Modality and the Semantics of Free Indirect Discourse.

Kate Judge

Throughout the literature on the semantics of modality there has developed an ongoing interest in the nature of how modality and time interact. The importance of how modality is relativised to time as well as "possible worlds" has lead to recognition that a distinction appears to exist in terms of the time to which epistemic and root modals are relativised respectively, which is in-keeping with the so-called "Cinque hierarchy" (where epistemics are located above, or scope over, tense, and roots are located below, or within the scope of, tense). Epistemic modals are speaker oriented and are therefore relativised to speech time. In contrast roots are subject or participant oriented and are evaluated relative to the time represented in the VP. Furthermore, epistemics can also be relativised to a so-called "attitude time'(Hacquard: forthcoming), when embedded under an attitude verb (namely the time of the attitude holder represented in an attitude matrix clause). However, in the representation of free indirect speech, there appears to be a problematic exception to this distinction. The stylistics of free indirect discourse do appear to allow for epistemics to be evaluated at a time other than the "now" of the speech time, without the overt presence of an attitude matrix to substitute (Boogaart, 2007). Arguably the context provides the equivalent of a propositional attitude that is simply not made explicit, the time to which the modal is relativised is "the time of some covert intensional predicate to be inferred from context" (Boogaart, 2007:52). However this itself assumes a conceptualization of free indirect discourse as a representation of hypothetical speech act, easily incorporated into a neat sequential tense analysis. In the case of modality, the issue of whether free indirect speech indicates "speech in the sense of an act of communication intended for a hearer" or is a "representation of thought" (Blakemore 2009:578) has potential implications for the perception of modality as uniformly a representation of speaker commitment to a proposition. This paper seeks to explore whether the problem of free indirect discourse is simply one of idiosyncracy and style, or itself symptomatic of a more fundamental problem arising from how conventional accounts of modality conceptualise the semantics of modality as speaker commitment to proposition truth values, and the role of context disambiguation.

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