MODALITY TESTS IN MALAY

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Scholars have generally accepted that Malay has a closed class of auxiliaries that can be aspect markers or modals. There is no consensus, though, as to which words belong to which classes (cf. Asmah & Rama (1985), Imran (1993), Mohd. Isa (1993), Darwis (1989), Mashudi (1981) Ramli (1992)). The items in (1) have been classified by one or more scholars as aspect markers. Likewise, the items in (2) have been classified as modals at some place in the literature.

1) Aspect Markers (suggested)
   * pernah, — (perfective)
   * sudah, — (perfective)
   * telah, — (preterite)
   * sedang — (progressive)
   * masih — (progressive)
   * tengah — (progressive)
   * belum — (negative)
   * akan — (future)

2) Modals (suggested)
   * tentu, — ‘certain’
   * patut, — ‘proper, suitable’
   * pasti, — ‘certain’
   * harus, — ‘proper, fitting’
   * mesti, — ‘necessary’
   * boleh, — ‘can’
   * dapat, — ‘can’
   * mungkin — ‘possible’

It is an open question, however, what criteria delineate the category of modals. English has the well-known NICE criteria in (3): a. inversion with the subject, b. negative form with -n’t, c. ‘code’ and d. emphatic affirmation (Palmer 1974).

3) a. Must he come?
   * Come he?

   b. He can’t smoke.
   * He smoken’t.
c. Mary must come and so must Dave.
   *Mary comes and so comes Dave.

d. Jill máy visit.
   ?Jill visits.

   Palmer (1990:4) points out three further criteria that separate English
   modals from verbs and auxiliaries in (4): a. no -s form for the 3rd person
   singular, b. no non-finite forms (infinitives, past and present participles),
   and c. no co-occurrence of modals.

   4) a. *Karl majors.
       Karl has come.
       Karl comes.

   b. *maying, *to may, *mayed
       having been, to have been, had been
       visiting, to visit, visited

   c. *Carla will must come.
       Carla has been intending to come.

   These tests are not claimed to have any universal application. Modality, in
   particular, has idiosyncratic properties across languages.

   A number of these tests will not apply to Malay. Malay has no
   equivalent of negation with contracted -n't or the -s form of the third person
   singular on verbs. Neither does Malay have different morphological forms
   for finite and non-finite verbs as English does. Malay does not allow code
   (cf. the English examples in (3c)) as (5) shows.

   5) *Ali mesti makan dan juga mesti Reza.
      Ali must eat and also must Reza
      'Ali must eat and so must Reza.'

      On the issue of co-occurrence for the first five words listed in (2),
      the sentences in (6) are marked with a question mark to reflect the judgment
      that the two modals together sound redundant or semantically incompatible.
      This may indicate that there is no syntactic violation in (6).

      Ali certain must come
      'Ali certainly must come.'
b.  ¿Ali pasti harus datang.
    Ali sure should come
    ‘Ali surely should come.’

c.  ¿Ali patut mesti datang.
    Ali right must come
    ‘Ali rightly must come.’

The same restriction does not hold for the last three words in (2). Mungkin can occur with both boleh and dapat.

7)  a.  Siti mungkin boleh datang.
    Siti possible can come
    ‘Siti maybe can come.’

    b.  Siti mungkin dapat datang.
    Siti possible can come
    ‘Siti maybe can come.’

The data in (7) supports classifying mungkin as an adverb rather than a true modal.

Boleh and dapat can also occur together, but in this case, dapat functions as a lexical verb meaning “get”.

8)  a.  Siti mendapat wang itu.
    Siti meN+get money that
    ‘Siti got the money.’

    b.  Siti boleh dapat wang itu.
    Siti can get money that
    ‘Siti can get the money.’

Malay also has an interesting property with respect to the morphological possibilities of modals. In English, modals are inert morphologically; they do not allow any affixation. In Malay, most modals can combine with the same affixes that lexical items combine with. In particular, Malay has two prefixes, meN- and di- that mark the active and passive forms of a verb respectively.

    Ali meN+read book that
    ‘Ali read the book.’
   Book that di+read by Ali
   'The book was read by Ali.'

Malay also has the suffix -kan which among other functions adds an argument position to the lexical entry of a verb.

   Ali meN+read book that
   'Ali read the book.'

b. Ali membacakan Siti buku itu.
   Ali meN+read+kan Siti book that
   'Ali read Siti the book.'

The prefixes meN- or di- together with the suffix -kan not only can be added to verbs but also nouns and adjectives to make verbs out of them. That is, it functions like a verbalizing circumfix.

11) a. buku besar itu
    book big that
    'the big book'

b. Siti membesarkan rumahnya.
   Siti meN+big+kan house+her
   'Siti enlarged her house.'

c. Dewan Bahasa membukukan beberapa buah
   Dewan Bahasa meN+book+kan several classifier
   ceritanya story+his
   'Dewan Bahasa made a book out of several of his stories.'

In Malay, this morphological operation can also be applied to all the modals in (2) except patut. Also, these affixes can be applied to dapat but only in its lexical meaning, so that mendapatkan means 'to obtain' or 'to reach (some point)' but not 'to enable'.

12) a. Siti menentukan kedai itu ditutup.
    Siti meN+tentu+kan shop that di+close
    'Siti made certain the shop was closed.'