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**ON RELEVANCE AND LINGUISTIC  
STRENGTH IN  
TV COMMERCIALS:**

**THE WAY THEY SLIP AND SLIDE TO MAKE  
THEIR ANGLED POINT**

**BY**

**A. KATARINA THORSTRAND**

**B.A., STOCKHOLM UNIVERSITY, 1982**

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS**

**IN THE  
DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS**

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**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY**

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This thesis is an investigation of the use of modal verbs and the quantifiers *some/many/most* in the language of TV advertising. The investigation is based on a corpus containing 400 commercials taped 1992-1994. The goal of the investigation was to find what type of modals/quantifiers are characteristic of TV advertising, and why they are characteristic.

It was found that the possibility modals, especially *can* and *could* are very frequent in TV advertising, but necessity modals, *must* and *have to*, are scarce. Similarly it was found that the weak quantifier *some* was relatively frequent, but the stronger *many* and *most* were rare. If compared to 'ordinary' language (as investigated by Coates 1983), it is clear that the high frequency of possibility modals, and particularly the high frequency of *can*, is a notable characteristic of advertising language. 'Ordinary' language favours the high likelihood modals, *will* and *would*.

Reasons for the usefulness of *can* in an advertising context may be found in its semantic make-up. Basing my argument on McCallum-Bayliss' (1988) theory of modality, I conclude that the combination of [+grounds] and the truth condition *at least possible* makes *can* the perfect tool for speakers who wish to communicate confidence in their expertise on the topic at hand without coming on too strongly. The scarcity of necessity modals and strong quantifiers are explainable in similar terms, that is, the claim will be too strong in this context and chances are it will be judged as irrelevant by viewers/hearers. (It may also be illegal, if it cannot be defended.)

*Some* was found to be a relatively frequent quantifier in TV advertising. If the quantifier receives focal stress the data indicate that the two-sided, narrower, reading is necessary for contextual effects. If the quantifier does not receive this type of stress it is the one-sided reading that is relevant. The frequency of *some* compared to the other investigated quantifiers is probably explainable along the same lines as *can*. The semantic weakness of especially unstressed *some* makes it useful when it is necessary for an advertiser to assert that a set of things exists but unnecessary, or even undesirable, to specify a selection of that set.

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## INTRODUCTION

This study investigates of modal verbs and certain quantifiers as they are employed in the verbal messages of TV commercials. Because of the nature of communication in this domain, due to legal constraints on message content and lack of speaker knowledge about the audience and audience assumptions and reactions, modality and quantification are important for constructing verbal messages that inform an undefined audience about the advertisers' perception of a state of affairs in the world as they think it pertains to, and is beneficial for, the audience. For these reasons I judged that studying modality and quantifiers in the linguistic environment of the advertising domain could yield insights into how and why specific modals and quantifiers are employed for the purpose of persuasion and promising.

Advertisers are furthermore informing the audience how the perceived state of affairs can be changed for the better. They are, in effect, making claims about a possible future state of affairs. Needless to say, it is very hard to predict the future with some kind of certainty and remain credible. It is therefore of paramount importance to advertisers that they are able to back up their claims in terms of facts of the world, and also make this ability inferable to the audience. They must, furthermore, give themselves enough room for mistakes, since the future is not absolutely predictable.

This is why advertisers must construct their messages so that they seem knowledgeable and convinced of the reliability of their propositions, yet without committing themselves too strongly to the propositions, or they may be accused of 'promising too much.' In this respect modals and quantifiers play important roles.

[Modality is] essentially the qualification of the categorical and the absolute as realized, ... within the code of language. Instead of asserting absolutely that such and such is the case, one may — perhaps for reasons of uncertainty, tact, or politeness — indicate that the truth of what one has to say is by no means assured; ... Instead of issuing a categorical directive, one may — perhaps because one's personal authority is inadequate, because one does not want to assume direct responsibility, or again purely out of politeness — indicate that one is acting only in accordance with some set of rules. (Perkins 1983:18-19.)

Employing a quantifier in a proposition restricts the amount of information that the speaker wants to convey. One may quantify over a set of things in such a way that it is difficult to interpret just how large a part of the set is meant. This is another means for a speaker to

increase the chances of the proposition's being true in the viewer's world, and it lessens the risk of being caught with stating a falsehood. <sup>2</sup>

It has been argued that an utterance is more persuasive if it contains words that are strong semantically (Palmer 1979 and Perkins 1983). In an advertising context where persuasion is one of the main goals one should consequently find a great many strong modals and quantifiers, such as *must* and *most*. This is not the case, however. Rather, advertising, or at least TV advertising, abounds in weak modals and quantifiers, such as *can* and *some*, if my data reflect the situation correctly. My findings are similar to those of Geis (1982) who observed that semantically weak modals and quantifiers (and other lexical items) were far more frequent in TV advertising than stronger, more informative lexical items. Claims so semantically vague that they were bordering on vacuous were not uncommon in his data.

Since our findings are similar it would seem as if what advertisers perceive as persuasive language is not characterized by semantic strength. If we accept that advertisers would not spend money on advertising that they consider unpersuasive and without influence, we would have to conclude that semantically weak modals and quantifiers can be employed in such a way that they increase the *pragmatic* strength of an utterance, thus enhancing its conversational impact, and causing the utterance to be potentially more persuasive and influential.

In studying the semantic make-up of the modals it is possible to find a reasonable explanation for the preponderance of certain possibility modals and high likelihood modals in the domain of TV advertising.<sup>1</sup> If we accept that all modals have as part of their semantic make-up a meaning of possibility, probability, or necessity and that some of them furthermore include the semantic convention of *grounds*<sup>2</sup>, we find that most of the weak modals in my data fall into the [+grounds] possibility category. The weakness of claims with possibility modals is then only weakness as regards level of probability. They are strong in that they make inferable to the audience the speaker's competence concerning the topic at hand, and her<sup>3</sup> confidence in

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<sup>1</sup> I employ McCallum-Bayliss' (1988) theory of modality throughout my study, and she groups the modals in three classes, possibility, high likelihood, and necessity. For further explanation, see chapter 2 of this thesis, and McCallum-Bayliss (1988).

<sup>2</sup> Grounds = expert knowledge. If the speaker considers her knowledge about some facts of the world to be such that s/he can claim expertise about these facts of the world, she has grounds for her proposition, and she signals this to the hearer by employing a [+grounds] modal. See chapters 2 and 4 this thesis for further explanation.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout the thesis I refer to the *viewer* as *he* and the *speaker* as *she* unless the speaker discussed is part of an example in which case natural gender is used. Note also that *the viewer* means 'viewer and hearer', unless otherwise stated.

her knowledge about it. Such confidence and competence is important for the believability of the claim. Believable claims are normally more persuasive and influential.<sup>4</sup>

The relatively high frequency of weak quantifiers can be explained along the same lines. A claim containing an indeterminate, weak quantifier is more believable than one that is very determinate because it does not impinge upon a viewer's previous assumptions to a very great extent. Such claims have the further benefit of being applicable to a great many viewers in different cognitive environments. This is because they do confirm at least the existence of a set of things, and in many cases existence is enough for the proposition to be true. The speaker may make more definable the part of the set of things that the quantifier selects by stressing either the quantifier or some other part of the utterance. Narrow focal stress on the quantifier indicates that a more constrained; therefore stronger, reading of the sentence is intended; focal stress on anything but the quantifier indicates that a less constrained, weaker, reading is intended. (The same constraining effect is found when a modal is stressed.)

Both modals and quantifiers are, then, means to an end, to get the advertisers' point across to the audience in the smoothest possible way. They are linguistic tools that enable speakers to play on the audience's assumptions about the world by presenting the speakers' knowledge about the world in such a way that the speakers' assumptions look attractive to the audience, and make it desirable for the audience to incorporate those assumptions into their own assumptions.

### *1.1 TV commercials as a source of data*

It is not the aim of this study to make claims about what is true in all advertising. This is obviously not possible. Different conditions apply to different types of advertising, and generalizations are hard to pinpoint. What works in print advertising may not be feasible in radio advertising, and TV advertising has the advantage of being able to combine the advantages of both print and radio advertising.

TV advertising has in common with radio advertising that it is aurally perceived, and consequently the human voice can be employed to communicate the message. It also shares the cognitive constraints of radio advertising in that the messages must be constructed in such a way that they can be immediately processed, as each message lasts only 30 - 60 seconds. To catch the audience's attention, loud noises and unusual intonation patterns can be used. TV and radio

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<sup>4</sup> I base my reasoning about believability on Sperber and Wilson's argument that weak assumptions are more easily accepted than strong assumptions as the former may serve to confirm previous assumptions whereas the latter may be refuted as irrelevant. These concepts are further expounded upon in later chapters of this thesis, but for more explanations see Sperber & Wilson's *Relevance*, (1986).

advertising also share the problem that audience attention is normally minimal, and it is debatable whether there is a cognitive response at all on the part of the viewer. (Stewart and Furse, 1986:2)

TV advertising shares with print media the fact that both are visually perceived. Images can be, and are, used as attention catchers and to enhance the verbal message. In contrast to TV advertising, however, print advertising has no time constraints. Printed messages can be mulled over for as long as the reader wishes. Therefore they can contain a great deal more information than TV commercials (and radio commercials), and the information can be presented in such a way that it invites the reader to use his or her cognitive abilities to process it further for deeper meanings.

I chose to work with TV advertising because it is the most complex type of advertising. The interplay between visual and acoustic stimuli, and the way the verbal message is presented both visually, as in superscripts, and acoustically as in dialogues, monologues and voice-overs, makes it the potentially most influential type of advertising. Information that is presented audio-visually normally makes a stronger impression on the recipient than information that is presented only visually or only acoustically. This, and the constraints that the short time span of the messages puts on the speaker and the viewer with regard to constructing and processing them, make TV advertising and the language thereof a potentially rich domain for the study of how modality and quantification are used and possibly perceived.

The images that accompany the claims made in TV advertising serve as illustrations of facts of the world that are assumed to be the basis for the claims. In this respect they are very important, and the overall impact of the message relies on the interplay between images and spoken words. However, the reliability as regards information content of a commercial does not originate in the visuals, unless they consist of written words (superscripts). It is the spoken message, the verbal propositions, that show the advertiser's communicative intent, and the amount of information that she wants to convey.

## 1.2 Other studies of advertising language

In 1966 Leech did a survey of British televised commercials, dealing mainly with vocabulary and style; and in 1982 Geis published a study on the semantics/pragmatics of televised advertising in general, and on how children interpret commercials in particular. Both of these studies were made by linguists, but verbal language is not, on the whole, a very frequent topic in papers on marketing and advertising research. Some studies have been done on the topic of *informativeness* of commercials, such as Aaker & Norris' (1982) paper on the

"Characteristics of TV Commercials Perceived as Informative", and Stern's (1988) short study on 'how an ad means'. A great deal needs to be done in this field, especially as it is far from known 'how much total mental labor a consumer is willing to expend on any one advertising text.' (Stern 1988:13) It is interesting that language seems to be of so little salience for advertising research, in spite of the fact that Rosen (1987:152) in a short paper noted that, 'the ads seem to be about concepts which are inescapably verbal. Advertising may appear to be relying less on language, but language is simply functioning on a deeper level.' Geis (1982:44) also observes that 'language is not simply a vehicle of communication in advertising but can be and sometimes is the very substance of advertising.'

In their study on effective television advertising, Stewart & Furse (1987) make the interesting observation that 'unsubstantiated, nonspecific claims of product superiority (puffery) were favored over either direct or indirect product comparisons'(p. 53), but they also doubt that it is the puffery itself that is convincing to the audience. Instead they speculate that it is the simplicity of such claims that audience 'like'.

Aaker & Norris (1982) in their study on informativeness observe that commercials that appear to be informative are more persuasive, and they appeal to 'Personal Relevance'. They further suggest (p. 65) that the reason why 'informative' ads are 'interesting' is that a precondition of processing information is that it be relevant to the individual. 'Interesting' might be measuring the extent to which there is enough relevance to motivate processing.

A common problem for advertising researchers is that the people employed to codify the data have a 'difficult time differentiating true uniqueness from suggestive or clever wording', as Laskey, Day, & Crask (1989:38) state. Stewart & Furse (1987) also write that they had to instruct their coders to be particularly observant with regard to implicated messages and explicitly stated propositions.

### 1.3 *The data*

The data that I am using come from commercials taped from TV by myself and students and staff of the Media Lab at Simon Fraser University. The taping sessions took place from 1992 to 1994. They are random, in that they took place at no specific time, but rather at various times during the day, evening, and night. They come from different channels, both Canadian and American, general as well as specific interest channels (with the exception of sports channels) and they were taped during feature films, news programs, sit-coms, drama, and music video programs. The corpus consists of 400 commercials, out of which 198 were fully or partially

transcribed.<sup>5</sup> As TV commercials normally<sup>6</sup> contain between 20 to 100 words, I estimated the average to be 60 words/commercial. This gives a corpus of about 24,000 words.<sup>7</sup>

I transcribed the verbal messages verbatim, but without taking note of discourse features such as pauses, nor did I pay attention to pitch. Stress was noted when salient for my analysis, that is, when the focal stress occurred on the modal/quantifier, but not otherwise. Such parts of the messages as telephone numbers and repeated brand name superscripts have been omitted, although I have endeavored to capture all other superscripts or the salient parts thereof.<sup>8</sup>

For every commercial selected to be part of the transcribed body of data, I took note of the setting and the characters involved, and in a few cases, when this was of particular salience, the visuals accompanying the message. I recorded the sex of the speaker, or speakers, and whether the spoken message is in the form of a monologue, a dialogue, a voice-over, or a mixture of some or all of these.

### 1.3.1 Statistical distribution of modals and quantifiers in the data

Out of the 400 commercials that make up the corpus, 199 contained one or more modal verbs or quantifiers of the type I was looking for. This makes a total of 49.7%. All together 369 occurrences of modal verbs and quantifiers were recorded, and their distribution is illustrated in Table 1 below. It should be noted that when I refer to percentages of ads in which modals or quantifiers occur, those percentages are based on the total corpus, i.e. 400 commercials. It would be misleading to refer only to the set of data that includes the lexical items studied if the aim is to find out how, and with what frequency, these items are used in TV advertising as a whole. Furthermore, to construct a frequency table for TV advertising language in the way that Coates

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<sup>5</sup> For those commercials that were partially transcribed, only the sentence containing the lexical item of interest plus the sentences that made up the immediate context were transcribed. During the transcription process it gradually became clear that it was not necessary to transcribe the whole commercial in order to be able to interpret the modals/quantifiers correctly. Therefore only the first 50% of the taped commercials containing modals or quantifiers received full transcriptions.

<sup>6</sup> I counted the words of about 30 commercials manually, and based my estimate on this count. Computer word count was useless in this respect as it also counts various characters and punctuation marks as words, which inflates the number of words a great deal.

<sup>7</sup> There are no commercials completely devoid of words, although in some cases the words may be only a brand name repeated.

<sup>8</sup> A superscript is a written message that has different functions, depending on when and where in the commercial it appears. It sometimes reinforces the spoken message, but more often than not, it is there to modify the spoken message, spelling out the various conditions that often apply, but that the advertiser does not want to draw particular notice to.

(1983) does, it is necessary to compute those frequencies from the complete corpus, or the tables would not be comparable.

*Table 1. Total distribution of modals and quantifiers in the corpus<sup>9</sup>*

<u>Item</u>	<u>in #/% of ads</u>	<u>occurring/ times</u>	<u>pos/neg.</u>
Can/can't	91/22.8%	112	95/17
Will/won't	56/14%	84	73/11
Could/couldn't	34/8.5%	45	38/7
Would/wouldn't	18/4.5%	24	19/5
Have to/not have to	18/4.5%	19	18/1
May/may not	16/4%	20	18/2
Should	16/4%	19	19/0
Must	6/1.5%	7	7/0
Might.....	4/1%.....	4	4/0.....
		334	
<hr/>			
Some	20/5%	23	-
Many	6/1.5%	7	-
Most.....	5/1.2%.....	5	-.....
		35	
<hr/>			
		<b>total</b>	<b>369</b>

It is clear from Table 1 that among the modals *can* is predominant, occurring in 23% of the ads, and among the quantifiers *some* stands out, occurring more than 3 times as often as either of the others. Also obvious is that negated forms of the modals are infrequent. Table 1 furthermore shows that the modals differ in behaviour as regards their frequency within the same commercial. That is, some of the modals occur multiple times more frequently than others. This is better illustrated in Table 2.

<sup>9</sup> There are no instances of *should not*, *must not*, *need not* or *might not* in the corpus.

Table 2. Frequency of particular modals within the same commercial.

<u>Item</u>	
Will/won't	1.50
Would/wouldn't	1.33
Could/couldn't	1.32
May/may not	1.25
Can/can't	1.23
Must	1.17
Should	1.06
Have to/not have to	1.05
Might	1.00

Thus, although *will/won't* is not nearly as frequent as *can/can't*, when it does occur it does so 1.5 times in the same commercial, whereas *should* occurs only once in the same commercial. These patterns will be further looked into in the next chapter.

The frequency of *can* and *will* is not surprising considering that in surveys of language use, such as SEU and the Lancaster corpus<sup>10</sup>, the same results apply. Coates (1983) studied the frequency of the various modals in spoken and written language, and she found that the modals have the frequency pattern in Table 3.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> SEU stands for Survey of English Usage, a survey of spoken British English, comprising 109 transcribed texts (725,000 words) based at the University of London, under the directorship of Sir Randolph Quirk. The Lancaster corpus is a corpus of 1 million words (British English) comprising many categories of written texts. Coates (1983) bases her observations regarding the use of modals in British English on these corpora, utilizing the full Lancaster corpus but only 545,000 words of SEU as some of its categories overlap with those of the Lancaster corpus. The Lancaster corpus got its final form in 1978, as the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen corpus (LOB), but SEU is constantly being upgraded and added to.

<sup>11</sup> Coates does not separate negative occurrences of the modals from positive ones. The form *won't* is spelled out separately on account of its looking so different from *will*. She furthermore only investigates syntactic modals, hence *have to* is not covered in her data.

Table 3. Frequency of modals/1,000 words (Coates 1983)

<u>Item</u>	<u>Frequency per 1000 words/SEU</u>	<u>Frequency per 1000 words/ Lanc.</u>
Will/won't	4.0	2.8
Can	3.5	2.1
Would	3.5	3.0
Could	2.0	1.7
Must	1.1	1.1
Should	1.1	1.2
May	0.8	1.3
Might	0.7	0.7

In TV advertising the positions of *will* and *can* are reversed compared to their positions in Table 3 as is illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Frequency of modals/1,000 words in TV advertising

<u>Item</u>	
Can/can't	4.7
Will/won't	3.5
Could/couldn't	1.9
Would/wouldn't	1.0
May/may not	0.8
Have to/not have to	0.8
Should	0.8
Must	0.3
Might	0.2

Although Table 4 is not based on a corpus as big as SEU or Lancaster it still gives an indication that the modals are employed differently in TV advertising language as compared to 'ordinary' language. The data indicate that in TV advertising the concept of possibility is

more pertinent than the concept of high likelihood or necessity, and that the reverse is the case<sup>10</sup> for 'ordinary' language. The discrepancies and similarities in Tables 3 and 4 will further discussed in the introduction to chapter 2.

It is also interesting to see how the modals are employed with respect to class of modality. This is illustrated in Table 5.

*Table 5. Modality type and quantifiers in the data*

	<b>Percentage of ads they occur in</b>
Possibility ( <i>can/may/could/might</i> )	32%
High likelihood ( <i>will/would/should</i> )	21%
Necessity ( <i>have to/must</i> )	6%
Quantifiers ( <i>some/many/most</i> )	8%

Table 5 shows the percentage of occurrences of the various types of modality in the data, as well as the percentage of occurrences of the quantifiers investigated. Thus one or more possibility modal occur in 32% of the ads, and 21% contain one or more high likelihood modal. Only 6% of the ads contain some kind of necessity modal, which once again illustrates that necessity is not a very viable concept in this particular domain. Table 5 also shows that TV advertisers seem to find it preferable to construct their messages so that they describe the world in terms of modality rather than use weak quantifiers to limit the overall strength (amount of information given) of the verbal message of the ad.

## THE MODALS

## 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will analyze the modals described in 1.3, and look for distributional patterns that can be connected to specific environments and contexts. I will further look at possible interpretations of modals in the domain of the advertising message. In this context I will look at the use of stress on modals and the implications that such stress has on the recovery of the meaning of the utterance. Although recorded in the data I will not discuss the use of negated modals, as the problems pertaining to the use of negation are far too many to fit within the scope of this thesis.

In section 2.2 I analyze the use of the possibility modals, *can/may* and *could/might*; in section 2.3 I look at the high likelihood modals, *will* (but not *shall*), *would/should*; and finally I look at the necessity modals, *must* and the periphrastic construction *have to*. The division of the modals into these categories follows from McCallum-Bayliss' (1988) univocal theory of modality, but the ordering of the sections is reversed due to the importance of the possibility modals with respect to my domain.

The data indicate that in TV commercials, claims employing possibility modals are the most frequent of the claims containing modals, as 32% of all the ads contain one or more possibility modal. Whether the popularity of possibility modals depends on the advertisers' desire to be cautious with respect to how strong an assertion, declaration or promise can be made without risk, or on the idea that semantically weak utterances are more applicable to a wider audience is a question I will discuss further in chapter 4. Suffice it so say here that for TV advertisers it is preferable to claim the possibility of a proposition's coming true rather than to claim that there is a high likelihood or even necessity that a proposition is coming true, since high likelihood and necessity modals occur less frequently (in 21% and 6% of the ads respectively).

In section 2.2.1 I illustrate how *can* and *may* are employed in my data, and show that *can* is the most frequent modal. I note that *can* is mostly used with animate sentence subjects and propose that reasons for this may be found in the semantic make-up of *can*, which includes the property *grounds exist*. I further observe that for the most part *can* (and to a certain extent *may*) has a meaning that indicates *ability* or *characteristics* or *capacity* in utterances contained in TV advertising. The sense of *permission* hardly ever occurs (I found only 8 certain cases all

together). This is understandable since it is the speaker's interest to extol a product's or service's virtues and point out the possibilities that product X or service Y creates rather than tell the audience that it is permitted to use product X or service Y. I also describe the way the past marked possibility modals *could* and *might* (2.2.2) are employed and comment on the scarcity of *might*, as well as give possible reasons. Concluding the section on possibility modals is a brief discussion on the implications of stress on such modals (2.2.3), followed by a summary.

In the section on high likelihood modals I note that *will* is frequent and when used with first person sentence subjects may be interpreted as *willingness*; otherwise it is often interpretable as *cannot help but*. I further comment on the infrequency of *would* in my data compared to the data in Coates (1983), and propose that this is because it is not in the nature of advertising to hypothesize about products and services but again, to present them in a favourable light. In the section on necessity modals I note that these are scarce in TV advertising, probably because they commit the speaker too strongly to the proposition of the utterance.

In my analysis I make use of McCallum-Bayliss' (1988) univocal theory of modality. Figure 1 illustrates how the modals, according to this theory, are scaled with respect to semantic strength.

		<i>strong</i>
		[+grounds]
	[-grounds]	
<i>Necessity</i> .....	<i>must</i> .....	have to
	(shall) should= <i>unspecified</i> <i>for time or reality</i> )	will ( <i>would=time</i> )
<i>High likelihood</i> .....		<i>would (=reality)</i> <i>can (could=time)</i>
	<i>may (might=time)</i>	<i>could (=reality)</i>
<i>Possibility</i> .....	<i>might (=reality)</i> .....	
		<i>weak</i>

Figure 1. Scalar strength of modals<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Figure 1 is an interpretation of McCallum-Bayliss' attempt to illustrate the modals' scalar behaviour (1988:17).

Although Figure 1 may well be correct from a strictly semantic point of view, it is not clear whether it also illustrates correctly the pragmatic strength of the modals. It does show, however, where the modals stand in relation to each other, and forms a semantic basis that serves well in the pragmatic analysis of utterances containing modals whatever the context. The influence of grounds and remoteness on a modal's pragmatic strength relative to the others is further discussed in the sections on the particular modals later in this chapter.

What is referred to as grounds in the figure above is the expert knowledge regarding some topic that the speaker judges that she has after evaluating a set of facts of the world (through deduction or experiencing), and concluding that the result of this evaluation will serve as testimony to the validity of the utterance. This is a key concept in McCallum-Bayliss' theory and it is applied throughout my analysis. For further discussion on the concept of grounds see chapter 4 of this thesis and McCallum-Bayliss (1988).

The past marker (as in *should*, *would*, *could*, and *might*) has a weakening effect on a modal if it is interpretable as *remoteness in reality*. (Remoteness = the effect of the past marker in that it removes the proposition in time or reality from the speaker. This concept is used as presented by McCallum-Bayliss.)

Also important for my analysis is the concept of systems of world knowledge relative to which interpretation of utterances containing modal verbs takes place. The systems are of two different kinds, either based on Actuality, SA, where the laws can be changed if a counter-example is found, or Ideality, SI, where the laws remain intact and the counter-example is at fault (Wertheimer 1972). Within the former McCallum-Bayliss places modal meanings that traditionally are categorized as epistemic, dynamic, and alethic, whereas within the latter are found deontic meanings. Again, for further discussion on the systems I refer the reader to McCallum-Bayliss (1988).

## 2.2 The possibility modals

The possibility modals, that is *can*, *may*, *could*, and *might*, are the most frequently used modals in TV advertising. A possibility modal occurs in 32% of the ads in the data, and 57% of all the occurrences of modals are possibility modals. There are, however, great differences in their individual patterns of occurrence. While *can* is the most frequent of all the modals, *might* occurs only 4 times, making it the least frequent modal overall; and *could* occurs twice as often as *may*, in 8% and 4% of the ads respectively.

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Table 6. Frequency tables of modals in spoken, written and advertising English

<u>Item</u>	<u>Frequency per 1000 words/SEU</u>	<u>Frequency per 1000 words/Lanc.</u>	<u>Frequency per 1,000 words/TV ad.</u>
Will/won't	4.0	2.8	3.5
Can	3.5	2.1	4.7
Would	3.5	3.0	1.0
Could	2.0	1.7	1.9
Must	1.1	1.1	0.3
Should	1.1	1.2	0.8
May	0.8	1.3	0.8
Might	0.7	0.7	0.2

In Coates' (1983) data the high likelihood modals *will* and *would* occupy the top positions in written language, and also the top positions together with *can* in spoken language. In TV advertising the top position is occupied by, *can*, followed by *will*. *Would* is far more frequent than *could* in Coates' data, but the reverse is true for TV advertising. Also noteworthy is that in written English *may* is more frequent than both necessity modals and *should*, and in TV advertising *may* is at least as frequent as *should* and more frequent than necessity modals. In spoken English, however, *may* is only slightly more frequent than *might*, the least used modal. This may be an indication that in written advertising the use of modals follows the pattern of ordinary written language since 7 of the recorded occurrences of *may* are found in superscripts that are not spoken. (1) and (2) are examples of such superscripts.

- (1) Purchase options *may* be available at the end of the lease. (Maxima GXE lease)
- (2) Regular cough syrup *may* take up to 30 minutes. (Formula 44)

Semantically, all of the possibility modals have as part of their meaning *it is possible that...* (McCallum-Bayliss 1988:52). They differ in that they do or do not have grounds and/or remoteness among their semantic properties as well.<sup>13</sup> As Figure 1 shows, *can* is [+grounds], *may* [-grounds], *could* is [+grounds, +remoteness], and *might* [-grounds, +remoteness]. When correlated

<sup>13</sup> Whether grounds and remoteness are actually part of the modals' truth conditions, as McCallum-Bayliss (1988) claims, I leave an open question. Henceforth I will call these properties semantic conventions.

to Table 6 it is obvious that the property [+grounds] is important with regard to the overall frequency of modals, as [+grounds] modals occupy the top four positions on all three scales. The fact that the combination possibility and [+grounds] is the most frequent in TV advertising rather than high likelihood and [+grounds] may indicate that advertisers are reluctant to commit themselves too strongly to the propositions expressed by their utterances. This is not particularly surprising as claiming the high likelihood, or indeed necessity, of a proposition's coming true can have dangerous consequences for advertisers if the proposition is put to the test and is found to be false.

In the following sections I will show further how the individual possibility modals are employed in the data, taking note of linguistic environments and the implications that stress on the modal has for the meaning of the utterance as a whole.

### 2.2.1 *Can and may*

It was noted above that *can* is very frequent in TV advertising, occurring almost 5 times/1,000 words, and that *may* is rather infrequent, occurring 0.8/1,000 words. In other types of language the frequency of *can* is lower (3.5 for spoken and 2.1 for written) whereas the frequency of *may* does not differ greatly (0.8 for spoken and 1.3 for written). These figures suggest that there is something about *can* that makes it a more attractive choice of modal for advertising purposes, especially if the message is to be spoken. In this section I illustrate various uses of *can* and *may* in the data to show how they differ and to what extent their semantic properties make them more or less useful for the purpose of TV advertising.

According to McCallum-Bayliss (1988) both *can* and *may* have as part of their truth conditions (*at least*) possible, but *can* entails the semantic property [+grounds] while *may* is [-grounds]. It is not types of possibility that are differently signaled by *can* and *may* but types of knowledge that the speaker has on which she bases her proposition. As was mentioned in 2.1, minimal, or 'unfounded' knowledge about a proposition is signaled by using a [-grounds] modal, whereas knowledge that can serve as 'testimony to the validity of the proposition' (McCallum-Bayliss 1988: 53) is signaled by [+grounds]. In accordance with the Maxim of Quality<sup>14</sup> it would be uncooperative, and misleading, of a speaker to use *can* if, in fact, she did not have the expert knowledge to back up the proposition.

(3) W: 'You need an operator who speaks a foreign language? I *can* help.' (AT & T)

<sup>14</sup> Grice (1975) formulates this maxim: (i) Do not say what you believe to be false; (ii) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

- (4) 'You need an operator who speaks a foreign language? I *may* help.'

A speaker who utters (4) indicates that *it is possible that it is within my abilities to help you, but no more than just possible*. The speaker lacks the expertise necessary to be able to truthfully claim that she does have the ability to help. The speaker who claims (3), on the other hand, indicates that she has the expert knowledge (grounds) necessary to implement the request. It is the presence of such (implicit) expertise on the speaker's behalf that makes a claim with *can* stronger than one with *may*, although the possibility remains only a possibility.

For advertisers it is very important to inform viewers of abilities/powers that will aid them in imagined situations, and it is desirable for them to make it inferable to viewers that these abilities/powers are actual and not the result of speculation. A confident assertion of the possibility of an event's taking place in most cases increases the believability of the speaker and the claim (Carli 1990). The frequency of *can* in comparison to *may* is therefore not surprising.

There are many types of knowledge that serve as the basis for grounds. McCallum-Bayliss (1988:53) lists such examples as *control, specific world knowledge, knowledge of authority*, illustrated respectively here with examples from my own data.

- (5) Mother: 'By choosing a picture, then pushing a button to hear what he's chosen, he *can* create over 1,000 little stories.' (Storymaker)
- (6) Actor: 'It's my personal experience that when you have art in your life your dreams *can* become reality.' (Burnaby Arts Council)
- (7) CEO to would-be employee: 'You *can* have your choice of any colour of new Hyundai you want.' (Hyundai)

In some cases the immediate linguistic context will supply the basis for interpretation. In the case of (8) and (9) the viewer has the right to infer that because the utterances are about specific subjects (DHL and Canadian Airlines) it is reasonable to assume that the speaker has special knowledge regarding those subjects.<sup>15</sup>

- (8) M V-O: DHL *can* take almost anything to just about everywhere. (DHL)
- (9) M V-O: Canadian International Airlines *can* bring you there. (Canadian)

In the case of (8) we are shown the facts that serve as grounds for this particular speaker (a man picking up a parrot addressed to Siberia), but those facts need not serve as grounds unless the

<sup>15</sup> The capital letters in initial position of each example should be read as follows: M=male or man; W=woman; M V-O= male voice-over; F V-O= female voice-over; B= boy; G= girl.

speaker judges them to be testimony for this. Visuals only enhance grounds, if grounds are claimed; they do not determine what serves as grounds. Thus (10) is perfectly possible, but the net conversational impact will be that of a speculation about the subject, DHL; it is not really an assertion about DHL's capacities.

(10) DHL *may* take almost anything to just about everywhere.

From an advertiser's point of view such speculation is not normally considered efficient for advertising purposes. If you are trying to convince somebody of the validity of your argument, why make it clear that you are not certain about the reliability of your claim? If you do, it would seem as if you are not quite competent enough to be believable, which in this domain is an undesirable way of communicating a message.

It stands to reason that in TV advertising language [+grounds] is an important semantic property, as its presence diminishes the speculative character of an utterance containing a possibility modal. The conversational impact of (8) as compared to (10) is that the possibility of the proposition's being true seems stronger in (8), because the existence of grounds makes it inferable to the viewer that it was uttered with expertise to back it up. The data support the importance of [+grounds] possibility modals for the construction of verbal messages in TV advertising. 47% of the recorded instances of modals were [+grounds] possibility modals (*can/could*), whereas only 7% were [-grounds] possibility modals (*may/might*).

One may also observe that *can* occurs most frequently with an animate subject, 25.9% with a first person pronoun, and 43.8% with a second person pronoun. *May*, on the other hand, occurs mostly with third person subjects (75%) 2/3 of which are inanimate.

Table 7. Distribution of subject types with *can* and *may*

	1st person	2nd person	3rd person		total
			+anim.	-anim.	
<i>can</i>	29(25.9%)	49(43.8%)	2(1.7%)	32(28.6%)	112
<i>may</i>	1 case (5%)	4(20%)	5 (25%)	10 (50%)	20

Table 7 shows the predominant uses of *can* and *may* with respect to animacy and subject type.

(11) - (18) are examples of how these modals are employed in advertising.

- (11) M: 'I *can* sit down and I *can* stumble through a paper. I *can* read an article and understand it better.' (Literacy Council)
- (12) M V-O: 'Wrigley's Spearmint Gum. It's got a cool, clear taste we all *can* enjoy.' (Wrigley's)
- (13) M: 'Even if you've been late on some payments in the past you *can* still re-finance your mortgage and get today's low rates at the Money Store.' (the Money Store)
- (14) M V-O: 'Right now you *can* get two Big Macs for just \$2.22.' (McDonalds)
- (15) W: 'This is my choice, Monistat 7. You *can* feel how soft it is.' (Monistat 7)
- (16) M V-O: 'A dollar off the new Mickey Do extra value offer. (Prices and participation *may* vary.) (McDonalds)
- (17) M V-O: 'Now, this particular Canadian *may* seem ordinary to some, but to Royal Bank she's the inspiration behind the branches we've designed specifically for seniors.' (Royal Bank)
- (18) M: 'With its unique Schweppevessence and distinctly refreshing taste it *may* be the last oasis of true excellence in an otherwise vast desert of compromise. Cheers!' (Schweppes)

One reason for the frequency of *can* with a first person subject may be that when the speakers are identifiable with the subjects of the sentences, as in (11) and (12), it is expected that they should have expert knowledge regarding the circumstances behind the proposition. Therefore a [+grounds] modal would be the natural choice of modal to make such speaker/subject-based expertise inferable to the viewer. Why *can* occurs so often with *you* in the domain of TV advertising is again probably a consequence of speaker expertise, but this time not because she has control over the subject's capacities and abilities but because she has had experience with the topic at hand, (13) - (15). Such experience may be direct or, in most cases I would think, indirect, e.g., obtained through laboratory experiments etc. It is therefore not surprising that speakers in this domain are able to, and clearly often do, make expert claims about an event that is centred on the recipient of the message.<sup>16</sup> Not only do TV advertisers have knowledge about the topic at hand, they also endeavour to learn about the cognitive environment of the audience. The deeper their knowledge about this environment is the greater is their possibility to claim with credibility that an event will take place at the instigation of the recipient of the message. The fact that more than 40% of the instances of *can* occur with *you*,

<sup>16</sup> Leech (1966:125) observes that *can* + *you* indicates the power or ability of the consumer, whereas *can* + an inanimate subject points to the possibilities open to the consumer.

indicates that advertisers presumably find it a persuasive measure to point out the would-be consumer's abilities, and build their claims around these observations.

The use of *may* differs markedly from how *can* is used. While the data on *may* is too scarce to claim with certainty how *may* is generally employed in TV advertising (20 cases), it at least indicates that *may* is used mostly with third person subjects (15 cases), predominantly inanimate (10 cases). It furthermore often occurs in superscripts (7 cases; only one case with *can*). As such it is employed in utterances used to modify or further explain the spoken message, and it is not used in the sales message directly. Such superscripts are, however, a necessary part of the sales message as they serve to clarify to the consumer the parameters within which the sales message pertains. (The same pattern of use is also found with respect to *must* in section 2.4.1)

When *may* occurs in the spoken message (13 cases) the sentence subject is normally animate (8 cases), as in (17). Here the speaker indicates that although it is perfectly possible that there are people who find *this particular Canadian* ordinary, he is not very sure about the reliability of his proposition. The implication is that the proposition is not based on results of extensive research, or something else that would serve as testimony to the claim's validity, it is merely a suggestion or speculation on the part of the speaker.

(18) is an example of spoken *may* with an inanimate sentence subject. In this case, the use of *may* gives rise to implications of irony. The full context and text is given below in (18').

- (18') *The situation: A man is sitting in a room surrounded by 'high quality antiques' with a bottle of Schweppes on a side-table and a glass of the same in his hand. He exudes the confidence of one who is used to a lifestyle of comfort and who recognizes quality when he encounter it. As he talks the furniture and decor quite literally fall apart piece by piece, but he remains unperturbed.*  
 Man: 'It's becoming ever more difficult to surround oneself with absolute uncompromising quality. Which is why I take such extraordinary pleasure in telling you about Schweppes. With its unique Schweppevessence and distinctly refreshing taste it *may* be the last oasis of true excellence in an otherwise vast desert of compromise. Cheers!'

The irony lies in the fact that it is clear to the viewer that the speaker by his attitude hints that he is an expert on the subject of *excellence*, and his words furthermore imply that there has been more than one oasis of excellence prior to the situation illustrated in the ad. Yet he claims, by employing *may* instead of *can* or *could*, that he does not have grounds for his claim, that he lacks the expertise necessary. The fact that *may* lacks grounds makes it easier for the conversational implicature *may also not* to arise, which again contradicts the speaker's attitude of expertise. In order to make sense out of this apparent contradiction the viewer has to

access other assumptions besides that of mere possibility. The only relevant interpretation of the utterance in this context is that it is meant to be taken as ironical.<sup>17</sup>

Other examples of irony in advertising that arise out of the contrast between what is expected and what is uttered are (19) and (20). In this example *may* is far too formal for the context, giving the utterance ironical overtones.

- (19) Garfield: 'May I have a word with you? It's about my cat box. It stinks.'  
(Kitty Litter Max)

By using *may* in his request Garfield invests the addressee with authority and implies an unwillingness to impose on her. The irony lies in the fact that such a behaviour is contrary to what is expected of the character of Garfield, who is famous for his surly attitude (illustrated in a later utterance, "It stinks."). A less respectful form of address, with *can* or *could*, would have been expected, thus employing *may* here indicates a deliberate attempt at catching and retaining the audience's attention.

- (20) *Setting: A living room at night at Christmas; Santa makes a visit and is mangled by worn out, hazardous furniture.*  
M V-O: '...This time of the year you never know who might be dropping by. So you MAY want to consider replacing old furniture with something new from ...'  
(Furniture store, company name indecipherable)

In (20) the visual illustration serves as the necessary background for the irony implicated by the use of *may*. Playing on the assumption that if one has such worn-out furniture as is shown, one will quite obviously be thinking about replacing it before one receives important guests; thus the use of *may* is a clear understatement. The irony arises out of this contrast.

Both *can* and *may* are almost always employed in the sense of creating the possibility of an *ability*, a *power*, or a *characteristic* (SA senses). Senses of *permission* and *ordering* (SI senses), as in (19), are not frequent. In some cases, as in (13) and (14), both SA and SI readings are possible. One reading does not necessarily exclude the other (McCallum-Bayliss 1988:23), but normally either an SA or an SI reading will first come to mind when interpreting a sentence. For advertising the normal parameters are those associated with reasoning faculties rather than those associated with obeisance to rules. Showing and telling about abilities and powers of products/services/consumers is, after all, what advertising is about. There is no way an advertiser can order a consumer around. Thus, formulating a claim as an order or as an obvious

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<sup>17</sup> See further in Sperber & Wilson (1986, 1992) for an account of irony and relevance theory.

permission would be an inefficient way of communicating a proposal, as it would be deemed irrelevant or impertinent by the would-be consumer. Advertisers have no authority *per se*; their authority is particular and based on expertise on something. This expertise is inferable, however, only if they employ specific lexical items that make possible such inferences. With respect to the lexical items covered in my study, these are the [+grounds] modals.

### 2.2.2 *Could and might*

*Could* is relatively frequent in advertising language, it occurs 45 times in 34 of the ads (8%), with a frequency of 1.9 per 1,000/words. This is close to the frequencies recorded by Coates (1983), 2.0 for spoken and 1.7 for written language, showing that the use of *could* in TV advertising does not differ markedly from its use in 'ordinary' language. In the data *could* is stressed when negated (*couldn't*) otherwise, with one exception, it is unstressed.

*Might*, on the other hand, only occurs 4 times, which makes it impossible to say much about its general use. Its infrequency correlates to a certain extent with Coates' data, in that it is the least used of all the modals, but the infrequency is more pronounced in TV advertising, 0.2 occurrences/1,000 words, whereas Coates finds 0.7 occurrences/1,000 words (spoken and written).

The dominance of *could* over *might* comes as no surprise as we have seen that the same pattern holds for *can* and *may*. Speakers find [+grounds] modals more useful than [-grounds] ones even if the proposition is indicated to be remote in reality or time, which is what the past marker does. *Could* and *might* stand in the same relation to *can* and *may* as *would* does to *will* (and *should* to *shall*). They are the past marked forms of *can* and *may*, and they share the same semantic conventions as the non-past forms, thus *could* = (at least) possible, and grounds exist; *might* (at least) possible, but the past marker adds a dimension of doubt to the claim = remoteness, since it removes the speaker in time or reality from commitment to its propositional content. This is why *could* and *might* are semantically weaker than the non-past possibility modals.

The sense of speaker doubt about the proposition at hand that *could* indicates is useful to advertisers if they want to claim expertise on the subject but prefer to remain relatively uncommitted. If *could* is used in a context where *can* would have been equally possible, the viewer has a right to conclude that the chances of the proposition's coming true are not great. Again, this is not because the possibility *per se* is somehow different or because the speaker lacks expertise, but because he distances himself from what is claimed, as in (21).

- (21) M V-O: 'It's roll-up-the-rim-to-win-time again at Tim Horton's and you *could* win one of 10 [car brand name]. (Tim Horton's)

Here the speaker can be presumed to have previous experience with the kind of lottery mentioned, and part of this experience is to have come across at least one winner of the kind referred to. This is certainly knowledge that is good enough to serve as grounds. However, the speaker also knows that the chances of winning are remote, and is perhaps legally obliged to indicate this fact. Using *can* in (21) would make a stronger claim, probably too strong in these circumstances. To make this clear to the viewer he employs the past-marked [+grounds] possibility modal *could*. More examples of the difference in strength between *could* and *can* are shown below.

- (22) M V-O: '... If you bank with Seafirst your money *could* be shipped to California. That's where their head office is. (Puget Sound Bank)
- (23) If you bank with Seafirst your money *can* be shipped to California...

To claim (23) seems to hint rather strongly that money is indeed sent to California when it should not be. This may not be accurate from Seafirst's point of view, so employing a possibility modal that includes a past marker is a smoother way of hinting the same thing. By employing *could* in this context the comparison with Seafirst becomes fuzzier, and fuzzy comparisons are easier to accept and do not cause antagonism in viewers; consequently they should be relevant to a larger percentage of viewers.

It has been noted, as McCallum-Bayliss (1988:69) points out, that *could* and *may* seem to be on an equal level as regards semantic strength. And indeed, regardless of which one of them is employed in a proposition the conversational impact will be that chances of a felicitous outcome are quite small. Compare (24) and (25).

- (24) M V-O: 'Oxy 5 *could* show you the beginning of the end of your pimples in just 12 hours.' (Oxy 5 facial cleanser)
- (25) Oxy 5 *may* show you the beginning of the end of your pimples in just 12 hours.

Although (24) and (25) seems equally strong, claims with *may* are rather scarce in advertising<sup>18</sup>. When advertisers want to claim this particular level of probability they use *could*, and the reasons are clear when we look at the interpretation of (24) and (25). In (25) it is *at least possible that pimples disappear...* but the speaker gives the viewer no reason to believe that this is more than mere speculation on his part as he does not have grounds for the claim. In

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<sup>18</sup> Geis (1982) also comments on the scarcity of *may* in his data, but does not speculate as to why.

(24), on the other hand, the speaker claims some verifying knowledge about the process of getting rid of pimples, which to him serves as grounds.

The past marker, however, removes the indicated possibility from reality, functioning as a disclaimer by the speaker. The existence of expert knowledge increases the overall believability of the claim; the past marker modifies the proposition to indicate that the speaker's lack of desire to commit fully to it despite (or because) of his expertise. The fact that there are many ads using *could* in the way it is used in (24) but extremely few using *may* in this way indicates that the desire to claim expert knowledge overrides pragmatically the need to indicate a particular level of probability. If the past marker is included in a possibility modal its semantic strength is decreased. If the past marker is included in such a modal that is [+grounds] its semantic strength is still decreased semantically, but pragmatically it is stronger than its [-grounds] counterpart, as the proposition is based on facts of the world outside the speaker. There is a sense of objectivity attached to [+grounds] modals that adds to their pragmatic strength. (See also section 2.4.2 on *have to*.) This is the reason, I argue, why *could* is far more frequent in my corpus than *may*, although their semantic strengths are comparable.

The same argument holds with respect to *might*, and explains why it hardly ever occurs in TV advertising. Since it has the conversational impact of only a *suggestion of a possibility* (at least possible, no grounds, remote) it does not seem pertinent to use it in claims that should certify the need for a product/service. Therefore its infrequency is to be expected<sup>19</sup>. When it does occur (4 cases) it seems to be in a context where the advertiser tries to induce her own train of thoughts onto the viewer, rather than state something directly connected to the product<sup>20</sup>.

(26) W: 'If you have common arthritis, you *might* be surprised to learn what doctors recommend for the pain.' (Tylenol)

Since Tylenol is an extremely common remedy for pain it is not, in fact, very likely that the viewer will be surprised by the claim that doctors recommend Tylenol for arthritis, and any modal stronger than *might* would in this context be too strong for the proposition to remain plausible.

McCallum-Bayliss (1988) does not state whether the inferences drawn from the existence of the past marker are implicatures or if the past marker is part of the modal's truth conditions. Relevance theory claims that such inferences are pragmatic enrichments of the logical form. If this is the case, then the context should make it clear whether the past marker

<sup>19</sup> However, if Coates (1983) is correct in her argument that *might* seems to be the modal used to express *likelihood* in conversations, there could be more going with respect to the meaning and use of *might* than what a straightforward *weak possibility* interpretation yields.

<sup>20</sup> See also Coates (1983:136) on the use of *may* in this respect.

refers to remoteness in time or reality. That is, if the context demands a temporal reading, it will cost less, in terms of effort, to interpret the utterance in this way. Compare (27) and (28).

- (27) M V-O: '... He asked himself: Why would people want the taste of a chocolate chip when they *could* have the taste of a chocolate chunk?...' (Chunks Ahoy cookies)
- (28) M V-O: '... Introducing new Tide with grease releasers. Grease this tough is so tough many detergents *could* leave it behind but nothing beats Tide!...' (Tide detergent)

There seems to be no reason to interpret *could* in (27) as *remote in reality*, it is simply a description of a thought process that took place in some past time. However, for a claim like (28), a past time reading would be absolutely inconsistent with the linguistic environment, a claim in the present tense. The linguistic context, in particular the tense of surrounding clauses and sentences, determines how the past marker will be interpreted with respect to type of remoteness for the claim to become fully propositional.

### 2.2.3 Stress on possibility modals

The modals of possibility are not very often focally stressed in the data I have collected. With the exception of the negated occurrences of *can* and *could*, i.e., *can't* and *couldn't* (which I will not discuss), stress only occurs 5 times on *can* and once on *could*. Stress does not change a modal's meaning, but serves to put emphasis on the nature of the modality in question, as it implies strong speaker belief in the possibility claimed. This has the effect of somewhat strengthening the nature of the possibility, in that the uncertainty factor is decreased. It also gives rise to conversational implicatures of speaker involvement that may serve to strengthen the utterance's impact conversationally.

- (29) F V-O: 'There is now a home pregnancy test that takes as long to work as it **CAN** take to perform the act of love making itself.'  
(pause)  
M V-O: 'Results in three minutes.' [Results in 3 minutes.]  
(Home pregnancy test)

The stress on *can* in (29) puts emphasis on the speaker's beliefs and her expert knowledge that serves as grounds for the utterance. It also serves as an attention retainer, since it hints of something to come that is a continuation of, or a contrast with, the content of the proposition. When, in the second sentence, it is suggested that an act of lovemaking occasionally lasts for

three minutes, the implication is that this is contrary to what the speaker believes is normal and what he believes the audience thinks normal. Focal stress on *can* amplifies the contrast and the surprising fact that such rushed love-making is a possibility. The ironic implication is that the speaker definitely does not hold with the idea that lovemaking should take three minutes only, and it arises as the result of the advertiser's echoing of general attitudes on lovemaking. (Unless the viewer perceives the echo the irony will fall flat, of course.)

(30) and (31) are examples of how stress on *can* emphasizes the speaker's belief in the claim or in the effects of what is being proposed. The grounds in these cases are given even more importance by the speakers, and it is this that they try to communicate to the viewer.

(30) F V-O: 'People in 17 countries are switching to the products with the most powerful cleaners available that are derived from natural, renewable ingredients. Discover Down to Earth. One step *CAN* make a difference.' (Down to Earth)

(31) M V-O: 'At Nissan...We believe a family vacation *CAN* actually be a vacation.' (Nissan)

In (30) and (31) the speaker wishes to transfer her or his own apparent belief in the propositions by trying to reason with the viewers' assumed doubts about the possibility of one step's making a difference, or a family vacation's being a true vacation. If, in (30) the stress had been on *step* instead of *can*, it would not have been the possibility as such that would have mattered to the speaker, but rather the action implied in *step*. The possibility would then be taken for granted, as would the assumption that the viewer has the same assumption; the possibility is mutually manifest. But such is not the case. In the advertiser's opinion, doubts regarding the effects of the action must be removed before the action can be felicitously promoted. As for (31), the speaker by stressing the modal emphasizes *the possibility* open to the viewer of having a family vacation free of the hassles normally associated with such vacations. He does so because he, or rather the company he represents, has created this possibility, and it is thus the possibility itself, embodied in the car advertised, that he is selling.

When stress occurs on *could* I argue that it is the [+grounds] aspect that is emphasized, not the remoteness. I base this on the improbability of an advertiser's emphasizing her doubts regarding the proposition. Stress would act as a suppressor of the one-sided reading of the modal, acting in concordance with grounds to incur an two-sided, more constrained and, consequently, stronger reading. However, since I only found one occurrence of stressed *could*, my argument is not based on statistic evidence, but on the presumption that *could* follows the pattern discernible for the other modals and the quantifiers.

(32) M V-O: 'You *COULD* win one of these five BC adventures.' (BC Hydro)

Again it must be emphasized that focal stress on a modal does not change the semantic nature of possibility involved. The semantic property of possibility remains the same, the meaning of the existence of grounds, or lack thereof, also remains unchanged, and the past marker still indicates the proposition's remoteness from the speaker. What is different is the conversational implicatures regarding speaker belief and involvement in the proposition that stress on a modal gives rise to. Such implicatures are intended to act as strengtheners on the overall impact of the utterance.

#### 2.2.4 Summary

In this section I have shown that the possibility modals are the most frequent modals in my data. They occur in 32% of all the ads in my corpus. *Can* is the most frequent of all modals, it occurs almost 5 times/1,000 words. *Might*, on the other hand, is the least frequent modal of them all, occurring only once per 5,000 words. As for *could* and *may* they seem to follow the frequency pattern shown by Coates (1983). However, my data indicate that there is a difference between 'ordinary' language, as investigated by Coates, and TV advertising language, since possibility modals are generally more frequent in TV advertising than in Coates' data, which have high likelihood modals as the most frequent.

I have also shown that *can/could* and *may/might* differ in that the former have the semantic components *at least possible* and *grounds exist* whereas the latter only mean *at least possible*. *Could* and *might* furthermore include a past marker that is interpreted as remoteness, either in time or reality. [+/- grounds] and [+/-remoteness] seem to play an important role in the explanation of the frequencies and types of employment that the possibility modals have in TV advertising. Thus it was shown that [+grounds] is used to make inferences regarding speaker expertise about the proposition possible for the viewer. [-grounds] indicates that the speaker is unsure about the reliability of the proposition. Such insecurity about the propositional content of the utterance is not appropriate in an advertising situation, as confidence will increase the believability of the speaker and the claim. Not surprisingly *can*, which is [+grounds] is more frequent than *may*, which is [-grounds].

*Can* is mostly used with first and second person sentence subjects. Employed like this *can* indicates powers and abilities on the part of the speaker and on the part of the consumer. When used with a third person inanimate sentence subject it indicates possibilities open to the viewer. *May*, on the other hand, was mostly used with third person inanimate sentence subjects, and as such it appeared mainly in silent superscripts modifying or explaining the spoken/visual messages.

I furthermore showed that *could* is used when the speaker wants to indicate that she has doubts about the proposition but still wants to claim expertise on the subject. The past marker that is included in *could* makes such doubts inferable to the viewer. Pragmatically, the use of a past-marked form weakens the claim if compared to an equivalent claim with *can*. If compared to a claim with *may* the result is that they seem to be of close to equal strength. This is because *may* is [-grounds] and [-remoteness].

Possibility modals are hardly ever focally stressed in my data, unless they are negated. When focal stress does occur on an unnegated possibility modal it does not change the type of possibility involved, but indicates a decrease of the uncertainty factor expressed by the modal, and puts emphasis on the speaker's beliefs and knowledge about the propositional content of the utterance. Such signs of speaker involvement are intended to make the proposition more believable, and ultimately more influential. Focal stress may also serve as an attention retainer, as it gives rise to a variety of implicatures that need to be figured out by the viewer in order for the utterance to be fully interpreted.

### 2.3 The high likelihood modals

The modals denoting high likelihood are *will*, *shall*, *would*, and *should*. (Since *shall* does not occur in my data I will not deal with it otherwise than mention that it is the [-grounds] counterpart to *will*.) *Will* is frequent in the data, occurring in 14% of the ads, whereas both *would* and *should* are relatively rare, occurring in 4.5% and 4% of the ads. Coates (1983) observes that in her corpus both *will* and *would* are among the most frequent modals, in fact they top the frequency table, as was shown in Table 3. The discrepancy between Coates' data and mine is particularly noticeable with respect to *would*. In TV advertising *would* occurs only once per 1,000 words, whereas in both spoken and written ordinary language it occurs more than 3 times /1,000 words. Reasons for this discrepancy will be sought in section 2.3.2.

The data indicate that the existence or lack of grounds affects the pragmatic strength of the high likelihood modals *per se*, and relative to the necessity and possibility modals. The existence of grounds for *will* often gives an utterance with *will* a conversational impact that is stronger than that of an equivalent utterance with *must*, as the latter lacks grounds (see further in 2.3.1). We have seen this effect of grounds before, in regard to the pragmatic strength of utterances with *could* and *may*.

I will demonstrate how such interpretations of *will* as *prediction* and *willingness* can be traced to the existence of grounds, and which of all the possible interpretations of *will* are relevant in the context of advertising. In this context I will show how *will* may be modified and

point to the consequences as regards the strength of the proposition when such modification occurs. Finally I will show how the past marker constrains the use of *would* and *should* with respect to the advertising context.

### 2.3.1 Will

As was noted above, *will* is frequent in the data. An interesting feature of the use of *will* in my data is that it occurs more often than any other modal occurs twice or more in the same commercial (Table 2). The reason for such repeated usage seems to be that if some sense of futurity is implied consistency of expression is needed, therefore *will* often appears in a later utterance in the same ad.

- (33) M V-O: 'You'll laugh, you'll cry, and you'll fall in love with Yonkers.'  
(Trailer for 'Lost In Yonkers')

In McCallum-Bayliss' (1988) theory of modality, *will* and *shall* and their past forms, *would/should* occupy a middle position with respect to semantic strength, between the possibility modals and the necessity modals. She argues that *will* has a place on the modal scale as a true modal, for which one of the interpretations is *futurity*, rather than being a pure tense marker with the structural and syntactical properties of a modal.<sup>21</sup> Notably, Coates (1983:233) observes that, 'tense and modality overlap where there is reference to the future', and Palmer (1991:37) states that 'if modality is concerned with events and propositions whose factual status is in doubt... it's perfectly appropriate to refer to future events without factual status'. *Will* is [+grounds], and it may be paraphrased as 'it is the case that in all likelihood' or 'it is highly likely' (McCallum-Bayliss 1988:96).

If an advertiser employs *will* in a proposition that is directly connected to the product/service advertised, she makes quite a strong claim. It is therefore not surprising that we find claims with *will* modified with adverbials or superscripts (10 instances in the data) as in (34) - (36).

- (34) M V-O: 'You'll often get one-dose relief with new Kaopectate II tablets.'  
(Kaopectate II, diarrhea prevention)
- (35) M V-O: 'Over the next year his food bill *will* likely rise 2%, his rent 4%.'  
(Royal Bank)

<sup>21</sup> She further observes that American English no longer makes a difference between *will* and *shall*, although this difference is still discernible in British English.

- (36) M V-O: 'Spend \$40 a month and we'll take 25% off your favorite area code.' (Discounts off AT&T basic residential direct-dial domestic prices. Other conditions and exclusions apply.) (AT&T)

By modifying (34) and (35) with adverbials the advertisers make sure that they stay within any legal restrictions as to what may be 'promised' (predicted) outright, and they furthermore ensure that the claims will not be viewed as too strong in context. A bank is in no position to safely 'predict' a rent rise (unless it is the landlord), and nobody has the power to effect guaranteed one-dose relief from diarrhea. Adding a modifier, then, makes the proposition more believable, and it is easier to interpret it as relevant in this context and consistent with the truth. As for (36), it is not so much to make it more relevant as to keep the promise in line with what is the factual truth, that (legally) forces the advertiser to add a disclaimer in the form of a superscript.

Concerning the semantic strength of *will*, it is debatable whether it is stronger or weaker than *must*. Although *must* is a necessity modal, the impression that it is no stronger than *will* remains. In fact, in some contexts a claim with *will* seems to be stronger than a claim with *must*. Compare (37) and (38),

- (37) M V-O: 'Get CLR! It *will* work for you, or your money back!' (CLR Clear)  
 (38) Get CLR! It *must* work for you, or your money back!

Both (37) and (38) make very strong claims about the certainty of an event's taking place, but they have very different conversational impact. (37) is a prediction about the event, based on the speaker's special knowledge (grounds) about it. Because the existence of grounds is mutually manifest, his claim will be interpreted as a justified prediction about the probability of the event's taking place.<sup>22</sup> In (38), the speaker claims that there is no reasonable alternative to the event's taking place but without grounds for this the conversational impact is that of an equally or less strong claim than (37).

Why a *justifiable prediction* seems stronger than a *necessary deduction*, is a matter for debate. Horn (1976:100) argues that with respect to natural language speakers and hearers are 'more willing to commit themselves to their perception of reality, ..., rather than to the elegance of the frequently counter-intuitive formal processes of logical deduction.'<sup>23</sup> The reason for this may be that the interpretation of *will* as a prediction is stored in memory as part of

<sup>22</sup> Leech (1966:125) argues that *will* in an advertising context 'does not so much indicate futurity as the infallibility of a claim.' *Will* in this case seems to have the sense *cannot help but*.

<sup>23</sup> In a domain where logical reasoning is the only way to deduce truth, as in the language of science, the necessity modals have stronger impact than the high likelihood modals.

one's assumptions on how predictability may be coded in language. Such an assumption comes with initial strength (Sperber & Wilson, 1986:83). Logical deductions, on the other hand, are mental operations that follow from filling in an assumption schema. Although the resulting assumptions will often be plausible, they are not necessarily strong. McCallum-Bayliss (1988:97) argues that grounds is both what makes the difference between *will* and *must*, and what causes the similarities in pragmatic strength. If her argument is tied to Sperber & Wilson's argument above, it would mean that grounds are based on an assumption stored in memory, and if one has no assumptions regarding some topic it follows that one may only make claims about it based on logical deduction, at least if the Maxim of Quality is not to be violated.

The varying nature of the grounds explains why *will* in some cases has a volitional interpretation. One of the reasons for having grounds is that one is in control of the matter at hand, an act at issue. Consequently one can choose whether to perform it or bring it about. Given that the choice is positive, the viewer has every reason to believe that the act/event is certain to happen, and will interpret the claim accordingly.

- (39) [Superscript]Together we'll work out a plan that works for you (Investor's Group, TD)
- (40) Man: 'Silo *will* beat any price!' (Silo home electronics)
- (41) M-V-O: 'If you're between 50 and 75 Norwich Union *will* insure you for life, with no medical exam and no health questions.' (Norwich Union)

In (39) - (41) the advertisers may assert the likelihood of the events' taking place because they are in control of the product/service referred to and in control of their desire to carry out the propositions. The viewer may infer that the factual knowledge on which the claims are based lie within the speakers' sphere of control, not on some fact outside the speaker's control.<sup>24</sup> Such an assumption makes it more believable that these particular futures are in fact predictable as stated.

### 2.3.2 *Would and should*

*Would* is not very frequent in TV advertising language, as was noted above. *Would* contains the past marker, which means that a proposition with *would* is remote from the speaker. In TV advertising data indicate that it is employed mostly in contexts that create backgrounds for

<sup>24</sup> In the case of (41) the pronoun *we* also gives the hearer a clue as to where control lies.

contrasting claims, either in a straight description of the past or in a hypothesis. The following <sup>31</sup> contrasting claim then presents the circumstances as they appear today, or presents the result of the hypothesis. Since hypothesizing directly about a product or service that you are trying to persuade someone to buy does not seem to be an effective way of communicating its good qualities, such 'background uses' of *would* are not surprising. Reasoning about something that needs change, and then presenting a product that effects such a change can be very persuasive, whereas hypothesizing alone, without giving a solution, leaves the viewer stranded with questioned assumptions only.

(42) W: 'I *would* lose will power after 3 PM... until Late Day.' (Acutrim II)

By describing the past characteristics of her behaviour the woman sets the scene for the presentation of the product that changed her behavior. (42) is an example of how a past marked high likelihood modal is used to show that the proposition is remote in time from the speaker. Such a formulation may be used to imply a contrast with the present, where a solution has been found. (43) is another example of such a reasoning process described as taking place in the past, which has the effect of highlighting the present, where the people's preference for chunks has been satisfied by the producer of Chunks Ahoy.

(43) M V-O: 'He (the cookie-producer) asked himself: Why *would* people want the taste of a chocolate chip when they could have the taste of a chocolate chunk?... the cookie is new Chunks Ahoy. The waiting is over...'  
(Chunks Ahoy)

The knowledge of past behaviour of people gives the speaker good reasons for assessing the probability of their similar behaviour in the future. In (43), the speaker asked himself at some time in the past a question about people's probable behavior with regard to the taste of chocolate, and he based the question on his acquired knowledge about their preference for chunks instead of chips.

The past marker may also show that the proposition is *remote in reality*, having the effect of distancing the speaker from commitment to the proposition, which is interpretable as speaker doubts about the proposition. This allows the use of *would* as a marker of hypothetical thinking as in (44).

(44) Woman: 'If it weren't for 16 hrs I'd eat all night.' (Acutrim II)

The expression of conditional reality that *would* ('d) indicates, invites the viewer to draw inferences regarding that hypothetical reality, and conclude that today's reality as it is presented in the commercial is to be preferred. The probability of the hypothetical reality's being true is interpretable as strong, [+grounds], [+high likelihood]. This is important in order to impress upon the viewer the contrast with the present reality.

The other past-marked high likelihood modal, *should*, is interesting as it appears to have acquired a set sense of *recommendation* or *obligation*, regardless of the context. McCallum-Bayliss (1988) treats *should* as the [-grounds] counterpart of *would*, thereby according them the same level of probability, but *should* is semantically weaker due to its lack of grounds. The fact that *will* does not really stand in the same relationship to *shall* as *can* does to *may*, in spite of the same [+grounds] and [-grounds] contrast, seems to leave a hole in the modal map that needs to be filled. There are situations when it is appropriate to express the high likelihood of a course of events, although one does not have grounds for the proposition. If *shall* is not a viable option something must be used instead, and possibly *should* is used to fill this hole. This is possible because it lacks grounds and can therefore be employed in a situation where the speaker does not have the verifying knowledge needed to be able to claim grounds. When it is employed as a [-grounds] counterpart of *will*, the role of the past marker in *should* is less pronounced. As for indicating remoteness in reality (speaker doubts), this aspect of the past marker seems to still be in effect.

- (45) Man: 'It *should* say Kodak on the back.' (Kodak Colorwatch)  
 (Setting: studio with a man carrying round an enormous picture while explaining about color and photographic brand names.)
- (46) It *would* say Kodak on the back.
- (47) It *will* say Kodak on the back.

In (45) the speaker claims that *it is highly likely that it says Kodak on the back, but I have no grounds for it, and the proposition is remote in reality*. It is a weaker claim than (46) and far weaker than (47). However, there is a sense of obligation present in (45) which (46) and (47) lack. The paraphrase *there ought to be the word Kodak on the back* does not strike me as incongruous, although there is, in fact, no law or regulation that proposes the obligation of the existence of the word *Kodak* on the back (of the picture). This sense of obligation somehow enhances the probability of the proposition's being true, in spite of the fact that grounds do not exist and that the proposition is furthermore remote in reality.

- (48) M V-O: 'You *should* explore Frigidaire Elite,...' (Frigidaire refrigerators)

- (49) *Setting: Two anglers fishing from small boats in the dark, one with lanterns lit the other without; a speed boat crashes into the dark boat.*  
 M V-O: 'If you're not afraid of the dark you should be.' (US Army Corps of Engineers)

(48) and (49) are *recommendations* that the viewer may or may not choose to carry out. Since the speakers, by removing themselves from the reality of the proposition, express their doubts that the course of action and state of mind proposed will take place, they, in effect, leave the choice to the viewer. Advertisers are not in a position to give anything stronger than recommendations, they cannot order a viewer to act out a proposed course of events, therefore a claim with *should* is the strongest one they can make on the basis of social authority alone, if they expect the suggestion to be taken seriously.

Why *should* seems to have this sense of obligation in every case even in TV advertising, where SI interpretations are rare, is a matter for speculation. Lack of grounds probably influences interpretations to go in this direction simply because it implies that the speaker who uses a [-grounds] modal bases her claim on social authority alone. No reasons based on facts of the world are indicated. If there are no such reasons for the proposition's coming true and yet it is highly likely that this will happen, there must be other forces at play. One such force is the impetus that awareness of the presumed existence of a 'higher authority' may have on the interpreter of the utterance. The morality aspect of the meaning of *should* is possibly explainable by the influence such awareness may have on a hearer interpreting a proposition containing *should*. And a hint of moral obligation may indeed serve to strengthen the proposition pragmatically.

### 2.3.3 Summary

The high likelihood modals are relatively frequent in the data, occurring once or more in 21% of the ads. Most of these are occurrences of *will*, whereas *would* and *should* are quite rare.

*Will* often occurs modified for strength to make the claim less absolute, but still utilizing grounds to imply strength. *Will* may need modification in TV advertising to keep the claim within legal bounds and relevant to the situation. The interpretations of *will* as *willingness* and *prediction* may be derived from the existence of grounds. The expert knowledge indicated by grounds licenses the speaker to make assertions regarding a future course of an event, and the viewer can infer that the conditions applying to it are something that the

speaker controls. If the speaker can be believed to have such control, she is justified to predict the future of that event. She is also able to make a choice as to whether to cause it to come about, which is interpretable as *willingness*.

*Will* seems to be conversationally as strong or stronger than *must*, at least in an advertising context. This is because *will* is [+grounds] and *must* is [-grounds], the grounds 'raising' the high likelihood to the level of a prediction with a force close to *there is no reasonable alternative to...* or *cannot help but*. SA-readings of *will* are the most appropriate in the domain of advertising, as the SI-reading of an order is, from a viewer's point of view, not justifiable and not relevant (none found in the data).

*Would* and *should* are the past-marked high likelihood modals, and the past marker indicates remoteness in time or reality. As with *could*, the past marker is used by TV advertisers to indicate a reluctance to commit to the claim, which as a result conversationally weakens it. This is especially so when compared to an equivalent claim without the past marker. The scarcity of *would* in TV advertising is probably an indication that hypothesizing about the product/service that is up for sale is not judged by advertisers as an efficient way of communicating a persuasive message.

*Should* does not conform to the normal pattern of favouring SA readings, as it seems to have overtones of *obligation* or *recommendation* (SI) whatever the context. This suggests that there is a stereotypical interpretation of *should* which is always accessed first during the interpretation process, and only if the interpretation *recommendation* or *obligation* does not yield adequate contextual effects are other meanings of *should* accessed (SA readings).

#### 2.4 The necessity modals

This section is necessarily short since necessity modals occur only infrequently in the data. There exists only one syntactic necessity modal, *must*, but for all practical purposes the periphrastic construction *have to* should be included in a discussion on necessity modals. Of the two necessity modals *have to* occurs more than twice as often as *must*, 19 times versus 7, in my data. Such few occurrences are not enough to show patterns of employment for necessity modals in TV advertising. Once again, however, the [+grounds] modal is far more frequent than the [-grounds] one, illustrating the importance of speaker belief in her knowledge in this context. If the frequency of *must* in TV advertising, 0.3, and 'ordinary' language, 1.1, is anything to go by, it indicates that claiming the necessity of a proposition's coming true is not really a viable concept in TV advertising. I would hazard that it is not a viable concept in any kind of advertising as it would almost certainly leave the advertiser open to claims of breach of promise.

McCallum-Bayliss (1988:75) offers as an interpretation of the necessity-modals, *there is no reasonable alternative to the state of affairs in the proposition*, which leaves room for the eventuality that the proposition does not, in fact, turn out to be true. She concludes this to be an appropriate meaning as it is hard to say exactly what a sentence with a necessity modal entails. In modal logic necessity is stronger than truth, as Horn (1976:100) states, but in natural language, and pragmatically, the facts of the world as they are perceived are far more important with respect to believability than is logical deduction. What types of necessity *must* and *have to* represent are hard to determine. As McCallum-Bayliss (1988:75) points out, *must* ≠ *certain* and the type of necessity indicated in sentences like (50) is *desired* necessity, not at all the same as certainty.

(50) John *must* be home because the lights are on.

Nor is it logical necessity, as John might not be home at all, and a claim to this effect will not contradict (50). 'The speaker does not claim that it is a logical necessity that John is at home or that he is certain of it but, based on all he currently knows, that he has determined that John's being at home is the only state of the world that he considers a reasonable one'. (McCallum-Bayliss 1988:75) However, claiming that *there is no reasonable alternative to a proposition* indicates a very high commitment by the speaker. This is probably one of the reasons why necessity modals are so scarce in advertising. Another reason may be that it is mutually manifest that it is virtually impossible for an advertiser to back up with factual proof a claim that some proposition is, for all the speaker knows, true, and consequently such claims may easily be regarded as irrelevant in this context.

Although an analysis of *have to* and *must* in a TV advertising context will be of a hypothetical nature due to lack of data, it is still interesting to look at some examples of how these modals are employed in this context. The differences in frequency indicate that there are linguistic environments in which one but not the other is normally used, which in turn indicates that they have different semantic properties. By looking at some examples and contrasting the two modals it is possible to get insights into why they differ, and what importance the differences have for their use in my domain.

*Must* is the only syntactic necessity modal<sup>25</sup> and its semantic properties lend it a position at the top of the scale in Figure 1. As was noted above, however, its strength is not that of absolute necessity if employed in natural language, but it indicates inferred necessity as the speaker sees it. This is what makes a sentence with *must* at once both weaker and stronger than the equivalent sentence without a modal.

(51) Metaspirin *must* stop headaches.

(52) M V-O :‘Metaspirin stops headaches.’ (Metaspirin)

But note that pragmatically, (51) commits the speaker far more to the proposition that Metaspirin stops headaches than does (52), as he claims in (51) that *there is no reasonable alternative to Metaspirin’s stopping headaches*, and the reasoning process behind this claim originates within the speaker. (52), on the other hand, receives its pragmatic strength from the implication that it is based on scientific generalizations.<sup>26</sup> Stating such a generalization does not commit the speaker to the same extent to the truth of the proposition as her personal knowledge about the proposition is not called upon. This is important for advertisers as they cannot be held responsible for something that they have not committed to. Consequently it seems inadvisable for advertisers to employ *must* in their claims, and the data indicates that, on the whole, they do not do so.

*Must* occurs 3/7 times in superscripts, such as in (53).

(53) Callers *must* be 18. (The Chatline)

Recall that *may* also occurs frequently in superscripts, 7/19. For both *must* and *may* the data indicate that they are used in contexts where explanation or modification of the commercial’s message is necessary for reasons originating with social (legal) authorities. Such authorities need not claim grounds in order to be perceived as an expert = authority on the matter at hand. Their authority is based on their elevated social position. It is therefore not surprising that the

<sup>25</sup> That is, it belongs to a class of modal morphemes that have certain syntactic characteristics in common. This class excludes any modal expression containing more than one morpheme that has all of those characteristics.

<sup>26</sup> Geis (1982:81) says that this is so because ‘in science... a generic statement will be used only when it expresses a statistically significant generalization. It is this assumption from which the apparent strength of generic sentences arises.’

[-grounds] modals *may* and *must* occur mostly in contexts where rules and regulations are explained (SI contexts).

An interesting case of *must* in a TV commercial is the one about the *Crest* egg. Here the plausibility of the verbal message relies on the speaker's deduction that what holds for eggshells holds for teeth.

- (54) (Did you know...)  
 M V-O: 'Eggshells, like teeth, *must* retain calcium to stay strong.'  
 (Crest toothpaste)

If indeed there is an alternative way for eggshells to stay strong, that is, without retaining calcium, the whole argument of the commercial and its accompanying visual demonstration of the calcium-containing toothpaste's effect on eggshells falls flat. Claiming that he believes that there is no reasonable alternative way for eggshells to stay strong except by retaining calcium is as much as the speaker can truthfully claim. A generic statement to the effect that *eggshells retain calcium to stay strong* would be too strong from the point of view of facts of the world. If it turns out that calcium is not necessary for eggshells to stay strong, the *eggtest* in which the calcium-containing toothpaste is smeared over one half of the egg and then left in an acid solution would be worthless as 'proof'.<sup>27</sup>

Employing the [+grounds] necessity modal, *have to*, is no good either, as it would still be too strong for an inductive inference from the kind of observation offered. This is because the facts that give a speaker reason to claim grounds, which is part of *have to*'s linguistic properties, originate outside the speaker as facts of the world, rather than within the speaker as a result of inductive reasoning.<sup>28</sup> The differences between *must* and *have to* are further shown in the next section.

#### 2.4.2 *Have to*

*Have to* is the other necessity modal, albeit it not a syntactic one. It shares with *must* the truth condition *there is no reasonable alternative to the state of affairs in the proposition* with the semantic convention [+grounds] added. The difference in meaning between *have to* and *must* is subtle, but nevertheless important.

<sup>27</sup> Needless to say it is worthless anyway, as even if calcium is necessary as claimed, smearing it on a surface like in the 'eggtest' might have no effect whatsoever.

<sup>28</sup> See also Palmer (1990), who argues that if actuality is implied, *have to* must be used.

It has been claimed by Palmer(1979:189) and by Perkins (1983:61) that objectivity is implied with *have to* but not with *must*. This is especially noticeable with SA readings of these modals.

The conclusiveness of the evidence on the basis of which the speaker makes his claim is dependent upon circumstances over which the speaker has no control. *MUST*, on the other hand, appears to be compatible with either objective or subjective epistemic modality — the latter being a case where the conclusiveness of the evidence is arrived at via the speaker's own mental deductive processes, which are his own subjective province. (Perkins 1983:61)

This sense of objectivity is compatible with McCallum-Bayliss' (1988) argument that *have to* and *must* differ, in that the character of the evidence functioning as the basis for claims employing these modals is different. Thus [+grounds] indicates that the speaker has evaluated some facts of the world generated outside the speaker, whereas [-grounds] indicates that no such evaluation has taken place. If there has been no evaluation of outside facts, there is nothing that precludes the non-existence of such outside facts. The conversational evidence necessary for the utterance to be cooperative may be generated solely within the speaker. This is probably why a sentence with *have to*, being [+grounds], seems stronger than one with *must*.

- (55) M V-O: 'Advertising like this [word of mouth] can't be bought. It *has to* be earned.' (Ford Escort)
- (56) Advertising like this can't be bought. It *must* be earned.
- (57) M V-O: 'If you're looking for furniture, you *have to* look at Dodd's Furniture.' (Dodd's Furniture)
- (58) If you're looking for furniture, you *must* look at Dodd's Furniture.

In (55) the speaker bases his claim on an evaluation of facts about this desirable type of advertising. In (56) the speaker infers that reasonably this type of advertising cannot be bought. He draws these inferences based on his own inductive or deductive reasoning but his premises or the result of his reasoning are not drawn from or founded in facts of the world. The same argument holds for (57) and (58).

*Have to* is not normally used in claims directly related to the product in advertising. This comes as no surprise as it might incur unnecessary challenges to the claim, just because it is so strong. Rather *have to* is employed to assert that when a customer has a necessary need (from the customer's point of view) the product is the answer, as in (59).

- (59) M V-O: '... So when you have a shipment going there [Europe] that *has to be* on time, use the delivery company whose punctuality is a time-honored tradition...' (ups)

By referring to the packages as *having to be on time*, the advertiser acknowledges that the customer's assessment of the necessity for timely delivery (grounds) is a valid one, and it is on this assumption that the speaker makes his suggestion that the customer use the delivery company advertised, thereby implying that such necessities are not a problem for them.

### 2.4.3 Summary

The necessity modals are *must* and the periphrastic construction *have to*. They are each paraphrasable with *there is no reasonable alternative to the state of affairs in the proposition* (McCallum-Bayliss (1988)). *Have to* is [+grounds], *must* is [-grounds]. This seems to be borne out by the implications of objectivity arising from the use of *have to* in an utterance, whereas *must* implies that the evidence for the proposition is speaker-based. Since [+grounds] indicate that the speaker has evaluated some facts of the world originating outside her, it seems plausible that objective modality is connected to [+grounds] and subjective modality to [-grounds].

By not equating necessity in natural language with logical necessity the paraphrase *there is no reasonable alternative to the state of affairs in p* may be arrived at. Consequently a sentence with *must* or *have to* may turn out to be false without contradicting *the reasonable alternative to the state of affairs in p* the proposition

The necessity modals seem to be of limited use to advertisers if their occurrences in the data is anything to go by. *Have to* occurs only 19 times and *must* 7. This is probably due to the fact that employing necessity modals in an utterance commits the speaker too strongly to the proposition. Such a claim may too easily be challenged and possibly not defended.

It was also noted that *must* and *may* are used in similar ways in TV advertising. They both occur in superscripts that modify or explain the message of the commercial in terms of rules and regulations that apply. As such they are not directly part of the sales claim, but they are necessary for the commercial as a whole to keep it within legal parameters.

## 2.5 Chapter 2 - summary

In chapter 2 I have analyzed the use of modal verbs in my data. I found that modal verbs are used in half of the ads of my corpus, and that the distribution of particular modals

vary widely. The possibility modals dominate in TV advertising whereas the high likelihood<sup>40</sup> modals dominate in 'ordinary' language. The necessity modals are in both cases used only infrequently.

The data also indicate that [+grounds] modals dominate the overall use of modals, again regardless of type of language. More than 80% of the modals found are [+grounds]. The analysis further showed that *can* is the most frequent modal in TV advertising, whereas *will* and *would* are the most frequent modals in 'ordinary' language. *Can* is used predominantly with animate sentence subjects, and most of all with *you*. Used in this way it is interpretable as an *ability or power* of the viewer. When used with inanimate sentence subjects it indicates a *possibility* open to the viewer. The low frequency of *may* in TV advertising is comparable to that of *may* in 'ordinary' language. In such language it is more frequent in written than spoken language. In TV advertising this pattern is also discernible as *may* is used predominantly in silent superscripts that explain or constrain the spoken message.

The frequency of *could* is also comparable in TV advertising and 'ordinary' language. *Could* is used in my data when the speaker seems to want to claim the possibility of a proposition's coming true, but has doubts, or is obliged to express doubts, about it. *Could* therefore indicates that the claim is weaker than a comparable one with *can*. On a scale of semantic strength *could* seems equal to *may*. However, it is twice as frequent as *may*. This is probably due to its having grounds as part of its semantic properties, making it more useful than *may* in situations where speaker knowledge needs to be indicated. *Might* was found in so few instances that nothing conclusive can be said about its use in TV advertising. Its frequency patterns in TV advertising concurs with that of 'ordinary' language, as it is the least used of all the modals anywhere.

When possibility modals are stressed (not very often according to the data) the speaker's beliefs and assumptions regarding the matter at hand are emphasized. It creates conversational implicatures of, especially, irony. Stress on modals furthermore has the pragmatic effect of increasing possible conversational impact as it works as an attention catcher and if the implicature is worked out the resultant assumption will likely be retained in the viewer's memory.

With respect to the high likelihood modals it was found that they are relatively frequent in TV advertising, but mostly so because *will* is frequent. Neither *would* nor *should* occur frequently. As for *should* this is explainable by the fact that *should* lacks grounds and has connotations of 'moral obligation'. As such it is of limited use in a TV advertising context. *Would* includes grounds, but it is nevertheless not frequent in TV advertising. There is no conclusive evidence as to why, but it could be because the sense of hypothesis seems to be a standard interpretation of an utterance with *would*, and hypothesizing about the

product/service that is for sale is probably not a good way of selling it. As for *will*, it is employed in the sense of *willingness* if the sentence subject refers to the speaker, and if employed with *you* it seems to have a sense close to *cannot help but*.

The necessity modals were found to be infrequently used, but of the two, *must* and *have to*, *have to* dominated. As it is [+grounds] this is according to the usual pattern. Because of their infrequency it is hard to say anything conclusive about their use in TV advertising. However, *must* occurred mostly in silent superscripts explaining and constraining the spoken message. No particular pattern regarding linguistic environments for *have to* was discernible in the data.

## QUANTIFIERS

## 3.1 Introduction

Modals and quantifiers are related in that they modify the strength of a claim both semantically and pragmatically. As we have seen in the previous chapter it is hard to pinpoint exact *meanings* for modals, but in advertising they are used to express degrees of speaker uncertainty about the content of a proposition. It is equally hard to pinpoint the meanings of the quantifiers of my study, *some/many/most*, except that they are used pragmatically to specify *not all* and *not none* of sets of things. The semantic vagueness makes all of these items useful pragmatically. When a speaker does not want to commit herself fully to a proposition but wants to make a claim that contains an indeterminate amount of information nevertheless, one way to do it is to employ a quantifier, another way is to employ a modal verb. If modals modify the probability of a course of event's coming true (the VP or S), quantifiers modify the amount of information covered by an NP. Employing either of them leaves the speaker considerable leeway with respect to the factual truth of the claim. The relative semantic strength of the modal or quantifier (with the exception of *every* and *no*) thus employed has the pragmatic effect of weakening the claim to different degrees.

I have chosen to discuss only the quantifiers *some*, *many*, and *most* for the reasons that they occur relatively often in TV advertising, and their use has interesting implications with respect to the pragmatic strength of the utterance. I have excluded *few* from the discussion since I only found one occurrence of *few* in my data.

A discussion of *some*, *many*, and *most* must take into account three distinct but related problems concerning their use and interpretation: (i) their relationship to each other and the consequences their relative positions on a putative scale may have on inferable strength of a proposition; (ii) their relationship to the set of things they are employed to quantify; (iii) the importance of stress with respect to emphasizing the upper or lower boundary, i.e., whether the semantic contrast is with *none* or *all* or some intermediate quantifier.

The first question, the quantifiers' semantic relationship, is traditionally determined in terms of entailment relations, so that a sentence with *most* unilaterally entails a sentence with *many*, which in turn unilaterally entails a sentence with *some*. Such entailment relationships have also been taken as the basis for interpretation of strength, so that *most* is stronger than *many*, which is stronger than *some*.

The second question is how quantifiers are interpreted in terms of cardinal values. Here the context plays a crucial part. *Many* items of a particular set may be fewer in number than *some* items of another, larger set. Furthermore, the value of the same quantifier may differ with respect to the character of the sets it ranges over. The whole notion of pinpointing values with regard to specific quantifiers is very difficult, leaving it up to the viewer to make a judgment based on his assumptions about the world, about what value, if any, the speaker may have in mind. Advertisers seem to exploit this indeterminacy in order to make claims that might be acceptable to everyone and be defensible at all times. They depend on viewers' having assumptions about values associated with specific quantifiers in specific situations. Indeterminate claims may serve to strengthen such assumptions. I will return to this in 3.2 and 3.3.

The third question has to do with whether or not the quantifier needs a two-sided or one-sided reading for full truth-conditionality. Horn (1976) claims that the one-sided reading is the truth conditional one, and the two-sided reading arises through a generalized conversational implicature. However, my data indicate that focal stress on the quantifier causes the two-sided reading. In all other cases only the one-sided reading will arise. I will discuss this in the sections on the separate quantifiers and furthermore in chapter 4.

### 3.2 *Some*

Of the quantifiers investigated only *some* occurs fairly often in TV advertising. I found 20 instances in my data (8 of which received focal stress), and it occurred in 5% of the ads. Because of its indeterminate value it can be employed in almost any context to select almost any amount. To indicate quantity at all often seems to be as important as to indicate some particular amount. If *some* receives focal stress, the implication is that it is necessary to contrast *some* with *all* in order for the utterance to have contextual effects. If not, the speaker indicates that the set that *some* selects is non-empty.

My data indicate that advertisers use focally stressed *some* when it is important to imply that the selected set could be the majority of the set ranged over. They do so both to mark their own product or service as an exception not included in the set that *some* selects, and to implicitly contrast it with competitors' products and services.

- (64) W: 'This sensor is what *SOME* women use for yeast infections. Not me.'  
(Monistat 7)
- (65) M V-O: 'For *SOME* allergy sufferers there's no escaping the itchy, watery, puffy eyes, the sneezing, the runny nose. That's why there's Seldane.'

(Seldane)

- (66) B: [Statistics] tells us that only a few [relationships] will develop into long-lasting friendships built on trust. Then again *SOME* relationships will also be built on senseless immature fun. (A&W)
- (67) M V-O: 'To *SOME*, (*pause*) rising costs are a fact of life, but with Royal Bank's extended freeze service prices, his banking costs won't go up.' (Royal Bank)

In (64) the advertiser implies that although a great many women use the demonstrated sensor this is not the case with the speaker. Her exceptionality serves to focus attention on the alternative product that she is presenting, and its qualities compared to the first mentioned sensor. (65) implies that Seldane has changed the lives of several allergy sufferers, that is, all of those not included in the set that *some* selects. (66) stresses the uniqueness of relationships that develop in pleasantly unconventional ways, implying that this is the way they develop at A&W. And in (67) Royal Bank acknowledges that there exist people for whom rising costs are not a fact of life, but for the majority they are. If the intended reading were merely *at least some* the importance of the service that Royal Bank presents here would be severely diminished.

However, when *some* is not stressed the enrichment of *some* to *some but not all* is not necessary for the proposition to be either truth conditional or have contextual effects. This is because the relevant contrast is that of *none* and *just some*, and the contrast with *all* is not necessary. (68) and (69) illustrate this. It is the existence of a set for *some* to select that matters, not that this set contains *some but not all*. These are what Carston (1990:23) calls threshold cases 'where the upper bound is of no significance.'

- (68) Marnie McBean: 'Training is hard on my perm. I've tried *some* separate shampoos and conditioners, they just make it limp and flat...' (Pert Plus)
- (69) M: [The Money Store] looks at your total credit picture. They won't automatically disqualify you for *some* late payments.... So even if you've been late on *some* payments, you can still refinance your first mortgage. (The Money Store)

In (68) the focal stress is on *separate shampoos and conditioners* and the intended meaning is that there exist separate conditioners and shampoos that Marnie McBean has tried. Again, in (69), the advertiser intends to communicate that it is not important for her to know how great a part of the set of late payments is selected by *some*, and she does so by putting focal stress on *late payments*. This is done to highlight that the Money Store is not concerned with late payments (implying that other mortgage institutions are.)

Carston (1990:22) furthermore discusses cases where *some* is employed to have the conversational effect of surprise. She gives (70) as an example, arguing that *some* here is used to indicate that *an unexpectedly large amount of time* is involved.

(70) It took me *some* time to get there.

'A hearer would standardly take a speaker to have explicitly communicated that the time taken was longer than he might have expected.' (1990:23). This interpretation seems to hold if focal stress falls on *time*. If, however, focal stress falls on *some*, the interpretation needs to be narrowed down to *some but not all* for the effect of surprise to arise.

(71) It took me *SOME* time to get there.

With focal stress on *some* the conversational effect is that it actually took less time than expected, i.e., *some but not all* expected time, to get to the indicated place. (72) is an example from advertising of the use of *some* as exemplified in (70) above.

(72) F V-O: 'One woman in four receives no pre-natal care, and *some* of these women have health care plans.... I found one health plan with special pre-natal service.' (Blue Cross Health Plan)

In (71) the speaker claims that a surprisingly large number of health care plans don't include pre-natal care; in fact she found only one. The element of surprise again serves to highlight the advertiser's service, by putting other services in an unfavourable light (without actually saying so).

On the question of how great a *valuesome* selects in particular cases, this is so variable that the net conversational effect of a claim employing *some* is one of near vacuity. The use of *some* without focal stress only confirms the existence of a set, and does not constrain the set in any way. To do so *some* has to have focal stress. In certain cases, such as in (68) and (69), confirmation of existence is all that is needed, however, for the utterance to be meaningful and in compliance with the truth.

### 3.3 Many

*Many* is very vague with regard to specifically assigned values, yet it seems to imply that the value is considerable. The considerable value could be anywhere from 20 - 80% of the

set, depending on the context. Although *many* seems almost as weak as *some*, use of *many* has the effect of indicating that the speaker has in mind a larger part of the set than if she had used *some*. As Geis (1982) observes, our *expectations* regarding the items of the set *many* ranges over have to be taken into account when the value is determined. Thus if, say, 70% of the set is not expected to fulfill the predicate, *many* will range over the remaining 30%, and the value selected will be quite small<sup>29</sup>. If the reverse is the case, the value selected will be quite large.

In my data *many* does not often receive focal stress (2/7 cases), it is normally unstressed or receives non-focal stress. In such cases it is not necessary to narrow down the interpretation of *many* to *many but not all* for the utterance to have contextual effects.

(73) M V-O: 'These are documents that flow through every business. On their way they get touched by *many* people.' (Xerox)

In (73), for example, the stress is on *people* and the implication is that there exists a set of people who touch these documents. It is not important for the interpretation that these documents are not touched by *all*. The same holds for (74), where the relevant interpretation is simply that *man has invented devices that save time*. An implicature to the effect that man has not invented *all* timesaving devices does not arise.

(74) F V-O: 'Throughout history man has invented *many* devices to save time...' (Eggs)

The *not all* reading yields rather ludicrous results in this case, as it implies that there is a particular number of devices that man can invent to save time. The fact that man has invented timesaving devices is enough to serve as a contrast to the thing presented that is time-saving but not invented by man, i.e. eggs.

When *many* is stressed the *not all* reading is indicated.

(75) M V-O: 'Introducing new Tide with grease releasers. Grease this tough is so tough *MANY* detergents could leave it behind, but nothing beats Tide!.' (Tide - detergent)

In (75) the relevant interpretation is that *many but not all detergents could leave grease behind*. To claim only that *there exist detergents that could leave grease behind* would leave open the possibility that Tide is one of them. The stature of Tide would be severely diminished in this case. The *not all* interpretation highlights the fact that Tide is an exception to the rule, a much more desirable interpretation from the advertiser's point of view.

<sup>29</sup> Thus in '*many* senators are male', *many* is assigned a greater value than *many* in '*many* senators are female' simply because we tend to expect that senators are male, unfortunately.

Finally, my data illustrate Geis's (1982:65) observation that the actual amount conveyed by *many* varies, depending on our expectations. In (76), viewers probably expect at least 50% of the nutrients of a well-balanced meal to be included in the set that *many* selects.

- (76) F V-O: 'Introducing Essentials. A meal replacement that contains *many* of the nutrients of a well-balanced meal.' (Essentials)

In (75), above, it is hard to say what expectations a viewer might have with respect to the grease-releasing properties of detergents. That probably depends on the viewer's experience with detergents and the idea he has of the number of detergents available. The stress on the quantifier indicates that the speaker wants to convey the notion that far more than 50%, probably closer to 80%, of the 'other' detergents do in fact leave grease behind. Hearer expectations probably run a great deal lower than that. And expectations regarding the proportion of *workplace accidents* that put families in hospital (77) are likely even lower.

- (77) Setting: Hospital; silent with superscript  
[*Many* workplace accidents put the entire family in hospital...]  
(Workers' Compensation Board)

How many accidents are workplace accidents, in the first place, and out of these, how many are needed to justify a claim containing the quantifier *many*? I would say that the number of workplace accidents that put entire families in hospital is relatively small, but that no one expects the number to be very great since the entire family is generally not at the workplace.

### 3.4 *Most*

The only quantifier that is to some extent absolutely determinable for value (with the exceptions of *all* and *none*) is *most*. For a claim with *most* to be true, the set selected must be the majority of the set ranged over, at least 50%+1. If a semantic contrast is necessary for contextual effects it is once again with *all*, but in many cases the lower boundary, *at least most* = 50%+1, is sufficient for contextual effects. *Most* is unusual in advertising, it occurs only 5 times in the data. This is not surprising, considering that it is always risky to claim specific values, and a majority of something can be rather a lot. However, the examples conform to the same pattern as *some* and *many* with respect to the importance of focal stress for relevant interpretations.

There are two examples of non-focally stressed *most* in my data.

- (78) M V-O: 'It's the backyard, the front porch, Amanda, Lulu, and Gloria. Big D and the kids' table. Now it's the area code *most* of your calls go back to... Spend \$40 a month and we'll take 25% off your favorite area code.' (AT & T)<sup>30</sup>
- (79) B: '*Most* people want convenience and people they can trust and I'm getting that at Seafirst. (Seafirst Bank)

When focal stress falls on something other than *most* the one-sided reading is the relevant one. Thus it is only necessary to determine that there exist people who want banking convenience for (79) to be relevant, as it is desirable for Seafirst to emphasize that they offer their services to everyone, not to a select few.

In (80) and (81) the focal stress is on the quantifier, which then makes the two-sided reading the relevant one.

- (80) M V-O: 'You're looking at one Canadian...she owns a home... To *MOST*, she's an average Canadian.' (Royal Bank)
- (81) Garfield: 'May I have a word with you? It's about my cat box. It stinks.'  
M V-O: 'That's because *MOST* litters merely mask odours and ignore the germs that cause them.... Only Kitty Litter Max attacks germs to stop odours before they start.' (Kitty Litter Max)

The important contrast in (80) and (81) is not *at least 50%+1* but rather *not all*. If the contrast is not with *all* in (80) the uniqueness of Royal Bank is questionable; this is an undesirable interpretation from the advertiser's point of view. And in (81) the stress on *most* serves to highlight the exceptional qualities of Kitty Litter Max, as *most* in this case will be interpreted as *most but not all*, with Kitty Litter Max not included in the set that *most* selects.

Although data on *most* is scarce in my corpus it is clear that *most* conforms to the pattern discernible for *some* and *many* with respect to focal stress and the two-sided reading. It is more difficult to make any claims concerning TV advertisers' preferences for stressed or unstressed *most*. However, the data definitely illustrate that *most* is not the quantifier of choice among TV advertisers. Presumably this is because *most* is not only determinable for value, but the value so determined is quite strong. It was likewise observed in the chapter on modals that the strong modals, *must* and *have to*, are relatively rare in TV advertising.

<sup>30</sup> It is unclear in (75) whether it is the majority of the calls that need to go to a specific area code, or a plurality of the calls that need to go there. If plurality is intended the value assigned to *most* could be less than 50%+1.

Of the quantifiers investigated in this study only *some* is used with frequency, in 5% of the ads. *Many* is unusual and *most* rare. It was concluded that the scarcity of the stronger quantifiers is due to advertisers' preference for vague propositions.

The use of the right intonation is important when it comes to pointing to how a quantifier should be interpreted. If the quantifier receives focal stress it is necessary to narrow down the interpretation to the upper bound for a relevant reading. If focal stress falls somewhere else in the utterance it will have contextual effects at the lower bound, *at least some/many/most*.

The context in combination with the viewer's expectations plays a crucial role in determining how quantifiers are related to sets in the world; if the viewer expects that the majority or the minority of a set ranged over by a quantifier will not fulfill the predicate, this will influence the value selected by the quantifier fulfilling the predicate.

As for the specific quantifiers investigated, *some* seems to be used more to indicate contrast with *none* than with *all*, that is, to indicate the existence of a set of things rather than to narrow the selected set down to some value. This is predictable, since it is enough for an assertion with *some* to be true if indeed *just some* exists. If *some* stands in contrast with *none*, the value *some* might select is of little or no importance; if the contrast is with *all*, the value selected becomes more relevant but due to the vagueness of *some*, absolute values are still not important enough to require recovery.

*Many* seems to have a stereotypical interpretation of *a considerable amount*, anything between 20% and 80%. Although *many* is vague, the conversational effect is that a proposition with *many* is stronger than one with *some*. With respect to focal stress it yields the same results as with *some*.

*Most* is the only quantifier, with the exception of *none* and *all*, that is determinable for value, *at least 50+1%*. The fact that *most* is thus determinable, and therefore possible to falsify, makes it less useful in advertising language.

## DISCUSSION

4.1 *Grounds*

As may be observed in the analysis of the modals (chapter 2) I have employed the concept of *grounds* throughout the study as the main factor in differentiating the various senses of the modals in various contexts. The notion that we may express our views on events of the world in terms of possibility, probability, and necessity, and base our observations on the kind of knowledge we have about these events seems to explain why there are six different modal verbs with closely related senses. They are needed to make inferable to a viewer what level of expertise the speakers regard themselves to have on the topic of the utterance. (McCallum-Bayliss 1988:33.) Sperber & Wilson (1986:83) also point out that we store in memory encyclopaedic knowledge of all kinds, but that our assumptions regarding such stored knowledge are more or less accessible and of different strengths depending on how they were initially formed. Assumptions constructed through an inference process come with the kind of plausibility (to the speaker) that may serve as grounds for a claim about some event of the world, elevating the speaker to the status of an 'expert' on this particular event, and lending strength to the claim. Assumptions based on direct experience, often the strongest type of assumptions there are, may also serve as grounds.

In order for an utterance to be at all cooperative according to Grice's Maxim of Quality the speaker needs adequate evidence for her utterance. Whether a speaker thereby commits herself to knowledge about the proposition or simply belief in it is a matter for debate. Gazdar (1979) claims that knowledge is indicated, Hirschberg (1985) argues that the speaker only asserts her belief in the proposition. This is a complicated issue that I do not intend to go further into, suffice it to say that McCallum-Bayliss (1988) uses the word *knowledge* in her study. However, the way she explains speaker knowledge indicates that she is really talking about speaker assumptions and speaker belief in her assumptions. Thus assumptions regarding some proposition is enough to serve as conversational evidence for the utterance, but not enough to serve as grounds.

Seeing a picture that shows snow in June may serve as evidence for asserting something about the likelihood of snow in June, but it may not be convincing enough to serve as grounds for such a claim; being caught in a blizzard in June would give the speaker grounds for her claim. If it is June and you are able, due to your profession as weather expert, to deduce that the effects of

a low pressure ridge in combination with a cold mass of air will be snow, such a reasoning process<sup>51</sup> may also serve as grounds. This does not, by any means, mean that if expert knowledge, or assumptions about expert knowledge, is expressed, there is necessarily a factual basis for it. We often make statements based on assumptions founded in faulty reasoning processes, but that does not stop us from making assertions about things we know nothing about! What is important is that when grounds are indicated, the viewer can assume that the speaker intends to communicate some kind of expert knowledge, faulty or not.

Conversational evidence is a trademark of all cooperative utterances. To utter (82) or (83) if the speaker has absolutely no idea what he is talking about would be misleading to say the least.

(82) M: 'Using spades, forks, and cultivators *can* be back-breaking.'  
(The Garden Claw)

(83) Using spades, forks and cultivators *may* be back-breaking.

In order to cooperatively utter (82) and (83) the speaker must have some evidence that (82) and (83) are *at least possible*. This is the minimum requirement. However, in order to utter (82) the speaker's knowledge about the proposition must be such that it is based on expert knowledge or 'knowledge that results from the speaker's powers of reasoning.' (McCallum-Bayliss 1988:53) This is because *can* is [+grounds] and to utter (82) without having, or at least believing to have, the special knowledge necessary would be uncooperative.

It is not necessary that what serves the speaker as grounds is true in the factual world. However, for the sake of plausibility it is in the speaker's interest to claim grounds only when the topic of the proposition is such that it is reasonably in line with the viewer's assumptions regarding the possible expertise the speaker may have about this topic. Conversely, for the viewer (82) indicates that the speaker has the kind of knowledge necessary to serve as testimony to the validity of the utterance. (83), on the other hand, indicates that the only evidence that the speaker has is what it takes for him to utter cooperatively something about the characteristics of gardening. For further discussion on the difference between grounds and conversational evidence see McCallum-Bayliss (1988).

In TV advertising the speaker has the advantage of being able to use visuals for evidence of her deep, expert knowledge about something. Using a person on screen whose identity attests to his or her believability in a particular context is one way of enforcing the assumption that the advertiser has reasons for claiming grounds. (82) illustrates how grounds may be illustrated visually; in this case the reasons for possible back-ache are illustrated with images of a man working in an uncomfortably crouched position, a recognizable cause of back

pains. More commonly, visual illustration of grounds is presented in the form of a demonstration of an 'experiment', as in (84).

- (84) W: 'Nothing protects better than Stayfree Prima. So you can stop worrying.'  
(Setting: A studio with two women, one looking worried; a demonstration of how fluids behave when poured onto panty liners.)

In the next part of this chapter I will discuss the importance of grounds with respect to implicatures and the recovery of a truth conditional form of a proposition.

#### 4.2 Implicatures and explicatures

Can the concept of grounds aid us in explaining how different types of implicatures arise? Does the existence or lack of grounds preclude certain types of implicatures, and encourage others? Could indeed some of the implicatures be explicatures?<sup>31</sup>

We have seen in the previous two chapters that stress on the modal or quantifier seems to implicate that an two-sided reading of the proposition is the speaker's intended reading. We have also seen that the existence/lack of grounds in particular contexts can encourage implicatures of irony. It seems clear that those implicatures are of a purely conversational nature as they are calculable, cancelable, and detachable. But how do we characterize the stress-related implicatures?

Horn (1988:127) argues that one-sided readings are truth-conditional whereas two-sided readings are the result of implicature, the generalized conversational implicature. He gives the following examples to illustrate how propositions about possibility are interpretable.

	<i>lower-bounded</i>	<i>upper-bounded</i>	
(85)	You ate some of the cookies.	'...some, if not all...'	'...some, but not all...'
(86)	It's possible she'll win.	'...at least possible...'	'...possible, but not certain...'

'All scalar operators are thus lower-bounded by their truth-conditional meaning, and upper-bounded by general conversational implicature.' (Horn 1988:127)

<sup>31</sup> For Grice the explicature is the result of reference assignment and disambiguation of a proposition, neither of which he regards as pragmatic operations, but which are necessary for the proposition to be fully truth-conditional. Sperber & Wilson (1986) and Carston (1988,1990) argue that both reference assignment and disambiguation are in fact pragmatic inferences, thus an explicature is the result of pragmatic inferences at the level of explicit content of the proposition. The less inferencing that is necessary, the more explicit the explicature.

What characterizes a generalized conversational implicature is that it goes through always unless something in the context stops it. However, the way the concept of possibility is employed in my data does not support such generalized conversational implicatures. It seems as if the one-sided reading, *at least possible*, is always intended when focal stress does not fall on the modal or quantifier. It is the speaker's way of advertising to the viewer how she intends the proposition to be interpreted. Conversely, when the speaker puts focal stress on the modal/quantifier the intended reading is the two-sided one.

- (87) M V-O: 'You know, *SOME* gums claim that they won't cause cavities, but now Dentyne is the only gum proven to actually fight cavities' (Dentyne)

Unless (87) is interpreted as *some gums, but not all* the exceptional properties of Dentyne will not shine as much as intended. Claiming that there exists *at least some gums that claim they won't cause cavities* will not serve as a good enough contrast to the claim that Dentyne actually prevents cavities. Narrowing down the interpretation of *some* in this context to *some, but not all* will make possible the implication that Dentyne has gone one step beyond what a specific group of gums has done; in the hierarchy of gums Dentyne is exceptional.

The data does not, then, support the hypothesis that the two-sided reading is a generalized conversational implicature, as there is a need for the right intonation for the two-sided reading to be interpretable.

So, if the two-sided reading is not a generalized conversational implicature, what is it? If we are to follow Grice's hypothesis that anything beyond disambiguation and reference assignment is an implicature, the two-sided reading would be an ordinary conversational implicature. However, Carston (1988) has put forth the idea that implicatures like the two-sided reading above may not be implicatures at all, but rather explicatures. She questions that the one-sided reading does at all arise if the context calls for an two-sided reading for the utterance to make sense. In the case of (87) the context does call for an two-sided reading, consequently the one-sided reading *at least some* would not arise. It would not arise because it would be entailed by the two-sided reading, thus it is useless information and falls victim to Occam's razor. But if the lower-bounded reading does not arise, the two-sided reading cannot arise as an implicature of it. If it is not an implicature, it must be contained in the logical form of the proposition, as part of its truth condition, and it would be the explicature of the proposition.

It seems then, as if inference does matter for the full truth-conditionality of a proposition. Unless stress together with reference assignment and disambiguation is taken into account the interpretation of (87) cannot be fully truth-conditional. Horn (1988) acknowledges the importance of intonation with respect to apparent semantic anomalies, (the problem of

intonation in conjunction with negation) but he rejects that upper-boundedness is built into the propositional content of an utterance as this is contrary to the Gricean line of argument. The fact that the same kind of problem arises in different contexts (negation combined with intonation in Horn, modality/quantification and intonation in my study) supports the fact that there is a problem with treating upper-boundedness as a generalized conversational implicature, and that it seems more probable that upper-boundedness is indeed truth-conditional.

#### 4.2.1 Implicatures and grounds

The generalized conversational implicature is also invoked in the discussion of the possible negative interpretations of possibility modals. McCallum-Bayliss (1988) claims that a sentence with *may* has the generalized conversational implicature *may also not*, and that a sentence with *can* has the corresponding generalized conversational implicature *can also not*. However, for *can* the generalized conversational implicature is 'suppressed' due to the existence of grounds, thus *can* only weakly implicates *can also not*. She further argues that the strong generalized conversational implicature of *may also not* is one of the reasons why *may* seems weaker than *can*. I find this line of argument problematic, and once again it is the idea of the generalized conversational implicature that does not seem to work.

To claim that a generalized conversational implicature is by nature suppressed seems to me as if we are not dealing with a generalized conversational implicature at all, rather we are dealing with particularized conversational implicature. That is, an implicature that is inferable if the speaker so intends. If it is not intended, it will not arise.

- (88) M V-O: 'At Xerox we help you to look at your documents differently so that you *can* manage your business differently.' (Xerox)
- (89) At Xerox we help you to look at your documents differently so that you *may* manage your business differently.

For (88) the generalized conversational implicature *can also not* seems improbable, for (89) *may also not* seems very unlikely. Their difference in pragmatic strength comes from the existence of grounds in (88) and the lack thereof in (89), not the putative existence of generalized conversational implicatures. For the viewer the reading of (88) as *at least possible that... and grounds exist* would be enough for contextual effects.<sup>32</sup> The fact that the speaker

<sup>32</sup> Unless s/he is of the mind that the speaker is not speaking truthfully, in which case the *can#not* reading will arise, possibly as the explicature, since such a cynical viewer/hearer might consider the 'negative' reading the truth-conditional one. This is a very problematic issue and neither Grice nor Sperber & Wilson

has chosen to use *may* instead of *may not* in (89) is salient for the conversational impact of the utterance in that he makes the intention clear that it should be interpreted only as *at least possible that...*

I agree that *can* conversationally implicates *can#not* as it implicates the negation of the highest items of the scale in Figure 1, *must* and *have to*, that is *need not* and *do not have to*, but there is nothing generalized about these implicatures. I am not alone in such thinking. Hirschberg (1985:44) rejects the generalized conversational implicature on the grounds that context is not defined and speaker intention not accounted for. Sperber & Wilson (1986:199) argue for a continuum of implicatures, from the very strong to the very weak. Strong implicatures are those that force the viewer to access one assumption only in the process of interpretation, whereas weak implicatures force the viewer to access a range of different assumptions. On such a continuum *can* weakly implicates *can#not*, and *may* rather more strongly implicates *may#not*.

However, contextual factors may move even these implicatures up and down the continuum. If (83), repeated below, was uttered by a secretarial type of person, instead of a supposedly knowledgeable gardener-type, it seems probable that the implicature *can#not* is more likely to arise.

(83) M: 'Using spades, forks, and cultivators *can* be back-breaking.' (The Garden Claw)

The conflict between the perceived identity of the speaker and assumptions that the viewer may have about the speaker's knowledge about something that seems alien to her will lessen the strength of the utterance, although the speaker claims grounds. Consequently, the implicature *can#not* is strengthened, possibly decreasing the overall believability of the claim.

#### 4.3 Advertising and linguistic strength

In the discussions above on grounds and implicatures the concept of strength has been touched upon but only in passing. I observed that a proposition with grounds included is stronger than one without grounds, and that the inclusion of the past marker weakens the proposition. I further noted that McCallum-Bayliss (1988) regards the weakness of a [-grounds] possibility modal to be the result of its strong implicature *also possible not*. And throughout this study the

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really touch on the communicative problems that arise when uncooperative listeners disregard speaker intentions completely. The problem is particularly salient with respect to the communicative situation in TV advertising, or any other kind of advertising, since a certain amount of distrust of people who make the kind of promises that advertisers do is regarded as advisable.

lexical items investigated are ranked on scales of probability (the modals) and quantity (the quantifiers), which again is an indication that varying degrees of strength are involved.

The concept of strength in language is a complicated issue. Semantically, strength can be encoded in lexical items whose truth conditions stand in such a relationship to each other that one item may be thought of as covering more information than another. Entailment relations are an example of this.<sup>33</sup> Thus scaling lexical items with respect to probability and quantity is a way of illustrating semantic strength. This is what Geis (1982:63) refers to when he claims that 'we interpret a claim... in the light of the fact ... that the advertiser who says it did not say [X] and did not say [Y].' Such an argument is in line with Grice's theory of the logic of conversation, which assumes that we interpret an utterance on the awareness that another utterance might have been used but was not. For example, if an advertiser says (76), repeated below, the viewer's interpretation would be dependent on his recognition that the speaker did not say (89), or, for that matter, (90).

(76) F V-O: 'Introducing Essentials. A meal replacement that contains *many* of the nutrients of a well-balanced meal.' (Essentials - meal replacement)

(89) Essentials. A meal replacement that contains *most* of the nutrients...

(90) Essentials. A meal replacement that contains *all* of the nutrients...

Thus (76) would implicate that *most* in (89) and *all* in (90) are both too strong for this context, and that the speaker does not have enough evidence to back up (89) or (90). I claim, however, that this is the case if the quantifier receives focal stress but not otherwise. If it does not receive focal stress the first proposition evoked is not that of (89) or (90) but rather (91).

(91) There are nutrients in a well-balanced meal.

In Gricean terms (91) is a conventional implicature (presupposition) of (76). (91) is the one-sided reading of the quantified noun phrase (76), where *many* is contrasted with the lower boundary only. As was seen in sections

3.2 - 3.4 focal stress on the quantifier excludes this reading, and indicates that it is the upper boundary that the quantifier must be contrasted with the upper boundary for full truth conditionality.

I argue further that viewers have assumptions stored in memory concerning quantities that various quantifiers select in different contexts. During the interpretation process they

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<sup>33</sup> Geis (1982:28) 'A sentence *S* entails a proposition *P* if and only if in every possible circumstance in which *S* is true, *P* is also true.' and thus 'if a sentence *S* entails a proposition *P*, it does so by virtue of the meaning of sentence *S*'.

relate these assumptions to the present context in their search for the relevance of the utterance. Stress is a cue in this respect. If there is something anomalous in the way a particular quantifier is used, the viewer will access non-stereotypical assumptions regarding the contents of the proposition, or may disregard the utterance as irrelevant. In the case of (76), if a viewer has an assumption regarding *many* as meaning for instance *more than 50%* he would process (76) in this light and the truth value of the utterance would be dependent on whether this assumed meaning is consistent with the sentence context. The outcome is furthermore dependent on the viewer's knowledge about nutrients and meal replacements as this knowledge will aid him in assessing the possibility that *many* = *more than 50%* nutrients are indeed contained in this particular meal replacement.

Strength may also be inferred pragmatically, based on the linguistically encoded string in its context. Thus the semantic strength of an item must be taken into account when it is employed, so that its strength is compatible with both the immediate linguistic context and the meta-linguistic context in order for the utterance to get an interpretation along the lines that the speaker intended it to have. If the decoded string constrains the range of implicated assumptions to only one or two, then it is pragmatically stronger than an utterance that triggers a range of weakly implicated assumptions. The use of a semantically weak modal in a request to someone in authority is an example of matching semantic strength to the context in order for the utterance to be pragmatically strong.

Whether the concepts of grounds and remoteness indicate semantic strength or should be regarded as pragmatically inferred information necessary to make the utterance fully truth-conditional is not a question that can be answered in the present study. McCallum-Bayliss (1988: 55-56) accords grounds the status of a semantic truth condition. She is not clear on whether the past marker that indicates remoteness in either time or reality is a semantic truth condition as well. What the data in my study indicate is that grounds and remoteness are important for the strength of the conversational impact of the utterance.

Also clear from the data is that the combination of the type of semantic strength that can be scalarly measured, and the type of strength that includes the concept of grounds and remoteness is important with respect to conversational impact. The data indicate that TV advertisers construct their utterances in terms of possibility and [+grounds], whereas in ordinary language utterances are usually constructed in terms of high likelihood and [+grounds]. If it is true that utterances come with *degrees of strength*,<sup>34</sup> it seems as if TV advertisers rely on the

<sup>34</sup> According to Sperber & Wilson (1986:199) strength is measurable by (i) the number of contextual effects the utterance has on hearers' assumptions about the world; and (ii) the range of assumptions triggered off in hearers' conceptual domains upon interpretation. A claim can be strong in two ways: (i) it has a large number of contextual effects; (ii) it constrains the range of assumptions triggered off to one or only a few. A claim is weak if (i) it has few contextual effects; (ii) it triggers off a wide range of weak assumptions. These different forces may combine. A claim that triggers off a wide range of weak assumptions may have many contextual effects in the right circumstances.

combined effect of [+grounds] and created possibility for their utterances to be maximally strong, that is, have maximal contextual effects.

By claiming grounds they make inferable their expertise, which should increase the believability of the claim and the trustworthiness of the speaker. The existence of grounds furthermore has the effect of narrowing down the range of assumptions accessible to the viewer upon interpreting the utterance, in that it excludes the assumption that the speaker is merely speculating. By claiming the possibility of *p* rather than the high likelihood of *p*, the speaker creates an opportunity to access a wider range of weak assumptions, which creates a greater chance among a greater number of recipients for the utterance to have some contextual effects. This is simply because it will be applicable to more people with different assumptions about the world, than would a more constrained utterance.

Because of the preponderance of semantically weak utterances in the data I argue that Sperber & Wilson (1986:128) seem to be on the right track when they claim that a semantically strong utterance does not automatically have a strong conversational impact.<sup>35</sup> TV advertisers, whose main intention with their utterances is to persuade viewers that their assumptions about the world could be beneficial for the viewer if agreed with and acted upon, would seem well-served by not antagonizing those viewers. Claims containing semantically strong items have a greater chance of causing antagonism in viewers because the assumptions thus communicated may not be accessible to the viewers or may be incompatible with their assumptions about the world.

Another consequence of the lack of constraints that utterances claiming possibility are characterized by, is that they are easy to process. One of the characteristics of TV advertising is that the message must be pretty much instantly communicable due to the short time span allowed. The processing of the speakers' utterances must therefore be highly cost-effective. By combining [+grounds], which constrains the interpretation process slightly and possibility, which opens it up wide, it seems as if a great number of viewers would have a chance to process the utterance with the least possible effort.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Note that Palmer (1979) and Perkins (1983) indicate that a semantically strong utterance is more persuasive than a weak one.

<sup>36</sup> This notion is borne out in studies in communication theory as well. Schramm & Porter (1982) refer to George K. Zipf's (1935) 'Principle of least effort', which formulates the probability of any given communication pathway being selected as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Promise of Reward}}{\text{Effort Required}} = \text{Probability of Selection}$$

The upper term has chiefly to do with contents and how likely it is to satisfy needs as they feel at a given time. The lower term has mostly to do with the availability and ease of using pathways.

## CONCLUSION

What conclusions can be drawn from the data that this study is based on?

Firstly, the data indicate that the language of TV advertising is more tentative than assertive. The high frequency of possibility modals compared to other types of modals, and the relatively high frequency of the weak quantifier *some* illustrate this finding. It seems reasonably safe to assume that advertisers do not spend money on advertisements that they do not judge to be persuasive and potentially influential. Therefore it can also be assumed that advertisers reckon that their chances of getting their messages across to the viewer are greater if they express themselves less assertively. Thus it seems as if tentative language = persuasive language.

Such a finding is contrary to Palmer's (1979) and Perkins' (1983) argument that persuasive strength seems dependent on the linguistic, and especially semantic, strength of a speaker's propositions. It is, however, corroborated by Carli (1990) who found that in situations where the speakers do not have high social status they were more influential if they spoke tentatively. Advertisers do not, on the whole, have a great deal of social status. They have to compete for attention and they struggle for credibility. In their situation strongly assertive language might diminish their credibility even more. An indication that TV advertisers lack social authority is the infrequency of linguistic contexts in the data in which the modals get SI-interpretations (*permission, order, obligation*).

Secondly, the data indicate that TV advertisers are no different from other speakers when it comes to the need to make it inferable that they are competent and knowledgeable. This is indicated by the high frequency of [+grounds] modals whatever type of language is involved. In both Coates' (1983) and my data [+grounds] modals occupy the top four positions on the list of frequency/1,000 words. It is with regard to the modals' individual positions relative to each other that there is a difference. In Coates' data the high likelihood modals *will* and *would* occupy the top positions, whereas in my data *can* is the by far most frequent modal. Also [+past-marked] modals seem to be more frequent in ordinary language (Table 6). Here the data indicate a difference between TV advertising language and other language, in that of the [+past marked] modals, only *could* occurs with some frequency in TV advertising. From this difference we can conclude that advertisers are less willing to commit themselves to their propositions than speakers of 'ordinary' language.

The very high frequency of *can* (almost 5 times/1,000 words) in my data is explainable if we accept that grounds is a means of indicating competence, that a competent speaker is more

believable (Carli 1990), and that an 'underdog' position creates a need to express oneself less assertively. The combined semantic properties of *can*, [+grounds] and possibility, fit the needs of such a speaker perfectly, consequently it should be frequent in the language of advertisers, who, as was observed, are not in a position to claim the social authority necessary for stronger language to be relevant or credible.

Conversely, the semantic properties of necessity modals make them totally unsuitable in the context of advertising. To claim that *there is no reasonable alternative* is inappropriate for two reasons: (i) it is too assertive in a situation in which the speaker is not accredited with the necessary social status, and consequently such a claim will be less influential; (ii) advertisers have to bow to authority, especially legal authority, and claiming that *there is no reasonable alternative* is highly risky if they can be proven wrong to such higher authorities. Not surprisingly, then, only a few necessity modals were found in the data, and, correspondingly, only a few instances of the semantically strong quantifier *most* were found.

With regard to the semantic properties of the modals and quantifiers investigated, the findings were less conclusive. Nothing definitive can be said as to whether grounds is part of the modal's truth conditions in a strictly semantic sense, or whether grounds is part of the truth conditions but inferred pragmatically, or whether grounds is a pragmatically inferred implicatum. The interpretation of the past marker is problematic along the same lines.

I lean towards agreeing with McCallum-Bayliss (1988) in her thinking that grounds and remoteness (indicated by the past marker) are part of the modal's truth conditions. Without processing the information conveyed by these concepts the propositional content of the utterance will not be fully truth-conditional. Furthermore, there seems to be no point in having six different lexical forms for only three different semantic concepts, possibility, high likelihood, and necessity, unless these different forms exist to make a distinction possible to the viewer as to the basis for the speaker's utterance. The way especially *can* and *may* are employed in my data seems to corroborate this hypothesis. *Can* is invariably used in contexts when the speaker's expert status is mutually manifest, and *may* in contexts when higher authorities than the speaker (authorities that are accredited with making assertions without a need to show expertise) are issued with the claim, or it is mutually manifest that the speaker cannot claim with reliability what s/he is claiming.

With respect to the importance, semantic and pragmatic, of grounds, the data further indicate that there is no real support for the idea of the generalized conversational implicature. McCallum-Bayliss' (1988) claim that *can* and *may* have generalized conversational implicatures *can also not* and *may also not* is not supported in the data. When an advertiser claims that his airline can take you somewhere, she certainly does not implicate

that it *can also not* take you there. Such an implicature simply does not arise, unless the speaker (and the context) makes it clear that it is necessary for the full interpretation of the utterance. Factors such as the identity of the speaker, the type of situation, and the attitude of the viewer also play important roles with respect to these implicatures. Employing a [+grounds] modal constrains the interpretation of the utterance so that a 'negative implicature' does not arise. The existence of grounds ensures expertise, and there seems to be no point in claiming such expertise if at the same time you want to imply that the proposition is also possibly not true.

Another reason for my disbelief in the generalized conversational implicature is that there are indications in the data that the upper-boundedness of scalar implicatures is not an implicature at all, but part of the propositional content. The pattern seems to be that when focal stress falls on the scalar item, the two-sided reading is relevant. When there is no focal stress on the scalar item the one-sided reading is the relevant one. This is quite clear when we look at the use of the quantifiers *some*, *many* and *most*. In those commercials where it is clearly not necessary to narrow down the readings of *some/many/most* to *some/many/most, but not all*, the quantifiers receive no focal stress. Conversely, when the narrower reading is needed for contextual effects the quantifiers are stressed. As was noted in the analysis, this explanation of the nature of upper-boundedness is contrary to Horn (1988) and furthermore to Grice (1975). It is, however, consistent with a relevance-theoretic approach, and certainly Carston (1988), and to a certain extent Hirschberg (1985), argues against the idea of upper-boundedness as a result of a generalized conversational implicature.

### 5.1 Further studies

I admit that with respect to the conclusions above regarding the existence or not of the generalized conversational implicature, the corpus of my data is too small and the domain of my study too narrow. My findings are only indications. As such I think that they are interesting enough indications that they deserve further study.

Corpus-based studies on the use of specific modals and quantifiers in specific domains should yield different patterns with common denominators, if the indications of my data point in the right direction. Thus, it could be interesting to study different styles and registers and look at the use of specific modals and/or quantifiers. If it is true that speakers generally have a need to express their expertise on the subject of a claim, as is indicated by my data and Coates' (1983), then [-grounds] modals should be more frequent than usual in contexts where such expertise is not necessary or desirable. Furthermore, if the past marker denotes the kind of

remoteness that is interpretable as speaker doubts about the proposition, then such modals should be frequent in the styles of speakers who wish to express themselves extremely tentatively and with great hesitation.

More comprehensive studies on intonation with respect to the semantics and pragmatics of both modals and quantifiers are also needed. Stress is a big concept and various kinds of stress mean different things for the interpretation of an utterance as a whole. However inconclusive my findings regarding stress and two-sidedness are, the fact that intonation has repercussions on the interpretation of negation (as Horn (1988) observes) as well as one- and two-sidedness, seems to indicate clearly that contextual factors must necessarily be taken into account if the truth conditions of a proposition are to be fully interpretable.

## 5.2 End-note

In order to get their point through, TV advertisers need to be extremely wily. They compete with every distraction imaginable, from the coffee-maker to dozing, and even if the viewer is wide awake his mental state might not be that of alertness, and certainly not alertness to the messages of commercial breaks. (In fact, the word *break* implies that this is indeed a period of mental rest.) And if indeed the viewer is alert to the commercials, his attitude towards TV advertising in general, and special advertisers in particular, may not be such that he is inclined to believe what is claimed.

Therefore strategies are needed, and they must be so constructed that the speaker can catch the viewer's attention without later alienating him with an inappropriate claim. TV advertising makes full use of visuals as attention-catchers, but seems to rely on the verbal message to get the intended meaning of the advertisement across. Composing this message so as to make it as attractive as possible to the viewer, and by now also hearer, is of paramount importance; otherwise money will be spent fruitlessly.

By making claims that are non-assertive, inoffensive, and easy to process in terms of effort and rewards, and by making it clear *implicitly* that they are experts on what they talk about, advertisers often manage to make themselves believed, even trusted, although the factual basis for their claims is sometimes as flimsy as is the need for the product/service that they are advertising.

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