Epistemic Modal Auxiliaries in Brazilian Portuguese: *pode* versus *podia*

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The paper investigates epistemic uses of *pode* and *podia* in Brazilian Portuguese (BrP). Both express possibility, but they are semantically distinct due to the imperfective morpheme *'-ia'*, which may express past possibility or counterfactuality. The counterfactual component conveys that the proposition expressed by the prejacent sentence is a slight possibility. It is then possible to derive, via implicature, that *podia* can express the speaker's desire. The paper aims at clarifying the semantics of these two modal verbs, and to contribute to some theoretical issues: we will claim that von Fintel & Gillies' (2007) proposal cannot explain the distinction between *pode* and *podia*, and that Iatridou's (2000) approach to the semantics of imperfective morphemes can be improved with Kratzer's (1991) *ordering source*.

For von Fintel & Gillies (2007), the epistemic *might* reveals that the prejacent proposition is compatible with the speaker's state of knowledge. This analysis can be applied to both *pode* and *podia*, and does not account for the wierdness of (1), although Kp → ◊p is logicaly correct:

(1) # Eu sei que João está em casa mas ele pode/podia estar.
I know that John is in home but he might/could to be.

Moreover, only *podia* is felicitously used if the speaker knows that ~p is the case:

(2) * Eu sei que João não está em casa, mas ele pode estar.
I know that João is not home, but he might be.

Pode presupposes that the speaker is ignorant about p (~Kp), whereas *podia p* is allowed both if she does not know about p (~Kp) or if she knows that ~p (K~p). Felicity conditions differ because of the counterfactual element. Both *pode* and *podia* can express the possibility of a present/future situation:

(3) João pode ser casado.
João might be married.

(4) João podia ser casado.
João could/might be married.

In the future-oriented interpretation, the imperfective morpheme is a *fake past/imperfective.* Following, Iatridou (2000), this morpheme carries the *exclusion feature* which, in this case, excludes from the topic worlds the speaker's actual world. This approach cannot explain that the speaker conveys that João's being married is a possible situation, but not a very plausible one. We propose that the imperfective morpheme organizes the worlds according to a contextual parameter (the "ideal" world), in line with Kratzer's proposal (1991). In (4), worlds in which João is not married are closer to the ideal worlds than the worlds in which he is. Thus, the speaker not only conveys that according to what she knows it is possible that João is married but also that this possibility is remote, because worlds in which he is so are far from the ideal one. There is no ordering source with *pode*, it is "neutral" with respect to the possibility of the situation expressed by the proposition. This apparatus allows us to explain the most common use of *podia* in BrP: to expresses the speaker's desire. The expression of desire is more prominent when it is discursively clear that the speaker knows that p is not the case (K~p). Why would the speaker convey that some state of affairs is a non actual possibility? Via Gricean reasoning, it is because she wants to convey that this is the situation that she desires.

Bibliographical references:

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