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ON MODALITY IN CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

J.B. Carroll (1968, p. 113–122), looking at contrastive linguistics from the angle of the psychology of learning, takes a positive view of the subject. He and others (see Nickel, Wagner 1975, p. 248) have called attention again to the well-known fact of interlingual convergences and divergences. The psychologists will be interested in the relationship between convergence and divergence phenomena and the learning process. And what a fertile field is the area of modality in this respect. Psychology must account for the speaker's attitude which marks the decision how to assess the truth of a proposed statement. The modals have the function of marking the illocutionary potential of the sentence, rendering the speaker's attitude. This analysis may be complicated a little as the speaker's purpose in uttering a sentence is not always the same as his attitude to its propositional content. For example, *John must walk to school* may be understood as an obligation or a possibility. Therefore, modals signal the speaker's attitude (illocutionary potential of a sentence) which may or may not coincide with the speaker's purpose (illocutionary force) in an utterance. This fact, therefore, has different implications according to the language skills that are to be taught.

Applied contrastive linguistics does not aim at drawing the pupils' attention constantly and systematically to language contrasts. Its objective, rather, is to aid the textbook author in collecting and arranging his material and to help the teacher in presenting his subject matter. Both author and teacher require knowledge of contrastive grammar in order to be able to predict, explain, correct and eliminate errors due to interference between source and target language. The effect of contrastive linguistics in teaching practice will vary according to teaching objectives and age of learners. Not all the results of contrastive linguistics will be utilizable for practical work.

However, the problem of foreign language teaching will certainly not be solved by contrastive linguistics alone. The psychology of learning will also have to contribute to the investigation of interference phenomena since the latter may well be highly idiosyncratic in many cases. The question of whether interference phenomena depend in some ways on the particular level of language concerned must also be investigated by the psychology of learning. Why constructions in which modal embed generics in their deontic value are easily assimilated by Romanian learners and the same constructions with an epistemic reading are not? Explanation of target language errors, then, not their prediction, is the main objec-

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tive of contrastive analysis: the establishment of cross-linguistic semological equivalents for the purpose of teaching meaning or content structure. Where areas of the conceptual systems underlying the source language and the target language are isophormous, meaning can probably be taught most effectively by pointing to semological equivalences between source language and target language. Thus, the most convenient way of teaching the deontic value of *must* to Romanian learners is to point out to the equivalent meaning of *trebuie.*

Whereas formal equivalence can be established relatively easily, it is most difficult to set up any kind of functional-semantic equivalence, especially in the case of modals. Since individual languages possess modal systems and subsystems peculiar to themselves, every function and construction within the language must be regarded as a part of the whole. Probably the best one can do is to take the pragmatic view and approach it by the way of a notion of 'quasi-equivalence' with approximate values, as is done in the field of translation. If instruction is exclusively in the target language, the teacher has to confront the learner with a series of instances of *must* in contexts in the hope that the learner will create the association between the target language modal-value and the source language meaning of his own accord. Often this procedure makes too great demands on the learner.

The aim of a contrastive analysis of two modal systems is the description of a system made up of the sum of the differences between the subsystems of the source language and those of the target language. The differential system is the focus of the didactic programming. That does not, of course, imply that corresponding sections of the two systems should not be taught. Such a step would inevitably lead towards a distorted view of the target language on the learner's part. At all events, this system will influence the selection and grading of the teaching material, thus also determining the staging of instruction and sequencing of the material used.

After a long period of favouring the investigation of linguistic expression used to describe facts in reality, language is more and more considered to be an instrument of interaction. These last few years' questions concerning the relations between social interaction and language have come to the fore in linguistic research. However, language has been mainly studied from the view point of its descriptive function and so there has been no focus on the connection between language structure and conditions of communication, a factor that cannot be overlooked in any attempt to describe modals.

A full grammatical description a sentence comprising a modal implies complete semantic descriptions of the lexical items it contains: it should also take into consideration information about what its utterers must presuppose to be true. This account will involve many types of grammatical facts and a great many subtle properties of lexical items.

This view is representative of what is called interpretive semantics, but it is one which involves operations which are quite distinct from those proposed in the

earliest presentations of interpretive semantics. Operations involving selectional restrictions are here replaced by an understanding of presuppositions: this has the effect of dissolving the problem of discovering the boundary between the semantic properties of the words and the physical properties of the things in which the words could be correctly applied. Interpretive semantics is one which welcomes lexical items that contain in their definitions variables not found in the expressions that contain them. These variables are relevant for the semantic interpretations of sentences because there are situations in which predications involving these variables are more essential parts of the communication than anything else.

All of the information relevant to the semantic interpretation of a sentence must be present in a representation of the deep structure of that sentence, as, in fact, there is no level of "deep structure" that is distinct from the level of semantic representation. The observance about the meaning of modal verbs and expressions, the relations which must be described in characterizing the semantic structure of representations containing specific modals, and the format for expressing these facts can and must be captured in the same matrix.

The new field of empirical and theoretical interest in linguistics included the study of speech acts, which has been brought to the attention of linguists by philosophers. For the time being we can hardly maintain that this field of research has already led to a sufficient degree of clarity. Neither the empirical facts nor the theoretical basis needed to describe and explain facts are at an advanced level of explanation. The framework developed by J. R. Searle (1975, p. 59–82) has been widely accepted by linguists as a proposal for a linguistic approach to the study of language actions, an approach that we consider to be the best for an interpretation of modals and modality. The theoretical basis of this approach comprehends at least the following assumptions: (a) an utterance performed in a certain situation is an action of a certain type, e.g. *You must be back at six* is an order, (b) the type of utterance can be investigated by analysing the use of linguistic devices indicating illocutionary force, e.g., modals, and (c) for each language a set of types of speech acts is available i.e., for English and Romanian, too. The framework of the study of speech acts has to be sufficiently complex and extended in order to cover all facts relevant for the description of illocutionary forces. It is required to study the interactional function of an expression in concrete situations in which the language action takes place because the social nature of speech acts can only be grasped if at least a sketch of a theory of human social activity is available. Being a component of social activity, communication by language can only be understood if we study its embedding in the totality of social activities forming concrete, historically developing social systems.

Since the conditions of life are different for social groups and classes, communication cannot simply be investigated from the viewpoint of an ideal community. Modality, in particular, implies relations between attitude configurations and the grammatical structure of utterances. To study language means which serve to

describe or indicate properties of situational contexts is impossible on purely linguistic grounds. W. Motsch (1980, p. 158) points out that the investigation of illocutionary force indicating devices has shown that performative formulas used to indicate illocutionary forces cannot be considered as grammatical forms. Performative formulas are different, in an unsystematic way, as to grammatical structure; and other kinds of devices such as modal verbs, particles, intonation have more than one function. In order to study devices of a language serving to indicate aspects of the interactional context in which a proposition is expressed, we have to interpret the means a language has for indicating illocutions, propositional attitudes, valuations, and topicalization.

A theory of symbolic interaction has, among other, to specify the aspects and properties of the situational context the speaker has to take into consideration when he draws up a plan for an utterance. More precisely, it has to provide a representation of the mental state of a speaker reflecting the situational context. A situation becomes a communicative situation due to the intention of a person to influence the mind(s) of an audience by means of an utterance. It may be supposed that the hearer uses the same kind of knowledge, following, however, another mechanism. The speaker anticipates the role of the hearer and makes assumptions about the ability of the hearer to specify the situation.

Thus, the subject matter of modality and modals, in its grammatical, semantic and pragmatic subdivisions, requires the full catalogue of knowledge which the speakers of a language can be said to possess about the format structure of the sentences in their language, as well as their knowledge about appropriately situated uses of these sentences. So far, the scope of linguistic description and explanation has been limited to observations about sentences is isolation. In no case is any attention paid to how a sentence comprising a modal can be used, under what conditions a speaker might choose to use it, or what role the sentence could play in an ongoing conversation. In no case is the sentence viewed in terms of its potential anchoring in a communication situation. Modal sentences cannot be understood at all apart from considerations of their being anchored in some social context. That is why the definition and description of modality has been one of the most pervasive and persistent problems in linguistics, spilling over as well into related disciplines such as philosophy and psychology.

In a contrastive analysis we deal only with sentences that, presumably, satisfy the condition of ‘sincerity’. The conversation rules of the language community govern not only the conditions under which it is appropriate to perform permission-requesting utterances of the *May we come in* type analysed by Ch. Fillmore (1973, p. 111). They must also determine the principles by which a speaker of English is able to recognize and correctly interpret appropriate responses to the request. The sentence *May we come in?* may be used ‘insincerely’ in two ways. It may be used politely, in which case the assumptions associated with the sentence about the social dominance (for this occasion) of the addressee are intended as a gesture of politeness

only; or the sentence may be used ironically as in cases where the suggested dominance relation is clearly contradicted by the realities of the situation.

The class of modals is, in many languages, both syntactically and semantically highly irregular and unpredictable: modals frequently have idiosyncratic conjugational patterns and are subject to highly specialized syntactic rules, in order to define the class of modals or to provide a set of environments in which a modal may be correctly or appropriately used, one must refer to many levels of language: the purely syntactic environment, as well as the logical structure, the context of the utterance, the assumptions that are shared by speaker and addressee, whether or not previously given linguistic expression in the discourse, the social situation assumed by the participants in the discourse, the impression the speaker wants to make on the addressee, and so on. Robin Lakoff remarks (1972, p. 230ff) that there is also the question of the appropriate contextual environments. This is a minor or marginal element in language, but one of its three primary functions that concern with the establishment of social relations and with the participation of the individual in all the various role relationships contracted by the individual, and thus plays an essential part in the development of his personality. Modality represents a very small but important part of these resources – of the semantics of personal participation; and the means whereby we express modalities are strung throughout the clause, woven into a structure, with other elements expressing different functions. That is why, argues M. A. K. Halliday (1970, p. 322ff) there is grammar in language; grammar is the weaving together of strands from the various components of meaning into a single fabric that we call linguistic structure.

We cannot advance very far in the understanding of modality if we assume that the modal auxiliaries in the verb are treated on their own, and that the list of modal verbs and modal expressions could be taken as representing the system. We have to identify the categories of modality and show how these are realised; and the realisation involves some fairly complex syntagmatic and paradigmatic patterns of relationship. The various kinds of facts that need to be included in a fully developed system of linguistic description comprise, among others, the linguistic description for each lexical item in the language, the grammatical constructions in which it can occur, the grammatical processes which its presence in a construction determines, the information about speech act conditions, conversation rules, and semantic interpretation which may be associated in an idiosyncratic way with the lexical item in question. It must also indicate the grammatical structure of each sentence on its "deep structure" or maximally abstract level, the grammatical processes by which deep structure representations are mapped into surface sentences, the principles for deriving the complete semantic and pragmatic description of a sentence and it must contain a theory of communication acts. It must also draw a theory of discourse which accounts for the role of sentences in conversational and discursive contexts and a theory of natural logic by means of which such judgements as the success of an argument or the appropriateness of contributions to a conversation can be deduced (Fillmore 1972, p. 113–114).

In order to explain modality we must understand the structure of language; we need to consider its use: language is as it is because of the functions it is required to serve. In the field of language acquisition it has become clear that it is necessary to operate with basic concepts of a functional type: when one learns to use a modal expression he learns it in situations of use, and the structures he subsequently builds up reflect the situations and functions that he himself internalises. We are able to understand the structures underlying the utterances to the extent that we understand the purposes we are using language for. The traditional interest of linguists, particularly those of or influenced by the Prague school, in a functional analysis of language is very directly relevant to current problems.

Just as the child builds up its linguistic structures in a way which reflects his acquisition of the uses of languages, so the structure of language as a whole has been built in such a way that it reflects the demands that are made on language and the functions it is required to serve (Halliday 1970, p. 323). A study of the system of modality (probable, possible, certain, necessary, etc.) and the system of mood (declarative, interrogative, etc.) raises certain questions, of a different kind in each case, which can be answered most effectively when it is shown that the system in question involves the interrelation of different components in the grammar, and that these components are functional in origin. The functions of language, as they are to be understood here, are not on different "levels"; nor have they to do with a distinction such as that between a format system, its interpretation and its use. Rather, the functions are to be understood as generalised uses of language, which, since they seem to determine the nature of the language system, require to be incorporated into our account of that system.

Most speech is functionally coherent, in the sense that its structure reflects what it is being made to do; and this is what (given just the assumption that speech is purposeful activity) makes it accessible to the learner (Searle 1977, p. 73). It could perhaps be added that it is also coherent structurally. The acquisition of the modal system is, obviously, part of the acquisition of information about the situational context, about the set of environments in which a modal may be appropriately employed, about the social position of the speaker, etc.

The view that the speech to which a young child is exposed is a rather impoverished array of formless semi-sentences is very far from the truth, and appears to test a number of doubtful assumptions. One is that a set of very disparate phenomena (hesitations, repetitions, false starts, slips of the tongue, coughs, etc.) can be lumped together as instances of formlessness, whereas some of these are in fact structured and are made to look formless either by the way they are expressed ("false starts" instead of "restructuring") or by being collocated with the others. Another is that the only structure in language is cognitive (i.e., ideational) structure, whereas in fact the pragmatic and expressive utterances which make up much of the linguistic experience of the young child are also fully structured, and are less liable to continuous planning that the very intellectuated discourse that is usually used to exemplify structural disorder.

The young child is, typically, exposed to a large quantity of highly structured speech, in situation types where the functions of the speech act tend to be clearly observable and the structure directly relatable to them. Since the very first moment a young child is exposed to a modal expression, he/she makes use of it in the appropriate context. It is never the meaning that is a source of mistakes for him, but, sometimes, the syntactic pattern. Thus his experience of what language means, is not restricted to its ideational meaning or "content" – being rather broader in this respect than the view of meaning that lies behind assertion of the poverty of his linguistic environment (Halliday 1970, p. 323–324). However, things seem to be different with adults acquiring modality in a second language. Often "meaning" is misleading because of a tendency to associate a modal expression in the target language with a similar expression in his native language, regardless of specific situational parameters.

Learning is subject to lawful principles and the cognitive economy depends on the intelligible organisation of what is learned. Theories of the synchronic organisation of lexical knowledge were undoubtedly inhibited by the inevitable exceptions to almost every generalisation; lexical information is characteristically information that a person must learn by rote.

Conventional dictionaries indicate some of the kinds of information associated with a word: spelling, pronunciation, etymology, and inflected forms: phrases suggesting different sense, sentences illustrating use, comments on usage of nearly synonymous words, and pictures or tables where appropriate. In the case of most lexical items from definitional phrases it is often possible to trace extended conceptual relations to other words and to infer the need for general information of a type more appropriate to an encyclopaedia than to a dictionary. A person who masters a vocabulary in some language has to learn much of the information about every word. This mental lexicon is needed most immediately to produce and understand sentences, so lexical information must be represented in a manner compatible with what people know about the syntax and semantics of sentences of their language. However, for modal expressions even this larger sentential context is insufficient, for a broader view of how lexical information is used it would be necessary to consider the context into which sentences enter. At this level one begins to glimpse processes of real psychological interest – thoughts, memories, percepts, desires, feelings, intentions – as these are expressed in everyday speech, and of sociological interest – relations among the participants in the speech act, or relations between the participants, on the one hand, and social institutions on the other, etc.

A summary of the kinds of information a person must have about a modal in order to produce and understand it appropriately would include pronunciation and spelling, syntactic categorisation, meaning (concept expressed, relation to other concepts, syntactic, contexts, etc.), pragmatic constraints (relation to general knowledge and

relation to discourse contexts). The problem with foreigners learning a second language is that they might not fully understand the social context in which a sentence is uttered and, consequently, assimilation with the wrong situational context leads, inevitably, to the wrong use of the modal. Modals require the perfect understanding of social relations between participants, of other socio-economic realities, of the status of the participants in the speech act, etc. This is not easily done outside that particular context. In order to internalise and store information about the context, one should be immersed in that environment, otherwise it is a "lecture" that is never paired with the use of modals.

Pragmatic questions can be answered only on the basis of information about the speaker and hearer, about their shared information, about the situation in which they are acting, about the normal course of events in such situations, and about plausible alternative states of affairs – information that runs well beyond what anyone would propose to include in a grammar or dictionary. The density and complexity of these pragmatic problems are impressive and of great psychological importance. The need for pragmatic theories is obvious. It is necessary to keep constantly in mind that a modal verb can be used for different purposes and with different meanings in different situations; it is a legitimate psychological question to ask how people form and interpret the concepts.

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MODALITATEA ÎN ANALIZA CONTRASTIVĂ
(*Abstract*)

Analiza gramaticală este un alt domeniu care a simţit un suflu nou venit dinspre analiza contrastivă mai exactă. Desigur, într-un anumit sens, gramatica este construită pe principii contrastive. Un element important în analiza contrastivă este selecţia unor criterii sistematice conform cărora este făcută analiza. Acest lucru nu este uşor de făcut. Aici vedem că reţeaua de parametri componenţiali necesari identificării sensului sunt destul de neclari din punct de vedere pedagogic şi de aceea gramatica trebuie să ducă la o selecţie judicioasă a rezultatelor obţinute de cercetarea teoretică, încât să poată fi folosite pentru scopuri didactice.

Cuvinte-cheie: *modalitate*, *analiză constrastivă*, *epistemic*, *deontic*.
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