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Intellectual Empathy as a Socio-Cultural Facet of Communication: The Case of English Modals from the Perspective of Polish

Abstract

The paper addresses the issue of compatibility between the speaker's intention and the hearer's expectations in a communicative act as an issue related to what I would like to call "intellectual empathy." The immediate inspiration for the topic is the following quotation from Susan M. Ervin-Tripp (1964: 93): "The possibility of insult and of humor based on linguistic choices means that members agree on the underlying rules of speech and on the social meaning of linguistic features." Langacker's Cognitive Grammar allows us to accommodate the extra-linguistic facets of meaning construction, thus to identify the role of the speaker/hearer's cooperation in the construction and reconstruction of meaning in a particular usage context, the role that is dependent on the degree of intellectual empathy between the speech act participants. English modals have been selected as an aspect of the language illustrating the relevance of linguistic choices resulting from socio-cultural determinants behind intellectual empathy.

Keywords: communication, sociolinguistics, semantics, foreign language learning, concepts, metaphor.

The paper will be akin to a journey – from an aspect of learning a foreign language, through the notion of intellectual empathy, to the semantics of modal predicates in English, whose functioning in the language is immersed in intellectual empathy.

I tend to think of learning a foreign language in terms of the metaphor: LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IS A CONTACT OF THREE PEOPLE FOR A COMMON GOAL.[1] These three people are: the learner, the native language, and the foreign language. The first two personae, *i.e.* the learner and the native language, are good friends; the third one, *i.e.* the foreign language, is a stranger to the learner that is

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1   I would like to thank prof. Post for his suggestion definitely improving the formula.

somehow related to the well-known friend – the native language. Each of these personae has a different role to play in the drama: the persona expecting to take advantage of reaching the goal, *i.e.* the potential beneficiary (the learner), wants to get acquainted with the stranger, *i.e.* the foreign language, in order to gain, through this acquaintance, access to new perspectives and possibilities, *e.g.* success. The potential beneficiary's (*i.e.* learner's) well-known friend (*i.e.* the native language) is the persona mediating between the potential beneficiary and the stranger by being a relative of the stranger and always being around the potential beneficiary. The stranger (*i.e.* the foreign language) is the newcomer/stranger that the potential beneficiary (*i.e.* the learner) wants to get to know, thus expecting some kind of benefits from this acquaintance. Summing up, the three personae act toward the common goal, which is the potential beneficiary's welfare, to be achieved through his or her familiarizing him or herself with the stranger with the aid of the stranger's relative who is the potential beneficiary's well-known friend. This fairly complicated system of interdependencies is illustrated in Figure 1.
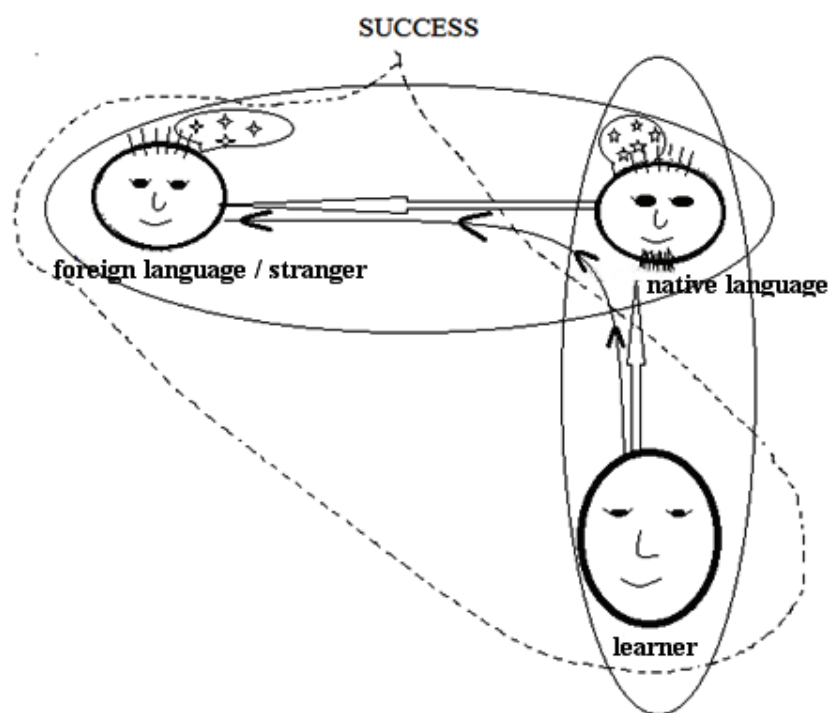

Figure 1. A reflection of the conceptual metaphor LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IS A CONTACT OF THREE PEOPLE FOR A COMMON GOAL

An interesting question is: to what extent can the potential beneficiary's friendship with the well-known friend truly help achieve his/her goal, *i.e.* in getting to know the stranger to such a degree that the acquaintance will bring advantages? By proceeding with the metaphor that LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IS A CONTACT OF THREE PEOPLE FOR A COMMON GOAL, we can draw a number of inferences concerning the role of the mediating person, *i.e.* the metaphorical native language, in the process of getting to know the stranger, *i.e.* the metaphorical foreign language, by the potential beneficiary, *i.e.* the metaphorical learner.

To begin with, in the process of familiarizing oneself with the stranger, the potential beneficiary may look for some similarities and/or differences in the appearances of the two relatives. This phase of the process of familiarizing oneself with the stranger through his/her physical resemblance to the well-known relative can be accomplished relatively easily, as physical appearance is accessible to perception and subsequent similarity judgments. When people meet for the first time, getting *familiar with their appearance* is a natural first step in getting familiar with the person. By analogy, in the initial phase of learning a foreign language, for a learner, *the word stock* is the directly accessible component of language. If that is so, then the metaphor allows for two inferences: (i) that similarities and differences between both the native and foreign vocabulary attract the learner's attention, first of all; and (ii) that for a learner, learning the vocabulary is a natural priority in the process of familiarizing oneself with the foreign language.

In the world of social communication – important as familiarizing oneself with physical appearance may be – it does not guarantee successful communication with the "stranger," in that to know *what one looks like* does not exactly mean to know *the way one thinks*. Hence, in order to achieve the goal of getting access "through the acquaintance to new perspectives and possibilities," the potential beneficiary will need to obtain some knowledge about the stranger's personality (which is represented by the "clouds" in the figure). In this case, the fact that our stranger and the well-known friend are relatives need not be helpful. Indeed, knowing the well-known friend's social manners, preferences, habits, *etc.*, *i.e.* having developed a certain *concept of the friend's mentality*, can facilitate getting to know the stranger's manners, preferences, habits, *etc.*, *i.e. the stranger's mentality*. However, relying too heavily in the process of construing a representation of the stranger's mentality on what the potential beneficiary knows about (the mentality of) the stranger's relative (and the beneficiary's well-known friend) may turn out to be very misleading and may impede reaching the goal, *i.e.* the possibility of taking advantage from familiarizing oneself with the stranger. Simply put, presupposing *a priori* a *similarity of mentalities* between two relatives may prevent the potential beneficiary from getting to know *what the mentality of the stranger truly is* and, subsequently, *how to interact with him towards the common goal.*

Mapping metaphorically the above inferences from the real world to the mental world, in which the learner experiences "two languages in contact," invites the following entailments: (i) becoming familiar with the vocabulary is only the first step in the process of getting to know the foreign language (just like getting to know the appearance of a person is only the first phase in the process of getting acquainted); (ii) language beyond vocabulary is equally important for successful communication (just like knowing more than the appearance of our partner in a communicative act is important for successful communication); (iii) in becoming familiar with the body of a foreign language beyond its vocabulary, the mental representation of the learner's native language beyond its vocabulary *need not* be very helpful, (just like having developed a representation of the mentality of a well-known friend need not be helpful in trying to get to know the mentality of the friend's relative).

So far, the metaphor LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IS A CONTACT OF THREE PEOPLE FOR A COMMON GOAL has shed some light on the roles of the learner, the native language and the foreign language in the process of learning the latter. As may have already been noticed, within the metaphor the native and foreign languages are construed as living creatures. Thus, the metaphor imposes on the **concept language** the structure of a **living organism** or, simply, of a human being, with elements of the structure: the flesh (the element of the body that is accessible to perception), the bones (inaccessible to

perception and immersed in the flesh, whose positions determine the body's outer looks), and the mind / neural system (inaccessible to perception, inherent in the flesh and in the bones) which organizes proper interactions between the flesh and the bones and is responsible for the proper functioning of the whole organism.

Based on the assumption that the metaphor LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IS A CONTACT OF THREE PEOPLE FOR A COMMON GOAL implies the metaphor LANGUAGE IS A HUMAN BEING, the following mappings can be postulated: the lexicon as the flesh (both are directly accessible to perception) and the constructional schemas as the bone structure (both inaccessible to direct perception, immersed in the lexicon/flesh, respectively). Supposing that the mappings do look sound, there remains one more question: what facet of language structure is the metaphorical counterpart of the human mind? As a cognitive linguist, I would like to postulate that in the metaphor the human mind maps onto the grammar of the language, the grammar conceived of as serving "an 'imagistic' function" by construing the meanings of utterances by organizing the symbolic resources of the language "in a particular way […], emphasizing certain facets [of the scene under conceptualization] at the expense of others, viewing it from a certain perspective, […]" (Langacker 1987: 39). In other words, by analogy to the mind, which controls processes at the flesh/bone structure interface, the grammar of the language "controls" the process of meaning construction out of the symbolic resources: phonemes, morphemes, words, and constructional schemas.

Consequently, in view of the mappings between the mind and grammar as postulated above, an inference that is directly relevant to the present discussion can be formulated: since *empathy* is situated within the human mind, then *intellectual empathy* can be understood as a facet grammar. More precisely, to the extent that *empathy* is one of the factors controlling human social interaction, *intellectual empathy* as an agent in the process of meaning construction and reconstruction contributes to communicative intelligibility of the utterance.

Obviously, the notion of *intellectual empathy*, postulated here as a facet of meaning construction, must not be left without a word on its methodological context. In view of the number of excellent papers that were published in *Kognitywistyka: Empatia, obrazowanie i kontekst jako kategorie kognitywistyczne*, edited by Henryk Kardela, Zbysław Muszyński and Maciej Rajewski (2012), in which an inquisitive reader can enjoy disputes on the notion of *empathy* from philosophical, sociological, psychological, linguistic and literary studies perspectives, I will refrain from dwelling on the issue. Instead, I will evoke Langacker's (2001) work titled "Discourse in Cognitive Grammar," in which the linguist characterizes the roles of speech event participants in discourse as a usage event as follows:

> A usage event is an action carried out by the speaker and the hearer. The speaker […] acts in an initiative capacity, the hearer […] being responsive: but whether their role is active or reactive, each has to deal with both a conceptualization and a vocalization, the two basic "poles" of an utterance. The speaker's and the hearer's action involves the directing and focusing attention. In successful communication they manage to coordinate this action and focus attention on the same conceived entity. (Langacker 2001: 144)

Precisely, the ability to direct, focus and *share* the interlocutors' attention for (re)construing the meaning of an actual utterance is what I would call intellectual empathy.[2] The adjective "intellectual" is to stress the "non-emotional" nature of the type of empathy, understood as being responsible for

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2   Kubiński (2012: 174) suggests that the term "empathy" could be appropriate for the particular "cooperation" between the speaker and the hearer in discourse, raising the question how could it be accommodated in Cognitive Grammar.

the "merging" of two independent processes of meaning construction, *i.e.* the speaker's and the hearer's, which consist in integrating the contents of predicates (overt language structures) with specifications of the context of the utterance that is relevant for the overall construal of the message. Intellectual empathy means the responsibility of the conceptualizer in *selecting* linguistic devices that are appropriately explicit for precise meaning construal in view of the available specifications of the actual (extra-linguistic) context; on the part of the addressee of the message, the responsibility consists in her/his ability to *reconstruct* the intended meaning emerging from what is encoded in the symbolic resources and relevant specifications of the usage context.[3]

Towards postulating the notion of intellectual empathy, I was driven by my research into the area of English modal predicates,[4] therefore, this aspect of English will serve as a case illustrating the issue.

The modals

Supposing that the metaphor which helped introduce the notion of *intellectual empathy* makes sense and that we are ready to tentatively accept the notion as an analytic tool that is relevant for the study of languages in contact, as, for example, in the process of learning a foreign language, what awaits to be demonstrated is whether indeed the notion of intellectual empathy bears relevance for the study of language and where the intellectual empathy comes from. As the languages in focus are English and Polish, and modals serve as the study material, let me begin with a brief overview of modal verbs in the two languages.[5] Specifically, for my present purpose I have selected the Polish modals which are considered to be equivalents of the core modal predicates in the English system: *móc* ('may/can'), *musieć* ('must'), *mieć powinność* ('ought (to) / should'), *potrzebować / mieć potrzebę* ('need'), and *ośmielać się* (dare). As the purpose of introducing the overview is watching languages in contact, I will discuss Polish modals and point to some similarities and differences with the English system.

1. The Polish equivalents of *may/can* and *must*, which are *móc* (for *may/can*) and *musieć* (for *must*), form conjugation paradigms like full verbs: *mogę* (I 'may/can'), *możesz* (you 'may/can'), *może* (he, she, it 'may/can'), *możemy* (we 'may/can'), *możecie* (you 'may/can'), *mogą* (they 'may/can'); the Polish counterparts also inflect in the past tense: *mogłem* (I 'may/can' + past), *mogłeś* (you 'may/can' + past), *mógł* (he 'may/can' + past), *mogliśmy* (we 'may/can' + past), *mogliście* (you 'may/can' + past), *mogli* (they 'may/can' + past); importantly, the past tense forms in Polish do not convey hypothetical meanings, as is the case with the past forms of the English modals: *could/might*.

2. The assumed Polish counterpart of *ought/should*, the verb *powinien* (third person, masculine), is inflected only for person and number, with neither the infinitive (unless one accepts *mieć*

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3 I expect to receive arguments that pragmatics could handle the cooperation problems that are an indispensable part of discourse. Without disagreeing, I would like to stress that I view intellectual empathy as a facet of the meaning construction process rather than as a factor that comes into play when meaning is (pragmatically) interpreted.

4 My first mention of intellectual empathy as a notion relevant for the analysis of English modals was in 2005.

5 To my present knowledge, at least within Polish linguistics, modal verbs have not been analyzed as a formally marked subcategory of verbal predicates, thus, I will characterize selected modal verbs in Polish on the basis of both my native speaker intuition and on my analytic experience as a linguist.

powinność 'to have the duty/obligation' as the periphrastic infinitive) nor present/past tense differentiation (again, unless the conjugation paradigm of *mieć powinność* is accepted as a periphrastic variant). Interestingly, the Polish form forms paradigms for counter-factual meanings: *powinien był* 'should/ought' 3rd person, sg. + 'be' 3rd person, sg., past tense for all persons, both singular and plural.

3. *Need* and *dare* can be regarded as counterparts of *potrzebować / mieć potrzebę* 'have a need' and *ośmielać się / mieć śmiałość*, respectively. In either case, the Polish counterparts of *need* and *dare* appear to form conjugation paradigms inflected for person, number, tense and mood.

4. As for *will*, possibly *mieć wolę* 'have (a) will,' with inflected *have* could be considered a better counterpart than *woleć*, *i.e.* the verb which shares the root with the noun *wola* 'will' but is used to mean 'prefer' rather than 'have (a) will.'

Summing up the above comparison, I would like to point to a number of differences between the grammar(s) of the "assumed as equivalent" predicates: in Polish, inflectional endings specify the relations within a sentence with a modal verb, so that there is no doubt as to who the "possibility," "permission" or "obligation" refers to; English is "deficient" in this respect. Besides, although the above comparison does not reflect it, polysemy is the most often discussed feature of English modals, thus the range of meanings assigned to the English predicates is only partly reflected in the pairs above. Indeed, as far as modal predicates are concerned, it may prove counter-effective for a Polish learner to look for similarities between the well-known friend, the Polish language, and its relative – the English language, especially if grammatical information is analyzed as contributing to meaning construction. Bearing in mind that the speakers of English are somehow able to uncover necessary information from what they hear despite the deficiency in formal grammatical devices, there must be other factors that facilitate construing the meaning of utterances with modals in English, the factors to be explicated and, possibly, to be implemented in the teaching of English to Polish learners. In what follows I will attempt to find an answer to the question as to what it is that aids successful communication despite the peculiarities of English modals.

The root/epistemic distinction

The root/epistemic opposition has been acknowledged in the majority of analyses of modal meaning since Hofmann (1966) (Lyons (1977), Leech and Coates (1979), Coates and Leech (1980), Butler (1982), Coates (1983), Sweetser (1984), Langacker (1991)), though alternative subcategories have also been postulated. Researchers basically agree as far as the differentiation is concerned, although the definitions of the two categories are fairly vague. For example, Coates defines the category *epistemic* as: "… concerned with the speaker's assumptions or assessment of possibilities" (1983: 18); root modality, as a non-epistemic modality, is identified basically through its syntactic patterns. For practical purposes, a handy way of differentiating the meanings is to evoke paraphrases of sentences with epistemic modals and root modals. As far as the modal MAY is concerned, the paraphrases of epistemic meaning are: *it is possible/probable that sth is the case*, whereas the root meanings, besides the meaning of *permission*, are *it is possible/ probable for sb to do sth*. At the same time, a few more specific meanings can be identified within each

of the categories; for example, epistemic MAY allows paraphrases with *it is possible/probable/likely that, perhaps*; whereas root MAY paraphrases as *permit/allow sb to do sth*, *be probable, possible for sb to do sth*. Besides, there are also subjunctive meanings, such as *May God bless you*, which is difficult to categorize as either epistemic or root.

A milestone in the area of research into modal indeterminacy and the problem of ambiguity between *root* and *epistemic* is Coates' work (1983), which uncovered regular interdependencies between a meaning assigned to a modal and the predicate's syntactic context, thus calling for a framework capable of accounting for the (traditional) syntax/semantics interface. Cognitive Grammar satisfies the criterion as a framework providing tools for discerning a conceptual contribution of grammatical elements and patterns to the construction of the overall meaning of a sentence. In Turewicz (2000), I discuss the interdependency between the syntactic context of a modal and the root/epistemic dichotomy, pointing to the conceptual import of the main verb's profile, *i.e.* perfective or imperfective (Langacker 1987: 254–267) to the meaning of the utterance (sentence). That discussion also allowed to discern the parameters of the usage context which differentiate *within* the modal category *root* in relation to the interlocutor's "reading" of the contextual information. Because my later attempt to accommodate these facts into the analysis of modals directed me to the notion of intellectual empathy,[6] let me briefly summarize the study.

The meaning of MAY

Let us analyze sentences (1)–(3). The only formal element differentiating the sentences given below is the choice of personal pronoun in the function of the subject, whereas the verb is agentive in each case.

(1) I may go out tonight.
(2) You may go out tonight.
(3) S/he may go out tonight.

All three sentences allow *permission* reading, though only in (2) is this type of meaning the "first choice" meaning assigned to the modal; (1) does not exclude the root/permission modal meaning, though it simultaneously allows the epistemic reading *it is possible that I will go out tonight*, or, simply the root/possibility *it is possible for me to go out tonight*. All three readings: root permission, root possibility and epistemic possibility obtain in (3). Considering the fact that formally the three sentences differ in the *pronoun* in the function of the subject, the differences in meaning are related to the specifications of the language expression in the function of *subject* of the sentence, rather than the modal itself. The evidently root meaning is assigned to (2), where the subject is *you*.

Consider, however, (4):

(4) You may be going out tonight.

6　My first truly premature attempt to explicate the role of intellectual empathy for the analysis of modals was in my paper, titled "From Usage Based Model to Intellectual Empathy: A Three Level Approach to Modal Meanings," which was presented during the conference Converging and diverging tendencies in Cognitive Linguistics. October 2005, Dubrovnik, Croatia.

In (4), the subject is specified as *you*, just as in the case of (2), but the root permission interpretation is not likely. Rather, a possible paraphrase is *It is possible that you will be going out tonight*, hence the meaning of the sentence conforms to the "epistemic prediction of some future event."

The fact that (4) does not categorize as a root meaning although the subject is *you* suggests that the "nature" of the main verb as the syntactic context can be the decisive factor for interpreting a modal as root, thus confirming the role of the immediate syntactic context in the *construction of meaning* with the modal predicate MAY. If this is the case, then *neither epistemic nor root meanings are the meanings of the modal predicate*; instead, they are *meanings construed at the level of sentences*. The questions that remain to be asked now are: (i) what is the meaning of MAY if it is *not* a possibility/probability or permission; and (ii) where does the permission meaning of MAY come from?

Of the three meanings related to MAY, *permit* seems to be the most concrete one, therefore, we start our search for the meaning of MAY with an analysis of *permit*.

Towards the meaning of *permit*

Consider (5):

(5) I permit you to go out tonight.

Informally, the meaning of *permit* as in (5) can be characterized as follows: *permit* defines a special kind of participation of a human being (*I*) in carrying out an activity performed by another human being (*you*). Indeed, an utterance such as (5) implies a special usage context: there are two participants (a speaker and a hearer); they are related by a special type of relation, *i.e.* one of them is an **authority** to the other; the other, the **performer**, intends to perform an activity that he or she is able to perform by him or herself, but undertaking the action requires a kind of declaration on the part of the non-performer/authority. The declaration has the value of *not preventing* the action specified by the other verb. In view of the above, the performer's influence on fulfilling the activity designated by the main verb has the value of the authority/non-performer's "declaration" not to bar the performer's action. Indeed, without the non-performer's share, *i.e.* his or her "declaration," the action is blocked, and without the performer's share, his or her readiness to perform, the non-performer's readiness not to bar the action remains just a "declaration." Although both participants have equal influence on the realization of the action, the verb *permit* points to its subject, the **non-performer**, as the more important participant. His or her **authority** to decide without performing gives him or her a privileged position. The organization of conceptual material in *permit* is reflected in Figure 2.

The thickest circle represents the figure of the conceptualization, *i.e.* the authority (A), the thick arrow represents the act of "giving the share," the rectangle represents the action that "giving the share" makes possible, the thin circle represents the actual performer and the wavy arrow represents the perfective process to be performed.

More formally, the meaning of *permit* can be defined as follows: *an act of declaring by a non-performer giving his or her share to the realization of an action specified by the other verb, to be performed by the other participant – the performer; the share of the non-performer in the realization of the action to*

be performed stems from his or her authority status with respect to the performer. Despite the different statuses, each of the participants has about the same, *i.e.* 50%, responsibility towards fulfillment of the situation designated by the main verb, and both "shares" are equally indispensable for the action to be performed. Accordingly, in (5) *I permit you to go out tonight*, the subject *I* **explicitly** assumes the position of **the authority** and guarantees fulfillment of the process: *go out tonight* to a degree of 50%, thus leaving the other half to be supplied by the **performer**. In other words, *I* does not impose on the performer fulfillment of the action; the subject *I* only declares not to bar the action. In view of the above discussion, the "*fifty/fifty*" *responsibility* of both individuals and *the authority position* of the non-performer are two salient elements in the meaning structure of *permit.*
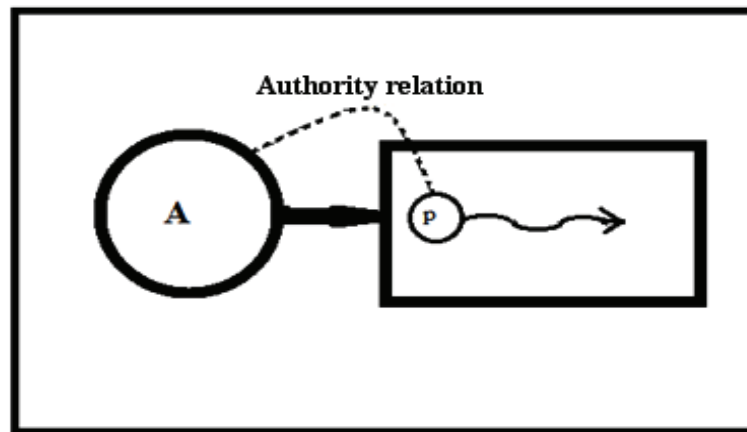

Figure 2. Graphic representation of the construal *permit*

Interestingly, as far as **epistemic** MAY is concerned, Sweetser (1984: 63) postulates the following definition: "may denotes **lack of restriction**"; for Langacker (1991: 273), MAY has a value of "absence of a potentially present barrier." Non-cognitive works on modality also define epistemic MAY as a modal expressing a possibility/probability of occurrence of the situation denoted by the main verb (Palmer 1979). Examples (6), (7) illustrate the case.

(6) I may be a few minutes late but I don't know.
(7) They may or may not come and connect the television on Saturday.

Both sentences estimate the occurrence of the situation specified by the main verbs as probable, but with no guarantee. Indeed, the presence of "I don't know" and "may or may not" in the respective sentences suggests that the degree of guarantee is relatively low, as it allows the speaker to avoid responsibility in case the situations depicted by the main verbs do not come true.

In view of the above, the 50% guarantee on the part of the speaker with respect to the reality status, *i.e.* the probability of occurrence, of some situation is present in both *epistemic MAY* and *permit*. Recalling that the meaning permission in (5) *I permit you to go out tonight* can be conveyed by *You may go out tonight*, with MAY categorizing as the **root** meaning, it is legitimate to hypothesize that an equal amount of certainty and doubt, which for the sake of convenience can be presented as *a 50% guarantee*

of occurrence of some situation, as estimated by the speaker, is *also* the meaning of MAY in sentences/utterances conveying the meaning **root permission**.

     Of all the meaning elements profiled by *permit* in (5), only the 50% guarantee can be found in (2), understood as "granting permission." The meaning elements missing from sentence (2) in comparison to (5) are: a specified source of authority and the authority relation. In view of the fact that (2) can legitimately be used to grant permission, the "authority" elements missing from the overt language structure *You may go out tonight* should be recoverable from usage specifications. This brings us to the notion of ground.

The Ground, the speaker, the hearer

Langacker (1987: 126) formally introduces the term of *Ground* "to indicate the speech event, its participants, and its setting." Specifically, the role of Ground in structuring the meaning of an utterance is to specify an epistemic status of the scene that the speaker describes: whether it is a fact or a non-/counter fact, coinciding with the time of speaking or not. To define the "reality status" of a situation, the speaker employs appropriate language devices, such as: traditional grammatical tense markers and modal verbs, deictic expressions as articles, pronouns, and some adverbs and prepositions. The predicates whose conceptual contents specify various aspects of the speaker's perspective on the scene are **epistemic predicates**.

     Accordingly, language expressions can be divided into those designating a type of real world entity – an objective scene, such as "permit," "go out" or "talk," and those used by the speaker to define his or her subjective perspective on the objective (conceptualized) scene, *i.e.* epistemic grounding predicates. In view of the definition of Ground and epistemic grounding predicates, English modals are epistemic grounding predicates. This being the case, MAY is an epistemic grounding predicate regardless of whether it is related to *epistemic* or *root* modal meanings.
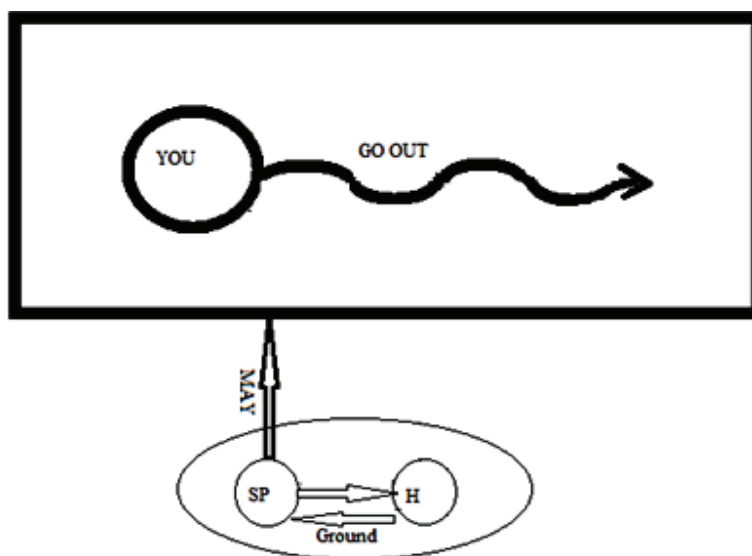

Figure 3. Graphic representation of the construal of MAY in sentence (2)

Due to their function, English modals as epistemic grounding predicates encode the speaker's assessment/guarantee of the reality of a scene construed by non-grounding language elements. In the case of MAY, the judgment has the value of a 50% guarantee on the part of the speaker towards fulfillment of the situation specified by the main verb. Since the other participant within the Ground is the hearer, by construing a sentence with MAY the speaker informs him or her that, from the speaker's point of view, the situation is 50% probable. The construal of sentences with MAY is represented by the Figure 3.

In the construal, the salient/on-stage information is that encoded explicitly in the linguistic form, *e.g. you go out tonight*. The arrow between the speaker and the circle with the linguistic form relates the source of the probability/guarantee judgment – the speaker – and the situation the judgment refers to. The arrows within the Ground between the speaker and the hearer represent the flow of information (the probability/guarantee judgment) that the speaker intends to share with the hearer, and the hearer's responsiveness.

If one compares the construal represented by Figure 2 (*permit*) with that represented by Figure 3 (the sentence with MAY), certain similarities can by observed:

- both construals incorporate the participant *expressing the 50% probability/guarantee judgment expressed by the non-performer*: it is the subject in sentence (5) and the speaker/conceptualizer in sentence (2);
- both incorporate the *performer* with equal *contribution to fulfillment of the action*: the embedded clause subject in sentence (5) and the subject in sentence (2).

As for the differences:

- the construal in Figure 2 foregrounds the *authority of the non-performer* by assigning him or her the function of a sentence subject, whereas in Figure 3 the authority value is absent from the overt language structure; simultaneously, because in Figure 3 the source of the guarantee is not overtly present, *i.e.* it is not encoded by the actual language form (it remains implicit in the Ground), the *figure in the construal is the performer* of the potential action, *i.e.* the sentence subject;
- in Figure 2 the construal explicates the entities linked by the authority relation, whereas in the construal in Figure 3 there is no such link because there is no entity with authority status, while the 50% judgment is directed towards the *action as a whole* rather than at an individual to perform the action.

In view of the similarities and differences between the two construals, let us now attempt to specify the conditions under which the construal in Figure 3 with MAY as an epistemic grounding predicate could represent the meaning of *permit*, as represented in Figure 2.

As the speaker in the Ground is the source of the 50% judgment, just like the authority in Figure 2, let us assign the value of "authority" to the speaker. What remains missing is the entity with who the speaker – authority – is related. The language material used to construe sentence (2) points to the correspondence between the subject *you* and the implicit element in the ground – the hearer – to whom the information about the 50% probability/guarantee of making the scene real is directed. In other words, assuming that the speaker is an authority that could bar realization of the action intended by the hearer, the authority relation between the onstage performer *you* and the source of authority is possible only *indirectly*, through

the **authority relation between the speaker and the hearer**.[7] More precisely, the authority relation can be established in an online manner during an act of communication between the authority (the speaker) and the performer (you) only if the hearer as the referent of the onstage *you* acts in a responsive way and acknowledges the authority status of the speaker. Figure 4 reflects the construal *permit* for utterances with root MAY.
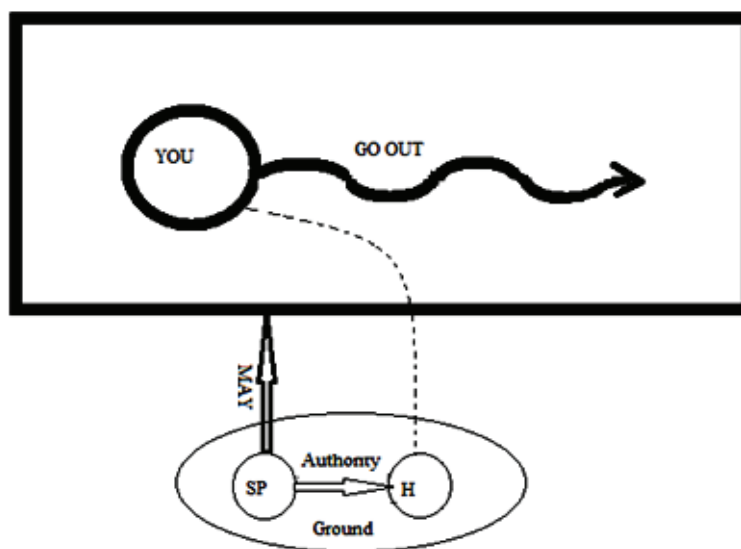

Figure 4. Graphic representation of construal *permit* with MAY

In view of the above, MAY can **contribute** to the construction and reconstruction of the meaning 'permit' rather than **has the meaning** of *permit*, when the addressee of sentences such as (2) through *intellectual empathy* (i) identifies the specifications of the actual usage context corresponding to the meaning components of *permit* (and missing in overt language expressions: "you go out") by *sharing* with the speaker the focus of attention, and (ii) (re)construes the meaning by *integrating* the semantic structures of language expressions with thus identified specifications of the usage context.

Intellectual empathy – the ability to direct, focus and *share* the interlocutors' attention to (re)construing the meaning of an actual utterance through mapping elements of the actual usage context onto the explicit and implicit knowledge of the speech act participants – seems to be the key to understanding the semantic indeterminacy of English modals. Indeed, if *You may go out tonight* is uttered by a parent to his/her child, granting permission comes as the first interpretation, *i.e.* as long as the addressee is able to map the parameters of usage onto the implicit knowledge defining the context for appropriate use of *permit*. However, if a sentence of the type is uttered by a non-authority speaker, *e.g.* a friend checking whether the interlocutor will be home in the evening, as in *I understand, you may go out tonight,* the permission meaning is unlikely. Precisely, in that case, intellectual empathy, *i.e.* the ability to direct, focus and *share* the interlocutors' attention to (re)construing the meaning of an actual utterance, will not direct the addressee towards construing the permission meaning.

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7   As may be rightly noticed, the case under discussion illustrates partial objectification of Ground elements. Due to limitations of the paper, I refrain from discussing Langacker's (1990) concept of subjectification.

Intellectual empathy as a socio-cultural facet of communication

Supposing *intellectual empathy* is an indispensable facet of meaning construction for successful communication between speakers of the same, ethnic language, it should be viewed as an inherent element of the process of first language acquisition. Indeed, in connection with Langacker's conception of the dynamic usage-based model, I would like to argue that a natural linguistic interaction with a child, *i.e.* a language acquirer, has a double effect on the acquired language structure: (i) it guides the child towards establishing a symbolic relation between salient aspects of the scene and its phonological representation, *i.e.* facilitating the learning of an explicit meaning of the word, and (ii) it contributes to the development of a particular type of implicit knowledge of relevant socio-cultural aspects of the usage context of the acquired language structure, to the effect that they become conventionalized facets of meaning construal.

Indeed, to the extent that the speakers of a language share implicit socio-cultural knowledge as conventionalized aspects of usage, they are capable of intellectual empathy, *i.e.* the ability to direct, focus and *share* the interlocutors' attention to (re)construing the meaning of an actual utterance integrating the symbolic structure profiled in language forms with the *conventionalized parameters of usage to guarantee compatibility of the speaker's intention and the hearer's expectations in a communicative act.*

The metaphor LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IS A CONTACT OF THREE PEOPLE FOR A COMMON GOAL relates the problem of intellectual empathy to successful communicative teaching of a foreign language. Should a metaphorical learner tend to implement intellectual empathy organizing his or her interaction with a well-known friend, *i.e.* the native language, onto the interactions with the metaphorical stranger, *i.e.* the foreign language, successful communication can be endangered because of the different socio-cultural parameters that have become a part of the linguistic convention. In that case, intellectual empathy as a facet of one language convention should not map onto the meaning construal of the other one. An example related directly to my present argument is English sentence (5), which is grammatically correct and semantically correct but never heard, probably because the construal foregrounding the "I – authority" would make the utterance sound rude. Its closest Polish equivalent, *Pozwalam*, is a socio-culturally acceptable form of granting permission, without the heavy load of foregrounding the authority status of the "I." In view of the socio-cultural inappropriateness of utterances such as (5) in English, the communicative teaching of English to Polish learners should accommodate the role of intellectual empathy in construing meanings such as *permit* in an indirect manner and in (re)construing them according to the conventions of English.

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