1. Overview of the project

- We give a modal typology for 6 (out of 18) Luhya languages. Luhya is a subfamily of Bantu (ISO: lub; Guthrie: JE 32) spoken by approximately 5 million people in western Kenya and Tanzania.
- Our data was collected using a modified version of Vander Klok’s (2014) modal fieldwork questionnaire.
- We situate our findings within the modal typology of van der Auwera & Plungian (1998) and Nauze (2008), who distinguish between three categories:
  - Participant-internal (PI) modality: expresses an ability or need of a participant of the action.
  - Participant-external (PE) modality: expresses a possibility or obligation on the part of someone external to the action. (Incl. the subclasses deontic and goal-oriented.)
  - Epistemic modality: expresses a judgment towards a proposition based on knowledge.

We show that the Luhya modals can vary in expressing modal category, but not in modal force. We additionally show that there is substantial inter- and intra-speaker variation.

2. Modals verbs

Luhya languages use three verbs to express modal meanings. They have both modal and non-modal uses. We categorize these verbs into three classes (I, II, and III), and give rough (Kratzerian) modal meanings. All examples on this poster are from Llogoori.

3. Class I: Existential force

(1) PI: Ability

Kageha a-nyal-a ku-tema mandazi.
1Sg a-1-nyal-a 1SG-MOD.1-FV 15-cook 6mandazi
‘You can cook mandazi.’

(2) PE: Deontic possibility

1Kageha a-nyal-a ku-voliza.
Kageha 1SG-MOD.1-FV 15-date
‘Kageha may go on a date.’

(3) Epistemic possibility

professor a-nyal-a ku-za mpiki.
1professor 1SG-MOD.1-FV 15-come in 7class
‘The professor might come to class.’

4. Classes II & III: Universal force

(4) PI: Circumstantial necessity

n-enya-a n-voholek-e.
1SG-MOD.1-FV 1SG-relieve-SBJV
‘I need to pee.’

(5) PE: Deontic weak necessity

ga-enya-ka-er Sira a-sav-e.
1SG-MOD.2-AC-FV 15Sira 1ask-SBJV
amwaavo.
1brother
‘Sira should ask his brother.’

Class II expresses weak necessity with respect to participant-internal and participant-external modals in all 6 languages.

(6) PE: Deontic necessity/weak necessity

ku-duka w-evek-e.
15-MOD.1-FV 2SG-wear-SBJV
‘You (must/should) wear a helmet.’

(7) Epistemic necessity/weak necessity

ku-duka mbura (ku-duka) e-e-
15-MOD.3rain 15-MOD.3-9-COP-SBJV
neekuba.
falling
‘It (must/should) be raining.’

Class III expresses (weak) necessity with respect to all modal categories across all 6 languages.

5. Modal typology

The Luhya languages lexically distinguish between existential and universal force modals and between weak and strong necessity.

Support for Nauze’s typology:
1. Variation occurs along one axis: flavor (here, “categories”), not force.
2. No “skipping” categories; i.e. if a modal expresses need and necessity, it also expresses obligation.

Problems for Nauze’s typology:
1. Class III can vary in both modal category and force, since it can express both weak and strong epistemic modality.
2. Volitional modality appears to play an important role in Luhya’s modal system, as the class II modals in their non-modal use mean “want.”

6. Variation

Variation #1: Non-cognate modal verbs. Not all modal verbs are cognate. For instance, class III: khoya (Lubukusu) vs. kuduuka (Llogoori).

Variation #2: Expletive subjects. We observe inter-/intra-language variation with respect to the choice of expletive subject agreement. Different agreement morphemes reflect differences in modal force, as shown in (8) (Gluckman & Bowler, to appear).

7. Non-verbal modals

- All languages have (at least) one pure possibility adverb (haondi in Llogoori).
- All languages have (at least) one general purpose necessity “adverb” borrowed from Swahili: mpaka, which means ‘until’ in Swahili. It distributes like an adverb, but selects for subjunctive mood, like the modal verbs.

Selected references.