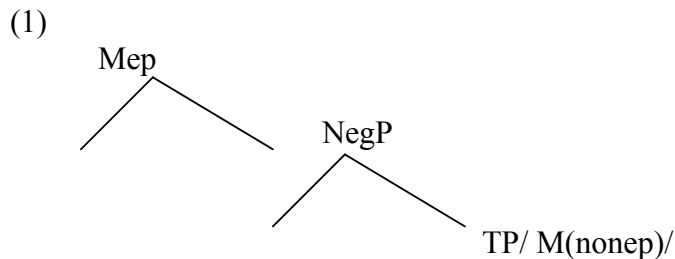


Is root v. epistemic modal disambiguation derived in syntax? Some arguments from Czech

It is beyond any doubt that root and epistemic modal interpretations differ in scope. However, the proposed paper will try to argue against the assumption that the varying scopes of modality affect the syntactic derivation of modal structures. I will call this a ‘syntactic assumption’ and summarize it in relation to Drubig (2001) as follows:



(1) assumes that epistemic modals have a tenseless quality visible in overt syntax and as such enter the derivation above the TP. On the other hand, nonepistemic (root) modal verbs can occur only in tensed structures. NegP then stipulates that epistemic modals project above negation, whereas root modals are derived within the scope of negation in (1).

The aim of this paper is to show that most difficulties with this ‘structural assumption’ can be avoided by treating the varying scope of epistemic and root modality as a LF (or semantic) issue not visible in overt syntax.

I will first look at negation in Czech modal structures and demonstrate that the licensing negative prefix *ne-* can be attached to both the modal verb and its infinitival complement:

- (2) a. *Jan nemusí číst Harryho Pottra.*
 Jan NEGmust3Sg readINF Harry Potter Acc
 ‘Jan cannot read Harry Potter.’
 ‘It is not likely that Jan is reading Harry Potter.’
- root
epistemic
- b. *Jan musí nečíst Harryho Pottra.*
 Jan can3Sg NEGreadINF Harry Potter Acc
 ‘Jan must not read Harry Potter.’
 ‘It is likely that Jan is not reading Harry Potter.’
- root
epistemic

In both cases (2a) and (2b) neither root nor epistemic interpretation is ruled out. Moreover, the structure in (2b) involving the lower (narrow scoping) negation is still ambiguous in terms of epistemic v. root interpretation.

Tense poses similar issues for the Czech modal structures, which allow all epistemic modals to appear in the marked past tense structures:

- (3) *Jan měl/musel/mohl před měsícem vyloupit banku.*
 Jan have/must/can3SgPast before month robInf bankAcc
 ‘Jan had to/could rob a bank a month ago.’
 ‘It is likely/necessary/probable that Jan robbed a bank a month ago.’

root

epistemic

I will agree that the epistemic interpretation scopes above Tense, but argue that scope positions cannot be derived in the overt syntax. It is more straightforward to assume that the epistemic modals remain under TP in derivational syntax and achieve their ‘tenseless’ scope later by the movement to the individual scope positions at LF as suggested in Butler (2003).

The main argument in favour of separate MepP and MrootP projections was that they are split by Tense and Negation in the structure. My objection to this approach will be that it is neither necessary nor feasible for Czech modal structures. The examination of the relevant data will aim to show that both epistemic and root modals in Czech can be inserted into a single syntactic position. This position is within the domain of Tense and either below or above the phrase headed by the prefix *ne-*. As a result, the proposed article aims to accentuate a **scope-based** rather than **structure-based** approach to the root v. epistemic ambiguity.

Selected (preliminary) references

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