

Epistemic Modal Verbs, Functional Projection and Tense

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In my talk I will summarise some problems concerning the interpretation of epistemic modal verbs and their relation with tense, the semantic properties of the embedded verb and other elements which can affect the verbal complex in some way. I will be starting with some German, Italian, Dutch and Norwegian data, which apparently challenge the hierarchy of functional projections proposed in Cinque (1999).

In particular the so-called Absolute Temporal Reference – i. e. the temporal relation between the time expressed by the modal verb and the time of the utterance – is expected to be peculiar to root modal verbs, as can be seen in the German examples in (1),

- (1) a. Das Kind **muss** seine Hausaufgabe machen
- b. Das Kind **musste** seine Hausaufgabe machen
- c. Das Kind **hat** seine Hausaufgabe machen **müssen**
- d. Das Kind **wird** seine Hausaufgabe machen **müssen**

and not to epistemic modals, since they usually get a Relative Temporal Reference more naturally, i. e. a relation between the epistemic evaluation time and the time expressed by the embedded verb. Boogaart (2003) and Eide (2003) provide evidence that epistemic modals can occur in past tenses and allow for a true past reading (or, more generally, a temporal shift) in Dutch and Norwegian respectively,

- (2) a. Hij moest ziek zijn
 he must-PAST ill be
- b. Han har måtta arbeidd med det i heile natt (Norw. dial.)
 He has must-PERF worked on it whole night
- c. Han har skullet bo i Århus (Dan.) [“misplaced perfect”, Vikner(1988)]
 He is said to have lived in Århus

Thus, starting with the “strange” form of Italian imperfect, that we can find in an epistemic sentence like (3),

- (3) Il tuo cane **doveva** essere molto intelligente
your dog must-IMPF be very intelligent

which is very similar to (4),

- (4) Il tuo cane deve essere stato molto intelligente
your dog must have been very intelligent,

I will try to demonstrate that these Italian constructions seem to share the same properties of their Dutch counterparts which are intrinsically imperfective in Boogaart's analysis. Nonetheless, I will also slightly modify it in order to support the validity of Cinque's hierarchy of functional projections.

REFERENCES

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