

Reassessing and Separating Subjectivity and Performativity of Modals: With Central Focus on English Epistemic Modals

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1. Introduction

- (1) Aims of this talk:
 - a. To reassess Lyons' notion of subjectivity and the speech act theory's performativity.
 - b. To argue that subjectivity and performativity should be seen as separated notions.
- (2) The advantages with our framework are shown with examples of English epistemic modals.

2. Subjectivity and Performativity Proposed Prior to Verstraete (2001)

2.1. Lyons' (1977) Subjectivity

- (3) Lyons' subjectivity:
THE SPEAKER'S "opinion or attitude towards the proposition that the sentence expresses or the situation that the proposition describes" (1977: 452).
- (4) ex) Alfred *must* be unmarried. (1977: 789)
 - a. *Subjective* interpretation:
The speaker makes a conclusion based on his/her own opinion or belief.
 - b. *Objective* interpretation:
The speaker makes a conclusion depending on some factor(s) external to the speaker.
cf. Traugott (1989) and Traugott and Dasher (2002)

2.2. Performativity in Speech Act Theory

- (5) Performativity in Speech Act Theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1969):
→ The state in which the speaker utters a sentence and at the same time does something other than uttering it.
ex) "I name this ship *Queen Elizabeth*" (Austin 1962: 5)
- (6) ex) Mary *may/will/must* have arrived by now. (Palmer 2001: 33)
→ Inferences or conclusions expressed by epistemic modals are performative in that they "are actually made by the speaker, at the time of speaking" (ibid.)

3. Verstraete's (2001) framework

3.1. Verstraete's View on the Notions Above

- (7) Verstraete finds it difficult to consistently apply Lyons' subjectivity to epistemic modals (2001: 1516).
 - Lyons (1977): Epistemic modality is either subjective or objective.
 - Halliday (1970): Epistemic modality is only subjective(although Lyons and Halliday defines subjectivity in virtually the same way)
- (8) Verstraete argues that performativity exhibited in subjective modality is different from performativity in speech act theory (or "interactive performativity") (2001: 1517).

3.2. Alternative Notions of Subjectivity and Modal Performativity

- (9) Verstraete's notion of subjectivity:
 - Bringing into existence "a particular position of commitment with respect to the propositional content of the utterance" (2001: 1517)
 - (In other words) involving what he calls "modal performativity"
- (10) Subjective modality is modally performative, expressing **SOMEONE's** particular position of commitment with respect to the propositional content (2001: 1518).
- (11) ex) The flood of letters *must* have had some impact after all (2001: 1507)
 - The speaker here "presents himself as being committed to the status of the proposition as an inevitable conclusion" (2001: 1517).
- (12) Objective modality is modally non-performative, not involving any position of commitment with respect to the propositional content (2001: 1518).
- (13) ex) But to reach orbit an object *must* accelerate to a speed of about 17,500 miles per hour (28,000 kilometers per hour, called satellite speed or orbital velocity) in a horizontal direction (2001: 1508)
 - The speaker here merely describes some existent obligation.
- (14) Subjective modality is necessarily modally performative.
Objective modality is necessarily modally non-performative.
 - Verstraete's model virtually reduces subjectivity to (modal) performativity.
- (15) Verstraete adopts modal performativity in order to give a more comprehensive account for behaviors and interpretations of subjective modality in interrogatives.

- (16) Can subjective modality occur in interrogatives?
- a. “No” by Lyons (1977) and Hengeveld (1988).
 - b. “Yes” by Verstraete (2001).
→ It expresses a particular position of commitment on the part of someone other than the speaker.
- (17) ex)
- THOMPSON: If the trials are successful, *might* this be used as the first line of treatment of cancer?
- THORPE: Well that’s exactly where we are going. We are hoping that this will replace conventional chemotherapy. (2001: 1522)
- The speaker is transferring toward the interlocutor a responsibility for the epistemic position.

4. Discussion

4.1. Reassessing Lyons’ Subjectivity

- (18) There are some behavioral differences of modals that Verstraete’s approach cannot well account for but Lyons’ can.

4.1.1. Epistemic *Must* and Epistemic *Have to* in Interrogatives

- (19) In Lyons’ framework:
- Epistemic *must* is subjective in that the necessity is based on the speaker’s own belief or opinion.
 - Epistemic *have to* is objective in that the necessity is based on some fact external to the speaker.
cf. Kashino (2002: Chapter 11) and Westney (1995: 145-146)
- (20) In Verstraete’s framework:
- Both epistemic *must* and epistemic *have to* are subjective.
 - Given this and (16b), we can predict that epistemic *must* and epistemic *have to* can both appear in interrogatives.
- (21) Sanada (2007) shows that epistemic *must* occurs in interrogatives more easily than epistemic *have to*.
- a. *Must* John be a liar? (Papafragou 2000: 98)
 - b. Well, obviously the girl isn’t here, so we’d better look for her on the campus. – *Must* she be on the campus? She could have gone to Pete’s digs. (Declerck 1991: 408)
- If epistemic *must* in (21a) and (21b) is replaced with *have to*, the resultant sentences cannot be interpreted epistemically.

- (22) Why is epistemic *must* acceptable in interrogatives?
 → The judgment made by the speaker can be doubted if the speaker him/herself finds it less evident (Sanada 2007: 218) as in (21a).
 → Speakers may also doubt judgments pronounced or assumed by other people, rather than some external factor(s) (ibid.), as in (21b).
- (23) Why is epistemic *have to* unacceptable in interrogatives?
 → The speaker's judgment expressed by epistemic *have to* is based on some external factor, and then an epistemic force is so strong that the judgment is less likely to be doubted (Sanada 2007: 218).

4.1.2. Epistemic *Might* and Epistemic *Could*

- (24) a. * This picture *might* be a Chagall, but it is in fact a Braque.
 b. This picture *could* be a Chagall, but it is in fact a Braque.
 (Johannesson 1976: 58)
- (25) a. The speaker in (24a) asserts the possibility and falsehood of the truth of the proposition "this picture is a Chagall" at the same time, thus contradictory.
 b. The above contradiction is not brought about in (24b), where "the speaker does not indicate that he is inclined to believe in the truth of the basic proposition (which he does if he uses *might*)" (Johannesson 1976: 58).
 → These accounts are in line with Lyons' notion of subjectivity.
- (26) Under Verstraete's notion of subjectivity, both *might* in (24a) and *could* in (24b) would be acceptable, considering that his epistemic modality entirely involves someone's (not necessarily the speaker's) position of commitment toward the proposition.

4.2. Reassessing Performativity in Speech Act Theory

- (27) The speech act theory's performativity is sufficient for achieving the aims of this talk.

4.2.1. *Have to* in Interrogatives Again

- (28) Deontic *have to* and epistemic *have to*:
 → Both are objective, involving some external factor rather than the speaker.
 → The former can easily occur in interrogatives, but the latter cannot.
 ex) Do you *have to* go now? (Leech 2004: 81) → deontic / *epistemic
- (29) Deontic *have to* is non-performative, while epistemic *have to* is performative.
 → The latter, but not the former, clashes with a function of suspending "speaker commitment" (cf. Dancygier 1998: 14-24)

4.2.2. Epistemic *May* and Epistemic *Can* in Interrogatives

- (30) a. * *May* Emma have gone shopping? (Swan 2005: 316)
b. *Can* she get in trouble? (Kashino 2012: 57)
- (31) Izutsu's (2002) account:
a. Epistemic *may* expresses "the simple judgment of the possibility of an event" (2002: 9). The judgment made of his/her own (i.e., the subjective judgment) cannot be questioned or denied by the speaker (2002: 10).
b. Epistemic *can* sets up an entity and makes "a statement about one of the possible properties of the entity" (2002: 9). In this case, we can cast doubt on or deny a nature or natures of an entity.
- (32) Izutsu's account is compatible with the following performativity-based account.
a. Epistemic *may* is performative because the speaker actually expresses his/her own judgment.
b. Epistemic *can* is non-performative (i.e. descriptive), in that it makes a statement of some entity, rather than actually expressing the speaker's judgment.
→ The former clashes with the function of interrogatives, but the latter does not.

4.3. Separating Subjectivity and Performativity

- (33) It is of importance to (Lyons') subjectivity and (speech act theory's) performativity, against the way Verstraete seems to be doing.
- (34) a. PERFORMATIVE AND SUBJECTIVE:
There *must* have been something I was reminded of but I couldn't remember what. (*Corpus of Contemporary American English*)
b. NON-PERFORMATIVE AND OBJECTIVE:
This picture *could* be a Chagall, but it is in fact a Braque. (= (24b))
c. PERFORMATIVE AND OBJECTIVE:
"The guy ain't on the plane." "He *has to*. He didn't get off."
(Kashino 2002: 131)
d. NON-PERFORMATIVE AND SUBJECTIVE:
When he asked me, I said there *should* be multiple packages.
(*Corpus of Contemporary American English*)

[PERFORMATIVE]: the speaker is actually making an inference/a conclusion at the time of utterance.

[NON-PERFORMATIVE]: the speaker is merely stating some inference/conclusion.

[SUBJECTIVE]: the speaker's inference/conclusion is based on his/her own belief or opinion.

[OBJECTIVE]: the speaker's inference/conclusion is based on some external factors.

5. Conclusion

(35) What this talk discussed:

- a. empirical advantages of Lyons' subjectivity (Section 4.1)
- b. empirical advantages of speech act theory's performativity (Section 4.2)
- c. validity of separating subjectivity and performativity (Section 4.3)

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