

NYU Semantics Group 10/11/24
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Title. A unified probabilistic semantics of modality

Abstract. In this talk, I introduce a theory of modality which highlights the connection between expected utility and Bayesian measures of evidential support. The account is a probabilistic semantics for deontics and epistemics, yet it proposes that deontics and epistemics share a common core modal semantics, as in traditional possible-worlds analysis of modality. I argue that this account is not only theoretically advantageous but also has far-reaching empirical consequences; it predicts modal versions of reasoning fallacies from the heuristics and biases literature. I also present linguistic evidence from Korean, the language in which modal concepts are often expressed in terms of a conditional and an evaluative predicate. I show that the proposed modal semantics can be compositionally derived from such Korean modal expressions.
