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## A Relevance-Theoretic Account of Some Constraints on Syntactic Parentheticals: Evidence from English and Polish

### Abstract

The present article has two main goals. First, it attempts to contribute to the linguistic research on parentheticals by drawing attention to some constraints on syntactic parentheticals, i.e. parenthetical comment clauses including a predicate (verb or adjective) expressing the propositional attitude and/or source of the information presented in the host clause into which the parenthetical comment is interpolated or which it follows. Second, it offers an analysis illustrated with data from English and Polish which derives the observed constraints from the cognitive mechanisms independently argued for in Relevance Theory, thus offering support for the approach to syntactic parentheticals taken in this pragmatic framework. The constraints focused on here include: (a) the requirement that the parenthetical comment be upward-entailing on the epistemic scale of the strength of speaker commitment; (b) the requirement that the host proposition update the common ground and (c) the requirement that the propositional attitude of the speaker to the host clause proposition be indicated with mood markers. All of the constraints are argued here to stem from the nature of the cognitive inferencing mechanisms that guide verbal communication and in particular, from the necessity – in certain communicative contexts – of accessing the illocutionary force, the propositional attitude of the speaker's utterances, and the strength of the speaker's commitment for the purposes of meeting the hearer's expectations of relevance. Building on Wilson (2011), evidential parenthetical comments are argued here to communicate that the speaker's information is well-evidenced and demonstrate the speaker's reliability.

### Keywords

parenthetical comment clauses, Relevance Theory, commitment, epistemic vigilance

### Streszczenie

Artykuł omawia ograniczenia, którym podlegają parentetyczne ciągi komentujące (tj. parentetyki stanowiące zdania, w których orzeczenie jest wyrażone czasownikiem opisującym postawę epistemiczną mówiącego względem propozycji zawartej w zdaniu głównym, w którego obrębie parentetyk się znajduje) i argumentuje (na podstawie danych z języka angielskiego i polskiego), iż analizowane ograniczenia wynikają z postulo-

wanych w teorii relewancji mechanizmów poznawczych, z których korzystają uczestnicy procesu komunikacji, gdy zachodzi potrzeba oceny siły illokucyjnej wypowiedzi, postawy epistemicznej mówiącego i stopnia gotowości mówiącego do zaspokojenia oczekiwań stosowności przez odbiorcę danego komunikatu. Celem artykułu jest wykazanie, że: (a) parentetyk wchodzący w skład wypowiedzi epistemicznej może zawierać tylko funkcyjny epistemiczny implikujący przekonanie mówiącego, że zachodzi stan rzeczy, o jakim mówi, (b) propozycja wyrażona w zdaniu głównym musi się przyczyniać do uaktualnienia wspólnego dla mówiącego i odbiorcy danego komunikatu kontekstu interpretacyjnego wypowiedzi i (c) postawa epistemiczna mówiącego względem propozycji zawartej w zdaniu głównym musi być przedstawiana za pomocą zdań z czasownikiem w formie osobowej, gdyż tylko taka forma gramatyczna pozwala na tworzenie trybu czasownika, dzięki któremu jest wyrażany stosunek mówiącego do treści wypowiedzenia. Artykuł dowodzi, że rolą parentetycznych ciągów komentujących zarówno w języku angielskim, jak i polskim jest sygnalizowanie odbiorcy komunikatu wiarygodnej postawy mówcy względem wypowiadanych treści.

### Słowa kluczowe

parentetyczne ciągi komentujące, teoria relewancji, zaangażowanie mówiącego, czujność epistemiczna

## 1. Background: parenthetical predicates and their syntactic, semantic and pragmatic properties

Following Urmson (1952), verbs such as *think*, *believe*, *suspect*, etc. are generally analysed as parenthetical and as such, they have an interpretive effect on the propositional content of the clause that they combine with. The generally accepted view is that parenthetical clauses, i.e. clauses with a parenthetical predicate, a verb or an adjective, mitigate the speaker's epistemic commitment, i.e. they modify or weaken the claim to the truth of a simple assertion  $p$  contained in the clause that the parenthetical clause modifies. Thus, while B is fully committed to the truth of the proposition she offers in an answer to A's question in (1a), in all of the utterance in (1b)–(1j), the degree of her commitment is weaker (cf. Simons 2007: 1036):<sup>1</sup>

- (1) A: Who was Louise with last night?  
 B: a. She was with Bill.  
 b. Henry thinks/I think she was with Bill.  
 c. Henry believes/I believe she was with Bill.  
 d. Henry said that she was with Bill.  
 e. Henry suggested that she was with Bill.

<sup>1</sup> In (1b)–(1j), it is the embedded clause that is the main point or information focus of the utterance, but in other contexts, the main clause with a parenthetical verb may have the main point status (cf. Simons 2007: 1036):

- (i) A: What is bothering Henry?  
 B: He thinks that Louise was with Bill last night.

- f. Henry hinted that she was with Bill.
- g. Henry imagines/I imagine that she was with Bill.
- h. Henry supposes/I suppose that she was with Bill.
- i. Henry heard/I heard that she was with Bill.
- j. Henry is convinced/I'm convinced that she was with Bill.

When the embedded clause has main point status, as in (1b)–(1j), the parenthetical clause, which is the main clause, carries information about the source and/or reliability of the truth of the embedded proposition and can thus be taken to have evidential meaning.<sup>2</sup> For example, by using the parenthetical verb the speaker of (1d) indicates that the source of the information in the embedded clause is Henry and that its truth is as reliable as Henry can be taken to be reliable. By indicating Henry as the source of the information, the speaker conveys that she is not to be taken to be (fully) responsible for the truth of the embedded proposition *p*. According to Simons (2007: 1037), the oddity of the utterances in (2) offered as answers to A's question in (1) follows from the fact that hopes and wishes generally do not provide good evidence for the reliability of the truth of the clause constituting the main point of the utterance, i.e. the embedded clause:

- (2) a. (?Henry hopes/I hope that she was with Bill.
- b. ?Henry wishes that she was with Bill.

However, parenthetical main clauses are not restricted to expressing only speaker commitment or source of knowledge. As pointed out by Hooper and Thompson (1973), Ifantidou (2001) and Rooryck (2001), among others, a parenthetical predicate can also indicate a degree of probability, indicate speaker's concession, mark politeness, carry an emotional or subjective evaluation such as (dis)approval, or serve to express speaker's surprise or to attenuate hearer's surprise, which Rooryck (2001) refers to as the surprisal meaning, etc. This suggests that in parentheticals, verbs undergo a change of meaning towards a purely evidential or evaluative meaning (Rooryck 2001: 128). Some examples from Hooper and Thompson (1973: 478), Rooryck (2001: 128) and Simons (2007: 1051) are given in (3):

- (3) a. It is likely that Kissinger is negotiating for peace. [probability]
- b. We are pleased to announce that your visa has been renewed. [politeness]
- c. I am afraid that your insurance policy has been cancelled. [surprisal]

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<sup>2</sup> Understood narrowly, evidentials indicate only (the type of) the source of evidence for the proposition expressed, e.g. hearsay. On the broad definition of evidentiality (cf., among others, Ifantidou 2001; Rooryck 2001; Speas 2004), evidentials indicate (the type of) the source of evidence for the proposition expressed and/or the degree of its reliability/probability/certainty. See Ifantidou (2001) and Rooryck (2001) for discussion of the range of evidential meanings.

A clause with a parenthetical verb need not appear preceding the clause that it combines with, as shown in (4) and (5). Interpolated into the host clause or following it, a parenthetical clause is generally taken not to have the main point status. Rather, it is the host clause that is focused (cf., among others, Grimshaw 2011; Simons 2007) in such structures, which I will refer to as syntactic parentheticals here after Simons (2007).<sup>3</sup> Also in sentence-medial or sentence-final positions, parentheticals express evidential meanings, including the degree of the speaker's commitment to the truth of the host proposition (cf. (4a)) or the source of the information (cf. (4b)), as well as additional emotional and evaluative meanings, as demonstrated in (5) from Rooryck (2001: 128):

- |  |               |
|--|---------------|
| (4) a. Jules is back, I think.         | [speculative] |
| b. Jules is back, they say.            | [hearsay]     |
| (5) a. Jules is back, can you imagine! | [surprisal]   |
| b. Jules is back, I'm sorry to say.    | [surprisal]   |

Although parenthetical predicates contribute evidential or evaluative meanings to the utterances in which they occur, i.e. have interpretive effects on the propositions that they combine with, sentences with main clause parenthetical predicates (cf. (1)–(3)) are often distinguished from syntactic parentheticals (i.e. structures with a parenthetical clause interpolated or following the host clause) such as (4)–(5) in view of a number of special grammatical, semantic and pragmatic properties (cf., among others, Ifantidou 2001; Grimshaw 2011; Hooper and Thompson 1973; Rooryck 2001; Ross 1973).<sup>4</sup>

From the syntactic point of view, while the complementiser *that*, an indicator of a subordinating relation, is always available in (1)–(4), in constructions like (5), which are referred to here as syntactic parentheticals after Simons (2007), the complementiser *that* is unavailable, as demonstrated in (6b)–(6c):

- (6) a. They said (that) it was raining hard.  
       b. \*That it was, they said, raining hard.  
       c. \*That it was raining hard, they said.

When the main point clause is a question, it must have interrogative syntax, unlike embedded questions, regardless whether they have the main point status or not. Furthermore, the interrogative complementiser *whether*, which could flag the main point clause as a question, is disallowed (Grimshaw 2011):

<sup>3</sup> Ifantidou (2001) refers to such parentheticals as genuine.

<sup>4</sup> An early account focusing on the grammatical properties of syntactic parentheticals is Ross (1973), where parenthetical verbs are analysed as *slifting* (for 'sentence lifting'), i.e. as triggering the lifting of the complement clause in the syntax. A more recent study focusing on the grammatical properties of syntactic parentheticals is Grimshaw (2011).

- (7) a. He wondered whether she had made a mistake/\*whether had she made a mistake.  
 b. Had she made a mistake, he wondered.  
 c. \*Whether she had made a mistake, he wondered.  
 d. \*Whether had she made a mistake, he wondered.

In addition, unlike in constructions with a parenthetical verb in the main clause such as (1)–(3), where the embedded clause need not be finite, in syntactic parentheticals, the host clause must be finite, i.e. it must be marked for illocutionary force (Grimshaw 2011; Hooper and Thompson 1973):<sup>5</sup>

- (8) a. I promised them that I would leave.  
 b. I would leave, I promised them.
- (9) a. I promised them to leave.  
 b. \*To leave, I promised them.
- (10) a. I insisted that she learn to sing.  
 b. \*That she learn to sing, I insisted.

On the semantic side of things, the non-parenthetical or host clause in syntactic parentheticals is a semantic argument of the parenthetical, which is unsaturated in the absence of the host (Grimshaw 2011):

- (11) a. They surmised that Mary was a talented singer.  
 b. Mary was a talented singer, they surmised.  
 c. \*They surmised.

Furthermore, there are selectional restrictions between the parenthetical clauses and the hosts into which they interpolate or which they follow, which are analogous to the restrictions that main parenthetical verbs impose on their semantic arguments syntactically encoded as complements. Only predicates that allow propositional complements can combine with declarative host clauses in syntactic parentheticals and only predicates that allow interrogative complements can combine with interrogative host clauses in syntactic parentheticals:

- (12) a. Mary believed/\*wondered that Harry would like the film.  
 b. Harry would like the film, Mary believed.  
 c. \*Harry would like the film, Mary wondered.

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<sup>5</sup> In view of the syntactic differences between the sentences with predicates used parenthetically as main clause verbs embedding a complement (cf. (1b)–(1j), (3)) and syntactic parentheticals (cf. (4)–(5)), I will assume here the host clause has the main clause status in the latter. However, as this issue does not bear on the problems discussed in this paper, I will remain agnostic about the derivation of syntactic parentheticals, but see Rooryck (2001) for an overview of different approaches to how syntactic parentheticals arise in the grammar of natural language.

- (13) a. Mary wondered/\*believed whether Harry would like the film.  
 b. Would Harry like the film, Mary wondered.  
 c. Would Harry like the film/\*Mary believed.

Grimshaw (2011) takes the existence of a selectional relationship, whereby the parenthetical predicate semantically selects the semantic type of the host as evidence that the host clause is a semantic argument of the syntactic parenthetical. Assuming that the host is the semantic argument of the parenthetical predicate, if a *pro*-form such as *so* or *it* that occurs in the parenthetical clause fills the position of that argument, the host clause and the *pro*-form are incompatible, as they compete for the same argument position. This is shown in (14b) from Grimshaw (2011).<sup>6</sup>

- (14) a. Is Mary a talented singer? The students said/thought \*(so).  
 b. Mary was, the students said/thought (\*so), a talented singer.

Apart from their special syntactic and semantic properties, syntactic parentheticals are also special from the pragmatic point of view. Although the host clause has often been analysed as an assertion (cf., among others, Urmson 1952; Hooper and Thompson 1973), in discourse, a syntactic parenthetical with a declarative host cannot be used to answer a question (Grimshaw 2011), unlike a declarative sentence with the parenthetical predicate in the main clause:

(15) What did Fred say?

- (16) a. He said that he was an idiot./That he was an idiot.  
 b. \*He was an idiot, he said./\*He was, he said, an idiot.

Also interrogative host clauses in syntactic parentheticals are not used as requests for information:

- (17) a. What, he wondered, was going to happen next?  
 b. \*I haven't a clue.

If the host clauses in syntactic parentheticals have the syntax and semantics of main declarative and interrogative clauses, but they do not have the pragmatic functions of declaratives and interrogatives in that the former are not assertions and the latter are not used as requests for information, the question that arises is how the parenthetical clause influences the pragmatic function of a syntactic parenthetical. This is a valid question, as Ifantidou (2001) has convincingly shown that parenthetical comments can be truth-conditional and such syntactic parentheticals could be expected to be make assertions. In this paper, I will follow Ifantidou (2001) and Jary (2011), who claim the function of

<sup>6</sup> See Grimshaw (2011) for a discussion of the apparent exception, the parenthetical *I take it*.

parenthetical predicates is to indicate that the speaker does not take responsibility for the content of the host clause in a syntactic parenthetical (cf. (4)–(5)) or for the content of the clause embedded under a parenthetical verb as in (1) and that she only takes responsibility for the contents of the clause including the parenthetical verb (cf. also Simons 2007). Assuming with Sperber et al. (2010) and Wilson (2011) that the speaker has two main goals in communication: that her audience understand her and that the audience believe what she is communicating or else the speaker's utterance will not pass the epistemic vigilance mechanisms of the hearer, who needs to understand and to protect himself from being misinformed, the hearer does not only need to recover the degree of commitment communicated by the speaker, but he also needs to assess the certainty and reliability communicated by the speaker's utterance to integrate the utterance in his cognitive environment. Wilson (2012: 32) suggests that the role of evidentials is to "display the communicator's competence, benevolence and trustworthiness to the hearer." Thus, the pragmatic function of parenthetical clauses seems to lie not only in activating and constraining the comprehension procedure, but also in activating the hearer's epistemic assessment procedures which assess the reliability of the content of the communicated information as well as those which assess the reliability of the source of information. Even if the speaker indicates a high degree of commitment to the content communicated in the host clause, to the extent that she is not judged as reliable, the speaker's utterance may still not pass the hearer's epistemic vigilance mechanisms.<sup>7</sup> As I will show in this paper, the grammatical constraints on syntactic parentheticals pointed out above as well as the constraints on the distributions of the parenthetical predicates themselves, which cannot include the component of factivity in their meaning, as demonstrated in (18) and which cannot fail to contribute some evidence for the truth of the host clause, as shown in (19) from Hooper and Thompson (1973), provide support for the relevance-theoretic account of parentheticals as guiding the assessment of the degree of the speaker's commitment by the hearer, his assessment of the reliability of the source of information as well as the degree of strength that the hearer attributes to the information for the purposes of integrating it into his cognitive environment.

(18) \*Santa has lost a lot of weight, I regret.

(19) \*Kissinger is negotiating for peace, it is likely.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses how parentheticals have been analysed in Relevance Theory. In Section 3, I offer

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<sup>7</sup> The speaker's utterance may fail to meet the hearer's expectations of achieving maximum cognitive effects at the least cognitive effort if the speaker is judged as trustworthy, but she produces an inherently acceptable or an inherently unacceptable utterance (cf. Wilson 2011 for discussion).

a relevance-theoretic account of the constraints on parenthetical comments. Section 4 provides conclusions. The analysis of the constraints on syntactic parentheticals is supported with data from English and Polish, as in both languages syntactic parentheticals have similar special grammatical properties. For example, *że*, the Polish cognate of the complementiser *that* introducing embedded declarative clauses in Polish does not have a null variant and its absence in the host clauses of the syntactic parenthetical in (20) provides even stronger evidence for the main point status of the host clause than in English, which has a null variant of the complementiser *that*.<sup>8</sup> As will be shown in Section 3, English and Polish parenthetical comments have similar semantic and pragmatic properties and are subject to similar distributional constraints.

- (20) a. *Myślę, że/\*∅ Janek wróci jutro.*  
 think-1sg that/∅ John comes.back tomorrow  
 'I think (that) John will be back tomorrow.'
- b. *\*Że/∅ Janek wróci jutro, myślę.*  
 That/∅ John comes.back think-1sg  
 'John will be back tomorrow, I think.'

## 2. Evidential syntactic parenthetical clauses in Relevance Theory

In most general terms, relevance-theoretic studies of syntactic parentheticals offered by Blakemore (2005, 2006, 2007, 2009), Dehé and Kavalova (2006), Ifantidou (2001), and Kavalova (2007) (cf. also Carston 2002; Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995; Wilson and Sperber 1993) have focused on explaining how parentheticals contribute to explicit and implicit communication and on elucidating the types of meaning that they can encode. The parenthetical material (which can be a word, a phrase, or a clause) has been argued to assist the hearer in deriving the intended cognitive effects of an utterance and to help achieve optimal relevance, as it may diminish the effort of memory and inference by helping the hearer to achieve early and correct disambiguation and reference

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<sup>8</sup> By contrast, interrogative host clauses do not offer direct evidence for the ban on the interrogative complementiser in Polish, unlike English (cf. (7b)–(7c)). The reason is that both main and embedded interrogative clauses are formed with the interrogative particle *czy*, as shown in (i) and (ii) respectively:

- (i) *Czy on mnie kocha?*  
 Whether he me loves?  
 'Does he love me?'
- (ii) a. *Zastanawiałam się, czy/\*∅ on mnie kocha.*  
 'I wondered whether/\*∅ he loved me.'
- b. *Czy/\*∅ on mnie kocha, zastanawiałam się.*  
 'Does he love me? I wondered.'

assignment (Dehé 2010: 308). The role of parenthetical comment clauses in achieving relevance for the available cost in processing effort has been linked mainly to their involvement in indicating the source of the speaker's knowledge and the speaker's degree of certainty about the host proposition, hence to eventuality broadly conceived (cf. note 2).

The first comprehensive relevance-theoretic account of evidentials, including syntactic parentheticals, is Ifantidou (2001). There, parenthetical comments with verbs lexicalising attitudinal or speech-act description encode conceptual information and contribute to the explicit conceptual content of their hosts. However, their contribution to the truth conditions of the utterances in which they occur may differ. When a parenthetical introduces information relating to the speaker's own point of view, the parenthetical will be perceived as inessential to the truth conditions of the utterance. Nevertheless, although the speaker does not assert the truth of the host proposition, she still expresses her commitment to its factuality, as in (21):<sup>9</sup>

(21) John is waiting at the airport, I think.

Ifantidou (2001) captures the contribution of the parenthetical comment in utterances like (21) by suggesting that the parenthetical comment manifests the higher-level explicature of the proposition expressed in the host, which she calls the ground-floor proposition. This higher-level explicature is shown in (22):

(22) The speaker thinks that John is waiting at the airport.

By contributing not to the main explicature (the ground-floor proposition), but to the way in which the main explicature is interpreted for relevance, the parenthetical clause *I think* in (21) only affects the strength of the ground-floor proposition. In other words, what (21) communicates is (23a)–(23b):

- (23) a. John is waiting at the airport.  
 b. The speaker thinks that (23a) is true.

That the addition of a parenthetical clause reduces the strength of the speaker's commitment also in main parenthetical clauses such as (1b)–(1j) above is

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<sup>9</sup> Wilson (1994: 24) defines commitment as part of the speaker's expression of propositional attitude, which is concerned with "the strength of her belief in, certainty about or commitment to the truth of her assertion." Commitment figures in subsequent work in the Relevance Theory, including the study of epistemic modality by Papafragou (2006), eventuality by Ifantidou-Trouki (1993) and Ifantidou (2001), and declarative mood by Jary (2011). It is modelled explicitly from the speaker's perspective in Moeschler (2013) and from the hearer's perspective in Morency et al. (2008). In Papafragou (2006), certain epistemic modals have subjective interpretations, conveying the speaker's commitment to a base/host proposition. For Ifantidou (2001: 5), commitment is about the speaker's degree of certainty about what she communicates. Assuming that a speaker aims at optimal relevance, to achieve the intended effects, her utterance must be strong enough to warrant processing.

inherent in Jary's (2011) account of assertion, where the speaker who makes an assertion takes on "assertoric responsibility" or commitment to act in accordance with her assertion and its inferential consequences in subsequent verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Thus, uttering *I think John is waiting at the airport*, just as in uttering (21), the speaker takes assertoric responsibility only for the content of the parenthetical clause, i.e. the fact that she thinks that John is waiting at the airport, but not for the content of the embedded/host clause. In Jary's (2011) approach, the use of a parenthetical predicate with a declarative sentence indicates the speaker's avoidance strategy, i.e. the avoidance to take assertoric responsibility for the first-order or ground-floor proposition.<sup>10</sup>

In Ifantidou's (2001) account, the hearer needs to recover the intended interpretation and the intended attitude towards the communicated contents, i.e. speaker's commitment. Speaker's commitment is recovered through the process of enrichment, specifically through the recovery of higher-level explicatures.<sup>11</sup> In the absence of the parenthetical comment, e.g. when *John is a spy* is uttered, to satisfy his expectations of relevance,<sup>12</sup> the hearer might have to pragmatically infer the speaker's communicative intention in uttering *p* by choosing from a range of higher-level explicatures manifesting the degree of the speaker's commitment, e.g. The speaker knows that *p*, The speaker thinks that *p*, The speaker believes that *p*, The speaker suggests that *p*, The speaker heard that *p*, The speaker imagines that *p*, The speaker is sure that *p*, etc. or her emotional attitude, e.g. The speaker fears that *p*, The speaker hopes that *p*, etc. (cf. also (1b)–(1j)).

The strength of the evidence contributed by the parenthetical comment depends on the degree of epistemic commitment that a verb lexicalizes. Thus, *I know*, *I insist*, *Chomsky says* have a strengthening effect compared with *I think*, *I fear*. In normal circumstances, "the most accessible higher-level explicatures will be drawn from the set *she thinks*, *she is fairly certain*, *she is certain*

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<sup>10</sup> Also Green (2000) in his semantic approach to assertion suggests that the role of a parenthetical comment with respect to the host clause is to communicate what he calls the speaker's assertoric commitment to the host clause without the speaker asserting the proposition in the host clause. Like Ifantidou (2001) and Jary (2011), Green (2000) sees the role of the parenthetical comments discussed here to consist in communicating the degree of the speaker's commitment to the truth of the proposition in the host/ground-floor proposition, which is a proposal to update the common ground.

<sup>11</sup> Also Papafragou (2006) recovers commitment at the level of explicatures in the case of epistemic modals.

<sup>12</sup> As explained by Ifantidou (2001: 196), "[r]elevance is achieved by modifying a set of existing assumptions, by strengthening them, contradicting and eliminating them, or combining with them to yield contextual implications. An assumption with no strength can achieve relevance in none of these ways. Yet a speaker aiming at optimal relevance must intend her utterance to be relevant enough to be worth the hearer's attention. It follows that she must expect at least some of the assumptions expressed and implied by her utterance to be strong enough (i.e. evidenced enough) to achieve the intended effects."

and *she knows*” (Ifantidou 2001: 156). Other parenthetical indicators of the strength of commitment to the truth of the communicated proposition will thus normally have a weakening effect.

By contrast, when a parenthetical clause communicates not the speaker’s own but somebody else’s thoughts, for Ifantidou (2001), it marks the interpretive (rather than descriptive) use of the parenthetical clause and thus contributes directly to the truth conditions of the utterance. In (24) below, unlike in (21), the speaker is not committed to the truth of the ground-floor proposition in the host clause:

(24) John is, you say, a spy.

This is because (24) is not a representation of the speaker’s thought, but the thought of her audience, as indicated by the parenthetical *you say*.

To capture the contribution of parenthetical comments to the interpretation of syntactic parentheticals containing them, Ifantidou (2001) proposes that the parenthetical and the host clause perform two separate speech-acts, one commenting on the other, as shown in (25) for (21) and in (26) for (24):<sup>13</sup>

(25) a. John is at the airport.  
b. The speaker thinks this.

(26) a. John is a spy.  
b. The audience say(s) this.

In each case, (a)&(b) are two separate propositions and each can be true or false in its own right. The function of (b) is to guide the interpretation of the utterance by encoding the higher-level explicature of (a). Hence, a parenthetical serves to comment on the main clause: the utterance of (21) communicates the explicature in (25a), which will interact with the hearer’s assumptions to yield cognitive effects (e.g. it can be added to the common ground),<sup>14</sup> while the higher-level explicature in (25b) contributes to relevance only by way of affecting the strength of (25a). In (26), as (26b) is not the representation of the speaker’s thought, (26b) can be denied (Blakemore 2006: 1684):

(27) George, you say, is a liar (but I don’t believe it).

<sup>13</sup> Ifantidou (2001) focuses on parentheticals interpolated into the host or following it such as *John is a spy, I think*, to the exclusion of sentence-initial parenthetical comments such as *I think, John is a spy*, as the latter may be impossible to distinguish from constructions with a parenthetical verb embedding a complement proposition such as *I think (that) John is a spy*.

<sup>14</sup> In fact, the notion of common ground is replaced in RT with that of mutual cognitive environment, which, as Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995: 15–21, 28–31, 38–46; see also Sperber and Wilson 2015) argue, is more psychologically appealing and avoids infinite regress that common ground generates. However, since the term common ground appears more familiar and may be viewed as theory-neutral, it will be used for the purposes of the present discussion.

If a proposition which is relevant were a proposition of the thought which is the speaker's own thought, it could not be denied (Blakemore 2006: 1681):

(28) George, as you said, is a liar (\*but I don't believe it).

In (28), the host proposition will be understood as the representation of the speaker's thought, hence the speaker is asserting that George is a liar while the function of the parenthetical is to indicate that the proposition resembles a thought already communicated by the audience. Thus, (28) with the bracketed addition is a logical contradiction, the speaker asserting that George is a liar while at the same time denying that George is a liar. (27) is not a contradiction, as saying (27) the speaker communicates that the proposition that George is not a liar is not her own thought.

To summarize, in her analysis, Ifantidou (2001) assumes that the speaker chooses to communicate her information with an evidential parenthetical clause in a syntactic parenthetical in contexts in which the hearer could recover "the wrong higher-level explicature, or the wrong degree of strength, or might be in doubt as to which higher-level explicature, and which degree of strength was intended" (Ifantidou 2001: 156). The main role that parenthetical comments play in this approach is in indicating the speaker's degree of commitment for the purposes of meeting the hearer's expectations of relevance so that the hearer will choose the first and the most accessible assumption which has cognitive effects with the least processing effort.

Ifantidou's (2001) approach thus focuses on the role that the reliability of the content of the message plays in communication. However, as pointed out by Sperber et al. (2010) and Wilson (2011), the reliability of the information source also plays a vital role in making the hearer believe or reject the communicated assumption. Sperber et al. (2010) suggest that two assessment procedures constitute the cognitive mechanism called epistemic vigilance which protects the hearer from being intentionally or accidentally misinformed: the mechanism for the assessment of the trustworthiness of the content of the communicated information and the mechanism for the assessment of the trustworthiness of the information source. What this means is that to be not only understood, but also to be believed, the speaker must choose appropriate linguistic means to pass the hearer's epistemic vigilance mechanisms. Wilson (2011: 22–25) suggests that the use of procedurals like *but*, *therefore* etc., may not be motivated by the need to constrain the hearer's comprehension process so that he arrives at the right inferences without undue effort, but rather, it may serve to activate the assessment procedures, i.e. the epistemic vigilance mechanism. Building on Ifantidou (2001) and Wilson (2011), I would like to suggest in this contribution that the speaker chooses to use a parenthetical comment not only to persuade the hearer to accept the content communicated in the host clause, but, by disclosing the source of the information, also to persuade

the hearer of her reliability and trustworthiness. That both the reliability of the content and the reliability of the source of the information play a role in comprehension is demonstrated by the constraints on the distribution and interpretation of parenthetical comments in syntactic parentheticals in both English and Polish, as discussed in the next section.

### 3. Constraints on syntactic parentheticals: evidence from English and Polish

#### 3.1. The requirement that the epistemicity of the parenthetical comment is upward-directed

If each clause in a syntactic parenthetical contributes a proposition which could be true or false in its own right, the question might be posed why the integration of the propositions should require that the parenthetical comment be associated with a degree of certainty that is upward-directed. That the degree of speaker commitment must be upwards in syntactic parentheticals, but not in main-clauses with a parenthetical verb as the matrix clause verb, is shown in (29)–(30), adapted from Jackendoff (1972: 97, 99). The distribution of evidential parenthetical adverbials is governed by the same requirement, as shown in (31) from Jackendoff (1972: 99):

(29) a. I think John is a fink.

b. John is a fink, I think.

c. John is, I think, a fink.

(30) a. I don't think/I doubt John is a fink.

b. \*John is, I don't think/I doubt, a fink.

(31) a. Truthfully/Honestly/Sincerely, I can't tell you the answer.

b. \*Falsely/Dishonestly/Insincerely, I can't tell you the answer.

Polish evidential parenthetical comments as well as evidential adverbials have similar distributional properties:

(32) Nie sądzę/Wątpię, że są nieproszonymi gośćmi.

'I don't think/I doubt they are unwelcome guests.'

(33) a. Ale to są, jak sądzę/jak nie wątpię, nieproszeni goście.<sup>15</sup>

'But they are, I think/I don't doubt, unwelcome guests.'

b. \*Ale to są, jak nie sądzę/jak wątpię, nieproszeni goście.

'\*But they are, as I don't think/as I doubt, unwelcome guests.'

<sup>15</sup> The Polish examples in (33a), (34a) and (35a) are taken from National Corpus of Polish (<http://www.nkjp.pl/index.php?page=0&lang=1>).

- (34) a. To był sen – powiedziała cicho Joanna.  
 ‘It was a dream, Joanna said quietly.’  
 b. \*To był sen – nie powiedziała cicho Joanna.  
 ‘It was a dream, Joanna didn’t say quietly.’
- (35) a. Prawdę mówiąc/Uczciwie mówiąc/Szczerze mówiąc, zawałam sprawę.  
 ‘Truthfully/Honestly/Sincerely speaking, I’ve messed up.’  
 b. \*Mówiąc nieprawdę/Nieuczciwie mówiąc/Nieszczercze mówiąc, zawałam sprawę.  
 ‘\*Falsely/Dishonestly/Insincerely speaking, I’ve messed up.’

Interestingly, grammaticalized evidentials in both English and Polish all seem to be upward-directed:

- (36) English: *beyond all doubt, no doubt, for sure, for certain, etc.*  
 Polish: *szczerze mówiąc* ‘sincerely speaking,’ *prawdę mówiąc* ‘speaking the truth,’  
*bez wątplenia* ‘beyond any doubt,’ *bez cienia wątpliwości* ‘without a shred of doubt,’  
*z całą pewnością* ‘in all certainty,’ *po prawdzie* ‘in truth,’ etc.

As Sperber et al. (2010) and Wilson (2011) argue, the cognitive mechanisms for epistemic vigilance oblige the speaker to be trustworthy and reliable since if they were not, they would risk losing the hearer’s trust in the long run. As hearers access the information they are presented both with an eye to the reliability of its content and the reliability of its source, speakers should link their information to the hearers’ background assumptions, i.e. speakers must show how the information they present logically follows or is strongly supported by the hearers’ background assumptions or beliefs and they must convince hearers that they are trustworthy. Hence the evidence supporting the inferential process aimed at the recovery of the informative intention of the utterance must be reliable. I suggest here that this reliability can be made manifest by the use of upward-directed predicates, which provide explicit support for the validity of the host proposition and can thus contribute to convincing the hearer that the speaker can be trusted. By contrast, the use of downward-directed evidential parentheticals and adverbials would undermine the assumption that the communicator is competent, benevolent and trustworthy. While the speaker may have doubts about or even deny the truth of the host proposition and may communicate her doubts or denial, as in (30a) or (32) respectively as a representation of her own thought, the epistemic vigilance mechanism prevents her from using disbeliefs and doubts to express her commitment, since this would prevent the hearer from assessing her as a reliable source of information, which the unacceptability of (30b), (33b) and (34b) demonstrates. The upward-directed requirement on evidential parenthetical comments thus offers evidence that to be assessed as a reliable source of information, the speaker must present a proposition that she at least believes to be possible.

Furthermore, the effect of negating a downward-entailing predicate is that the host proposition can be interpreted as reliable, i.e. negation

of a downward-entailing produces an evidential comment that expresses a high degree of certainty and contributes to assessing the speaker as reliable:<sup>16</sup>

(37) Mushrooms are great on diets, I don't doubt (Ross 1973).

(38) It's a long shot, I don't deny (Hooper 1975).

(39) Nie dlatego, że byłem jakimś fantastycznym partnerem, ale dlatego, że w takich momentach zawsze jest trudno, a do tego przyzwyczaiłaś się do mnie i – nie wątpię – pokochałaś.

'It's not that I've been such a terrific partner for you but because it's always difficult to be on your own in such situations and besides, you've grown accustomed to me and – I don't doubt – you've grown to love me.'

(40) Bywam tchórzem, nie przeczę.

'I can be a coward at times, I don't deny.'

### 3.2. The ban on the use of weak evidential predicates in parenthetical comments

Although both predicates like *to be sure*, *to be obvious*, *to be certain* and predicates *to be possible*, *to be likely*, *to be probable* are upward-entailing, the latter are unacceptable as parenthetical comments in syntactic parentheticals. The English examples in (41)–(46) are drawn from Hooper (1975) and Hooper and Thompson (1973). The unacceptable Polish examples in (47)–(49) are modelled on their acceptable counterparts (50)–(52) drawn from the National Corpus of Polish:

(41) \*Kissinger is negotiating for peace, it's likely.

(42) \*Many of the applicants are women, it's likely.

(43) \*Factivity is important in other constructions as well, it's probable.

(44) Kissinger was negotiating for peace, it was certain/I was sure.

(45) Many of the applicants were women, it was certain/I was sure.

(46) Factivity is important in other constructions as well, it's obvious/I'm sure.

(47) \*Skończyły się beztroskie czasy, to prawdopodobne.

'The carefree days are over, it's probable.'

(48) \*Nic nie znaleźli, to prawdopodobne.

'They haven't found anything, it's probable.'

(49) \*Wyrzucili go, to możliwe.

'They have fired him, it's likely.'

<sup>16</sup> (39) and (40) are from the National Corpus of Polish.

(50) Skończyły się bez troskie czasy, to oczywiste/jestem pewna.

'The carefree days are over, it's obvious/I'm sure.'

(51) Nic nie znaleźli, to pewne/jestem pewien.

'They haven't found anything, it's certain/I'm sure.'

(52) Wyrzucili go, to pewne.

'They have fired him, it's certain/I'm sure.'

If the contribution of parenthetical comment clauses under discussion is to alter the context for the interpretation of the host/main clause, the comment must provide evidence for the speaker's commitment. Both *to be likely* and *to be certain* indicate a high degree of certainty. Yet, only the latter are licensed in syntactic parentheticals. In line with Ifantidou's analysis of evidential adverbials, the difference seems to lie in the fact that predicates like *to be possible* do not have any positive evidential content in and of themselves while predicates like *to be certain* implicate the existence of evidence for the host proposition.

Ifantidou (2001) analyses parenthetical adverbials like *apparently*, *seemingly*, *obviously*, *clearly* as evidential and adverbials like *possibly* and *probably* as non-evidential. *Apparently* and *seemingly* alter the context for the interpretation of the host/main clause, as they suspend the speaker's commitment to the proposition that falls within their scope. Consequently, evidence that would have falsified a stronger assertion no longer counts as falsifying evidence. As such, *apparently* and *seemingly* are clearly truth-conditional (Ifantidou 2001: 152). The speaker of (53) is not committed to the truth of (54) but the truth of (55):

(53) a. John is, apparently, a spy.

b. John is, seemingly, a spy.

(54) John is a spy.

(55) It seems/appears that John is a spy.

Since they are truth-conditional evidentials, *apparently* and *seemingly* fall within the scope of factive connectives. The speaker uttering (56) is committed to the truth of (57), but not to the truth of (58):

(56) a. Although John is, apparently, a spy, he is very charming.

b. Because John is, seemingly, a spy, we should avoid him.

(57) a. Although it appears that John is a spy, he is very charming.

b. Because it seems that John is a spy, we should avoid him.

(58) a. Although John is a spy, he is very charming.

b. Because John is a spy, we should avoid him.

As an evidential adverbial like *apparently* ensures that the speaker is putting forward the proposition that John is a spy with a very reduced degree of

strength (a degree determined by the semantic content of the adverbial), it is a commitment-suspending ‘weak evidential’ on Ifantidou’s (2001: 153) account. Similar modification of the truth-conditional status of the host/main clause is achieved with the help of non-evidential *possibly* and *probably*. Since they reduce the range of falsifying evidence, they are perceived as ‘weak.’

By contrast, *obviously p* and *clearly p* are referred to as ‘strong evidentials’ (Ifantidou 2001: 153), as the speaker’s commitment to the proposition is strengthened, and it is implied that there is clear evidence for *p*. The truth-conditional status of the utterance is altered because the range of falsifying evidence is altered (increased). I suggest here building on Ifantidou (2001) that *to be possible*, *to be probable* as well as their Polish counterparts are unavailable as parenthetical comments in syntactic parentheticals, because although they indicate that the speaker considers the host proposition to be epistemically possible, they fail to provide evidence for the truth of the host proposition and as a result, the utterance is not strong enough to warrant the hearer’s cognitive effort needed to process it and as the speaker cannot be assessed as a reliable source of the information, her utterance cannot get past the hearer’s mechanisms of epistemic vigilance.

### 3.3. The requirement that the host clause update the common ground

As observed by Hooper and Thompson (1973: 481), a factive verb, which presupposes its semantic argument, cannot be used in the parenthetical comment in a syntactic parenthetical:

(59) \*Santa has lost a lot of weight, I regret.

Further examples from English and Polish are given in (60)–(63) below:

(60) \*John will, I deny, be late.

(61) \*Bernard has forgotten the meeting, it bothers me.

(62) \*Kochałam go, żałuję.

‘I loved him, I regret.’

(63) \*On jest moim wrogiem, zaprzeczam.

‘He is my enemy, I deny.’

If semantic arguments of factive verbs are presuppositional, i.e. their truth is already taken for granted, the host proposition cannot update the common ground and thus satisfy the hearer’s expectation of relevance. A proposal to update the common ground should be challengeable (Stalnaker 2002), i.e. the hearer should be able to decide whether to add the proposition to the common

ground or not. If the host propositions in (60)–(63) are already part of the common ground, by uttering (60)–(63), the speaker fails to contribute a proposition which could achieve relevance, i.e. whose processing could modify the existing assumptions in the hearer's cognitive environment (cf. note 12) and yield cognitive effects compensating the cognitive effort needed to process the information and his expectations of relevance could not be met.

That the host clause must have information focus in a syntactic parenthetical is further supported by the unavailability of evidentials like *I know*, *I heard*, *I saw* and their Polish cognates in contexts like (64) and (65), where the speaker proposes to add her information to the common ground. While the hearer can confirm that this assumption is part of his cognitive environment, he cannot do so using a construction with a parenthetical comment, in which the known message is afforded the main point status:

(64) A: Betty is alive.

B: I know that Betty is alive.

B': \*Betty is alive, I know/I heard/I saw.

(65) A: Jan już przyjechał.

'John is already back.'

B: Wiem/słyszałem/widziałem, że Jan już przyjechał.

'I already know that John is back.'

B': \*Jan już przyjechał, wiem/słyszałem/widziałem.

'Jan is already back, I know/I heard/I saw.'

To the extent that the host proposition is not discourse-new information and does not have information focus, processing the parenthetical comment cannot satisfy the hearer's expectations of relevance, as processing the parenthetical comment cannot lead to cognitive effects matching the cognitive processing effort. For the processing of the parenthetical to have cognitive effects adequate to the processing effort, the context for the interpretation of the utterance must be altered and the degree of speaker commitment must change, which is not the case in (64) and (65). What the difference between, for example (64B) and (64B'), indicates is that an evidential verb like *know* can be used in a clause with the main point status (64B), as there, it communicates the speaker's strong commitment to the truth of the embedded claim, processing which thus alters the hearer's cognitive environment. In (64B'), the speaker focuses information which is already part of the common ground and thus the communicated information cannot meet the hearer's expectations of relevance.

In contrast to factive parenthetical verbs, complements of semi-factives like *to know*, *to notice*, *to realize*, *to learn*, *to discover* have been independently shown not to be necessarily presuppositional. These verbs can be used in parenthetical comments, as observed by Hooper and Thompson (1973: 480) for English and as further illustrated for Polish with (69)–(71), drawn from the

National Corpus of Polish. The utterances below are acceptable, demonstrating that for the host proposition to meet the hearer's expectations of relevance, it must be focused to alter the hearer's cognitive environment:

- (66) Santa has lost a lot of weight, I notice.
- (67) She was a compulsive liar, he soon realized.
- (68) Many problems remain to be solved, I learned.
- (69) Założyć firmę nie jest trudno, wiem, bo sam niedawno zakładałem.  
'It is not difficult to start a business, I know because I have recently started mine.'
- (70) O tym Dolid nie napisał, uświadomił sobie marszałek.  
'Dolid hasn't written about that, the marshal realised.'
- (71) Przecież to właściwie ja pierwszy ją poznałem, uświadomił sobie nagle Julek.  
'Yet it was me, actually, who first got to know her, Julek suddenly discovered.'

### 3.4. The requirement that the parenthetical comment modify a proposition unmarked for illocutionary force

As already noticed in Section 1 above, a host clause in a syntactic parenthetical construction cannot be infinitival, gerundial or subjunctive. Rather, it must be finite (Grimshaw 2011; Hooper and Thompson 1973), as illustrated in (8)–(10) above, repeated here for convenience as (72)–(74), as well as in (75) for English and in (76)–(77) for Polish:

- (72) a. I promised them that I would leave.  
b. I would leave, I promised them.
- (73) a. I promised them to leave.  
b. \*To leave, I promised them.
- (74) a. I insisted that she learn to sing.  
b. \*That she learn to sing, I insisted.
- (75) a. I imagine living in a place where there are no cars.  
b. \*Living in a place where there are no cars, I imagine.
- (76) a. Właściwie obiecałem jej nie powiedzieć nikomu.  
'I actually promised her not to tell anyone.'  
b. \*Nie powiedzieć nikomu, właściwie obiecałem jej.  
'\*Not tell anyone, I actually promised her.'
- (77) a. Wyobrażam sobie mieszkanie pod jednym dachem z jakimś facetem.  
'I imagine living with a guy under the same roof.'  
b. \*Mieszkanie z jakimś facetem pod jednym dachem, wyobrażam sobie.  
'\*Living with a guy under the same roof, I imagine.'

Independently of the constraints on the use of preference predicates as parenthetical comments, which require an independent explanation, the utterances given above demonstrate that the host clause must be finite. If the relevance of syntactic parenthetical comments lies in the information that they communicate about the truth-conditional content of their hosts, the hosts must be finite as only finite clauses can make manifest the propositional attitude the speaker intends to express with her utterance. If the host does not indicate mood-related information, the hearer is unable to recover the higher-level explicature that mood indicators encode. For example, declarative/indicative mood is associated with the propositional attitude of belief (cf. Wilson 2011). In the absence of mood indicators that enable the development of logical form into full propositional content, including the speaker's propositional attitude, the host cannot serve as input for the propositional attitude or speech act operator in the logical structure of a parenthetical verb to perform its function of weakening or strengthening the speaker's commitment to the truth of the host proposition. The hearer thus cannot be guided towards a hypothesis about the speaker's propositional attitude and cannot infer the speaker's commitment to the truth of the host.

## 4. Conclusion

In this paper I have investigated several constraints on the distribution of parenthetical predicates in syntactic parentheticals in English and Polish, focusing on the properties of syntactic parentheticals that are responsible for their special pragmatic status. I have shown here that the special properties of syntactic parentheticals can be given a uniform explanation in relevance-theoretic terms. Ifantidou's (2001) assumption that the speaker chooses to communicate her information with an evidential parenthetical comment clause in a syntactic parenthetical in contexts in which the hearer could recover "the wrong higher-level explicature, or the wrong degree of strength, or might be in doubt as to which higher-level explicature, and which degree of strength was intended" (Ifantidou 2001: 156) can explain why the parenthetical comment cannot be downward-entailing, why the host clause must update the common ground and why the host clause cannot be unmarked for illocutionary force. To meet the hearer's expectations of relevance and add to his cognitive environment, the speaker's communicated information must be strong and well-evidenced. Unless the information is communicated with some degree of commitment and is well-evidenced, it will not get past the hearer's epistemic vigilance mechanisms. Interestingly, it is also the constraints on syntactic parentheticals in different languages, as is evidenced here for English and Polish, that offer support for these assumptions.

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