

Realizations of Intensionality in Ancient Greek: The Differing Cases of ἄν and μή

Introduction: In this paper, we provide a formal semantic analysis of the Classical Greek modal particle ἄν and the negative particle μή, both of which Gerö (2001, 2000) identifies as elements that appear only in intensional contexts. We show that ἄν is not a *marker* of intensional contexts but rather an intensional operator. Situating our analysis within the general framework of Kratzer (1978, 1981), which views conditionals as always (at least implicitly) containing modal quantifiers restricted by the antecedent of the conditional, we argue that ἄν is a modal quantifier with universal force that quantifies over situations. In contrast, we analyze μή not as an intensional operator but as the realization of negation that is anti-licensed by veridical contexts.

Previous Analyses: Our analysis extends and formalizes the analyses in Gerö (2000, 2001), although we focus exclusively on the usage of ἄν and μή in Classical Greek, leaving Homeric Greek aside. After identifying the contexts in which ἄν occurs as intensional contexts, Gerö (2000) suggests that ἄν be analyzed as a modal operator, but she does not formalize this proposal. Gerö (2001) observes that the negative particle μή occurs in noun phrases within the scope of intensional expressions such as conditionals, modals, and certain classes of attitude verbs. In order to explain why μή does not occur in noun phrases within the scope of other arguably intensional contexts such as past and future tense and following attitude verbs of assertion, Gerö divides intensional expressions in Greek into two classes—strong and weak—and asserts that μή is only required in the former. She classes modals and certain types of propositional attitude verbs (e.g., desideratives) as creating strong intensional contexts, and the past and future tenses, as well as propositional attitude verbs of assertion, as creating weak intensional contexts.

The Modal Particle ἄν: In order to argue that ἄν be identified with a universal modal quantifier, we must account for all of the contexts in which ἄν occurs. We first consider the fact that ἄν occurs in the antecedent of some types of conditionals, but in the consequent of others. As Gerö (2000) also notes, we find in Homeric Greek that the placement of ἄν—or often the dialectal variant κε(v)—was much freer (cf. (1a), with κε in the antecedent instead of the consequent, and (1b), with κε(v) in both the antecedent and the consequent), and we suggest that the placement of ἄν in Classical Greek conditionals may represent a fossilization of preferred patterns of use that derive from semantically irrelevant restrictions on where the particle can appear in a clause. Secondly, in considering potential optatives (2a, 2b) and iterated indicatives with ἄν (3a), the two cases where ἄν appears outside of conditionals, we argue that the best analysis maintains ἄν as a modal operator with universal force and assumes an implicit antecedent. The implicit antecedent accounts for the variable force of potential optatives in that an antecedent that is likely to be true (in the speaker’s assessment) shifts the interpretation towards universal force (2a), while an antecedent that is not as likely to be true or is difficult to judge (e.g., because it amounts to speculation about others’ mental states) shifts the interpretation towards existential force (2b). With iterated indicatives, the implied antecedent provides the set of past situations to be quantified over (3a). Thus, we see iterated indicatives as being exactly parallel to cases of past general conditionals containing ἄν in the consequent (3b). In the case of counterfactuals, we argue from cases in which ἄν is *absent* and replaced by a modal verb to the conclusion that ἄν must also be serving as the modal operator in these cases, since it is omitted when another modal operator is present (4a), excepting cases in which both modal operators are interpreted separately (4b). Finally, in order to explain why ἄν does not occur in indicative conditionals (5a), we analyze ἄν as a universal modal quantifier that quantifies in particular over situations—parts of possible worlds. This further fact about the behavior of ἄν also allows us to account for both the variable occurrence of ἄν in “general” conditionals and counterfactuals (Smyth, 1956, §2339, 2320) (5b, present general with ἄν; 3b, past general with ἄν; 5c, past general without ἄν; 4b, counterfactual with ἄν; 5d, counterfactual without ἄν) and the universal occurrence of ἄν in future conditionals (5e) (we set aside “emotional future” conditionals (Smyth, 1956, §2328) as a possibly different use of the construction). Following Kadmon (1987)’s distinction between one-case and multi-case (i.e., generic in the sense of Kratzer (1989)) conditionals, we analyze the conditionals in which ἄν appears as being multi-case conditionals and the conditionals in which ἄν is absent as one-case conditionals. We find this distinction to be particularly apt in the case of future conditionals: future conditionals always contain ἄν because the only reasoning that is possible when considering events that have yet to occur is reasoning based on generic truths.

The Negative Particle μή: In our analysis of the negative particle μή, we replace Gerö (2001)’s descriptively adequate distinction between “strong” and “weak” intensional contexts with a more explanatorily adequate distinction. First, we note Gerö’s observation of intensional contexts, such as following attitude verbs of assertion, in which the “indicative” negative particle οὐ(κ) appears in preference to μή. We argue that this indicates that the behavior of μή is subject to anti-licensing: μή is only barred from certain contexts, not required in any. Since μή appears in many types of intensional contexts beyond just modal contexts—appearing also in the scope of propositional attitude verbs such as βούλομαι ‘wish’—we propose that the contexts from which μή is barred are veridical contexts; that is, within the scope of an operator that entails the truth of its argument ($\text{Op}(p) \rightarrow p$ (Giannakidou, 1998)), μή cannot appear.

- (1) a. οὐ μὲν γάρ τι κακώτερον ἄλλο πάθοιμι, οὐδ' εἴ κεν τοῦ πατρὸς ἀποφθιμένοιο
not CONJ for pronoun.INDEF worse some suffer.ISG.OPT, not-even if PRT the.GEN father.GEN having-died.PARTIC.GEN
πυθοίμην
learn.ISG.OPT
“For I would not suffer anything worse, not even if I should learn of my father’s dying.” (Hom. Il. 19.321)
- b. εἰ δέ κε μὴ δώῃσιν ἐγὼ δέ κεν αὐτὸς ἔλωμαι
if CONJ PRT not give.3SG.SUBJUNCT I.NOM CONJ PRT myself take.ISG.SUBJUNCT
“But if he does not give (her), then I will take (her) myself.” (Hom. Il. 1.324)
- (2) a. ἅπαντες ἂν ὁμολογήσειαν
all.NOM.PL PRT agree.3PL.OPT
“All would agree.” (Isoc. 11.5) (Implied Antecedent: “If they considered the matter fully...”)
- b. ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν καὶ φθόνῳ ἂν εἴποιεν
but these.ACC CONJ even envy.DAT PRT say.3PL.OPT
“But these things they may have said even out of envy.” (Herod. 9.71) (Implied Antecedent: “If they were very jealous...”)
- (3) a. διηρώτων ἂν αὐτοὺς τί λέγοιεν
ask.ISG.IMPERF PRT them what say.3PL.OPT
“I used to ask them what (the poems) meant...” (Plato Apol. 22b) (Implied Antecedent: “If (when) I was considering their poems...”)
- b. καὶ εἴ τις αὐτῷ δοκοίη τῶν πρὸς τοῦτο τεταγμένων βλακεύειν, ἐκλεγόμενος τὸν ἐπιτήδειον
and if someone him.DAT seem.3SG.OPT the.GEN to this assigned.PARTIC.GEN slack-off.INF, choosing the.ACC deserved.ACC
ἔπαισεν ἂν
hit.3SG.AOR PRT
“And if someone of the ones assigned to this seemed to him to be slacking off, choosing the one deserving he would hit him.”
(Xen. Anab. 2.3.11)
- (4) a. καίτοι εἰ ἐβούλετο δίκαιος εἶναι περὶ τοὺς παῖδας, ἐξῆν αὐτῷ κατὰ τοὺς
but if wish.3SG.IMPERF just be.INF with-respect-to the children, was-possible.3SG.IMPERF him.DAT according-to the
νόμους... μισθῶσαι τὸν οἶκον
traditions rent-out.INF the.ACC house.ACC
“But if he had wanted to be just with respect to the children, it was possible, according to tradition... for him to rent out the house.”
(Lys. 32.22-23)
- b. καὶ ταῦτα εἰ μὲν δι' ἀσθένειαν ἐπάσχομεν, στέργειν ἂν ἦν ἀνάγκη τὴν τύχην
and these.ACC if CONJ because-of weakness suffer.IPL.IMPERF, bear-with.INF PRT was necessary the.ACC fate.ACC
“And if we were suffering these things because of weakness, it would be necessary to bear with our fate.” (Lys. 33.4)
- (5) a. εἴπερ γε Δαρείου καὶ Παρυσάτιδος ἐστὶ παῖς... οὐκ ἀμαχεὶ ταῦτ' ἐγὼ λήψομαι
if indeed Darius.GEN and Parysatis.GEN is son.NOM not without-resistance these.ACC I.NOM take.ISG.FUT
“If indeed he is the son of Darius and Parysatis, I will not take these things without resistance.” (Xen. Anab. 1.7.9)
- b. Καὶ ἐὰν ἴσοις ἴσα προστεθῇ, τὰ ὅλα ἐστὶν ἴσα.
and if+PRT equals.DAT equals.NOM add.3SG.SUBJUNCT.PASS, the.NOM wholes.NOM are equal
“And if equals are added to equals, the wholes are equal.” (Euc. Ax. 2)
- c. εἰ ποῦ τι ὁρῶη βρωτόν, διεδίδου
if anywhere any sees.3SG.OPT food.ACC, give-out.3SG.IMPERF
“If he saw any food anywhere, he gave (it) out.” (Xen. Anab. 4.5.8)
- d. τοῦτ' ὁ δ' εἰ μὴ ὠμολόγουν, οὐδεμιᾷ ζημίᾳ ἔνοχος ἦν
this.DAT CONJ if not grant.3PL.IMPERF, no.DAT penalty.DAT subject-to was
“But if they had not granted to him (what he wished), he would have been subject to no penalty.” (Lys. 7.37)
- e. ἀλλ' ἐὰν ζητῇς καλῶς, εὕρησεις
but if+PRT seek.2SG.SUBJUNCT well, find.2SG.FUT
“But if you seek well, you will find.” (Plato Gorg. 503d)

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