

Assertion, Evidence, and the Future

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I present some examples in which one is in a position to assert, at time t_1 , that something will happen, but then not in a position to assert, at later time t_2 , that the event in question did happen (despite not gaining or losing any evidence in between). The phenomenon is nicely explained by semantic theories that treat future operators as epistemic modals of a certain kind (Kaufmann, Copley). Unfortunately, those theories face a number of independent problems due to the truth-conditions they assign to sentences containing future operators (Cariani and Santorio). Instead, I argue for a pragmatic-epistemic account of the target phenomenon, one that relies on the connection between knowledge and assertion. According to this approach, the linguistic phenomenon is explained by the fact that one can lose knowledge simply by moving through time. Kaufmann and Copley take future operators to be modals that quantify over a restricted set of future possibilities, with the restriction provided by considerations of probability (Kaufmann) or normality (Copley). I argue that the notion of probability/normality should not be understood as a component of the semantics of future operators, but rather as functioning as a constraint on which future possibilities are relevant for assessing knowledge ascriptions. I close by suggesting that the needed notion of normality is familiar from the literature on counterfactual conditionals.