A contrastive analysis of modal adverbs of epistemic possibility: ENG *perhaps*/*maybe*, GER *vielleicht/womöglich/möglicherweise*, DUT *misschien*

Previous research has shown that the epistemic uses of the modal verbs ENG *may/might*, GER *können/könnte* and DUT *kunnen* do not correspond to each other: while in English, the modal verb *might* can be regarded as the default form of expression for subjective epistemic possibility, in German and Dutch the epistemic adverbs (especially GER *vielleicht* and DUT *misschien*) take over a considerable part of the functions that are fulfilled by the modal verb in English (Author, in prep.). This observation suggests that modal verbs and modal adverbs in these languages should be considered under the same premises (contra Leiss 2009, Diewald 1999, Doitchinov 2001, but along the lines of Nuyts 2001).

In my contribution, I will therefore focus on modal sentence adverbs of epistemic possibility from a contrastive perspective, thereby also taking into account the English modal adverbs *perhaps* and *maybe*. More specifically, I will address the following questions:

1) In German, not only *vielleicht*, but also *womöglich* and *möglicherweise* regularly function as modal sentence adverbs of epistemic possibility. *Vielleicht* is often said to be polyfunctional (Péteri 2013): it can also be used in imperative clauses and polar questions (typically to mitigate a request, Ramat & Ricca 1998: 193), and it can be embedded under both factive and non-factive verbs. The question arises as to whether this applies to the sentence adverbs *womöglich* and *möglicherweise* to the same extent.
2) In Dutch, there is only one sentence adverb of epistemic possibility (*misschien*) which regularly corresponds to epistemic *might*. The main question to be investigated here is whether *misschien* shares the wide range of possible uses of *vielleicht* (cf. Ehrich 2010) or even extends them to include other uses (see e.g. van der Auwera 1983).
3) For English, it can be questioned whether there is a kind of distribution of labour between the modal verbs (*might/may*) and the modal adverbs (*perhaps*/*maybe*)? It remains unclear under which conditions epistemic modal adverbs are favoured over epistemic modal verbs, but note that corpus studies indicate that embedded clauses favour modal verbs (*I think she might be an x* vs. *I think she maybe is an x*). An additional question pertains to possible functional differences to be found between *perhaps* and *maybe* (cf. Suzuki 2018).

The analysis is based on a self-created contrastive corpus of present-day crime fiction – whereby original texts in UK English, Dutch and German will be compared with their translations in the respective languages – as well as relevant monolingual corpora of written language (German: DWDS, Dutch: Corpus Hedendaags Nederlands).

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