Modality at work.
Cognitive, interactional and textual functions of modal markers

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The bulk of the research on modality has been concerned with what modality does in terms of qualifying the proposition. Over the last decade, also other layers of analysis have become prominent within the field. It is now generally accepted that modality as stancetaking has, in addition to its qualificational function, well recognized interactional, textual and rhetorical functions, such as persuading, manipulating, challenging, confronting, accepting, encouraging the flow of discussion, creating cohesive texts (Coates 1987; Kärkkäinen 2003; Simon-Vandenbergen & Aijmer 2007; Englebretson 2007).

This special issue[1] will deal with the discourse functions of modality, including interactional and textual aspects, and the constructional behaviour of modal markers. As for the scope of the studies presented, we will be concerned with the whole super-category of modality, broadly defined as the grammatical domain expressing attitudinal qualifications –whether evidential, epistemic or deontic–, so as to put a finer categorization and reclassification of the domain on the agenda.

Our introduction is structured in the following shape. In the first section, we will focus on the functional definitions that the literature provides for the concept of modality. The attention paid to the different expression types of modality will be dealt with in Section 2. In this section, we will discuss the lexical vs. grammatical status of modal markers as well as their polyfunctionality in discourse contexts. In Section 3, the interactional and textual functions of modality will be examined in greater detail. An overview of the papers as well as of the main findings of the contributions are summarised in Section 4.

1. Modality

The category of modality in the general sense of the speaker's attitude towards what (s)he says, is one of those categories that "establish a relationship between the speaker and his enunciation" (Benveniste, 1970 (1974)). As was made clear by Palmer (1986: 2) this notion is quite vague and leaves open a number of interpretations. As a consequence, a number of different definitions of modality have been proposed in the literature. Four main approaches can be recognized:

(i) Modality is defined as the category expressing the attitude of the speaker towards the propositional content of his/her utterance. This is the approach inherited by Greek and Latin grammatical traditions. This large definition has been accepted by Bally (1932), and is widely shared (cf. Bybee et al. 1994 and Gosselin 2010).

(ii) Modality is defined as the category qualifying the factuality of an utterance. This is the position of Palmer (2001) and Narrog (2009).

(iii) Modality is concerned with the opposition of possibility and necessity. This conception, inherited by modal logics has been largely adopted in linguistics (see Van der Auwera et Plungian (1998: 80), among others).

(iv) Modality expresses the subjectivity of the speaker (Lyons 1977, Palmer, 1986, Halliday 1970).

In what follows we will adopt a large definition of modality and define it as the category that refers to the broad domain of attitudinal qualifications, i.e. qualifications expression the speaker's stance toward, or the speaker's subjective evaluation of, what is being said or the speaker's intersubjective awareness of the co-participant's stance.

The most common qualifications of modality involve epistemic modality, evidentiality and deontic/dynamic modality. Epistemic modality stands for "the evaluation of the chances that a certain hypothetical state of affairs under consideration (or some aspect of it) will occur, is occurring or has occurred in a possible world" (Nuyts 2001: 21). Evidentiality then refers to the "encoding of the speaker's (type of) grounds for making a speech act" (Faller 2002: 2). Both qualifications are traditionally considered to be proposition-oriented. Deontic modality, by contrast, is event-oriented, but can nevertheless be seen as an attitudinal category in that it involves "an indication of the degree to which the 'assessor' (typically, but not necessarily, the speaker) can commit him/herself to the state of affairs in terms of certain principles external to that state of affairs, in this case 'moral' principles'" (cf Nuyts, Byloo & Diepeveen 2005:8; see also Nuyts 2005). These external principles are the forces behind the permission and obligation readings associated with deontic modality.

We take the whole super-category of modality as the object of our analysis, even though we are quite aware of the fact that important distinctions exist between epistemic modality, deontic modality and evidentiality which have been thoroughly discussed -- after Lyons 1977 and Palmer 1986 -- by De Haan 1999, Plungian 2001, Cornillie 2007a, 2009, Nuyts 2009, Squartini 2001, 2004, 2009, Boye 2010).

2. Modal markers

The early literature has mainly been concerned with modal auxiliaries. Most modality accounts deal with their cognitive-semantic definition and their formal integration within a grammatical paradigm (Lyons 1977; Coates 1983; Palmer 1986; van der Auwera & Dendale 2001; Dendale & van der Auwera 2001).

Nowadays, research on other modal expression types has become increasingly important, cf. Nuyts (2001), Simon-Vandenbergen & Aijmer (2007), Squartini (2008). Nuyts' (2001) monograph on epistemic modality compares epistemic modal adjectives, adverbs and auxiliaries and accounts for the cognitive and linguistic differences between them. In the same vein, Dendale & Coltier (2004) compare the epistemic conditional and adverbial constructions of reportive evidentiality in French. The special issue of the *Italian Journal of Linguistics* edited by Mario Squartini (2007) gathers a number of papers focussing on the lexical marking of evidentiality in European languages (Pusch 2007, De Haan 2007, Cornillie 2007b, Pietrandrea 2007,

Wiemer 2007, Giacalone & Topadze 2007, Olbertz 2007, Dendale & Van Bogaert 2007, Aikhenvald 2007, Squartini 2007). Squartini (2008) shows that the study of the lexical expressions of evidentiality is crucial for determining a consistent classificational model of evidentiality as a linguistic category. Simon-Vandenbergen & Aijmer (2007) have studied in an important monograph a specific set of modal adverbs:, i.e. certainty adverbs. The hypothesis that deontic modality is expressed by voice has also been put forward (Paradis 2009).

A number of analyses give an unified account of the semantic and syntactic scope of both modal auxiliaries and other modal markers (Hengeveld 1987, 1988, 1989, Dik 1997, Pietrandrea 2005, 2007, Boye 2010, Narrog 2009, Alcazar 2010).

2.1. The lexical vs. the grammatical status of modal markers

A lot of attention has been paid to the question whether, in line with tense markers, the categories of evidentiality and epistemic modality should fulfil the known criteria of grammatical categories or whether they can be seen as a broad functional category. Aikhenvald (2004) and Lazard (2001) are perhaps the most extreme voices in the debate in that their approach to evidentiality is deliberately limited to paradigms of obligatory evidential markers. This option has the benefit of clarity but means a severe restriction to the study of evidentiality. A much broader view is presented by Squartini (2007) and colleagues in the guest edition of the *Italian Journal of Linguistics* cited above. This special issue focuses on lexical markers of evidentiality. Many of its contributions argue that (i) lexical markers form a continuum with grammatical modal markers along a grammaticalization path; (ii) the semantic classification of lexical markers can be refined on the basis of their degree of grammaticalization.

When speaking of lexical markers, the question also arises as to how we can delimit the borders of what is considered lexical in order to better determine grammar. From a functional point of view, Boye & Harder (2009), following Boye & Harder (2007), answer this question quite satisfactorily. According to them, grammatical expressions belong to a (limited) number of cross-linguistically relevant substance domains and, crucially, involve secondary predication with respect to the main predication, the latter being the lexical part of the linguistic system. From this point of view, evidential and epistemic sentence adverbs such as *reportedly* and *apparently*, and parenthetical constructions such as *it seems* and *I think* are considered as grammatical elements "in so far as their meanings are inherently non-addressable" (Boye & Harder 2009). The notion of "non-addressability" is discussed on the basis of a series of tests.

Boye & Harder's (2007, 2009) account is a step forward in the direction of a solution for the debate on grammatical vs. lexical modality and evidentiality: they not only define secondariness more precisely than most of the tradition, their model also allows for accounting the (layered) variety of uses of linguistic expressions. As they write:

> […] Secondariness is the fundamental property associated with grammatical
> status: grammaticalization occurs in all and only those cases where an
> element becomes coded as secondary in relation to another, thereby creating
> both a new, less prominent element, and a dependency relation with the

associated primary element. Together, this provides a usage-based definition of grammatical status and grammaticalization. (Boye and Harder 2009: 38)

The difference with other views of the lexical vs. grammatical division is that Boye and Harder attribute a crucial role to the discourse status of the grammatical linguistic element, which is always seen in relation to some other linguistic element. At the same time they recognise that "secondariness is reminiscent of the difference between bleached vs. fully lexical meaning, and the difference between having 'main predication' status vs. a more 'discourse-pragmatic' character (Traugott 1982 and Brinton & Traugott 2005: 136-140)".

Building on Boye and Harder's (2009) functional redefinition of grammatical meaning, the contributors to this volume have focused on any marker encoding modality as secondary, ancillary information in discourse: modal verbs, tense, mood, but also adverbs, modal discourse markers, as well as larger constructions.

2.2. *The polyfunctionality of modal markers*

It is cross-linguistically attested that modal auxiliaries, in comparison with other modal expressions, are quite polyfunctional. English *can*, *may* and *must*, and their equivalents in other languages, combine epistemic (evidential), dynamic and deontic readings which vary according to the contexts of use.

The polyfunctionality of modal markers seems to be motivated by the complex communicative strategies of the speaker/writer and their co-participants. As for the speaker, Coates (1987: 130) observes that, "[i]n informal conversation, where participants are trying to achieve simultaneously the goals of (a) saying something on the topic under discussion; (b) being sensitive to the face-needs of the various addressees; (c) qualifying assertions to avoid total commitment to a point of view which they may want to withdraw from; (d) qualifying assertions to encourage the flow of discussion; (e) creating cohesive text, then it does not seem feasible to conclude 'this form expresses *x* and that form expresses *y*'".

The question arises as to which of the other modal markers testify to some kind of polyfunctionality. Adjectives can have epistemic and dynamic readings (Lyons 1977). Evidential verbs, e.g. *parecer,* can have hearsay and inferential reading (Cornillie 2007a). Recent research has shown that epistemic modal adverbs can also be used in different hearer-oriented communicative strategies (cf. Simon-Vandenbergen & Aijmer 2007; Pietrandrea 2009; Cornillie 2010a,b). Unlike modal auxiliaries, modal adverbs do not usually convey dynamic or deontic readings. By contrast, they can have slightly different, post-epistemic, readings in talk-in-interaction, such as in the following example.

Perhaps you wanna help me?

Hence, future research will also have to focus on the specific contexts of use of modal expressions and how they correspond to specific communicative needs. This brings us to the next step, namely, the shift of attention from the set of modal markers and their structural vs. semantic status to the interplay of speech participants, i.e. the interactional dimension.

3. Towards a textual and interactional account of modality

3.1. The interactional dimension

Interaction is a crucial point in the analysis of modality, in that a number of modal markers seem to derive from specific dialogical, i.e. interactional, contexts (Rossari 2008, Rossari & Cojocariu 2008, Kärkkäinen 2003, amongst others). Nowadays several domains of language sciences increasingly focus on interaction (cf. Enfield & Levinson 2006). Interactional linguistics is an approach that takes into consideration how the interaction between speech participants shapes language (see Ochs, Schegloff and Thompson 1996 for an overview). Within this field of linguistics, Conversation Analysis (CA) offers an accurate description of the active and dynamic structure of conversation. The origins of CA are in the field of sociology, which explains why it has only recently entered in discussion with other empirical human sciences such as psychology and linguistics. In a special issue of *Discourse Studies*, Schegloff (2008: 154) differentiates between conversation analysis and cognitive sciences arguing that CA pays crucial attention to "'multiple passes' for each order of organization that is inescapably implicated whenever 'talk in interaction' --actual or potential-- is the state the participants find themselves in". Cognitive sciences, by contrast, are involved in the direct relation between individual intentions and thoughts and the utterances a speaker produces, but lacks a social dimension.

The 'multiple passes' approach is also useful for the analysis of modal qualifications. The interactional approach has challenged cognitive psychologists to look at the dynamics of interaction, and now it also challenges linguists to see modal markers as something more than the speaker's own evaluation of the proposition and to take into account the interactional context of use. From both a discourse-functional and a cognitive-functional point of view, it is worthwhile examining to what extent specific modal and evaluative expressions or specific question types are motivated by the sequential context of interactional discourse, hence, by its turn constructions.

CA-studies have shown that a speaker can display 'shared knowledge' with another speaker by completing another's utterance. That is, speakers can show recipients that they 'know what's on each other's minds' (Sacks 1992: 147). The question then arises as whether specific modal markers appear in the immediate context of turn completion? And if so, are these markers used to confirm alignment with the co-participant or do they serve to sollicit alignment (cf Haddington 2004: 107)?

Interestingly, interactionally oriented studies of modality often use the term "stance", which is much broader and includes non-linguistic expressions (e.g. pauses, gesture, face, eye gaze) in addition to linguistic expressions (e.g. intonation, tag-questions) (cf. Kärkkäinen 2002; Englebretson 2007). Hence, a first contribution of interactional studies is that the focus on (epistemic) stance has directed the attention to new linguistic and communicative phenomena at stake. This widening of the scope of the analysis brings about a couple of new questions. There is, for instance, the issue of the usual impossibility to question epistemic/evidential markers. If interrogative mood and modal markers combine, does this mean that the interrogative mood changes the modal expression by using the utterance as a whole as stance-taking (see Keisanen 2006)? In this context, it is also important to examine to what extent modality interacts with prosody and embodiment (see Goodwin 2006).

3.2. The textual dimension

Another extension of the analysis of modality concerns the textual dimension. Modal markers may also evolve from a purely qualificational function towards textual and rhetorical functions. Interestingly, they may have functions similar to those of connectives (Traugott & Dasher 2002), confirmation markers, adversative markers, continuity and causal markers (Simon-Vandenbergen & Aijmer 2007), and markers of argumentative moves.

It is therefore also crucial to look beyond the sentence. In a recent study of the "higher level dependency" Navajo marker –*go*, Mithun (2008) writes:

"An awareness of processes of extension beyond the boundaries of the sentence can alert us to structures we might otherwise miss. They can also contribute to our understanding of the reasons behind certain basic morphological and syntactic patterns" (Mithun 2008: 113).

In line with this awareness, Simon-Vandenbergen & Aijmer (2007) propose a "syntagmatic approach" to the analysis of the adverbs of modal certainty which aims at exploring the entire context of occurrence of modal markers:

"We have to go beyond the sentence to look for clues regarding interpersonal relations and information structuring factors which have prompted the use of adverbs. Logical and rhetorical relations which are expressed within the sentence in one case may indeed be expressed between sentences in other cases" (Simon-Vandenbergen & Aijmer 2007: 81-82).

A number of studies included in this special issue will observe the behaviour of modal markers beyond the sentence level and will examine the functions that modal markers develop in text construction.

4. The structure of this special issue

This Special Issue is structured in two parts according to the construction extension of the modal markers (focus on the verb vs focus on the propositional and discourse level).

The first part contains three contributions that focus on constructions centred around the verb. This apparently classical topic in the study of modality, is approached in a new fashion by the authors in that they try to spell out interactional functions of modal constructions. This leads to an important revision not only of the meaning of the single markers analyzed but also sheds new light on the relation between modal categories (evidentiality and epistemicity, epistemicity and deonticity, modality and voice).

Mario Squartini studies the values of the epistemic future in Italian. This marker has a "conjectural meaning", which some scholars consider purely epistemic, whereas other scholars consider it evidential. The analysis of this modal value is therefore crucial not only for a semantic definition of the epistemic future, but also for an appraisal of the relationship between epistemic modality and evidentiality. By focussing on the concessive extension of the conjectural future, Squartini shows that

this marker is to be regarded as a marker of factuality, which belongs in the evidential domain, rather than in the epistemic domain. Squartini also conducts a pragmatic analysis of the uses of the concessive future and shows that this marker is used to express intersubjective knowledge based on what has been uttered in the speech situation or on the joint direct perception of the speaker and her interlocutor. His pragmatic analysis reinforces thus the evidential interpretation of the future and contributes to plead for an inclusion of conjectures within the domain of evidentiality.

Andrea Rocci proposes to formalize the procedural meaning of Italian modal verbs by using the description apparatus of argumentation theory. Rocci focuses on two constructions of the Italian necessity modal dovere ('must') associated with an epistemic interpretation, $DEVE_E$ and $DOVREBBE_E$. as they are employed in a large journalistic corpus. He disentangles the basic values of the two constructions: $DEVE_E$ is analyzed as an inferential evidential modal selecting a conversational background combining an epistemic component and a doxastic component, whereas $DOVREBBE_E$ is analyzed as a deontically-based modal involving a double conversational background consisting of the conjunction of an alethic or deontic modal base and a conditional restriction to be saturated by a set of non-factual propositions. Rocci's approach also sheds new light on the possible relation between deontic and evidential meanings.

Tanja Mortelmans conducts a contrastive analysis of modal verbs in three Germanic languages: English, German and Dutch. She shows that the English modals present a higher frequency as compared to their German and Dutch counterparts. This difference in frequency is explained with the fact that the English modals present a number of inferential and intersubjective functions that in Dutch and German are usually conveyed by markers other than modal verbs.

The second part is concerned with the constructional nature of modal markers, involving different degrees of complexity. Modal markers can be regarded as conventional pairs of form and modal meaning located at any level of linguistic structure. Three papers of this part focus on modal meanings conveyed by complex constructions (Mithun and Rossari analyze constructions detectable in the final position of the utterance. Kärkkäinen studies a construction typically occurring in the initial position); whereas Cuenca & Marín's paper takes the analysis of modal markers beyond the strictly proposition-oriented view of modality, by examining extensions of modal markers evolving into discourse markers.

Marianne Mithun proposes a classification of the functions of tag constructions in Mohawk, based on the analysis of their syntactic and prosodic properties as well as on the observation of the typical listener's response. Mithun shows that besides a well recognized epistemic function, tag constructions serve interactive and textual functions. In some uses the epistemic function is foregrounded: the tag serves primarily to indicate reduced commitment on the part of the speaker. In others the interactive function takes priority: the speaker may be quite certain of the truth of the proposition, but wish to heighten the involvement of the listener in the conversation. By using tag constructions, the speaker invites the listener to share the setting of a scene, the establishing of a topic or the highlighting of crucial points in a narrative. These constructions show functional extensions beyond both epistemic modality and interactional strategies, in that they serve discourse structuring functions. Mithun both provides a crucial explanation of the relation between interaction and text structuring functions of basically modal markers and introduces a

new parameter of formal classification of modal constructions by taking into account the response of the listener in her analysis.

Corinne Rossari conducts a syntactic and semantic analysis of three French evidential constructions: *faut croire* (roughly 'one should believe'), *on dirait* (roughly 'one would say') and *paraît* ('it seems'), which typically occur in a detached sentence-final position. She highlights the role played by the syntactic position in determining the evidential value of the markers under examination. Markers occurring in a detached final position may take the value of confirmations on an assessment. They condense in other words polyphonic patterns that can be interpreted as a general indication of indirect shared knowledge. The evidential value of each construction therefore is described as the result of the composition of its lexical meaning with the semantic interpretation of its syntactic position.

Elise Kärkkäinen examines the occurrences of the construction *I thought* typically occurring in the sentence-initial position in the Santa Barbara Corpus of American English. She shows that this construction is regularly associated with a small number of "conversational formats" such as the introduction of an explicit evaluative or epistemic stance, the change in the epistemic stance of the speaker, the report of thoughts of the current speaker, the expression of an affective stance involving disbelief, astonishment or impatience. A formal analysis shows that these formats are each characterized by a reduced number of syntactic and prosodic properties and that body conduct (especially the speaker's eye-gaze) also plays in role in determining the stance taking.

In their account of *clar* 'clear', María Josep Cuenca and María Josep Marín show that the study of modal markers can benefit from an analysis of the relationship and overlap with discourse markers. That is, they indicate that some markers express evidentiality but also bracket units of talk, as discourse markers typically do. Cuenca and Marín propose a cline from a prototypically modal meaning to a prototypically structural meaning and characterise some of the intermediate areas by describing the use of *clar/és clar* in spoken Catalan, and by briefly illustrating some uses of *és que* as a fixed modal marker.

4.1. Combined approaches to modality

Each paper of the proposed issue is the result of a deliberate combination of approaches to some aspect of modality. Below we present succinctly the main results of this collective work:

Some authors focus on how specific grammatical properties of modal markers respond to interactional needs (Mithun, Rossari, Kärkkäinen). Other authors propose to refine the semantic description of modal markers by taking into account their interactional properties (Squartini, Rocci, Mortelmans, Cuenca & Marín).

New attention is paid to the reaction of the hearer to the modalized utterance. The analysis of this response is taken into account in the functional definition of the modal markers under examination (in particular by Mithun, Rossari). Usually neglected formal aspects of modal constructions, such as their prosody or their syntactic patterning are also considered (Mithun).

The composite approach adopted by the contributors leads not only to a redefinition of modal markers, but also brings about a reappraisal of the general typology of modal qualifications (Squartini, Rocci, Mithun).

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