

## Preverbal modal markers in Kriol (creole, northern Australia): an irrealis system?

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In this paper we will present a synthetic analysis of the Kriol system of preverbal modal markers, informed by comparative descriptions of each of these markers, themselves based on extensive first-hand, variety-specific data . The data revealed a number of preverbal modal markers that share coherent distributional and syntactic properties. We will first discuss the morphosyntactic properties of these modal markers; then propose to approach the system of Kriol modal markers as structured around ‘irrealis modality’ rather than quantification over possible worlds.

Much of the comparative and theoretical discussion of modality across the world’s languages focuses on the question of the semantic axis around which modal markers vary

. In many of the languages studied in the literature, modal markers are described as fixed in modal strength, and variable in modal flavour (English being an example). There are also linguistic analyses of markers characterized by fixed flavour and variable strength (e.g. St’át’imcets , Nez Perce , Pintupi/Luritja ). Finally, some modals are known to be fixed for both strength and flavour (e.g. Paciran Javanese , or variable for both (e.g. Washo , Koryak ).

We want to explore the hypothesis that characterizing Kriol preverbal modal markers in terms of their flavour and/or strength does not do justice to their semantic organization as a system. The flavour and strength dimensions apply to the semantics of quantification over possible worlds; instead, we suggest, Kriol preverbal modal markers span across the broader domain of ‘irrealis’ semantics. In spite of the evident English influence on their forms, the semantics organization of Kriol modal markers would in fact be typical of Australian languages, where the irrealis category is often grammatically salient

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