

The level of grammaticalization of modals in the languages of Europe

This paper addresses the nature and status of modals in the languages of Europe. There are diverging traditions in the treatment of modals as a separate category in the linguistic descriptions of individual European languages; this ranges from applying morphological and morphosyntactic criteria in English (the well-known “NICE-properties”) to descriptions in other languages that take a fully semantic approach (“only those elements are modal that express modal notions”), without investigating whether such elements actually have different formal properties.

We look at the formal nature of modals and see how grammaticalized the notional category of modality is in the languages of Europe. We take as our starting point the paradigmatic and syntagmatic parameters of Lehmann (1982), as they are not language-specific (unlike the NICE properties). We find that some of these parameters are less relevant than others, but overall they form an important framework for discussing the grammatical status of modals. Two features are given here as examples.

1. Modals typically do not turn into affixes which runs counter to expected grammaticalization patterns (the parameter of *integrity*, or *erosion*). In fact, modals do not lose any phonological information (with the exception of the Albanian modal *mund* ‘can’ in certain dialects) but retain their full verb / adverb status. We also find that any modal meaning is added to the premodal meaning, rather than replacing it. In English and other Germanic languages the premodal meanings of the current core modals have been lost, but that is atypical. In languages such as Irish, Albanian, Hungarian and Russian the modal meanings are added to the list of meanings of the verb or adverb, although there may be morphosyntactic differences between usages.

2. We claim that modal constructions are located on a continuum between bi-clausal and mono-clausal structures; we find that they can vary with respect to the following features (even within one and the same language):

- i) the syntactic encoding of the subject argument,
- ii) assignment of the subject agreement marking to the modal and/or the main verb,
- iii) TAM marking on the modal and/or the main verb,
- iv) presence or absence of an auxiliary or light verb,
- v) presence or absence of a complementizer.

Some examples of these are: i) While some European languages (Germanic) have a single way of encoding subject agreement, others use two or more (e.g. Slavic). ii) In Serbian, the subject agreement may be found on the modal or on the main verb, depending on the modal. iii) in Germanic, all TAM marking is on the modal, but in Albanian it is on the main verb. iv) since modals need not be verbal, some languages (e.g., Irish, Basque and Russian) use a separate element for TA marking. v) the presence of a complementizer is a well-known feature of the Balkan *Sprachbund*.

We show that the Lehmann parameters allow for the integration of seemingly arbitrary facts about modal elements in individual languages into a larger framework and allow us to better distinguish between modals and lexical elements.