ON THE TRANSLATION OF MODAL DEVICES OF HIGH PROBABILITY IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH

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1. DATA AND HYPOTHESIS

In the literature about the English modal auxiliaries, it is often stated that "will" and "must", when they express present high probability, as in

1. Peter *will/must* be reading the newspaper now.

differ mainly in that "will" is predictive or prospective, thus orienting the utterance towards a future confirmation of its truth, while "must" is deductive or retrospective, that is, it lays emphasis on the fact that the high probability is based on evidence previously perceived. The Spanish *futuro* and the periphrasis *deber (de)*[1] are usually considered as more or less literal translations of "will" and "must", respectively: that is, *futuro* is predictive and *deber* (*de*) is deductive, as may be seen in the following opposition:

2. *Pedro* estará/debe de estar *leyendo el periódico ahora.*

In order to check this equivalence between "will" and *futuro* on one side, and between "must" and *deber (de)* on the other, an analysis was carried out of all the instances of the four expressions in two corpora of face-to-face conversation of roughly equal length: the English corpus consists of 46 texts from the Svartvik and Quirk[2] corpus, which total approximately 280,000 words; the Spanish corpus comprises the 126 texts labelled *conversacionales o familiares* in Marcos Marín's corpus,[3] which total 269,500 words. Both corpora have been used in machine-readable versions in ASCII code. The transcription of the Spanish corpus is orthographic; that of the English corpus includes prosodic signals, but in the examples quoted here these have been omitted and replaced by punctuation marks for better readability.

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[1] In traditional Spanish grammars it is stated that the form *deber* expresses obligation, whereas *deber de* expresses high probability. However, speakers tend to ignore this distinction and use both expressions for the two kinds of modality. Given this situation, I have thought best to consider both periphrases jointly under the label *deber (de)*.

[2] Jan Svartvik and Randolph Quirk (eds.): *A corpus of English Conversation.* Lund, CWK Gleerup, 1980.

[3] Francisco Marcos Marín (ed.): *Corpus oral de referencia de la lengua española contemporánea,* Madrid, Univ. Autónoma, 1992.

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In the retrieval of the expressions of our concern with the meaning of present high probability, it was found that in English "must" (80 instances) was more frequent than "will" (33), while in Spanish *futuro* (184) was more common than *deber (de)* (32). It would then seem that present high probability conveyed intraclausally within the verbal group tends to be predictive in English and deductive in Spanish. Nevertheless, this statement is not convincing. An attempt to translate the instances of these four expressions showed that the correspondences *futuro*/"will" and *deber (de)*/"must", even though in most cases yielded grammatical constructions, were not always adequate; especially numerous were the cases in which the more frequent expression in each language, namely *futuro* and "must", was not adequately translated by its correspondent in the other language. For example, in (3), "must" seems to be better translated by *futuro* than by *deber (de)*:

3. I think it *must* be lovely to live a really well ordered life where you get up at a certain time (Text 1-12, tone unit 581)
(Creo que será *encantador* / cf. *Creo que* debe (de) *ser encantador)*

As a consequence of these mismatches, the hypothesis came out that the choice of one expression or another in each of the languages is not wholly accounted by the opposition predictive/deductive: there are other factors that also come into play.

2. METHOD FOR TESTING THE HYPOTHESIS: THE DATA BASES

In order to determine these factors, all the instances of the four expressions were registered in two data bases of identical structure, one for each language. The fields in the bases contained hypothetical factors which could be responsible for the distributional difference between the pairs "will"/"must" and *futuro/deber (de)*. The most important of these factors will be described in this section; their influence on translation will be approached on Section 3.[4]

a) *Ambiguity*, that is, the possibility for the expression to be interpreted in a different way from conveying high probability[5].

b) *Process of the verb*: material, mental, or relational. Verbal and existential processes have not been considered here because of their scarcity in relation to the total.[6]

c) *Coexistent expressions* of probability or belief, in the same clause or in a contiguous clause.

d) *Repetition*, in the same clause or in an adjacent clause.

e) *Future confirmation*, that is, whether the truth of the utterance is likely to be con-

[4] For a more extensive view of these and other factors that account for each of these probability devices, see M. Carretero (forthcoming): "On the epistemic intraclausal verbal present high probability in Spanish and English", *Multilingua*.

[5] For more details on the concept of ambiguity and on ambiguity in the English modal auxiliaries, see J. Coates: *The Semantics of the Modal Auxiliaries*, London, Croom Helm, 1983.

[6] For more detailed information about verb processes, see A. Downing and Ph. Locke: *A University Course in English Grammar*, Hemel Hempstead, Prentice Hall, 1992, Chapter 4.

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firmed in future; in the affirmative case, a distinction will be made whether the confirmation is to take place either by the addressee (A) in a close turn, or simply in the near future.

f) Pragmatic force. Especially important are the following purposes for which the speaker (S) utters these high probability expressions: 1) to be tactful; 2) to persuade A that the probability is high; 3) to express agreement with A; 4) to express interest in A.

g) Explicit evidence in favour of the truth of the utterance.

h) Generic participants (*"the English", "children"...*) *or reference to a large subset* of referents of a substantive (*"most of the English", "most children"...*).

i) Indefinite pronouns, such as *"some", "someone", "something"...*, and their Spanish equivalents *algo, algún...*

j) Approximative expressions, such as *"about", "something like", or "something"*, and their Spanish equivalents *aproximadamente, o algo así...*

Fields *h*), *i*) and *j*) indicate a relative lack of precision in the expression of high probability.

k) Negative polarity.

l) Questioning, either direct or indirect.

m) Special uses, in which the expressions retain some semantic features of their probability meaning, although there is no doubt about the truth or falsity of the utterance. For instance, *"you must be joking"* may be uttered even knowing that A is absolutely serious.

The quantitative data concerning the factors mentioned above of the Spanish and English high probability expressions and the context in which they occur are displayed in Tables 1 and 2. The most significant differences found between individual expressions have been marked in bold type. It must be noted that, in both tables, for the row 'frequency' the percentages are calculated with respect to the total of present high probability expressions in each language; for the rest of the rows, the percentages are calculated with respect to the total of occurrences of each individual expression.

TABLE 1
QUANTITATIVE DATA OF THE SPANISH EXPRESSIONS *futuro* AND *deber (de)* OF PROBABILITY, AND OF THE CORRESPONDING CLAUSES AND CONTEXTS

	futuro		deber (de)	
	Total	%	Total	%
FREQUENCY	184	85.19	32	14.81
AMBIGUITY	—	—	1	3.12
PROCESS OF THE VERB:				
material	30	16.30	—	—
mental	33	17.93	3	9.37
relational	100	54.35	26	81.25
COEXPROBAB	29	15.76	4	12.50
REPETITION				
-same clause	11	5.98	1	3.12
-contig.cla.	23	12.50	6	18.75
FUTCONFIRM				
-Addressee	73	39.67	9	28.12

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-Near future	20	10.87	1	3.12
FORCE				
-Tact	5	2.72	4	12.50
-Persuasion	11	5.98	—	—
-Int. in A	25	13.59	5	15.62
EXP.EVIDENCE	63	34.24	22	68.75
GEN.PART	31	16.85	3	9.37
INDEF.PRON.	10	5.43	1	3.12
APPROXIMA.	10	5.43	1	3.12
NEGATION	17	9.24	1	3.12
QUESTIONING	22	11.96	—	—
SPEC. USES	26	14.13	—	—

TABLE 2.
QUANTITATIVE DATA OF THE ENGLISH EXPRESSIONS *"will"* AND *"must"*, AND OF THE CORRESPONDING CLAUSES AND CONTEXTS

	"will"		**"must"**	
	Total	%	Total	%
FREQUENCY	33	29.20	80	70.80
AMBIGUITY	—	—	7	8.75
PROCESS OF THE VERB:				
material	5	15.15	14	17.50
mental	6	18.18	5	6.25
relational	19	57.58	51	63.75
COEXPROBA	13	39.39	23	28.75
REPETITION				
-same clause	3	9.09	3	3.75
-contig. cla.	—	—	3	3.75
FUTCONFIRM				
-Addressee	6	18.18	16	20.00
-Near future	20	60.60	4	5.00
FORCE				
-Tact	1	3.03	11	13.75
-Persuasion	3	9.09	7	8.75
-Int. in A	2	6.06	13	8.75
EXP.EVIDENCE	9	27.27	31	38.75
GEN PART	8	24.24	16	20.00
INDEF.PRON.	2	6.06	8	10.00
APPROXIMA.	1	3.03	7	8.75
NEGATION	3	9.09	2	2.50
QUESTIONING	1	3.03	1	1.25
SPEC. USES	—	—	9	11.25

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2. DESCRIPTION OF THE FACTORS THAT CHARACTERIZE EACH EXPRESSION OF HIGH PROBABILITY AND ARE INFLUENT ON TRANSLATION

An overview of the quantitative data presented in Tables 1 and 2 leads to the thought that there is no equivalence between *futuro* and "will", nor between *deber (de)* and "must": each of the four expressions has its own peculiar characteristics. This section will deal with the ways in which these factors may be influent in an adequate translation of these four expressions of high probability.

3.1. Factors that favour the translation of *futuro* by "will" and *vice versa*

The following factors, common to *futuro* and "will", favour the translation of each of these expressions by the other:

a) The truth of the utterance is to be confirmed in the near future, but not by A in the next turn:

4. I haven't had the bill; the bill for the works *will* be about five thousand (4-2, 268)
(la factura de las obras será *de unas cinco mil)*

b) The process of the verb is mental. In this case, the verb is often in the second person (*verás, sabrás, comprenderás*..., or their English equivalents):

5. <H1>*o sea, dije que la niña estaba muerta nada más enseñarme la fotografía, después hice mi estudio, eh... Fíjate, tú te* recordarás, *Jo* <palabra cortada> ... *José Luis, que hablábamos el otro día de concretamente... de los m*<palabra cortada>... *de... de los espíritus mayores, ¿no?*
<H2>*Sí.*
<H1>*Bueno, pues yo utilicé mi mediumnidad para buscar... pelos y señales de esta niña...* (Text ACON009A, line 19)
(you *'ll* remember... José Luis, that the other day we talked about...)

6. and you'll probably find that there are people with talents, unheard of talents, who could help (2-3, 632)
(verás *probablemente...*)

c) The high probability expression coexists with one or more expressions that indicate a weak degree of probability (*a lo mejor, probablemente*... or English equivalents such as *"maybe", "probably", "perhaps"*...); in these contexts, the use of *deber (de)* or "must" yields ungrammatical utterances, *futuro* and "will" being then the only option:

7. [...] *ese camionero* ganará *a lo mejor trescientas mil pesetas mensuales* (CCON022E, 156)
(*perhaps* this lorry driver *will* earn...)
8. and whereas here it *probably will* be dearer too (1-6, 631)
(probablemente será *más caro*)

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d) In negative utterances, *futuro* is best translated by "will" and *vice versa;* "must" and *deber (de)* could provoke an interpretation of obligation:

9. *Y nada, tienes, todavía sigues teniendo un poco de transaminasas ¿eh? Bueno, imagino que alcohol no* probarás *ni una gota.* (PCON002A,108)
   (you *won't* try a drop of it; cf. you *mustn't* try a drop of it)
10. something like that; two letters that, you *won't* agree, could be written alike (1-6, 1094)
    (no *estarás* de acuerdo; cf. no *debes (de)* estar de acuerdo)

3.2. Factors that favour the translation of "must" by *futuro* and *vice versa*

The following factors are common to *futuro* and "must", thus favouring the translation of each of these expressions by the other:

a) S's expectation of A's confirmation of the truth (or falsity) of the utterance in a close turn, with the exception of mental processes referring to the second person, which, as we have seen, are usually expressed by "will" or *futuro*:

11. C: I've got a job at Columbia University, in New York
    A: have you? That *must* be a private university, not a state university as
    C: yes (1-5, 1052)
    (*será* una universidad privada)

b) Presence of features that convey imprecision, especially generic participants. In Spanish, imprecise judgements of probability are usually expressed by *futuro*, whereas in English "must" is more common in these contexts:

12. I think it *must* be lovely to live a really well ordered life where *you* get up at a certain time (1-12, 581)
    (creo que será *encantador...)*
13. B: *psychologists*
    A: a very blinkered profession (clears throat)
    d: they *must* do *something.* What do they do? (2-4, 696)
    (*algo* harán)

c) Coexisting expressions of probability or of belief. The awkwardness that tends to result from the combination of *deber (de)* with these expressions favours the translation of "must" with *futuro* (14):

14. they *must surely* apply this to peacetime (2-3, 1103)
    (seguramente aplicarán *esto a tiempos de paz*)

In these cases it must be noted that in certain Spanish constructions after verbs of belief the verbal form of the subordinate clause carries a tense other than *futuro*, such as *presente de indicativo* (15) or *pretérito imperfecto de subjuntivo* (*cantara* or *cantase*) (16):

15. it really is absolutely obscene, and then [cos] they, I *think* they *must* kill the whole goat off (4-6, 926)

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(creo *que* descuartizan *toda la cabra)*
16. C: isn't he in his early thirties? I've got the
a: *sounds* as though he *must* be (2-6, 594)
*(*parece *como si los* tuviera*)*

d) Pragmatic force of persuasion. In this case, Spanish tends to make use of *futuro*, so as to insist on the common sense of the truth of the utterance; in contrast, while English favours "must", to emphasize the well-groundedness of this truth:

17. *Y con, con gajos, con trozos de naranja, para irlo, pues* estará *bien, claro, como [...] está lo salado con lo dulce* (CCON022E, 132)
(it *must* be fine)
18. obviously they can't if you're blind, there *must* be some limit (2-5, 978)
*(*habrá *algún límite)*

3.3. Factors that favour the translation of "must" by *deber (de)* and *vice versa*

In this respect, only the English-Spanish translation deserves much attention: concerning the Spanish-English translation: all the cases of *deber (de)* found were adequately translated into English by "must". An instance of this adequateness is (19), in which S expresses a mocking deductive effort:

19. *Alberto Caminos, muchísimas gracias por habernos contado hoy esta... esta prehistoria, no esta historia, porque ya es de trece mil años. El... el... el pintor ya* debe *estar crecidito, ¿verdad? No has podido obtener declaraciones de él, ¿no?* (CCON012B, 45)
(the painter *must* be already grown up)

Concerning the English-Spanish direction, "must" is best translated by *deber (de)* when the following factors obtain:

a) Explicit evidence in favour of the truth of the utterance; here the deductive orientation of the probability is clearest:

20. they do support the humanities - but if *Joe Eccleston hasn't mentioned them* he *must* have the idea that they wouldn't support it or something (2-1, 880)
*(*debe (de) *tener la idea...)*

b) S uses the probability expression with the purpose of being tactful, when the utterance is compromising for S; in these cases, it is wise for S to use a deductive expression, in order to present the probability as being strongly founded on evidence. (21) is an instance of how the extreme caution needed favours the translation by *deber (de)* even after a lexical verb of belief:

21. B: Graham Williamson was ill and she says he yes he won't recover; I should think it *must* be cancer, cause
A: I should think so
B: I met him once at a dinner... (1-4, 1064)
(creo que debe (de) *ser cáncer...)*

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c) In certain utterances about A, the deductive value of "must" permits S to be polite in two ways: S shows interest in A's concerns and at the same time respects A's status of privileged knower, even if S has not any doubt. This impression of politeness is maintained in the translation by *deber (de)*:

22. A: you know I mean just *the teaching is in is in absolute hell*
a: during this interim period it *must* be terrible for you yes yes (1-9, 647)
*(*debe (de) *ser terrible para ti)*

3.4. Factors that favour the translation of *futuro* by different devices from "will" and "must"

In the following cases, the best translation for *futuro* seems to be the English "simple present":

a) Questions. The best translation for questions with *futuro* appears to be the "simple present":

23. <116> *Es que resulta* **que necesita** *que se caliente el... [motor]*
<117> *¿No* será *un Ford?* (CCON019A, 1755)
(*Isn't* it a Ford?)

b) Special uses of *futuro*, which preserve similarities with the meaning of probability, but there is no doubt whether the utterance is true or false. If there is a nuance of disapproval it may be enhanced by a strengthening adverbial, such as *really* in statements (24) and *on earth* in questions (25):

24. (talking about some delinquents)
<111> ... <ininteligible> serán *incapaces, porque le voy a decir pelos y señales, hasta de la hora que van al servicio.* (ACON009A,217)
(they're *really* incompetent)
25. *gastarse millones de dólares en sacar las plantas cuando hay eh... ¿dónde las* tendrán *durante el resto del año?* (CCON034A, 692)
(where *on earth do* they keep them?)

The concessive *futuro* can be translated by the "simple present", since there is no doubt about the truth of the utterance, but "may" seems a better translation, since it, like *futuro*, conveys irrelevance of the truth of its utterance for the truth of the following utterance:

26. <111> *el armario* será *atractivo...*
<113> <risas>
<111> *pero el tejano de uno noventa...* (ECON006B, 712)
(the wardrobe may be attractive...)

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3.5. Factors that favour the translation of "must" by *tener que*

In certain instances of "must", S is so strongly inclined towards the truth of the utterance that *deber (de)* sounds too weak, *tener que* being a suitable translation. This is the case of (27), in which S stresses his or her disbelief of a consequence of the falsity of the utterance:

27. well it surprises me that Eileen should be surprised I can imagine Leslie being surprised but in America, she *must* know that lots of dentists working are women (1-13, 67)
(*tiene que* saber que...)

3.6. Cases in which factors favouring different translations coexist

In certain instances, some factors favour one translation, but others incline it towards another alternative. For example, in (28) the reference to a large subset of referents *(muchos particulares)* favours the translation by "must"; however, the probable confirmation in the near future makes "will" more adequate:

28. *...que si el Ayuntamiento eh... en nombre del bien común puede hacer muchas cosas,* habrá muchos particulares *que digan: "Pues por agravio comparativo, yo, en el solar que está al lado, también hago una torre".* (ACON026A, 153)
(there *will* be many individuals)

CONCLUSIONS

As was predicted in Section 1, the oppositions between "will" and "must" in English, and between *futuro* and *deber (de)* in Spanish, cannot be totally accounted for by the opposition prediction/deduction: there is a wide array of heterogeneous factors that characterize each of these expressions in a particular way. These factors, which are influent on the adequate English-Spanish or Spanish-English translation of these devices, are mainly the following: ambiguity; process of the verb; coexistent epistemic expressions; future confirmation of the truth of the utterance, either by the addressee or by some other means; pragmatic force of the modalized utterance; explicit evidence; generic participants, a large number of included referents, indefinite pronouns and approximative expressions; negation and questioning; special uses of the expressions.

The difficulty that these high probability devices pose for translation is, I believe, an instance of the complexity that pervades the more general area of modality, to which they belong. It is well known that modality, due to the intricate ways in which syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and contextual factors interact, is one of the most complicated issues that linguistics has to cope with.

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