From existential modality to concessivity: Alternatives and reasoning *per absurdum*

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Since the sixties, the literature on Italian (and some other Romance languages) mentions a concessive use of the future tense (see e.g. Squartini 2012). We claim that there is a cross-linguistic equivalence between this use (1) and what has been labeled 'speech act modality' in the literature on English modals (Sweetser 1990 (2)). In these parallel literatures, the idea is advanced that the future and the modals *may/might* are concessive in that they 'concede' to the addressee that *p* is true and they thus convey 'distancing'.

(1)   *Sarà simpatico, ma non ha amici.*
        be-FUT nice, but not has friends
        'He might be nice, but he does not have friends.'

(2)   *He may be a university professor, but he sure is dumb.*

*A*rguing that there is no such category as `discourse modality' (see also Papafragou 2000) and establishing a connection with *irrelevance conditionals* (König, 1986 and sqq.), we propose a different unified view of these phenomena, which grounds in the existential epistemic modal semantics of both the future tense in Italian and the epistemic modal in English their capacity of enhancing a concessive interpretation in discourse and in particular in an adversative construction. Specifically, we will argue that concessivity arises as a pragmatic enrichment of a literal meaning featuring a tautology.

We capitalize on their alternative semantics, as well as on the interaction between the alternatives and the adversative, and propose an account in which distancing is the pragmatic counterpart of the dismissal of a premise that leads to an inconsistency in a pragmatic reasoning *per absurdum*. We will spell out a variety of pragmatic effects, which have been all previously gathered under the label 'distancing' and which correspond, in our analysis, to different strategies to repair *the absurdum*.

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