

Modality in the Grammar of Modern Mayan Languages

Igor Vinogradov

There is no category of tense in the grammar of almost all modern Mayan languages. So modality along with aspect are the main semantic domains expressed by the verbal grammar. In the presentation there will be examined the grammatical means used to express the modal meanings in the Mayan languages, as well as the distribution of these means.

There are two main modal domains, irrealis and imperative, in the Mayan grammar. Traditional descriptions provided by the grammars of European languages consider *irrealis* and *imperative* as values of a common grammatical category (the category of mood). In this work I will argue that *irrealis* and *imperative* are values of two different categories (irrealis and mood, respectively).

Not all languages of the family have *imperative*, hence they don't have the category of mood at all. The good examples here can be K'iche' and Sakapultek. In these languages there is no special marker in the imperative contexts, instead the marker of irrealis is always used. The main feature of grammatical expression of mood in the Mayan languages is the difference in using imperative markers depending on the transitivity of the verb. For example, in Tzotzil imperative is expressed by the suffix *-o* with transitive verbs and by *-an* with intransitive ones. Compare the forms of 'wait' and 'seat down' in the example below:

Mo'oj,	mu	x-a-ti'-on,	mala- o	j-likel-uk,	chotl- an -ik
no	NEG	IPFV-2-eat-1	wait-IMP	one-moment-DIM	seat.down-IMP-PL
'No, don't eat me! Wait a minute! Sit down!' [Laughlin 1977: 48]					

Moreover, in Jacalteco and Mam there is only one imperative suffix used with only transitive verbs or only intransitive ones. With other verbs imperative meaning is expressed by pure verbal stem or by the marker of irrealis depending on the language. Such difference in the ways of expressing imperative between transitive and intransitive verbs can be explained by the ergative strategy of person marking in the majority of the Mayan languages.

Not all linguists admit typological adequacy of the term *irrealis* (see, for example, critical opinions in [Bybee 1998]), but it is used more and more widely nowadays. In particular, the category of irrealis seems highly relevant for the Mayan languages. In general, the scope of use of *irrealis* in the Mayan languages corresponds to the typological picture obtained via the comparative studies of this category, such as [Elliott 2000]. In some Mayan languages *irrealis* has yet some special features (such as outlying position of potential meanings, and the usage of irrealis affixes not only with verbs but also with nouns and particles) that will be shown in more detail in the presentation.

One of the most interesting features of the Mayan verbal grammar is a specific interaction between the irrealis and aspect categories. The markers of aspect cannot combine with the marker of irrealis within a single verbform, and it seems to be the universal principle for all languages of the family. So, it would be reasonable to consider aspectual, modal (and sometimes temporal) meanings as values of one common *TAM-category*.

A typologically uncommon phenomenon occurs in the Mayan languages at the lowland area (Yucatecan branch, some Ch'olan languages): the TAM-category is usually expressed in two positions at once within a single verbform. In these cases some other meanings from the semantic domain of modality (desiderative, debitive, optative, hortative) can be expressed together with irrealis or aspect. Here is an example with the optative marker from Yucatec:

ko'x	ka	han- ak -o'on,	ts'o'ok-ol-e'	k-a	bin
let's.go	OPT	eat-IRR-1.PL	finish-IPFV-DET	IPFV-2	go
'Let's eat, then you can go' [Andrade, Máas Collí 1990]					

Abbreviations:

1 – 1st person; 2 – 2nd person; DET – determinative; DIM – diminutive; IMP – imperative mood; IPFV – imperfective aspect; IRR – irrealis; NEG – negative; OPT – optative; PL – plural.

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