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Context-sensitivity and the semantics of epistemic vocabulary in natural languages

Results in Brief

A contextual approach to the semantics of knowledge

Researchers have examined the way in which epistemic terms are used in conversational contexts. The study opens the path to achieving a deeper understanding of the notion of knowledge that is central to the knowledge society of the 21st century.



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Epistemic contextualism is the view that the content of the verb 'know' can change with the speaker's context of what is said. This stems from the idea that 'knowledge' is sensitive to the speaker's context and practical situation. It also arrives out of a comprehensive formal account of other context-sensitive expressions.

In recent years, there has been a disregard for contextualist approaches to the semantics of knowledge. There have also been numerous philosophical and linguistic approaches that discredit it. EPISTEMIC VOCABULARY (Context-sensitivity and the semantics of epistemic vocabulary in natural languages) was an EU-funded project that created conditions of adequacy for epistemic contextualism and critically evaluated alternative approaches. This resulted in the development of a novel contextualist

semantics of knowledge attributions, namely one that postulates a close semantic link between the content of 'knows p' in a context of utterance C and what is pragmatically presupposed in C. The resulting view is called presuppositional epistemic contextualism (PEC).

PEC provides semantics for knowledge attributions that avoid and resolve the objections against contextualist semantics. Additionally, PEC is well motivated from both a linguistic and a philosophical point of view. It avoids the most familiar linguistic objections to contextualism and allows for a fruitful resolution of a number of philosophical problems in epistemology.

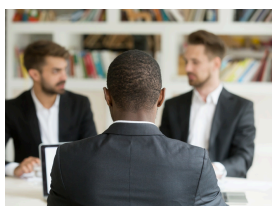
Project work involved innovative solutions to classical philosophical problems. These include problems of scepticism and induction within a broader epistemological framework. It related it to other central epistemological issues about epistemic justification, evidence and testimony. In addition to offering solutions to philosophical problems, EPISTEMIC VOCABULARY also addressed the role of knowledge in public policy debates about climate change.

Disciplines that involve the generation and administration of knowledge will be able to shift focus by examining knowledge from a linguistic perspective. This is done by looking at the way in which epistemic terms are used in conversational contexts.

Keywords

Semantics, knowledge, conversational contexts, epistemic contextualism, EPISTEMIC VOCABULARY

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EPISTEMIC VOCABULARY

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