Modal and post-modal uses of Lithuanian adverbials: evidence from a parallel corpus

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1 Introduction

Contrastive studies based on parallel and comparable corpus data (Aijmer 1996, 1999; Johansson 2001, 2007; Simon-Vandenbergen and Aijmer 2007; Mortelmans 2010 among others) show that in a cross-linguistic perspective the degree of lexical correspondence in expressions of epistemic modality is not very high and different subsystems tend to interact. This phenomenon is explained in terms of structural cross-linguistic differences as well as different degrees of grammaticalization, pragmaticalization and/or polyfunctionality of modal markers.

Polyfunctionality is a common phenomenon in many languages. Great attention has been paid to modal verbs (auxiliaries) and their epistemic, deontic and dynamic interpretation in different languages (Coates 1983; Hoye 1997; Palmer 2001; Holvoet 2009 and others). Adjectives can also have epistemic or dynamic readings (Lyons 1977). Recent research has shown that epistemic modal adverbs can be used in different ways as well (Simon-Vandenbergen and Aijmer 2007; Pietrandrea 2008; Cornillie 2010). Modal adverbs do not usually convey dynamic or deontic readings; however, besides their epistemic status, they can have a variety of slightly different, post-modal, interpretations, e.g.:

> (1) *Could you perhaps explain it?*

Lithuanian modal adverbials have not yet been looked at in great detail, nor have they been explicitly compared with their English correspondences in terms of polyfunctionality. As no consensus has been reached so far regarding the distinction between the word classes of modal particles and adverbs in Lithuanian linguistics, the term 'adverbials' is used to cover both (Smetona and Usonienė 2012). The present paper aims to investigate the modal and post-modal uses of Lithuanian polyfunctional adverbials *gal* 'perhaps' and *galbūt* 'maybe': to determine their functional variants in different discourse types and to establish parallels between the function and form with the help of the analysis of their translational correspondences.

2 Data and methods

The corpus-based approach adopted in this study helps to reveal patterns and meanings of modal expressions which would be difficult to find otherwise. The method used in the research is non-experimental data collection; it is a contrastive analysis based on the data obtained from a self-compiled bidirectional parallel corpus – *ParaCorp*_{EN→LT→EN} (Šolienė 2013). The corpus design follows the model of the English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus (Johansson 2007). The *ParaCorp*_{EN→LT→EN} was compiled from original English fiction texts and their translations into Lithuanian and original Lithuanian fiction texts and their translations into English. The size of the corpus is about 5M words.

Since the sub-corpora are of different size, the raw frequency numbers have been normalized per 10, 000 words. Furthermore, in order to check whether the similarities and differences are statistically significant, the log-likelihood test was performed, which is commonly considered to be a more statistically reliable test than the chi-square test (cf. Dunning 1993). Frequencies of particular patterns and uses are of crucial importance to this study, since frequency can be an important factor in specification of meaning (Leech 2003; Simon-Vandenbergen and Aijmer 2007). Some of the tendencies identified in the parallel corpus were verified in other databases: the Corpus of the Contemporary Lithuanian Language[1] and the Corpus of Academic Lithuanian[2].

3 Results and preliminary observations

The investigated adverbials *gal* 'perhaps' and *galbūt* 'maybe' as well as their English counterparts mainly serve as markers of epistemic modal possibility, which is attributed to them as their main function by various dictionaries and grammars. Though the adverbial *gal* 'perhaps' is more versatile in terms of polyfunctionality, it is clear that both adverbials have developed post-modal uses. The markers exhibit a diversity of functional variants in different types of discourse: they can act as intensifiers of the alternative, which emphasizes the choice between several options; as mitigating devices reducing the illocutionary effect of an utterance; as interrogative particles; as approximators estimating a figure, number or quantity.

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