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Introduction

The overall goal of this dissertation is to study natural language modalities from the perspective of both typology and formal semantics. The idea is to combine the methods and results of both in order to get a better grip on the systematic features of modality.

Two important parts of this dissertation thus consist in investigating the notional category of modality from a typological perspective, and in using the results of this investigation as input for formal semantics. The typological approach to modality becomes the first step of the research strategy for semantics. Another question that this dissertation will address is whether a formalized semantics of modality can provide an explanation for the results of the typological investigation (on top of being an adequate description of these results).

Modality is a broad category embracing many different interpretative types that can be expressed by many different constructions. There are surely a lot of directions for research within the typological approach that may deliver fruitful information about the category of modality.

One possibility is for instance to classify languages in terms of the type of system they use to express modality. This is illustrated in the famous (Palmer 2001) where such a distinction is drawn. Some languages express modality through modal systems, others through mood. Palmer (2001) further classifies the category of modality for both systems. This results in a typology of modality based on crosslinguistic analysis. This path has been successfully followed by among others Palmer (1986), van der Auwera and Plungian (1998), and Hengeveld (2004).

Another research program investigates the grammaticalization paths of modal elements as in (Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca 1994) and (van der Auwera and Plungian 1998). These works are characterized by their diachronic perspective.

A last example of fruitful investigation within the typological approach is the cross-linguistic study of the interaction of modality with other categories such as tense and aspect, or with operations like negation (de Haan 1997).

This dissertation concentrates on modal systems and leans on existing typolo-

gies of modality. I therefore take for granted much of the work cited above and will leave the mood category for future work. In contrast to the second suggestion above, this study is synchronic in nature. Finally I will not investigate the interaction of modality with other categories but focus instead on the combinations of modal items within the category of modality.

It is not an uncommon practice in semantics to use typological data, or at least to use some examples from languages other than English in order to investigate some issue. Ad hoc examples are often used to argue for or against a hypothesis within a language. Typically, crosslinguistic data is not used in such situations to make universal claims about how semantics should look. This method is perfectly fine as long as one wants to find support for one's analysis (or arguments against a competing one). Nevertheless it falls short when the goal is to make general claims about the semantic architecture of modality. Such a goal needs a *systematic* crosslinguistic analysis of modality. This fact has been made clear for the study of modality in a series of publications by Kai von Stechow and Sabine Iatridou, (von Stechow and Iatridou 2004), (von Stechow and Iatridou 2006) and (von Stechow and Iatridou 2007).¹

The aim of this dissertation is to make general claims about the architecture of the category of modality. The formal semantics of modality presented here will thus be based on the results of a systematic typological investigation.

This being said, what does a typological investigation into modality usually consist in? First, it begins with the study of the syntactic items expressing modality in a relevant sample of languages. The next step consists in classifying the data, i.e. constructing a typology. The kind of classification obtained is of course dependent on the specific question being asked. For instance, if the question is “what are, crosslinguistically, the different types of modality?”, the result will be a categorization of the relevant types of modality found in the data. If the question is “how does modality interact with negation?”, quite a different typology will be obtained revealing the different strategies of combinations with negation (for instance the use of specialized modals). Based on the typology one can then make hypotheses on the nature of the modal system and for instance look at crosslinguistic regularities. If some property or pattern of the system occurs for each language, we can formulate it as a general principle that accounts for this regularity (called an unrestricted language universal); if some pattern occurs under some condition for each language, we can formulate a general principle that accounts for this variation (called an implicational universal). The natural step is then to adopt this universal as a constraint on your theory as long as no counter-example is found.

I will adopt this method and use it to build and constrain a formal framework for the semantics of modality. To make this point clear, it seems obvious that we want to have at least descriptively adequate semantic theories, therefore we

¹(Iatridou 2000) is probably the precursor of this fruitful method.

should in the first place make our theory compatible with the general results obtained from the typological investigation.

The departure point of this investigation is thus the study of modal items in the languages of our sample. That is, the investigation begins at the syntax/semantics interface where I will have to identify and organize the semantic information about modality via some syntactic or lexical items (which can vary in nature). Of course, it would be difficult to take this step without a prior expectation or hypothesis about the structure and organization of the semantic system of modality. As already mentioned this dissertation leans on the available literature on the typological approach to modality, particularly (Palmer 1986), (Bybee et al. 1994), (van der Auwera and Plungian 1998), (Hengeveld 2004).

The method of investigation is thus circular in nature: we make assumptions about the nature of the system of modality, test these assumptions with the data obtained for some languages and finally, fine tune our theory and assumptions with respect to the results of the tests. This circularity is not different from the circularity involved in any other empirical investigation. In a way it would only come to an end if a complete analysis was given, and this dissertation will not reach this ideal end state. A first example of such an assumption is that modality is expressed crosslinguistically through either a modal system or mood (Palmer 2001). Another example would for instance be that any modal system divides into an epistemic and a non-epistemic part (with maybe further distinctions into the non-epistemic realm).

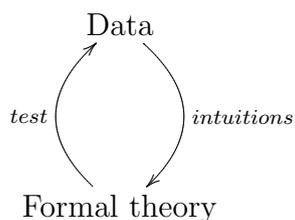
The thread running through this dissertation is the question of combinations of modal items. I will in particular show that a certain ordering between modal items is valid through all the sample and conjecture that it is an unrestricted universal: in a nutshell (based on the toy hypothesis made above about the nature of modal systems) epistemic modals outscope non-epistemic modals.

The task will then be to check whether existing semantic theories of modality account for this semantic universal and can explain it. I will argue that, as it stands, this is not the case and I will thus present a new formalism. Finally the last move of this circular process will be to go back to particular language data and see how it can help further research on modality for particular languages.

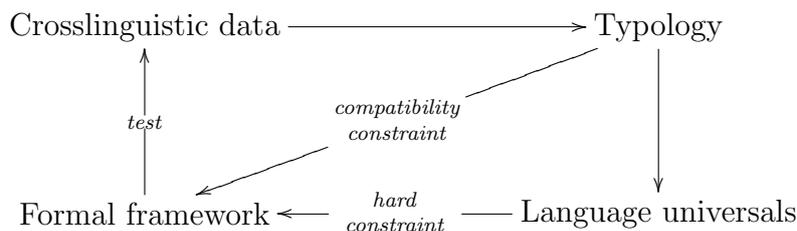
A hidden assumption of the proposed method is that I must assume a version of the “no variation” hypothesis which roughly says that “there is no crosslinguistic variation in the semantics” (Matthewson 2001, p156). This hypothesis is quite standard in the typological literature and amounts to assuming an underlying semantic or conceptual space ((van der Auwera and Plungian 1998, p86) or (Croft 2003, p134) respectively) that allows us to compare different languages in terms of their grammatical realization of this space.² Obviously there will be

²Semantics with respect to this hypothesis refers to the realm of things that can be expressed (for instance, within a category like modality) independently of the particular grammatical form used.

a great deal of variation at the syntax/semantics interface, hence I will need to assume some kind of separation between the particular language-dependent realization of modality and its (formal) semantics. Therefore the view proposed in crosslinguistic semantic research can be contrasted with a more traditional approach in the following way. The usual way for semanticists to go is to formalize their intuitions about some phenomenon in their preferred language from their intuitions about the data at the syntax/semantics interface, and to then check whether it correctly predicts the observed patterns.



The method of investigation is here somehow less direct and involves some extra steps and a different starting point. We begin by studying a phenomenon, here the notional category of modality, in different languages.³



The dissertation is organized as follows. In the first chapter, I begin with a succinct general introduction of the concepts and key notions of typology. The body of this section is mainly based on the textbooks of (Greenberg 1974), (Comrie 1989) and (Croft 2003). The second part of this chapter is devoted to the core topic of this dissertation, modality. I will present some typologies of modality developed by (Palmer 2001), (Hengeveld 2004) and (van der Auwera and Plungian 1998). I will choose the last typology as a starting point for the investigation of modality in the second chapter.

The second chapter is devoted to the investigation of the modal systems of six languages: Dutch, Gbe (cluster), Korean, Lillooet, Turkish and Tuvaluan. The description of these modal systems will show that the chosen typology is quite accurate in the sense that the different types of this typology are indeed represented by specialized modal items. I will first for each language present an overview of the modal system and then investigate the issue of modal combinations. The findings are summarized in the last section and an unrestricted semantic universal concerning the combination of modal items is formulated.

³The diagram will be discussed in section 1.1.3.

I then turn to the formal theory of modality. In the third chapter, I present and discuss the theory of modality developed by Angelika Kratzer in (Kratzer 1976) up to (Kratzer 1991). In this series of articles, a context-dependent analysis of modality is formulated that still forms the backbone of most semantic work on modality. I will also present some extensions of this standard framework proposed by (von Stechow and Iatridou 2004) and (Brennan 1993) to account for some interesting data about goal-oriented modality and dynamic modals respectively.

The fourth chapter is about some problems which I will argue the standard framework and its extensions cannot cope with. In particular the issue of modal combinations for which an unrestricted universal has been formulated in the previous chapter will be shown to be highly problematic.

In the fifth chapter, I construct an update semantics framework for modality. The gist of this framework is to implement the typology of modality discussed in the previous chapters as a constraint on the architecture of the framework. Therefore different types of modality operate at different places in the architecture (although in a very similar manner). This permits an elegant account of the unrestricted universal on combinations of modals and also explains most of the problems of the standard framework. Another key point is the intrinsic connection it makes between the two types of goal-oriented modality and ability.

Finally I conclude on what has been achieved in this dissertation and the future prospects.