

A mental space analysis of tense and modality: a progress report

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This talk presents a progress report on developing a mental space analysis of tense and modality, based on prior cognitive semantic and typological research in those domains. Mental spaces are a model to represent "alternative realities", including past and future times and unrealized events, the focus of our interest. Mental spaces are evoked by specific grammatical constructions including tense, mood and modality, complement-taking predicates and conditional constructions. Following Cutrer (1994), we analyze these constructions as providing access paths for the hearer from one space (viewpoint) to another space (focus), which may be a new space or one already established in the discourse. We propose a revised (and simplified) version of Cutrer's analysis of tense, based on Comrie's (1981) analyses. We also adopt Fillmore's (1990) analysis of conditionals, treating his concept of epistemic stance as a relation between the hypothetical space and the "reality" (speaker's belief) space. We extend epistemic stance to model epistemic modality, following Boye (2012), and use a mental space analysis of Clark's (1996) theory of common ground (shared knowledge) extended to individual knowledge to model Boye's theory of the relationship between epistemic modality and evidentiality. Finally, we argue that hypothetical and "reality" (speaker belief) spaces are of the same kind, differing only in epistemic stance, and that they should be embedded in an interactional model of the negotiation of shared knowledge, as indicated by the grouping of epistemic, evidential and (knowledge) interactional categories in a single grammatical category (see Palmer 2001).

If time permits, I might present our tentative analysis of nonepistemic modality, where we argue that dynamic modality should be subsumed under generic spaces, and deontic modality should be subsumed under future spaces, and different stances are interpreted as types of instantiation for generic spaces and degrees of predictability for future/deontic spaces.