Henrik Høeg Müller (ed.): *Reflections on Modality*. København: Samfundslitteratur. 2001.

Reflections on Modality contains four articles first given as papers at a seminar held at the Copenhagen Business School in November/December 2000. The first three are directly concerned with modality, whereas the latter only touches on the topic indirectly.

The first article, *Modals and Modality: Some Issues and Some proposals*, by Finn Sørensen (FS), aims at providing a description of the semantic features of the category of modal verbs in Danish. More specifically, it is FS's aim to contribute to an information based theory of modality, within the framework of Situation Semantics. Rather than discussing modality as a linguistic category, FS provides a theory-internal discussion of the subject.

According to the traditional view of modality, "the modal verb indicates or expresses an attitude (or the mind of the speaker) towards the content of the sentence containing the modal" (p. 15). On this view, modal constructions are binary structures; combinations of a modal operator and a proposition. FS represents this in the following way (p. 16):

$$mod(p)$$

Unlike the semantic structure of modal constructions, the syntactic structure follows a triadic pattern:

$$NP\ V_m\ V_{inf}$$

FS claims that the syntactic/semantic representations of modal constructions constitute a representational mismatch. On this basis, FS sets out to provide a representation of the semantics of modal constructions which matches their syntactic structure.

FS states that "the subject matter of modal utterances (…) is (…) the possibilities which remain when in a certain context you take away what is assumed to be actualities and what must be impossibilities" (p. 18). Such possibilities are motivated by context, in the sense that the speaker is taken to possess a certain amount of information on the basis of which a certain possibility, rather than any other possibility, is taken to hold of some situation.

Modal verbs may be lexically divided into those which express possibility and those which express necessity. These two groups of verbs differ semantically with respect to the force "with which a possibility is pointed out or suggested by the motivating information in a given context (…)" (p. 32). In this sense, one may distinguish between weakly suggested possibilities and strongly suggested possibilities. The difference between them is defined in terms of quantification.

FS suggests the following two formulae to account for the distinction between the two types of modal utterances (p. 30-31):

Possibilities: $s \models \ll pos,\ s\text{-object},\ v\text{-object} \gg$

Necessities: $s \models \ll nec,\ s\text{-object},\ v\text{-object} \gg$

In these notations, s is a situation, s-object is the entity denoted by the subject NP and v-object is the propositional frame denoted by the infinitive including its complements. It is a common feature of the two notations that they represent modal utterances as binary relations between two objects, s-object and v-object, to which modality applies as either possibility or necessity.

With respect to utterances expressing possibility, the notation above makes explicit that the possibility expressed by a sentence is supported by s if and only if the state of affairs (soa) resulting from functionally applying v-object to s-object is a possibility. This may be illustrated with FS's example (18) (p. 22):

(1)   Peter may be snoring

In this sentence the referent of "Peter" is s-object, and the set of objects denoted by the infinitive phrase which may be snoring is v-object. The modal operator then states that Peter may belong to the set of objects which snores.

A necessity relation, on the other hand, results from the relation between s-object and v-object in s if and only if the soa resulting from functionally applying v-object to s-object is a necessity. Again this may be illustrated by an example[1].

(2)   Peter must be in Paris now

The referent of "Peter" is s-object, the set of objects denoted by the infinitive phrase which are in Paris now is v-object, and the modal operator states that Peter necessarily belongs within the set of objects which is in Paris now.

FS then argues that the logical distinction between epistemic and deontic modality, unlike the necessity/possibility distinction, is not inherent in verbs, but one or the other is imposed from motivating information.

In this article, FS shows how the notion of modality may be incorporated in the representational scheme of Situation Semantics. Within this framework he obtains to solve the representational disharmony between the syntax and the semantics of modal utterances. In the beginning of the article, FS says that he does "not intend to go into more formal and technical details than needed for the discussion of modals and modality. At this point [he –HD] just [needs - HD] a few concepts which are "innocent" in the sense that they are borrowed from existing literature on situation semantics" (p. 17). It seems to me that this

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1   Translated from example (36) in the article: Peter må være i Paris nu, p. 32.

statement underestimates the importance of the theoretical foundation on which this contribution rests. First of all, any theoretical approach is based on a set of assumptions which are implied during the application. Secondly, Situation Semantics is a formal representational framework and when applied to linguistic data, it may seem complex to the uninitiated. Consequently, it does not seem all that innocent to me.

In the second article, *The Spanish Modal Auxiliaries*, Henrik Høeg-Müller (HM) sets out to investigate the possibility of establishing a set of parameters on the basis of which modal verbs may be established as a homogeneous category in Spanish.

On the basis of an examination of a number of different grammar books in Spanish, HM argues that the area of modality in Spanish is blurred. The area lacks a well-defined set of parameters: "[there is a –HD] lack of profoundness in the theoretical discussion aiming at setting up the necessary and sufficient conditions for defining modal verbs" (p. 40). Evidence of this is that some grammars include a long list of verbs in the category of modal verbs, while others restrict the category to include just a few verbs.

Along this line of argument, HM states that, due to an intuitive and seemingly rather chaotic approach to modal verbs, "most possibilities of generalizations are left untried" (p. 40). Starting from a set of morpho-syntactic and semantic criteria, he sets out to investigate the possibilities of generalizing over the alleged group of modal verbs in Spanish.

HM starts out by discussing the relation between syntax and morphology on the one hand and modality on the other. Grammar books in general appear to recognise a relation between auxiliarity and modal verbs. HM states that the reasons for recognising this relation are not quite clear, but it may be explained by the fact that "the degree of auxiliarity (...) reflects (...) the level of integration between the modal and the infinitive" (p. 42).

Since, according to HM, morpho-syntactic criteria have not as yet been applied to Spanish data as a parameter for establishing a category of modal verbs, he decides to discuss two morpho-syntactic parameters for delimiting the group of modal verbs: morphological defectiveness and the relation between modal verbs and the imperative mood.

HM argues that morpho-syntactic defectiveness cannot serve as a criterion for distinguishing a category of modal auxiliary verbs due to the fact that verbs usually considered modal verbs do not have defective inflexion, unlike modal verbs in Germanic languages which typically are unable to be marked for person, number and tense.

With regard to the imperative as a syntactic criterion, there appears to be a lack of compatibility between this mood and verbs typically considered to be modal verbs (e.g. *poder, deber de, tener que, haber de*) (p. 43). HM concludes that this incompatibility can in fact serve as an argument for establishing a category of modal auxiliary verbs, but that this would be no more than a first approximation as also other auxiliary verbs imply this restriction. It applies for example to so-called state predicates (e.g. *valer, yacer*). HM then argues that a more detailed explanation may be given if the logical categories of epistemic, deontic and dynamic modality are included as a parameter. In this regard, HM points out that, in general, the imperative mood and modality are competing categories. This is why sentences expressing deontic modality do not allow the imperative mood; it would generate redundancy as the imperative mood inherently expresses deontic modality.

Next, HM considers syntactic criteria of substitution, among those the possibility of substituting an infinitive with a nominal expression. If the finite form allows substitution, it is categorised as a full lexical verb (*acepta hacer la maleta* 'he accepts to pack – *acepta la* propuesta 'he accepts the proposal', p. 47). Although this test appears to be operational with regard to some verbs - that is, verbs which traditionally are considered to be modals, are in fact categorised as such according to this criterion - it is problematic in other respects. On the one hand, it seems to be too broad seeing that it categorises some verbs as modal verbs which for semantic reasons are not usually considered to be so (*parecer, ir a*). On the other hand, it seems too narrow as the verb *querer* which otherwise is regarded as a central member of the group, is excluded. Subsequently, HM argues that other criteria of substitution (such as substitution with elliptic and cleavage constructions and subject deletion) do not help to clear the field. Typical modal verbs respond in different ways to the tests, and the parameters do not therefore provide a homogeneous basis for establishing a category of modal verbs. HM concludes "that it is impossible on the basis of syntactic criteria to claim anything unambiguous about a homogeneous class of modals which clearly separates itself from other non-modal auxiliaries" (p. 50). This conclusion prepares the way for a shift of perspective from Syntax to Semantics.

According to HM, it is characteristic of Spanish grammar books that they fail to provide a systematic account of the meaning of modals. HM then discusses modality as a functional category on the basis of the logical categories, epistemic, deontic and dynamic modality, and the distinction between objective and subjective modality. He concludes that the subjective/objective distinction cannot be used to show the variation in use of *deber* and *tener que*, and therefore is not applicable in a description of the central modal verbs in Spanish.

On these grounds, HM introduces the notion of **speaker's evaluation**, inspired by Sørensen (2000). The modal auxiliaries are distinguished with starting point in the speaker's evaluation of the degree of force of the information that he possesses. *Tener que* is characterised by signalling a high degree of force; that is, the speaker has much confidence in the effect of the information, whereas *deber* signals a low degree of force seeing that the speaker has less confidence in the effect of the information. According to HM, this parameter explains facts which may not be accounted for with starting point in the categories mentioned above. Furthermore, HM discusses the verb *poder*. In this case, he argues that it cannot be determined which modal reading is valid without further context; one must take both speaker's evaluation and specific linguistic features into account. It is the interplay between those which provides the means for a univocal interpretation. HM provides an example of how one may reach either an epistemic, a deontic or a dynamic interpretation of *poder*. One of the linguistic criteria is the interpretation of the subject (animacy and agentivity). It should be mentioned that it is not quite clear how one determines whether a subject is to be interpreted as being either agentive or non-agentive. In some cases, it appears to be the verb which makes the subject non-agentive (*María puede estar enferma*) (p. 61), whereas in other cases, it seems to be the meaning of the subject itself (*Este coche puede andar 220 kilómetros por hora*) (p. 61).

HM then gives a more detailed overview of the notion of Speaker's evaluation. Accordingly, speakers may evaluate a piece of information as being either factual or non-factual. The latter applies to expressions with a deontic or an epistemic modality. In such cases, the speaker "cannot or will not describe the relation between the subject of the full verb and the situation denoted by the predicate as factual" (p. 63), whereas the former applies to cases where expressions with dynamic modality are used. Then the speaker "presents it as an empirical fact that the syntactic subject is able to, capable of or wants to do what is denoted by the predicate" (p. 63). HM leaves it as an open question whether modal auxiliaries are a restricted area comprising only non-factual meaning, or whether the area is larger comprising both factual and non-factual meaning. The factual branch of the distinction comprises verbs such as *saber* and *querer* which typically are considered to be modal verbs. HM points out that it is not a discrete modal category since it also includes verbs with for example a future orientation, e.g. *preferir* and *prometer*. This point seems problematic to me seeing that it triggers the question of whether it is in fact possible to establish a discrete semantic modal category at all, and whether such a category has any explanatory power if it cannot be delimited in a precise way.

This article constitutes an interesting contribution to the discussion of modality in general and, in Spanish, in particular. HM discusses different sets of parameters

for establishing modality as a category, either syntactically or semantically. It provides analyses and resulting arguments for abandoning modal verbs as a syntactic category in Spanish, and subsequently for recognising modality as a functional category. The section destined to a discussion of this latter point, presents the reader with a large array of analyses, but it restricts the conclusion to pointing out that it is of uttermost importance that we do not corroborate the apparent synonymy between syntax and semantics which is characteristic of English modals with Spanish modals since there is no such correspondence.

The next article *Modality and the Indefinite Article* by Michael Herslund (MH) is concerned with the relation between modality and the reading of indefinite NPs. With reference to Donnellan (1966), MH starts from the assumption that NPs in general allow two uses: a referential use and a descriptive use. The referential use is characterised by implying existence of an entity. The descriptive use, on the other hand, applies to cases in which NPs simply describe an entity without commitment to existence. The object of study is narrowed down to the use of indefinite NPs.

MH's starting point is that the descriptive use of indefinite NPs comprises two complementary readings: a non-specific and a generic reading. On this basis, he proposes a hypothesis according to which the distribution of the two descriptive uses "is determined by the basic **modality** of the sentence, subjective or objective (…)" (p. 68). It is then MH's concern to discuss this hypothesis.

In the discussion of the generic/non-specific distinction, MH starts out by examining syntactic position as a criterion for distinguishing the two readings. According to this criterion, there is a correlation between the generic reading and indefinite NPs occurring in the subject position, whereas NPs in postverbal position receive a non-specific reading. This hypothesis, however, is immediately contradicted by the following example (p. 73):

> (13)
> En kvinde ler bare ad den slags og vil aldrig trætte en husbonds ører med det.
>
> 'A woman only laughs at such things and would never burden a husband's ears with it'

Both the indefinite NP in the subject position and that in the postverbal position seem to have a generic reading. The difference in reading does not therefore appear to follow automatically from syntactic position. Subsequently, MH provides examples of indefinite NPs appearing in subject and postverbal positions, which allow both readings. To illustrate this point, one may consider the following example quoted from Sueur (1977) in which the indefinite NP allows both readings (p. 74).

(14)
En soldat fra 2. kompagni kan/skal deltage i den officielle frokost 'a
soldier from the 2d company can/must participate in the official lunch'

Out of context, this sentence may have both a generic and a non-specific reading.
If it is given the following context, it is interpreted as non-specific (p. 74),

a. …men staklen er ikke udpeget endnu.
'…but the poor fellow has not yet been appointed'

whereas the next context generates a generic reading of the indefinite NP (p.
74).

b. ..Det står der i reglementet
'…That is written in the regulations'

MH argues that the two contexts each provides the sentence with a different
kind of modality, and that it is this difference which generates one of the two
readings. The latter (b) provides the information that (14) is to be understood as
a norm or a principle; it is not the speaker's personal judgement which is ex-
pressed. The modality is objective. In the former (a), on the other hand, the
speaker expresses his own point of view. This is subjective modality. According
to MH, objective modality is, among others, expressed syntactically and seman-
tically by the general use of the present tense and for example by the quantifier
"always". Subjective modality, on the other hand, results for example from
hypothetical constructions, interrogative constructions or implicit/explicit
epistemic elements. One may add, of course, that it may not always be possible
to specify which specific linguistic elements contribute to the conception of one
or the other kind of modality.

MH concludes that the non-specific and the generic reading of descriptively
used indefinite NPs have a complementary distribution. This distribution is not
syntactic, though; one or the other reading is dependent on the modality of the
sentence. In MH's account, the subjective/objective modal interpretation seems
then to be generated first, only afterwards is the language user able to reach
either a generic or a non-specific interpretation of the indefinite NP. It seems
quite plausible to me to recognise a relation between modality and the reading
of indefinite NPs, but it is, however, important to specify that the reading of the
sentence and that of the indefinite NP are interdependent. That is, the reading of
the indefinite NP cannot be determined by the modality of the sentence if the
reading of the NP itself forms part of the reading of the whole sentence and
thereby by its modality. Exemplifying, a VP can only be said to be used with a
general reading if the other parts of the sentence allow for it. That is, in a sentence
like "the elephant has four legs", we would interpret the NP in the subject position
as having a generic reading and the predicate as being general –an indicator on

objective modality-, by default. However, if we substitute the head of the NP by "fly", it is more likely that we would read the NP as referential and the predicate as particular, and hence subjective. In this sense, the reading of the indefinite NP is part of the modality of a sentence in its entirety; if parts of a sentence contribute to a subjective reading, then the reading of the indefinite NP is non-specific by necessity since this reading forms part of the subjective modality.

MH's analysis of the use of the indefinite article in terms of modality contributes to an explanation of the interplay between syntax and semantics and the influence of context in our understanding of linguistic expressions; that is, it is not the indefinite NP per se which is either generic or non-specific. Rather, it is the context of which it forms parts which guides us to one or the other reading.

The aim of the last article, *Evidence for Evidentiality in Danish*, by Kasper Boye (KB), is to substantiate the assumption that evidentiality is manifest as a linguistic category in Danish.

In general terms, evidentiality is a term for the speaker's evaluation of the evidence of his/her utterance. This, however, is not made clear right at the beginning of the article. It should also be mentioned that examples of linguistic expressions in Danish with evidential meaning are not provided until the reader has read the first nine pages.

According to KB, evidentiality is manifest in Danish in so-called evidential verbs as a linguistic form-content category. After having provided a description of the notion of 'category', KB gives a detailed description of the semantic and syntactic characteristics of evidential verbs on the basis of a set of criteria which must be met by a language in order to dispose of a category of evidentiality. These criteria are the following (p. 87).

(1) a formally delimited system of linguistic items (…) which

(2) are epistemic (...)

(3) indicate evidence for a proposition as their primary meaning (...)

(4) allow for a (..) content-based classification in accordance with the universal kinds of evidence (...)

(5) are more or less grammaticalized

KB's claim is then that evidentiality is formally coded in evidential verbs. Semantically, such verbs are characterised by having epistemic meaning and by indicating evidence for a proposition. Through a number of analyses, KB substantiates the claim that Danish meets these criteria.

The first criterion concerns the syntax of the category. KB argues that two syntactic criteria for evidential verbs may be established. Firstly, evidential verbs may be constructed with an *at*-nci-nexus (nominativus-cum-infinitivo) (an

expression not explained). Secondly, they may occur with an anteposed or raised adverbial. These two criteria delimit the group of verbs to those which indicate perception, declaration, attitude and appearance (e.g. *det lader sagtens til, han kan gå* 'it appears easily to he can walk', p. 90). This formal characteristic delimits evidential verbs from other verbs such as emotive verbs (**Han begrædes at kunne gå* 'He bewail-PASS to could walk') and so-called phonetically descriptive verbs[2] (**He shout-PASS to could walk*').

The second and the third criteria concern the semantics of evidential verbs. With respect to (2), KB argues that it is evident that epistemicity is part of the meaning of verbs expressing perception, declaration, attitude and appearance.

Contrary to this, it is less obvious that such verbs indicate evidence for a proposition as their primary meaning, as demanded by the third criterion. This is due to the fact that they may be interpreted in two different ways either as propositional or as non-propositional. Exemplifying, *ses* in (1) (p. 93) below may, on the one hand, function as a predicator in a propositional predication. It is thus understood literally.

> (1) *Det ses, at prisen er steget* ('it see-PASS to that price-the is increased')

However, it may also function as a modifier of the superordinate proposition. In this case, it is not understood literally, but is taken to indicate evidence for a proposition.

The fourth criterion concerns the category of evidentiality as a system of related content-units. Only few studies on the typology of evidentiality have been carried out. KB refers to a study by Willett (1988) which distinguishes three kinds of evidence.

One of these is **attested evidentiality**. In this case there is direct evidence, either from direct perception or from direct perception of some evidence of it. This kind of evidence is indicated by those verbs which are non-propositional occurrences of perception verbs such as in "Det ses, Bo spiller fodbold" ('It see –PASS Bo plays football') (p. 95).

Indirect, reported evidence concerns non-propositional occurrences of attitude or declaration verbs. "Det siges, at Bo spiller fodbold" ('It say-PASS Bo plays football') (p. 95).

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2   Reference is made to Leech (1983:214).

In the case of **indirect, inferring evidence**, "the truth of the subordinate proposition follows from an inference based on circumstantial evidence". "Det virker til, at Bo spiller fodbold" ('It seems to that Bo plays football') (p. 96).

KB concludes that with "the evidential verbs, evidentiality is thus *lexicalised* in Danish since these verbs manifest evidentiality as a linguistic form-content category" (p. 106).

Lastly, KB argues that the group of evidential verbs also meets the last criterion, grammaticalization. The substantiation of this assumption is based on a process of grammaticalisation according to which evidential verbs are developed from verbs to auxiliaries. They are not entirely grammaticalised as such, though, but are in the beginning of the process (p. 109). On this basis, KB states that the criteria of grammaticalisation applied on the one hand must be language specific and on the other must be criteria of weak grammaticalisation. On these grounds, KB provides five arguments for regarding evidential verbs as being grammaticalised. Next, the categorisation of evidential verbs as auxiliaries is discussed. KB establishes two criteria. First of all, evidential verbs are non-predicative; that is, unlike full verbs, they do not express a predicative relation in a state-of affairs. Evidence for this is for example that they cannot be modified by an adverbial. In a sentence such as *Drengen, som ikke ses at løbe* ('Boy-the who not see-PASS to run') (p. 115), the verb can only be interpreted in its literal sense, not as evidential verbs, if *ikke* is taken to modify the verb or the predication to which it is attached. Secondly, evidential verbs are taken to have a copulative function. Contrary to full verbs, auxiliaries do not take complements. This is shown among other things by the fact that if evidential verbs are to be interpreted as having evidential meaning, they must occur with a predicative linguistic item, such as in: *Det ses at prisen er steget* (p.93), but not in: *Han ses* ('He see-PASS') (p. 117), in which the pronoun is a non-predicative complement.

In general terms, this article contributes to the discussion of the relation between form and content. It provides evidence for the relevance of recognising evidentiality as a linguistic category in Danish; evidentiality has consequence for the structure of language and for our understanding of it. Throughout the article, the reader is provided with a multitude of analyses and definitions of the parameters applied. But one is helped along by the structure of the article; the reader is constantly kept informed about what has already been done and about what will be done.

In its entirety, the book excels in dealing with the subject of modality from different angles and at the same time in having a much wider scope than "mere modality". Both HM and KB deal with the problem of establishing linguistic categories. But where HM's object of study is modality as a category in Spanish,

KB is concerned with the category of evidentiality in Danish. With regard to this latter, it should be mentioned that one may argue that his subject matter falls outside the scope of the book. Unlike HM and KB, the contribution by FS is not concerned with modality as a linguistic category, but as a parameter in a representational scheme. In a wider perspective, his concern may therefore be said to be the representation of language, rather than an explanation of the components of language. MH differs from the three contributions already mentioned by using modality as a parameter for an explanation of a different linguistic problem, viz. that of the interpretation of indefinite NPs. We are shown how the meaning of the different parts of a sentence may contribute to the meaning of the whole.

By bringing in different facets of linguistics with modality as a centre point, the book is an interesting initiator to a discussion, not only of modality, but of different aspects of linguistics.

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