
The ontological cookbook of modal categories: There are more flavors than you think

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modal categories via speaker's subjectivity (Palmer 2001) or a vague appeal to necessity and possibility (Kratzer 1991) is insufficient. We define modal categories as consisting of four operators with different forces: strong, weak, anti-strong, antiweak. Whereas the set of modal flavors is open, only a few of them are central, among them the two that link up with the major sentence moods: volitionality and epistemicity.

Strong epistemic operators map their argument *P* to the proposition that the epistemic subject subjectively knows that *p*, where *p* is either *P* (transparent case) or one of the alternatives coded by *P* (opaque case). Assuming that the German perfecto-present *wissen* codes epistemicity in this sense predicts that it has both a transparent and an opaque reading.

Strong volitional operators map their argument *p* to the proposition that the volitional subject realistically aims at bringing about *p*. Assuming that the German modals *wollen* and *sollen* code volitionality in this sense predicts that applied to arguments that cannot be realistically aimed at they either result in nonsense or invite metonymic coercion.

- (1) Eva will mit 23 Jahren ihre Prüfung /a. bestehen /b. bestanden haben
Eva wants to /a. pass /b. have passed her exam at the age of 23

If Eva is 21 years old (1) a. is read as plain future, and (1) b. as future perfect: In both cases she aims at having the degree within two years.

If Eva is 31 (1) a. is nonsense, and (1) b. gets an epistemic reading: She aims at *making people think* she got her degree eight years ago.

Putting together these building blocks we argue that the core sentence moods are best defined as coding either material volition (imperative) or epistemic volition: transparent (declarative) or opaque (interrogative).

References: • Kratzer, A. (1991): Modality. In: *Hdbook of Semantics*. De Gruyter, 639-650. • Palmer, F. R. (2001). *Mood and Modality*. Cambridge University Press.