

Modality in Kanakanavu and Mayrinax Atayal

Yi-Yang Cheng
National Taiwan University

The present study investigates two Austronesian languages spoken in Taiwan—Kanakanavu and Mayrinax Atayal—which are also known as Formosan languages (Ross 2009). By examining the modal expressions in the two languages, it is demonstrated that their modal systems, as characterized by a set of formally definable verbal elements (e.g. defective morphology, fixed syntactic positions, etc.), exhibit several phenomena that are not covered by established typological categories and commonly observed developmental paths in modals. By examining their epistemic systems and how the notion of necessity is conceptually structured in the two languages, a cognitive typology is proposed for modal systems.

In the domain of root modality, it is found that notions which commonly serve as conceptual imports for the expression of necessity are absent in the two languages, where the concepts of NEED, DUTY, and OBLIGATION are not found to be denoted in the lexicon. In Kanakanavu, the only modal that is semantically similar to, but not easily defined as, a typical deontic modal expression has a unique lexical source that refers to *habitual actions that are strongly expected to occur in the future*, as in (1). On the other hand, Mayrinax Atayal also has a necessity expression with *planned actions that somehow never happened* as the core meaning of its lexical source, as in (2).

- (1) **masiraru** putukikio sua Pani (Kanakanavu)
 have.always work NOM Pani
Non-modal reading: 'Pani is working (*not surprisingly*, since he has always been a diligent worker).'
- Modal reading: 'Pani **should** work.'
- (2) **naki** m<in>usa' qumluap i Payan (Mayrinax Atayal)
 was.going <Perf>go.AV hunt.AV NOM Payan
Non modal reading: 'Payan *was going* to go hunting (*but he didn't*)'
- Modal reading: 'Paya **should** have gone hunting'

In the domain of epistemic modality, no connections to root modals are found, the presence of which is commonly observed to be characteristic of European languages (van der Auwera and Ammann 2005). There is, however, a shared opposition between epistemic judgment based on the speaker's own supposition, as in (3a) and (4a), and epistemic inference based on observable evidence, as in (3b) and (4b). Accordingly, the distinction of strength or degree of probability is not attested to be inherent in the epistemic systems in the two languages, but is found to be subject to the speaker's own knowledge of the world, or nature of the evidence being evaluated.

- (3) a. **manasu** putukikio Pani 'Pani is probably working (I suppose).' (Kanakanavu)
 b. **kan** putukikio Pani 'Pani is probably working (since I saw him preparing)'
- (4) a. **ki'i** minusa' qumluap i Payan 'Payan has probably gone hunting (I suppose).' (M. Atayal)
 b. **tali ki** minusa' qumluap i Payan 'Payan has probably gone hunting (since I saw him preparing).'

Based on the above observations, modality in the two languages is analyzed in the framework of Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1991) as sensitive to the distinction between judgment based on known reality and judgment based on immediate reality at both the root and epistemic domains. Kanakanavu and Mayrinax Atayal would represent the type of languages where the well-known root-epistemic ambiguity is absent in the modal system, hence typologically distinguished from the type of system found in familiar languages such as English, where the evolutionary momentum is only evoked at the epistemic domain as defused potency from the semantics of root modals, leading to the presence of root-epistemic ambiguity. In sum, this paper calls for a revisit to the putative centrality of possibility and necessity in the study of modality. With the proposed cognitive typology, it hopes to contribute to further examination of the conceptual structure of modality in languages where root-epistemic ambiguity is not found.

References

- Langacker, R. W. 1991. *Foundations of cognitive grammar*. Vol. 2. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Ross, M. 2009. Proto Austronesian verbal morphology: a reappraisal. In Adelaar and Pawley eds., *Austronesian historical linguistics and cultural history: A festschrift for Robert Blust*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.
- van der Auwera, J., and A. Ammann. 2005. Overlap between situational and epistemic modal marking. In Dryer, Gil, Haspelmath, and Comrie, eds., *World atlas of language structures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.