

Embedded questions, lexical aspect, and neg-raising

Attitude verbs are extensively studied for their combinatorial and logical properties. It is, for example, customary to think that a verb like 'think' does not combine with questions because it is neg-(ative) raising. That is, the oddness of (1) is explained by the availability of the inference from (2) to (3).

- (1) #Alice thinks whether plum trees can grow here.
- (2) Alice doesn't think that plum trees can grow here.
- (3) Alice thinks that plum trees can't grow here. [implied by (2)]

But, the aspectual properties of attitude verbs are often overlooked, in particular in their interaction with these verbs' combinatorial properties. Thought reports, for example, may describe events (4–6) in addition to states (1–3). When this happens, combining 'think' with questions becomes possible, in (4), and, as (5) does not imply (6), the neg-raising inference becomes unavailable.

- (4) Alice is thinking whether plum trees can grow here.
- (5) Alice isn't thinking that plum trees can grow here.
- (6) Alice is thinking that plum trees can't grow here. [not implied by (5)]

In this talk, I argue that the aspectual properties of attitude verbs depend on the type of clauses that they combine with and that these properties affect, in turn, the kinds of inferences that they license. That is, understanding the aspectual properties of attitude verbs is key to understanding other aspects of their syntax and semantics.