

The Semantic Dimensions of Disposition Ascriptions

Abstract

Recent work on the semantics of disposition ascriptions claims that dispositional predicates are context sensitive. However, the cases that are put forward to provide a linguistic base for this conclusion are unconvincing. In this paper, I will provide new evidence that dispositional predicates are context sensitive and offer an account of the underlying mechanisms involved. After careful consideration of cases provided in the literature, in addition to cases that are new to the debate, I will propose two dimensions along which dispositional predicates can be sensitive to shifts in context. The first dimension consists in the contextually supplied tester's level of expertise. The second dimension consists in the practices and standards associated with the object of the dispositional predicate in a given context. With these two dimensions of context sensitivity in place, I will offer a unifying semantic account of the varying degrees in which dispositional predicates are context sensitive.