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CHAPTER 5

The pragmatics of modal *ergens*

The descriptions of modal *ergens* in previous chapters used mainly paraphrases like *in someone's feelings or thoughts, from a certain point of view* and *somehow* to express the various interpretations of modal *ergens*. In this chapter, the function and use of modal *ergens* will be discussed more elaborately using Mental Space Theory.

5.1 Introduction to Mental Space Theory

People's ability to speak and think about situations that are not occurring at that moment or are even impossible shows that humans are cognitively able to detach their current perceptual input from their thoughts. People may, for instance, talk about being on the beach when they are actually waiting for the bus in freezing weather. In other words, they build a mental space in which they are on the beach. Mental Space Theory (Fauconnier, 1994 [1985]; Sweetser and Fauconnier, 1996) tries to model the cognitive abilities of people via the study of their linguistic behavior.

Mental spaces are described by Sweetser (2012, 3) as follows:

A mental space is a partial and local conceptual representation, which can be mapped onto or combined with other such spaces to build complex conceptual structure. Mental spaces differ from other constructs, such as possible worlds, in being cognitive.

This means that according to Mental Space Theory people can make and combine all kinds of conceptual representations, which do not need to be linked to an actual real world situation. In order to invite other people to engage in building a mental

space that is not directly connected to the real world, speakers use so called *space builders* which may be used to invite the addressee to imagine a situation. Examples of space builders are *yesterday, if, on Hawaii, in the story* etcetera. By using these words the speaker signals to the addressee that he should not interpret references as pertaining to the situation here and now (i.e. the ground base space¹), but to a conceptual situation, which may not even exist in reality.

A speaker can also introduce more than one space as in the following example:

- (1) If I were rich, I would live in Hawaii and never wear a coat again.

By means of *if* and the past tense the speaker invites the addressee to build a space that is not in line with reality, namely that he is rich. Within this space, the addressee is again asked to build another space, namely one of living in Hawaii, which implies a warm climate. This shows that spaces can be embedded in each other.

It is also possible to let two spaces merge by putting references to two spaces in the same clause. An example is *free indirect speech* as in example (2).

- (2) Morgen zou hij verder lezen, maar nu moest hij echt gaan slapen.
 Tomorrow would he on read, but now had to he really go sleep.
 Tomorrow he would read on, but now he really had to go to sleep.²

In example (2), we are ‘listening’ to the thoughts of a character as described by a narrator. The viewpoint (and thus the mental space) of the narrator is present in the fact that this sentence is in the third person and in the past tense, whereas both *morgen* ‘tomorrow’ and *nu* ‘now’ refer to the situation and the viewpoint of the character. Also the thoughts that are expressed are part of the mental space of the character even though they are in the past tense and the third person. This way of merging two spaces in one sentence is called *blending* (Fauconnier and Turner, 1996, 2002).

A last example of a sentence that builds a complex (blended) space involving different viewpoints is the following:

- (3) Ik wou dat ik twee hondjes was dan kon ik samen spelen.
 I wished that I two small dogs was then could I together play.
 I wish I were two doggies, then I could play together.³

In this example, we have the speaker, I, who expresses the unreal wish to be two doggies. In this part of the sentence, an unreality space (marked by the past tense *wou* ‘wished’) is built, in which the speaker is two doggies. The use of the word *dan* ‘then’ implies that we have to interpret what follows from within the newly built space in which the speaker is two doggies. Normally, we would expect the following sentence to have the viewpoint of the new situation, instead of the viewpoint of the *ground base space* (i.e. the space which the speaker and the addressee perceive each other).

¹For the term see Ferrari and Sweetser (2012), elsewhere this is also just called the *the base space*.

²The example was taken from: <http://terrebel.blogspot.nl/2012/06/slaaptekort-een-verhaaltje.html>.

³From a poem often attributed to Godfried Bomans but which is probably a loan translation by Michel van der Plas from a German poem by Friedrich Torberg (Zaal, 2009, 183-185).

The space builder *ergens* has, however, also an effect on viewpoint, which will become clear if we substitute *ergens* with the epistemic adverb *misschien* ‘maybe, perhaps’ and compare the resulting interpretations. In example (5-a), the speaker suggests that someone else may be bothered by something. *Misschien* expresses that the speaker is not completely sure that what he states is true.

- (5) a. Misschien zat het hem niet lekker
 Perhaps sat it him not nice.
 Maybe he was bothered by it.⁵
- b. Ergens zat het hem niet lekker wat er gebeurd was.
 ERGENS sat it him not nice what there happened had
Ergens what had happened, bothered him.⁶

In (5-b), however, we automatically seem to get some sort of free indirect speech. The viewpoint in this sentence does not lie with the speaker anymore, but with the character of the story. The effect of *ergens* seems to be that the viewpoint switches from the speaker to the character. At the same time, a metaphorical space is set up. This metaphorical space is linked to the mind/feelings of the character and the feeling that bothers the character is located in this space.

The reason for this change of viewpoint seems to be that modal *ergens* requires the speaker to have access to the mental processes of the agentive subject. For instance in example (6-b), there is no change in viewpoint, because the speaker already has access to his/her own feelings. For the same reason, example (6-a) is awkward. A speaker is supposed to know what he feels and a marker of uncertainty does not comply with that assumption. Accordingly, no examples of this last type are found on the internet or in the corpora.

- (6) a. ?? Misschien zat het mij niet lekker.
 ?? Perhaps sat it me not nice.
 ?? Maybe it bothered me.
- b. Ergens zat het mij niet lekker.
 ERGENS sat it me not nice.
Ergens it bothered me.⁷

Native speaker intuitions of three speakers, however, agree that a phrase like (6-a) would be acceptable if we would add a *because*-clause. The reason is that the use of a causal connective suggests some evaluative distance between the speaker and his own feelings. That is, he seems to split himself into a person who is bothered and a person who is explaining that feeling. Making this type of split is, as we will see below, one of the main functions of *ergens* and by means of an epistemic adverb and a *because* clause, we get almost the same effect. As we will see below, creating a distance

⁵http://forum.girlscene.nl/forum.php/Schrijfsels/Verhaal_ik_had_je_lief/list_messages/142572/4?visitorId=71b8536e78b8205d998603138c75ff3c.

⁶<http://www.bloempje.nl/index.php?itemid=1246>.

⁷<http://forums.marokko.nl/archive/index.php/t-420909-p-4.html>.

between the speaker and the feelings in the *ergens* clause may play an important role in distinguishing the different uses of *ergens* and the possibility of replacing *ergens* with *misschien*.

If we now look at the use of *ergens* in examples that contain a contrast, as in (7), we see that the speaker accommodates two viewpoints within her own mental space. Some part of her thinks it (that is, cloning in order for childless couples to be able to have children) does have some beauty in it, another part of her thinks it is a step backwards.

- (7) ja als je toch speciaal ja een kind wil hebben en zo. ja ja. dan
 Yes if you PTCL especially PTCL a child want have and so. Yes, yes then
- ja ergens vind 'k 't wel mooi. Maar ergens ja 't is
 PTCL ERGENS am of the opinion I it PTCL beautiful. But ERGENS PTCL it is
- uh d... ja. 't is een stap achteruit vind ik uh...
 ehm d... PTCL it is a step backwards am of the opinion I ehm...
- If you especially want a child and all that. Yes *ergens* I think that is beautiful.
 But *ergens* it is.. It is a step backwards, I think, ehm...⁸

The presence of two viewpoints within one person can be described as a *split-self* (Lakoff, 1996). Lakoff shows that people seem to set up locations in their mental space for different values. If they are indecisive about which value they adhere to they even talk about *going back and forth* between them.

Something comparable seems to be the case in example (7). The person speaking seems to split herself into a part that is positive about cloning and a part that is negative about it. This way, the speaker shows her indecisiveness. However, this indecisiveness is not the same as uncertainty on the propositional level. In this case, it is impossible to replace both cases by *misschien* 'perhaps, maybe'.

However, there are also examples in which it is possible to replace *ergens* with *misschien* without the sentence becoming infelicitous. This may have to do with the distance created between the speaker and the values presented. Lakoff says that a speaker knows that one cannot have incompatible values. This means that one has to choose which value one wants to endorse.

- (8) Daar staat tegenover dat het ergens niet fair is om bepaalde kennis
 There stands opposite that it ERGENS not fair is to specific knowledge
- te hebben jij als individu en die dan niet vrij te geven in bepaalde
 to have you as individual and that then not free to give in certain
- omstandigheden.
 circumstances.

⁸From CGN comp-a/nl/fn000968.

On the other hand, it is *ergens* not fair for you as an individual, if you have specific knowledge, not to share that in certain circumstances.⁹

In example (8), the speaker avoids endorsing one of the values he proposes by not committing himself too much to the points of view that he sets up by using *ergens*. The sentence depends on an impersonal construction and there are no other particles. Because of this lack of connection between the mental space that is built by *ergens* and the speaker, bringing up a new point of view is only marginally different from presenting just another option that may be considered. This is relatively close to saying that something may be the case, which explains why in examples like (8) *ergens* can be replaced by *misschien* without changing the overall interpretation of the sentence in a fundamental way. I will explain this further.

In example (8) the use of *daar staat tegenover* which literally means ‘there stands on the opposite side’, suggests that the speaker wants to point out that there is another viewpoint that may be endorsed. By stating that the position is on the opposite side, he not only shows that the view is contradictory to the views that were taken before, but also that his own viewpoint is not (yet) in that position. If he wanted to put himself in that position, he had to say *in my view* or *I think*.

As we already saw above, modal *ergens* directs the focus of the attention to an epistemic mental space to which the speaker has access. In example (8), the use of modal *ergens* suggests that the speaker may take a viewpoint in his epistemic space in which the *ergens* sentence is true, although he does not exclude the possibility to take other viewpoints. The use of *daar staat tegenover*, earlier in example (8), however, has already set up a metaphorical mental space in which the speaker explicitly places himself in a different viewpoint from the two viewpoints he is describing. By not linking his own viewpoint directly to the viewpoint created by *daar staat tegenover*, the speaker has set up two possible viewpoints, that may be separate from his current viewpoint. The first is the viewpoint in which the opinion resides that was discussed before this sentence (i.e. that someone’s DNA-information, including the knowledge about illnesses and time of death is completely private and should be kept from anyone but the person him/herself). The second one contains the content of the complement clause. In addition, we have a third viewpoint, which is the speaker’s own viewpoint, that allows him to evaluate both without taking one of them as his own value. By splitting his own viewpoint from the other possible viewpoints, he creates an evaluative distance from the other possible viewpoints. The use of *ergens* in this sentence adds to this objectively construed metaphorical mental space a notion of subjectivity. The content of the *ergens* clause is only true if the speaker takes a specific viewpoint within his own mental space. From another point of view this would not be true. Because of the objective metaphorical space that is already set up, however, it is suggested that he leaves aside whether he will really choose to take this point of view in his mental space. As we already saw in the discussion of example (6-a), it is exactly this type of evaluative distance that allows *misschien* to be

⁹From CGN comp-n/vl/fv400567.

used, even though it normally cannot be used in a sentence the focus of which lies in the mental space of the speaker himself.

- (9) *Ergens* is dat natuurlijk ook wel lekker om te horen als mensen ja
 ERGENS is that of course also PTCL nice to to hear if people PTCL

't knap vinden dat je toch je je weet te
 it admirable are of the opinion that you PTCL you yourself know to

handhaven op zo'n school en voor zo'n klas. En aan de andere
 keep up at such a school and in front of such a class. And on the other

kant zeggen ze dan toch van nou ik zou dat nooit doen.
 side say they then PTCL of PTCL I would that never do.

Ergens it is nice to hear that people think you do a good job, keeping yourself up at such a school and in front of such a class. And on the other hand they also say like: I would never do that.¹⁰

As is clear from example (9), not all examples of *ergens* that contain an impersonal construction allow *ergens* to be replaced by *misschien*. In this example, the speaker is making an impersonal but subjective statement without distancing herself. This allows *ergens* to be automatically linked to the speaker's viewpoint within her epistemic mental space. Therefore, the function of *ergens* in this example seems to be mainly to evoke the image of a split-self. This split-self is needed because the speaker wants to express a conflict of values. On the one hand the comments people make seem to be compliments, on the other hand they reveal very low esteem for the job of teaching itself. Therefore, the speaker evaluates the same comment both positively and negatively, which she already expresses in the first sentence by means of *ergens*.

Saying that something takes place somewhere can mean that there is an undefined place as opposed to another place, as we saw in the previous examples, but it can also mean that the speaker is not able or willing to give much more information about a place without contrasting it with another place. This use we also find within the modal domain.

- (10) *Ergens* heb ik het gevoel dat veel mensen nu moeten huilen.
 ERGENS have I the feeling that many people now need to cry.

Maar waarom weet ik niet.
 But why know I not.

Ergens I have the feeling that many people will start crying now. But why I don't know.¹¹

¹⁰CGN comp-b/nl/fn000128.

¹¹<http://forums.marokko.nl/archive/index.php/t-3909154.html>.

In example (10), the implication of *ergens* that the speaker does not have or is not willing to give arguments for his statement is made explicit by *Maar waarom weet ik niet* ‘but why I don’t know’. The speaker suggests that this feeling has been found almost coincidentally in his own epistemic mental space without much more background information or argumentation. The effect seems to be that the addressee is not supposed to ask for an argumentation, because this is a purely subjective statement.

We can conclude that an important function of *ergens* seems to be to build a mental space in which one or more subjective views reside. This mental space can be used for split-self constructions, but it can also be used to carefully propose another view, in which case the effects of its use may be compared to the effect of an adverb like *misschien* ‘maybe, perhaps’. A third use is more like an indefinite. The speaker suggests that the source, reasons or arguments for a statement are unknown, which has the effect of warning the addressee not to ask for argumentation, but to consider the statement as purely subjective.

This new view on the function of *ergens* raises the question of how this can be linked to the interpretations that were used in the surveys and the collocational characteristics that were found in the corpus study. These questions will be discussed in the following section.

5.3 The connections between mental spaces, interpretations and collocations

The previous analysis of the pragmatics of modal *ergens* raises the question of what the relation is between the interpretations and the collocational characteristics we found in the previous chapters.

In the previous section, we found that the group of modal senses of *ergens* had one characteristic in common: the directing of the focus of attention to an epistemic mental space which is accessible to the speaker. This common feature may explain the fact that people generally choose consistently between modal and non-modal interpretations, but have much more difficulty choosing a specific modal interpretation within the modal category. It may be that one of the first things an addressee decides, is whether the place to which *ergens* refers is to be found in a base space (i.e. a non-metaphorical location) or in an epistemic metaphorical mental space.¹² The main differences we found between the modal categories and the non-modal categories were respectively subjectivity and relevance of the non-modal interpretations within the sentence. This last feature includes the question as to whether *ergens* is an argument of a verb or preposition. In addition, the non-modal interpretations generally have relatively clear collocations.

Although we found that modal *ergens* changed the focus of attention in all cases

¹²The term *epistemic* is used here in the sense of *based in the speaker's thoughts or beliefs*, contrary to the use of the term in the modal context in which it refers to the estimation of the truth of the proposition. For a discussion of this type of terminological confusion see Nuyts (2005).

to an epistemic mental space to which the speaker has access, we also saw that there were differences in the way this feature was used. In some cases we found split-self constructions, in other cases the subjectivity of the statement lead to the irrelevance of argumentation. We will now see whether and how these different uses of *ergens* correlate with the paraphrases that were used above.

The split-self effects are found in the *feelings* category and the *point of view* category. Generally, however, the split-self is implicit in the *feelings* category, whereas in the *point of view* category, the values within the split-self are explicitly mentioned. That is, in the *feelings* category it is only implied that there are also other points of view, whereas in the *point of view* category they are almost always explicitly mentioned and contrasted with each other. This may be directly connected to the use of adversative markers in the *point of view* category. These markers are used to contrast the two views with each other.

As was mentioned by Lakoff (1996), it is socially not accepted to hold two contradictory values. This problem, which arises most in the *point of view* category because of its explicit description of the two points of view, seems to be resolved either by explicit split-self constructions or by taking an evaluative distance from the two values. This evaluative distance also creates a split between a person's evaluative self and his stance. The explicit split-self constructions are expressed by adversative expressions like *on the other hand*, the more implicit distancing is found most frequently in the form of impersonal subjective copula constructions, which are preceded or followed by a contrastive view.

The function of making the statement so completely subjective that it is almost impossible to ask for any argumentation is mainly found in the *feelings* category. This may be connected to the use of mental state predicates and first person pronouns, because they clearly mark the subjective nature of a statement.

The *somehow* use of *ergens* brings together several of the points mentioned above, but it generally lacks the explicit subjective properties of the other two interpretations. Many cases in this category seem to be very weak cases of the *point of view* type, as in example (11). This is in line with the findings of survey 1, which showed that in 11 cases *somehow* and *point of view* were both chosen more frequently than chance for the same sentence. Only in 3 cases was the variation between the *feelings* interpretation and the *somehow* interpretation only.

- (11) D'r zitten d'r zat op 't IVBO met een goed verstand. Maar ze
there sit there enough at the IVBO with a good mind. But they

krijgen *ergens* de kans niet. Willen ook niet hoor.
get *ERGENS* the chance not. Want also not PTCL

There are a enough smart children at the IVBO, but they *ergens* don't get the chance. Neither do they want it.¹³

¹³From: CGN comp-b/nl/fn000130.

In example (11), the contradictory views are explicitly mentioned, but the connection to the speaker is very weak and there are no adversative markers. This makes the origin of and arguments for this point of view unclear to addressees. This results in the implication that it is unclear for the speaker why the situation described is as it is. This is exactly what modal markers like *op een of andere manier* 'somehow' do, they express that the background of or the reason for a certain situation is unclear, which is why this paraphrase works here. The adverb *misschien*, with which we contrasted *ergens* in the previous section, does not really work here, because it produces a different effect. The speaker does not express that she thinks this is only a possible explanation, but that it is only from some point of view/ partly an explanation, which makes replacement with *misschien* unsuitable.

Summarizing, we can say that the lack of variation in participants' judgements between non-modal and modal interpretations suggests that language users make a clear decision to interpret *ergens* within the ground base space or in an epistemic mental space. This is probably triggered both by the clear collocations that non-modal markers tend to have as well as by the presence of an argument position for *ergens* in the clause. In addition, there are subjective markers that tend to be present in two of the three modal categories, which may play a role in this decision.

The characteristics of modal *ergens* are more closely related, because they all direct the focus of the interpretation to an epistemic mental space to which the speaker has access. In most *feelings* interpretations there are no explicit contradictory views, although the use of *ergens* does seem to imply that the speaker does not reject other views. The frequent use of mental state predicates and first person pronouns may be linked to the use of *ergens* as a marker of complete subjectivity, which makes it pointless to ask for an argumentation, because the speaker suggests that he just found that view in his mental space by coincidence.

The *point of view* interpretation is found with two groups of examples, which are both characterized by the explicit expression of more than one option. On the one hand there are the split-self constructions, which are often characterized by adversative markers, on the other hand there are the cases in which the speaker places his viewpoint at an evaluative distance from the opinions expressed, suggesting that both options may be considered. These cases are characterized by impersonal subjective constructions like copular constructions with subjective adjectives.

In the cases that are interpreted as *somehow*, there is generally very little subjective content in the clause, but both views are mentioned implicitly. Many of these cases can be seen as weak instances of a *point of view* interpretation, but because they lack subjective content and contrasted views, they are not clear representatives of this category. The lack of subjectivity and the presence of action verbs results in almost no connection with the speaker. Often *ergens* implies that the speaker does not really know why the statement in the *ergens* clause is the case, which explains why it can be paraphrased with the modal uses of *op een of andere manier* 'somehow'.

5.4 Conclusion

The main function of modal *ergens* is to move the focus of the interpretation to a mental space to which the speaker has access. In this mental space *ergens* expresses a viewpoint of which the location is unspecified or indefinite. From this viewpoint the content of the rest of the *ergens* clause is endorsed. From other viewpoints, which are implicitly or explicitly acknowledged to exist, the *ergens* clause is not endorsed. This way *ergens* delimits the endorsement of the clause in which it is found.

The connection between the mental space analysis and the collocational conclusions that were drawn from the surveys and the corpus study are as follows: The *feelings* interpretation is characterized by an implicit existence of other options, first person pronouns and mental state predicates or other subjective predicates. The effect of this category is that a speaker suggests that within his own feelings or thoughts he has found a viewpoint, which may be different from the common or expected viewpoint.

The *point of view* interpretation is found in sentences in which the contrastive options are made explicit. This is frequently done by means of adversative markers. This category consists of split-self constructions and constructions in which the speaker evaluates possible viewpoints. These last cases are characterized by impersonal subjective copular constructions.

The examples with the interpretation *somehow* suggest some *point of view* interpretation, but there is very little subjective content and almost no relation to the speaker, due to the use of action verbs and the lack of subjective markers. Often *ergens* has the implication that the speaker does not really know why the statement in the *ergens* clause is the case, which explains why it can be paraphrased with the modal uses of *op een of andere manier* 'somehow'.

