On theoretically-informed fieldwork: A case study on the modal system in Javanese.
Jozina Vander Klok
University of British Columbia

Abstract:
Through a case study on the modal system of a Javanese dialect spoken in Paciran, East Java, Indonesia, I discuss the predictive power of theoretically-informed fieldwork on understudied languages. In order to establish how the modal system is carved in Javanese, my fieldwork on modality hinges on what the theoretical literature identifies as two fundamental properties: MODAL FORCE (e.g. possibility, necessity) and MODAL FLAVOUR (e.g. epistemic, based on a body of available evidence; deontic, based on a body of rules or regulations) (e.g. Kratzer 1977, 1981; von Fintel and Matthewson 2008, among many others). Using a variety of fieldwork methods such as elicitation, a questionnaire that I designed, and storyboards (totemfieldstoryboards.org), I use context to control for only one combination of these two modal properties, such as possibility-epistemic or possibility-deontic. From these controlled contexts, we might expect to find the following types of modals regarding their lexical specification:

(i) Modals that lexically specify for force, but not for flavour, such as English may which lexically specifies for possibility force, but is compatible with, for example, epistemic and deontic flavour.

(ii) Modals that lexically specify for flavour, but not for force, such as St’át’imcets k’a which lexically specifies for ‘epistemic-inference’, but is compatible with any force from possibility to necessity (Rullmann et al. 2008).

(iii) Modals that lexically specify for both force and flavour, such as English might which is only compatible with possibility force and epistemic flavour.

In Paciran Javanese, I show that most modals are of type (iii) like iso which can only be interpreted as a circumstantial possibility modal. I show that other modals are of type (i) such as kudu which only has necessity force, but is compatible with any root flavour. Finally, I discuss the modal paleng in Paciran Javanese that seems like type (ii); however, on closer inspection I show that the apparent variable force of this epistemic modal is limited to upward-entailing contexts, similar to ó’qa in Nez Perce (Deal 2011). Based on further examination, I argue that neither the scalar account in Deal (2011) nor the second-ordering source account in Peterson (2010) is appropriate for paleng in Paciran Javanese. Instead, I offer a proposal based on the abandonment of Grice’s maxim ‘Be informative’, similar to Keenan’s (1976) proposal for Malagasy.

References:
Peterson, T. 2010. Epistemic modality and evidentiality in Gitksan at the semantics-pragmatics interface, PhD, University of British Columbia.