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Chapter 5 The modal use of *yě*

So far, I have presented two different uses of *yě*, namely, the additive use and the scalar use. We have seen that they do not only differ in interpretation, but also occupy different syntactic positions. The scalar *yě*, in CP, is interpreted with a clausal/propositional reading and the additive *yě* occupies a position in IP. In Chapter 1, I also mentioned another use type of *yě*, i.e., the modal use of *yě*. In this chapter, the modal use of *yě* will be discussed in detail. Before that, I will briefly introduce the general characteristics of *yě* as a modal particle.

5.1 *Yě* as a Modal Particle

Cross-linguistically, modal particles demonstrate a “multiple class-membership” property and they are considered to be polyfunctional (König 1991: 173). In other words, in some contexts, these particles usually don’t serve as modal particles. Instead, they are adverbs, focus particles, conjunctions and so on. German *auch* and Dutch *ook* are good candidates to show the polyfunctional feature. They serve as additive focus particles in some contexts, while they are also found to be used as modal particles in other contexts. Klooster (2001: 169-170) argues that sometimes Dutch *ook* ‘also’ can make a request sound politer and more modest without adding more information. In other words, the additive meaning of *ook* ‘also’ seems not be present in these contexts; one example is presented here as (1):

- (1) *Is Wim ook thuis?*
 is Wim also home
 ‘Is Wim at home?’

Interpretation: I would like to see Wim if he is home.

(Klooster 2001: 169)

Different from the additive use of *ook*, the contribution of *ook* in (1) is not to suggest that someone other than Wim is at home, rather, it is used to make a polite request. For the same reason, as Klooster reports, a police officer will never request the name of a suspect with an *ook* without sounding sarcastic, saying *Mag ik uw naam ook weten?* ‘May I maybe know your name?’. Furthermore, *ook* can never be stressed in this context.

The German additive particle *auch* can also be used as a modal particle, as is shown in (2):

(2) A: *Peter sieht schlecht aus.*
 Peter looks bad out
 ‘Peter Looks bad.’

B: *Er war auch sehr lange krank gewesen.*
 he was auch very long ill been.
 ‘(It is because) He has been ill for a long time.’
 (Karagjosova 2004: 226)

According to Karagjosova (2004), German *auch* in (2B) is applied to indicate that the speaker acknowledges that he has known the fact expressed by the utterance of A and he can also provide an explanation for the proposition conveyed by the previous speaker. Therefore, *auch* signals and makes it explicit that there is “an inferential relation” between the two utterances by A and B (Karagjosova 2004: 227). Like the Dutch *ook* in (1), in contrast to its additive use, German *auch* in (2) does not require an explicit antecedent nor suggests an alternative proposition that someone else has also been ill for a long time. Furthermore, the modal use of German *auch* cannot be stressed either. From the German and Dutch cases, we may speculate that the modal use of an additive particle is not a language-specific phenomenon.

Likewise, it has been noted that Mandarin *yě* has a modal use too (Ma 1982, Hou 1998, Lu 1999, Liu 2001, Lü. etc. 2010, Hole 2004). It can be illustrated by (3), which is repeated from chapter 1.

(3) *Nǐ yě tài jiāoqì le,*
 you YE too squeamish SFP
shuō nǐ liǎng-jù jiù kū.
 criticize you two-CL then cry
 ‘You are too squeamish. You cried simply because I made few comments on you.’
 (Liu 2001: 246)

Comparing the use of *yě* in (3) to its Dutch and German counterparts, at least two features are common: firstly, concerning its licensing condition, the use of *yě* in (3) also does not require an explicit antecedent in the discourse. This forms a contrast to the additive *yě* discussed in chapter 2. Plus, different from the additive use of *yě* which should always have a direct counterpart in the translation, in the translation of (3), *yě* (i.e., *also*) is not spelled out.⁶⁶ Secondly,

⁶⁶ Speakers of Dutch tell me that in a Dutch translation, it would appear, as *ook*: ‘*Je bent ook zo overgevoelig, één woord en je huilt al.*’ Later I will show that almost all sentences with a modal use of Mandarin *yě* can be paraphrased by a Dutch sentence with *ook*.

considering the prosodic feature, modal *yě* can never be stressed. For instance, if *yě* in (3) bears stress, it can only denote the ‘also’ meaning. This unstressability is shared with the scalar use of *yě*. Furthermore, there is a great potential that the actual tone of *yě* in (3) is a neutral tone and hence its Pinyin transcription should be *ye* instead of *yě*. This is exemplified by the following sentence drawn from a popular Chinese situation comedy “*Wǒ ài wǒ jiā*” (‘I love my family’):⁶⁷

- (4) *Nín ye děi zhùyì shēntǐ ya.*
 You YE have.to take.care body SFP
 ‘You have to take care your health in any case.’
 (Episode 1-part 1: 6:13)

The neutral tone is regarded as a “fully-fledged tone” and forms minimal contrasts with other tones in Mandarin. It has been documented that Mandarin functional words, e.g., particles expressing aspect or sentence final particles, are often associated with a neutral tone. A neutral tone is always unstressed (Wiedenhof 2015: 19-21). The prosodic feature, i.e., the unstressability and even a possible neutral tone, suggests that the modal use is different from its additive counterpart. The reduced neutral tone form *ye* is different from stressed and unstressed *yě* and may be the result of grammaticalization; cf. Wiedenhof’s (2015: 254) discussion of the reduced neutral-tone form *yī* ‘a, a certain’ from *yī* ‘one’. This assumption is in line with the claim made in the literature that the meaning of a modal particle can be traced back to the meaning of its other uses (Helbig 1988, Weydt 1969, Abraham 1991, Karagjosova 2004) and the modal use of some functional words, e.g. the focus particles, is the result of a process of grammaticalization (König 1991: 174).

Then what is the function of the modal use of *yě*? It has been argued by many that modal particles do not have a lexical or compositional meaning (Hentschel and Weydt 1989, Bayer 1991, Zeevat 2002, Karagjosova 2004: 24) or only have “bleached” semantics (Abraham 1991: 12). This seems to be the case in Mandarin as well. *Yě* as a modal particle in (3) and (4) can be omitted without affecting the truth conditions or the grammaticality of the host sentence (in which it also differs from both the additive and the scalar *yě*). The function of a modal particle involves the speaker’s attitude, belief or evaluation of the proposition; for instance, it is argued that a modal particle is used in a sentence to express “epistemic attitudes” of the speaker or the hearer (Doherty 1987) or the “propositional attitude” (Karagjosova 2004: 23) of the

⁶⁷ A YouTube video link for this episode: <https://youtu.be/E2qfVHKSize?t=372>

speaker. Therefore, a modal particle is assumed to modify the whole clause. For instance, the German particle *ja* is claimed to suggest a positive epistemic evaluation of the proposition expressed by the sentence in which it occurs, as is shown below (König 1991: 177):

- (5) (Ich lasse dir den Vortritt.) Ich habe ja noch Zeit.
 I leave you the precedence I have JA still time
 ‘I will let you go first. I have got plenty of time.’

Similarly, the function of *ye* has to do with the speaker’s evaluation or attitude too. The modal use of *ye*, in sentences like (3) and (4) can make the utterance gentler and milder, while without *ye*, it would be too direct and not polite (Hou 1998: 620, Liu et al. 2001: 246, Lü et al. 2010: 597).

Moreover, modal particles are often assumed to have context-dependent communicative functions (Dittmann 1982, Helbig 1988, Karagjosova 2004:26). The multiple occurrence contexts often result in the claim that one modal particle can have many different functions depending on the context. Therefore, it is important to first identify the contexts in which a modal particle occurs and then distinguish contextual aspects from the function(s) of the modal particle itself.

In what follows, contexts in which the modal *ye* is used will be investigated and the pragmatic function of the modal *ye* in each context will be discussed in detail. We will determine whether the contribution of modal *ye* used in all these contexts reveals something a core function of the modal *ye*.

5.2 Contexts involving modal *ye*

Earlier on I mentioned that modal particles make no lexical or truth-conditional contribution to the host sentence. Instead they are assumed to express certain attitudes or beliefs of the speaker towards the proposition of their host sentences, or to signal some discourse relations, such as contrast relation and cause/inferential relation between the two adjacent sentences (Dittmann 1982, Karagjosova 2004). The motivation to use a modal particle is “the need to point out these beliefs” (Karagjosova 2004: 65). However, it appears that a single modal particle can occur in various contexts; as a case in point, Karagjosova identifies at least four types of contexts in which German *auch* can occur as a modal particle. As is noted by König (1991) and Karagjosova (2004), the fact a modal particle can occur in various contexts does not necessarily mean that the modal particle has a different function in each context. It is crucial to distinguish the contextual factors from the contribution of the modal particle itself. In fact, in line with König and

Karagjosova, I argue that Mandarin modal *yě*, like German *auch*, invariably indicates certain relations between the propositions expressed by its host sentence and other contextual propositions. Before further developing this argument, a detailed description of the contexts in which the modal *yě* may occur is necessary.

5.2.1 The modal *yě* in a “criticism” context

Hole (2004: 41) describes two contexts where the modal *yě* (the “emphatic” use of *yě* in his terms) is used. One is in utterances which express tactful criticism to the addressee; the other case involves the expression of “resignation or the fact that the speaker accepts the things the way they are.” The first case is illustrated by (6) to (8):

- (6) *Nǐ yě tài xiǎokàn rén le,*
 you YE too belittle person SFP
tā kě shì kēbān chūshēn.
 he in.fact is professional.training background
 ‘You’d rather not look down on him [lit. you look down on him too much]. After all, he has received professional training.’
 (Hou 1998: 620)
- (7) *Nǐ yě tài jiāoqì le,*
 you YE too squeamish SFP
shuō nǐ liǎng-jù jiù kū.
 say you two-CL then cry
 ‘You are too squeamish. You cry simply because I say something about you.’
 (repeated from (3): Liu 2001: 246)
- (8) *Xiànzài dézhòng le,*
 now pass (the civil service examination) PERF
lián lǎoshī dōu bú bài,
 even teacher DOU not call.on
zhè yě tài bù tōng rénqíng le.
 this YE too not understand human.feeling SFP
 ‘Now he has passed the civil service examination, but he even did not bother to call on his teacher. This is just too inhuman.’
 (Hou 1998: 620)

It is clear that the host sentences of *yě* in (6)-(8) denote criticism or dissatisfaction with the hearer (in (6) and (7)) or a third person in the

conversation (in (8)). Another contextual aspect common to the three sentences is that the criticism denoted by the host sentence of *yě* is followed immediately by a sentence which provides the reason why the speaker sends out the critical message. The same sentences in (6)-(8) would express the same sentiments without *yě*. Therefore, it is the contextual elements but *yě* that have to do with the criticism reading. Another observation is that all the three sentences involve the construction *tài...le* ‘too...’ which has an intensification effect. With this construction, the accusation or criticism is strengthened. Interestingly, if the construction *tài...le* ‘too...’ is dropped in the sentences above, the necessity of using the modal *yě* seems to also disappear. The pragmatic function of *yě* can hence be regarded as a neutralization or modification effect of the speech act expressed by the asserted sentence, i.e., a sharp or way too direct criticism or comment.

This neutralization or modification effect is relevant to the speaker’s evaluation or confidence level about the claim. It is a bit difficult to associate *yě* to the speaker’s evaluation due to the modal particle’s void lexical meaning per se. However, this relation can be evidenced by the fact that *yě* in contexts like (6)-(8) often co-occurs with, and can even be replaced by, the speaker-oriented adverb *wèimiǎn* ‘rather, kind of’. For instance, (6) can also be reproduced as (9):

- (9) *Nǐ wèimiǎn (yě) tài xiǎokàn rén le,*
 you kind.of YE too belittle person SFP
tā kě shì kēbān chūshēn.
 he in.fact is professional.training family.background
 ‘You’d rather not look down on him [lit. you look down on him too much]. After all, he has received professional training.’
 (Hou 1998: 620)

Wèimiǎn ‘rather, kind of’ is a speaker-oriented adverb and is often used in a sentence conveying the speaker’s negative evaluation or critical comments. In distribution, *wèimiǎn* ‘rather, kind of’ often co-occurs with the construction *tài...le* ‘too’ or *guòyú* ‘excessively’ which are used to intensify the degree of criticism (Gu 2005). Using *wèimiǎn* ‘rather, kind of’ can add a very strong “subjectivity” flavor to the statement (Zhou 2011: 38). When the adverb expressing subjectivity is used, the following proposition is often regarded to be related to the speaker’s subjective attitude or evaluation (Benveniste 1972: 228-229). In effect, the proposition with *wèimiǎn* ‘rather, kind of’ is epistemically weaker than the proposition without it. In other words, the “subjectivity” flavor weakens the absoluteness of the claim and allows room for compromise. As I mentioned, *wèimiǎn* ‘rather, kind of’ and *yě* in contexts like (6)-(8) are interchangeable. I therefore argue that the role of the modal *yě*

in the above sentences, in parallel with *wèimiǎn* ‘rather, kind of’, is relevant to the speaker’s attitude and evaluation about the confidence level of his claim. Adding the modal *yě*, due to its subjectivity flavor, seems to make this strong accusation milder and leave some space for negotiation and doubt.

Although I have determined the pragmatic function of the modal *yě* in this context, it is still not clear what mechanism is operative behind it all. Or, put it in another way, why does *yě* have this effect? Below I will argue that this moderation effect can be attributed to the fact that the use of *yě* triggers common knowledge or contextual assumption of the existence of an alternative proposition different from the speaker’s criticism. For instance, the use of *yě* in (7) implies the existence of a presupposition that, under certain circumstances, crying is not taken as a squeamish act (we will come back to this point in 5.2). The contextual alternative to some degree rebuts the current critical claim and thus adds a concessive flavor to the discourse. By using the modal *yě*, the speaker acknowledges the existence of this contextual alternative.

5.2.2 The modal *yě* in an “acceptance” context

According to Hole (2004), modal *yě* can also be used in a context to acknowledge or accept the fact with a feeling of resignation or reluctance. Consider (10) to (12) (from Hou 1998: 620):

- (10) *Nà-jiàn shì yě jiù suàn-le,*
 that-CL thing YE then let.it.pass
nǐ búbì zǒng guà zài-xīn-shang.
 you no.need always hang at-heart-on
 ‘Let’s just let that thing pass. You don’t need to always put it in mind.’
- (11) *Zhè diànshì yòng-le bā-nián le,*
 this TV use-PERF eight-year SFP
túxiàng néng tiáo-chéng zhèyang,
 image can adjust-become so
yě jiù hěn búcuò le.
 YE then very not.bad SFP
 ‘This TV has been in use for eight years. That we can adjust its image to this level is not bad at all.’

- (12) *Yuánlái, wǒ zài biérén-de yǎn-zhōng,*
 originally I at others-ATTR eye-inside
fēnliàng bǐ yí-ge yuánzǐ hái qīng.
 weight compare one-CL atom even light
Yě nánguài, nà shì lǐgōng-de niándài,
 YE difficult.blame that is science.engineering-ATTR time
liúxué-de niándài, yīshēng-de niándài.
 study.abroad-ATTR time doctor-ATTR time
 ‘So, I am even lighter than an atom in others’ eyes. Nevertheless, it is
 pardonable. (That is because) this is a time for people who study science
 and engineering, who study abroad and who are doctors.’

The sentences above all imply that the speaker simply accepts the current state of affairs in spite of the fact that it is not very satisfactory. In particular, the phrase *yě nánguài* ‘it is hard to blame anyone’ in (12) is a fixed expression in the sense that the two elements within the phrase always cooccur.⁶⁸ The phrase is used to express a certain kind of understanding or acknowledgement of some embarrassing or unpleasant situation and is often followed or preceded by a sentence which explains the situation. In this sense, this context is similar to the first context. Again, the “acceptance” sense in all above sentences has nothing to do with *yě* itself.

In Mandarin, the modal *yě* also occurs in a few other fixed expressions, e.g., *yěbà* and *yěhǎo*.⁶⁹ These expressions denote the meaning of “reluctantly accepting the way it is”, as is illustrated in (13) and (14):

⁶⁸ More examples of *yě nánguài* ‘it is hard to blame anyone’ can be found in Lü et al. (2010: 408). It is also important to distinguish this predicative use of *nánguài* in (11) from the adverbial use (translated as ‘no wonder’) of the same word which is always used when introducing a sentence expressing a truth or fact.

⁶⁹ There is also a conjunctive use of *yěbà* and *yěhǎo*, which denotes a free-choice reading like ‘either...or...’, which can also be classified as an additive use. One example is demonstrated below:

Dìdi qù yě bà, mèimei qù yě bà,
 Younger.brother go also fine younger.sister go also fine
dōu děi yǒu rén zài-jīa kàn-zhe lǎolao.
 all must have person at-home see-PROG grandmother
 ‘Either the younger brother or the younger sister can go there. But anyway, we
 must have someone left to take care of the grandmother.’
 (Hou 1998: 621)

- (13) *Bú huì lā bǎnchē yěbà,*
 not can pull handcart also.fine
néng kàn diǎnr shū zǒngshì hǎo de.
 be.able.to read little book always good ATTR
 ‘Well, I have to accept the fact that you cannot pull the handcart. (After all,) doing some reading is always good.’
 (Hou 1998: 621)
- (14) *Yěhǎo, bú duì yěbà. Wǒ wèn nǐ,*
 Well not respond also.fine I ask you
shì Huánghé qīng róngyì ne,
 is Yellow.River clean easy SFP
háishì guānlì qīng róngyì?
 or government.officials clean easy
 ‘Well, it is okay if you do not want to respond. But let me ask you: what is easier, for the Yellow River to become clean or the officials to be not corrupted?’
 (Hou 1998: 622)

As is shown in (13) and (14), *yěbà* and *yěhǎo* are used in the beginning or at the end of sentences expressing an unsatisfying fact. By using *yěbà* and *yěhǎo*, the speaker conveys an attitude of resignation. Therefore, the context of (13) and (14) is similar to that of (10)-(12). In this context, the sense of “acceptance” can be derived from other lexical elements in the sentence rather than *yě*, for instance, *hǎo* ‘good’, *bà* ‘end’, *suàn-le* ‘forget it’ and so on. Indeed, the adverb *jiù* ‘then’ in (10) and (11) can be used to express a firm or determined tone (Liu 2001: 252). Therefore, the contribution of the modal *yě* is only to add a reluctance or resignation reading to the acceptance.

The reluctance attitude expressed by the host sentence of modal *yě* results from the speaker’s evaluation about the current not very satisfactory situation. It also signals that the speaker is as well aware of the possible alternative, i.e., the ideal situation. Be that as it may, for now at least, the speaker has to accept the status quo. Therefore, the pragmatic function of *yě* is to “neutralize” the acceptance expressed by the current proposition. In order to do this, the use of modal *yě* triggers an assumption that the speaker may expect something different or something more ideal, i.e., an alternative.

5.2.3 The modal *yě* in a “denial” context

In addition to two contexts mentioned in the previous sections, another context should also be mentioned, which is illustrated by (15) to (18):

- (15) *Yě bù néng quán yuàn tā,*
 YE not be.able.to completely blame her
yàoshi wǒ yě gēn-zhe qù
 if I also follow-PROG go
xīngxǔ jiù bú zhìyú zhèyang le.
 perhaps then not to.such.an.extent.as.to so SFP
 ‘It is in fact not all her fault. If I went there together with her, things might not be like this.’ (Hou 1998: 620)
- (16) *Zhè-jiàn shì yě bù néng quán guài tā,*
 this-CL thing YE not be.able.to completely blame him
zhǔyào shì wǒ zuò de bù duì.
 mainly is I do DE not correct
 ‘We can’t blame this entirely on him. It is mainly due to my fault.’
 (Liu 2001: 246)
- (17) *Wǒ yě méi chī shénme bù gānjìng-de,*
 I YE not eat what not clean-ATTR
zěnmē huì shíwù zhōngdú ne?
 how be.possible food poisoning SFP
 ‘I did not eat anything that was not clean. How is it possible to suffer from food poisoning?’
- (18) *Zhè-duàn huà nǐ zhèyàng lǐjiě yě bú*
 This-paragraph words you like.this understand YE not
suàn cuò, yǐqián yě yǒu rén zhèyang
 count wrong previously YE have person so
jiěshì-guo, búguò duōshù-rén dōu bú zhème kàn.
 explain-EXP but majority-people all not so see
 ‘It is in fact not wrong to understand this paragraph in this way. Others have surely explained it the same way in the past, but most people don’t interpret it this way.’
 (Hou 1998: 620)

In these sentences, the modal *yě* is used in a clause which serves as a denial to people’s expectations or assumptions. For instance, (15) presupposes that people would blame ‘her’ for the difficult situation that they are faced with.

However, the speaker denies the presupposition by uttering the clause with *yě*. Similarly, because the speaker of (17) is suffering from food poisoning, the assumption (based on common sense) is that the speaker may have eaten something bad. However, the speaker denies this assumption. In this context, the denial is realized by the negation adverb *bù* ‘not’ and the denied presupposition can be derived from the context or common sense. Note that this contextual assumption is in fact overtly pronounced by the following sentence in (18). In other words, both the current proposition expressing denial and the presupposed alternative can be derived by elements other than *yě*. Then we may wonder: what exactly is the role of *yě* in this context? It seems that the modal *yě* here is used to send a clear signal that the speaker has acknowledged the presupposition or the assumption of the hearer, even though he has an adversative opinion. This acknowledgement act is by no means trivial, in the sense that this contextual alternative can only be activated and included in the discourse at work by acknowledging it. And the process of acknowledgement is naturally involved with the speaker’s judgement and weighing between the two alternatives. Marking explicitly the acknowledgement of an adversative expectation by the modal *yě*, the speaker leaves room for further discussion by denying the expectation.

So far, I have examined three contexts where the modal *yě* is used. Crucially, I separated the contextual aspects from the contribution of the modal word itself. A brief summary is demonstrated in (19).

(19) The function of the modal *yě* in different contexts

Utterance meaning of the host sentence without <i>yě</i>	Pragmatic function of the modal <i>yě</i>	Contribution of the modal <i>yě</i> to the utterance
(1) Expressing criticism or dissatisfaction	-Softening the tone of the criticism -adding a subjectivity flavor to the statement	-Triggering a background assumption which is contrary to the current proposition
(2) Expressing acceptance of the current state of affairs	-Adding a compromising or reluctant flavor to the acceptance	-Signaling the existence of an alternative, e.g., a more ideal situation
(3) Expressing a denial to people’s expectations	-Leaving room for further discussion of a denial	-Marking the acknowledgement of an adversative expectation of the hearer or a presupposition in the context

Interestingly, as an aside, all the Mandarin sentences with a modality *yě* can indeed be translated into Dutch equivalent sentences with *ook*, as is indicated in the following examples:⁷⁰

Context 1:

- (20) *Je moet ook niet zo op hem neerkijken,*
 you must OOK not so on him look.down
hij is wel /eigenlijk een professional, hoor.
 he is well/indeed one professional SFP
 ‘You’d rather not look down on him. After all, he has received
 professional training.’ (cf. (5))

Context 2:

- (21) *Deze zaak is nu ook wel klaar, je hoeft*
 this thing is now OOK well ready you need
je er niet altijd zorgen over te maken.
 you it not always care over to make
 ‘Let’s just let this thing pass. You don’t need to always worry about it.’
 (cf. (9))

Context 3:

- (22) *We kunnen haar ook niet helemaal de schuld*
 we can her OOK not all the fault
geven, als ik met haar mee was gegaan had de
 give if I with her with was gone was the
situatie anders kunnen zijn.
 situation different can be
 ‘It is in fact not all her fault. If I went there together with her, things
 could have turned out differently.’
 (cf. (14))

The similarities between Dutch *ook* and Mandarin *yě* confirm some universal value of this current research.

In what follows, the mechanism behind the contextual functions of modal *yě* will be discussed and I will argue that in all contexts, modal *yě* invariably indicates a concessive relation.

⁷⁰ The translated Dutch sentences are provided by Jeroen Wiedenhof.

5.3 The modal *yě* as a concessivity marker

It is clear from the table in (19) that the interpretation or the pragmatic role of modal *yě* shows context-dependence. However, concerning *yě*'s contribution to the meaning of an utterance, there is something context-independent: by using *yě*, the propositions in different contexts are all somehow connected with an existing expectation or a contextual assumption, i.e., an alternative proposition to the current one. It sheds some light on a possible “minimalist” approach to a unified account for the function of the modal *yě* in different contexts in line with some literature on the modal use of German *auch* (Dittmann 1982, Deherty 1987, König 1991, Karagjosova 2004). For instance, it has been proposed that the German modal particle *auch* is used to indicate an “inferential relation” between the proposition with *auch* and an existing assumption or a preceding proposition in the context (König 1991: 184, Karagjosova 2004: 234). The utterance where *auch* occurs can be taken as a “precondition”, “cause” or “reason” for the existing assumption, as is shown in (23):

- (23) A: *Sie haben vortreffliche Arbeit geleistet.*
 YOU.HONORIFIC have excellent job performed
 ‘You have done an excellent job.’
- B: *Ich habe auch Tag und Nacht geschuftet.*
 I have also day and night toiled
 ‘I have slaved away day and night.’
 (König 1991: 184)

Along with them, I would like to argue that the modal use of Mandarin *yě* indicates some relation between the utterance with *yě* and the contextual alternative. However, this relation may not be “inferential”. It is obvious from the above examples that the sentence with *yě* often expresses the speakers’ attitude such as criticism or acceptance based on some reasons. The propositions expressed by the host sentences are not used as a certain “precondition” or “cause” for this attitude. Instead, I propose that the modal *yě* marks a concessive relation between the contextual proposition and the proposition expressed by the host sentence.⁷¹ This proposal is supported by

⁷¹ Di Meola (1998) claims a close link between the concessive relation and causal (inferential) relation, i.e., concessivity is a “hidden causality”. König (1991) and König and Siemund (2000: 341-360) argue for an opposition between causal relation and concessive relation. The difference is similar to the presupposition of the causal and concessive constructions, i.e., the former presupposes “ $p \rightarrow q$ ” and the latter presupposes “ $p \rightarrow \neg q$ ”.

the fact that, if the contextual proposition is spelled out by a subordinate clause, all the Mandarin cases above can be rewritten into complex sentences connected by a conjunction expressing concessivity, e.g., *jīshǐ* ‘even if’ or *suīrán* ‘although’. This can be exemplified by the following sentences selected from each context mentioned above:

(24) *Jīshǐ/suīrán* *hěnduō rén* *shòudào yánlì*
 even.if/although many people suffer sharp
pīpíng *shí* *huì kū*, *nǐ yě* *tài jiāoqì* *le*.
 criticism when will cry you YE too squeamish SFP
 ‘Even if/ although many people will cry when they suffer from sharp criticism, you are a little bit too squeamish.’

(25) *Jīshǐ/suīrán* *wǒ rènwéi* *yīnggāi gèng yánsù*
 even.if/although I think should more serious
duìdài, *nà-jiàn* *shìqìng* *yě jiù suàn-le ba*.
 treat that-CL thing YE then let.it.pass SFP
 ‘Even if/although I believe that we should treat this thing more seriously, let’s just let it pass.’

(26) *Jīshǐ/suīrán* *dàduōshù rén* *bú zhème kàn*,
 even if/ although most people not so see
nǐ zhème *lǐjiě* *yě bú suàn cuò*.
 you so understand YE not count wrong
 ‘Even if/although most people don’t think like this, it is not wrong that you do.’

The paraphrase relations between (24)-(26) with an overt concessive construction and the corresponding sentences with modal *yě* (respectively, (7), (10) and (17)) support my claim that modal *yě* indicates a concessive relation.

In light of the common ground between sentences with an overt concessive construction and sentences with a modal *yě*, a suggestion that is comes up immediately is that the *yě*s in the two cases are of the same type. This does not refute my proposal that modal *yě* is a concessivity marker. We can subsume the use of *yě* in the complex sentence with an overt concessive subordinate clause under the modal use of *yě*, even though, different from sentences with typical modal use of *yě*, the concessive presupposition is

explicitly spelled out in the concessive sentence.⁷² Therefore, *yě* in the following sentences with a concessive connective could also be viewed as an instantiation of modal *yě*.

- (27) *Suīrán méi xià-yǔ, tā yě dài-zhe sǎn.*
 although not fall-rain he YE take-PROG umbrella
 ‘He took along an umbrella although it wasn’t raining.’
 (Hou 1998: 619)

- (28) *Tā suīrán bù jìgè, yě bèi lùqǔ-le.*
 he although not pass YE PASS admit-PERF
 ‘He was admitted although he did not pass the exam.’
 (Hou 1998: 619)

- (29) *Rénshēn gùrán yǒu zībǔ zuòyòng,*
 Ginseng admittedly have nourishing function
yě bù yí duō chī.
 YE not suitable a.lot eat
 ‘Eating a lot of ginseng is not good for you although it has nourishing effect.’
 (Hou 1998: 619)

When the concessive alternative is explicitly expressed as in (27)-(29), a concessive conjunction is necessary to connect the two parts. Otherwise, a modal *yě* is sufficient to mark the concessivity.

⁷² The content expressed by the subordinate clause in the concessive construction is assumed to be presupposed (König and Siemund 2000: 345-346). It is supported by the (i), considering the fact that the subordinate clause is not affected by negating and questioning the main clause.

- (i) a. *Suīrán méi xià-yǔ, tā yě dài-zhe sǎn.*
 although not fall-rain he YE take-PROG umbrella
 ‘He took along an umbrella although it wasn’t raining.’
 (Hou 1998: 619)

- b. *Suīrán méi xià-yǔ, wǒ bú-rènwéi/huáiyí*
 although not fall-rain I not think/doubt
tā yě dài-zhe sǎn.
 he YE take-PROG umbrella
 ‘I don’t think/ I doubt that he would take along an umbrella although it wasn’t raining.’

As shown in (9), modal *yě* can be replaced by other adverbs. Likewise, *yě* in the concessive constructions is interchangeable with other adverbs as well, such as *réngrán/háishi* ‘still’.

However, different from the scalar context, *dōu* is strongly dispreferred in concessive contexts, consider (30) (Hole 2004: 228):

- (30) *Suīrán* *méi xià-yǔ*,
 although not fall-rain
*tā yě / *dōu* *dài-zhe* *sǎn*.
 he YE DOU take-PROG umbrella
 ‘He took along an umbrella although it wasn’t raining.’
 (Hole 2004: 228)

Moreover, as briefly discussed in chapter 4, *dōu* is also in general dispreferred in the concessive conditional constructions. One example is repeated here as (31):

- (31) *Jìshǐ* *guówáng lái*, *wǒ yě / *dōu* *bú qù*.
 even if king come I YE DOU not go
 ‘Even if the king comes, I won’t go.’
 (Hole 2004: 223)

It seems that concessivity is the factor that blocks the use of *dōu* in these contexts. I will not further explore the underlying reasons. However, it again shows the difference between the parametric uses of *dōu* and *yě*.

So far, we can conclude that the modal *yě* contextual independently indicates a concessive relation between the contextual proposition and the proposition of the host sentence. Furthermore, the use of *yě* in the main clause of a concessive sentence should also be regarded as a modal use.

5.4 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, three contexts in which the modal *yě* can be used have been examined in detail. Although modal *yě* plays a specific pragmatic role in different contexts, it invariably signals the existence of a contextual proposition as an alternative to the proposition expressed by its host sentence. I argue that *yě* invariably indicates a concessive relation between the two propositions. The concessivity has to do with the neutralization or degradation effect and leads to a polite, indirect, tactful or less absolute reading of the host sentence. We thus have a concise account, yet with explanatory power.

A following question is: does the modal *yě* differ from the other two *yě*s? We seem to have all reason to argue that the modal *yě* is different from the

additive *yě*. For instance, as a modal particle, it is assumed to associate with the whole clause and it does not require an explicit or verifiable antecedent. Additive *yě* and modal *yě* also differ in stress patterns, i.e., additive *yě* can be stressed, but modal *yě* cannot.

However, it seems to me that the modal *yě* marking concessivity is closely linked to scalar *yě*. A piece of evidence in favor of the link is that in English the word expressing “concessive conditional” meaning is *even if* in which the concessive component is realized by *even*, which is a scalar marker as discussed earlier. As to Mandarin, in both concessive conditional constructions (e.g., with *jíshǐ* ‘even if’, a scalar context as discussed earlier) and purely concessive constructions (e.g., with *sūirán* ‘although’), *yě* is preferred to *dōu*.

Meanwhile, the function of both scalar *yě* and modal *yě* involves the speaker’s attitude or evaluation. It is pointed out by Greenberg (2019), that a scalar particle can be regarded as an “evaluative particle” with a scalar presupposition that indicates a degree that is higher than the salient standard. Likewise, it is generally agreed that modal particles can express a certain kind of belief or propositional attitude of the speaker.

Moreover, it is reasonable to argue that sentences with a modal *yě* involve a scale. It is indeed not difficult to put the contextual proposition and the proposition of the host sentence of modal *yě* on a scale. Take (7) as one example. On a scale of “being squeamish”, the behavior that “crying due to some mild comments” is evaluated as a very high degree and less-likely occurs. The alternative background assumption that many people may cry when they encounter severe criticism is measured as a lower degree on the “being squeamish” scale. In short, the two alternative propositions are ordered hierarchically.

On the basis of the above evidence, we can establish a close connection between the modal *yě* and the scalar *yě*. A following speculation will be that they occupy the same structural position in the CP since modal particles are also claimed to modify the whole sentence (Karagjosova 2004:19).

One last thing that I would like to point out is that although modal *yě* is clearly interpreted with a sentential scope which patterns with scalar *yě*, it roughly occupies the same (linear) position as additive *yě*. More research is necessary to bring these contradictory findings (or mismatch) in line with each other, also because this has consequences for additive *yě*: if modal *yě* is free to occupy a low position while being interpreted high, why would that not be possible for additive *yě*? I will look into this question in future projects.

