

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2 This name may be found on p. 48 of L. Carlson, Aspect and quantification, Syntax and Semantics, Vol 14, Tense and Aspect (ed. P. J. Todeschi and A. Zaenenn), New York, Academic Press, 1981, pp. 31-64. Not only Carlson's article but the whole of this volume provides an excellent background to the topic of the present paper. An analysis of adverbs in interval semantics is presented in my Adverbial Modification, Reidel, 1985.