Spanish auxiliaries of modal necessity: objective vs. subjective?

There are basically two types of auxiliary expressions of modal necessity in Peninsular Spanish: the “true” modal, *deber* (de) ‘must’, and the periphrastic expression *tener que* + infinitive. The latter covers both deontic and inherent, i.e. “logical necessity” meanings and has only very little epistemic impact; the former does not have an inherent modal meaning, but expresses both deontic and epistemic meanings.

According to Hengeveld’s (2004; fc.) classification of modality, the “logical necessity” meaning would be a case of event-oriented inherent modality, deontic meanings would be either participant-oriented or event-oriented, and epistemic meanings either episode- or proposition-oriented, depending on their objective or subjective nature.

Our talk will address two problems, one related to epistemic and the other related to deontic necessity. First, how to decide whether a given epistemic use of *deber* (de) or *tener que* expresses objective or subjective modality? According to Hengeveld and Mackenzie (2008: 174) objective epistemic SoAs can be additionally modalized at the level of the proposition. The latter need not be “harmonic”, i.e. semantically compatible with the objective modal, as in Lyon’s (1977: 808) *Certainly he may have forgotten*. The specification by means of modal adverbs is possible with Spanish modalas of necessity, but such a modification cannot be really “non-harmonic”:

(1) *Lo cierto es que* probablemente debía de habérmelo explicado ya porque llevaba largo rato hablando sin que yo le escuchara.*
    ‘As a matter of fact *he probably must have explained it to me* already, because he had been talking to me for some time without me listening to him.’ (CREA)

Therefore, it is difficult to assess whether *probablemente* in (1) is indeed a higher order modifier or just a redundant addition to the modalization by means of *deber de*.

The second problem is illustrated in (2), which shows that participant-oriented deontic necessity can have scope over relative tense, which is a problem for FDG, because relative tense is supposed to have a wider scope than participant-oriented modality (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 173f, 212ff).

(2) *Que a ella no le tenía que haber pagado nada.*
    ‘*She shouldn’t have paid her* anything at all!’ (CREA)

A possible solution of this problem might be to assume a differentiation between subjective and objective deontic modality as does Lyons (1977: 792f) and to take the source of modal evaluation as a starting point for the classification of modal meanings rather than their goal. The latter approach will also help us to solve the first problem.

References:
Hengeveld, Kees (fc): “The grammaticalization of tense, mood and aspect in FDG”.