Linguist 237: Modality and Gradation

Summary of von Fintel and Iatridou (2008):
“How to Say *Ought* in Foreign”

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1 Basic Claims

- The strong necessity modals are sensitive to the primary ordering source. The weak necessity modals are sensitive to both primary and secondary ordering sources.

- In languages such as Greek, Spanish, French, Russian, Croatian, Dutch, Icelandic, and Hungarian, the English weak necessity modal *ought* translates into a strong necessity modal plus what appears in the consequent of a counterfactual conditional.

- Therefore, weak necessity can be expressed by taking a strong necessity modal and marking it with counterfactual morphology.

- The weak necessity reading in “transparent OUGHT” languages is the result of the promotion of a secondary ordering source of a strong necessity modal.

- Counterfactual marking in the aforementioned languages signals the meta-linguistic operation of ordering source promotion.

2 A Basic Contrast

- Strong Necessity Modal: *must, have to*

- Weak Necessity Modal: *ought to*

(1) After using the bathroom, everybody *ought to* wash their hands; employees *have to / must*.

(2) (Weak Necessity & NOT Strong Necessity)
You *ought to* do the dishes but you don’t *have to*. 

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(3) (Strong Necessity & NOT Strong Necessity)
   a. # You have to do the dishes but you don’t have to.
   b. # You must do the dishes but you don’t have to.

(4) a. (Weak Necessity > Strong Necessity)
   You ought to wash your hands - in fact, you have to.
   b. (Strong Necessity > Weak Necessity)
   ?? You have to wash your hands - in fact, you ought to.

3 Weakness

• Hypothesis 1 (Horn): Strong necessity modals require the prejacent to be true in all of the favored worlds. Weak necessity modals say that the prejacent is true in most of the favored worlds.
  - We have some qualms about being able to “count” possible worlds in such a way as to make sense of saying that most of the worlds in a particular set have a certain property.
  - The “most analysis” does not capture the meaning of weak necessity modals. A sentence like “You ought to do the dishes” means not that among the favored worlds, most are worlds where you do the dishes. Rather, it means that among the favored worlds, all the very best ones are worlds where you do the dishes.

• Hypothesis 2 (von Fintel & Iatridou): “ought p” says that among the favored worlds, p-worlds are better than non-p-worlds. That is, the ought-claim makes a further distinction as to how good particular worlds among the favored world are. Strong necessity modals say that the prejacent is true in all of the favored worlds, while weak necessity modals say that the prejacent is true in all of the very best (by some additional measure) among the favored worlds.

4 The Crosslinguistic Picture

• How is the meaning of English weak necessity ought expressed in other languages?
  - Greek: tha eprepe (FUT + MUST.PST)
  - French: devr- (MUST.COND)
  - Spanish: deveria/tendria (MUST/HAVE.COND)
  - Russian: dolzhen byl byl (Required + BE.PST + byl)
  - Croatian: mora- bi (MUST.PCPL WOULD)
  - Dutch: horen (ought), zou moeten (WOULD MUST)
– Icelandic: aett- ath (HAVE.CF TO)
– Hungarian: kell-ene (MUST.COND)

• Crosslinguistically: OUGHT = CF + MUST

5 Flavors

• “Transparent OUGHT” (OUGHT + CF) can be used as an epistemic modal, deontic modal, and goal-oriented modal. Therefore, it seems to be very much the same as English ought semantically.

6 Counterfactuality?

• CF marking signals that some explicit or implicit assumption has taken us outside the context set in Stalnakers sense.
• CF + MUST: In some possibly counterfactual world, strong necessity holds.
• ought: Weak necessity holds in the actual world.
• English would + have to is not weak necessity. It means that some necessity obtains in a counterfactual world.
• In the transparent languages, counterfactual marking has two uses in combination with a strong necessity modal: (i) saying that the strong necessity holds in a counterfactual scenario, (ii) saying that a weak necessity holds in the actual world.
• In English, counterfactual marking on a strong necessity modal only has use (i). To express use (ii), English resorts to the lexical item ought.

7 A Consolation and a Presedent

• English lexicalizes into the verb wish what some other languages express with CF + WANT, and English lexicalizes into ought what other languages express with CF + MUST.
• Can english do CF + WANT to mean wish?

(5) a. I wish that I was taller.
   b. * I would want that I were taller.

(6) a. If he were taller, he would want to have a different bed.
   b. * If he were taller, he wishes (for/ to have/ that he had) a different bed.
• No!

• CF + WANT in transparent languages are ambiguous between wanting in the actual world and wanting in a counterfactual world.

• Why should in English the combination of CF-marking and strong necessity not be able to express weak necessity? Morphological Blocking.

• But Dutch has a dedicated weak necessity item *horen*.

• Perhaps extra enabling factors are absent in English?

• For example, CF-morphology with a necessity modal that is adjectival also fails to yield ought (in English and Greek).

(7) To get to the island it would be necessary to use this boat.
8 Scope Confusion?

• What if in OUGHT reading of CF + MUST there is a permutation at LF whereby the counterfactuality doesn't actually take scope over the modal but takes scope under it?

(8) I would have expected him to be here ...
   a. If he had promised to attend this meeting. (counterfactual expectation)
   b. Why isn’t he? (actual expectation)

• The same with counterfactual marking on want. It could be seen as expressing not a want in a counterfactual scenario but an actual want towards a counterfactual state of affairs.
The analysis fails for two reasons:

1. In ought, it is not a strong necessity modal that makes it to the actual world.
2. In the transparent ought cases, the complement is simply not marked as counterfactual. There is no feeling whatsoever that the event under ought is contrary-to-fact or even unlikely.

9 Ordering Source Promotion

- Strong necessity modals say that the prejacent is true in all of the favored worlds, while weak necessity modals say that the prejacent is true in all of the very best (by some additional measure) among the favored worlds.

- They build the sensitivity to primary or secondary ordering sources into the lexical entries of must/have to and ought. The lexical entry of the strong necessity modal only looks at the primary ordering source. The lexical entry of the weak necessity modal looks at both primary and secondary ordering sources.

- In the transparent OUGHT construction (MUST + CF), the CF marking makes it so that a strong necessity modal suddenly shows sensitivity to the secondary ordering source.

- So the CF marking is promoting the secondary ordering source to primary status so that the strong necessity modal can be sensitive to it.

(9) Ordering Source Promotion?
   a. To go to Ashfield you ought to take Route 2, because its the most scenic way
   b. To go to Ashfield in the most scenic way, you have to take Route 2

- How do we formalise the notion of ordering source promotion?

  1. Union of the primary and secondary ordering sources does NOT work.
  2. – The context provides for each modal, a modal base f and a bipartitioned sequence of ordering sources $<< g_1, ..., g_i >, < g_{i+1}, ..., g_k >>$.
     - Strong necessity modals say that the prejacent is true in all worlds in $\text{Max}_{g_i}(w) (\ldots (\text{max}_{g_1}(w) (f(w))))$.
     - Weak necessity modals say that the prejacent is true in all worlds in $\text{Max}_{g_k}(w) (\ldots (\text{max}_{g_{i+1}}(w) (\text{max}_{g_i}(w) (\ldots (\text{max}_{g_1}(w) (f(w)))))))$.
     - An ordering source sequence $<< g_1, ..., g_i >, < g_{i+1}, ..., g_k >>$ is changed by ORDERING SOURCE PROMOTION by moving any number of ordering sources from the second tier into the first tier. For example, $<< g_1, ..., g_i, g_{i+1} >, < g_{i+2}, ..., g_k >>$. 
3. Set union of the two ordering sources but only add propositions from the secondary ordering source into the new ordering source if they do not conflict with the primary ordering source. However, there might not be a unique way of getting a newly merged ordering source. What if the secondary ordering source itself contained two contradictory propositions?

10 Why Counterfactual Marking?

- Why is CF morphology doing the promotion?
- Perhaps CF marking is metalinguistic.
- CF is saying that “if we were in a context in which the secondary ordering source was promoted, then it would be a strong necessity that . . . ”.
- This would explain why even though there is CF-morphology, the modal claim is made firmly about the actual world; all that the morphology marks is a change in evaluation parameters.
- The counterfactual morphology marks this quasi-meta-linguistic operation of promotion of a secondary ordering source.

References