



THE TYPOLOGY OF MODAL EXPRESSIONS IN GA

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the paper provides a functional description of some modal expressions in Ga. Ga is a member of the Kwa branch of Niger-Congo languages and it is spoken in Ghana in Accra and its environs. Modal markers are used by speakers to show their opinion and attitudes toward the propositional content of utterances. The paper discusses the meaning and grammar of modal expressions in Ga within the domains of different types of modality. The concept of modality in linguistics is seen as a semantic category which is connected to the notions of necessity and possibility of states affairs as indicated in propositions. The methods in gathering data used include the study of a small corpus of written and spoken Ga comprising different types of texts, and two elderly speakers purposively sampled as well as an introspection of the native intuitions of the authors of the paper. The modal markers are extracted and examined in different contexts without any prejudgment as to whether they represent invariant or extended meanings. The result shows that Ga uses different types of expressive devices for the expression of modality. Among them are lexical forms such as adverbials and verbs (verbal constructions). The modal adverbs examined mostly expressed possibility or certainty and seemed to have a specific position in terms of syntax. Items within the different types of expressive devices express different types of modal meanings such as epistemic, deontic and dynamic modalities. Some of these different qualificational meanings are highly context-dependent and are linked with the expression of future time in the language. It is relevant for writers and speakers to therefore bring to the fore that decoding of some of these lexical categories are not only based on how they are stringed together, but the other lexical categories they co-occur with determine their meaning semantically and pragmatically.

Keywords: *modality, deontic, epistemic, possibility, necessity, adverbials.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In communication, humans discuss anything as language has the property of displacement. The present, past and future can be expressed with the use of language due to this property. Sometimes the future that is expressed is based on assumptions, possibilities and probabilities. The lexical items that aid in expressing these possibilities or probabilities and necessities are often modals used in the utterances of the interlocutors in the language. The use of modality can be from any lexical class but it has been noted that most often modal adverbs, predicative



adjectives, modal auxiliaries, mental states predicates and modal verbs are employed as noted by Nuyts (2001) and Hacquard (2009). According to Fowler (1985) modality occurs in linguistic forms such as modal auxiliary verbs (eg may, shall, must etc), sentence adverbs (certainly, probably, etc), adjectives (unfortunate, necessary, certain etc) and some verbs and nominalisations (prove, permit, likelihood, obligation etc). Furthermore Bonyadi (2011) postulates that modal auxiliaries, modal adverbs, evaluative adjectives and adverbs, reporting verbs and generic phrases are also used to express modality in clauses. Also in the literature modal adjunct (Halliday 1994), intensification (Martins ad David 2003), lexical verbal nouns (McCarthy 1991), negation (Saeed 2003) are also used to encode modality. Modality in speech is often claimed to express an attitude by the speaker or the opinion of the speaker to the utterance made. In this paper modality is discussed and is not in relation to evidentiality as it is sometimes fused together as the same in some of the literature. The paper investigates the lexical categories that are used to express modality in Ga. It further examines these modals in Ga and their syntactic patterns as well as their types and pragmatic functions. The paper outline is to briefly discuss some features of the Ga language, some definitions of modality and the types and some discussion of literature. The data discussion follows and the findings are enumerated and then the paper comes to a conclusion.

1.1 Ga Language

This is language of the Kwa branch of the Niger Congo family which is taught in schools as part of the curriculum. It is spoken mainly in Greater Accra and its environs in Southeast Ghana, West Africa. Ga is basically SVO language with generally two tones that is high and low. It has seven oral vowels and five nasal vowels. There are no dialects of Ga, however, few vocabulary differences may exist as one moves from one geographical area to another.

2.0 OVERVIEW OF MODALITY

There are several scholarly works on modality with authors giving different definitions. Lyons (1977:45) defines modality as ‘the expression of the speaker’s attitude and opinions as indicated in a proposition’ (see Palmer 1986). It is also postulated to be those semantic domains or category of linguistic meanings having to do with the possibility and necessity (Lyons 1977, Bybee et al., 1994, Bybee and Fleischman 1995, van der Auwera and Plungian 1988). Bybee (1985) asserts modality as a semantic grammatical category is expressed in English by modal verbs. It is asserted that epistemic modality portrays the speaker’s attitude of a proposition as either being the truth, certainty or probability (Givon 1993, 2001). Five categories of modality were put forward by Fowler (1985) as indicators of speaker or writer attitude towards a proposition said which are validity, predictability, desirability, obligation, and permission). Nuyts (2005, 2006) sees it as the qualifications of states of affairs or means for expressing the speakers judgement about a proposition (also Givon 1995, Palmer 2001). From these definitions above it can be concluded that modals are linguistic items in a languages that encode possibility and necessity of an utterance indicating the speaker’s opinion.

Scholars have tried to study modals by examining them in different languages from different perspectives. Yalcin (2005) examined the semantics of the modal *De re* and defined the scope that it takes in relation to its occurrence in the syntax. Modality is considered an attitude by the



speaker towards an utterance. It is most often said that it does not contribute to the truth conditions encoded in the utterance, however, Papafragou (2006) disagrees with this assertion and gives evidence in her paper that modals especially epistemic ones can contribute to truth value. She claims that this depends on the person saying the utterance and gives an example of a meteorologist saying something like 'It may rain tomorrow'. The truth condition she argues is based on the speaker competence and skills in a field and this therefore should not be overlooked in decoding the utterance. Hacquard (2009) in discussing modality enumerated some features of modals such as they are used to express possibilities and necessities which may not even occur, adverbs, nouns, auxiliary verbs and possibility adjectives may be used to encode this modal meaning in some languages. He further claimed that there could be two perspectives of examining modals as to being possibility modals and necessity modals. Examples of possibilities modals in English given include may, might, could and can and examples of necessity modals are should, must, would and have to. In addition, the modals were put into types such as epistemic modality, deontic modality, abilitive modality, teleological and bouletic modality. The semantics and pragmatics context of an epistemic modal should be considered in decoding an utterance and its occurrence could indicate its scope over the entities in the sentence as argued by Knobe and Yalcin (2014). In the interpretation of modals, some scholars claimed it does not overlap, however Traugott (1988), Drugbig (2001) and Palmer (2001) argued that some modals may have both epistemic and deontic meanings attached to them in the same utterance. In studying the development of children and their acquisition of modals Papafragou (1997) stipulates that due to the polysemous nature of English modal verbs, their acquisition in relation to the child development is connected to the theory of the mind. Sakyi (2013) in examining Akan, another Kwa language, its modals and evidentiality noted that adverbs are used to express modality in Akan and they often occur sentence initial and predicative adjectives occur in few instances and others that are expressed in English with solely adjectives are expressed with verbs. Some modals she found include *gyama*, *sesεε* and *anɔkware*. She further stated that *sesεε* can occur with another modal and in that instance expresses time. Other works on modality examine modality in research articles in statement of objectives where it was revealed that four categories of modal auxiliaries were discovered (possibility, necessity, prediction and permission) for details see Olaniyan and Adeniji (2015), the use of epistemic modals as hedging strategy in research articles written in English depended on type of data employed in the discipline (Vazquez and Giner 2008). From the modest literature seen, it came to light that not in-depth studies have been done on modals in Kwa languages, Ameka (2008), Essegbey (2008) and Gbegble (2012) all investigated Ewe. This was why the paper was written after conducting a research to find how these modality issues are encoded in the Ga language.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data for the analysis of this paper is from a corpus gathered from three written Ga books in addition to spontaneous conversations that had modals in them were also collected as well as some native constructed examples. The books are read and constructions with modals are extracted and analysed syntactically and also what it encodes in the context it was found. In relation to the conversations heard randomly statements consisting of modal markers were written down and follow up questions were made to find out where possible why the speaker



used such a modal. Two elderly natives aged above 60 years purposively sampled were consulted to confirm some of the modals heard in the conversations and some from the books. The data were gathered between September 2017 and February 2018. The extracted data are then examined to determine the lexical class of the modal and then the syntactic properties are briefly considered and the types they denote are enumerated. The modalities based on the following types were adopted from the literature.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 modality Types

Modality are of different types and the following types were considered in this paper
Epistemic: “marks the degree of likelihood of the state of affairs.” (Nuyts 2001:55).

- Certainty → probability → possibility

The above shows the ranking of the epistemic modals as from certainty descending to probability. Some examples from Nuyts (2001) are illustrated below.

1. *Certainly/surely* they have run out of fuel.
2. *Probably* they have run out of fuel.
3. They *must* have run out of fuel.
4. They *might* have run out of fuel. (Nuyts 2001:55)

Epistemic modality takes into consideration the knowledge of the speaker about the world in the sense that the speaker assesses the truth of proposition in terms of certainty, probability or possibility (Downing and Locke 1992 cited in Olaniyan and Adeneji 2015). In real terms epistemic modality encode possibility, for instance with use of the verb ‘may’, likelihood with a verb like ‘can’ or ‘could’, prediction with a verb like ‘will’ or ‘would’, probability with a verb like ‘may’ or ‘might’, certainty with a verb like ‘will’ or ‘would’ mostly weak one and necessity with a verb like ‘must’ or ‘should’.

Dynamic: “relates to ability or willingness, which comes from the individual concerned” Palmer (2001:10). Some examples given by Palmer to buttress his point are below in 5 and 6.

5. John *can* speak French.
6. John *will* do it for you. (Palmer 2001:10).

In example (5) the modal ‘can’ is used to indicate that John is able to speak French and in (6) the modal ‘will’ is employed to show that John has accepted to do something without any persuasion or pressure put on him but offered to do whatever it was gladly.

Deontic: “relates to obligation or permission, emanating from an external source” (Palmer 2001:9). See example 7 and 8 below.



7. John *may/can* come in now.
8. John *must* come in now. (Palmer 2001:10)

From the above examples the modal in (7) indicates permission from the speaker to the hearer and in example (8) the modal indicates that the hearer is obliged to do the act required of him. Palmer (1986:56) cited in Olaniyan and Adeniji (2015) posits that when a modal occurs in a person speech, the person is granting permission, making a promise or threat or laying down an obligation. Deontic modality can be seen also as a form of ‘participation of the speaker in the speech event’ Halliday (1970:335). This means that with the use of deontic modality in an utterance wants, desires, commands, obligations, permission and undertakings of the speaker is expressed.

From the above examples the opinion of the speaker is expressed with the use of a type of modal and the more the truth value and attitude could be deduced from the modal used by the speaker.

4.2 Analysis of Ga Modals

The inventory of modal markers taken so far from the written materials and published grammars assumes that Ga expresses modality through two ways. That is the use of full verbs that occur with complementizer and also non-complement taking forms. Examples of the first means of expressing modal are shown below.

Complement taking forms: full verbs that occur with the complementizer *áké* ‘that’

9. *Susu ake* ‘think that’
10. *jwɛŋ ake* ‘to think/assume’
11. *yɛ mli (faŋŋ) ake* ... ‘it is clear that...’
12. *hi ake*... ‘it is good that...’
13. *hia/sa ake* ‘it is necessary that...’

Some of these verbs are used in the sentences below in (14 a-b).

- 14a. Àyíté *jwɛŋ* sàné lé hè.
 Ayite think matter DEF self
 ‘Ayite thought about the issue.’
- 14b. Àyíté *jwɛŋ áké* Àyèlé é-téè sùkúú.
 Ayite think COMP Ayele PERF-go school
 ‘Ayite thought that Ayele has gone to school.’ [Epistemic possibility]
15. è-yè *mli (fáŋŋ) áké* Àyèlé yè kǒmì été.
 3SG-be inside ADV COMP NAME eat.PST kenkey three
 ‘It is very true /clear that Ayele ate three balls of kenkey.’

In (14a) the verb *jwɛŋ* occurs in the sentence without a complementizer and therefore most often does not encode modality whereas in (14b) the same verb occurs with the complementizer and



this encodes modality (possibility). In example (15) the adverb *fáńń* ‘clear’ and the copula verb ‘*yè*’ has both been employed in the sentence in addition to the occurrence of the complementizer. The modal in (15) shows epistemic certainty. The complementizer in (15) cannot be left out unlike in (14a).

It was also observed that a verb *nyé* ‘can/ may /be able’ can also be used to encode the person attitude towards the utterance said. An illustration from one of the Ga books is shown below in (16a and 16b) indicating possibility.

- 16. a. *Yàà-táó nùù kpákpa ní bàá-nyé bò ákwé.*
 Go-find man good COMP Fut-MOD 2Sg look
 ‘Go and find a good man who can take care of you’

(Abbey 1994: 3) [Dynamic]

- b. Obiele: E- *bàá-nyé égbó tètè!*
 3SG-FUT-MOD PERF-die
 ‘He may possibly die’.

(Abbey

1994:18)[Dynamic]

- c. *Nùgbò bàá-nyé ánè*
 rain FUT-MOD fall
 ‘It may/might rain’ [Epistemic possibility]

In (16 a -b) above the verb occurs with the future *baa* ‘future auxiliary marker’ in Ga. In (16b) the use of the verb expresses dynamic modality that it is possible the man husband who had been left by the wife will die from the story (See *Mɔ Ko Nɔ Leebi*). In (16c) the verb *nyé* ‘can’ expresses the likelihood of it raining at the time of the utterance. On the other hand the use of the same verb expresses dynamic type of modality as the willingness and ability of the person involved is needed as in (16d). With the use of the same verb *nyé* in the negative form the ability of the one in subjective position as ascertained as shown in the example below.

- 16. d. *Ayele nyé-ŋ wòló lé è-ŋmá*
 Ayele can-NEG paper DEF 3SG –write
 ‘Ayele will not be able to write the paper.’

It must be pointed out that the same verb can be used to express permission depending upon the context of the utterance.

From the small corpus data also gathered from the Ga books the verb *fèé* ‘do/make’ was employed to express modality but though it occurs with the complementizer, it has its complement *mì* ‘me’ in all its occurrence as illustrated below in 17.

- 17. E- *fè-ɔ mì áké nɔ nì gbáá wɔ-nàà*
 3SG-make.HAB 1SG COMP thing that worry 3PL-mouth.....



‘I think perhaps what is worrying all of us’ Abbey (1994:18)

The second means of expressing modality is by employing non-complement taking forms which are adverbs. These modal adverbs may appear at fixed position in a sentence and mark a state of affairs for epistemic certainty and possibility/uncertainty. The choice of the position of these adverbs are based on context from the interviews and conversations listened. The choice of the position therefore denotes the type of modality as well. Some of the adverbs that appeared in the data are as follows:

kē ‘certainly’, *lɛɛlɛɲ* ‘surely’, *ekole* ‘maybe/perhaps/possibly’, *aleenɔ* ‘maybe/perhaps’

An example of a modal adverb in a sentence is seen below in (18).

18. *Aléénɔ* Kòjò tɛ̀ Ga.
 MOD Kojo go.PST Ga.
 ‘Perhaps Kojo went to Accra’.

With the use of *aléénɔ* ‘perhaps/ maybe’ in example (18) the modal occurs at the initial position of the sentence and rarely would you find it at the final part of the sentence. Follow up interviews from natives confirm that the adverb *aléénɔ* may be heard from a learner of the language at the final part of a statement at certain times. With conversations and follow up interviews from some native speakers it is believed that the occurrence of this modal at sentence initial expresses more certainty than probability and occurs as an interrogative to confirm an existing knowledge. However with the use of some other adverbs like *ékólé* ‘possibly’ the positions could vary as illustrated in (19a-c) below.

19. a. *Ékólé* àmè- tɛ̀ɲ bàá-fíté kɛ̀jì á wié.
 Perhaps 3Pl-POS LOC FUT-spoil if 3Pl-INDEF talk
 ‘Their relationship will probably be destroyed if they intervene’ (Laryea 1972: 33)
- b. Òdàì há hètòò ákè *ékólé* wò-bàá-yá ɲmò mli.
 Odai give.PST reply that maybe 1Pl -FUT -go farm inside
 ‘Odai replied that we shall probably go to the farm’ (Lante-Lawson 1972: 45)
- c. Lááyé kèé nùgbò bàá-nè *ékólé*.
 Laaye say rain FUT-fall probably
 ‘Laaye says it will probably rain’ (Lante-Lawson 1972: 45)

In examples (19a-c) the modals have appeared in different positions. The modal is found in the initial position in (19a) to mean perhaps where the level of certainty is higher than when it occurs in the final position. In the middle position in (19b), here the modal occurs immediately after a complementizer. It must be noted that when the modal is absent in (19b) there is no possibility attached to the utterance anymore. It is worth mentioning that changing the positions of the



modals in these different utterances has some kind of attitudinal commitment from the speaker. In (18c) for instance the scope of the modal at the final position is on the occurrence of the event (rain) but when it occurs at the end its scope will be over the subject (Laaye) as to whether he is the one who mentioned the occurrence of the event or someone else. There are more examples below on the adverb *kè* ‘certainly/surely’.

20. è- báà-bá **kè**.
 3SG- FUT –come certainly
 OR

21. **Kè** è-báà -bá
 Certainly 3SG- FUT -come
 ‘She will certainly come/certainly she will come’.

In examples (20) and (21) the position of the modal *kè* ‘surely/certainly’ either at the end or the initial positions shows the same level of commitment by the speaker. The choice depends on the speaker except that the time is unknown but despite the wait, the person will surely arrive. From the spontaneous conversations gathered with follow up confirmation from two elderly speakers *kè* is also employed with the word *bé* to express modality and also *bé* and *nè* was also found in some utterances made. Examples (22) and (23) show some utterances from the data.

22. bé kè e-há-áá lé nù.....
 time surely 3SG-give-NEG 3SG thing...
 ‘.....perhaps he was not giving her food.....’

23. Wɔ-nyè-èè wɔ -kèè bé nè e-piŋ yòò ààhú
 1PL-can –NEG 1PL-say time DET 3SG-suffer woman continuously
 ‘We cannot say, maybe she maltreated the woman continuously.’

5.0 SUMMARY

The Tables 1 and 2 below show a summary of the modals that were found in the data gathered. The Table 1 indicated the verbs that are used to express modality in Ga and their types, that is the complement taking forms, such as *sa* plus the complementizer expresses deontic as well as dynamic modality in Ga. It is noted that the use of some the verbs and their complements could both express dynamic and deontic modalities as observed by Palmer (2001). Morphologically these verbs could be inflected like all the other verbs and appear after the subject in the Ga sentence. The complementizer in most cases cannot be left out of the construction. Table 2 shows the adverbs that were found in the Ga data. The adverbs gathered from the Ga corpus indicate that syntactically the position of most of the adverbs are fixed and the choice of one depends on the speaker who normally take the context in which the adverb will occur into consideration. The position of the adverb shows the scope over which elements the adverb takes.



Table 1: Complement Taking forms

Form	Expressive device	Modality
<i>Sa aké, hi ake, hia ake</i>	<i>Verbs + Comp</i>	<i>Deontic Dynamic</i>
<i>Susu aké, jwéj aké</i>	<i>Verbs + Comp</i>	<i>Epistemic possibility</i>
<i>nyé</i>	<i>Verb</i>	<i>Epistemic/Dynamic</i>

It is observed that the verb can both express epistemic and dynamic types of modality as noted by Drugbig (2001). From Table 1 the verb *nyé* seems to express both epistemic and dynamic modality which can be deduced from the context and does not occur with the complementizer.

Table 2: Non complement taking forms.

Form	Modality	Modality
<i>ké, leléj</i>	<i>Adverb</i>	<i>Epistemic certainty</i>
<i>ekole, aléénɔ</i>	<i>Adverb</i>	<i>Epistemic probability/possibility</i>

In Table 2 the summary of the non-complement forms that is the adverbs used to express modality is shown. Apart from *aléénɔ* which occurs only sentence initial all the others can occur either initial, medial or final.

6.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that adverbs and verbs were the lexical classes found mainly to encode modality in Ga as also found in Akan (Sakyi 2013). The data did not show yet any predicative adjective which was employed, but, it may be likely that in future, further investigation may come across other categories but it is for another paper. Syntactically the verbs were mostly complement taking verbs and their positions occurred in relation to the structure of the complex sentences in Ga, as the verb normally appears after the subject in Ga. The complementizer is found to be obligatory in most cases as leaving it may not make the sentence grammatical. In terms of the modal adverbs unlike Akan (Sakyi 2013) where all the positions of the adverbs are sentence initial, Ga may have them in various positions such as initial, medial and final except that the occurrence may indicate the possibility or the necessity of the event. The paper has shown that adverbs and verbs are used to express modality as noted in the literature and sometimes seen as a hedging strategy as noted by Vold (2006) who even went further to discuss and compare three languages namely English, French and Norwegian research articles. The study therefore implies that the lexical categories, verbs and adverbs used in expressing modality in Ga are decoded based on context apart from their semantics and could be factored in teaching and learning of the verbs and adverbs in Ga.

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Glossary

COP –copula	PERF-perfect marker
DAT – dative	PRES - present
DEF – definite	PROSP - prospective
EMP – emphasizer	RED - reduplication
FOC – focus	TOP - topic
HAB – habitual	1SG – first person singular
INDEF – indefinite	2SG – second person singular
LOC-location	1PL-first person plural
MOD-modal	3PL – third person plural
NEG – negative	

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