From the subjective and intersubjective to the textual: textual functions of English epistemic adverbs

This paper focuses on the types of textual functions developed by English epistemic adverbs. As defined by Halliday (2004 [1994]: 30), textual functions involve indicating connections between parts of discourse, i.e. "creating cohesion and continuity". In their basic sense, epistemic adverbs are used to signal the speaker's judgment concerning the truth value of the proposition; they can thus be said (to simplify things somewhat) to be subjective in character. They express such notions as certainty (*certainly, surely*) and probability (*probably, perhaps*). As a result of grammaticalization, many of them have also developed intersubjective and textual functions (cf. Simon-Vandenbergen and Aijmer 2007; Narrog 2014). As markers of "intersubjective stance", to use White's (2003) term, they "engage with dialogic alternatives" (White 2003: 262) and are used to negotiate meanings. In their "post-epistemic" textual uses, which this paper focuses on, modal adverbs are employed to connect claims and signal different types of relations between them. As demonstrated in this paper, their textual functions correspond to those which Quirk et al. (1985) distinguish for non-modal conjuncts, i.e. items such as *moreover, consequently, in other words*. Using Quirk et al.'s (1985) typology of conjuncts, this paper identifies some of the textual functions performed by such items as *indeed, certainly, of course, admittedly, probably, likely, perhaps*. The analysis shows that modal adverbs typically perform reinforcing, reformulatory, focusing and concessive functions. Some of them can also function as appositional, equative and antithetic conjuncts. The greatest range of connective uses have been identified for *indeed*; *admittedly* is primarily used as a marker of concession; the other adverbs seem to perform textual functions a little less often. The analysis is corpus based; the textual functions of epistemic adverbs are identified on the basis of their occurrences in the British National Corpus.

References

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Word count: 448