

A semantic map for epistemic and inferential functions

The purpose of this presentation is to consider the issue of representing various epistemic and inferential functions in the form of a semantic map. Inferential functions may be interpreted as purely evidential, or they may combine both evidential and epistemic notions. From a typological perspective, epistemic and inferential functions have very intricate relations to each other and to some other functions, too. Many of these relations are not represented in the map, proposed by van der Auwera and Plungian (1998). It is important for the development of the semantic map methodology to find an adequate way of representing these kinds of relations.

The presentation is based on the obtained results of my typological study of epistemic modality and its relation to evidentiality. In this study, I have selected a genealogically stratified sample of the languages of the world (60 languages). On the selected languages, reference material, consisting of descriptions of epistemic modality and evidentiality, has been used. The data consists of various kinds of grammatical expressions, considered in these descriptions. By means of a detailed analysis of the data, it is argued in this study that epistemic modality and evidentiality are closely related categories. Both of these categories delineate the speaker's attitude to the truth-value or factual status of the proposition. An epistemic modality marker indicates the speaker's attitude towards the proposition in terms of the degrees of certainty. An evidential marker indicates the source of the speaker's attitude. Especially various types of inferential functions often combine epistemic and evidential notions. In these functions, either epistemic or evidential notions are predominant. These notions can often be described by means of two semantic parameters and their values (cf. Vilkki 2006a). For example, the English modal *must* has many functions, and one of them can be described as "the degree of the speaker's certainty: certain" and "the source of the speaker's attitude: the speaker infers P on the basis of general knowledge". In addition, the value of the first parameter is predominant. For the description of the inferential functions of some languages, a third parameter, indicating "degrees of the reliability of evidence", is needed. The values of this parameter can combine with the values of the second parameter or with the values of both the first and the second parameter. They are rarely predominant.

In the presentation, it will be argued that the parameter "the degree of the speaker's certainty" should be used as a vertical dimension and the parameter "the source of the speaker's attitude" should be used as a horizontal dimension on the semantic map for epistemic and inferential functions. The parameter "degrees of the reliability of evidence" is, however, difficult to represent as a third dimension, because the combinations of the values of this parameter and the values of the other two parameters are quite variable. Therefore, an alternative way of representing this parameter, using different shades, will be discussed. The names of the specific functions of epistemic and inferential expressions are based on the values of the three parameters. Selection of the relevant functions and arranging the functions on the map follows the principles presented by, for example, Haspelmath (2003). It will be proposed that the predominant values of the functions could be indicated by using bold lines and shades. Some implicational universals are also presented. Finally, the possibility of using semantic maps for the representation of secondary functions of epistemic and inferential expressions will also be briefly discussed (cf. Vilkki 2006b).

References:

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