

# NEW TRENDS IN FORMAL SEMANTICS

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## *Still going strong – Kai von Fintel · Anthony S. Gillies*

<b>MUST IS WEAK</b>	<b>MUST IS STRONG</b>
WP1 <i>must</i> is <b>not a strong</b> necessity modal	S1 there are no epistemic modals strictly <b>stronger</b> than <i>must</i>
WP2 <i>must</i> does <b>not entail its prejacent</b>	S2 <i>must</i> does <b>entail its prejacent</b>
WP3 distribution of <i>must</i> comes from <b>pragmatic</b> derivation	S3 distribution of <i>must</i> comes from a <b>presupposition</b>

- The paper was very well structured, and we decided to look at the main sections of the paper and discuss some relevant examples.
- Not everyone agreed on every example, and, judging from the footnotes, the reviewers felt similarly.
- In general, we observed that in several parts of the paper, it would have been beneficial to focus more on their actual proposal, which looked indeed very relevant and appropriate, rather than on unclear examples.
- We discussed the importance of a correct evaluation of the data. Data might come from different sources (authors' intuitions, informants, corpora, controlled experiments, ...). Language is complex, messy, and multi-faceted, even though it tries to be the opposite. Semantic theories are not an unblemished reflection of language. They are more like cubist images: they turn smoothness into simple shapes, hoping that the result will still tell us something meaningful about language. If we have clear intuitions about a certain set of examples, which tell

us that our theory and assumptions are going in the right direction, we should welcome these data. And if someone tries to look at peripheral regions of language to find a counterexample, we should not be so much discouraged after all.

Nowadays, experimental confirmation seems to be always needed, even when the data clearly speaks for itself. We believe that this excessive attention to behavioural data might cause more harm than good sometimes. At the same time, the opposite behaviour, relying only on our own intuitions, might be even more dangerous. In this paper, many readers, including the reviewers, disagree with the intuitions of the authors. And, if that is the case, we should be a bit discouraged after all. In fn. 9, von Fintel & Gillies argue against Lassiter, who considers some examples from a corpus. They argue against the idea that the examples collected from the wild are somehow more probative than intuitive judgments about homegrown examples because the latter are “mere intuitions”. And they conclude that, after all, everything is just “mere intuitions”. It might be so, but intuitions might be biased, and that is something to be aware of.

- In the last part of our discussion, we focused on the “indirectness” contribution of epistemic *must*. Indirectness is linked with evidentiality, and we wondered if there might be different kinds of indirect knowledge cross-linguistically (for instance, in Italian we both have the counterpart for *must* and an epistemic future, which patterns in some cases with *must* and in others with *might*.)
- We briefly commented on the usage of “strong” and “weak” necessity modals. And we observed that their usage is different from the original Karttunen’s view.

In the original account by Karttunen, weakness is spelled out in these terms: : “The intuitive feeling that [it must be] is a weaker assertion than [it is] is apparently based on some general conversational principle by which indirect knowledge— that is, knowledge based on logical inferences— is valued less highly than “direct” knowledge that involves no reasoning.” Von Fintel and Gillies might prefer to talk about presuppositions rather than a ‘general conversational principle’. But this notion of weakness in terms of direct/indirect knowledge looks quite compatible with their account, even though, as the title says, they are ‘still going strong’.