

LSA 220
Morphology, syntax, and semantics of modals
Syllabus

Kai von Fintel & Sabine Iatridou

1 Coordinates

- Monday and Wednesday, 1:30pm – 3:15pm
- Classroom: 101 Moffitt

2 Instructors

- Kai von Fintel, fintel@mit.edu, +1.857.234.2662
- Sabine Iatridou, iatridou@mit.edu, +1.617.201.4616

3 Prerequisites

- Basic background in syntax and semantics

4 Course Requirements

To receive a grade and credit for this class, you have to do A or B:

A: Write a paper on a modality-related topic

B: Pick a language that is spoken by somebody at this Institute. The language cannot be English. Investigate the following questions about modals in this language:

- i. Make a list of the necessity modals (epistemic, deontic, goal-oriented) and the possibility ones (epistemic, deontic, goal-oriented).
- ii. Do the epistemic necessity modals display the properties discussed for English *must* in Session I?

- iii. What are the scopal properties of the epistemic and deontic universal and existential modals with respect to sentential negation (see Session II)?
- iv. Does this language have a sufficiency modal construction like the ones discussed in Sessions II-III?
- v. Does the language convey the meaning of *ought* by using counterfactual morphology on a necessity modal (see Session III-IV)?
- vi. How does the language convey modals about the past and modals in the past (see Session V)?
- vii. Does this language form Type II IaDs with a formally imperative verb in the first conjunct (see Session VI)?
- viii. Pick your answer to one of the above questions and elaborate further on it.

Due Date: Sunday August 16 @5pm

5 Required Readings

von Fintel, Kai. 2006. Modality and language. In Donald M. Borchert (ed.), *Encyclopedia of philosophy – second edition*. Detroit: MacMillan Reference USA. URL <http://mit.edu/fintel/fintel-2006-modality.pdf>.

von Fintel, Kai & Anthony S. Gillies. 2009. *Must ...stay ...strong!* URL <http://mit.edu/fintel/fintel-gillies-2009-mss.pdf>. Ms, MIT and Rutgers University, submitted to *Natural Language Semantics*. Sections 1-6, 8.

von Fintel, Kai & Sabine Iatridou. 2007. Anatomy of a modal construction. *Linguistic Inquiry* 38(3). 445-483. doi:10.1162/ling.2007.38.3.445. URL <http://web.mit.edu/fintel/anatomy.pdf>.

von Fintel, Kai & Sabine Iatridou. 2008. How to say *ought* in Foreign: The composition of weak necessity modals. In Jacqueline Guéron & Jacqueline Lecarme (eds.), *Time and modality* (Studies in Natural Language and Linguistic Theory 75), 115-141. Springer. doi:10.1007/978-1-4020-8354-9.

Many other readings will be listed in the continuously updated course bibliography.