

Preface

The papers that constitute *The Expression of Modality* provide a picture of the core issues in modality, the latest advances, and prospects for future work. As such, this book is not a handbook or state-of-the-art per se, but more like a comprehensive tutorial on how notions of possibility, probability, necessity, belief, and confidence are expressed and learned in human language and how to analyze and explain such notions. Not only are foundational ideas discussed – e.g., differences across root, deontic, and epistemic modality – but so are leading-edge ideas (such as new views of the logic of possibility) and illustrations of the variety of the manifestations of modality in languages not often treated in the canon of modality studies (e.g., ASL). *The Expression of Modality* is therefore designed as a kind of working text, something which stands between the settled ideas of modality and the future of research in the area.

Jan Nuyts, in *Modality: Overview and linguistic issues*, lays out the basics for any understanding of modality by covering all the essential concepts and terms, differentiating ideas where past studies gave conflated notions and converging others where previous work has made unproductive splits. Important lessons from his paper are the need to identify the locus of modal force and effect and the significance of scales vs. categorical notions. Nuyts' paper is in many ways a primer to modality as a whole.

Ferdinand de Haan, in *Typological approaches to modality*, takes the ideas that Nuyts so nicely explicates and applies them to a broad typological analysis of modality. He shows how typology has an essentially conceptual motivation, clarifies the modes of modal expression in the world's languages, and elucidates the ways modality interacts with mood, realis-irrealis, and other categories. One might take de Haan's paper as a kind of handbook for the field: when you go out to study a language in situ, keep these ideas and distinctions at the ready.

In *Formal approaches to modality*, Stefan Kaufmann, Cleo Condoravdi, and Valentina Harizanov outline systems of propositional logic and the nature and function of modal logic within such systems. They then offer a new picture of modality in terms of modal bases and accessibility relations across worlds. In addition to the admirable clarity and completeness of the formal exposition, one significant lesson inferable from their paper – not argued by them but an implication – is that discrete, abstract frameworks can work with the kind of scalar data and “realism assumptions” of empirical and typological linguistics. (This is nicely seen in their consideration of “settledness,” e.g.) *Formal approaches to modality* might thus be understood not only as a logical counterpart to de Haan's work – a kind of handbook for the “field modal-logician” – but also as a statement about where and how logical and data-driven linguistics might work together with some hard thought in all camps.

Elizabeth Traugott provides a comprehensive picture of the historical development of modals in *Historical aspects of modality*. Important ideas here are considerations of the nature of historical change, the varied trajectories of formal changes, and, especially, the ever-present *counter-data* that fine tune accepted notions about such claims as

unidirectionality, paths of grammaticalization, and the superiority of formal over functional, or functional over formal, explanations. If de Haan's paper is a kind of fieldguide to modality, and if Kaufmann, Condoravdi, and Harizanov's paper is a fieldguide for the modal logician, then Traugott's paper is a fieldguide for the linguistic archivist. Her work clearly shows the need for close attention to data so that nuanced claims about the causes and direction of historical change can be properly advanced.

Soonja Choi, in *Acquisition of modality*, takes us through the landscape of the acquisition of notions of possibility, necessity, and evidence. She offers important crosslinguistic data on the learning of modals, showing that children at a very early age are sensitive to the subtlety of meanings and range of forms in the languages to which they are exposed. Moreover, not all of children's behavior is traceable to features of input. Her paper is a good example of how empirical work on acquisition cuts the fine line between frequentist and nativist accounts and between purely formal explanations and explanations with syntactic and semantic-pragmatic interactions.

Munro's *Modal expression in Valley Zapotec* and Wilcox and Shaffer's *Modality in American Sign Language* are designed to illustrate how much of the foregoing finds illustration in two languages that not only are infrequently used in studies of modality, but also have maximally different grammaticalization possibilities. In her study of modality in Valley Zapotec, Pamela Munro describes the range of distinct grammatical expressions for modal notions in the language, and she shows how regularities in modality in Valley Zapotec both converge with universal patterns (e.g., with deontic and epistemic differentiated) and diverge from them (e.g., no core modality in the usual sense). ASL has a similar pattern: with trends in development analogous to what Traugott describes, ASL follows universal tendencies, but modality in ASL also interacts with intensification and so manifests some alternate routes of development. These two papers can be read as invitations for those working in the data-intensive side of linguistics to look closely and thoroughly at more languages for modal patterns.

The book closes with the *Topical outline*, put together by my research assistants, Erin Eschenroeder, Sarah Mills, and Thao Nguyen. This outline is designed as an accompaniment to reading or a way for a user of this book to go back and check ideas. The *Topical outline* is a critical part of the book's function as a tutorial.

I have assembled *The Expression of Modality* for a purpose larger than just to aggregate ideas on modal notions in the world's languages. I would hope that a book like this would stand a small test of time and serve as a very modest first step in trying to unify claims in critical areas of linguistics. A useful strategy would be to read the papers in this book – and hence modality in general – against the backdrop of current theoretical oppositions: scalar vs. categorical, functional vs. formal, frequentist vs. nativist, modular interfaces vs. multiply interactive distributive models, cognitive vs. noncognitive accounts, etc. If work in modality can enlighten these oppositions, perhaps more of such work in other areas can help us advance our field as a whole.

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William Frawley

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