

Semantics 6:

Modality and Evidentiality

Last week

- situation type
- telicity
- aspect
- tense

Today

We'll look at two semantic categories which also operate at the sentence level.

- modality
- evidentiality

1. Modality

The expression of possibility, probability, necessity -- sentence types in which *a proposition is not asserted*

Asserted proposition: The film is scaring

Modalised proposition: The film may/could/must be scaring

Semantic properties of *modals* (also known as *modal verbs* or *auxiliary verbs*):

1.1 scope ambiguity (results from interaction with another operator, such as negation)

We could not have any exam

- (i) It would be possible for us *not to have an exam* **POSS** [~have exam]
- (ii) It *would not be / was not possible* for us to have an exam **~ POSS** [have exam]

1.2 deontic vs. epistemic readings

- Deontic modality: permission or obligation ('deontic': relating to duties or obligations)

- Epistemic modality: possibility or certainty (epistemic: relating to knowledge; epistemology: knowledge).

Deontic modality calibrates the area of meaning lying between *Do it!* and *Don't do it!*, whereas epistemic modality calibrates the area of meaning lying between *Yes* and *No* (Halliday 1985).

It is a notable fact that modal expressions regularly have **both** deontic and epistemic uses, which doesn't seem to be confined to English, but a universal phenomenon.

We should arrive on time:

- (i) we are under an obligation to arrive on time (deontic)
- (ii) it is likely that we'll arrive on time (epistemic)

She must be good, to get into MIT

- (i) it is required that she be good (in order to enter MIT) (deontic)
- (ii) it is evident that she is good (since she is at MIT) (epistemic)

<i>Types of Modality:</i>	<i>deontic</i>	<i>epistemic</i>
Possibility:	You may leave now	He may be insane
Necessity:	You must leave now	He must be insane

	deontic	epistemic
possibility	English: <i>can, may</i> Mandarin: <i>ke3yi2, ...xing</i> Cantonese: <i>ho2ji5, ...dak1</i>	<i>may/might</i> <i>ke3neng2</i> <i>ho2lang4</i>
necessity	English: <i>must</i> Mandarin: <i>bi4xu2, yi1ding4 yao4</i> Cantonese: <i>jat1ding6 jiu3</i>	<i>must</i> <i>yi1ding4 (shi4)</i> <i>jat1ding6 (hai6), sat6</i>
obligation	English: <i>should, ought</i> Mandarin: <i>ying1gai1</i> Cantonese: <i>jing1goi1</i>	<i>should</i> <i>ying1gai1 (shi4)</i> <i>jing1goi1 (hai6)</i>

2. Modality in logic

2.1 Modal operators:

NEC p 'p **must** be the case'

POSS p 'p **may** be the case'

2.2 Logical relation of possibility and necessity

NEC $p \Leftrightarrow \sim$ POSS [$\sim p$] he must come \Leftrightarrow it's not possible that he won't come

ta yiding yao lai \Leftrightarrow Ta bu keyi bu lai 'he must come'

POSS $p \Leftrightarrow \sim$ NEC p he may come \Leftrightarrow it's not necessary that he come

Keoi5 ho2lang4 lai4 'He may come' \Leftrightarrow Keoi5 mei6 bit1 lai4 'He may not necessarily come'

2.3 Modality and possible worlds

The Queen may visit HKU

'There is a possible world such that the Queen visits HKU'

The Queen should visit HKU

'There is a desirable possible world such that the Queen visits HKU'

3. Additional ("non-logical") forms of modality in natural language

3.1 *subjective* vs. *objective* modality (Lyons)

I should work faster (i) according to the rules (objective: I'm supposed to)
(ii) according to my own judgment (subjective: I think so)

We must go and renew these books (objective `must': obligation imposed from outside)

We must go and see this film (subjective `must': obligation imposed by self)

You may leave = (i) You are allowed to leave by law (objective deontic possibility)

(ii) I hereby give you permission to leave (subjective deontic possibility)

3.2 Degrees of possibility/necessity

may > might I may come (c. 50% probability) vs. I might come (<50%)

can > could

must > should

4. Evidentiality

4.1 Defining evidentiality:

"a term for the ways in which a speaker qualifies a statement by referring to the source of the information." (Saeed 1997:133)

Compared with the assertion *Ellen was excited*, all the examples are used to communicate *the speaker's attitude towards the source of information*.

I saw/heard that Ellen was excited.

I'm told that Ellen was excited.

Ellen was excited, so they say.

Ellen was excited, it seems.

Apparently Ellen was excited.

Possible sources of information:

- Sensory perception (visual, olfactory etc)
- Hearsay (rumour, quotation, etc)
- Inference (deduction, induction etc)
- Speculation

Speculative use of Mandarin *ba*:

(1) a. *Zhe ge Hanzi bu dui ba.* (Cheung 1994:166)
this CL character not correct PRT
“This Chinese character is wrong, I guess.” (source = speculation)

b. *Ni de gou you maobing ba.*
you ‘s dog have shortcoming PRT
‘I guess that there is something wrong with your dog.’

c. *Women qu kan dianying ba.*
we go watch movie PRT
‘Let’s go to the movies.’

ba in (1a-b), but NOT in (1c), expresses an evidential meaning, i.e. it designates a speculation.

4.2 Evidentiality and modality

Hearsay evidential usage of the French conditional:

(2) *Il aurait choisi la mort.*
he have-COND chosen the death
"He is said to have chosen death." (source = hearsay, legend etc)

Speculative usage of French future:

(3) *Il aura fait son choix.*
he have-FUT made his choice
"He has probably made his choice."

German: auxiliary *sollen*

(4) *Ich soll ihn anrufen.* “I’m supposed (obliged) to call him.” (deontic)

(5) *Ich soll ihn angerufen haben.* “I’m supposed (alleged) to have called him.” (evidential)

French: conditional “tense”

(6) *Ce serait le meilleur film de l’année*
it be-COND the best film of the year

(i) It would be the best film of the year (if it were made: conditional)

(ii) It is supposed to be the best film of the year (evidential)

4.3 Cantonese evidential particles

(7) A: *Keoi5 zou6 mat1je5 m4 lai4 ge2?*
'Why didn't he come?'

B: *M4 syu1fuk6 a1maa3* (self-evident)
'He was sick, of course.'

M4 syu1fuk6 gwaa3 (speculative)
'He was sick, I guess.'

M4 syu1fuk6 wo5 (hearsay)
'He was sick, apparently.'

4.4 Evidentiality and mirativity (i.e. unexpected information)

“[The category mirative] marks both statements based on inference and *statements based on direct experience for which the speaker had no psychological preparation*, and in some languages hearsay data as well. What these apparently disparate data sources have in common... is that *the proposition is one which is new to the speaker, not yet integrated into his overall picture of the world.*” (DeLancey 1997: 36)

Turkish: “inferential perfect” verb form in **-mIs** indicating inference, hearsay or surprise:

(8) *Kenmal gel-mIs*
Kemal come-INFER
“Kemal has come (presumably/apparently/surprisingly).”

Mapudunun (Chile: Aikhenvald 2004): same suffix for reported (REP) and mirative

(9) *aku-rke-y*
arrive-REP-IND
'She arrived, they say' (evidential interpretation)

(10) *Fey ti chi domo kalko-rke*
that ART woman witch-MIR
'This woman turns out to be a witch (surprisingly)' (mirative interpretation)

(11) *Go leizai hou leng wo*
that girl very beautiful PRT
'That girl is said to be very beautiful' or
'That girl is really beautiful!'

Reading

Saeed: §5.3 - §5.4

Cruse: §15.4.6

References

Aikenvald, Alexandra. 2004. *Evidentiality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chafe, Wallace and Johanna Nichols (eds). 1986. *Evidentiality: The Linguistic Coding of Epistemology*. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.

Cheung, Samuel Hung Nin. 1994. *A Practical Chinese Grammar*. Hong Kong: CUHK Press.

DeLancey, Scott. 1997. 'Mirativity: the grammatical marking of unexpected information.' *Linguistic Typology* 1-1, 33-52.

Halliday, Michael. 1985. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Arnold.