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# Semantic Diversity and Conversational Potential of *faxo* in the Language of Roman Comedy

**Abstract:** The study aims to identify the semantic nuances, pragmatic functions and conversational potential of the sigmatic future *faxo* in the language of Roman comedy. The vast majority of its 89 occurrences demonstrate causative semantics, but there are at least seven cases in which a clear semantic shift can be observed. This shift resulted in a series of connotations that can be defined as either modal-epistemic or evidential. The author substantiates this assumption by means of in-depth linguistic and philological analyses of those contexts in which *faxo* does not have causative value, and by drawing on evidence from modern languages in which a similar semantic shift is attested. Since the relationship between epistemic modality and evidentiality has been a highly debated issue, it is also addressed in the paper. As a result, *faxo* is identified as an evidential parenthetical marker with inferential meaning in two of the seven cases considered, and as a modal marker with high epistemic support in the other five cases. Finally, the conversational properties of *faxo* in causative, epistemic, and evidential contexts are examined, and conclusions are drawn about the contribution of *faxo* to the inventory of linguistic means of conveying im/politeness.

**Keywords:** *faxo*, causative meaning, epistemic modality, evidentiality, conversational strategies, im/politeness

## 1 Introduction

The extraparadigmatic sigmatic future *faxo* has long sparked scholarly interest, in terms of both its origin and its semantic nuances (Lindsay 1936; De Melo 2002, 2008; Pinkster 2015; Novikova 2015; Bertocci 2017). The origin of *faxo* remains a subject of debate, and the suffix *-s-* has been attributed to both the sigmatic aorist (in which

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case *faxo* is a reflex of an earlier aorist subjunctive) and the Indo-European desiderative mood.<sup>1</sup> *Faxo* was used intensively by Plautus and Terence and then, after a considerable time gap, by some later archaizing authors who probably used this extravagant form as a spectacular stylistic device rather than as a genuinely existing synchronic feature of the language. Out of 114 instances attested in Latin literature (Pinkster 2015: 470), 79 occurrences are found in Plautus and 10 in Terence, and since *faxo* occurs exclusively in the dialogue parts of Roman comedy and practically disappears in the post-Plautine epoch, we can consider it not only as an archaism but also as an element of colloquial language. This article continues my earlier research<sup>2</sup> and will be an attempt to identify the range of semantic nuances and to evaluate the conversational potential of *faxo* in the language of Roman comedy.

## 2 The Diversity of Syntactic Constructions with *faxo*

The variety of syntactic patterns and semantic connotations that *faxo* exhibits in the sub-corpus of early Roman comedy is truly remarkable and deserves a brief overview. Unlike *faxim*, *amassim*, and other similar forms, *faxo* occurs only in independent clauses, but in a range of quite different constructions. Sometimes it is used as a full-fledged verb in the simple future, alternating with the standard forms of the future (*faciam*), in combination with the first-person pronoun *ego* and the construction *accusativus duplex*, as in (1):

- (1) *Ego te hodie faxo recte acceptum, ut dignus es.* (PLAUT. Rud. 800)  
 ‘Today I will **honour** you (lit: “**make** you respectable”) as you deserve.’<sup>3</sup>

In a couple of examples *faxo* occurs in combination with *ut obiectivum* (2):

- (2) ... *faxo ut scias*  
*quid pericli sit dotatae uxori vitium dicere.* (PLAUT. Asin. 897–898)  
 ‘I’ll **make** you learn how risky it is to dishonour a wife who has a dowry.’

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of opinions, see Novikova (2015: 728–731) and Bertocci (2017: 24–26).

<sup>2</sup> See Zheltova (2022).

<sup>3</sup> All translations are mine unless indicated otherwise.

But most often *faxo* occurs directly alongside another verb in the future (49 instances in Plautus and 5 in Terence) or the subjunctive (14 cases in Plautus and 2 in Terence), see (3) and (4):

- (3) *Iam ego illic faxo erit.* (PLAVT. Men. 956).  
‘Now I will **bring** him there.’ (lit. ‘I’ll **make** him be there’).
- (4) *Quin venis quando vis intro? Faxo haud quicquam sit morae.* (PLAVT. Amph. 972)  
‘Why don’t you come in as soon as you wish? I’ll **make sure** that there won’t be any delay.’

*Faxo* with the present subjunctive is thus found in both hypotactic and paratactic constructions (Lindsay 1936: 61), and it is hardly possible to see any tangible semantic differences between, for instance, *faxo ut scias* (2) and *faxo scies / scibis* (5):

- (5) PY. *Vise amabo num sit.* PH. *Iam faxo scies.* (TER. Eun. 663)  
‘PY. Please, see if he is there. PH. I will **let** you know immediately.’

It is worth noting that two specific combinations predominate in numerical terms: *faxo* with *scies / scibis / scias* (13 cases) and *faxo* with (*ad*)*erit / (ad)erunt* (15 cases), which together make up almost a third of the total number of occurrences of *faxo* in the language of Roman comedy. It cannot therefore be ruled out that these two expressions functioned as special formulae or collocations, much like *certiore facio*, which has almost the same meaning as *faxo scies / scibis / scias*.

### 3 *Faxo* as a Causative Verb

As can be seen from (2–5), *faxo* is most frequently used as a causative verb with the meaning “make sure, bring it about, cause it to happen (that)”,<sup>4</sup> sometimes in emotionally neutral contexts, but much more often in promises (6–7) or threats (8–10):

- (6) *illa hic cubabit, vir aberit faxo domo.* (PLAVT. Cas. 483–484)  
‘She’ll sleep here and I’ll **make sure** the husband is out of the house.’
- (7) *nunc Amphitruonem volt deludi meus pater: faxo probe iam hic deludetur, spectatores, vobis inspectantibus.* (PLAVT. Amph. 996–997)

<sup>4</sup> See Glare (Ed. 1968: 668).

'My father wants to fool Amphitryon.  
I'll **make sure** he's fooled, in front of your eyes, dear audience.'

- (8) *faxo foris vidua visas patrem.* (PLAVT. Men. 113)  
'I'll **make sure** you visit your father as a widow.'
- (9) *Nescio quam tu familiaris sis: nisi actutum hinc abis,  
familiaris accipiere faxo haud familiariter.* (PLAVT. Amph. 354–355)  
'I don't know how familiar you are. If you don't leave right now,  
I'll **make sure** you're not seen as an acquaintance here.'
- (10) *Non enim ibis. Ego ferare faxo, ut meruisti, in crucem.* (PLAVT. Mos. 1133)  
'For you will not get away. I will **make sure** you hang as you deserve.'

Although *faxo* shows causative meaning in most occurrences available in early Roman comedy, there are a few contexts where this value is not observed. We will focus on these in the next section.

## 4 *Faxo* in Non-causative Contexts

De Melo (2002: 83) has drawn attention to two cases in which *faxo* does not demonstrate its typical meanings, namely PLAVT. Curc. 586–587 and PLAVT. Men. 790–791.

In the passage from *Curculio*, the comic effect is created by the pun linking the proper name *Curculio* and the noun *curculio* 'breadworm', ex. (11):

- (11) THER. *Ubi nunc Curculionem inveniam? CAPP. In tritico facillume,  
vel quingentos curculiones pro uno faxo reperias.* (PLAVT. Curc. 586–587)  
'THER. Where is he, the evil worm (Curculio)? CAPP. In the wheat, of course,  
you will [*faxo*???] find five hundred breadworms instead of one.'<sup>5</sup>

It is unlikely that Cappadox plays the role of a causer stimulating (or facilitating) Therapontigonus' search for breadworms in this scene, as Therapontigonus is searching for a parasite with the charactonym *Curculio* rather than actual breadworms. Therefore, in this instance, *faxo* must have something other than causative meaning, which may be difficult to translate accurately.

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<sup>5</sup> In this section, I will intentionally leave *faxo* untranslated or question the generally accepted translation.

The second example is from *Menaechmi*, (12):

- (12) MAT. *At enim ille hinc amat meretricem ex proxumo*. SEN. *Sane sapit, atque ob istanc industriam etiam faxo amabit amplius*. (PLAVT. Men. 790–791)  
 ‘MAT. But he has fallen for a hetaera from the neighbourhood.  
 SEN. Well, he’s got a knack for it! By your efforts, he’ll [*faxo*???] fall for many more.’

The causative meaning of *faxo* is inappropriate in this context too. Translating *faxo amabit* as ‘I’ll make him fall in love’ would be absurd, as a father-in-law would hardly encourage his son-in-law to have an affair on the side, much less openly confess such bizarre conduct to his own daughter.

De Melo (2002: 83) suggests two potential explanations of *faxo* in the examples above: 1) *faxo* has been reanalysed syntactically and has become an adverb similar to *forsitan* ‘perhaps’, and 2) *faxo* has been reanalysed semantically and has turned into a parenthetical expression with the meaning ‘I assume’.

In addition to the cases highlighted by De Melo, I have found five other examples of non-causative *faxo*. Two of them are located close together in the dialogue between two old men in Plautus’ *Trinummus*. Example (13) shows Megaronides persuading Callicles to exchange their annoying wives. Megaronides assures his friend that he will not lose out by such an action, as he considers his own wife much worse than his friend’s wife. In this context, *faxo* seems to take on a meaning similar to ‘I believe’ or ‘be sure’, rather than its usual causative value:

- (13) MEG. *Vin commutemus, tuam ego ducam et tu meam?*  
*Faxo haud tantillum dederis verborum mihi*. (PLAVT. Trin. 59–60)  
 ‘MEG. Would you like to swap? You’ll take mine,  
 And I’ll take yours. [*Faxo*???] you won’t have tricked me, not in the slightest.’

In example (14) which comes immediately after the previous one, *faxo* appears to behave in the same way: Megaronides does his best (*Ne . . . hercle*) to reassure Callicles that he will know in advance what is to be done:

- (14) CAL. *Namque enim tu, credo, me imprudentem obrepseris*.  
 MEG. *Ne tu hercle faxo haud nescias quam rem egeris*. (PLAVT. Trin. 61–62).  
 ‘CAL. Well, I’m sure you’ll sneak up on me.  
 MEG. I swear by Hercules, [*faxo*???] you won’t be unaware of what you have done.’

Three additional instances of non-causative *faxo* can be found in the plays *Pseudolus*, *Poeniculus*, and *Asinaria*.

In example (15), Callidorus requests that his slave Pseudolus read Phoenicium's letter, from which he will learn why Callidorus needs money so desperately. Pseudolus is his last hope of rescuing his girlfriend from the Captain, so he can only plead with him, not force him to do anything. The causative interpretation is once again unsuccessful:

- (15) CAL. *Recita modo: ex tabellis iam faxo scies  
quam subito argento mi usus invento siet.* (PLAVT. Pseud. 49–50)  
'CAL. Just read it! From the letter, you will [*faxo*???] realize at once  
how urgently I need to find money.'

The next passage from *Poeniculus* is of special interest (16):

- (16) AGOR. *Omnia faciet Iuppiter faxo,  
[nam mi est obnoxius et me metuit.]* (PLAVT. Poen. 1191)  
'I'll **make sure** (???) that Jupiter will do it all,  
for to me he is indebted, and stands in awe of me.'

Evidently, Agorastocles speaks of Jupiter in an unacceptably impious manner, especially if one interprets *faxo* as having its typical causative function, as Riley does. He translates this line as follows: 'I'll engage that Jove shall do it all; for to me he is indebted, and stands in awe of me.' On the basis of this reading, Riley (1912) considers "this impious expression out of character with Agorastocles, and the latter portion of the line to be spurious".

In my view, if we recognize the non-causative value of *faxo* here, it may sound less arrogant.

The last example (17) seems to be ambiguous and allows for both causative and non-causative interpretations:

- (17) *Horrescet faxo lena, leges quom audiet.* (PLAVT. Asin. 749)  
'The madam will [*faxo*???] shudder when she hears the terms.'

Parasitus is indeed the author of the terms to be read to the madam, which makes a causative reading of *faxo* quite possible. At the same time, the terms were written by Parasitus on behalf of his master Diabolus, who is ultimately the causer in this scenario, meaning that *faxo* need not have a causative connotation.

Obviously, in all the passages in question, *faxo* has lost its grammatical meaning of future tense, as well as its syntactic function as the verb governing the dependent

predicate, and its lexical meaning “do, make”. The question arises as to what value this verb has acquired to compensate for what has been lost.

Analysis of the syntactic structure of example (14) will presumably help us to identify the true meaning of *faxo* in all these non-standard cases. Let us take a closer look at this passage:

- (14) CAL. *Namque enim tu, credo, me imprudentem obrepseris.*  
 MEG. *Ne tu hercle faxo haud nescias quam rem egeris.* (PLAUT. Trin. 61–62)

What catches the eye first and foremost is the remarkable and thoroughly elaborated parallel structure of lines 61–62, namely the alliteration of the particles *Nam* and *Ne* at the beginning, the homoeoteleuton in the words *obrepseris* and *egeris* at the end, and parenthetical *credo* and *faxo* in the middle. Of particular interest is the deliberate parallelism of *credo* and *faxo*, which I think may shed light on the meaning of *faxo* in all the passages under consideration. Assuming that *faxo* in line 62 fulfils a similar pragmatic function to *credo* in line 61, we can suppose that *faxo* is a kind of parenthesis with the function of epistemic evaluation of the utterance. And if we compare all passages (11–17) with each other, the most likely meaning of *faxo* seems to be either ‘certainly, definitely, without any doubt’, which corresponds to the adverb *certe* / *certo*, or ‘perhaps, possibly’, which is in line with *forsitan*. In the first case, we are dealing with the lexicalization of *faxo* into a modal-epistemic adverb, and in the second case, the grammaticalization of the full-fledged verb into a parenthetical evidential marker.

## 5 Epistemic Modality and Evidentiality: What Do They Have in Common?

It is worth emphasizing that epistemic modality and evidentiality are partly overlapping categories, and their interaction has long been the subject of lively discussion. A detailed analysis of the literature on the topic is beyond the scope of this paper, but a few remarks may be helpful.

According to one commonly used definition, “epistemic modality is a conceptual domain pertaining to the speaker’s assessment of the truth concerning some propositional content *p* (in logical traditions) or to the speaker’s subjective evaluation of the degree of certainty that *p* holds true (in functional cognitive frameworks)” (Wiemer 2018: 87). The range of epistemic meanings includes knowledge, certainty, epistemic necessity, probability, likelihood, uncertainty, epistemic possibility, doubt, unlikelihood, and epistemic impossibility. As for evidentiality, this

is “a linguistic category whose primary meaning is source of information” (Aikhenvald 2004: 3). Depending on the ways knowledge can be obtained, evidentials are divided into three groups, *viz.* direct (perceptual, visual, firsthand), indirect inferential (obtained by means of inferring, presumption or induction), and indirect reported.<sup>6</sup> In early studies of evidentiality, it was often treated as a subcategory of epistemic modality (Palmer 1986: 51; Willett 1988: 52, among others), whereas in later studies quite a few scholars consider evidentiality and epistemic modality to constitute two different categories which, however, are very close to each other and are often expressed by the same means (de Haan 1999; Cornillie 2009; Remberger 2010; Plungian 2010: 44–46; Haßler 2010: 239; Zheltova 2017; Wiemer 2018).

The affinity of these two categories is particularly understandable if evidentiality is reconsidered as encoding the *mode of access* to information rather than its source. What links evidentiality with epistemic modality is the speaker’s “attitude towards knowledge” (Givón 1982; Chafe 1986: 262; Willet 1988: 52), and it is no surprise that Chafe and Nichols (1986) subtitled their collective monograph on evidentiality *The linguistic coding of epistemology*. In recent works one can observe an intention to find new explanations why evidential and epistemic markers often coincide. Wiemer (2018) has put forward the notion of *reliability* as an intermediate layer between evidential and epistemic meanings. With reference to de Haan (1999: 85), he argues that epistemic modality and evidentiality both deal with evidence but differ in what they do with that evidence: epistemic modality *evaluates* evidence and on the basis of this evaluation assigns a confidence measure to the speaker’s utterance, while an evidential *asserts* that there is evidence for the speaker’s utterance but does not interpret the evidence in any way (Wiemer 2018: 99–103).

It should be stressed that the intertwining of epistemic modality with evidentiality concerns only one evidential type, *viz.* indirect inferential (presumptive). The fact that a question of probability arises at all indicates that the speaker has no direct knowledge of the situation (Plungian 2001: 354), which belongs to the realm of indirect evidentiality and is normally expressed by either grammatical or lexical tools with the meaning “perhaps, possibly, probably” corresponding to a weak or medium degree of reliability. The intersection of these two categories is successfully explained by Plungian (2010: 46):

If we regard such values as modal, we stress one of the basic characteristics of modality, namely the assessment of a situation (as highly probable); regarding it as evidential, we stress

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<sup>6</sup> For more detailed classifications of evidential meanings, see Plungian (2001: 353; 2010: 37); a concise classification of evidential meanings is also given in one of Aikhenvald’s recent works as follows: “[Evidentials] cover a limited set of semantic parameters – visual, non-visual sensory, inference, assumption, speech report, and quotation” (Aikhenvald 2018: 30).



one of the basic characteristics of evidentiality, namely the reference to logical conclusions as a source of information about a situation. This way, markers of presumptive evidentiality are the only evidential markers with inbuilt modal components and the only modal markers with inbuilt evidential components.

Importantly, epistemic markers can evolve into evidential ones, as happened with the Russian and Polish particle *jakoby* ‘allegedly’. It is worth highlighting that in Polish this particle became a pure reportative (quotative) evidential, with its epistemic component entirely suppressed, while in Russian it has not lost its epistemic component but retains both epistemic and evidential potential: Russian *jakoby* — often translated ‘as if, as though’ — frequently occurs in contexts of reported speech, but, unlike its Polish cognate, it has not lost its strong connotation of doubt (Wiemer 2005: 117; 2018: 102–104). These observations on the correlation and intertwining of epistemic and evidential values will hopefully help us to identify the true meaning of *faxo*.<sup>7</sup>

## 6 Epistemic or Evidential *faxo*?

We now return to the question of what this remarkable verbal form turns into at the final stage of its evolution.<sup>8</sup> Does it become a modal-epistemic marker signifying “certainly, definitely, without any doubt” or an evidential marker with the meaning “perhaps, possibly”? In other words, what semantic nuances can be identified in the *faxo* of examples (11–17)?

It will hardly be possible to answer this question if we rely only on the seven examples at our disposal. But on the assumption that the same or similar phenomena could occur in other languages, we have the opportunity to draw on comparative data from elsewhere. Unceta Gómez and Berger (2022: 31) have rightly observed with regard to politeness that “ancient languages offer data and evidence that challenge theorization on politeness and offer new angles on phenomena that are documented in modern languages”, but this statement can also be interpreted

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<sup>7</sup> The idea that *faxo* developed its evidential extension due to its pre-existing future tense value cannot be excluded: grammaticalized evidentials go back to future markers in some languages (Aikhenvald 2004: 111), and coinciding markers of indirect evidentiality and future tense are not uncommon (Forker 2018: 67). This may provide an additional argument in favour of an evidential interpretation of *faxo* in some contexts.

<sup>8</sup> In my previous study (Zheltova 2022: 80–81), I analysed all stages of the grammaticalization of *faxo* and came to the conclusion that in this process, *faxo* has reached the penultimate stage (switch context) of the trajectory laid out by Heine (2002) and Hopper (1991).

the other way round: modern languages also provide us with data and evidence that allow us to better understand challenging phenomena in ancient languages.

Fortunately, a problem similar to ours has been successfully solved by Dendale and Kreutz (2019), who investigated in detail the whole array of connotations of the French modal adverb *certainement*. This adverb had traditionally been considered an expression of epistemic modality with the semantics of certainty, akin to “sûrement, bien sûr”. However, on the basis of a corpus analysis that reflects the actual usage of this adverb in modern French, Dendale and Kreutz come to the conclusion that the traditional modal epistemic interpretation applies only to a limited number of contexts, whereas in the vast majority of cases *certainement* functions as a means of expressing an inferential/deductive conclusion (*probabilité, plausibilité*), which belongs to the domain of indirect inferential evidentiality. For this kind of evidential strategy, the scholars coin the terms “posture épistémique / posture de certitude”. With this strategy, a speaker, despite not being entirely assured of the truth of his/her statement, is pretending to be sure and makes the addressee believe in the truth of what he/she says (Dendale and Kreutz 2019: 18).<sup>9</sup> The term “posture de certitude” seems to be part of a broader concept of *stance*, which in recent studies has increasingly replaced the familiar term “evidentiality”. As Squartini argues with reference to Biber (2004: 109), “in some of the discourse-focused perspectives the relationship with the original grammatical notion is so loosened that the very term ‘evidentiality’ is dismissed in favour of the overarching notion of ‘stance’, which comprises ‘the linguistic mechanisms used by speakers and writers to convey their personal feelings and assessments’. Within these ‘linguistic mechanisms’ Biber (2004) admits evidential (*apparently*) as well as epistemic adverbs (*certainly*) without distinguishing them from prototypical grammatical markers” (Squartini 2018: 275–276).

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<sup>9</sup> Among many others, Dendale and Kreutz analyse the example: “Mon interlocutrice était certainement plus âgée que moi, mais la confusion était telle que j’avais du mal à ne serait-ce que mettre un âge sur son visage” and come to the conclusion that “la présence de *certainement* a pour effet que l’énoncé ne s’interprète plus comme transmettant un savoir mémorisé (Mon interlocutrice était plus âgée que moi), que le locuteur a pris dans son stock d’informations. Il s’interprète, au contraire, comme communiquant une information que le locuteur (ou locuteur représenté) a générée par inférence (déductive), information ayant ainsi le statut d’une supposition, conjecture ou hypothèse. Par conséquent, l’information a peu de chances de paraître intrinsèquement « certaine » à l’interprétant. Toutefois, par l’emploi de *certainement* (plutôt que d’un adjectif comme *probablement, sans doute, peut-être. . .*), le locuteur se donne une posture de certitude, une assurance « jouée » par rapport à l’information communiquée : il se présente – de bonne ou de mauvaise foi – comme légitimement confiant en ces propos. Une telle posture peut évidemment être exploitée à des fins argumentatives” (Dendale and Kreutz 2019: 18).

A detailed overview of Dendale and Kreutz's arguments and an analysis of the whole body of examples at their disposal lie beyond the scope of this paper. However, it seems important to emphasize that the authors examined all the examples against the background of sufficiently broad contexts which described various situations *not directly accessible* to the speaker, but comprehended on the grounds of inference, "common knowledge" or other indirect sources. The lack of direct access to information provides the basis for conjecture and hypothesis (Dendale and Kreutz 2019: 21). From this perspective, in modern French the adverb *certainement*, despite its etymology, corresponds not so much to the adverbs 'certainly, precisely, for sure' (epistemic-modal interpretation), as to 'obviously, probably' (evidential interpretation). Consequently, Dendale and Kreutz identify a semantic-pragmatic shift in the evolution of *certainement* similar to that seen with Russian *jakoby* 'as though, allegedly':<sup>10</sup> *certainement* has developed a new evidential extension but without losing its original epistemic value. In addition to *jakoby*, I can point to one more example in Russian: the word *navernoe* 'precisely, surely' has transformed syntactically from a modal-epistemic adverb into a parenthetical expression, and semantically from an epistemic marker to an evidential one, cf. *On znal navernoe, chto...* 'He knew for sure that...' and *On, navernoe, znal, chto...* 'He probably knew that...'<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, with regard to Latin we do not have at our disposal the tools which are applied to the analysis of living languages; nevertheless, we can try to look at our examples (11–17) from the perspective of "posture de certitude".

In the seven passages under consideration *faxo* seems to admit of both epistemic and evidential interpretations. In two of them (11–12), *faxo* is closer to *forsitan* than to *certo*, and should be translated by evidential expressions such as "perhaps, I suppose, obviously, probably":

- (11) *vel quingentos curculiones pro uno faxo reperias* (PLAVT. Curc. 587).  
 'You will **obviously** find five hundred breadworms instead of one'.
- (12) *ob istanc industriam etiam faxo amabit amplius*. (PLAVT. Men. 791)  
 'By your efforts, I **suppose**, he'll fall for many more'.

<sup>10</sup> See Wiemer (2005: 117, 2018: 102–104).

<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, the shift in usage (from adverb to parenthetical expression) is reflected in the shift in punctuation.

In both examples, *faxo* has a clear semantics of guess/presupposition, though accompanied by the “posture de certitude (position of certainty)” which the speaker wishes to inspire in the addressee.

By contrast, in ex. (13), Megaronides is eager to convince his friend that there is nothing but mutual benefit in his offer. Therefore, *faxo* appears to be close to a modal-epistemic marker with a high degree of reliability, such as *certo* ‘surely, certainly, definitely, no doubt’:

- (13) *faxo haud tantillum dederis verborum mihi.* (PLAVT. Trin. 60).  
**‘Be sure,** you won’t have tricked me, not in the slightest!’

The same strategy of assurance is evident in Megaronides’ remark in ex. (14). Both the formula of the oath (*Ne . . . hercle*) and the litotes *haud nescias* ‘you won’t be unaware’, which reinforces the statement, favour the epistemic interpretation, which, in turn, is reinforced by the parallelism of *credo* and *faxo* that has already been discussed earlier:

- (14) *Ne tu hercle faxo haud nescias quam rem egeris.* (PLAVT. Trin. 62)  
 ‘I swear by Hercules, **no doubt** you won’t be unaware of what you have done’.

As regards the remaining examples, viz. (15–17), they seem to provide grounds for treating *faxo* as a modal-epistemic marker with a high degree of reliability rather than an evidential with low epistemic support. Therefore, I suggest the following translations:

- (15) CAL. *Recita modo: ex tabellis iam faxo scies  
 quam subito argento mi usus invento siet.* (PLAVT. Pseud. 49–50)  
 ‘CAL. Just read it! From the letter, you will **definitely** realize at once how urgently I need to find money.’
- (16) AGOR. *Omnia faciet Iuppiter faxo,  
 [nam mi est obnoxius et me metuit.]* (PLAVT. Poen. 1191)  
 ‘**No doubt** Jupiter will do it all,  
 for to me he is indebted, and stands in awe of me.’
- (17) *Horrescet faxo lena, leges quom audiet.* (PLAVT. Asin. 749)  
 ‘The madam will **certainly** shudder when she hears the terms.’

Thus, modal-epistemic cases of *faxo* appear to occur more often than evidential ones. The predominance of epistemic over evidential instances of *faxo* seems to be the result of the natural evolution of its semantics: it is only one step from the causative meaning “make sure that” to the epistemic meaning “be sure that”. And just as the French adverb *certainement* and the Russian epistemic markers *jakoby* and *naverno* have developed evidential extensions in some contexts, Latin *faxo* may well have followed the same path.

## 7 Conversational Potential of *faxo*

We are now in a position to try to understand how *faxo* contributes to the inventory of strategies used by comic poets to create the illusion of live conversation.<sup>12</sup> The conversational potential of *faxo* is determined at least by the fact that it is predominantly encountered in situations of highly emotional dialogue, which are somehow related to the pragmatic domain of im/politeness. These situations favour various strategies of im/politeness involving “a set of compensatory behaviours that try to avoid or mitigate face-threatening acts” (Brown and Levinson 1987: 65).

The semantic diversity of *faxo* presumably makes it appropriate in the context of quite diverse im/politeness strategies. Thus, *faxo* as a causative verb may have conveyed threats or warnings that, according to Brown and Levinson (1987: 65), “primarily threaten the addressee’s (H’s) negative-face want, by indicating (potentially) that the speaker (S) does not intend to avoid impeding H’s freedom of action”. Examples (8–10) in Section 3 seem to be of this type. By contrast, the non-causative instances of *faxo* which allow an evidential interpretation could be taken to show a hedging device used to mitigate assertions (ex. (11–12) in Sections 4 and 6).

As regards the five examples in which we identified epistemic-modal semantics, they could be placed in between, as part of “those acts that predicate some positive future act of S toward H, and in so doing put some pressure on H to accept or reject them, and possibly to incur a debt”. According to the classification suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987: 66), they also belong to those acts that threaten the addressee’s (H’s) negative face, as exemplified in (13–17), see Sections 4 and 6.

To sum up, in the course of its evolution, *faxo* developed a whole array of connotations that could be used as different conversational strategies in talk-in-interaction.

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<sup>12</sup> It is no secret that the “comedies of Plautus and Terence, with their vivid colloquial style and socially diversified characters, have been a valuable source for pragmatic and sociolinguistic investigations of (early) Latin” (Berger 2021: 57).

## 8 Conclusions

We have analysed the syntactic behaviour, semantic diversity and pragmatic functions of the sigmatic future *faxo* in the language of Roman comedy. Alongside the large array of examples of causative *faxo*, there are seven instances of non-causative uses that can be identified as modal-epistemic and evidential. Our interpretation is based on in-depth linguistic and philological analyses of contexts in which *faxo* does not have causative meaning, as well as on data and evidence from modern languages in which similar semantic shifts are attested. Taking into account that “the lack of native speakers . . . undoubtedly hinders the access to the interpretation of a given utterance, both as intended by the speaker and as understood by the addressee” (Unceta Gómez and Berger 2022: 28), drawing on comparative data appears to be not only desirable but indispensable, because it lends more weight to our hypothesis. It is especially notable that the abundance of semantic nuances and pragmatic functions of *faxo* manifested itself particularly in the genre of Roman comedy, in the lively dialogues of comic characters. This gives us reason to assume that *faxo* made a major contribution to the set of colloquial techniques which could be used by comic poets to reproduce the colloquial speech of ordinary people, and from this point of view it can be considered as a special marker of orality in a written text.

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## Section 6: **Epigraphy**