

CATEGORY OF MODALITY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract: The article investigates the category of modality in the English language. The author describes the origin of modality, all the categories and types of modality.

Key words: modality, category of modality, extensional modality, temporal modality, natural modality, logical modality, ethical modality, objective modality, subjective modality.

In the Linguistic Encyclopedic Dictionary modality is defined as a functional-semantic category which expresses different types of relations between the utterance and reality as well as different types of subjective evaluation of the information contained in the utterance. In the deepest sense, modality is concerned with the differing and varying *levels of being*; hence its central place in both ontology and epistemology. The study of modality could be called 'Tropology': it is a broad field.

The category of modality is one of the most complicated linguistic categories which have various forms of its expression in the language. It has also a lot of various definitions and interpretations. We call categories of modality the concepts of possibility or necessity, impossibility or un-necessity, contingency or in-contingency, probability or improbability and their degrees — as well as presence or absence.

Presence signifies the occurrence of an ostensible individual phenomenon, a unit clearly defined in time and place; and absence is the negation of this. Presence is a class standing under possibility and above necessity; absence, between un-necessity and impossibility. Presence or absence occurs either because of in-contingency, or through the realization of contingency.

Possibility may be viewed as a generic concept which embraces either contingency or necessity. Likewise, contingency and impossibility may be viewed as mutually exclusive species of un-necessity. Contingency signifies possibility and un-necessity taken together. In-contingency is a genus for necessity or impossibility. The various degrees of probability are subcategories of possibility or un-necessity.

In practice, these concepts are expressed in sentences by words like 'in some cases', 'sometimes', 'can', 'may', 'might', 'possibly', 'potentially', 'permissibly', 'perhaps', and all their related terms. The differences between these modal expressions are not merely verbal.

Indeed, in normal discourse, we tend to interchange terminology indiscriminately. For instance, in some cases we say 'always' to mean 'all'; in some cases, 'can always' means 'all can'. This is not our concern as logicians: we identify the connotations closest to what we are trying to discuss, and henceforth adopt restrictions which serve our purposes (Belichova-Krizhkova, 2001).

The majority of scientists (A. Kratzer, F.R. Palmer) consider that there are six main types of modality, six senses in which the various categories of modality may be understood. Within each type, all the categories occur, but with other meanings than in the other types. The categories have similar interrelationships and properties within each type. These uniformities allow us to abstract them, but ultimately each type needs to be considered separately. The interactions between types must also be analyzed.

Quantity, or extensional modality, is the primary type of modality, and is the one which was thoroughly dealt with by Aristotle. As it is stated previously, we are not consistent in our everyday use of terms like 'sometimes', 'can', 'may', 'might', 'must', and so on. Ultimately these are semantic issues, not important to us, though they need pointing out. Logic simply establishes conventions for terminology, and focuses on the material issues.

Two more, temporal modality and natural modality interact intimately with quantity. Temporal and natural modality may be called 'intrinsic' modalities, because they concern the properties of concrete individuals; extensional modality is comparatively 'extrinsic', in that it focuses on abstract universals. While it is true that often the copula 'is' is intended in a timeless sense, we sometimes use the word with a more restrictive connotation involving temporal limits.

The temporal equivalent of what is a singular instance in extension, is a momentary occurrence; this is the unit under consideration here. When we say 'S is P' we may mean either that S is always P, or that S is now P, or even that S is sometimes P. This ambiguity must be taken into consideration by Logic explicitly. A possible modification of standard propositions is therefore through the factor of temporal frequency.

The most significant type of modality is called natural modality. This refers to propositions such as 'S can be P', 'S cannot be P', 'S cannot-be P', and 'S must be P', with the sense of real, out-there potential or necessity. These relations were effectively recognized by Aristotle in his philosophical discussions, but were not systematically dealt with in the framework of his logic works.

Such modality differs radically from temporal modality. We do not here merely recognize that something may be sometimes one thing and sometimes another, or always or never so and so. We tend to go a step further, and regard that there is a character intrinsic to the object which makes it able to behave in this way or that, or incapable of doing so or forced to do so. Thus, temporal and natural modalities represent distinct outlooks, which cannot be freely interchanged.

Two other main types of modality, the logical and the ethical, need to be also indicated. As it is previously stated, these types are each sui generis, and worthy of thorough treatment on their own. Logical modality will be dealt with later in this work, but ethical modality is left to some future volume.

Logical modality expresses the compatibility or otherwise of a proposed assumption with the general framework of our knowledge to date. Logical modality makes use of terms such as 'might' (or perhaps) and 'surely'(or certainly), for possibility and necessity. Remember that we defined truth and falsehood as contextual, so this definition fits in consistently.

To the extent that such an evaluation is scientific, based on rigorous process, thorough, common public knowledge, and so on, it is objective information. To the extent that thought is deficient in its methodology, such modality is subjective.

Whereas the extensional, temporal and natural types of modality may be called 'materialistic', in that they refer directly to the world out there, which is mainly material or in any case substantial, logical modality may be called 'formalistic', because it operates on a more abstract plane.

Ethical statements tacitly refer to some value to be safeguarded or pursued, and consider the compatibility or otherwise of some proposed event with that given standard. We use terms such 'may' (for permissibles) and 'should' (for imperatives), to indicate ethical possibility or necessity.

Ethical modality is of course relative to standards of value. An ethical statement can in principle be judged true or false like any other.

Subjectivity comes into play here, not only in the matter of selecting basic values, but also to the extent that, in this field more than any other, factual knowledge is often very private.

Logic must, of course, eventually analyze such modality types in detail. But for our present purposes, let us note only that, in either case, the resemblance to the other types of modality is the aspect of conditionality. They are defined through the conditions for their realization.

Their distinction is that they do not concern the object in itself (i.e. the S-P relationship as such) like the others, but involve an additional relation to man the knower of that object, or man the eventual agent of such object. The latter relation is thus a new object, which includes the former, but is not identical with it. Such modalities, then, are not essentially subjective, though they can degenerate into subjectivity, but rather concern another object.

The reader should beware of the various ways the words 'modality' or 'modal' are used. In its broadest sense, 'modality' applies to any type and category of modality, which details should be specified, and every proposition is 'modal'.

In practice, we sometimes use the word 'modality' to refer specifically to the natural, temporal or extensional types of modality, to the exclusion of the logical. Sometimes, the sense is restricted to

only natural and temporal modality, as distinct from quantity. Likewise, we may in some cases call a proposition 'modal', to signify that it is other than actual or singular or factual.

The two types of modality we are introducing here are effectively qualifications of terms similar to distribution, although strictly speaking they apply to the relationships of terms. Such propositions are complex variations of the standard forms researched by Aristotle, involving an additional factor, modality, which can be subjected to whole-and-part, inclusion-exclusion type analyses, as was done with quantity (Grepl, 2003).

Also there is another theory of modality which was provided by Ch. Bally and in accordance with it modality expresses 2 types of relations and includes 2 levels. That's why the linguists usually differentiate between 2 types of modality: objective (or primary) and subjective (or secondary). Ch. Bally considered that each utterance consists of two parts, the part which presents information (he called it 'dictum') and the part which presents the speaker's evaluation of this information (he called it 'modus').

The primary modality expresses the relation of the contents of the sentence to reality as established by the speaker who, choosing the appropriate form of the mood presents the event as real, unreal or desirable. It is expressed by the grammatical form of mood and thus it is a component of predicativity and as such it always finds a grammatical expression in the sentence. E.g. You are my wife. Be my wife. I wish you were my wife. Thus, primary modality as a component of predicativity is an obligatory feature of the sentence - we cannot make a sentence without expressing primary modality.

Secondary modality presents another layer of modality, built over the primary modality. It does not always find an explicit expression in the sentence. Secondary modality is not homogeneous. It contains two layers and we can differentiate between two types of secondary modality. The first type expresses the relations between the subject of the sentence and the action. The action may be presented as possible, permissive, obligatory, necessary, desirable or unnecessary for the subject. It is expressed by the modal verbs in their verb-oriented meanings: ability, possibility, permission, necessity, obligation etc. E.g. Children must be seen but not heard. I can jump puddles. You may be free for today. The second type of secondary modality expresses the attitude of the speaker to the contents of the utterance or the speaker's evaluation of the event presented in the utterance. This type of modality can be expressed by: 1) modal words and modal adverbs and modal particles: maybe, probably, certainly, of course, perhaps, sure, evidently, supposedly, luckily, fortunately etc. (E.g. This is probably the best chance you have ever had); 2) by modal verbs in their sentence-oriented meanings: probability, doubt, supposition, certainty, disbelief (E.g. She couldn't have done it alone); 3) by modalized verbs seem, to appear, happen, chance (She appeared to be holding something back from him); 4) by the so called performative verbs and phrases which name speech and mental acts: think, suppose, guess, doubt, be certain, be sure etc. (e.g. I guess you are right; I am afraid this is true); 5) by special syntactic structures like 'tag questions' (This is true, isn't it?), as well as 6) by intonation and word order. As we can see the modal verbs participate in the expression of two kinds of secondary modality (Bally, 2003).

Nowadays modal words are used everywhere in all spheres. They are very useful, because they help us to express our thoughts and feelings in a correct way. However the category of modality is enough complicated and it requires a further investigation.

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