



Book review

Modes of Modality: Modality, typology and universal grammar [Studies in Language companion series 149]. Edited by **Elisabeth Leiss** and **Werner Abraham**. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2014. vi, 511 pp.

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In *Modes of Modality: Modality, typology and universal grammar*, Elisabeth Leiss and Werner Abraham compile fifteen articles from various (sub-) fields of Linguistics (theoretical and applied linguistics, typology, the semantics/pragmatics interface, and language philosophy) with the aim of providing a universal definition of modality and capturing its various modes of realization and different subtypes in Natural Languages. The aim of this edited volume is thus to explore and compare the various functions and patterns of modality across a wide variety of languages (Slavic, Germanic, Latvian, Igbo, Kakabe (Mande) and Cantonese) through a variety of current linguistic perspectives (generative vs. functionalist, or language philosophy, among others). The central idea of this volume is that modality is found in all of the languages of the world, but it can manifest itself in various ways (intra-, but also inter-linguistically), which can either be overt or covert.

A lot of semantic and syntactic works have been devoted to the study of modality (Kratzer 2012, Palmer 2001, Portner 2009, Cinque 1999, Hacquard 2006 to cite just a few). One of the major subjects of interest has been the distinction between root and epistemic modality. For instance, in Germanic languages (but not only) this distinction is typically represented by modal polyfunctionality (Hansen: 90), as in (1):

- (1) a. In the future you *must* try to get here earlier (deontic)
 - b. It *must* be later than I thought (epistemic)
- (from Hansen: 90, ex. (1), (2))

In (1a), *must* is interpreted as involving an obligation: *in view of the rules, in the future, you will be obliged to get here earlier*. Used as an obligation, *must* has a root meaning, in that this interpretation focuses on the relation between the subject and the predicate. In (1b), the same modal verb is used, but the meaning is not that of an obligation, but of a probability: *in view of what I know, it is probable that it is later than I thought*.

Modality is typically triggered via modal verbs/adverbs (as we just saw in 1 on the example of English; see also Akiba (pp. 19–42) on Japanese, and Hansen

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(pp. 89–126) and Wiemer (pp. 127–166) for its manifestation in the languages of Europe), but it can also be overtly realised through other means, such as with modal particles. This is typically observed in German (Grosz, pp. 263–290; Schenner & Sode, pp. 291–315), but also in Kakabe, a Mande language (Vydrina, pp. 379–406). Modality can also be overtly triggered through grammatical mood (see Varley (pp. 43–86) about overt morphological evidentiality in Bulgarian, and Lokmane & Kalnača (pp. 167–189) about the overt morphological Latvian debitive mood). Moreover, modality can also be triggered covertly, that is when it is only ‘visible’ semantically (vs. syntactic or morphological), as illustrated by the modal reading of *ima da* ‘have to’ in Macedonian (Mitkovska & Bužarovska, pp. 193–218), some covertly marked epistemics (as discussed in Zeman, pp. 457–484), the novel periphrastic past with *mieć* ‘have’ in Polish (Abraham & Piskorz, pp. 409–455) or by Igbo specific verbs (Uchchukwu, pp. 485–506), among others.

In addition, instances of (less studied) peripheral modality are also covered in this volume: modality of insufficiency (Melis, pp. 353–376); modality of attitudinality (Yap & Chor pp. 219–260; Zeman, pp. 457–484), modality and illocutionary force in German (Grosz, pp. 263–290, Schenner & Sode, pp. 291–315), and modality and procedural relations (Salkie, pp. 319–351).

This book greatly contributes to the understanding of how modality is expressed in the languages of the world, how it interacts with its environments and how it is related to the concept of perspectivization. It consists of six parts *plus* an introduction, written by the editors, Abraham & Leiss.

The introduction puts forward an *un-Cartesian* view of the Universal Grammar, presenting a functionalist approach to UG. The aim of this volume is thus to view modality as part of UG, and to treat it (also) in a functionalist way. This is why many contributions come from such different perspectives. The introduction also consists of a very good overview of all the contributions compiled in the present volume.

Contributions to Part I – *Formal properties of modality*, are mainly interested in the formal properties of modality. More specifically, they investigate the root vs. epistemic distinctions, as well as evidential modality.

Akiba’s contribution focuses on the semantic ambiguity illustrated in (2) – also known as root vs. epistemic alternation – and tries to answer the following questions (Akiba: 20, (6)): Why do modal auxiliaries cross-linguistically exhibit the same ambiguity? Why does one single modal auxiliary allow two interpretations?

- (2) *John may go to the party*
 - a. (In view of the house rules) it is possible for John to go to the party (root)
 - b. (In view of what we know) it is possible that John goes to the party (epistemic) (Akiba: 19, (1))

The author proposes a minimalist answer to these questions. He shows that modals in Japanese (and German, see Abraham 2002) can overtly occupy different positions that trigger different interpretations (epistemic vs. root readings). Akiba proposes that the two modal meanings are interpreted on phase heads. The ambiguous meaning is derived by the idea that *may* in (2a) and *may* in (2b) are merged in different positions: root modals are merged under v^*P and epistemic modals above v^*P/vP , reflecting the fact that the former are scopally ambiguous, while the latter must take wide scope over the entire clause (see Stowell 2004, in particular). Both are in an agree relation with a phase head (v^* and C). If this is correct, then modal verbs are like auxiliaries *have* and *be* in the sense that they are semantically light: their modal meanings are interpreted by v^* and C, whereas modal verbs themselves have no semantic effect at the Conceptual-Intentional interface, and can head-move to T° at PF.

Within the cartography framework (Rizzi 1997, Cinque 1999), Varley investigates the formal aspect and (discourse-) syntactic representation of overt evidential morphology in Bulgarian, with the aim of uncovering some of ‘the complexities of a universally underlying structure’ (p. 43). The author shows that evidentials in Bulgarian correlate with modality and speaker attitude. More precisely, she shows that evidentials are analogous to epistemic modality and grammatical aspect. The main claim of this paper is that hearsay evidentiality and inferential evidentiality must crucially be distinguished, which means that there is no single head for ‘evidential mood’ (Cinque’s 1999 $Mood_{EVID}$). In Bulgarian, evidentiality is manifested as a verbal suffix, syncretic with perfect morphology. When inferential evidentiality is manifested, the 3p auxiliary must be present. When hearsay evidentiality is expressed, the 3p auxiliary is absent. In order to account for these empirical facts, Varley proposes that hearsay evidentials are licensed by a functional head located within the C-domain, while inferential evidentials occupy a functional projection within the TP-domain.

Contributions to Part II – *Typological survey*, are essentially devoted to Slavic, Latvian and African (Kakabe Mande). Contributors are concerned with the way in which evidential modality is encoded across languages and how modal polysemy is disambiguated. Some contributors are also interested in exploring how modal grammaticalisation / degrammaticalisation is achieved with temporals.

Hansen’s contribution explores the cross-linguistic morpho-syntactic variations of modal constructions. More precisely, it investigates the syntax of modal polyfunctionality (i.e. the alternation between root and epistemic meanings, cf. (2)) in the languages of Europe with the aim to distinguish between the syntactic features that are necessary to modal constructions and those that are not (i.e., those that vary cross-linguistically). On the basis of the languages of Europe (and a typological study from Hansen & de Haan 2009), Hansen claims that variations among

languages concerning modals come from (i) the encoding of the subject (nominative vs. oblique case) and (ii) inflectional categories. The author proposes that one must distinguish between raising vs. control in order to explain the necessary syntactic features of polyfunctionality.

Wiemer's contribution is concerned with the modal *mora* 'must' and its collocation with the non-factivity linker *da* in Macedonian. The author notes that there might be two instances of *mora*: one that inflects and another whose inflection is petrified (with default 3.p.sg present). Wiemer also claims that the uninflected meaning correlates with the epistemic reading of the modal, while inflected *mora* with the root reading. In addition, he proposes that petrified *mora da* should be analysed as a unit, some kind of a sentence adverb with propositional scope, marking epistemic necessity.

Lokmane & Kalnača's contribution offers an overview of the functions, morphosyntax and modal semantics of the Latvian grammatical mood *debitive*, which expresses mainly necessity of obligation, i.e., root modality. The debitive mood has special forms: it combines 3rd person present indicative with a prefix, *jā* (my emphasis) and the auxiliary *būt* in a finite tense form, as in *darīt – dara – ir jā-dara* 'to do – do – must do' and *būt – ir jā-būt* 'to be – must be' (from Lokmane & Kalnača: 170, (2)). This contribution is particularly interesting because, as the authors point out, there is no other attested language displaying this kind of grammatical mood.

In their contribution, Mitrovska & Bužarovska present an analysis of the Macedonian verb *ima* 'have'. They observe that in addition to the possession and existence meanings, *ima* can also display various meanings when it co-occurs with an untensed *da*-clause: when *ima* is inflected, it expresses weaker obligation than its uninflected variant. The strongest version (i.e., with uninflected *ima*) also involves some kind of future meaning. They show that uninflected *ima* can actually display both epistemic and deontic readings, and that these readings depend on the type of speech act involved. They also propose that the development of the meanings of *ima da* is semantically driven and that it is based on the source semantics: possessive *ima* 'habere', and existential *ima*.

As for Yap & Chor, they examine the semantic extensions and pragmatic functions of two types of attitudinal/epistemic markers in clause-medial position in Cantonese Chinese. These stance-markers originally come from psych-verbs (e.g. *gok³dak¹* 'feel/think', *paa³* 'fear', *m⁴zi¹* 'don't know') and directive verbs (*faan¹* 'return' and *maai⁴* 'approach'). Similar to English parenthetical *I think*, the first type involves 'insubordination' of the embedded complement clause. The authors show that both subject ellipsis and topicalization are crucial factors for psych verbs to get reanalysed as epistemic, evidential and attitudinal markers. As for the evolution of directive verbs into speaker's attitude markers, they show that this is not

achieved via subject ellipsis or topicalization, but rather ‘via verbal complementation and a disjunctive strategy’ (p. 253).

In Part III – *Interfaces between mood and modality*, contributors are mainly interested in the interaction between sentential modality (introduced by a modal verb, for instance) and (illocutionary) force. They study this phenomenon in finite vs. non-finite clauses, as well as in veridical vs. non-veridical embedded clause. In order to do so, they focus on German clause-medial modal particles (MP), which are unique in being typical of speech act restrictions. Typically, ‘modal particles do not contribute directly to the proposition expressed, but give rise to illocutionary, expressive or procedural meanings’ (Schenner & Sode: 297).

Grosz focuses on the German MPs *ruhig/bloss/JA*, which generally occur in modal declarative clauses, as well as in imperatives. Compared to other MPs, Grosz observes that these particles must occur with a modal verb in declaratives. Based on previous works (Grosz 2009, 2010), the author proposes that these MPs diagnose the presence of a (c)overt modal operator. Their function in this sense is to increase the degree of necessity or possibility that the modal utterance expresses, i.e., they are neither speech acts, nor illocutionary modifiers. The question that Grosz tries to answer is how such MPs can be accounted for in rational clauses, which obviously cannot be analysed as modal declaratives or imperatives. In order to solve this puzzle, the author argues that rational clauses involve a covert existential modal with a modal choice function, as in Rullmann et al. (2008).

Schenner & Sode are interested in the embedded clauses in which German MPs are licensed. In particular, the authors focus on the commitment-weakening MP *wohl* when it occurs under the causal connective *weil*, creating veridical contexts. They explore the special unexpected semantics of this type of combination and argue that a sentence of the form ‘*p weil wohl q*’ is interpreted as ‘*p and assume(speaker) (q) and (if q then (q)(p))*’. Anchoring their analysis in a dynamic perspective based on speaker commitments allows to derive the desired conditional reading involved in these constructions.

In Part IV – *Modality conceptualizations*, contributors reconsider modal concepts.

Salkie, for instance, studies the (differences in meanings and use of) modals *can* and *may*, as well as their counterparts in German and French, from a different perspective, namely from the semantics and pragmatics divide. He proposes to re-explore these modals in the light of ‘procedural relations’ (Goldman 1970, Delin et al. 1994), focussing on the relation of *enablement*. Based on a corpora study, he proposes that all uses of *can* can be equated with *enablement*, while *may*, on the other hand, involves metalinguistic possibility. His analysis thus leads him to the conclusion that although the notions of *enablement* and modal possibility are related, *enablement* is not inherently modal, in that it does not trigger possible

worlds semantics. Sentences involving these items are semantically incomplete, which means that the interpretation of *can* and *may* must be triggered by pragmatics, through what he calls *implicature*.

Melis's contribution is concerned with constructions expressing the notion of 'sufficiency', which is triggered by a degree quantifier (*enough, too, excessively, suffice*). She proposes that these constructions involve covert modality, more specifically *strong necessity*. A degree quantifier like *enough* then establishes a relation of necessity between an element in its scope and a state of affairs, which might either be recoverable from the non-finite complement or from the context. The author investigates the relation between these operators and possible worlds, and tries to understand how it can 'be reconciled with their evaluating function in the real world' (Melis: 354).

The unique contribution to Part V – *Diachronic derivation*, deals with the relation between modality and dependency and attempts to answer how this relation is accounted for diachronically in Katabe (a West-African language, from the Mande family). Vydrina observes that the marker *ni* in this language is polysemic. As a modal marker, *ni* can be used to mark weak obligation, intention, purpose, imperative, and is also typically used to mark the dependent clause as irrealis under desideratives and directives. All these usages correspond to Bybee et al.'s (1994) path of grammaticalization established for the modal meaning of obligation. *Ni* as a modal marker is agent-oriented. The author also shows that *ni* can appear as a purely 'sequential meaning'. In that sense, *ni* only marks the dependent status of the clause. It can also be used as a conditioned result in a generic context. In these two last readings, *ni* doesn't trigger any agent-oriented reading. Vydrina claims that the modal and non-modal meanings of *ni* are in fact related, because both lack assertiveness. She also investigates this idea in a diachronic perspective.

Finally, Part VI covers *Covert modality*. The contributions to this section show that modality can also be covert in the sense of only being 'visible' semantically.

Abraham & Piskorz observe two phenomena in spoken Polish. The first of those is the emergence of a periphrastic past, formed by the combination of *mieć* 'have' and a past participle of a lexical verb. The authors note that although this new analytic past form is similar to Modern German, its emergence is not due to linguistic areal contact. The second phenomenon they observe concerns the fact that when *mieć* + past participle is interpreted as *have to* + *V-infinitive*, it triggers epistemic and evidential readings, contrary to what is generally observed cross-linguistically. On the basis of these two phenomena, Abraham & Piskorz evaluate the temporal status of *mieć* + past participle and the relation of this combination with the (epistemic) modal meaning – if there is any. They argue that the epistemic or evidential readings are a combination of *mieć* plus covert modality that

is contingent either on the aspect marked on the non-finite verb or on viewpoint aspect (including adverbial material). Predicative aspect marked on the non-finite embedded verb is then the crucial factor to (root and epistemic) modality.

Zeman's contribution recognizes the universal character of modality. By adopting the wide-spread definition of modality, according to which the latter is 'a semantic domain concerned with the 'speaker's attitude' to the factual status of the proposition' (p. 457), she explores the (c)overt marking of epistemic modality and its perspectival effects on the textual level. The author argues that modality is reflected everywhere, including on different levels of linguistic structure (sentence level, textual level and narrative level). Her investigation leads her to the conclusion that the core principle of modality consists of two alternate levels reflected by 'speaker' vs. 'evaluator' (grammatical level), propositional vs. illocutionary subject (sentence level) and the 'narrator' vs. 'character' (discourse structure).

The last contribution to this volume is concerned with the study of modality in Igbo (an African language) where this category has only recently been discovered (Uchechukwu 2008, 2011), and remains relatively understudied. Uchechukwu tentatively explores the constructions and lexical items that could involve covert modality (i.e., wh-complements, simple relative clauses and purpose clauses, as well as the lexical verb *-kwé* 'agree', which encodes varying degrees of modal possibility, and the verbal derivative involving reduplication of the verb root). The author concludes that Igbo expresses covert modality.

Although the book offers very interesting discussions of the data and insights on the issue of modality across languages and language families, a few critical words are nevertheless in order.

First of all, one might wonder why, among all the languages treated in the volume, Romance languages are not explored at all.

Secondly, the main strength of this volume – namely, the fact that it presents the 'state of the art' research on the issue of modality from a number of different points of view and theoretical frameworks – could also be seen as its weakness, because this volume is more a survey of various contemporary approaches to this issue rather than an in-depth and sophisticated analysis of modality in a precise framework. To be fair to the editors, though, it's a methodological choice.

Thirdly, offering an overview of the recent developments in various linguistic approaches is challenging. This volume is not an easy read, due to the various linguistic (sub-) fields and frameworks (and the resulting terminological variations) it covers: jumping from one framework to the other is not always an easy task. That is why the Introduction to this volume is a 'must read': Leiss & Abraham deserve credit for their very helpful introduction, which is crucial to the understanding of the main idea of the volume, i.e. exploring Modality from different points of view in order to reach a universal definition of modality. It is also very

helpful in deciphering some of the concepts/terminology used by authors working in frameworks that are less familiar to the reader.

Moreover some articles show some (minor) inconsistencies in their internal organisation: for instance, in Vydrina's overview of her paper, the author says that she will give her conclusions in section 7 of her paper, yet, there is no section 7 in her article. Finally, the list of abbreviations at the end of each article is quite handy, but sometimes a bit idiosyncratic. For instance if cl means 'clitic' in Varley's contribution, it means 'classifier' for Yap & Chor, which appears confusing.

All in all, this volume offers a very interesting overview of the recent developments in the study of modality, covering various linguistic approaches and a wide array of languages, many of them non-related, thereby enriching both our empirical knowledge and our typological knowledge of the issue of modality, and furthering linguistic theory in general. As a result, any linguist interested in the study of the issue of modality will find something to take home from this volume.

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