Event accessibility and modality-aspect interfaces. Exemplified with English *must.*

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A vast body of research has discussed the interaction of modality with other categories, such as aspect or negation (e.g. Abraham 1999, 2008, Hacquard 2009, de Haan 1997). Regarding modality-aspect interfaces, Abraham (2006: 8) proposes that: "[p]erfective aspect is compatible with root modality" and "[i]mperfective aspect is compatible with epistemic modality", e.g.:

(1) a. He must **die**.

b. He must **be dying**. (taken from Abraham 1999: 66)

In (1a) a terminative, and thus perfective, event converges with root *must*; while an ongoing, and thus imperfective, event in (1b) converges with epistemic *must*. Literature, however, provides examples of root *must* with the imperfective, e.g.:

(2) You **must be working** when the inspector comes in. (taken from Alexander 1991: 212)

This paper attempts to demonstrate how concepts developed in logic and formal semantics can be applied to natural language analysis (Portner 2009: 29-45), and endeavors to explain the lack of modality-aspect interaction.

Abraham's (2008) generalizations employ the *perfective/imperfective* dichotomy that English does not mark overtly. Only the English *progressive* presents an event as ongoing, thus as imperfective (Binnick 2006, Comrie 1976/2001, Sasse 2002). The English progressive is expressed with the *progressive infinitive*, which is one of the verb forms that can follow a modal.

This qualitative study investigates a sample of randomly retrieved occurrences of *must* with the progressive infinitive. It does not consider the perfect progressive infinitive, since the perfect can also trigger epistemic readings (cf. Szymański 2019), which could obscure the influence of the progressive. The analysis adapts the model of *the semantic field of modal expressions* (Kratzer 1991) in an attempt to explain why the imperfective does not

always trigger epistemic readings. The model is based on the concept of *conversational backgrounds* (*possible worlds*), which make up the context of an utterance.

The paper aims to demonstrate that the lack of modality-aspect convergence can be explained with the characteristics of the conversational backgrounds that a speaker evaluates. The results show that there is a correspondence between the factual or supposed/inferred availability of the event to the event participant, which is responsible for triggering particular modal flavors of *must*, irrespective of the progressive (or the imperfective). For example, in (2), the speaker evaluates an event in which the agent is present in the circumstances where it is possible for them to be working when the inspector comes in, thus the event of working is factually available to them.

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