1

PRELIMINARIES

1.1 Scope of the work

Modality, the grammatical domain expressed by moods, or modal verbs in English (may, must, will, can, etc.), is one of the most interesting semantic domains; we use these modal forms to communicate most 'subjectively', to express our beliefs, intentions, desires, abilities and wishes. In Homer, the subjunctive and optative are used to beseech the gods, to beg for something not to happen, to suggest a course of action, to speculate about what might be. Yet in spite of the obvious interest of the meaning of these forms, the domain of modality has only recently been paid much theoretical attention.[1] A reanalysis of the Homeric modal system is therefore overdue in the light of this recent theoretical interest, even though the uses of the moods have been minutely described in several standard grammars (Monro, Chantraine, Goodwin, Smyth). I will argue here that the traditional accounts need to be radically revised.

This book is both a close analysis of the various constructions in which moods are found in Homeric Greek, and also a case study in the theoretical description of a modal system. The analysis of the constructions discusses and takes issue with many of the assertions found in textbook grammars. Because of the nature of the constructions in which the moods are found (e.g. prayers (chapter 5.4), counterfactual conditions (3.2.4 and 5.3), prohibitions (4.4), descriptions of capacity (5.5.2), purpose clauses (6.2)), this discussion will not only be of interest to linguists concerned with the meaning of Homeric Greek, but also to those considering the poems from a literary perspective. Using findings from grammaticalisation and modern studies of modality that demonstrate

[1] The first full-length textbook on the subject (Palmer *Mood and Modality*, 1st edn) was only published in 1986.

the complexity of the domain, the modal system as a whole is here reconsidered, and the study thus also has conclusions which will be of interest to linguists considering ancient Greek and Proto-Indo-European from a theoretical perspective. Finally, I hope that the book will also interest linguists concerned with the description of modality in general. Most modality studies have discussed the use of modal verbs; in Homeric Greek modality is expressed primarily through moods, and important differences between the two types of systems may thus be highlighted.

This book is based on a Ph.D. thesis submitted to the University of Cambridge in 2003. There I used a corpus of the first six books of the *Iliad* for a preliminary survey of the different uses of the moods, sampling widely for extra data where necessary. For this book, all the examples of the moods throughout both Homeric poems have been analysed and categorised. While examples used for illustration might primarily come from my original corpus, these are always cross-referenced to any other examples elsewhere. An appendix of these examples, intended to be a useful research tool in its own right, may be found at the end of the book (see the index locorum).

The structure of the book, and the main arguments found in the separate chapters are as follows:

In chapter 2 the theoretical foundations of the book are laid. It consists of a description of traditional accounts of the Greek and Homeric modal system restated in terms found in the modern theoretical literature, and some preliminary theoretical reasons why such an account is implausible. Here many of the terms used throughout the book are introduced, particularly the concepts of the 'irrealis continuum' (and the terms 'realis' and 'irrealis'); 'epistemic', 'deontic' and 'speaker-oriented' types of modality; and the theories of 'grammaticalisation' and 'fuzzy set theory'.

Chapter 3 consists of a brief analysis of the indicative *qua* mood, necessary because the subjunctive and optative are often defined in relation to it. I analyse the whole spectrum of conditional clauses in which the indicative is found and argue that the mood is neither the most 'realis' nor an 'epistemically neutral' marker, but that it rather expresses 'positive epistemic stance'. The analysis

provides an interesting overview of the different types of conditional clauses expressed by the indicative. The definition I propose also allows a more successful analysis of the use of the indicative in counterfactual conditional sentences than has previously been offered, explaining the difference between it and the optative in this context.

Chapter 4 is an analysis of the subjunctive in three parts, relating to the three major uses of the subjunctive in main and conditional clauses: epistemic, hortative and prohibitive. I argue that the main task in defining the epistemic use of the subjunctive is to distinguish it from the future indicative. I describe the theoretical difficulties of distinguishing between an epistemic mood and a future marker in general, and the formal difficulties of distinguishing between the subjunctive and future indicative in Homeric Greek. Taking these difficulties into consideration I claim that there is no evidence to suggest that the subjunctive is more 'irrealis' than the future indicative, as traditional analyses would suggest, and that the major difference between the two categories is one of distribution. I then consider the hortative meaning of the subjunctive and argue that these may be divided into two: invitation and autoprescription. I argue that these could have arisen from the epistemic meaning through 'conventionalisation of implicature'. I also demonstrate that in some of the examples previously given of this meaning, the subjunctive has been misunderstood. I argue that it expresses the true deontic meaning of intention in addition to the 'speaker-oriented' hortative meaning. Intention meaning is commonly found in future markers, confirming the claims made for the epistemic meaning of the mood. These conclusions have important consequences for our view of the 'subjunctive' and 'future' category in Proto-Indo-European. In the section on the prohibitive constructions I show that traditional accounts do not sufficiently account for the use of both the subjunctive and the imperative in this construction. Based on comparison with the cross-linguistic data, I argue that the subjunctive expresses a significantly different meaning from the imperative. This analysis allows us to understand the real meaning of prohibitions in a more sophisticated way.

In chapter 5 I consider the two major uses of the optative as traditionally defined but also demonstrate that the optative is more complex. The optative is traditionally described as a more remote version of the subjunctive, but I show that the claim is not supported either by formal marking or by its meanings. I suggest that, in conditional clauses, it would best be defined as a marker of 'negative epistemic stance' rather than 'most irrealis' marker. I argue that, in its use in wishes, it is not a 'weaker version' of the imperative but has specific semantic reference which has significant ramifications for our understanding of ancient prayer. I finally claim it is possible to distinguish other uses of the optative. I describe these meanings in detail and discuss the possible relations lying between these uses and the meanings that are traditionally distinguished. Of particular importance for translators and those considering the language from a literary perspective is the recognition that the optative expresses the ability or capacity of the subject.

While some of the uses of the moods in subordinate clauses have been considered in other chapters, in chapter 6 I look at what have been described as more 'grammatical' subordinate uses of both moods. It is in this context that the claim is most adamantly made that the optative is the 'past-time variant' of the subjunctive. I consider three constructions (purpose clauses, iterative clauses, relative clauses), and argue that the traditional claims do not stand for any of them, calling into question the traditional notion of the 'vivid subjunctive'. I argue that the use of both moods in these constructions can be explained with reference to their semantic meaning as defined elsewhere.

The conclusions are summarised in chapter 7 where I give the overall structure of the new 'maps' I propose for each mood, and outline their consequences for the general field of modality studies. There are also two appendices. In appendix 1 I give a brief explanation of the motivation for the lack of emphasis laid on the presence or absence of the modal particle and negator in the study. Previous scholars have claimed that they were used to mark the two types of modality that have traditionally been distinguished for the two moods, but I show that the evidence is not conclusive. Appendix 2 is a series of indices listing all the instances of the moods arranged

according to the different types which are discussed throughout the book.

1.2 The nature of the corpus

As noted above, the corpus to be used for this analysis are the two epic poems of Homer, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. It is of course impossible to conduct a linguistic analysis based on this corpus without addressing the particular problems presented by the language of these poems.

First, like any ancient language, we are not in a position to ask a native speaker about the acceptability or the semantic nuances of a given collocation. We must therefore rely on the text and our interpretation of it, while acknowledging that we can never capture exactly what it meant to its original hearers (Lightfoot 1975: 24). Even without the problems of subjective interpretation, we may not even be sure that the text as we have it now is a true representation of the poems as they were first written down. The long history of textual transmission has meant that the preconceived ideas of scholars may have actually shaped the language. A particularly clear example of this in relation to the study of modality is the treatment of the modal particle ἄν/κε: scholars have argued that it may be 'corrected' to other particles in the contexts in which they believe it should not exist (e.g. Bolling 1960: 34). A similar problem arises in the choice between the subjunctive and future indicative. Since the forms are often metrically equivalent, our interpretation of a particular form as either future indicative or subjunctive may well be based on prejudices about what the two categories 'mean' (see further chapter 3).

The above problems are faced by any linguist who uses ancient texts. But the language of Homer has a more specific problem: it is now generally acknowledged that it is the product of a long tradition of oral poetry.[2] There are several reasons why this makes it a far from ideal linguistic database. The 'formulaic' nature of the poetry leads to the possibility that a particular collocation may be used in

[2] The original hypothesis is found in Parry 1928, 1930 and 1932.

spite of not being perfectly 'semantically integrated' to the context (Bakker 1988a: 19). That is, metrical constraints could have led to phrases which are well formed in one particular semantic context being used in rather less appropriate contexts (Horrocks 1997: 18). Furthermore, elements from several different dialects are used, partly, at least, because of their metrical expediency. The language also has a diachronic dimension: older forms are fossilised in the language as newer forms would not fit metrically.[3] The Homeric language is thus an amalgam of different regional and temporal dialects, shaped by the constraints of the epic metre.

The existence of this diachronic dimension is perhaps the most serious problem for this study. It has been shown that the Homeric poems preserve elements that may well have entered a form of epic diction perhaps even before the division of the Indo-European proto-language into its various dialects, and almost certainly into a Greek tradition before the period of the Linear B tablets (Horrocks 1980: 4). In the several centuries between this earliest point and the final (significant) chronological slice to be incorporated into the language (normally taken to be eighth or seventh century Ionic Greek, see further Janko 1982 and West 2001), it must be assumed that the uses of the moods underwent several changes. We may not therefore be sure that the various uses of the moods we see in the Homeric poems were ever found in one synchronic period of the Greek language.

However, in spite of the peculiar nature of the language, I would suggest that these problems are not as serious as they seem. Although it is clear that the metre may have caused some rather unusual uses of forms, it has been pointed out that constructions have prototypical and peripheral uses in all styles of language (Bakker 1988a: 19). Non-prototypical uses of a particular construction may not therefore be dismissed as a 'metrical anomaly'. Stephens (1983: 76) further argues that the use of formulas will not be entirely linguistically unconstrained. That is, it would be surprising for formulaic adaptation to break a 'rule' of the language. It is probable that this problem of formulaic adaptation will

[3] Palmer, L. R. 1962: 97–106; Palmer, L. R. 1980: 93–7; Janko 1985: 8–19; Hainsworth 1988; Horrocks 1997.

be more visible in some contexts than others: it is perhaps less likely that the mood chosen in any particular main clause will be determined purely by metrical considerations, and more likely that a subordinate clause will be 'imported' into a context which is not entirely appropriate. For instance, we could compare the following use of a relative clause with a singular subject pronoun but a plural antecedent:[4]

O 20.294 οὐ γὰρ καλὸν ἀτέμβειν οὐδὲ δίκαιον
ξείνους Τηλεμάχου, ὅς κεν τάδε δώματ' ἵκηται.

It is neither polite nor right to maltreat the guests of Telemachus, whoever comes to this house.

The use of the relative clause in this context could be explained as governed by the formulaic nature of the text. However, there is likely to be some linguistic justification for it too: this can be understood as shifting the focus from the general to the particular – 'whoever the guests of Telemachus are, anyone who comes to his house should be treated well' (Monro: §283b). We will return to the particular problem of the interpretation of subordinate clauses in chapter 6.

Although it is well established that some archaic elements have been preserved in the language, there are also reasons to think that the diachronic nature of the language will not cause too many problems for our understanding of the useof the moods. The modal forms do not generally feature in the lists of forms that have been used to indicate whether passages are particularly early or late (e.g. Janko 1982: 71), and there are only a few examples of modal forms that are argued to be 'modern'. For example, μαχέοιντο found in 1.344 is said to have a modern ending (see Leaf ad loc. and Kirk et al. ad loc.). It was corrected by Bentley to μαχεοίατ', but the lateness of the ending is only one of the problems in its

[4] Throughout the book, all Greek examples will be from Homer unless otherwise indicated. A bare number refers to a book and line of the *Iliad*, a number preceded by O refers to a book and line from *Odyssey*. The text used is that of the Teubner edition (West, M. L. 1998) for the *Iliad*, and the Oxford Classical Text for the *Odyssey* (Allen, T. W. 1917), unless otherwise indicated. The line referred to is the line in which the particular modal form appears, not necessarily the first line quoted. Examples are accompanied by a translation. This is to aid the reader, and to explain the general context of the form in question: they have no aspiration to literary merit.

interpretation – see further section 6.2.2. The optatives φοροίη (O9.320) and φιλοίη (O4. 692) are also said to have the Attic vocalism (Palmer, L. R. 1962: 94), but the exact formation of the moods is in any case of little importance to my argument. Perhaps more importantly, some scholars have claimed that the use of 'vivid' subjunctives in subordinate clauses after a secondary main verb indicates that a passage is late (e.g. Leaf on 19.354). But as I will show in chapter 6, the evidence for this construction is very complex. At any rate, the study of grammaticalisation has shown that even truly synchronic slices of a language will provide evidence for various different chronological stages of development. For example, as will be discussed in chapter 2, the distribution of the modal verb 'will' in modern English provides evidence for its historical development. Homeric Greek may have a more obviously diachronic dimension, but it is thus only quantitatively, not qualitatively, different from other languages.

The particular nature of the Homeric language does not therefore cause insuperable problems for its use as a linguistic database. This is not to say that there will be nothing further to say regarding the diachronic aspect of the language. For example, it is interesting that all the certain examples of the future indicative in conditional clauses are found in the *Iliad*, the earlier of the two poems (Janko 1982: 228). I will return to the discussion of the possible significance of this distribution in chapter 4.

In any case, there are many positive reasons to use the Homeric language for a study of the meaning and development of the moods in Greek. Apart from Mycenaean, for which only a very limited set of verb forms is attested, it is the oldest available stratum of the language (Chantraine: §304). Perhaps most importantly, it has been claimed that the use of the moods is here less 'mechanical' than in Attic (Chantraine: §368; Hahn: §106). This suggests that a range of earlier meanings of the moods will be detectable in the Homeric language, even if these have become more grammaticalised and determined by context in the later language. Too frequently the Homeric language is seen against the back-drop of the better understood classical language, and the differences between it and the classical language are seen as 'peculiarities' (Goodwin: §434).

I will argue that these very peculiarities hold the key to properly understanding the modal system in Greek. Thus, although the language of the Homeric epics is perhaps not an ideal corpus to use for a synchronic analysis of a particular part of the grammatical system, the benefits of looking again at this earliest evidence for the Greek verbal system are clear.

2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Over the last 150 years, many discussions of the moods in ancient Greek in general and Homeric Greek in particular have been published, both in grammars of the language, and in specialist monographs.[1] It might therefore be claimed that there is nothing new to be said on the subject. But there are various reasons why a reconsideration of the Homeric Greek moods can provide insights into this fascinating area of the grammatical system.

The first reason is that it may take account of the relatively recent proliferation of theoretical studies on modality, a category which was largely 'unfamiliar' to general linguists before the first edition of Palmer's important *Mood and Modality* (1986), as he notes in its preface. The traditional understanding of the ancient Greek moods may certainly be recouched in terms more familiar to the modern linguist, and this will be undertaken in section 2.2. I will show that the traditional understanding actually appears to accord very well with the 'standard' view of modality as outlined by Palmer. Indeed Palmer frequently uses ancient Greek data to exemplify his distinctions.

But in section 2.3 I will argue that this accord is illusory, thereby giving further reasons why a re-examination of the data will be profitable. The theory of grammaticalisation has shown that descriptions of grammatical systems have until now depended on a rather out-moded structuralist view of language which does not sufficiently take into account the diachronic dimension of language

[1] Grammars: Goodwin 1870; Smyth 1956; Kühner and Gerth 1898–1904; Monro 1891; Stahl 1907; Humbert 1943; Chantraine 1948; Schwyzer and Debrünner 1950; Abbott and Mansfield 1949. Monographs: Goodwin 1889; Hahn 1953; Gonda 1956; Lightfoot 1975. Hahn (§3–§18) provides a good discussion of earlier work, and also refers (§3) to Bennett (1910–14: 145–61) for more references.