



On epistemic modality and discourse strategy: Evidence from Galician adverbs



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ABSTRACT

This paper argues for a conceptual distinction between epistemic modality and discourse strategy, and aims to disentangle both notions by showing how they relate to each other on the basis of corpus data. The meanings of six Galician epistemic adverbs are studied using samples taken from an electronic corpus. 1800 observations were coded for the relevant meaning categories, including epistemic modality, mitigation, strengthening and other strategic and non-strategic uses, such as tendency and dynamic modality. The results reveal a relation between the epistemic value encoded by an adverb and the discourse strategic goals it serves: possibility adverbs feature several strategic uses, but only in a small portion of their occurrences; probability adverbs are almost purely epistemic; and certainty adverbs take on strategic functions most often. Thus, the study shows the viability and descriptive adequacy of distinguishing between modal and strategic uses of epistemic expressions.

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1. Introduction

This paper aims to draw the line between epistemic modality, on the one hand, and discourse strategies, namely mitigation and strengthening, on the other hand, using Galician epistemic adverbs as a case study. A widely accepted definition of epistemic modality characterizes it as an estimation of a state of affairs in terms of likelihood of occurrence, as made by the speaker (Nuyts, 2001, pp. 21–22). In this view, epistemic modality is a scalar semantic category that ranges from positive to negative certainty, with intermediary positions in between. Mitigation and strengthening are discourse strategies that modify the illocutionary force of the speech act, downplaying the utterance or reinforcing it, respectively (Holmes, 1984). While epistemic modality acts on the semantics of the clause, mitigation and strengthening operate on the speech act level. In formal terms, epistemic modality is known to constitute a complex formal paradigm, consisting of modal auxiliaries, cognitive verbs, adjectives and adverbs (Nuyts, 2001), whereas mitigation arises as an implicature when using preexisting linguistic forms (Albelda Marco and Estellés Arguedas, 2021b, p. 81). It is not clear, however, which category strengthening fits into. According to Albelda Marco and Estellés Arguedas (2021a, pp. 22–23), strengthening mirrors mitigation in that it is a context-dependent meaning. Yet, in the realm of discourse markers catalogues of strengthening operators are found (e.g., Freixeiro Mato, 2005, pp. 105–106), which suggests that strengthening, rather than being derived contextually in all cases, might be encoded by some expressions.

Epistemic adverbs have not been studied from a pragmatic perspective in Galician linguistics, but they have been dealt with in Galician grammars. Thus, Álvarez and Xove (2002, pp. 607–608, 627–628) include uncertainty adverbs in their class

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of modalizers, whereas Freixeiro Mato (2006b, pp. 511–512) includes them in his “adverbs of doubt.” In this taxonomies, prototypical epistemic adverbs such as *quizais*, *talvez*, *se cadra*, *ao mellor* (all the above close equivalents to English *maybe* and *perhaps*), *posiblemente* ‘possibly’, *probablemente* ‘probably’, and *seguramente* ‘surely’ are lumped together with inferential/reportative expressions such as *disque*, *seica*,¹ *polo visto*, and *ao parecer*, and non-adverbial expressions such as *poida/pode que* ‘it may be that’. As for adverbs of certainty, Álvarez and Xove (2002, p. 628) grant *abofé* ‘of course’, *certamente* ‘certainly’, *realmente* ‘actually/really’, and *verdadeiramente* ‘truly’ the status of modalizers. To find comparable expressions in the work of Freixeiro Mato one must look into the domain of discourse markers, particularly into the class of strengthening operators (Freixeiro Mato, 2005, pp. 105–106; Freixeiro Mato, 2006a, p. 171). This paper will delve into the uses of six Galician adverbs that convey different epistemic values, thus occupying different positions on the same semantic scale. In doing so, the focus of attention will be on the distribution of epistemic modality, mitigation, and strengthening meanings, but other uses of the adverbs will also be taken into consideration.

This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 explains the confusion between epistemic modality and discourse strategy and presents previous work that has succeeded in operationalizing the distinction between the two notions. Section 3 summarizes the corpus and method employed. Section 4 presents the pragmatic analysis of the six adverbs under scrutiny, distinguishing between non-strategic and strategic uses. Section 5 presents the results and discussion, while Section 6 adds some concluding remarks.

2. Setting the boundaries between epistemic modality and discourse strategy

On paper, epistemic modality and discourse strategies are clearly different linguistic phenomena. However, we often see epistemic values readily translated into strategic ones. Thus, the expression of an epistemic value of uncertainty tends to be considered an instance of mitigation, and something similar applies to strengthening, with the expression of certainty being automatically labeled as a case of reinforcement of the utterance. The next example offers an illustration of this approach:

- (1) *probabilmente è una conseguenza di un problema intestinale che è cominciato con l'influenza eh?*
‘it is probably a consequence of an intestinal problem that began with the flu eh?’

(adapted from Caffi, 2007, p. 103)

(1) is an Italian example extracted from an interaction between a doctor and a patient. In the example, the doctor makes his diagnosis, using *probabilmente* ‘probably’ to introduce it. According to Caffi (2007), this constitutes a case of mitigation, since the adverb “weakens the speaker’s degree of certainty about the whole proposition: the overall effect on the utterance is that the diagnosis is downgraded to a hypothesis” (Caffi, 2007, p. 103). This way, mitigation is directly associated with the “degree of certainty” of the proposition, that is, epistemic modality. Similarly, Hummel (2018) uses “epistemic mitigation” to refer to the fact that Romance equivalents of English *surely* and *certainly* “downgrade the truth value of the proposition” (Hummel, 2018, p. 111). From this perspective, literal uses of epistemic expressions of possibility and (im)probability are by definition cases of mitigation: what defines these linguistic devices semantically – their epistemic value – is the downgrading of the truth value of the utterance, which is in turn equated with mitigation.

In this context, the boundaries between the semantic content of epistemic expressions and their pragmatic use is distorted by equating the semantics of uncertainty with a mitigating pragmatic strategy, and the semantics of certainty with a strengthening pragmatic strategy. When dealing with the pragmatics of epistemic modal devices, it is necessary to take into consideration whether the use of a marker of doubt or certainty conveys the mental state of the speaker or if (besides that) it has the goal of achieving some type of special effect in discourse, such as downplaying or boosting the force of the assertion. The guiding assumption of this work is that only in the second case should the term *discourse strategy* be applied.

Although drawing the line between the semantics of linguistic expressions and their pragmatic effects is not always easy, previous work shows that the distinction can be operationalized. In her analysis of Spanish adverbial expressions of evidentiality, Albelda Marco (2016) considered the involvement of public face as a fundamental criterion to recognize mitigating uses of evidential markers. Her results show that there is no perfect match between evidentiality and mitigation thus understood: the latter is very frequent in conversations and interviews, where interlocutors interact directly, but is very infrequent in journalistic prose and political debates, where the purely evidential and the dissociative functions respectively prevail. These results (and those of similar works, such as Albelda Marco, 2018; Figueras Bates, 2018) show the key role played by the concept of public face in characterizing mitigation as a discourse phenomenon, and have paved the way to recent theoretical and methodological breakthroughs. In this connection, Albelda Marco and Estellés Arguedas (2021b) propose an operational definition of mitigation based on three dimensions: cognitive (“mitigation is the result of a speaker reading her hearer’s mind and suspecting her image in the hearer’s eyes might be endangered”, p. 83); social and rhetorical (“mitigation aims to achieve goals of human communication”, p. 83); and linguistic (“mitigation is realized through linguistic forms and mechanisms that minimize semantic or illocutionary intensity, increase vagueness, or defocalize the sources of enunciation”, p. 84).

¹ It is worth noting that evidential expressions *disque* and *seica* have been paid more attention than epistemic adverbs. They were studied by Rosales Sequeiros (2000) from the perspective of Relevance Theory, by Sousa (2012) from a grammaticalization point of view, and by González-Vázquez (2021) from a pragmatic angle.

Strengthening, also known as *emphasis* or *reinforcement*, has been paid far less attention than mitigation (Schneider, 2017, p. 24). Nevertheless, there also exist previous research that shows the appropriateness of distinguishing strengthening from the semantics of devices that typically express it, such as certainty adverbs (Byloo et al., 2007; Simon-Vandenberg and Aijmer, 2007) or general knowledge evidentials (Kotwica, 2020). Byloo, Kastein, and Nuyts (2007) study English *certainly* and Dutch *zeker*, distinguishing several uses, among which are epistemic modality and strengthening. Their results reveal a predominance of strengthening and a marginal character of epistemic modality: strengthening is the most frequent meaning for *certainly*, and it is quite relevant for *zeker*, whereas epistemic modality is the less frequent meaning for both adverbs. The authors conclude that “talking about certainty has a quite different conversational role from talking about uncertainty” and that maybe “terms specifically dedicated to expressing epistemic certainty are relatively less often ‘needed’” (Byloo et al., 2007, p. 56).

3. Corpus and method

This paper investigates the meanings of six Galician epistemic adverbs on the basis of corpus data. Lacking negative forms, adverbs are restricted to the positive side of the epistemic scale – from possibility (e.g., English *maybe*), through probability (e.g., English *probably*), to certainty (e.g., English *certainly*). The scalar character of epistemic adverbs is acknowledged by Galician grammars. Thus, Álvarez and Xove (2002, pp. 627–628) point out that adverbs may convey increasing degrees of probability: *posiblemente* lit. ‘possibly’ > *probablemente* ‘probably’ > *seguramente* lit. ‘surely’. Note that *posiblemente* and *seguramente* have faded away from their respective etimological meanings of possibility and certainty, and convey probability in Present-Day Galician. In order to give a consistent account of epistemic modality in the adverbial domain, the present work studies forms spanning over the whole epistemic scale. Hence, not only markers of probability, but also expressions of possibility and certainty were considered. The chosen adverbs and their mutual arrangement are captured in (2).

(2)	> <i>certamente</i>	[certainty]
	> <i>seguramente</i>	
	> <i>probablemente</i>	[probability]
	> <i>posiblemente</i>	
	> <i>quizais, se cadra</i>	[possibility]

The six adverbs were studied through present-day language data, which were extracted from the biggest corpus for Present-Day Galician, CORGA (Centro Ramón Piñeiro para a investigación en humanidades, 2017). In its version 3.0, CORGA had almost 37 million words of (mostly written) language from 1975 to 2014. The scarcity of spoken materials in CORGA led to the exclusion of spoken language from the corpus study, thus restricting the data to three written genres: narrative, essay, and press. Samples of 100 tokens per adverb and genre were taken, totaling 1800 data points, and submitted to careful pragmatic analysis.

4. Analysis

The pragmatic analysis consists of a classification of every instance of an adverb into one or more meaning categories. Such categories have been established through observation of the data, that is, by finding differences and similarities between occurrences. Therefore, the process was a constant round trip between data and definitions. This procedure, exclusively based on semantic criteria, was followed by Byloo et al. (2007) in their analysis of Dutch *zeker* and English *certainly*. Some authors (e.g., Simon-Vandenberg and Aijmer, 2007) have used other analytical devices, such as paraphrases, to establish meaning categories, but, at least in Galician, these are problematic. For instance, if we used *de verdade* ‘seriously, honestly’ or *efectivamente* ‘indeed’ to detect the non-epistemic uses of *certamente*, it would soon become obvious that such expressions do not provide a complete match, but rather alter the context where *certamente* originally occurred, and that they possess complex meaning patterns of their own. As a consequence, the use of paraphrases was dismissed as a methodological tool.

Another noteworthy observation has to do with the fact that, on many occasions, assigning a single value to a particular occurrence was not possible. In these cases, all the values observed were reflected in the annotation. These cases will be referred to as ambiguous.

A brief preliminary definition of each meaning category is provided below:

- Non-strategic uses
 - *Epistemic modality*. The adverb qualifies the state of affairs (SoA) in terms of likelihood.
 - *Situational dynamic possibility*. The adverb expresses a potential inherent in the SoA.
 - *Conditionality*. The linguistic string *se cadra* works as a conditional protasis.

- Strategic uses
 - *Mitigation*. The adverb downplays the force of the assertion for face-saving purposes.
 - *Strengthening*. The adverb reinforces the assertion.
 - *Tendency*. The adverb provides an orientation to an otherwise neutral polar question.

4.1. Non-strategic uses

4.1.1. Epistemic modality

Epistemic uses involve an expression of the speaker's assessment of likelihood of the SoA. Adverbs usually convey diverging epistemic values, corresponding to one of three dimensions (Hoye, 1997, p. 240): certainty, probability, or possibility, as illustrated in (2). The scalar character of epistemic modality might lead to conclude that all dimensions of the category are gradual. However, not all subcomponents of epistemic modality are gradable, an often neglected fact (Jiménez Juliá, 1989, pp. 202–204; Rodríguez-Espiñeira, 2010, pp. 196–198): whereas probability is a gradual dimension, certainty and possibility are conceptually simple, consisting of one discreet semantic value.

In its epistemic use, *certamente* expresses certainty that the (positive or negative) SoA applies. (3) gathers examples of this use in narrative prose and press.

- (3) a. *Foi esta indeterminación o que o induciu a non dicir nada á policía. Isto e os reberetes fantásticos do sucedido, que certamente farían pensar á policía nunha historia de drogas ou alcohol.*
 'It was this lack of resolution what led him not to tell anything to the police. That and the fantastic details of what had happened, which would certainly lead the police to think of a story of drugs or alcohol.'
 (1995, Narrative, CERTNARR0284)
- b. *Chámanlle imposición e compáranas coa que se fixo do castelán outrora. A falacia do argumento evidénciase cun similitudine que pode parecer antigo: Non é o mesmo destronar un rei lexítimo que repoñelo no seu trono. Certamente non leron a Paulo Freire na súa Pedagogía do oprimido, perfectamente aplicábel ao caso do galego.*
 'They call it imposition and compare it with what was done with Castilian in the past. The fallacy of the argument is made evident by a simile that may seem old: it is not the same to dethrone a legitimate king than to put him back in his throne. They certainly did not read Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, fully applicable to the case of Galician.'
 (2010, Press, CERTXORN0323)

The explicit marking of certainty flouts the maxim of quantity, raising pragmatic by-effects, such as signaling that the speaker is not really sure about what she is saying or that there is some reason to doubt it – why would she otherwise “insist” on an element that needs not be marked explicitly? This has been dubbed “an apparent paradox” by Halliday (2004, p. 625), that is, “the fact that we only say we are certain when we are not” (p. 625). Thus, (3a) and (3b) sound *less certain* than their unqualified counterparts.

In these examples, what *certamente* does is signaling the existence of the epistemic assessment, something that a bare assertion does not entail. In (3a) *certamente* expresses an epistemic qualification by the protagonist. However, it is the narrative voice who is producing this piece of language. For an omniscient narrator like this one, it would be strange to utter an epistemic judgment, which would question their unlimited knowledge of events. Thus, the presence of *certamente* forces us to interpret the utterance as an epistemic judgment made by the protagonist. The epistemic adverb is used to turn the clause into a prediction by the protagonist (an assessment of likelihood from a past temporal anchor), whereas without the adverb the clause could be interpreted as a report of facts by the omniscient narrator (what *will* happen in the protagonist's time frame, what *has* happened from the point of view of the narrator).

In (3b) *certamente* is used in a similar way, with different effects. This example is part of an article where the author calls for the restoration of all social uses of the Galician language. In this particular excerpt, she argues against the idea of the current imposition of Galician, and concludes that the supporters of such “fallacy” do not know Paulo Freire's work. Such supporters are unspecified (we do not know their referent), so the conclusion is introduced by *certamente* to denote an epistemic qualification, thus signaling that the SoA is the product of a reasoning process (rather than, say, world knowledge or hearsay): their ignorance of Freire's ideas is a logical conclusion of the preceding discourse. *Certamente*, conveying the degree of likelihood of the SoA, invites an inferential reading, since the context explicitly mentions the evidence (i.e., the “evident fallacy”) leading to the epistemic judgment. This inferential nuance of *certamente* is due to the context, and absent in most of its epistemic uses.²

Seguramente, *probablemente*, and *posiblemente* convey probability in their epistemic uses, that is, they present the SoA as the preferred hypothetical scenario. The following examples are from essayistic prose.

- (4) a. *A relación entre espacio e tempo é inequívoca. Seguramente foi Aristóteles o primeiro que tentou aprofundar, dentro do pensamento occidental, no concepto de espacio e tamén o primeiro en tentar de establecer a súa relación co tempo.*
 'The relationship between space and time is unequivocal. Aristotle was probably the first one, in Western thought, who tried to look into the concept of space and also the first one who tried to establish its relationship with time.'
 (1981, Essay, SEGUENSA0003)

² We must bear in mind that epistemic modality and inferential evidentiality refer to different aspects of the same reasoning process (Cornillie, 2009; Nuyts, 2017, pp. 72–73). Therefore, it may be the case that they often implicate one another, although in a way much weaker and more indirect than that of (3b).

- b. Segundo a STS de 2 de abril de 2001, a importación de obras lícitas non se podía sancionar conforme ao artigo 270 do CP. Polo tanto, xurisprudencialmente negábase esta posibilidade. O lexislador, sen embargo, en 2003 decántase pola posición contraria e reforma o artigo 270.2 da forma que expuxo. E iso permite pensar que probabelmente o que pretende o lexislador penal é precisamente sancionar a importación das copias lícitas e non as ilícitas, xa que esta última conduta xa sería de por si delituosa.
'According to the STS [Supreme Court Judgment] of 2 April 2001, import of legal works could not be punished in accordance with CP [Criminal Code] article 270. Therefore, this possibility was denied in terms of jurisprudence. The legislator, however, opts for the opposite stance in 2003, and reforms article 270.2 in the way they presented. And that allows (one) to think that what the criminal legislator probably intends is precisely to punish the import of legal copies rather than illegal ones, since the latter behavior would already be a criminal act by itself.'
(2008, Essay, PROBENSA0054)
- c. Mentres o home dependeu da caza para vivir non puido medrar de maneira notable, xa que non podía facer acopio de alimentos que lle permitiran enfrontarse a épocas de escaseza na caza. É coa aparición da agricultura, no neolítico, cando os alimentos poden acumularse e almacenarse e as poboacións medrar en número. Así, cara ó ano 8.000 antes de Cristo, a humanidade alcanza posiblemente unha cifra preto dos 5 millóns de persoas.
'As long as man depended on hunting to survive, he could not grow in a remarkable way, since he could not store up the food that would enable him to deal with periods of game scarcity. It is with the emergence of agriculture, in the Neolithic, when food can be accumulated and stored up, and populations can grow in number. Thus, around the year 8000 BC, humanity probably reaches a figure close to 5 million people.'
(1990, Essay, POSIENSA0097)

The adverbs denote decreasing degrees of probability. (4a) puts forward a stronger hypothesis than that of (4b), which is in turn stronger than the one contained in (4c). Moreover, the epistemic judgment in (4a) is exclusively ascribed to the writer, whereas the ones in (4b) and (4c) are presented as shared between the writers and others – they are opposed in terms of (inter)subjectivity in the sense of Nuyts (2015). (4b) is especially remarkable in this connection because it features a sentence that makes it obvious that the judgment is conceived of as impersonal or not exclusive to the writer (*E iso permite pensar que* 'And that allows (one) to think that ...').

Finally, *quizais* and *se cadra* express a neutral stance toward the occurrence of the SoA (i.e., possibility), when used as epistemic markers. Examples are from dialogical contexts – a newspaper interview and a fictional conversation.

- (5) a. —¿Roberto Blanco Torres vende máis cós escritores doutros anos? —Quizais estea vendendo máis. Pode deberse á figura e ó espírito que crea Blanco Torres pola forma en que morreu.
'—Does Roberto Blanco Torres sell more than writers from previous years? —Maybe he is selling more. It may be due to the character and spirit that Blanco Torres creates because of the way he died.'
(1999, Press, QUIZXORN1278)
- b. —Era bandida. —¿Boa ou mala? —Nunca me parara a pensalo, pero, se cadra, era boa—sorriu—. Coma Robin Hood.
'—She was a bandit. —A good one or an evil one? —I had never given it any thought, but, perhaps, she was good—she smiled—. Like Robin Hood.'
(1992, Narrative, SECANARR0365)

In strictly semantic terms, a qualification in terms of epistemic possibility expresses that the qualified SoA is not barred by evidence. However, expressions of epistemic possibility are often more than professions of ignorance and must rely on positive evidence (Przyjemski, 2017, pp. 187–190). When the speaker puts forward a particular hypothesis, she is highlighting it as a good candidate to explain some aspect of reality. In fact, reporting on any possibility that may be compatible with what the speaker knows – anything that is not barred by evidence – potentially flouts the cooperative principle and hinders effective communication. (5) contains examples where the epistemic judgment is (i) relevant on account of a previous intervention by the interlocutor and (ii) based on the speaker's knowledge, which is made explicit in (5a).

4.1.2. Situational dynamic possibility

Dynamic possibility is usually characterized as the ascription of an ability to the first argument participant in the SoA. A typical example includes the use of the modal auxiliary *can* in a sentence like *She can swim 10 km in a row*. Two types of dynamic possibility are often distinguished (e.g., van der Auwera and Plungian, 1998), depending on whether the ability is seen as inherent to the participant or as imposed on them. Nuyts (2016) argues for the inclusion of a third type of dynamic possibility, namely a situational one that expresses "possibilities/potentials (...), but then not related to any participant in the state of affairs in particular, but inherent in the state of affairs described in the clause as a whole" (Nuyts, 2016, p. 35). In my sample of Galician adverbs, situational dynamic possibility is conveyed by *posiblemente*, *quizais*, and *se cadra*. This meaning is always ambiguous with an epistemic modal qualification. In fact, the epistemic reading seems more likely in all cases, but the dynamic interpretation is still feasible. Examples are the following:

- (6) a. Eran os animais desta raza os que compoñían o goso das expedicións dirixidas aos matadeiros de fora da Galiza, lugares onde ao efectuar as pesaxes, posiblemente, se confundisen os caracteres dunha e outra estirpe.
'It was animals of this breed that comprised the bulk of the shipments headed for slaughterhouses outside Galiza, places where, at the moment of weighing, the traits of both breeds were possibly confounded.'
(1981, Essay, POSIENSA0002)
- b. Sempre había que cear ás horas máis dispareas. Se cadra un día xantaba ás doce da mañá e ceaba ás once da noite; outro tiña que xantar ás catro da tarde e xa non ceaba; e ó día seguinte había que pasar sen almorzar, e quizais xantase ás once da mañá e cease ás cinco da tarde.
'Dinner always had to be had at the most disparate hours. Perhaps one day he had lunch at noon and dinner at 11 p.m.; another day he had to lunch at 4 p.m., and did not have dinner; and on the next day breakfast had to be forgone, and he maybe had lunch at 11 a.m. and dinner at 5 p.m.'
(1992, Narrative, QUIZNARR0883)
- c. Pasou a ser unha rapariga normal, que ía á escola, xogaba cos nenos da rúa e o día das Angustias, se cadra, levaba o cadaleito dun meniño salvado ao pé da morte (...)
'She became a normal child, who attended school, played with the kids on the street, and on the Día das Angustias [Day of Anguish], perhaps, carried the coffin of a little child saved at death's door ...'
(2005, Narrative, SECANARR1086)

In these examples, the epistemic adverbs can be read as expressing either a potential inherent in the SoA (i.e., dynamic modality), or a possibility/probability based on the speaker's knowledge (i.e., epistemic modality).

4.1.3. Conditionality

Conditionality is only found in *se cadra*, which originated from a conditional clause consisting of the conditional conjunction *se* 'if' and the present indicative third person singular form of *cadrar* 'to be convenient' or 'to coincide'. It is very similar in origin and function to Portuguese *se calhar* (see Rodríguez-Espiñeira, 2019). The availability of the conditional use in *se cadra* is a sign of the recent emergence of this epistemic adverb. In the conditional use, the meaning of the expression is compositional, conveying a condition based on chance ('if it happens to be') or convenience ('if it is convenient'). The conditional use is always ambiguous with an epistemic modal reading. Some examples follow.

- (7) a. *Pero, se estudar non lle leva idea, mándao ao conservatorio, que, se cadra, acaba na Nacional, dando concertos polo mundo adiante ...*
 'But, if he does not want to study, send him to the music school, since, perhaps/if the chance arises, he ends up in the National [Orchestra], giving concerts around the world.'
 (1996, Narrative, SECANARR0660)
- b. *Ben podemos recapitular agora os principais puntos xa tratados denantes de enfrentámonos ó epílogo deste traballo, a desamortización. Cando tentemos de explicala poderemos, se cadra, recoller algún froito de todo o que aquí levamos exposto.*
 'Well, we may now summarize the main points already discussed, before heading toward the epilogue of this work, the *desamortización* [ecclesiastical confiscation]. When we try to explain it, we will be able, perhaps/if the chance arises/if it is convenient, to reap benefits from what we have presented thus far.'
 (1982, Essay, SECAENSA0020)

(7a) exemplifies the most frequent scenario, where the epistemic meaning is ambiguous with a chance conditional. By contrast, (7b) is the only case in the samples where the epistemic meaning coexists with the convenience conditional – note, though, that the chance conditional also seems a feasible reading. This seems to support the idea, put forward by Rodríguez-Espiñeira (2019), that the chance meaning of the conditional clause was the one that led to the emergence of the epistemic meaning.

4.2. Strategic uses

4.2.1. Mitigation

With the exception of *certamente*, all epistemic adverbs in the data samples feature mitigating uses. Mitigation is a discourse strategy whose aim is to reduce the force of the assertion, for face-saving purposes. In essence, mitigation is a way of sounding less aggressive in order for the message to come across as less unfavorable toward someone – usually, but not necessarily, the hearer/reader. Some examples follow.

- (8) a. *Traballos coma o de DKTC, Lamatumbá, The Homens, Loretta Martin, Zênzar, Compañía do Ruido, Marful, Galegoz ... demostran que a música ferve en cada recuncho, cadaquén co seu carácter propio, por iso recoméndolles ás persoas que se ocupan de facer crítica musical que teñan coidado e sexan respectuosos. Se cadra non convén falar de mundos que non se coñecen antes de condenalos.*
 'Works such as those by DKTC, Lamatumbá, The Homens, Loretta Martin, Zênzar, Compañía do Ruido, Marful, Galegoz ... show that music swarms every corner, everyone with their own character, that is why I recommend people concerned with musical review to be careful and respectful. Perhaps it is not convenient to talk about worlds that are unknown for oneself before condemning them.'
 (2006, Press, SECAORN0656)
- b. *Apurei a repeti-lo último número do teléfono. Equivoqueime polas présas. Posiblemente tampouco nos poderíamos ver hoxe, sentíao. Por moito que insistía e repetía a palabra sentir, non me servía de consolo.*
 'I rushed to repeat the last telephone number. I failed because of the hurry. Possibly we could not see each other today either, he was sorry. No matter how much he insisted on and repeated the word sorry, it did not offer me any consolation.'
 (1993, Narrative, POSINARR0248)

These are some of the few unambiguously mitigating examples in the data. The adverbs do not convey here an epistemic qualification, but rather downplay the force of the assertion. In (8a) the writer uses *se cadra* to mitigate his deontic judgment, thus sounding less aggressive toward "people concerned with musical review." In (8b) *posiblemente* introduces an indirect speech passage where the first person narrator represents the words of her telephonic interlocutor. The juxtaposition of the sentence led by *posiblemente* and the one containing the apology reveal that the use of the epistemic adverb is purely mitigating, as not being able to meet is not a hypothesis but a fact to be sorry about. An epistemic reading, that is, a judgment about the likelihood of the SoA, does not seem feasible in either case.

That mitigating uses are common in interactional settings is no surprise: mitigation is often aimed at saving the hearer's face. A typical case involves a directive speech act, which inherently threatens the interlocutor's negative face, that is, their desire of "freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 61). (9) is an example.

- (9) *De súpete Eva advertiunos que estábamos sós; "se cadra deberíamos pedi-la conta". Pero esta circunstancia foi interpretada doutro xeito polo persoal do restaurante, que, na figura da propietaria (...), se achegou a nós, saudou a Nano e, con toda naturalidade, sentou na nosa mesa.*
 'Suddenly, Eva warned us that we were alone; "perhaps we should ask for the bill." But this situation was interpreted in a different way by the staff of the restaurant, particularly the owner ... who approached us, greeted Nano, and, taking all in stride, sat with us at the table.'
 (2001, Narrative, SECANARR0896)

In this example, the quoted speaker uses *se cadra* to introduce her order, thus mitigating the directive speech act. The use of the *pospretérito* or conditional form *deberíamos* ‘we should’ instead of the present indicative *debemos* ‘we must’ is also telling, since this is a known mitigating strategy (Álvarez and Xove, 2002, p. 281; Freixeiro Mato, 2006b, p. 353).

However typical conversational examples are, mitigation is found in other settings as well. (8a) and (10) instantiate cases in which, despite the lack of a direct interlocutor, a mitigating discourse strategy is present in the use of the adverbs.

- (10) *Había só dúas semanas, eu dixera que a moza do Bruto era unha estreita co gusto no cu, e dixérao a voz en grito, un sábado pola noite que todo o mundo anda por aí, e por riba mentres mexaba nunha farola. Ben, algo borracho quizais fose, pero agora ía pagalo a prezo de ouro.*
 ‘Just two weeks before, I had said that the Brute’s girlfriend was prudish and had an awful taste, and I had said so shouting, a Saturday night when everybody is out, and, on top of that, while I was pissing on a streetlight. Well, I was maybe a little bit drunk, but now I was about to pay through the nose for it.’
 (2000, Narrative, QUIZNARR2040)

What is special about (10) compared with the previous examples is that mitigation is used here to save the speaker/writer’s (in this case, the first person narrator) own face. Not only does the narrative voice use the possibility adverb *quizais* to reduce the force of an assertion that would compromise him, but he also alters the semantics of the clause by means of the quantifier *algo* ‘a bit’, a typical example of a *bush*, that is, a mitigator that acts on conceptual meaning (see Caffi, 2007, pp. 98–102).

Mitigating uses of *seguramente* deserve a separate mention. There is a recurring pattern in the data that involves the use of *seguramente* with a second person subject and a modal future form.³ Some of the mitigating examples are the following.

- (11) a. *Nesta altura do estudio, o lector seguramente terá ben claro que a viúva non só está sometida ás tensións que nacen dentro de si senón a todo un cúmulo que provén do entorno social en que se move.*
 ‘At this point of the study, the reader surely knows that the widow is not just subject to the tensions arising within herself, but also to all those stemming from the social context she lives in.’
 (1991, Essay, SEGUENSA0049)
- b. *Seguramente comprobarías que na inmensa maioría de libros de ciencia ou de historia da ciencia a penas podemos atopar algún nome de muller.*
 ‘Surely you have noted that in the vast majority of science or history of science books we can hardly find any woman’s name.’
 (1999, Essay, SEGUENSA0137)

In these examples, *seguramente* functions as a mitigating device that saves the reader’s face. The writers’ intentions are to build solidarity with the reader, which is why they explicitly mention the information they assume to be known for the reader, solving the risk of the them ignoring it. Not using *seguramente* (nor the modal future form) in these cases would be assuming too much on the reader’s part, whereas using a possibility adverb would be assuming too little – both options being face-threatening for the reader. The high probability conveyed by *seguramente* seems to provide the perfect fit for these contexts.

If one excludes (8), all of the above cases allow an epistemic reading along with the mitigating one, that is, the adverbs assess the SoA as possible or probable, and, in doing so, they downplay the force of the assertion in order for the message to sound less aggressive.

4.2.2. Strengthening

In this use, *certamente* reinforces the assertion it occurs in. This assertion is often some kind of assessment, as in (12), where the speakers/writers express an aesthetic and a quality judgment, respectively.

- (12) a. *Cunqueiro, que escribe, certamente, moi ben non nos agrada moitas veces.*
 ‘Cunqueiro, who certainly writes very well, does not please us in many cases.’
 (2005, Press, CERTXORN0193)
- b. —*Luís Seoane, que naceu en Bos Aires e era fillo de emigrantes, foi probablemente o galego máis universal de todos eses anos (...). ¿Coñeceuno vostede? ¿Como o recorda? —Coñecino en Bos Aires a través de Rodolfo Prada. Era un home excepcional, certamente.*
 ‘—Luís Seoane, who was born in Buenos Aires the child of expatriates, was probably the most universal Galician of those years ... Did you know him? How do you remember him? —I met him in Buenos Aires thanks to Rodolfo Prada. He was an exceptional man, certainly.’
 (1993, Essay, CERTENSA0103)

In (11), *certamente* bolsters the point of view of the speakers/writers, emphasizing their commitment to the assessment (i.e., Cunqueiro’s quality as a writer and Seoane’s exceptionality). This is a very frequent reason to use *certamente* in its strengthening function. Nevertheless, this use of the adverb is also found with ‘neutral’ descriptions of facts, as in (13).

- (13) a. *Unha loba! A tarefa non era doada, máis ben era imposible. Certamente, as lobas, para parir e sacar adiante os seus lobetos, afástanse dos seus conxéneros, co que o fillo do ferreiro non tería que enfrontarse a toda unha manda.*
 ‘A she-wolf! The task was not easy, it was rather impossible. Indeed, she-wolves get away from their fellow wolves to carry forward their pups, so the blacksmith’s son wouldn’t have to deal with a whole pack of wolves.’
 (2008, Narrative, CERTNARR0704)
- b. *O problema radica en que restan dous asentos para tres grupos, o que de entrada deixa o BNG sen practicamente ningunha posibilidade de manter a vicesecretaría que ocupou Carme Adán no anterior mandato (...) Certamente o regulamento do Parlamento permitiría que o PSdeG quedase cos dous postos, sen ceder ningún nin a AGE nin ao BNG. Esta posibilidade, malia que resta representatividade e pluralidade á Mesa, cobra cada vez maior forza (...)*
 ‘The problem is that there are two seats left for three groups, which at first glance leaves the BNG [Galician Nationalist Bloc] with virtually no chance of keeping the Vice-Secretariat held by Carme Adán in the previous term ... Certainly the regulation of the Parliament would allow the PSdeG [Socialists’ Party of Galicia] to retain the two seats, without giving any of them either to AGE [Galician Alternative of the Left] or to the BNG. This possibility, despite it undermines the representativeness of the Bureau, becomes ever stronger ...’
 (2012, Press, CERTXORN0334)

³ Modal uses arise in future-oriented indicative tenses (viz. the so-called *futuro* ‘future’ and *pospretérito* ‘future preterite’ or conditional) when, instead of conveying a future perspective from a present or a past reference point, they locate the SoA in the present or the past, adding a modal overtone. A typical Galician example is *serán as 10* ‘it must be 10 o’clock’, where the *futuro* conveys an inferred SoA in the present.

In (13), *certamente* strengthens utterances that do not convey the personal view of the writer but general information about the world, that is, a description of reality rather than an interpretation thereof – in the above cases, she-wolves habits and Parliament's regulation. While the rhetorical usefulness of strengthening one's point of view is obvious, the reasons for highlighting “objective” information are less clear at first glance. However, underlining particular pieces of information has more to do with the purported relevance of the latter in the discourse context than with their “(non-)neutrality” or “objectivity”. Thus, *certamente* in (13) highlights information that, despite (supposedly) being generally known, is key to understand the situation under discussion. By using the adverb, the writer marks the content of the utterance as part of the common ground between the writer and the reader, thus recognizing the reader as equally knowledgeable and avoiding sounding naive by presenting as new information that is, or might be, widely known. The use of *certamente* in the previous examples (12) is also due to this type of contextual relevance: the aesthetic judgment is strengthened in (12a) in order to downplay the force of the negative view expressed in the main clause, whereas the quality assessment in (12b) is strengthened to show that it is in agreement with the interlocutor's perspective.

The strengthening use is often aimed at triggering a polyphony that enables the speaker/writer to show agreement with an external source. Such source may be explicit, typical instances being the direct interlocutor in a conversation, as in the interview in (12b), and a referred work in an essayistic text, or implicit, as in (13b). Therefore, *certamente* codes intersubjectivity – in Nuyts' (2015) sense –, which allows it to evoke different voices in discourse, and plays a key role in triggering polyphony, especially when the external source is implicit. In a way, *certamente* in its strengthening uses serves a discourse-structuring function, connecting the assertion it occurs in with other pieces of information, be them preceding or following utterances or implicit expectations. Pietrandrea (2008) found Italian *certamente* to behave in a very similar way.

Given the tendency of the adverb to interact with contextual information, it is no wonder why it is often found in concessive contexts. A typical instance is (14).

- (14) *O vocabulario, certamente, foi enriquecido por un certo número de expresións novas, pero nin o fondo esencial do léxico nin o sistema gramatical, que constituíen o fundamento dunha lingua, foron liquidados ou reempazados (...)*
 ‘The vocabulary was certainly enriched by a number of new expressions, but neither the essential lexical pool nor the grammatical system, which constitute the foundation of a language, were erased or replaced.’
 (1988, Essay, CERTENSA0039)

In this example, the adverb strengthens the first clause, which is then contrasted with the following clause, introduced by *pero* ‘but’. *Certamente* thus reinforces the conceded part of the utterance, flagging that particular piece of information as known and shared. Consequently, no reason was seen to classify concessive cases into a separate category. In fact, the adverb's ability to appear either in the conceded clause, as in (14), or in the contrasting clause, as in (15), makes it obvious that it plays no role in the definition of the concessive syntactic pattern.

- (15) *Pode parecer unha digresión gratuíta a insistencia en subliñar a viaxe simbólica dos homes de “Nós” dende a cultura europea ata a cultura galega. Mais non o é, certamente, para os obxectivos do presente traballo (...)*
 ‘Insisting on underlining the symbolic journey of the “Nós” generation from European culture to Galician culture may seem a gratuitous digression. But it certainly is not for the goals of the present work ...’
 (1988, Essay, CERTENSA0036)

The adverb may certainly be taken as a signal of a concessive discourse strategy when it scopes over the concession, as it announces the forthcoming contrast, but at any rate the adverb retains its strengthening value – it reinforces agreement, usually in order to render the upcoming disagreement less aggressive.

Strengthening uses are often ambiguous with epistemic uses. In cases such as (16), *certamente* allows both interpretations: it conveys either that the speaker/writer considers it 100% likely that the SoA applies (i.e., epistemic modality), or that they strongly ascertain that what they say is true (i.e., strengthening).

- (16) a. *Pois tampouco pagaba a pena vivir se tiña de facelo en permanente anguria. Diante de todo contaba a súa tranquilidade. E certamente un crime non sería o que mellor lla aportaría.*
 ‘Living was not worth it if it had to be done in permanent anguish. His peace of mind was first. And a crime would certainly not be the best thing to give him it.’
 (1991, Narrative, CERTNARR0173)
 b. *A solución podía ser un intento de desbloquear o proceso autonómico galego, pero certamente non supoñía unha mellora do proxecto.*
 ‘The solution might be an attempt to unblock the Galician autonomic process, but it certainly did not constitute an improvement of the project.’
 (1980, Press, CERTXORN0004)

Finally, there is a special case of strengthening that involves the use of *seguramente*, which assesses as highly likely an assumption that threatens the interlocutor's face. Formally, this use is very similar to mitigating uses of the adverb, see (11), since it involves a second person subject and a modal future. However, context reveals that the intention of the speaker is to challenge their interlocutor, rather than build solidarity with them. (17) is the only example of this use in the dataset.

- (17) —(...) Pero, ¿como sabe vostede tanto de nós se nunca viñemos aquí? —;Ai, meu neno!—salaíou a Metralla—. *Eu sonche soa e o meu único divertimento é falar coa xente, e falando sábense cousas. Ademais aquí na aldea o tempo non corre igual que nas cidades. Aquí temos máis tempo para falar. Gústanos saber o que lle sucede á xente que está connosco, e saber que foi da que xa non está connosco. —Seguramente saberá quen foi Leonel—espetou de pronto Ana, sorprendendo tamén a Miguel. —¿Leonel? ¿Quen é? Non sei ... Non é unha persoa da parroquia, ¿pois non? Anque ... , ai si, esperade, algo me soa ese nome, pero non consigo lembrar ... ¿Para que o queredes saber?*
 ‘— ... But, how do you know so much about us if we had never come here? —Oh, my boy!—sighed “the Metralla”—. I am alone, and my only form of entertainment is talking to people, and by talking one gets to know things. Besides, here in the village, time does not go by as in cities. Here we have more time to talk. We like to know what happens to people who are with us, and what happened to people who is not with us anymore. —Surely you

know who Leonel was—suddenly blurted out Ana, surprising Miguel too. —Leonel? Who is that? I don't know ... He's not a person from the parish, is he? Although ..., oh yes, wait, that name is somewhat familiar, but I can't remember ... Why do you want to know?' (1996, Narrative, SEGUNARR0916)

In (17), *seguramente* conveys an epistemic evaluation about whether the interlocutor knows someone called Leonel. However, the utterance does more than just put forward a hypothesis: the speaker reinforces the utterance, thus challenging her interlocutor, since she highly expects that the SoA applies, that is, that the hearer knows Leonel, which needs not be the case. This challenging use crucially depends on the high epistemic assurance encoded by *seguramente*: the absence of an epistemic marker would render the sentence a description of facts, whereas the presence of a weaker epistemic adverb, such as *quizais* or *se cadra*, would not threaten the interlocutor's face – it would rather be a polite way of asking for information.

This example illustrates the use of strengthening in conflict settings, where this pragmatic strategy is used to threaten the interlocutor's face for impoliteness purposes. Situations of conflict where these challenging strengthening uses arise are not frequent in written language, but they are often found in spoken discourse, as shown in the work of Brenes Peña (2011), focused on television talk shows.

A worthy observation, but one that cannot be taken further here, is that the mitigating and challenging uses of *seguramente* have different intonations – the former being unmarked, the latter having the intonation typical of declarative sentences that precede tag questions.

4.2.3. Tendency

Epistemic adverbs occurring in interrogative sentences are known to modify the tendency of the question (Bellert, 1977, p. 344; Nuyts, 2001, p. 58), and the ones found in this study are no exception. *Quizais* and *se cadra* occur in polar questions to achieve special effects in discourse, as in the next examples.

- (18) a. —¿O meu home?! ¿Que deixa a Olimpio dono de todo?! —exclamou Leonor. —Exacto —confirmou a xuíz. (...) —Debe ter moito tino cando lle dea a noticia ó seu home —aconsellou—. Por certo, ¿onde me dixo que estaba?
E sen agardar resposta, lanzoulle: “Porque ... desculpe a indiscreción pero, ¿non morrería?” (...)
—¿Está enfermo *quizais*? —aventurouse a dici-la xuíz. —Non, non, enfermo que eu saiba non —respondeu Leonor. E antes de que a señoría interrogase de novo, afirmou: —Está de viaxe.
‘—My husband?! He left everything to Olimpio?!—exclaimed Leonor. —Exactly—confirmed the judge—You must be very careful when telling the news to your husband—she advised—. By the way, where did you say he is?
And without waiting for a response, she blurted out: “Well ... sorry for the indiscretion, but he is not dead, is he?” ... —Is he sick, maybe?—ventured the judge. —No, no, he is not sick, as far as I know—replied Leonor. And before her ladyship could interrogate her again, she stated: —He is on a trip.’
(1998, Narrative, QUIZNARR1871)
- b. —¿Por que me observades con tanta curiosidade? —preguntou Hasefus ao universitario— ¿*Se cadra* xamais vistes un estranxeiro?
‘—Why are you observing me with so much curiosity? —Hasefus asked the university student— Have you perhaps never seen a foreigner?’
(2000, Narrative, SECANARR1970)

In these examples, the adverbs turn a neutral polar question into a tendentious one, that is, the speakers use the adverb to show that they are biased toward one of the alternatives posed by the question. Specifically, the speakers imply that what is asked is true – in the above cases: ‘your husband is sick’; ‘you have never seen a stranger’ – and this has different effects depending on context. In (18a), it indicates that the speaker suspects that her interlocutor has knowledge about the SoA, thus suggesting that the latter is withholding information from her. In (18b), the concealed affirmation threatens the hearer's face as a reaction to his curious (and, one supposes, annoying) way of looking. It is obvious that in neither of these examples the epistemic component is the focus of concern.

5. Results and discussion

Table 1⁴ shows the absolute frequency of each use or combination of uses by adverb. The unambiguous epistemic use is the most frequent for all adverbs but *certamente*. Whereas for the rest of the adverbs unambiguous epistemic modality represents between 81% and 99% of their uses, for *certamente* the share goes down to 6%. All instances of meaning ambiguity involve the epistemic meaning. Many ambiguous uses represent a very small fraction of the semantics of an adverb (<1%), but some are notable, such as the epistemic/strengthening use in *certamente* (19%), the epistemic/conditional use in *se cadra* (9%), or the epistemic/mitigating use in *quizais* and *se cadra* (approx. 5%). Unambiguous non-epistemic uses are rare, such as the mitigating and tendentious ones, with the exception of the strengthening use in *certamente*, which is the main meaning of the adverb (75%).

⁴ For the sake of space, on Table 1 only the first four letters of each adverb (columns) are used and some meaning denominations (rows) are also abbreviated.

Table 1
Absolute frequency of uses by adverb.

	cert	segu	prob	posi	quiz	seca
epist.	18	292	299	292	282	243
epist./cond.	0	0	0	0	0	27
epist./dynamic	0	0	0	3	1	5
epist./mitigating	0	7	1	4	15	17
epist./strengthening	57	1	0	0	0	0
mitigating	0	0	0	1	0	2
strengthening	225	0	0	0	0	0
tendentious	0	0	0	0	2	6

Adverbs of uncertainty (*seguramente*, *probablemente*, *posiblemente*, *quizais*, and *se cadra*) are primarily epistemic: more than 80% of their uses correspond to unambiguous epistemic modality. Mitigation is the only non-epistemic use shared by all of them, although it appears in modest quantities (<7%, considering ambiguous and unambiguous cases). In this use, the adverbs downplay the force of the assertion in order for the speaker/writer to sound less aggressive. Typical uses arise in spoken interaction (or written representations thereof) but the data shows that mitigation is not uncommon in written language either.⁵ *Posiblemente*, *quizais*, and *se cadra* have dynamic modal uses, that is, they can be interpreted as expressing a potential inherent in the SoA, in a few cases (<1.7%). *Quizais* and *se cadra* are the only adverbs in the sample that appear in interrogative sentences, where they modify the tendency of the question, implicitly asserting that what is asked is true, with various contextual effects. *Se cadra* is used as a conditional protasis (always ambiguously with epistemic modality) in a small but consistent portion of cases (approx. 9%), which is in line with its recent diachronic development (Rodríguez-Espiñeira, 2019).

Certamente is the most deviant epistemic adverb in the sample, as it does not have epistemic modality as its primary meaning. In fact, unambiguous epistemic modality accounts for only 6% of its uses, whereas ambiguous epistemic uses represent 19%. *Certamente* is essentially a strengthener that acts as a polyphonic trigger, reinforcing the assertion and relating it to contextually retrievable information. These results have some cross-linguistic validity, as they are in agreement with findings for Italian *certamente* by Pietrandrea (2008) and for Dutch *zeker* and English *certainly* by Byloo et al. (2007).

The main conclusion that can be drawn from the pragmatic analysis of epistemic adverbs is the existence of an asymmetry between the epistemic value encoded by the adverb and the discourse strategic goals it serves: whereas possibility adverbs feature a variety of strategic uses, in minor quantities, and probability adverbs are close to being purely epistemic expressions, an adverb of certainty is used strategically on most occasions. This asymmetry stems from the divergent communicative status of certainty and uncertainty. The former does not require linguistic marking, unlike the latter, which must be explicitly marked. This makes adverbs of certainty less viable than other epistemic markers, because they flout the maxim of quantity (i.e., they are redundant, since a bare assertion already conveys certainty), and may pose a risk of threatening the interlocutor's face by asserting the speaker's cognitive superiority (they are a way of saying 'I know more than you'). The reason why the strategic use is so prominent in an adverb like *certamente* is that strengthening avoids the pragmatic problems of certainty, so that the adverb aligns with the rhetorical goals of the speaker/writer, becoming a useful tool to show agreement or acknowledge the contribution of others to one's discourse.

Although the main contrast is between certainty and uncertainty adverbs, the latter do not constitute an homogeneous group. Possibility adverbs are clearly more versatile than probability adverbs in terms of strategic meaning. They are used as mitigators more often, and have tendentious uses, which probability adverbs lack. As for mitigation, this difference is likely to be down to the epistemic dimensions themselves. Epistemic possibility provides the ideal semantic value to downgrade the force of the assertion, as it qualifies the SoA with the lowest degree of likelihood, turning it into the weakest hypothesis possible. Epistemic probability, however, would yield too strong an assertion, making this epistemic value a less viable source of mitigating uses in most contexts. Probability adverbs do work as mitigators, though, since a stronger epistemic value may be more effective in some particular situations. For instance, *seguramente* occurs with a second person subject to build solidarity with the addressee when something is assumed to be known by the latter.

6. Concluding remarks

This study has shown how epistemic modal meanings are different from, but are related to, discourse strategies including, but not restricted to, mitigation and strengthening. Epistemic modality pertains to the realm of meaning representation, whereas discourse strategies revolve around the management of the communicative act. Illocutionary force is modified by altering the meaning component of the utterance (see Albelda Marco and Estellés Arguedas, 2021b, pp. 73–74), and the fact that some types of linguistic expressions (e.g., minimizing quantifiers, evidential and epistemic markers) are frequently used to modify illocutionary force must not obscure their having a semantic meaning independent from the discourse strategies they may serve. In fact, discourse strategies such as mitigation rely on context-dependent implicatures that arise in the use of

⁵ 20/47 or 42.6% of mitigating uses of the adverbs occur in written representations of spoken language (fictional dialogues, interviews, etc.), whereas the rest (27/47 or 57.4%) occur in "pure" written language.

many different types of expressions, rather than on closed linguistic paradigms. Uncertainty adverbs relate to mitigation in these terms. As for strengthening, it is the dominant unambiguous meaning in adverbs of certainty, which makes it harder to argue that it is derived contextually from certainty, since the latter is not present in most occurrences of the adverbs. This is in line with the initial observation that strengthening might be encoded by some sets of linguistic expressions (viz. strengthening operators).

Declaration of competing interest

There is no conflict of interest with this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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