MODALITY IN SINHALA AND ITS SYNTACTIC REPRESENTATION

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Introduction

Modality is considered a semantic concept expressing such notions as possibility, necessity, probability, obligation, permission, ability, and volition. These different notions have given rise to two major distinct sub-types of modality as epistemic and root modality. Languages vary considerably in the way they realize each of these finer distinctions. Epistemic interpretations are speaker-oriented, or, in the case of embedded clauses, matrix-subject oriented qualification or modification of the truth of a proposition. The root interpretations involve the will, ability, permission or obligation to perform some action or bring about some state of affairs. Nevertheless, sentences are often ambiguous between the two readings.

Palmer (2001) observes that there is considerable variation in the ways that languages deal with grammatical categories, and there is probably more variation with modality than with other categories. He observes that one language may mark commands as irrealis, another may mark them as realis, while yet another may not treat them as part of a system of modality at all. According to Cinque (1999), epistemic modality expresses the speaker's degree of confidence about the truth of the proposition (based on the kind of information he/she has). Further, in Cinque's functional sequence, epistemic modals and root modals correspond to a structural difference as well: epistemic modals are generated higher in the structure and have scope over the root modals.

Sinhala has a number of particles/suffixes to convey modality. They can attach to any lexical category in an agglutinative fashion and take scope over the domain to the left. (2) They can also attach at the clausal level thereby scoping the whole clause. (3)

1. Nimal kaareka seeduwa
   Nimal car   washed
   Nimal washed the car

2. Nimal lu   kaareka seeduwE
   Nimal EVID car washed-E
   Nimal, it is said, was the one who washed the car

Example (1) is a neutral sentence. In (2), the subject, *Nimal,* is exclusively in the (narrow) scope of the evidential modal particle[1], i.e. the evidential report is about *Nimal.*

The same particle can attach at the clausal level, and then the whole clause comes under the (wide) scope of that particle (3).

3. Nimal kaareka seeduwa lu
   Nimal car   washed EVID
   It is said that Nimal washed the car

This paper explores modality in Sinhala from a syntactic perspective. In particular, it attempts to answer such questions as (1) what are different types of modalities that can be observed in Sinhala and how are they represented? (2) Does the root-epistemic distinction in modality hold syntactically, and if so, what is their syntactic projection? (3) How does modality in Sinhala interact with the verbal system? Is there modal agreement in Sinhala?

The theoretical alignment of the study is the generative syntactic theory expounded by Chomsky (1965-), and within that, the cartographic framework proposed by Rizzi (1997-).

Methodology
Data for the present study consisted of the grammatical judgments of native speakers of Sinhala. Since the aim of generative syntax is to model the native speaker competence by examining his performance, this study too relied on such native speaker grammatical judgments. Although the researcher himself is a native speaker of Sinhala, it was still necessary to

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[1] Karunatillake, W.S. (1992) labels "lu" as a reportive marker which is used when someone is reporting or relaying information as to what someone else said.

rely on a rather larger corpus. Hence, a sample of 10 native speakers representing different age groups was selected. This included 03 children aged between 8-13, and 6 adults in the age group of 30-60. The researcher too was considered as a member of the sample. About 40 sentences were presented to them with different ordering of modality particles. This was necessary in order to judge the scope properties of such modal particles, in addition to testing accuracy of the utterances. The utterances included both matrix and embedded sentences.

Results And Discussion

A classification of the modals in Sinhala is presented in Table 1 below. The table illustrates a number of significant properties of Sinhala modals. Of the epistemic modals, evidential, evaluative, epistemic (except epistemic possibility), and interrogative attach to the fully inflected verb, i.e. they attach to the present, past, future, and past participle verbal forms which may be inflected for indicative/ imperative/hortative/volitive/and future/irrealis moods of the verb. But in root/event modalities, the modalities of ability, permission and prohibition, only the infinitive/imperative verb forms are allowed. Narrow scope marking by the modal is not possible here.

As the examples show, one major morpho-syntactic phenomenon associated with Sinhala modality is the special form the verb assumes when such modal particle is present in the clause. That is, the verb takes a special –e suffix, in the present and past tenses. This differential behavior of the –e suffix highlights two things: (1) it is not simply the modal particle that determines the contrastive modal interpretation, but the verbal inflection also takes part in this process. (2) It shows the scope marking potential of the modal particle and the corresponding verbal morphology.[2] That is, when the modal particle attaches to any phrase level constituent, the verb inflects for –e. This creates a set of alternatives out of which one individual/entity is given saliency. But, when the same particle attaches to the whole clause, it does not inflect for the –e suffix indicating that the alternative set is not available in this instance.

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[2] Karunatillake, W.S. (1992) calls this particular verb form with the –e suffix "emphatic verb". However, he does not attempt a separate analysis of –e.

Table 1: Epistemic and Root Modals in Sinhala:

Broad type	Category	Modal	Example (kapanava: cut)
Epistemic modals	Evidential	-lu	Nimal gaha kapanava-lu Nimal tree cut(PRS)- EVID It is said, Nimal is cutting the tree
	Evaluative	-ne	Nimal gaha kapanava-ne Nimal tree cut(PRS) EVAL Nimal is cutting the tree (evaluation/shared information)
	Interrogative	-da	Nimal gaha kapanava-da? Nimal tree cut(PRS)- Q Is Nimal cutting the tree
	Irrealis	-ta	Nimal gaha kapana bava-ta saakki thiyenava Nimal tree cut(PTCP) Fin –ta evidence has There is evidence that Nimal is cutting/going to cut the tree
	Conditional	oth/thoth	Nimal gaha kaepu-woth mama salli denava Nimal tree cut-COND I money give(PRS) If Nimal cuts the tree, I will give money (to him)
	Epistemic	vage	Nimal gaha kapanna vage Nimal tree cut(INF) seem seems, Nimal is going to cut the tree
	Epistemic possibility	puluwan	Nimal natanna puluwan Nimal dance(INF) possible Nimal **might** dance
Root modals	Ability	puluwan	Nimal-**ta** natanna puluwan Nimal-**DAT** dance(INF) can Nimal **can** dance
	Permission	puluwan	Oya-ta daen yanna puluwan You-DAT now go(INF) can You may go now (you are permitted to go now)
	Prohibition	epa	(Oya) yanna epa (You) go(IMP) NEG Don't go

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The three modals (epistemic possibility, root ability and root permission) can occur in embedded clauses. The evaluative, evidential and epistemic (vage) modalities are not part of the embedded periphery. Table 2 illustrates their properties.

Table 2: Properties of the Modals

Property	Epis modals	Root Modals
Contrastive narrow scope possible	✓	x
-e suffix on the verb in narrow scope	✓	x
Clausal level scope possible	✓	✓
Ability to pied-pipe an XP	✓	-
Occur in root clause	✓	✓
Occur in embedded clause	x	✓

Conclusion

The root/epistemic distinction hold in Sinhala not only semantically but also syntactically. In line with Cinque (1999), I propose that epistemic modals occur higher in the structure while the root modals occur closer to the vP so that the former takes scope over the latter. Sinhala modals show hierarchy not only with respect to epistemic-root distinction, but also among each other. Further, I consider the –e suffix as an overt reflex of an AGREE relation, i.e., a Spec-Head relation. The head orders of the modal functional heads can be illustrated as follows.

MD Speech Act > T> INT > MD Evaluative > Md Evidential > Md Epistemic possibility (Puluwan)/Md Epistemic (vage) > Sent Neg (Naeahe) / Md Prohibitive (epa) / Possibility Neg (Baehae) > Root Modal ability/permission (Puluwan) > vP

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