

# Modality Disordered

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Linguae Seminar Abstract

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March 2024

Orders play an essential role in current thinking about the semantics of modality. They lie at the heart of the similarity approach to conditionals (Lewis 1973) and more generally, Kratzer's (1981) analysis of modals, which orders possibilities along various dimensions (such as similarity, desirability, and plausibility). It is a remarkably general, compelling picture. However, in this talk we present evidence that it is mistaken for *would*. That is, the semantics of *would* cannot be expressed in terms of an order over possibilities—no matter how the order is intuitively understood.

The arguments all involve Reciprocity, the inference from  $A > C$ ,  $A > B$  and  $B > A$  to  $B > C$ , where  $A > C$  denotes "if  $A$ , would  $C$ ". On the similarity approach to conditionals and Kratzer's (1981) semantics of *would*, Reciprocity follows from reflexivity and transitivity of the order—the bare minimum constraints to impose. We present three pieces of evidence that Reciprocity is invalid. Firstly, experimental evidence in which half the participants judged the rule invalid (joint work with Tomasz Klochowicz). Secondly, new counterexamples to a consequence of Reciprocity, called Substitution: that whenever  $A$  and  $B$  are logically equivalent, then so are  $A > C$  and  $B > C$ . (Failures of Substitution are especially interesting since they show the limits of a purely truth-conditional approach to meaning.) Thirdly, that Reciprocity makes the wrong predictions for the semantics of causal claims, assuming a counterfactual approach to causation.

If not with orders, how should we model the meaning of *would*? This talk proposes a new approach based on aboutness. The idea is that when we interpret a *would*-conditional, we (i) pick a time at which to imagine a change, (ii) vary the part of the world its antecedent is about at that time, and (iii) play the laws forward. We show that this approach overcomes the problems of ordering approaches.

## References

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