

Modality interactions: An Edoid perspective

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Modality as a grammatical domain has had a tumultuous four decades. Investigations have stretched its traditional understanding (Bybee et al. 1994, de Haan 2006, Squartini 2016). In response, we find attempts to clarify modality types (Nuysts 2006, 2016), crucial as languages beyond the margins of Standard Average European get documented and described.

For this paper we delineate modality categories and their distribution within an under-analyzed Edoid language of West Africa (Elugbe 1989). Emai has a rich preverbal space where tone as sole or co-exponent conveys tense-aspect (TA), negation, and among others four modal category types: boulomaic (like/dislike), deontic (obligation), dynamic (capacity, volition), and epistemic (real-world probability). Relative to these modal types, we examine intra- and inter-category relations as well as syntagmatic interaction with mood and tense-aspect.

Intra-category relations are constrained absolutely for deontic, boulomaic, and dynamic. Epistemics reflect sub-category constraints (Palmer 2001), since assumptive elements combine, as do some speculatives with deductives or assumptives.

Concerning inter-modal relations, deontic hortative *i* ‘should’ is incompatible with epistemic subcategories; more compatible with boulomaic (allowing *wòò* ‘be better’); and partially compatible with dynamic: capacitives (*gbùdù* ‘courageously’) accepting but volitives (*dábò* ‘deliberately’) rejecting. Epistemic elements partially combine with boulomaic and dynamic. In turn, boulomaic interacts only with a subclass of dynamic, accepting capacitive but not volitive.

Modality categories interact with TA unevenly. Deontic disallows all TA. Boulomaic (*wòò* ‘be better’) disallows a proximal or distal value for each of past, present, and future. In contrast, boulomaic *dùù* ‘without reason’ and *kùkù* ‘lacking suitability’ permit proximal and distal values for past but not present or future. Dynamic favors past over present and future, as does epistemic.

Compatibility of modals with mood and negation varies. Most obvious is that epistemic and deontic reject imperative mood, while dynamic, boulomaic, and deontic uniformly restrict prohibitive. Subcategory constraints govern dynamic, where volitive rejects imperative but capacitive does not. Modality categories do not limit interrogative polar questions (PQ), but sub-categories do, as epistemic deductive rejects PQs, whereas epistemic speculatives are limited to PQs. Negation is incompatible with deontic hortative. All other modalities show mixed compatibility.

We conclude by noting linear order/semantic scope relations in Emai preverbal space (Narrog 2016). Although tense and negation have scope over all modality categories, epistemic has scope over all non-epistemic modalities and dynamic lacks scope over any other modality. Boulomaic has scope over dynamic, while deontic has scope over boulomaic and dynamic.

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