

Proposals through the prism of modality

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In this presentation, modality is addressed in relation to speech acts and lexical semantics, following the approach developed by Galatanu (1984, 2018). The focus is on the speech act of 'proposal', with examples from politics and democratic deliberations. Modality is understood in a broad sense as 'modal values' or 'modal attitudes', at a semantic level (cf., Pottier or Greimas), and modal categories are seen as ingredients of lexical meaning, similar to primitives (Wierzbicka). Lexical words can be modal by their nature (*can, should, possible, possibility*) or can convey some modal meaning (*democracy, progress, teaching, education*). The classes of modalities are organised on an objective-subjective continuum: alethic, deontic, epistemic, doxologic, axiologic, volitive, desirative.

Firstly, I identify the meaning and modal dimension of the lexemes *proposal* and *to propose*. For this, I use Galatanu's semantic framework (the Semantics of Argumentative Possibilities) and the principles of argumentative semantics (i.e. Anscombe and Ducrot's theory of Argumentation within Language, and Carel's Sematic Blocks Theory). The core meaning of the lexemes consists of 'S acknowledges the existence of a common interest to S and H THEREFORE S believes that A is possible/appropriate/beneficial THEREFORE S wants H to take into consideration the possibility/appropriateness/benefit of A'. The modal load of the lexemes *proposal* and *to propose* is manifested in the illocutionary force of the speech act of 'proposal' – and this is why lexical semantics is useful for approaching speech acts.

Secondly, based on the lexical meaning of the noun and verb that denote the speech act of proposal, I show how the felicity conditions can be reformulated in terms of modal attitudes (epistemic, deontic, volitive, evaluative...). I refine Aakhus's (2005) description, namely by showing that rather than a 'future act A of H + S', the propositional content of a proposal consists of a 'future act of *taking into consideration (the possibility of)* an act A of S/H/X' [S = the speaker, H = the hearer, X = someone else] – which elaborates on the attitudes conveyed by the speech act. This explains why rejecting the action A (e.g., *I don't want to*) is not an appropriate reaction to a proposal; in fact, it is the *possibility of A* that one rejects (e.g., *I can't. I'm busy*). Then I turn to the linguistic expressions used to perform a proposal and discuss them in connection with the modal attitudes conveyed by the speech act.

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