

The Role of Tense and Mood in Context Anchoring

Indicative sentences are anchored to the context. They are about a particular situation. But how does this context and anchoring arise compositionally? Since Klein, tense has been assumed to relate utterances to topic situations, but a similar contribution has also been attributed to the semantics of mood.

Examining the distribution of what are traditionally called subjunctive and indicative moods in Persian, I argue that mood and tense can be fused. Specifically, deictic tenses typically (though not always) associated with the indicative mood- carry an aboutness presupposition contributed by an operator that introducing a topic situation.

In addition to capturing some key insights from the literature on mood, this proposal also sheds light on how tense/mood presuppositions function in embedded contexts, such as conditionals. In particular, I show that the presence or absence of deictic tense- which correlates with indicative and subjunctive mood- in the antecedent of conditional plays a crucial role in determining its interpretation.