

Building modality with syntax: Focus on Ancient Greek

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Keywords: corpus study, moods, negation, particles, subordination

General discussion on modality has covered topics pertaining mostly to semantics and pragmatics including (a) the relevant semantic categories involved (“dynamicity”, “possibility”, “necessity”: van der Auwera & Plungian 1998, Nuyts 2016; “evidentiality”: Squartini 2016); (b) the role of clause polarity (factuality vs non-factuality: Kiefer 1997, Declerck 2011) and the correlation with speech acts (Narrog 2012a); (c) the pragmatically-oriented notion of “speaker’s attitude” (Palmer 1986; Nuyts 2005; see also the notion of “subjectification” in language change, cf. Traugott 2010, Narrog 2012b).

Ancient Greek (AG) is an interesting test bench for investigating modality and scholarship has dedicated studies to its rich system of moods (recently, Rijksbaron 2006, Willmott 2007), modal particles (Basset 1988, Gerö 2000, Beck et al. 2012) and modal verbs (Ruiz Yamuza 2008; Allan 2013), but also to the interaction of verbal moods with several modal adverbs and particles, e.g. ἴσως (*ísōs*), τάχα (*tákha*) (Ruiz Yamuza 2001; Conti 2019), τυχόν (*tukhón*) (Denizot & Vassilaki 2017), ἤ (*ê*) and ἄρα (*ára*) (La Roi 2019). The list of “modal-oriented” grammatical devices is longer and may include e.g. indefinites and negation. Recent studies suggest that “modal meanings could be available for all syntactic categories and at all the different levels of syntactic structure” (Arregui et al. 2017: 18).

All these categories may play a role in shaping modality but the way they interact and influence each other for building modal meanings has still to be explored in a more syntactically-oriented perspective. In AG linguistics, the interaction of multiple “modal-oriented” grammatical devices has been recently explored by Drummen (2013) on ἄν (*án*) + optative within the constructionist framework, Revuelta Puigdollers (2017) on result clauses in a distributionist approach, and Denizot et al. (forthcoming) on temporal clauses with ἄν (*án*) in a contrastive study on three stages of AG. The way different devices jointly contribute to create a specific modal meaning can thus be captured at the clause-level; the modal meaning in turn influences the meaning of its components (sub-clauses, reference of the indefinites, scope of the negation among others).

The aim of this workshop is to encourage corpus-based studies devoted to the syntax of modality in AG, within different theoretical models. All stages of AG from Archaic to Hellenistic Greek, including all types of texts, literary and non-literary, are within the scope of the workshop.

Issues to approach

1) The nature of factors involved

a) Verbal categories (e.g. aspect and tense) are not the only contributors to modality. More specific attention should be given to indefinites, negation, or a wide range of particles, e.g., as regards their interaction with other modal means.

b) These interactions are also syntactically-conditioned by the nature of the clause in which they appear (main vs subordinate clause, types of subordinate clauses, etc.).

2) The way the different factors interact

a) Is the interaction between different parameters a rule or a tendency? We need to investigate which factors are compulsory in interaction with others, which ones are possible, which combinations are unattested.

b) ‘Interaction’ is a practical but imprecise term that needs further elaboration. Is it relevant to consider that the interaction between different modal factors creates collocations or constructions, and if so, how? Which factors influence or condition the other(s) in building modality? How does the modal meaning of a clause influence the meaning of its components?

3) Role of different types of variation and language change

a) Synchronic and diachronic approaches to AG are equally welcome. Contrastive studies between different stages of Greek can also help to shed light on structural differences in the way modality is built at different synchronic layers.

b) Other factors such as sociolinguistic and dialectal variation, types of texts, e.g. literary vs non-literary may nuance our approach to AG.

4) Reflection on the relevant methodology

AG can be approached through a corpus, which is closed but large and with diverse and clearly defined types of text. It has also benefitted from a long and rich grammatical tradition. Corpus-based studies on AG allow us to test different theoretical frameworks and to evaluate the relevance of different concepts to describe and understand the way modality is built syntactically. This kind of approach should bring new knowledge to AG but also to general linguistics.

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