

# **Listening to causation, the "B side" of modality: The English progressive as a case study**

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Back when record companies used to send radio stations vinyl records, the "A side" of the record would be the intended hit single, and there would be another song, not necessarily good enough to be a single, on the "B side".

Similarly, it's been said that modality and causation are "two sides of the same coin" (Ilić 2014), or perhaps the same record. There's no denying that Angelika Kratzer's possible world semantics for modality has gone platinum - it's a powerful and highly useful theory.

Causation, apparently on the "B side" of this record, has not gotten nearly as much play in formal semantics. However, theories of causation can be quite powerful as well, and in particular, can be used to account for intentionality, counter factuality and normality. In this talk, I will put on the B side of the record, and propose that explicit causal relations, appropriately represented, can be in certain cases more useful than quantification over possible worlds.

This line of inquiry is especially relevant in the domain of aspect, where forms are often grammaticalized from non-modal-related items, and where the undeniably causal semantics of verbs is nearby in phrase structure. I consider the English progressive as a case study, arguing that the progressive semantics itself is inherently about temporal location, but that its combination with an explicit causal relation from the verb phrase captures the truth conditions of progressive sentences. Compared to a possible world analysis (Portner 1998), such a theory also aligns more closely with what is known about grammaticalization and phrase structure, so as to improve our theory of the syntax-semantics interface.