

Structure-sensitivity in actuality: notes from a class of preference expressions

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1. Introduction Some modals have puzzling entailments about the *actual* world (Bhatt 1999; Piñon 2003; Hacquard 2006), e.g. (1). While the phenomenon of actuality entailments (AE) in its totality might currently be an “open problem” (Portner 2009), there are two major types of approaches, namely *grosso modo* structural vs. non-structural. In this paper, we present and analyze evidence from a particular (thus far neglected) class of modalizing adverbial expressions of preference. While such data may, at first sight, seem good candidates for a purely pragmatic type of account, we argue here that they are best viewed as a combination of factors and can be straightforwardly analyzed at the level of LF by extending the scope of Bhatt’s and Hacquard’s suggestions on ability modals to this class of preference expressions.

2. Rather Alongside other meanings, Modern English *rather* has a preference meaning, (2). We analyze *rather* as a comparative over propositions (see especially Villalta 2006 for some interesting other predicates). *Rather* can be traced back to transparent comparatives (‘sooner’ etc. in Old English; see v.Stechow 2006 on the LF of such adverbs in German; (3)). The diachronic reanalysis of *rather* receives a compositional analysis, namely from a QR’ed comparative (of times) to an *in-situ* comparative over propositions (cf. Gergel 2009). The (characteristic functions of) the sets of times are re-interpreted as sets of situations. However, what has escaped attention in previous work, is that the preferred propositions *p* must also hold in the actual world (modulo additional effects that follow from the structural analysis in (4)). This may seem appealing for a pragmatic line in which, besides modalization, an additional performative act takes place. E.g. (2b) has the assertion that Francis resigned in the actual world. The data can be explained, however, structurally, by capitalizing on Hacquard (2009). The proposal featuring *rather* as a modal below Asp(ect) is summarized in (4).

3. Rather-expressions in two Romance languages. In this part of the paper, we show how certain grammatical factors interfere with *rather* expressions in European Portuguese and Romanian. EP. and Rom. have a series of pertinent properties: (i) they have the AE’s discussed e.g. extensively for French (controlling for AE’s is illustrated in (6) and (10), respectively); (ii) they have the key features of the imperfective/perfective Romance system frequently observed in connection with AE’s; (iii) they have expressions that are undergoing a partially similar semantic reanalysis as *rather* did. The latter are *mais depressa* and *mai de grabă*, both (still transparently) having a literal meaning ‘more of hurry’, but straightforwardly (and indeed preferably) to be interpreted as preferring *p* over *q* in contexts such as, say, (7) or (9). The next point is that the same expressions are sensitive to the perfective/imperfective distinction in subtle ways. In a nutshell, they induce AE’s depending on the distinction (cf. e.g. (8) and (12)). There is no direct reason why an additional assertion act on top of the preference expression should be sensitive to this particular distinction within the past tenses of EP and Romanian. Thus the strategy in which we follow structure-based accounts is as follows: while a performative analysis for *rather* itself might appear to be attractive, the aspectual distinction from such languages necessitates at least a grammatically co-anchored analysis. Extending the Bhatt/Hacquard line of reasoning to the preference modality of *rather* expressions in EP. and Rom., the perfective is bound by the highest actual-world binder and the imperfective introduces an additional modal operator, which binds the world variable (being closer than the actual-world binder, following locality, Percus 2000). Synchronically, such *rather* expressions may also be of potential interest for two additional, simple reasons. First, they make clear that, for the phenomena at hand, the level of LF is crucial. In this connection, notice also that the analysis goes beyond the class of modals proper as syntactic heads (e.g. Hacquard’s extensive account discards expressions that are not modals.) We show that AE’s can obtain with additional modalizing expressions that are neither modals nor quasi-modals etc. (cf. Gergel & Cunha 2009). Second, the paper capitalizes, in spirit, on a Heim/Villalta-semantics for predicates constructed along the lines of ‘want *p* more than *q*’. The particular class of *rather*-type preference expressions under discussion may be one useful illustration, in natural language, of the core idea of modal predicates as ordering devices over propositions (cf. Lewis 1973; Kratzer 1991; Portner 2009).

- (1) Jane put traverser le lac a` la nage, #mais elle ne le fit pas. (Fr., Hacquard 2006, 2009)
 ‘Jane could(PERF) swim across the lake, but she didn’t do it.’
- (2) a. Many of them [_pwent to jail] **rather** [_qthan pay the fine]. (Huddleston&Pullum 2002)
 b. Francis resigned rather than fight an enemy that was willing to live on so little food.
- (3) Temporal-based (old) LF: [-ER [_{ASPP} RATH=SOON (Q)]] [_λ Past [_{ASPP} RATH (P)]]
 ↑ [_{<i,t>} (time-based *than*-clause)] [_{<i,t>} [_{<t>} [_{<i,t>}]]]

- (4) Modal (ModE) LF of *rather*:

New Asp & T layers, enforced after diachronic reanalysis.

Binding of w_1 to the actual world.
 (If overt modal intervenes, e.g. *would*, this does not hold any longer, hence no AE.)

Remains of the early structure, re-interpreted as situations from the original sets of times.

Rather itself is a modal element with an inbuilt ‘phrasal’ comparative relator, here w.r.t. desires (e.g. Heim1985; Villalta 2006)

- (5) O João sabia resolver o problema (^{OK}mas por fim não o fez.) ((5)-(8): E. Portuguese)
 the João could.IMP solve the problem but at end not it did
 ‘João could solve the problem but he ended up not doing it.’
- (6) O João soube resolver o problema. (#mas por fim não o fez) (AE)
 ‘João could.PERF solve the problem (but he ended up not doing it).’
- (7) [Devido ao mau-humor do pai,... ‘due to dad’s bad humor’...]
 ...a criança comia mais depressa na escola do que em casa
 the child ate.IMP more of hurry in.the school than that at home
 ‘the child had meal at school rather than eat at home.’
 (mas naquele dia não o fez. ‘but that day he didn’t’.)
- (8) ...a criança comeu mais depressa na escola do que em casa. (AE)
 the child ate.PERF more of hurry in.the school than that at home
 ‘the child had meal at school rather than eat at home.’
 (#mas por fim não o fez. ‘but she ended up not doing it.’) [(9)-(12): Romanian]
- (9) Mai de grabă mă duc să văd pe Poli in divizia C decât să depindă T. de Iancu.
 more of hurry me go that see PE Poli in division C than that depend T. of I.
 ‘I’d rather go to watch (the team) Poli play in the third division than having (the city of) Timișoara depend on Iancu.’ (adapted after web-based example)
- (10) A putut să doarmă minunat (#dar nu a dormit pentru că a lucrat noaptea). (AE)
 has could that sleep wonderful (but not has slept because that has worked night.the)
 ‘He could sleep wonderfully (but he didn’t sleep because he worked at night).’
- (11) Pe vremea aceea putea să doarmă (^{OK}dar nu dormea pentru că lucra noaptea).
 at time that could.IMP that sleep (but not slept.IMP because that worked night.the)
 ‘At that time he could sleep (but he didn’t sleep because he worked at night).’
- (12) Mai de grabă s-a dus la cumpărături decât să-l însoțească la meci. (AE)
 more of hurry SE left.PERF to shoppings than that-him join to match
 ‘S/he went shopping rather than join him to the match.’

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