Modality and future tense: language change as a test case for semantic maps and modality models

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The intersection between modality and tense hinges on semantics, but also involves complex conditioning factors of grammar and pragmatics. Language change in these areas can be a good test case for models. This paper focuses on semantic maps, modality and temporal categories, especially future tense.

Semantic maps plot recurrent meanings and functions in an area of grammar or lexicon based on language comparison. Only formally expressed distinctions attested in at least one of the languages are plotted as distinct. However, the limits of a semantic map, and the distinction between polysemy and homonymy, require further investigation. In addition, as correctly noticed by Haspelmath (2003: 231), "semantic maps only show the relative closeness or distance of relations, not the exact nature of the relations within semantic space". This is considered to be the task of cognitive-semantic analysis, for which, however, no generally accepted methodology has been outlined.

Within and between semantic maps, implicational hierarchy may exist as a strict asymmetrical ordering relation usually assumed to be linear: an element presupposed all the preceding elements. Numeral systems are usually mentioned as clear examples thereof, because presence of higher numerals as a rule presupposes presence of all the lower numerals. However, language change even here reveals more complex structures. For example, some Rai Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal partially replace the original Tibeto-Burman numerals by the Nepali ones, but exhibit non-linearity in preserving numeral building blocks (e.g. 'five', 'ten') accompanied by those lower numerals that match the grammatical number in the language ('one', 'two', 'three' in a system with singular, dual and plural vs. only 'one' and 'two' in a system with only singular and plural) and optionally also multiples of these lower numerals (e.g. 'two', 'four', 'eight', but not 'seven', cf. Gvozdanović 1985: 136). Such evidence on underlying structures surfacing in language change shows that semantic maps are as a rule not bi-dimensional, but tri-dimensional (in line with Luraghi 2005: 15 etc.) or even multidimensional, interconnected in some domains.

The case in point in this paper is the development of periphrastic futures in Slavic in relation to modality, compared to Germanic and some other language groups. Starting from Andersen's (2006) comprehensive survey of periphrastic futures in Slavic, this paper critically examines the relation between modality and the historical emergence of the varieties of future tense. The results enable an addition to Narrog's (2017: 89 etc.) model for modality, an adjustment of Van der Auwera & Plungian's (1998: 98) model and a slight modification of Bybee's (2015: 123) development path from modality to future tense. The analysis confirms the hypothesis that semantic maps rest on more fundamental networks of semantic dimensions that outline development possibilities.

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