

Javanese Modals: In between auxiliaries and verbs

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Modals in Javanese behave like both auxiliaries and verbs. However, these modals cannot be classified as an auxiliary or a verb, suggesting that modals should be recognized as a separate grammatical category. Some support a modal category (Palmer 2001), others disagree with this classification (Nuyts 2005), but the reasoning has remained on semantic grounds. I argue that syntactic and morphological effects also need to be taken into account. I propose, then, a three-way division in Javanese between auxiliaries (relating to both tense and aspect), verbs and modals, where modals are treated as a separate category. I discuss the unique behaviour of the epistemic modal *mesthi* ‘inevitable’ and the deontic modal *kudu* ‘really-have-to’ in Pesisiran Javanese, an SVO Western Malayo-Polynesian dialect of Javanese.

The modals *mesthi* and *kudu* are similar to auxiliaries in that they do not display certain verb-like properties. Both modals and auxiliaries cannot stand alone, and they do not permit passive verbal morphology or prenasalization, which marks an active transitive verb. In addition, auxiliaries and modals are predicative; they select for AP, PP or VP predicates, predicting that they could also take a predicative NP as their complement.

Another property that these modals and auxiliaries share is that the prefix *sa’-* and the possessive suffix *-(n)e* may attach to both these categories, but not to verbs. However, different categorial and semantic effects arise depending on which class the morphemes attach to. When the affixes *sa’-* and *-(n)e* are attached to auxiliaries, the meaning correlates with the categorial change from an auxiliary (1a) to a preposition (1b). But for modals, *-(n)e* shifts the meaning and maintains category. In (2a), the epistemic bare modal *mesthi* asserts that the speaker is confident that the event has happened, based on facts he/she knows about the proposition. However, with the possessive suffix *-(n)e* in (2b), the speaker asserts that the event did *not* occur. The difference between a categorial and semantic shift shows that modals differ from auxiliaries, and moreover, that the possessive suffix must be treated as a multifunctional morpheme.

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| (1) a. Amina wis adus.
Amina already take.bath
‘Amina had already taken a bath.’ | b. Sa’-wis-e adus, Amina turu.
SA-already-POSS take.bath, Amina sleep
‘ After taking a bath, Amina slept.’ |
| (2) a. Dullah mesthi wis teko.
Dullah inevitable already come
‘Dullah must have already come.’ | b. Dullah (sa’)- mesthi-ne wis teko.
Dullah SA-inevitable-POSS already come
‘Dullah should have come.’ |

It is observed that the prefix *sa’-* is mandatory for auxiliaries, but is optional for the epistemic modal *mesthi*, and not permitted for the deontic modal *kudu*. As in (1a-b), *sa’-* and *-(n)e* derive prepositions when attached to auxiliaries. These prepositions create adjuncts, which modify the main clause. Conversely, modals better retain their syntactic status, and remain able to take AP, PP, or VP predicates. Modals normally have a fixed position relative to other auxiliaries, but may occur sentence initially or to the left of the VP (2b) when they appear with *sa’-* and *-(n)e*, showing that their syntactic position changes with these affixes.

Finally, modals and verbs, but not auxiliaries display semantic shifts via morphology. For verbs, a nasal-obstruent alternation seems to shift the register, the obstruent indicating politeness. For modals, only *mesthi* ‘inevitable’ allows a nasal-obstruent alternation, demonstrating a semantic continuum of modal strength; the obstruent variant *pesthi* ‘fate’ indicates a higher degree of certainty than the nasal *mesthi*.

These semantic and syntactic properties common between modals and verbs or modals and auxiliaries show that modals have a unique cross-section and must be treated as a separate category. The definition of modals is problematic cross-linguistically. The case of Javanese will shed light on this issue because of the wide range and large number of verb-like elements.

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