Modality in Achi-Igbo

Levi O. Igwe
Department of Linguistics
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Anambra State, Nigeria

Abstract
The terms 'mood and modality' have been employed in widely differing ways by various authors at various times. Woodcock (1959:83) speaking primarily of Latin, says, "By mood as a grammatical term is meant the form which a verb assumes in order to reflect the manners (modus) in which the speaker conceives the action." On the other hand, the term 'modality' according to Harris (1978:160), covers a whole range of nuances of meaning, which have in common the fact that they are opposed in some way to the most neutral semantic value that a sentence may have, that is FACTUAL and DECLARATIVE. Such nuances can in principle be realized in surface structure in any one or more of a variety of ways: intonational, morphological, syntactic or lexical. Modality, according to him, refers to elements of meaning which can be expressed through the grammatical category mood. In other words, mood is to modality in some sense what tense and aspect are to time. Igwe (2003). In this paper, the notional and the syntactic forms of modals are explored with the view to enhancing the standard Igbo. The examples are given in Achi- Igbo dialect. Achi is a town in Oji River Local Government Area of Enugu State.

1.1 Introduction:

Mood has been defined as a grammatical feature, while modality is a semantic feature used in describing the meanings that are usually associated with mood. Modality covers a whole range of nuances of meanings expressed by those verbs which are referred to as modals. Hartman and Stork (1972:140) define modality as "the way in which a speaker can express his attitude towards a situation in interpersonal communication, usually realized in English Language by modal auxiliaries, and /or adverbials such as Possibly or constructions like It is certain that..."

1.2 Modal auxiliaries in English

"Modal auxiliaries are auxiliary verbs which may occupy the first position of a verb phrase, which may not be immediately preceded by another verb, which may invert with the subject in the interrogation, and which are negated directly by not"

(Ehrman, 1966; Igwe, 1987:120). Huddleston (1976:68) adds that the syntactic property that most clearly distinguishes the modal auxiliaries from other verbs is that they have only finite forms, since the first verb in a VP can be finite; this means that a modal auxiliary can only occupy the first position in VP, and hence we cannot have two modals in the same VP.

Examples:

1. *John may will leave tomorrow.
2. * John must can swim.

These sentences are quite clearly deviant.

Modals are also distinguished from other verbs by the fact that they do not exhibit subject- verb agreement:

Compare:

3. He has gone versus They have gone, with.
4. He can/will swim versus They can/will swim

The modal auxiliaries also do not have the progressive form. These properties delimit the class of modals syntactically in English. Modality in English is solely expressed by means of modal auxiliaries while in Achi-Igbo it is expressed by periphrastic forms.

1.3 Modal forms in Achi-Igbo

In Achi dialect as well as in standard Igbo, modalities are expressed by periphrastic forms. Periphrasis is a term used in grammatical description to refer to the use of separate words instead of inflections to express the same grammatical relationship. With reference to verbs, the principal verb is combined with an auxiliary or some other particles as in will take, has taken, has been taken, in English. The comparison of adjectives in English involves periphrastic forms like, more beautiful, most beautiful (Huddleston, 1976 and Crystal, 1965).

Below are some of the periphrastic forms that can be used to express modalities in Achi dialect as well as in standard Igbo:

5 (a) – ga from (igā) to go, 'must', 'have to' etc.
(b) – fụ/pụ from (ịfụ/ịpụ) 'be able', 'can'.
(c) – nwe ikē from (inwē ike) 'can', 'be able', 'may be possible'.
(d) – tosi/kwēshi from (itōsi/ikwēshi) 'ought to', 'be worthy', 'supposed to'.
(e) – dị mkpà from (idi mkpà) 'necessity'
(f) – elēghi/elēhe anya from (ilē anya) 'doubts', 'probability', etc.

Syntactically, we can group these forms into two thus:

6 (a) periphrastic forms: dụ mkpà, ike kwe, gà/là, elēghi/elēhe anya and inwē ike.
(b) Modal verbs: fụ/pụ, toshi, kweshi

1.4 Modal verbs

We refer to modal verbs as those independent verbs which express different modalities on their own. We include fụ 'be able', toshi, 'ought to' and kweshi, 'supposed to' in this class. They, unlike the others, can function independently and can be inflected (cf. Igwe, 1987:128).

toshi- 'ought to'

(7) Igwe toshiri imetyagwo ihe ahụ[1].
'Igwe ought to have finished that thing'

The modality expressed in the sentence above is logical necessity or expectation.

fụ 'be able', 'can'

(8) Àda fụ̀rụ̀ ịsu bèkeè nke ọ͡nma[2]
'Ada is able to speak good English.'

The modality expressed in this sentence is ability.

1.5 Periphrastic forms and modalities

Apart from futurity (temporal time), the auxiliary, ga-, expresses different modalities in the Achi dialect. This is shown below. Note that the 2nd person singular ị/i and là/lè for other persons are used in place of 'ga'.

1.5.1 (y)à-/è or la/le- 'shall/will'

(A) obligation, compulsion, insistence'

(8) I (y)e-eme ihe a gwàrụ̀ wụ̀ mèe.
'You must/have to do what you are asked to do!'

(10) Ulū lē-edye ozu ahụ̀.
'You people must/have to go that errand.'

Note that most often, in the dialect, the emphatic morpheme '-riri' is added to the main verb to drive home the sense of obligation or compulsion:

(11) Obi là-àzàrịrị ụlọ ahụ̀
'Obi must unfailingly sweep that house.'

(B) Threat

(12) M lè-echi wụ ihe mà ikwuo okwū
'I will beat you if you speak'

(C) Promise

(13) M là-azụtara nnē m akwà mgbè m nwèrè ego.
'I will buy clothes for my mother when I have money'

(D) Intention

Usually; the expression, evù m l'obù 'I have in mind' can be used with la-/le- to bring out the meaning of intention.

(14) Evù m l'obù là ànyị là-aga nwhụ ị.
'I intend that we shall go to see him/her'

(E) Probability

In this case the là-/le- is modified by 'Ọ dụ ka' to create a sense of probability as in:

(15) Ọ dụ kà miri o le-ezo.
'It will probably rain'

(16) Ọ dụ ka ha la-edye Elugwu echi[3].
'It likely they will go to Elugwu tomorrow'

(F) Certainty

The la-/le- is modified by the addition of the bound morpheme '-riri' on the main verb to emphasize certainty and not compulsion:

(17) M là-abịarịrị dụ kà m kwùrù,
'I will certainly come as I said;

(G) Ability

The la-/le- modal auxiliary can also be modified by the addition of a bound morpheme -fute/-nwu to the main verb to convey the sense of one's ability to perform certain actions as in:

(18) Chioma lè-evufute ivu là.
'Chioma will be able to carry this load'

1.5.2 Nwe ike 'can, be able, may be possible, permissible'

The most familiar use of the periphrastic form, nwe ike, and one that grammarians often refer to as the basic meaning of can, is to express ability to do something. Other overtone meanings are: characteristic, permission, possibility, willingness and sensation.

(H) Ability – 'can, is able'

This modality is expressed when 'nwe ike' is followed by an infinitive verb form as in:

(19) Nwaànyị là nwere ike ịgbū maadu'
'The woman can commit murder'

(20) Chiwe nwèrè ike ịrụ ọrụ lā.
'Chinwe is able/can do this work'

(I) Possibility/probability – 'be, may, may be'

'Nwe ike' is also used to suggest that perhaps something may be; it is not as emphatic as 'nwe ike' in the modality of ability'. In this type, the 'nwe ike' may not be followed by the infinitive. 'Nwe ike', here, is translated 'may' in English.

(21) Ha nwèrè ike rụtyaa ọrụ ahụ́ échi.
'They may finish that work tomorrow'

(J) Permission – 'be allowed to, permitted to, can, may'

Permission to act may be granted by using 'Nwe ike'. In this sense, 'can' may be replaced by 'may' in English, though 'may' is a little more formal.

(22) Ḿ nwèrè ike iri ji ahụ?

'Can I or Am I permitted to eat that yam?'

(K) Willingness/volition – 'willing to'

'Ínwe ike' can refer to the willingness or volition on the part of the addressee to do a favour to the speaker as in:

(23) Ì nwèrè ike idyere m ozu là?

'Are you willing to do this for me?'

'Ínwe ikē' is used in a sense very similar to that of la/le to ask for a favour or to make an offer and is replaced by la-/le. In this sense, it always refers to the future and may collocate with future time adverbials as in:

(24) Ùde, i nwere ike isarụ m akwa echi?

(25) Ùde, ì (y)à- or là-asarụ m akwa echi?

'Ude, will you be willing to wash my clothes for me tomorrow?'

(L) Characteristics

This use of 'nwe ike' refers to patterns of behaviour, usually, but not always, in a derogatory sense. There is no analogous future time form. A very common collocation is with 'at times' and 'sometimes'.

(26) Nneka 'nwèrè ike' ikpa àgwà ọdyọọ mgbe ụwhọdụ

'Nneka can misbehave at times'

(27) O 'nwèrè ike' ịshị àshị ndụ egwu

'He can tell awful lies'.

1.5.3 Ike kwe/Eleghi anya 'may be, perhaps'

(M) Possibility/Doubt

In the sense of possibility, 'ike kwe/eleghi anya' is used with reference to present and future. It can also refer to an open construction in the past. The two forms may be accompanied by la which glosses as the English may/ might. The emphasis, however, is on 'ike kwe/ eleghi anya' and not on 'là'.

(28) Eleghi anya, ọ là-abia

'Perhaps, he might come.'

(29) Ike kwe ọ bịarụ l'ezhiokwu[5].

'Perhaps, he actually came'

1.5.4 Kweshi 'ought to, should, deserves'

'Kweshi', like the English equivalent, 'ought to' denotes obligation and logical necessity but it is less categorical than '-rịrị' bound moprpheme which is an obligation marker. Only one sense of 'Kweshi' needs to be noted – to express duty

or logical necessity. It leaves open the possibility of non-action, which 'là' or 'gàrịrị' (obligation) does not:

(30) Udenze kweshiri ka ọ bjagwo han.
'Udenze ought to have come by now.'

(31) O toshiri ka ha lọrụ kalà haà.
'They ought to be here by now'

Note that toshi again can be used in place of 'kweshi' to mean the same thing.

1.5.5 Dụ mkpà 'is necessary'

(N) Necessity

The copula with the complement, 'mkpa', is used to express a modality of necessity in Achi dialect:

(32) Ọ dụ mkpà là ha bjarụ.
'It is necessary that they come.'

(33) Ọ dụ mkpà kà ha bịa.
'It is necessary that they come.'

Like kweshi and toshi, Ọ dụ mkpà is followed by a complementizer 'kà' or 'là'. 'Là' introduces the NP complement.

1.5.6 Fụ 'can, be able'

Fụ denotes the ability to perform an action:

(34) Chineeke fụrụ imẽ ihe liile.
'God can do all things or God is all powerful.'

(35) Chukwueme fụrụ ịnụtya ite mmịị la.
'Chukwueme can finish drinking this pot of wine.'

It can be noted that 'fụ' has the same unequivocal meaning as the bound morpheme '-fute'; 'fụ', ability to do a task; '-te', motion towards as in:

(36) Irosò fụrụ ivu ivū la.
'Iroso is able to carry this load.'

(37) Irosò là-evufute ivu là.
'Iroso can carry this load'

2.0 Conclusion

As we observed above, the forms that are used to express modalities in Achi-Igbo are quite different from the English modal auxiliaries. We refer to some of them as periphrastic forms. These periphrastic forms express a wide variety of modalities.

Most of these forms express open propositions, that is, unrealized meanings. They usually refer to the future. This might be the reason why Lyons (1977:816) observes rightly, "Reference to future, unlike reference to the past, is as

much a matter of modality as it is a purely temporal reference." Ultan (1972:84) holds a similar view that "the reason for preponderance of modal application of future tenses must lie in the fact that most modal categories refer to differing degrees of uncertainties which correlates with the elements of uncertainty inherent in any future event." All these go to point out that there is a correlation between future tense and modalities of uncertainty.

The absence of inflectional markers for modality may be due to the fact that it is a purely semantic category while, mood which is a syntactic category, has formal markers.

Notes

1. /ty/ - [c] voiceless palatal plosive
2. /n͡m/ - [ŋ͡m] (voiced) labial velar nasal
3. [dy] – [ʃ] voiced palatal plosive
4. [wh] – [ʍ]- voiceless labial-velar fricative
5. (zh) – [ʒ] voiced palato-alveolar fricative

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