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PROCATALEPSIS AND THE ETYMOLOGY OF HEDGING AND BOOSTING PARTICLES

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1. INTRODUCTION

In her groundbreaking 1990 book *From etymology to pragmatics. Metaphorical and cultural aspects of semantic structure*, Eve Sweetser demonstrates that a cognitive approach to meaning can account for regularities in three important linguistic domains: polysemous relationships, lexical semantic change and pragmatic ambiguity. She argues that there are clear metaphorical or metonymic relationships between Meaning 1 (M1) and Meaning 2 (M2) in each of these domains and that these metaphorical relationships are universal and based in human cognition. What I wish to argue in this chapter is that, in a more restricted set of cases, another rhetorical figure, procatalepsis, may be invoked to describe the M1/M2 relationship and that this explains the somewhat paradoxical hedging-cum-boosting quality of pragmatic particles such as *quand même, though, but* and *aber*.

Examples 1–4, drawn, in the main, from corpora of contemporary spoken language and typical of everyday usage, illustrate the hedging/boosting qualities of these four particles:

(1)  *C’est une ville qui a quand même un cinéma.*
    ‘It is a town which has all the same a cinema.’
    It’s a town which *does* (after all) have a cinema.
    (Beeching Corpus, Interview 4, line 35)

(2)  Nice house **though** isn’t it?
    BNC spoken corpus

(3)  I was teaching the wee man to ride his bike the day. It’s good to see him cycling **but**.
    Overheard example, Dumbarton, Scotland
(4) “Du hast aber Mumm!” Rief sie bewundernd aus. (HC01.283)
“You have but guts!” shouted she admiringly out.
FSF: “Well, you are spunky!” she exclaimed admiringly.
(Translation of Scott Fitzgerald’s The Beautiful and the Damned.)

Most of these examples (or similar cases) will be discussed in more detail further down. Suffice it for the moment to say that each of these particles has a corresponding concessive or adversative subordinating or coordinating conjunctival form, each retains the trace of its contrastive forebear, each has, to differing degrees, a curiously emphatic yet apologetic, boosting and hedging quality. The business of this chapter is to shed light on the cognitive process whereby a concessive or adversative conjunction (M1) undergoes a semantic and grammatical change to become a hedging and boosting particle (M2) – and what might be the motivation for such a usage.

2. RHETORICAL EFFECTS

Metaphor and metonymy “are said to constitute an interpretive use, with the sentences being used to convey a relationship of resemblance between the proposition expressed and the thought(s) it is intended to convey” (Kempson, 2001: 414). In my analysis, procatalepsis has a similar rhetorical effect, which is, however, quite particular to itself. In ancient Greek rhetoric, procatalepsis is a figure which allows a speaker to concede certain arguments and thus strengthen his or her main argument. In ordinary conversation, there is a similar procataleptic strategy which seems to work in two stages; first, drawing on the core, propositional, meanings of words used in interaction, the speaker concedes that there may be an opposing view – the assertiveness of the speech act can be hedged and a potential criticism disarmed. Second, by downtoning the force of an assertion and conceding part of the argument, the speaker is paradoxically able to be more convincing and boost the argument. In the (possibly fictive) suggestion that there is an opposing view, the speaker attends to her interlocutor’s face needs, comes across as likeable and can thus simultaneously hedge and boost the proposition.

The paper takes as a starting-point Kempson’s (2001: 414) notion that “all word meaning is but a set of procedures . . . [which] suggests that any word is but the input to the construction of some novel “ad hoc” concept specific to that utterance”. In ordinary everyday interaction, speakers frequently employ language in ways which are designed to protect the faces of both speaker and hearer (Brown and Levinson, 1987) – and it is therefore unsurprising that words with semantic cores to do with contrast/concession are recruited to serve face-preserving needs. Contrast and concession allow the speaker to suggest that another view is possible. Metonymic processes (routinization resulting from repeated contiguity in the syntagmatic chain) thence confirm the M2, which, instead of hedging, performs the opposite: boosting. This process of