

The semantics of modality

General plan of the course

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I Escuela de Lingüística de Buenos Aires

15-19 February 2016

The semantics of modality

This course is an introduction to modality in formal semantics. After a two-day introduction to the formal system, we will present modal treatments of three linguistic categories that are the focus of some of our current research: imperfectives, evidentials, and miratives.

In this course our main aim is to put a current line of research in its proper context. The formal system is too complex to be learned in a day or two, but I hope to provide you with enough materials to do this on your own after you've understood the conceptual underpinnings and some of the results of the line of research. We'll hold a one-hour-long tutorial after class on Monday to present a tool that will allow you to practice Heim and Kratzer's formalism on your own, *The Lambda Calculator*.

Displacement

- (1) Andrés presenta un ejemplo del castellano.
- (2) Andrés presentó un ejemplo del búlgaro.
- (3) Andrés va a presentar un par de ejemplos del guaraní.
- (4) Si habla de miratividad, Andrés presenta ejemplos del tibetano.
- (5) Si hubiera hablado de miratividad, Andrés habría presentado ejemplos del tibetano.
- (6) Andrés tuvo que presentar estos ejemplos.
- (7) Andrés debió presentar estos otros ejemplos.
- (8) Creo que Andrés presentó ejemplos del mebengokre.
- (9) No creo que Andrés haya presentado esos ejemplos.

Displacement is a fundamental feature of human language

Hockett 1960:

“Man is apparently almost unique in being able to talk about things that are remote in space or time (or both) from where the talking goes on. This feature—”displacement”—seems to be definitely lacking in the vocal signaling of man’s closest relatives, though it does occur in bee-dancing.”

Pace Everett 2005, 622:

“[...] Pirahã culture severely constrains Pirahã grammar in several ways, [...] These constraints lead to the startling conclusion that Hockett’s (1960) design features of human language [...] must be revised. [...] I argue that these apparently disjointed facts about the Pirahã language [...] ultimately derive from a single cultural constraint in Pirahã, namely, the restriction of communication to the immediate experience of the interlocutors.”

A general framework and three problems

In this course we will deal with displacement within a particular framework, and we will examine modality in three domains.

The framework: a situation semantics for modality.

The empirical problems: imperfectives, evidentiality and mirativity.

Modals, the classical type

- (10) Bathers should wear clothes beyond this point.
- (11) You may leave now.
- (12) John must be in his house.
- (13) John may be in his house.

Temporal and modal readings of the imperfective

- (14) Cuando entré hablaba por teléfono con su novio.
- (15) El perro cruzaba la calle pero lo atropelló un auto.
- (16) El mes que viene nos íbamos al mar, pero cambiaron los planes.
- (17) Juguemos a que yo era ladrón y vos eras policía.

Evidentials

Tuyuca (data from Barnes 1984)

- (18) kiti-gĩ tii-í
 chop:trees-M.SG AUX-**VISIBLE.PRESENT.3.M.SG**
 “He is chopping trees” (I see him)
- (19) kiti-gĩ tii-gí
 chop:trees-M.SG AUX-**NONVISIBLE.PRESENT.3.M.SG**
 “He is chopping trees” (I hear him)
- (20) kiti-gĩ tii-hòì
 chop:trees-M.SG AUX-**INFERRED.PRESENT.3.M.SG**
 “Apparently he’s chopping trees” (I can’t really tell)
- (21) kiti-gĩ tii-yigĩ
 chop:trees-M.SG AUX-**HEARSAY.PAST.3.M.SG**
 “It is said he chopped trees”

Evidentials

- (22) Y finalmente entró el dizque gran profesor. (Colombia)
- (23) Estos animales se ven muy flacos, no los alimentarán bien.
- (24) Hoy día había llegado su mamá de él. (La Paz)
- (25) A esta hora estará llegando a Retiro.
- (26) Esto se ha caído ahí atrás y no lo vimos hasta ahora.
- (27) Será el jefe, pero no tiene la menor idea de cómo funcionan las cosas.

Miratives

Turkish (data from Slobin and Aksu 1982)

- (28) kiz-iniz çok iyi piyano çal-iyor-muş
 daughter-your very good piano play-PRES-MIR
 “Your daughter plays the piano very well!”

Hare (data from DeLancey 1997)

- (29) heee, gúhde daweda! ch’ifi dach’ída lō!
 hey up_there sit guy sit
 “Hey! (he’s) sitting up there! The guy is sitting up there!”

Miratives

- (30) ¡Había sido, estás vivo! (Paraguay)
- (31) ¡Eras alto! (Andino)
- (32) Resulta que estás vivo nomás. (Cono sur)
- (33) ¡No es que estás vivo!
- (34) ¡Pero sos alto! (Cono sur)

Day 1: Introduction to an extensional semantics

General references:

Heim and Kratzer, 1998. *Semantics in generative grammar*, Blackwell; ch. 1, 2, 3, 5.

Ferreira, 2014. *Curso de semântica formal*, ms.; ch. 1, 2, 5.

Day 2: A general framework for intensional contexts

General reference:

von Fintel and Heim, 2011. *Intensional semantics*, MIT ms.; ch. 1, 2, 3, 6.

Day 3: Modality in the imperfective

Background reading:

Cipria and Roberts, 2001. Spanish *imperfecto* and *pretérito*: Truth conditions and aktionsart effects in a situation semantics. NLS 8.

Kratzer, 2014. Situations in natural language semantics. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

Target article:

Arregui, Rivero and Salanova, 2014. Cross-linguistic variation in imperfectivity. NLLT 32.

Day 4: Modality in evidentials

Background reading:

Matthewson, Davis and Rullmann, 2007. Evidentials as epistemic modals: evidence from St'át'imcets. *Linguistic Variation* YB 7.

Target articles:

Faller, 2011. A possible worlds semantics for Cuzco Quechua evidentials. *SALT* 20.

Tonhauser, ms. Reportative evidentials in Paraguayan Guaraní. *SULA* 7.

Day 5: Mirativity

Target articles:

Torres Bustamante, 2012. Real tense and real aspect in mirativity. SALT 22.

Rett and Murray, 2013. A semantic account of mirative evidentials. SALT 23.