Editorial

Commitment phenomena through the study of evidential markers in Romance languages☆

1. Introduction

The notion of commitment is a key factor encompassing two major pragmatic domains: evidentiality and modality. In spite of its central, recurring position in the pragmatic literature (see for instance De Brabanter and Dendale, 2008; Coltier et al., 2009, two thematic volumes entirely dedicated to the theorization of commitment), this notion is far from having clear-cut contours: on the one hand it subsumes a vast array of forms; on the other hand, its very essence is labile, since it involves many different factors: the relation of the speaker to the truth-conditions of the uttered content, her personal involvement toward what she says, the way in which she has obtained the information conveyed by her utterance, her attitude towards it. Our volume investigates both facets of this tricky notion by questioning how it is affected by linguistic forms, not only those classically known as being related to commitment — verb moods and tenses, epistemic adverbs, quotative markers — but also forms not classically studied as being linked to commitment — discourse particles and copulas inside syntactic constructions, for instance. However, our volume also investigates in which ways the notion of commitment itself is to be shaped in relation to the perspective in which it is studied, taking into account the frame of the syntactic/semantic interface or the more usual pragmatic perspective centered on the dynamics of interaction (both from a speaker-oriented and from a hearer-oriented point of view). Compared to the existing contributions to the clarification of the linguistic notion of commitment, the specificity of the present volume resides in the particular focus given to the interrelation between commitment and the expression of evidentiality conveyed by the above-mentioned forms. Commitment is here appraised through the prism of the ways in which it is affected by the expression of the source of the information provided by the utterance.

Current research on commitment-related phenomena mainly adopts a pragmatic perspective to analyze the impact of linguistic forms on the speaker's stance towards her utterance, as evidenced by one of the above-mentioned volumes (De Brabanter and Dendale, 2008), whose contributions address commitment through pragmatic questions such as involvement, implicit aspects of meaning, as well as dynamic and discursive aspects. With respect to Romance languages, the linguistic phenomena considered in the literature are related to evidentiality or modality and are observed taking primarily verb tenses and modal verbs as the starting point for the analysis. One of the authors whose research work has been the most prolific in a comparative perspective, Mario Squartini, has analyzed evidential and modal senses of a number of verb forms (future, conditional, imperfect) in different Romance languages (see for instance Squartini, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2012). As for the research dealing more specifically with French (but often in a contrastive Romance perspective), the works have focused on modal verbs like *pouvoir*, *devoir*, as well as on verb tenses, like the conditional and the future (see Dendale, 1994, 1999, 2001; Dendale and Coltier, 2011; Dendale and Tasmowski-De Ryck, 2001; Desclés, 2009; Kronning, 2009, 2010, 2016; van der Auwera and Dendale, 2001; Vetters, 2012).

Other studies have focused on defining the notion of commitment itself (besides the above-mentioned volumes, see also Beyssade and Marandin, 2009). Commitment can be defined from a semantic perspective, in which modal forms are considered as playing a role on the truth conditions of the proposition, but also in a pragmatic perspective. Within the latter, some studies have taken into account the question considered here i.e. the relation between the source of information and the speaker's commitment. It has been shown that, according to the source, the speaker shows different degrees of commitment to the truth of the proposition she utters: it is acknowledged that direct personal experience implies a stronger degree of commitment than indirect personal experience; when the source of information is indirect, inference is related to a stronger

degree of commitment than hearsay (see Palmer and Robert, 1986). In both perspectives, commitment is mainly studied considering the relation between a speaker and the content she utters. However, commitment can be also considered as a dynamic phenomenon, co-constructed in the relationship between hearer and speaker (Morency et al., 2008; Boulat, 2015). In these analyses, commitment is viewed as the result of a process that takes place during the course of the conversation. In this perspective, multiple types of commitment can be identified in discourse (see for instance Boulat, 2015 for the distinction between four different types of commitment according to the parameters at stake in the interaction). Finally, commitment is defined by contrast to other categories such as involvement, attitude or the French label 'prise en charge', which is usually translated by 'endorsement'. Some studies argue that commitment is not a scalar category whereas involvement can be considered in a scalar way (Katriel and Dascal, 1989); from Bally to very recent work in a Romance languages tradition, attitude is conceived as the syntactic-semantic component of a proposition that gives access to the interpretation of commitment (see Pasch, 1990; Lang and Pasch, 1988); the notion of *prise en charge* is discussed in Beyssade and Marandin (2009): within the framework of French enunciation theories inspired by Benveniste and Ducrot, *prise en charge* is defined as including the modal attitudes of the speaker, and it is dissociated from 'commitment' which is not concerned with the latter, but with the speech act component in relation to the dynamics of dialogue.

The entryway to the study of commitment in this volume are Romance languages. The studies gathered here are conducted on languages of the same genetic stock, namely French, Italian, Romanian and Spanish. This allows the reader to build bridges between forms that can be considered as being or not being equivalent in another Romance language, inasmuch as they have or do not have similar effects on commitment. In particular, we have in mind what is said in the contributions of **Zafiu** and **Irimia** about the presumptive mood in Romanian: this form shares values with the Italian future tense which, in contrast, are not shared by the French future, a form morphologically equivalent to the Italian future (for a contrastive analysis French-Italian-Romanian see also Ricci et al., 2016 as well as Rossari et al., 2017). Also, by reading **Escandell-Vidal**'s contribution, one is able to notice a peculiarity specific to Spanish: the evidential effects visible within the Spanish double copula system, with the distinction between *ser* and *estar*, cannot be observed in languages that do not have a double copula system, like French and Italian.

The contributions in this volume take into account a vast array of forms: along with the future tense, the presumptive and the conditional mood or epistemic adverbs, that is forms that are traditionally related to evidentiality and commitment, some authors also take into account forms less obviously connected to commitment, such as the copula with individual level predicates, direct discourse report structures, quotative markers, as well as constructions like concessive structures, including modal forms. Such a variety of forms gives an expansive view on commitment, which is further broadened by the different linguistic fields in which the studies on these forms are conducted: formal syntax and semantics, pragmatics, discourse analysis and corpus linguistics. For instance, the same phenomenon − the conditional mood − is analyzed within a formal syntactic-semantic perspective in the contribution of **Irimia** and within a pragmatic one in the contribution of **Greco**. But the theoretical perspectives are also combined, giving thus an image of the complexity of the factors at stake when proposing a representation of commitment: the contribution by **Pietrandrea** combines morphosyntax and illocution starting from forms annotated in an onomasiological approach to systematize the epistemicity coding in Italian; **Cornillie** investigates evidentiality by combining the propositional and the interactional level to assess the interface between three fundamental notions related to commitment (involvement, epistemicity, and evidentiality). Such complexity also concerns the forms and structures examined: not only are single forms studied *per se*; the interrelation between one particular form and the structure in which it occurs is also observed, by examining the way this interrelation affects the interpretation of commitment. For instance, the paper by **Zafiu** makes visible how the interrelation between the concessive structure and the presumptive mood expresses a lower degree of commitment; **Greco** shows how the use of the epistemic future perfect with a peculiar prosodic pattern allows for an interpretation of strong commitment; **De Brabanter** points out the interrelation between direct discourse report and the lexical forms used to frame it, both modeling the degree of commitment of the speaker to the reported content; **Escandell-Vidal**'s study deals with the interaction between a particular subset of adjectives and the copula *estar*.

Let us have a closer look to each of the papers in this issue. The articles in the volume are presented in two groups in relation to the two facets discussed above about commitment (the analysis of the array of forms linked to it and the reflection on the essence of the notion), while keeping in mind that the two aspects are closely related. The first group collects the contributions of Escandell-Vidal, Zafiu, Greco, and De Brabanter, which focus on particular forms from a syntactic, semantic or pragmatic point of view. The second gathers the studies of Irimia, Cornillie and Pietrandrea, which more generally discuss the notions of commitment, modality and evidentiality in a theoretical perspective, paying attention to the complex structures or factors at stake in the interpretation of a commitment/evidential value.

Victoria Escandell-Vidal's paper considers two different types of commitment: epistemic commitment, concerning the truth of a proposition, and evidential commitment, concerning the source of the speaker's utterance. It is this second type of commitment that is taken into account here. The paper is concerned with the default evidential interpretation conveyed by a subgroup of constructions of the type 'copula verb *estar* + adjective', which systematically entail an indication of direct perception. Escandell-Vidal shows how evidential commitment does not result from intrinsic semantic properties of a specific form, since attributing a specific semantic value to the copula *estar* does not allow for predictions on when an evidential entailment will or will not occur. This does not mean that the resulting commitment is a purely pragmatic effect either (i.e. the result of mere conversational implicature), since in these particular constructions such an interpretation is triggered regardless of the contextual conditions in which the construction occurs. The determining factor at play here is thus the