

Multiple Modal Constructions in Rural Chesapeake English and Mandarin Chinese

Andrew Peters – abpeters@yorku.ca – York University

Multi-modal constructions of the type seen in Southern (or Rural) American English and Chinese languages are an oft-examined subject. Cross-linguistically, wide variation in the number of modals allowable in the syntax is observed, from simple double-modal constructions in Southern American English (SE), to up to four projections in languages like Mandarin Chinese (MC) (Lin, 2012). Examples of these constructions include:

- (1) He might should go into town.
"He likely will have to go into town." [Southern English]
- (2) Zhangsan keneng bixu yuanyi hui jiang Fayu.
"Zhangsan likely (will) need to be willing to be able to speak French." [Mandarin Chinese]
- (3) I would like to could swim.
"I would like to be able to swim" [Hawick Scots (Brown, 1991)]

However, among the literature for SE specifically, speaker grammaticality judgments for complex constructions are immensely inconsistent (Ellison, 2007). Nevertheless, some unifying patterns are observed cross-linguistically with respect to the distribution of modals in the sentence. There appears to be a consistent hierarchy of modals, roughly formulated as: Epistemic Modality > Root /Deontic Modality > Dynamic Modality (Tsai, 2015; Ellison, 2007; Brown, 1991 *inter alia*). Languages such as MC appear to hold to this hierarchy strictly, exhibiting strong judgments of ungrammaticality when the hierarchy is not obeyed (Huang, 2000). In SE, judgments are consistent for the most part when the hierarchy is followed, but are highly inconsistent as to the grammaticality of sentences that flaunt the hierarchy (Ellison, 2007). Furthermore, while MC forbids the use of more than one modal of the same class within a single clause (Li, 2003), some SE speakers do not categorically reject these constructions (Ellison, 2007) (e.g. 'He should must study'). The present study first examines data from MC and a variety of SE to establish the cross-linguistic validity of the modal hierarchy. I then argue that the inconsistencies in acceptability of sentences that flaunt the modal hierarchy in SE may result from availability of "repair" strategies, including: modified readings of the modal semantics (e.g. an epistemic reading of *should* in a sentence with 'should must'), or bi-clausal syntax wherein the first modal selects a TP complement. In the case of the latter strategy, I argue that some varieties of English have developed non-finite versions of selected modals which appear in these clausal modal complements, similar to those seen in Nordic languages (Larsson, 2014) and I support this conclusion by examining data from Hawick Scots (Brown, 1991) which exhibits the same (ex.3 above). I argue that while some SE speakers have access to these repair strategies, they are not universal, and furthermore are not available in languages such as MC.

References

- Brown, K. (1991). Double modals in hawick scots. In P. Trudgill & J. Chambers (Eds.), *Dialects of english: studies in grammatical variation* (p. 74-103). Longman Group, UK.
- Ellison, G. C. (2007). You might shouldn't say that: The cartographic syntax of english multiple modal constructions and its (speculative) history. *Generative Grammar in Geneva*, 5, 51-106.
- Huang, X.-Y. K. (2000). *Multiple-modal constructions in mandarin chinese: A view from cartography and mp* (Unpublished master's thesis). Tsing Hua University.
- Larsson, I. (2014). Tensed modal forms in non-finite contexts. *Nordic Atlas of Language Structures*, 1, 353-359.
- Li, R. (2003). *Modality in english and chinese: a typological perspective* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Antwerp.
- Lin, T.-H. J. (2012). Multiple-modal constructions in mandarin chinese and their finiteness properties. *Journal of Linguistics*, 48, 151-186.
- Tsai, W.-T. D. (2015). On the topography of chinese modals. In U. Shlonsky (Ed.), *Beyond functional sequence*. Oxford University Press.