Unit 4 (b)

Modality

The area between “yes” and “no”

Slides for the session of
Exploring English Grammar – the world of clauses
held on
13.xii.2021

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5. To understand the difference between the two ways in which [negative] POLARITY can be expressed – [direct] and [transferred].
6. To understand the difference between the [median] VALUE of MODALITY ('will') and the [outer] VALUES (either [high] 'must' or [low] 'may'), by studying how they interact with [transferred] [negative] POLARITY.

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7. Have I forgotten anything?

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- *better* may be 'on the way in' (we better let it in, bettern't we?)
- Even if verbs come in, or go out, or shift around within the system — wenn du magst ('wenn du das tun willst'); wenn du vermagst, das zu tun ('wenn du das tun kannst') — the ARCHITECTURE of the system remains the same, with [high], [median], [low] values.

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Overview of MODALITY

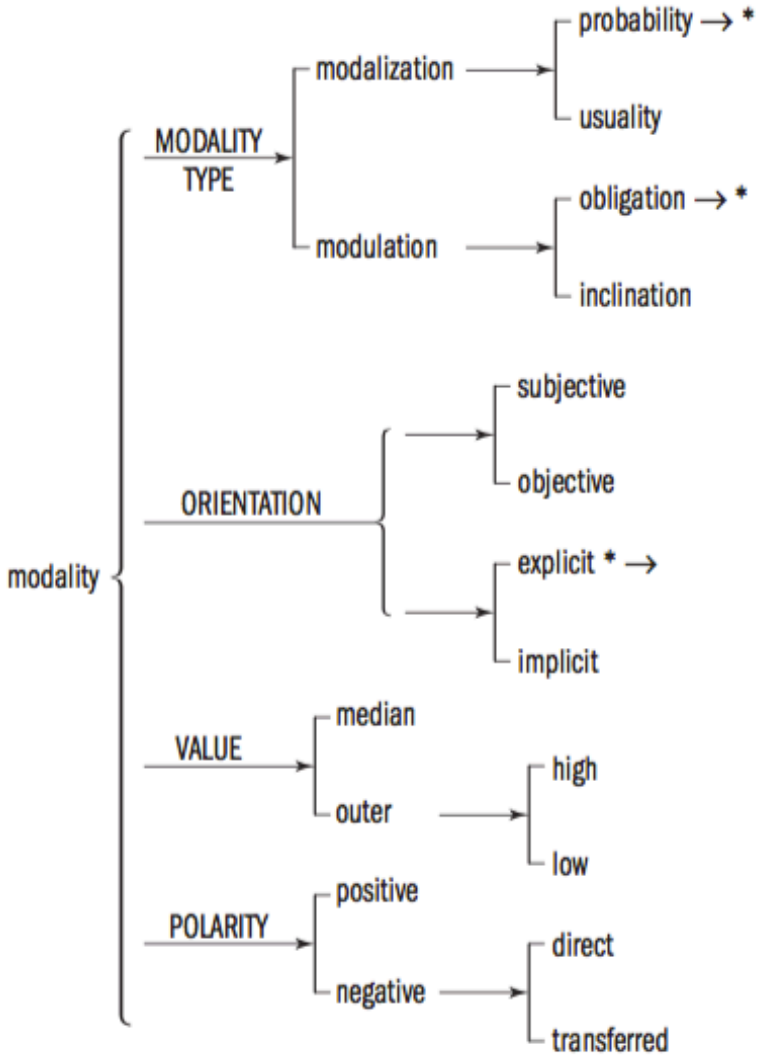
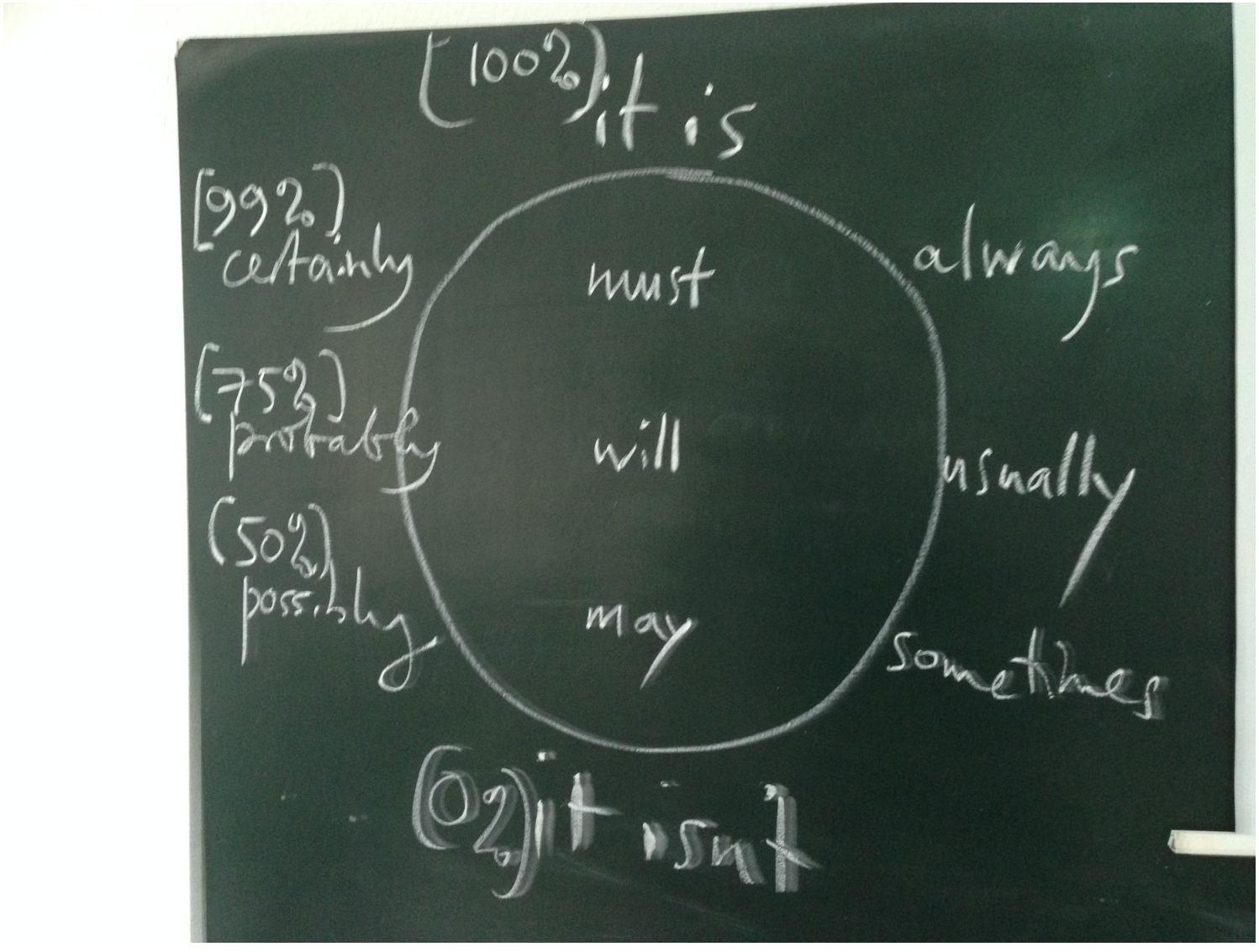


Fig. 4-25 System network of MODALITY

Simultaneous systems, so 4 × 4 × 3 × 3 combinations; in reality (*→ → *) only 12 × 9.

MODALITY TYPE and VALUE (1) — MODALIZATION (the "indicative" type)



MODALIZATION: PROBABILITY and USUALITY

- This is MODALIZATION (the "indicative" type of MODALITY).
- It spans the gap between "it is" and "it isn't".
- It is typically expressed by either a modal verb, or a modal adverb, or both together:
- that'll be Professor Steiner at the door ('right now')
- that's probably Professor Steiner at the door
- that'll probably be Professor Steiner at the door
- There are two dimensions:
- PROBABILITY (certainly/probably/possibly) and USUALITY ("indefinite frequency") (always/usually/sometimes)

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- cf. flipping a coin: probability of Heads is 50%, so if you flipped the coin 100 times you would expect to get Heads approx. 50 times and Tails approx. 50 times.

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- Adverbs expressing usuality are sometimes called 'adverbs of indefinite frequency'; like modal adverbs of probability they are part of the Mood element, just like the Subject and the Finite and the Polarity — because they're not just part of WHAT you're asserting, they're part of the ACT OF ASSERTING it !!

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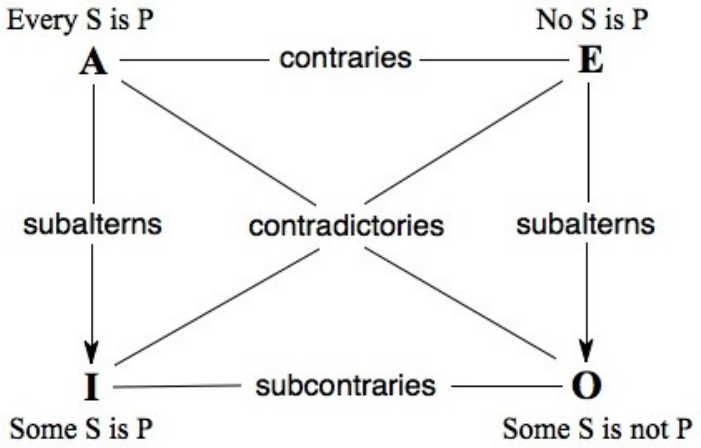
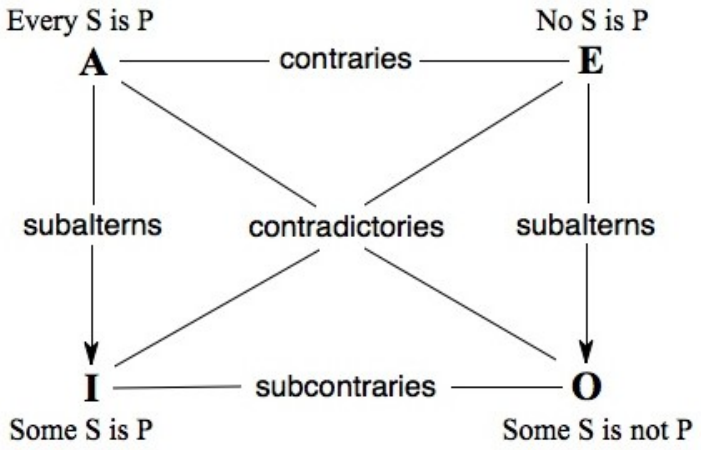
- that certainly might be him –> it’s certain that it’s possible that it’s him

MODALIZATION compared with Aristotle's Square (1)



- Term "A" (= universal affirmative): *All Australians are the descendants of convicts* (cf. *Australians are certainly… Australians are always…*)
- Term "I" (= particular affirmative): *Some Australians are…* (cf. *Australians are possibly… Australians are sometimes…*)

MODALIZATION compared with Aristotle's Square (2)



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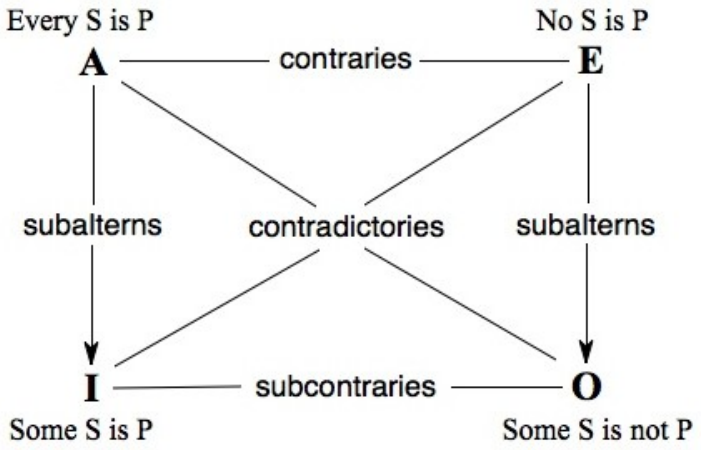

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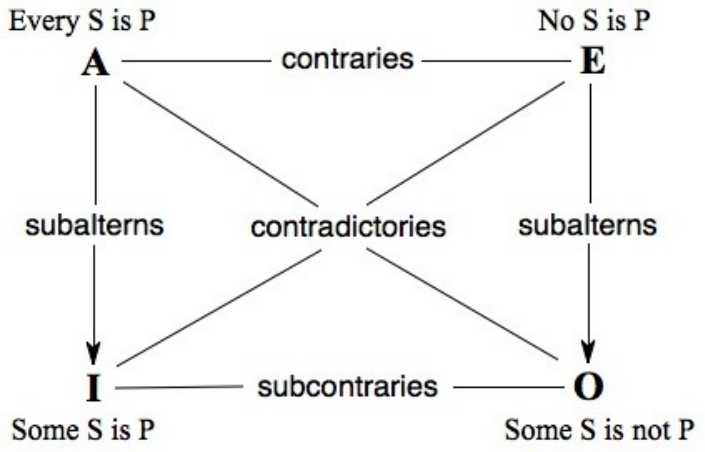

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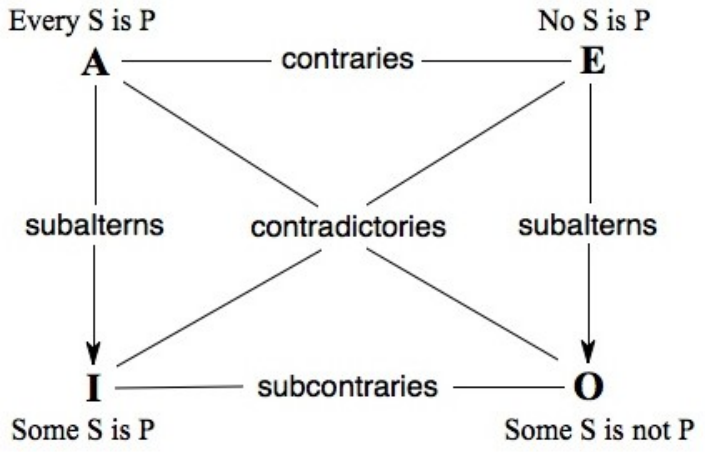

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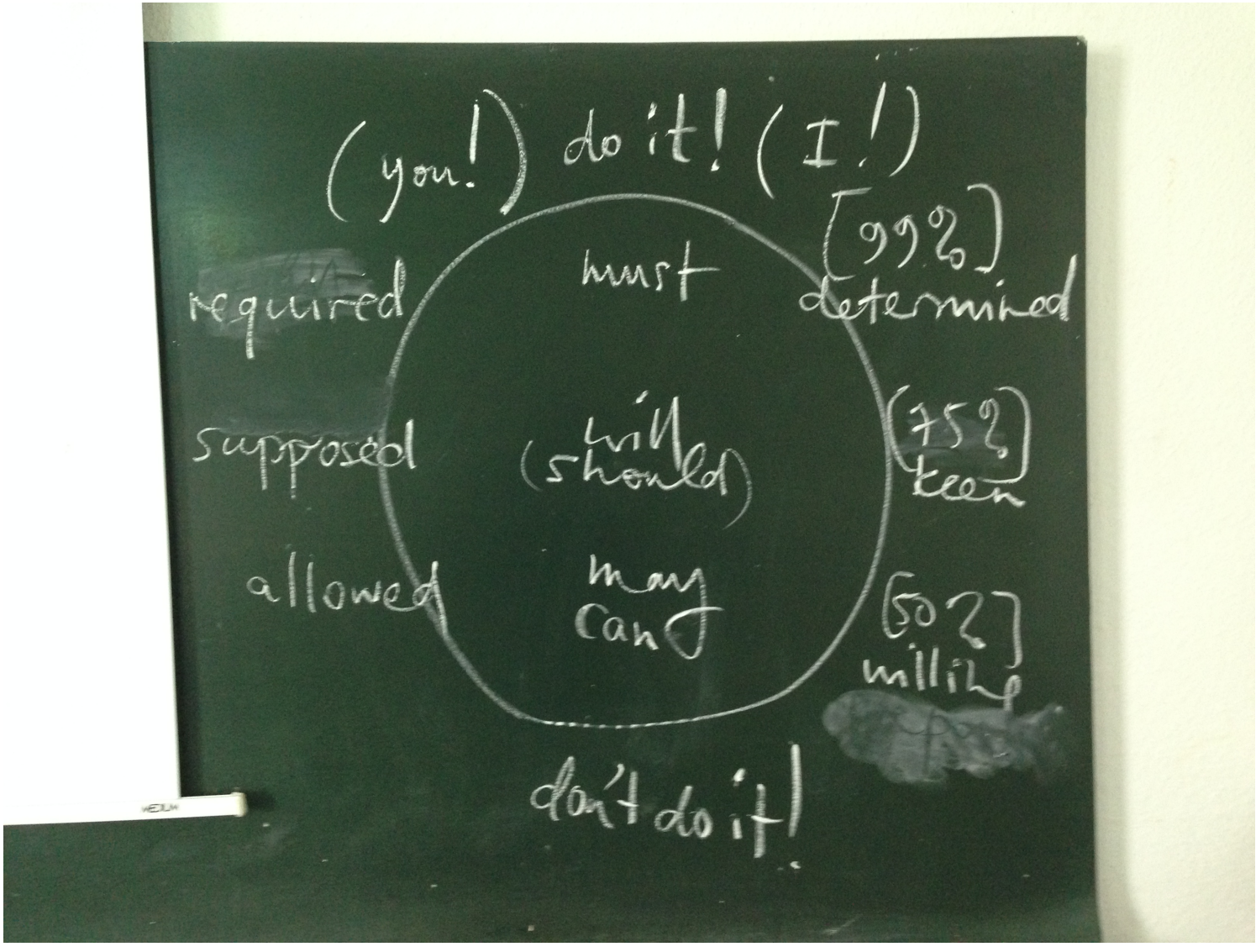
- 1) In real life, if we're absolutely certain, we just say "they are"; if we say "they must be", it means that we're slightly less than 100% certain
- 2) We add a term for 'less certain than certain, but more certain than possible': (*they'll be descendants of convicts* etc.)

MODALITY TYPE and VALUE (2) — MODULATION (the "imperative" type)



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- It is typically expressed by either a modal verb (1), or by a 'catenative' (hypotactic verbal group complex) structure (2):
- (1) you must do your homework!
  (1) I must drive you home!
- (2) you're required to do your homework!
  (2) I'm determined to drive you home!
- Note that, syntactically, the structures are [indicative] structures: Subject before Finite (i.e., [declarative]), reversible for [yes/no interrogative] e.g. Must you do your homework? Must I drive you home?
- There are two dimensions:
- OBLIGATION ('you!') ('are wanted to') (required / supposed [səˈpəʊst] / allowed) and
- INCLINATION (a.k.a. READINESS/ABILITY) ('I!') ('want to') (determined / keen / willing)

Knowledge and Power

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- Modality expresses intermediate degrees of knowledge and power.

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Knowledge and Power

- Modality expresses intermediate degrees of knowledge and power.
- Modalization: Probability (‘epistemic modality’)
- Modulation: Obligation (‘deontic modality’)

Summary: Modality compared with Polarity and Mood

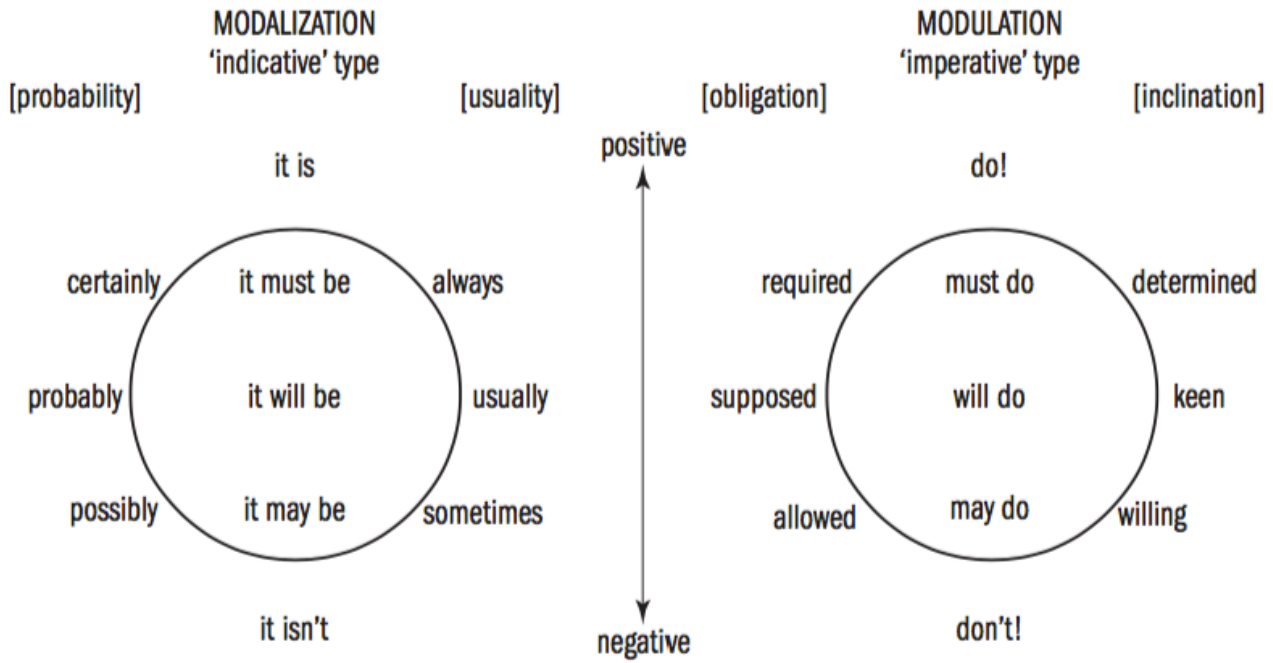
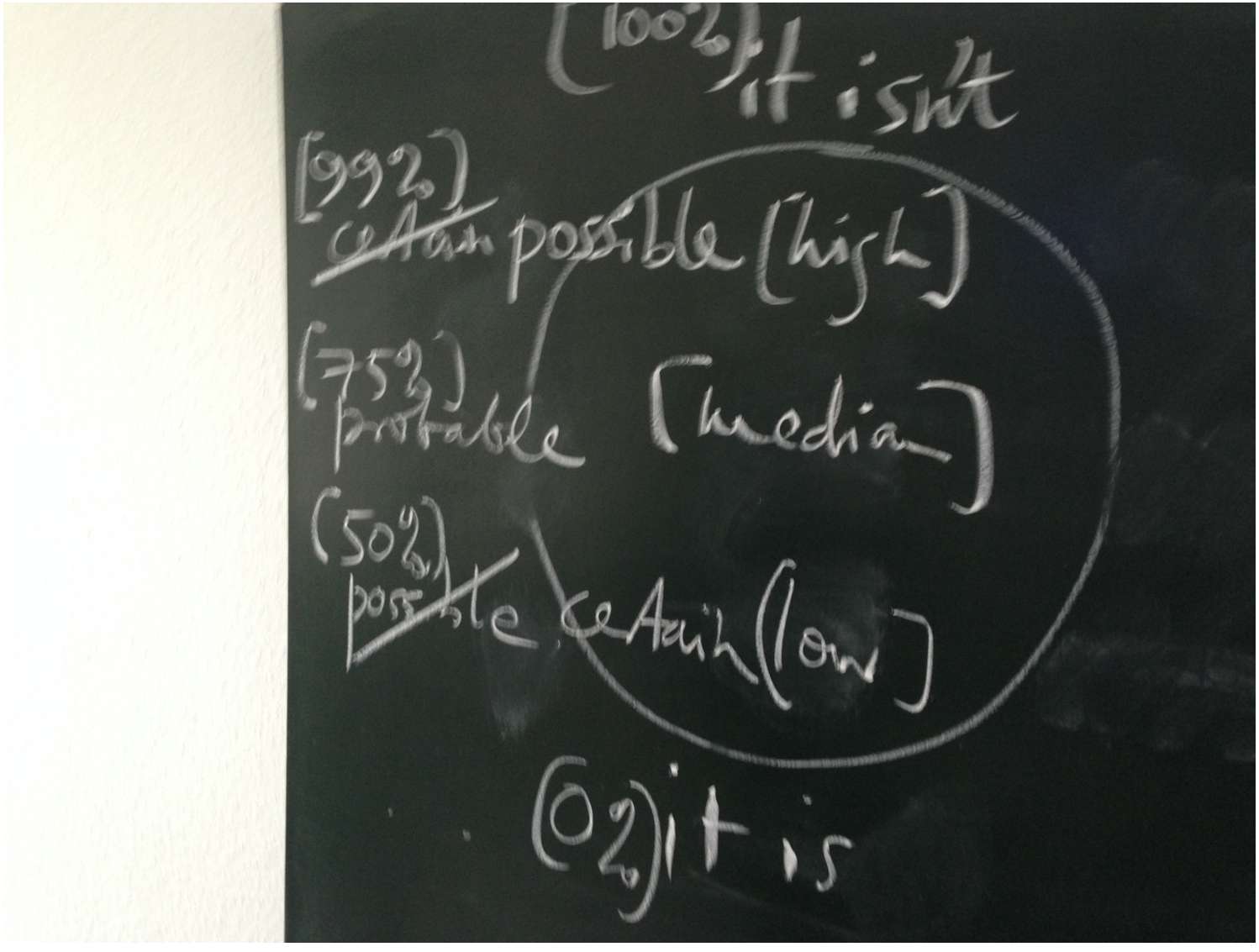
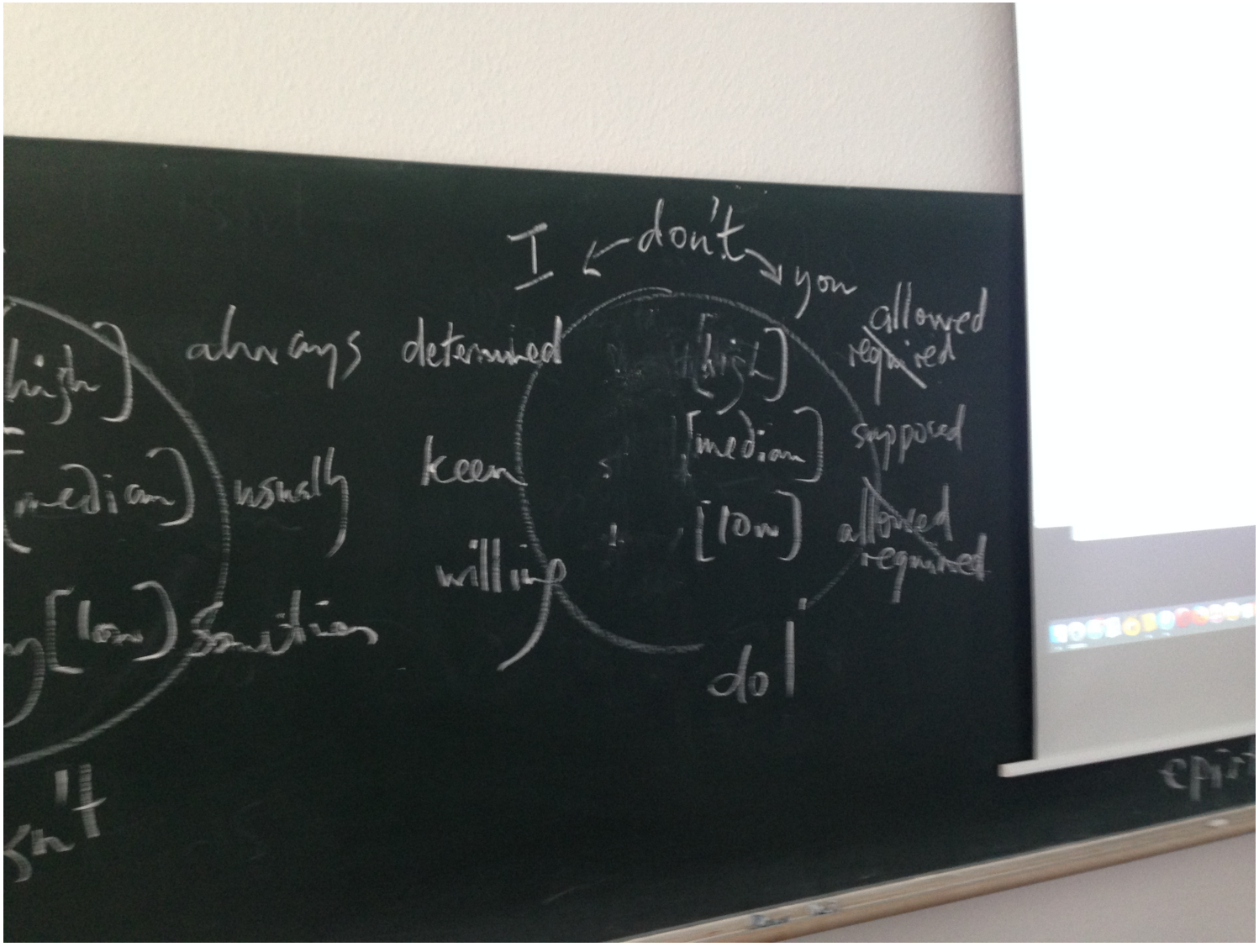


Fig. 10-6 Diagram showing relation of modality to polarity and mood

Combining [outer] VALUE and [transferred] [negative] POLARITY (1)



[outer] VALUE and [transferred] [negative] POLARITY (2)



[outer] VALUE and [transferred] [negative] POLARITY (3)

Note that probability, in itself, can only ever be positive, never negative (i.e. it is always somewhere between p 0 (0%) and p 1 (100%)). However, you can 'metaphorically' 'transfer' the negative marker – from the process itself to the Modality on the process. In so doing, you cause something interesting to happen:

[outer:high]
[negative:direct] [negative:transferred]
it's certain that it isn't him – it isn't possible that it's him

[median]
[negative:direct] [negative:transferred]
it's probable that it isn't him – it isn't probable that it's him

[outer:low]
[negative:direct] [negative:transferred]
it's possible that it isn't him – it isn't certain that it's him

Similar things happen with all four types of modality. (Try it!)

ORIENTATION [subjective] / [objective] and EXPLICITNESS [implicit] / [explicit]

The explicit forms (which are ‘grammatical metaphors’) are only possible with PROBABILITY and OBLIGATION, not (yet) with USUALITY or INCLINATION.

For highschool literary appreciation essays choose explicitly subjective assessments of probability.
For university science essays dress up your assessments of probability by making them explicitly objective.

ORIENTATION [subjective] / [objective] and EXPLICITNESS [implicit] / [explicit]

The explicit forms (which are 'grammatical metaphors') are only possible with PROBABILITY and OBLIGATION, not (yet) with USUALITY or INCLINATION.

- 1) I know that he did it (subjective: explicit) MOST SUBJECTIVE

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ORIENTATION [subjective] / [objective] and EXPLICITNESS [implicit] / [explicit]

The explicit forms (which are 'grammatical metaphors') are only possible with PROBABILITY and OBLIGATION, not (yet) with USUALITY or INCLINATION.

- 1) I know that he did it (subjective: explicit) MOST SUBJECTIVE
- 2) he must have done it (subjective: implicit)

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ORIENTATION [subjective] / [objective] and EXPLICITNESS [implicit] / [explicit]

The explicit forms (which are 'grammatical metaphors') are only possible with PROBABILITY and OBLIGATION, not (yet) with USUALITY or INCLINATION.

- 1) I know that he did it (subjective: explicit) MOST SUBJECTIVE
- 2) he must have done it (subjective: implicit)
- 3) he certainly did it (objective: implicit)

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ORIENTATION [subjective] / [objective] and EXPLICITNESS [implicit] / [explicit]

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- 2) he must have done it (subjective: implicit)
- 3) he certainly did it (objective: implicit)
- 4) it's certain that he did it (objective: explicit) MOST OBJECTIVE

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ORIENTATION [subjective] / [objective] and EXPLICITNESS [implicit] / [explicit]

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- 1) I know that he did it (subjective: explicit) MOST SUBJECTIVE
- 2) he must have done it (subjective: implicit)
- 3) he certainly did it (objective: implicit)
- 4) it's certain that he did it (objective: explicit) MOST OBJECTIVE
- 1) I demand that he do it (subjective: explicit) MOST SUBJECTIVE

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ORIENTATION [subjective] / [objective] and EXPLICITNESS [implicit] / [explicit]

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- 1) I know that he did it (subjective: explicit) MOST SUBJECTIVE
- 2) he must have done it (subjective: implicit)
- 3) he certainly did it (objective: implicit)
- 4) it's certain that he did it (objective: explicit) MOST OBJECTIVE

- 1) I demand that he do it (subjective: explicit) MOST SUBJECTIVE
- 2) he must do it (subjective: implicit)

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ORIENTATION [subjective] / [objective] and EXPLICITNESS [implicit] / [explicit]

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- 3) he certainly did it (objective: implicit)
- 4) it's certain that he did it (objective: explicit) MOST OBJECTIVE

- 1) I demand that he do it (subjective: explicit) MOST SUBJECTIVE
- 2) he must do it (subjective: implicit)
- 3) he's required to do it (objective: implicit)

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- 3) he certainly did it (objective: implicit)
- 4) it's certain that he did it (objective: explicit) MOST OBJECTIVE

- 1) I demand that he do it (subjective: explicit) MOST SUBJECTIVE
- 2) he must do it (subjective: implicit)
- 3) he's required to do it (objective: implicit)
- 4) it's required that he do it (objective: explicit) MOST OBJECTIVE

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Modality: Overview as Summary

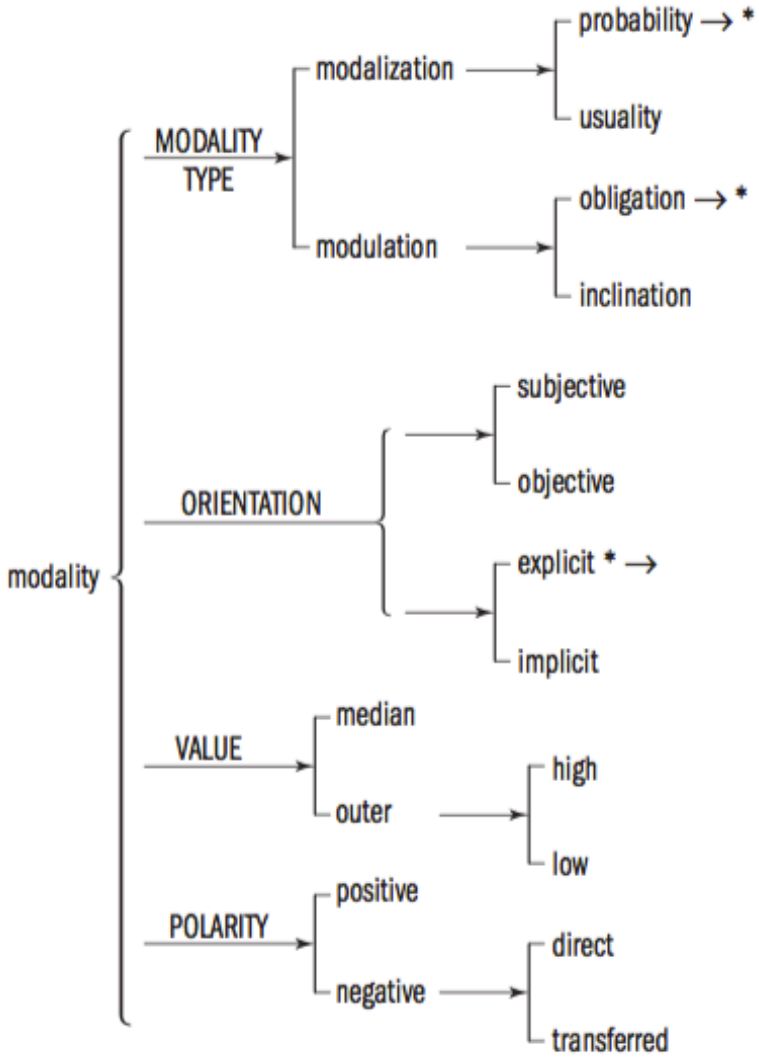

Fig. 4-25 System network of MODALITY

Simultaneous systems, so $4 \times 4 \times 3 \times 3$ combinations; in reality (*$\rightarrow \rightarrow$ *) only 12×9.

MODALITY TYPE and TENSE

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MODALIZATION is always tenseless (although combinable with any tense of the main verb); so the remote form means “remote in REALITY”.

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he may do it – 'possibly he does it'

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he might do it – 'very possibly he does it'

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he might do it – 'very possibly he does it'

he may have done it – 'possibly he did it'

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he might do it – 'very possibly he does it'

he may have done it – 'possibly he did it'

he might have done it – 'very possibly he did it'

(— the remote form (here: *might*) can mean 'toned down' (weaker), OR 'toned up'(stronger), depending on the tone contour used—)

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he may do it – 'I allow him to do it'

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he is allowed to do it – 'someone allows him to do it'

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he is allowed to do it – 'someone allows him to do it'

he was allowed to do it – 'someone allowed him to do it'

she said he might do it – 'she said someone allowed him to do it'

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he was allowed to do it – 'someone allowed him to do it'

she said he might do it – 'she said someone allowed him to do it'

she thought he might have done it –

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'even though he didn't do it, she believed he was allowed to do it'?

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'she considered it very possible that he did it'?

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she thought he might have done it –

'even though he didn't do it, she believed he was allowed to do it'?

'she considered it very possible that he did it'?

(there's ambiguity here – but often it's very subtle!!)

Combination of [future] time reference and PROBABILITY

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Normally, probability is tenseless (because you've chosen [modal] not [temporal] in the system FINITENESS TYPE a.k.a. MODAL DEIXIS).

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(KNOCK KNOCK!)

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(KNOCK KNOCK!)

That must be Professor Steiner = it is certainly him ('present')

Combination of [future] time reference and PROBABILITY

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(KNOCK KNOCK!)
That must be Professor Steiner = it is certainly him ('present')
(Who presided over the meeting?)

Combination of [future] time reference and PROBABILITY

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(Who presided over the meeting?)

It must have been Prof. Steiner = it was certainly him ('past')

Combination of [future] time reference and PROBABILITY

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(KNOCK KNOCK!)

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(Who presided over the meeting?)

It must have been Prof. Steiner = it was certainly him ('past')

(Who will be chairman next year?)

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Combination of [future] time reference and PROBABILITY

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But if instead of [high] VALUE ('certain') ('99%') you have [low] ('possible') ('50%'), then sometimes the modal verb can refer to the future:

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It may rain tomorrow = perhaps it will rain ('future') ('50%')

Combination of [future] time reference and PROBABILITY

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But if instead of [high] VALUE ('certain') ('99%') you have [low] ('possible') ('50%'), then sometimes the modal verb can refer to the future:
It may rain tomorrow = perhaps it will rain ('future') ('50%')
People disagree about the meaning of "will" in:

Combination of [future] time reference and PROBABILITY

Normally, probability is tenseless (because you've chosen [modal] not [temporal] in the system FINITENESS TYPE a.k.a. MODAL DEIXIS).
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It may rain tomorrow = perhaps it will rain ('future') ('50%')
People disagree about the meaning of "will" in:
It will rain tomorrow

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It must be going to be Prof. Steiner = it will certainly be him ('future')
But if instead of [high] VALUE ('certain') ('99%') you have [low] ('possible') ('50%'), then sometimes the modal verb can refer to the future:
It may rain tomorrow = perhaps it will rain ('future') ('50%')
People disagree about the meaning of "will" in:
It will rain tomorrow
Does it mean ('future') ('100%'), or ('future') ('75%')?

Combination of [future] time reference and PROBABILITY

Normally, probability is tenseless (because you've chosen [modal] not [temporal] in the system FINITENESS TYPE a.k.a. MODAL DEIXIS).
(KNOCK KNOCK!)
That must be Professor Steiner = it is certainly him ('present')
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People disagree about the meaning of "will" in:
It will rain tomorrow
Does it mean ('future') ('100%'), or ('future') ('75%')?
The sun will rise tomorrow at 6:45 a.m. means ('future') ('100%')

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Does it mean ('future') ('100%'), or ('future') ('75%')?
The sun will rise tomorrow at 6:45 a.m. means ('future') ('100%')
Don't be fooled by grammarians pretending to be philosophers! The grammar of a natural human language IS its OWN philosophy, and DOES contain the notion '100% certain knowledge of the future'!!

Homework

- Your homework for next week is to complete Exercise Sheet 4b, which was handed out in class and which contains a page from last summer semester's exam.
  In case you missed the class, the exercise sheet is also available here:
  `http://www.spence.saar.de/courses/grammar/questions04b/index.pdf`

Acknowledgements, further reading, other sources

Most of the ideas presented here come from M.A.K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 2nd edition 1994 (“IFG2”) or 3rd edition 2004 (“IFG3”).

Further reading: Halliday 2004, chapter 4.5 and chapter 10.3 (or Halliday 1994, chapter 4.5 and chapter 10.4).

See also: Annabelle Lukin’s “prezi” slide on Modality (on Vimeo): `https://vimeo.com/album/2028694/video/51422776`