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## From ‘actuality entailments’ to averitivity: on some postmodal meanings in French

So-called actuality entailments (AE) were first identified on the basis of French data over twenty years ago (Bhatt 1999), and typically involve two verbal elements: (a) a modal verb or construction with past tense marking, and (b) a lexical verb. According to Bhatt, the past modal verbs *a pu* (‘was able<sub>perfective</sub> to’) and *a dû* (‘was compelled<sub>perfective</sub> to’) in (1)-(2) have an implicative meaning à la (Karttunen 1971), i.e. the lexical verb, although embedded under a modal, comes to describe an actual event description; the modal is treated as lexically ambiguous. An obvious problem – addressed at length in (Mari 2016) – with views of AE thus putting aside modality (Mari & Martin 2007; Mari & Martin 2009; Homer 2011; Mari 2015; Nadathur 2019) is that it is empirically unsatisfying to treat (1)-(2) as being equivalent to an implicative construction (e.g. *manage*) or a non-modalized assertion in the past, as these examples respectively express that a capacity and an obligation became realized by some past event (a fact unaccounted for under if one brushes aside modality).

While (Mari 2016) argues for a presupposition-based analysis of the modal content of AEs in (1)-(3), where the modal turns out to be trivialized in the assertion, as its domain of quantification contains the actual world, I will show that (i) her analysis, based on construed (and sometimes, grammatically misjudged) examples, cannot explain some attested data points, e.g. where no presupposition arises (6), and (ii) that it shares with both the implicative view and de-modalizing accounts, the idea that *event actuality* is central to the phenomena at stake. I will argue that such a conception leads us away from the obvious, and crucial connection between so-called AEs, and averitive (Kuteva et al. 2019) structures in French. Indeed, *pouvoir*<sub>perfective</sub>, when combined with a negation, expresses a failed attempt (3), very much like a ‘try’ verb – and strikingly similar to an alternative averitive construction without negative marking, namely *vouloir*<sub>perfective</sub> (5). Such averitive readings of modal verbs in the past are ignored in existing contributions, or when discussed, are simply dubbed as ‘non actual’ (Hacquard 2006: 163 sqq.; Nadathur 2019). In short, I believe that the very term of ‘actuality entailment’ tends to obfuscate the complexity of the matter at hand.

To address these issues, I will propose that so-called AE and averitive structures form a natural semantic cluster, revolving around the notion of *an eventualized postmodal meaning* (EPM), which can either involve a realized (1) or a non-realized (‘failed’) (3)-(5)(2) modal content. And instead of adopting a systematically productive account of EPMs, be it based on e.g. presupposition and a trivialized modal (Mari 2016), or aspectual coercion (Homer 2011; Mari & Martin 2009), or some other mechanism, I will argue that at least some of them are essentially of a conventionalized nature, as some gaps in EPM paradigms, notably in combination with negation, do not seem readily explainable in terms of semantic composition, cf. e.g. (4). But unlike existing lexicalist accounts (e.g. (Bhatt 1999)’s ‘implicative’ proposal), I will claim that some EPM structures involve conventionalized implicatures à la (Potts 2007a; Potts 2007b), and a two-dimensional meaning, combining an at issue content  $\sigma^a$  (the actual event or failed attempt event) with a non-at issue content  $\tau^c$  (roughly speaking, the modal meaning, anchored in the past) – a fact which naturally explains why the latter can have presuppositional properties. My implementation will be inspired by (Davis & Gutzmann 2015)’s notion of *pragmaticization*, and will use their *bullet operator*  $\bullet$  ( $\llbracket \alpha:\sigma^a \bullet \beta:\tau^c \rrbracket^{Mi,g} = \langle \llbracket \alpha:\sigma^a \rrbracket^{Mi,g}, \llbracket \beta:\tau^c \rrbracket^{Mi,g} \rangle$ ) to relate the two semantic dimensions; I will also postulate an underlying diachronic change, whereby an implicature becomes conventionalized, then promoted to at issue meaning-level. I will finally suggest that not all EPM structures have equally progressed in this respect, and that *vouloir*<sub>perfective</sub> (3), is much less lexicalized than e.g. *pouvoir*<sub>perfective</sub> (1), and that some complete lexifications even obtain, as in (6). The latter, I will argue, is more advanced than both (5) and (1), and has become a semantically mono-dimensional, non-presuppositional frozen expression – i.e. it does not involve  $\bullet$  any more.

- (1) Il a pu partir. (French)  
 He have-3sg.PR be.able.to-PP leave-INF.  
 ‘He was able/managed to leave’. **(presupposes some difficulty)**
- (2) Il a dû partir. (French)  
 He have-3sg.PR have.to-PP leave-INF.  
 ‘He was compelled to leave’. **(presupposes agent’s unwillingness to act)**
- (3) Il n’a pas pu partir. (French)  
 He NEG.have-3sg.PR NEG be.able.to-PP leave-INF.  
 ‘He failed/wasn’t able/couldn’t bring himself to leave’ **(avertive)**
- (4) #Il n’a pas dû partir. (French)  
 He NEG.have-3sg.PR NEG have.to-PP leave-INF.  
 ‘He probably didn’t leave’. **(no EPM meaning, avertive or other)**
- (5) Il a voulu partir.  
 He have-3sg.PR want-PP leave-INF.  
 ‘He tried to leave [but failed]’. **(avertive)**
- (6) Nous avons pu constater les progrès remarquables que le monde peut faire lorsque tous vont dans la même direction. (www2.parl.gc.ca) **(not presuppositional)**  
 ‘We saw [= were able<sub>perfective</sub> to see] the remarkable progress that had been made when the world pulls together.’(www2.parl.gc.ca)

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