

What *can* can mean

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The talk will explore the 'lower' types of modalities ('circumstantial' modalities), pursuing a theoretical vision we may dub "Syntactic Contextualism". Syntactic Contextualism assumes that many apparent properties of lexical items are not truly properties of those lexical items themselves, but are contributed by items surrounding them in syntactic representations. Syntactic Contextualism has produced interesting results with nominal and verbal inflection, adverbial modification, and sentential complementation, and has been pursued for modals of all flavors by Valentine Hacquard. Following in the footsteps of Hacquard, I will develop a new analysis of circumstantial modalities where the arguments and aspectual properties of the embedded infinitival predicate determine both the modal alternatives and the presence or absence of actuality entailments.