

EPISTEMIC MODALITY AND DISCOURSE CONNECTIVITY

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Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es estudiar la relación entre los "modales epistémicos" y conectores discursivos como BUT y ALTHOUGH. Se demuestra que este problema se puede explicar mediante la noción de pertinencia dependiente. Según este análisis, la función de los conectores discursivos y pragmáticos consiste en dirigir la atención del destinatario hacia un supuesto contextual que, de un modo u otro, es incompatible con la proposición expresada en la cláusula modalizada. Como resultado, se debilita el compromiso del emisor con respecto a la verdad de la proposición modalizada.

Palabras clave: modalidad epistémica, conectores, pertinencia, interpretación

Abstract

This article sets out to account for the relation between the so-called epistemic modals and discourse and pragmatic connectives such as BUT and ALTHOUGH. I will try to show that the notion of dependent relevance is powerful enough to account for this problem. In this analysis, the role of discourse and pragmatic connectives is to guide the hearer's attention towards a piece of evidence which is, in one way or another, inconsistent with the proposition expressed in the modalized clause. As a result, the speaker's confidence or commitment to the truth of the modalized proposition is weakened.

Key words: epistemic modality, pragmatic connectives, relevance, interpretation.

Résumé

Cet article propose l'étude de la relation entre "les modaux épistémiques" et les connecteurs discursifs du type BUT et ALTHOUGH. Nous démontrons que ce problème peut se résoudre grâce à la notion de pertinence dépendante. D'après notre analyse, la fonction des connecteurs discursifs consiste à attirer l'attention du destinataire vers une supposition contextuelle, qui devient incompatible avec la proposition exprimée par la période modalisée. Comme résultat de ce processus le compromis de l'émetteur s'affaiblit par rapport à la vérité de la proposition modalisée.

Mots clés: modaux épistémiques, connecteurs discursifs, pertinence, interprétation

Sumario

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0. Introduction

In both the philosophical and linguistic literature on modality there are those who assume that there are various different types of modality (possibility, necessity, temporal, causal, deontic, etc.), and hence that sentences containing modal auxiliary verbs may be semantically ambiguous (cf. Palmer (1979), Coates (1983), Leech (1971), Marino (1973), Anderson (1971), Rescher (1968)). There are others who hold that modal auxiliaries have a single unitary linguistic content, and that the apparent ambiguities can be resolved by appealing to the situation and the domain of discourse over which they are uttered (cf. Ehrman (1966); Sweetser (1990); Perkins (1983)). My working hypothesis conforms to the latter view, which I support using a version of Relevance Theory (cf. Berbeira Gardón (1996a)). In this case the semantics of the modals turns out to be quite straightforward, and the interest in their analysis lies in the pragmatic operations performed by the listener's inferential mechanism. Other relevance-theoretic approaches to the English modals have been presented by Walton (1988), Groefsema (1992, 1995) and Klinge (1993). All these approaches have mostly concentrated on the semantics of the modals, and on how these verbs contribute to utterance interpretation. Yet, there are certain aspects of the interpretation of modals which have remained hitherto untreated within the relevance-theoretic framework.

Among the topics that called for some consideration in the relevance theory literature was the role played by the modals in the expression of politeness or, in other words, the 'politeness interpretation' of modals. Carretero Lapeyre (this volume) argues that the epistemic interpretation of MAY, WILL and MUST does not always implicate lack of absolute knowledge because in certain contexts it can be due only to politeness. She notes that "the modals in this 'politeness interpretation' implicate the communication of a wider array of weaker assumptions, thus conveying vagueness to the utterances in which they occur"¹. Although, at first sight, it might seem misleading to include socio-pragmatic phenomena such as politeness in a psychological theory of utterance interpretation, Carretero Lapeyre's analysis seems to show that this is not an entirely unreasonable enterprise. In fact, her view of how the speaker's assumptions about her social relationships with the hearer are communicated seems to me quite plausible, since the inferential process is in no way affected by the nature of these assumptions. Be that as it may, here I do not intend to deal with the politeness interpretation of modals, rather, the aim of this paper is to analyse two further issues which have been raised by Carretero Lapeyre, on the assumption that both are rooted in the same problem that of the interpretation of modals in conjoined utterances.

The first issue arises from the basic meanings Carretero Lapeyre proposes for WILL and MUST. For the former she proposes the following:

¹ Unfortunately, it falls outside the scope of this paper to evaluate Carretero Lapeyre's paper in detail

WILL: p is entailed by the set of all propositions which have a bearing on p, and the world type is potential

which, as she notes, corresponds to the one proposed for MUST in Berbeira Gardón (1996a). The latter is semantically characterized as follows:

MUST: not-p is not entailed by any propositions of the set which has a bearing on p, and the world type is potential².

In a footnote, Carretero Lapeyre (p. 244, fn.3) acknowledges her intuition that these semantic characterizations of WILL and MUST are too strong, "insofar as instances of both may coexist with counterevidence of which the speaker does not dispose". As examples she provides (1) and (2):

- (1) I think Smith will win the race although he was ill yesterday.
- (2) To judge by his look Peter must be having a good time, although his cheerfulness may be only apparent.

I will try to show that the difficulties to explain these two examples are due to the fact that the basic meanings proposed for WILL and MUST are inadequate. A proper semantic characterization of these verbs together with the relevance-theoretic account of discourse and pragmatic connectives (cf. Blakemore (1987), Wilson and Sperber (1993)) may be the key to explain how these utterances are interpreted.

The second issue I will be concerned with is the so-called 'concessive' use of the modals, where the speaker can have absolute knowledge of the truth of the modalized proposition, as in Carretero Lapeyre's example:

- (3) Mary may be friendly, but she is never punctual

What these examples have in common is the fact that they are conjoined utterances in which the first part contains a modal auxiliary, and the second communicates a proposition which, in some way or other, affects the degree of confidence or commitment of the speaker to the truth of the modalized proposition. The way the second proposition must be processed is indicated by the discourse connectives (ALTHOUGH, BUT), which in Relevance Theory are analysed in procedural terms, as encoding information about how the associated utterance is to be processed.

In the next sections I will try to show that the basic meanings Carretero Lapeyre

² This meaning parallels the one set forth in Kluge (1993: 351) "The SITUATION REPRESENTATION does not turn out not to be a true description of a WORLD SITUATION"

proposes for MUST and WILL are in fact too strong when trying to explain these types of examples, and will briefly outline how their interpretation might proceed following the relevance-theoretic account of the English modals developed in Berbeira Gardón (1996a) and the relevance-theoretic analysis of discourse and pragmatic connectives

1. The basic meaning of MUST

Let us start by considering the interpretation process of (2). Its logical form would be (2^l):

- (2^l) To judge by his look not-[_p Peter be having a good time] is not entailed by any propositions of the set which has a bearing on p, and the world type is potential, although there is at least some set of propositions such that [_q his cheerfulness be only apparent] is compatible with it, and the world type is potential.

It should be noted that in the first part of the utterance, the assumptions which have a bearing on the proposition expressed ([_p Peter be having a good time]) are those related to Peter's cheerful look (as explicitly stated in the first phrase), and this set is the one the hearer will have to focus on in order to reach the conclusion that it is not the case that Peter is not having a good time. This set might include propositions such as (a-d):

- (a) Peter has got a smile of contentment on his face.
- (b) Peter is talking to everybody at the party.
- (c) Peter is dancing wildly
- (d) Peter looks very cheerful.

The contribution of MUST to the interpretation of (2), according to Carretero Lapeyre's proposal, seems to be that none of the propositions (a-d) entails that Peter is not having a good time. Her intuition that the meaning of MUST is too strong is based on the feeling that the information conveyed in the second clause ("his cheerfulness may be only apparent") contradicts the information conveyed by the modal, given that the truth of the proposition expressed in it ([_q Peter's cheerfulness be only apparent]) would entail not-p. However, being modified by 'epistemic' MAY, the second proposition does not have a truth value, that is, the speaker does not entertain it as a true description of a state of affairs but as a mere possibility. The problem seems to be that the second clause has a bearing on p, because the truth of p depends on the truth of q. If q is the case, then not-p ensues. This is problematical for Carretero Lapeyre's basic meaning, because it doesn't make any sense to communicate that not-p is not entailed by any propositions of the set which have a bearing on p, and that, simultaneously, there is at least one proposition such that it has a bearing

on p but entails not-p

In other words, if the speaker entertains the second clause as part of the evidence for the proposition [_p Peter be having a good time], there is a contradiction, because the inherent proposition expressed in q entails not-p, since the possibility that Peter's cheerfulness is only apparent contradicts the belief that he is having a good time. Clearly, his cheerfulness is merely a façade, and the implications are that Peter is not really enjoying himself. It seems to me that the problem arises from Carretero Lapeyre's negative view of the contribution of MUST as a roundabout process on the part of the speaker to arrive at the entailment of all the propositions available to him towards the modalized proposition. In my view, this negative characterization is unnecessary

To articulate a viable explanation for this example, it would be essential to postulate a minimal condition of consistency regarding the proposition at issue, viz if the speaker believes that p, then the speaker does not believe that not-p. Given this condition, I will take the two clauses as two separate processing units and will show below that the second clause must be processed in terms of the procedural information encoded by ALTHOUGH, the connective giving rise to a relation of *dependent relevance* between the propositions it connects³.

Before dealing with the contribution of ALTHOUGH in this example, let us consider the contribution of MUST as characterized in Berbeira Gardón (1993, 1996a) The basic meaning proposed is the following.

MUST: p is entailed by the set of all propositions which have a bearing on p, and
 the world type is potential⁴

In order to see how the interpretation might proceed, let us first reconsider (2) (repeated here):

- (2) To judge by his look Peter must be having a good time, although his cheerfulness may be only apparent,

whose logical form is (2''):

³ By saying that the two clauses constitute two separate processing units I do not mean that they carry the presumption of optimal relevance individually. They constitute a single utterance and are linked by a relation of dependent relevance. This relation arises when the information made available by the interpretation of one segment is used in establishing the contextual effects of the next.

⁴ For the differences between this basic meaning and the one proposed in Groszema (1992, 1995), cf. Berbeira Gardón (1996a)

- (2") To judge by his look [_p Peter be having a good time] is entailed by the set of all propositions which have a bearing on p, and the world type is potential, although there is at least some set of propositions such that [_q his cheerfulness may be only apparent] is compatible with it, and the world type is potential.

As mentioned above, the contextual assumptions which have a bearing on the proposition expressed ([_p Peter be having a good time]) are those related to Peter's look, and this set is the one the hearer will have to concentrate on in order to reach the conclusion that Peter is having a good time. This set of propositions was (a-d):

- (a) Peter has got a smile of contentment on his face.
- (b) Peter is talking to everybody at the party.
- (c) Peter is dancing wildly.
- (d) Peter looks very cheerful

On considering this evidence (and assuming that Peter is not being hypocritical), the hearer should reach the conclusion that Peter is having a good time, because all the evidence entails this proposition. However, this does not explain why the complete utterance is interpreted epistemically. The relevance of the second segment ("his cheerfulness may be only apparent") also has to be explained

There is a feeling of inconsistency between the two propositions expressed in the utterance. This aspect of the interpretation of (2) is related to the procedural information linguistically encoded by ALTHOUGH. More specifically, ALTHOUGH communicates that the proposition it introduces is an argument for a conclusion which contrasts with the proposition expressed in the first segment, in such a way that it enters in contradiction with it but does not eliminate it. This contradiction without elimination forces an epistemic interpretation, given that the speaker cannot believe p and not-p at the same time. Our example communicates that, although to judge by his look Peter must be having a good time, there is at least some evidence (for example, that Peter sometimes behaves in that way even when he is actually bored) which suggests that Peter's cheerfulness is only apparent. If this were the case, the conclusion arrived at from the set of propositions (a-d) would be false, that is, we would conclude that Peter is *not* having a good time. In this example, it is then inadmissible to infer p from (a-d) solely on the basis of the fact that p follows from (a-d). However, given the contribution of MAY to the second clause, the truth of the proposition expressed in it [_q his cheerfulness be only apparent] is undetermined. This in turn implies that the modalized proposition in the first clause cannot be categorically denied, i.e. that "John be having a good time" could be perfectly conceivable as a conclusion if the situation described in [_q His cheerfulness be only apparent] turned out to be false. This explains why this utterance is interpreted epistemically.

In other words, the most natural interpretation of this example is that in which the first part of the utterance contains a modal auxiliary (MUST) which encourages the hearer to focus on all the evidence (a-d) as an argument for a conclusion p ("Peter be having a good time"). The second part must be processed as inconsistent with that evidence, thus attenuating the speaker's confidence in the truth of the proposition p.

From what has been said in this section, it seems clear that Carretero Lapeyre's semantic characterization of WILL would have to be revised so as not to coincide with the one I have proposed for MUST. The interaction between the proposition modified by WILL and the one introduced by ALTHOUGH will be shown to be parallel to that of the MUST example

2. The basic meaning of WILL

Let us first remember the basic meaning Carretero Lapeyre assigns to WILL:

WILL: p is entailed by the set of all propositions which have a bearing on p, and the world type is potential

This linguistic content of WILL, she notes, would run into problems when faced with examples such as (1) (repeated here):

- (1) I think Smith will win the race although he was ill yesterday,

where the proposition expressed in the second clause ("he was ill yesterday") would count as counterevidence against Smith winning the race

The question that needs to be raised at this point is what the set of propositions would be which would have a bearing on the proposition expressed. Let us suppose that this set of propositions is something like (i-l):

- (i) Smith has the reputation of being the best runner.
- (j) Smith has been training very hard for the last few weeks
- (k) Smith has broken the world record very recently.
- (l) Smith has won most of the competitions he has entered this year.

No doubt, the truth of all these propositions would help the speaker fixate, as the best hypothesis, the belief that there is a very strong chance of Smith winning the race, but *none* of them would entail the proposition [p Smith win the race]. Even if it is true that he has the reputation of being the best runner, that he has been training very hard for the last few weeks, that he is the world record holder and that he has won most of the competitions he has entered, it can still turn out to be the case that he does *not* win the race.

It seems to me that the set of propositions (i-I) would play a role in the speaker fixating her belief that Smith will win the race but they are not at all relevant in the interpretation process. I agree with Ehrman's (1966) view that the contribution of WILL to the utterances in which it occurs is to signal that "the occurrence of the predication is guaranteed", which, as noted by Groefsema (1995:63), can be interpreted as "don't worry about the evidence, concentrate on the proposition that will modifies".

It is not my intention here to set forth a definitive semantic characterization of WILL. However, I want to suggest that the linguistic content of this modal shares the same notion of potentiality as the rest of the members of the set but, on the contrary, does not relate the proposition expressed with any set of assumptions. The only function of WILL is to communicate that the speaker considers the proposition true, and that this proposition must be located in a potential world. According to Wilson and Sperber's definition of a potential world (Wilson and Sperber (1988: 85)), on uttering a sentence containing WILL, the speaker would be communicating that the proposition expressed can already be true or become true in the future. The context will decide whether the proposition is true in the present or in the future, thus establishing by a process of inferential enrichment whether the utterance will have an epistemic or a deontic interpretation. In this sense, I agree with Klinge's claim (1993: 346) that WILL does not have future time reference as part of its semantics. The hearer will interpret (1) as communicating that the speaker believes that Smith will win the race in a relatively short space of time (a few minutes, a few hours, a few days). Of course, to recover this much is not to recover a complete propositional form. In relevance theory the output of linguistic semantics is a logical form, i.e. an incomplete expression in the language of thought. In order to recover a complete language of thought expression, pragmatic enrichment must take place. Part of this process of inferential enrichment will involve the hearer making some assumption about the time at which the event described in (1) will take place. To see that such an assumption is standardly made, compare the sentences in (5).

- (5) a. You won't be wanting breakfast then, will you?
b. I will buy a big house when I become a doctor.
c. That will be the postman

The relevance of (5a) normally depends on the hearer assuming that the speaker does not intend to have breakfast within a relatively short space of time (this morning, within the next few hours, etc). On the other hand, if the speaker is young enough, the information that the event described in (5b) is going to occur at some time or other in the future is probably relevant enough on its own (i.e. it probably allows the hearer to derive some representation of a time in the distant future). On hearing a noise outside the door, the utterance of (5c) allows the hearer to derive some representation of a situation in the present time ("The person who is outside the house at the moment of utterance is probably the postman"). Such assumptions about time are a standard part of the interpretation process and are always

constrained by the criterion of consistency with the principle of relevance

The arguments above (that WILL encodes the notion of potentiality with no entailment relation between the proposition expressed and any set of assumptions, and no time reference as part of its semantics) allow us to propose a tentative basic meaning for WILL along the following lines:

WILL p is true, and the world type is potential⁵.

A semantic characterization of WILL along these lines would avoid the problems that arise from Carretero Lapeyre's view of the linguistic semantic content of WILL as an entailment relation between the proposition expressed and a set of assumptions, and would explain examples like (1) (repeated here):

(1) I think Smith will win the race although he was ill yesterday.

Processing the second clause of (1), the hearer is expected to derive the proposition (1c) on the basis of a contextual assumption like (1a) and the information explicitly conveyed by the second clause of (1), repeated below as (1b). The proposition in (1c), as ALTHOUGH indicates, is relevant in virtue of being a contradiction of the proposition expressed in the first clause of (1).

- (1) a. If Smith was ill yesterday, he will probably not win the race
 b. Smith was ill yesterday
 c. Smith will probably not win the race

As with the MUST example, we have here another case where the proposition introduced by ALTHOUGH is an argument for a conclusion that enters in contradiction with the proposition *explicitly* expressed in the modalized clause but does not eliminate it. It merely weakens the speaker's confidence or commitment to its truth. This explains why (1) is interpreted epistemically. The epistemic flavour of this example is not then ascribable to the presence of the modal auxiliary but to the relation of dependent relevance to which ALTHOUGH gives rise. I will propose below an epistemic function for ALTHOUGH that will help us explain the examples we have been discussing somewhat more fully

⁵ Klinge (1993: 345) suggests a similar paraphrase for WILL, though he gives it a rather different rationale

3. Epistemic ALTHOUGH

In the relevance-theory literature certain linguistic devices are analysed as carrying procedural information about the inferential phase of comprehension, that is, they guide the interpretation process by specifying certain properties of context and contextual effects⁶. Given that it is in the interest of both speaker and hearer that the processing effort required is offset by the contextual effects it gives rise to, then, it is reasonable that the speaker exploits the hearer's search for relevance by trying to minimise the effort required to process the information conveyed by the utterance. How does the speaker do this? If she intends a specific interpretation, she may guide the hearer with the aid of these linguistic devices towards that interpretation by facilitating a certain set of contextual assumptions. These devices are then thought of as constraints on the hearer's choice of context and contextual effects, i.e. as constraints on the pragmatic interpretation of utterances. The devices that can be used as constraints are quite numerous and among them we find certain discourse and pragmatic connectives like the ones in the examples we are discussing, BUT and ALTHOUGH. The problem seems to be that certain discourse and pragmatic connectives, for example ALTHOUGH and EVEN IF, seem to perform very similar functions so that it would be difficult for us to tell the difference between ALTHOUGH and EVEN IF in the following examples:

- (6) (a) Even if you don't like him you can still be polite.
(b) Although you don't like him you can still be polite

The problem is, then, how to distinguish between them. Usually a given discourse or pragmatic connective takes on more than a single function, and this cluster of functions distinguishes it from other words. For example, ALTHOUGH and EVEN IF perform similar functions in (6a-b), but ALTHOUGH seems to have an additional one which EVEN IF cannot perform. This I shall call the 'epistemic' function of ALTHOUGH. Compare (7-14):

- (7) (a) To judge by his look Peter must be having a good time
(b) although his cheerfulness may be only apparent
- (8) *(a) To judge by his look Peter must be having a good time.
(b) even if his cheerfulness may be only apparent

⁶ In utterance interpretation, the hearer will choose that particular context in which the utterance to be processed yields enough contextual effects to make the processing worthwhile. There are three kinds of contextual effects: contextual implication, strengthening of an assumption and contradiction and elimination of an assumption (Cf Sperber and Wilson (1995: 108-117)).

- (9) (a) I think Smith will win the race
(b) although he was ill yesterday.
- (10) (a) I think Smith will win the race
(b) even if he was ill yesterday
- (11) (a) You must be home by ten
(b) even if you don't want to
- (12) *(a) You must be home by ten
(b) although you don't want to.
- (13) (a) You must be home by ten
(b) although you may arrive later if you phone.
- (14) *(a) You must be home by ten
(b) even if you may arrive later if you phone.

In (7a), (9a) and (13a), the modalized proposition is presented with a strong degree of commitment on the part of the speaker in (7a), *MUST* communicates that all the evidence entails the truth of the proposition, in (9a) the proposition "Smith win the race", given the presence of *WILL*, is presented as true in the future; in (13a), which is interpreted deontically, all the evidence entails the truth of the proposition "you be home by ten", that is, the hearer is being told to make true the state of affairs described in it

By contrast, (7b), (9b) and (13b) function as arguments for the conclusion that it may be the case that the state of affairs described in (7a), (9a) and (13a) respectively will not turn out to be true: in (7), as shown above, the possibility that Peter's cheerfulness is only apparent is an argument for the conclusion that the state of affairs described in (7a) is possibly false; in (9b), the proposition "he was ill yesterday" counts as counterevidence for the proposition expressed in (9a) becoming true, because it functions as an argument for the conclusion that "Smith will not win the race", (13b) communicates that if a certain condition is met (if the hearer phones the speaker) the proposition expressed in (13a) does not necessarily have to be made true

From these examples we can conclude that the function of *ALTHOUGH* is to introduce a proposition which functions as an argument for a conclusion that enters in contradiction with the proposition expressed in the first part but is not strong enough to eliminate it.

In relevance theory, when there is a contradiction, the strength of the two contradictory assumptions must be compared. If one is found to be stronger than the other, the weaker one will be erased.

It is interesting to note that in (2) (repeated here):

- (2) To judge by his look Peter must be having a good time, although his cheerfulness may be only apparent.

the contradiction between the two assumptions ("Peter is having a good time"/ "Peter is not having a good time") is not resolved. As Sperber and Wilson (1995: 115) point out "there are situations where this straightforward method of resolving contradictions yields no result: for instance because the device is unable to compare the strength of the two contradictory assumptions, or because they are equally strong". (2) is a good example of the first case: the deductive device is unable to compare the strength of the two contradictory assumptions. The result of this failure in resolving the contradiction is that the hearer is presented with a potential proposition⁷, i.e. a proposition whose truth conditions are left unspecified. The speaker communicates that he doesn't know whether it is the case that p or whether it is the case that not-p

In other words, ALTHOUGH presents the hearer with a piece of evidence that explains why the speaker uses the modal instead of the non-modal counterpart. The reason why the speaker uses the modalized proposition in the first clause ("Peter *must* be having a good time") instead of a categorical assertion ("Peter *is* having a good time"), is that he does not have absolute certainty of the truth of the proposition. The clause introduced by ALTHOUGH, then, provides evidence for the source of the speaker's uncertainty (if his cheerfulness is only apparent, then it follows that Peter is not having a good time). This explains the epistemic flavour of the examples we are discussing: the speaker's confidence or commitment to the truth of the modalized proposition is weakened⁸.

This so-called epistemic function of ALTHOUGH cannot be performed by EVEN IF, as can be seen by considering examples (8), (10) and (14) (8) and (14) are pragmatically anomalous; in (10), the proposition expressed in (b) affects the attitudinal description "I think" rather than the truth of the modalized proposition in the first clause.

There are other kinds of interpretation where EVEN IF is preferred. Among these, we find the deontic interpretations of the modals. Consider (11) and (12) (repeated here):

⁷ This notion was first defined in Berbera Gardón (1996a).

⁸ This weakening, however, should not be considered as a fourth type of contextual effect as suggested by Seuren (1987: 732). As Sperber and Wilson (1995: 294 n.2d) point out, weakenings are allowed in their formal definition of the conditions under which a contextualisation has contextual effects. The definition is formulated as follows: "Let C be a context and P a set of new premises. Let *Conclusions of P* be the set of conclusions deducible from P alone. *Conclusions of C* the set of conclusions deducible from C alone, and *Conclusions of P U C* the set of conclusions deducible from the union of P and C. Let two assumptions with the same content but with different strengths count as two different assumptions. Then the contextualisation of P in C has no contextual effect if and only if the two following conditions are met:

- (i) *Conclusions of C* is a subset of *Conclusions of P U C*;
- (ii) the complement of *Conclusions of C* with respect to *Conclusions of P U C* is a subset of *Conclusions of P*.

If conditions (i) and (ii) are not both met, then the contextualisation of P in C has some contextual effect". (Sperber and Wilson (1995: 286, n 26)

- (11) You must be home by ten even if you don't want to
(12) * You must be home by ten although you don't want to

In (11), the first part is clearly interpreted deontically. The function of **EVEN IF** is to indicate that the proposition it introduces raises an expectation (if the hearer does not want to be home by ten, then he will not be home by ten) which is denied by the speech act performed in the first part, which is a command. If we substituted **EVEN IF** for **ALTHOUGH**, as in (12), the utterance would be anomalous.

4. The 'concessive' use of the modals

It only remains for us to consider the so-called 'concessive' use of the modals, which, from Carretero Lapeyre's viewpoint, is still a matter for further research. According to her, what has to be explained is the fact that in this use, "just as in the politeness interpretations (...), the speaker can have absolute knowledge of the truth of the proposition". I cannot see anything problematical in this kind of interpretation. Rather, I would say that the idea behind Carretero Lapeyre's suggestion is that **MAY** is always an epistemic modal.

In fact, the semantic characterization of **MAY** presented in Berbeira Gardón (1993, 1996a), and adopted by Carretero Lapeyre, is open to misinterpretation. Let us first remember this linguistic semantic content.

MAY. There is at least some set of propositions such that *p* is compatible with it, and the world type is potential⁹.

At first sight, it might seem that the phrase "there is at least some set of propositions" implies that the speaker does not have absolute knowledge of the truth of the proposition and hence that every utterance containing **MAY** must have an epistemic interpretation. But this is not always the case (deontic interpretations of utterances containing **MAY** constitute an obvious example of this). Let us consider Carretero Lapeyre's example:

- (3) Mary may be friendly, but she is never punctual.

It would be rather difficult to find an epistemic interpretation for (3). Rather I would

⁹ For the differences between this basic meaning and the one proposed in Groefsema (1992, 1995), cf. Berbeira Gardón (1996a).

consider this utterance as a case of echoic use where the speaker's aim is to express his attitude towards an opinion that a particular person has previously expressed. In relevance theory, echoic utterances are cases of interpretive use where the thought of the speaker, which is interpreted by the utterance, is itself an interpretation. What they interpret is normally a thought of someone other than the speaker. That is, they are second-degree interpretations of someone else's thought. In most cases, these interpretations achieve relevance by informing the hearer of the fact that the speaker has in mind what some individual has previously expressed and has a certain attitude to it. In Berbeira Gardón (1996a), MAY has been semantically specialized for interpretive use. It is not surprising, then, that this modal can be very frequently found in utterances like (3)¹⁰. The most general context for (3) would be (15):

- (15) He: Mary is very friendly
She: Mary may be friendly, but she is never punctual.

Here, by answering with the modalized utterance, the speaker is indicating her own attitude towards her interlocutor's thought. The contribution of MAY to her utterance is to communicate that she partially endorses the first speaker's opinion, because there is at least some set of propositions such that "Mary be friendly" is compatible with it (for instance, that Mary always has a nice smile on her face, that she is very talkative, that she is always there when her friends need her, and so on). The reason why she only partially endorses the first speaker's opinion is expressed in the second clause, which communicates that being friendly is not entirely compatible with being unpunctual¹¹. In this example, BUT introduces a contrast between two propositions (the proposition in the first clause communicating a positive quality of the subject, her being friendly, and the one in the second clause communicating a negative one, given that a friendly person is not expected by the speaker to make her wait)¹².

According to Coates (1983: 135-6), the concessive interpretation is a special usage of epistemic MAY, "where it can be paraphrased by a subordinate clause introduced by *although*"¹³. A clear example of this usage is illustrated in (16):

¹⁰ Coates (1983: 153) considers the concessive use of MAY as 'important', accounting for eleven per cent of the Survey sample, five per cent of the Lancaster sample.

¹¹ In some contexts it could imply absolutely no character reference to Mary whatsoever.

¹² BUT has been widely treated in the relevance theory literature. For detailed accounts, cf. Blakemore (1987, 1989), Rouchota (1990).

¹³ The paraphrase is not very clear in the case of (3) ("Although it is possible that Mary is very friendly, she is never punctual"). In fact, as pointed above, (3) cannot be interpreted epistemically. If, following Coates, we consider the concessive interpretation

- (16) A much better solution exists in the scheme drawn up by the London County Council's architects. It may not be perfect, but at least it has some of the qualities / .../ that one looks for in a modern city centre¹⁴

In a context in which someone has previously expressed that the scheme drawn up by the London County Council's architects is not perfect, (16) would be interpreted as an echoic utterance, and the interpretation process would be similar to that of (3) above. However, (16) can also have an epistemic interpretation. If the first utterance is interpreted as a suggestion and the proposition expressed in it has not previously been claimed not to be perfect by anyone else¹⁵, the second utterance will be interpreted epistemically. The contribution of MAY to the meaning of (16) is to communicate that there is at least some evidence such that the negation of the proposition expressed (not [_p The scheme be perfect]) is compatible with it. Our intuitive interpretation of this example as a concessive interpretation is due to the presence of BUT rather than MAY. In this case BUT introduces a denial of expectation: the fact that the scheme is not perfect raises the expectation that it does not have any of the qualities that one looks for in a modern city centre. This expectation is contradicted and eliminated by the proposition introduced by BUT.

Summing up this section, in order to explain the interpretation process of examples like (3) and (16), epistemicity and concessivity must be separated as depending on two different lexical items. While the former depends on how the basic meaning of MAY is to be enriched, the latter depends on the use of BUT. Furthermore, utterances like (3), where the speaker has absolute knowledge of the truth of the modalized proposition and BUT introduces a contrast, are echoic. Those like (16), where the modalized proposition is interpreted epistemically and BUT introduces a denial of expectation, are, in my view, pure cases of concessive utterances.

5. Conclusion

The issues which have been discussed here seem to be rooted in the same problem, that of the interpretation of a conjoined utterance which includes a modalized clause followed by another one introduced by a discourse connective, as can be seen by considering, once again, some of the examples we have discussed

a special usage of 'epistemic' MAY, the concessivity is not ascribable to the modal auxiliary but to the relation between the two propositions expressed in the utterance

¹⁴ Coates (1983: 135)

¹⁵ The higher-level explicature would be, "Speaker suggests that the scheme drawn up by the London County Council's architects is a much better solution".

- (1) I think Smith will win the race although he was ill yesterday.
- (2) To judge by his look Peter must be having a good time, although his cheerfulness may be only apparent.
- (3) Mary may be friendly, but she is never punctual

I hope to have shown that the problem can be accounted for by assuming that the pragmatic connectives give rise to a relation of dependent relevance between the propositions they connect. Their function is to guide the hearer's attention towards a piece of evidence which is in some way or other inconsistent with the proposition expressed in the modalized clause. As a result, the speaker's confidence or commitment to the truth of the modalized proposition is weakened.

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