

Workshop EVIDENTIALITY

Inferential evidentiality with epistemic modality. A pragmatic stance.

A common view is that epistemic modality by itself carries, or has close ties with, inferential evidential meaning (see notably Dendale & Tasmowski 1994, 2001, Cornilie 2009; cf. Barbet 2012 for a review). Palmer (1986) suggests even that epistemic modality and inferential evidentiality are indistinct.

However we suggest that epistemic possibility and epistemic necessity differ as to the manifestness of their possibly being a conclusion of an inference. At least intuitively, *John may come tonight* can appear as a mere stipulation totally unrelated to previous knowledge (apart from presuppositions and referential disambiguation) and thus does not exhibit whatever inferential process as a source of information (at least not more than any other assertion). On the contrary, epistemic necessity as in *John must be in his office* seems to actually exhibit the existence not only of background information but also of such an inference where the relevant pieces of information are taken and elaborated in view of an assumption which is not a mere stipulation.

In this talk I will defend a pragmatic view according to which:

i) expressions dedicated to epistemic possibility (*maybe, peut-être*, English *may*) may eventually give rise to an inferential evidential meaning but only through pragmatic enrichment processes depending on context and the search for relevance;

ii) expressions carrying ambiguously epistemic possibility (French *pouvoir*), being semantically underspecified expressions, give rise to both epistemic and evidential meanings only on pragmatic bases, and will thus also allow epistemic non-evidential readings as well as evidential non-epistemic readings;

iii) expressions carrying ambiguously epistemic necessity (English *must*, French *devoir* and other verbs expressing obligation or necessity), similarly, give rise to epistemic and evidential meanings only on pragmatic bases. However we claim that their epistemic meaning actually emerges from the manifestness of an inference based on uncertain premises. Hence we suggest that epistemic readings of *must* or *devoir* cannot go without the evidential meaning.

We will take a closer look at epistemic future (the doorbell rings and someone utters *That'll be the postman*) and claim that its basis is more that of a simulation of a situation rather than an inferential indication. Thus we take them as only optionally evidential even though they bear a meaning of necessity. However we suggest that in Italian, this form expresses all the spectrum of epistemic modalities, so that evidential meanings are significantly less accessible than in French or English.

We will try in the end to relate our position to recent debates in cognitive science about the (in)ability of humans to make predictions of possibilities not based on previous experiences (Teglas & al. 2011 and others), which might explain why many scholars feel that markers of mere possibility involve specific previous notions: possibility actually involves previous knowledge about a type of facts, but not of an inference in the classical

sense (maybe a probabilistic type of inference, but in no way something rendered manifest by the linguistic form).

Selected References

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