

# The modal origo

Christian Lehmann

University of Erfurt

## Abstract

Semantic accounts of subjective modality commonly assume that the speaker is the source of modal attitudes. However, there is a large body of data to suggest that attributing a certain subjective modality to the speaker is the default only for the declarative sentence type. In interrogative sentences, it is often systematically the hearer who is credited with the modal attitude. For instance, *Linda may go* is commonly interpreted as ‘I allow Linda to go’. However, the interrogative version *May Linda go?* usually rather means ‘do you allow Linda to go?’, not ‘do I allow Linda to go?’

Modal operators from a small set of diverse language (German *sollen*, Korean *-kess*, Yucatec *he'l*, among others) will be investigated from the point of view of the shift of the modal origo depending on sentence type. The analysis may be resumed as follows:

Subjective modalities are by default attributed to a speech-act participant as their origo. In polarity interrogatives, the speaker cedes the decision on the pragmatic focus to the hearer. A modal operator is the pragmatic focus of an utterance. Consequently, in interrogative sentences, the hearer becomes the default origo of such modalities.

## 1 Introduction

- E1. Linda ought to work.
- S1. OBLIG (WORK (Linda))
- E2. Linda ought to start working.
- S2. OBLIG (START (work (Linda)))
- E3. Ought Linda to work?
- S3. INT (OBLIG (WORK (Linda)))
- E4. a. Linda may leave.  
“It is permitted that Linda leave.”  
b. Linda shall leave.  
“It is determined that Linda leave.”
- S4. a. PERMIT (x, LEAVE (Linda))  
b. DETERMINE (x, LEAVE (Linda))

## 2 Some case studies

### 2.1 English *may*

- E5. a. Linda may go now.  
b. May Linda go now?

- E6. a. I allow Linda to go now.  
 b. Do you allow Linda to go now?

- E7. a. I think/know that Linda may go now.  
 b. Do you think that / know whether Linda may go now?

**T1. Modal origo of *may***

subject \ sentence type	declarative	interrogative
1	[2] 3	2 3
2	1 3	3
3	1 [2] 3	2 3

- $x$  must be distinct from  $y$ .
- In independent sentences,  $x$  may be identified with a speech act participant by pragmatic inference.
  - In a declarative sentence, that is the speaker.
  - In an interrogative sentence, it is the hearer.

**2.2 Reported commands in German**

- E8. Linda soll essen kommen.  
 GERM 'Linda should come to lunch.'

- E9. Linda soll den Mt. Everest bestiegen haben.  
 GERM 'Linda is said to have climbed Mt. Everest.'

- E10. Linda will den Mt. Everest bestiegen haben.  
 GERM 'Linda claims to have climbed Mt. Everest.'

- E11. a. Ich soll essen kommen. 'I should come to lunch.'  
 GERM b. Du sollst essen kommen. 'You should come to lunch.'

- E12. Komm essen! 'Come to lunch!'

- E13. a. Soll ich essen kommen? 'Should I come to lunch?'  
 GERM b. Sollst du essen kommen? 'Should you come to lunch?'  
 c. Soll Linda essen kommen? 'Should Linda come to lunch?'

**T2. Modal origo of *sollen***

subject \ sentence type	declarative	interrogative
1	[2] 3	2 3
2	1 3	3
3	1 [2] 3	2 3

- The modal origo of *sollen* must be distinct from the referent of the sentence subject.
- The modal origo of *sollen* may always be some third person.
- In an independent sentence, the modal origo of *sollen* may be a speech act participant.
- If the modal origo of *sollen* is a speech act participant, then that is the speaker in declaratives, the hearer in interrogatives.

- E14. a. Ich will essen kommen.  
 GERM b. Du willst essen kommen.

**2.3 Definite future in Yucatec Maya**

- S5. [ [ X ]<sub>Aux</sub> [ Y ]<sub>vcc</sub> ( [ -e' ]<sub>DC</sub> ) ]<sub>vc</sub>

- E15. [[ he'l ]<sub>Aux</sub> [ in bo't-ik teech ma'loob ]<sub>VCC -e' ]<sub>VC</sub>  
 YM DEF.FUT SBJ.1.SG pay-INCMPPL you good -D3  
 'I will pay you well' (HA'N\_0023.05)</sub>
- E16. ma'loob, he'l a kan-ik-e'x-e'  
 YM good DEF.FUT SBJ.2 learn-INCMPPL-2.PL-D3  
 'okay, you (pl.) will learn it' (BVS\_05.01.04.01)
- E17. Xeen hóok'-en bik u yil-o'n a taatah!  
 YM go.IMPexit-IMP PROHIB SBJ.3 see-ABS.1.PL POSS.2 father  
 Hach he'l u kiins-ik-o'n wal-e'.  
 really DEF.FUT SBJ.3 kill-INCMPPL-ABS.1.PL DUB-D3  
 'Go, go out, lest your father see us! I guess he will definitely kill us.'  
 (HK'AN\_232)
- E18. he'l-ili' in suut-e', y-aal x-káakbach,  
 YM DEF.FUT-IDENT SBJ.1.SG return-D3 POSS.3-offspring F-whore  
 ka in ka'ns-ech ...  
 CONJ SBJ.1.SG teach(SUBJ)-ABS.2.SG  
 'I promise you to be back, daughter of a bitch, and I will teach you ...'  
 (HA'N\_0017.04)
- E19. he'l wáa in kan-ik-e'?  
 YM DEF.FUT INT SBJ.1.SG learn-INCMPPL-D3  
 'will I learn it?' (CL)
- E20. he'l wáa a bin a man-ik xkabil k'úum-e'?  
 YM DEF.FUT INT SBJ.2 go SBJ.2 buy-INCMPPL candy squash  
 'will you go and buy preserved squash?' (ACC\_0272)
- E21. he'l wáah u páah-tal a ma'loobkiintik  
 YM DEF.FUT INT SBJ.3 possible-FIENT SBJ.2 repair-INCMPPL  
 u nu'kul-il in paax-a'?  
 POSS.3 instrument-REL POSS.1.SG music-D1  
 'would you repair me this musical equipment?' (ACC\_0165)

- E22. Ma' he' máakanmáak ha's  
 YM NEG soever any banana  
 he'l u páah-tal u meent-a'l  
 DEF.FUT SBJ.3 possible-FIENT SBJ.3 make-INCMPPL.PASS  
 u ch'uhk-il ha's-il-e'.  
 POSS.3 sweet-REL banana-?-D3  
 'you can't make banana candy with just any banana' (lit. it is not with just any banana that it is guaranteed for you to make banana candy)  
 (ACC\_0255)
- E23. a. he'l in t'aan y-éetel le nuxib hala'ch wiinik-o'  
 YM DEF.FUT SBJ.1 speak POSS.3-with DEF old ruler man-D2  
 'I will speak with that old chief' (HALA'CH 01.05)
- b. haah he'l u t'aan y-éetel-e'  
 true DEF.FUT SBJ.3 speak POSS.3-with-D3  
 'it was true that he talked with him' (HALA'CH 12.52.3)

### T3. Modal origo of Yucatec *he'l*

	sentence type	
subject	declarative	interrogative
1	1 (3)	2 3
2	1 3	2 (3)
3	1 3	2 3

### 2.4 Presumptive and volitive in Korean

- E24. a. pikonha-esø na-nun cuk-kess-ta  
 KOR weariness-ABL I-TOP die-PRSMPT-DECL  
 'I am dead tired' (lit. 'I think I will die of weariness')

- b. nae-ka cuk-kess-oyo  
I-NOM die-PRSMPT-INT  
'will I die?' = 'do you think I will die?'

- E25. a. sihəm-e hapkyəkha-yəss-uni nə-nən kippu-kess-ta.  
KOR exam-LOC pass-PRT-because you-TOP be.happy-PRSMPT-  
DECL

'I guess you are happy because you passed the exam'

- b. küləhke ha-myən ne-ka kippu-kess-ni?  
so do-if you-NOM be.happy-PRSMPT-INT  
'in that case, do you think you will be happy?'

- E26. a. nun-i kot naeli-kess-ta  
KOR snow-NOM soon fall-PRSMPT-DECL  
'it will presumably snow soon' = 'I think it will snow soon'

- b. nun-i kot naeli-kess-ni?  
snow-NOM soon fall-PRSMPT-INT  
'will it presumably snow soon?' = 'do you think it will snow soon?'

- E27. a. suni-nəən cikum cip-e ka-kess-ta  
KOR Suni-TOP now home-LOC go-PRSMPT-DECL  
'I guess Suni is going home now'

- b. suni-ka cikum cip-e ka-kess-ni?  
Suni-NOM now home-LOC go-PRSMPT-INT  
'do you think Suni is going home now?'

- E28. a. nai-ka ka-kess-ta  
KOR I-NOM go-PRSMPT-DECL  
'I will/would go'

- b. cəngmallo nae-ka ka-kess-ni?  
certainly I-NOM go-PRSMPT-INT  
'do you think I will actually go?'

- E29. a. ne-ka ku il-əl ha-e cu-əya ha-kess-ta  
KOR you-NOM that thing-ACC do-ADV BENEf-ADV do-PRSMPT-

DECL

'you will have to do that thing for me' = 'I presume you have to do that thing for me'

- b. ne-ka ka-kess-ni?  
you-NOM go-PRSMPT-INT  
'will/would you go?'

- E30. philca-ka cikcəp sucəngħa-kess-səpnī-ta  
KOR author-NOM personally correct-PRSMPT-HON-DECL  
'the author would (be honored to) correct it himself'

#### T4. Modal origo of Korean *-kess*

	sentence type	
	declarative	interrogative
subject		
1	1	2
2	1	2
3	1	2

- The modal origo for Korean *-kess* is the speaker in a declarative, the hearer in an interrogative sentence.
- The modal meaning of *-kess* is volitive if and only if all of the following conditions are fulfilled simultaneously:
  - Aspect is not perfective (consequently, time reference is to the future).
  - The executor has control.
  - The executor coincides with the modal origo.

### 3 The meaning of interrogatives

The interrogative is characterized by the following semantic components:

- There is a number of alternatives concerning the proposition (two in polarity interrogatives, a larger and possibly infinite number in pronominal interrogatives).
- I am making no choice among these alternatives.

3. I am giving up the assessment privilege, thus ceding it to other speech-act participants.

If an independent interrogative is used as a question at the end of a conversation turn, then semantic component #3 commonly has the following pragmatic implications:

4. I give up the floor, thus turning over.
5. I expect you to take over, to assume the assessment privilege and to provide the missing information.

#### 4 Conclusion

If a modal operator has an argument position for the modal origo which is not reflected in its valency, then this is occupied by the following principle:

In an independent sentence, if it is declarative, the modal origo cannot be the hearer; if it is interrogative, it cannot be the speaker.

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