

Modals in Mandarin Chinese

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Language name:	Mandarin Chinese
ISO 639-3:	cmn
Glottolog:	mand1415
Consultant demographics:	A male speaker of Mandarin Chinese from the Guangxi area.
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[Note: In addition, this questionnaire has been reviewed by a native speaker specialist](#)

BODY OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

A. EPISTEMIC

A1 Epistemic Necessity

(1) Ben goes swimming every day. Ben is not obliged or required to go swimming; it is just a habit of his. It is now time for Ben to go swimming... so **Ben MUST be swimming (right now)**.

本 现在 一定 在 游泳
Ben xianzai yiding zai youyong
Ben now **MOD at** swim

(2) You know that John goes to school at 9am every day. You look at the clock and see it is 9am, therefore **John MUST be at school**.

约翰 一定 在 学校
Yuehan yiding zai xuexiao
John **MOD at** school

(3) The math teacher says: The ball is in A or in B or in C. It is not in A. It is not in B. So, **it MUST be in C**. Adapted from von Fintel & Gillies 2007.

球	一定	在	C	里面
<i>Qiu</i>	<i>yiding</i>	<i>zai</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>limian</i>
ball	MOD	at	C	in

(4) Tim is calling for his dog. The dog is not coming. Tim looks for the dog in the kitchen, bedroom, living room, (in every room in the house) but the dog is not in any of those rooms. Therefore, **Tim thinks/concludes that the dog MUST not be in the house.**

蒂姆	认为	那只	狗	一定	不在	房子	里面
<i>Dimu</i>	<i>renwei</i>	<i>na zhi</i>	<i>gou</i>	<i>yiding</i>	<i>buzai</i>	<i>fangzi</i>	<i>limian</i>
Tim	think	that CL	dog	MOD	no more	house	in

A2 Epistemic Weak Necessity

(5) You know that Ann goes hiking from 7am until 8am every day. Most of the time Ann goes to the lake, but sometimes she goes to the mountains. It is now 7:30am. You say to your friend: **Ann SHOULD be at the lake right now.**

安娜	应该	现在	在	湖边
<i>Anna</i>	<i>yinggai</i>	<i>xianzai</i>	<i>zai</i>	<i>hubian</i>
Anna	MOD	now	at	lakeside

(6) You are not living in Location C anymore. You notice how different the weather is in the UK, where you live right now. You know that it often rains in Location C, especially in the afternoon, but not necessarily every day. Now it's the afternoon, so you think it **SHOULD be raining now in Location C.*** maybe try and make this a familiar location for consultants? i.e. location in their home country.

地点	C	现在	应该	在	下雨
<i>Didian</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>xianzai</i>	<i>yinggai</i>	<i>zai</i>	<i>xiayu</i>
place	C	now	MOD	at	rain

(7) When the light is on at Mary's house, it usually means that she is home. You want to visit Mary. You walk past Mary's house and notice that the light is on. However, there is no car in the driveway/there is a pair of sandals by the door that could be someone else's. You think to yourself: **Mary SHOULD be at home, but it's not certain.**

玛丽	应该	在	家	不过	不	一定
<i>Mali</i>	<i>yinggai</i>	<i>zai</i>	<i>jia</i>	<i>buguo</i>	<i>bu</i>	<i>yiding</i>
Mary	MOD	at	home	but	not	definitely

A3 Epistemic Possibility

Target: epistemic possibility vs. epistemic necessity

(11) targets epistemic possibility vs. deontic possibility

(8) The teacher is unreliable. His students never know whether he is going to come to class. Sometimes he turns up and sometimes he doesn't. It is now two hours before his class is meant to begin, and his students do not know whether he will turn up. They think...

He MIGHT / #must be coming to school today.

Not tested

Reviewer' s suggestion:

他	今天	有	可能	在	学校
Ta	jintian	you	keneng	zai	xuexiao
He	today	have	MOD	at	school.

He might be at school today.

(9) Grace is looking for her necklace. She can't remember where she last saw it. She has checked her jewelry box, but it is not there. She thinks she might have worn it in the car, but she hasn't checked the car yet.

Grace's necklace MIGHT / #must be lost.

Not tested.

Reviewer' s suggestion:

格雷丝 的	项链	可能	掉了
Grace de	xianglian	keneng	diao-le
Grace possession	necklace	MOD	lose-prf

Grace's necklace might be lost.

(10) Charles is looking for his pet cat, but cannot find it. He knows that his cat is very elusive/mysterious. Charles tells his sister:

The cat MAY be inside. The cat MAY also be outside.

那只	猫	(有)	可能	在	里面	也	可能	在	外面
Nazhi	mao	you	keneng	zai	limain	ye	keneng	zai	waimian
that.one	cat	have	MOD	at	inside	also	MOD	at	outside

(11) Daniel lives in London and his friend has recently moved to New York. Daniel's parents told him that he is not allowed to go and see his friend in New York because it is too far away. You heard that Daniel is

leaving London next week but you don't know where he will go. Daniel usually does things that he is not permitted to do. You think **Daniel MAY / MIGHT / #is allowed to go to New York.**

丹尼尔	可能	去	纽约
Danier	keneng	qu	niuyue
Daniel	MOD	go	New York

B. DEONTIC

B1 Deontic Necessity

(12) In Indonesia, the law states that when you ride a motor bike... **You MUST wear a helmet**

你	必须	要	戴	头盔
Ni	bixu	yao	dai	toukui
you	MOD	MOD	wear	helmet

(13) You are going to visit your friend in the hospital. When you enter the hospital, you stop at the information desk to inquire what room your friend is in. But the woman at the information desk tells you that you can't visit your friend now because it's already 8pm. She says, "I'm sorry, the hospital regulations say that... **Visitors MUST leave by 6pm.**"

访客	一定	要	在	6点	之前	离开
Fangke	yiding	yao	zai	6dian	zhiqian	likai
visitors	MOD	MOD	at	6pm	before	leave

(14) A pound/(kilogram) of rice usually lasts for three days, and there are two pounds/(kg) left now. I don't have time to go to the market because it's (too) far away... **So I HAVE to live off the remaining rice for six days.**

我	必须	要	把	剩下的	米饭	保持	至少	6天
Wo	bixu	yao	ba	shengxiade	mifan	baochi	zhishao	6tian
I	MOD	MOD	BA	leftover	rice	keep	at least	6days

Comment: Here we have a modal concord *bixu* (strong necessity) + *yao* (unspecified necessity)

B2 Deontic Weak Necessity

(16) Your friend is having a birthday party. She tells you that she would like it if everyone invited wore formal clothes, but that it is not necessary to wear formal clothes to attend. You think to yourself... **I OUGHT TO wear formal clothes to the party.**

我	应该	要	穿	正式的	服装	去	派对
Wo	yinggai	yao	chuan	zhengshide	fuzhuang	qu	paidui
I	MOD	MOD	wear	formal	clothing	go	party

Modal concord between *yinggai* and *yao*

(17) Your friend tells you that the rules of the restaurant state that employees must wash their hands after going to the bathroom. You reply to your friend:... **Non-employees OUGHT TO wash their hands too!**

非	雇员	也	应该	要	洗手
Fei	guyuan	ye	yinggai	yao	xishou
non-	employee	also	MOD	MOD	handwashing

Modal concord between *yinggai* and *yao*

(18) In England, it is recommended that face coverings be worn in stores, but it is not a legal requirement. You plan on going shopping, and you think to yourself... **I OUGHT TO wear a face covering.**

我	应该	要	戴	口罩
Wo	yinggai	yao	dai	kouzhao
I	MOD	MOD	wear	face.mask

Modal concord between *yinggai* and *yao*

B3 Deontic Possibility

(19) The ferris wheel ride is only for children under 12 years of age. Martin is 10 years of age. It is not obligatory for Martin to go on the ride if he doesn't want to. **Martin MAY / #must ride the ferris wheel.**

马丁	可以	坐	摩天轮
Mading	can	zuo	motianlun
Martin	MOD	ride	ferris.wheel

(20) According to the rules of the hospital, only family members are allowed to enter the patient's room during visiting hours. You came to visit your sister, but it was after visiting hours. But the really nice/kind nurse says... **You MAY / #must enter.**

你	可以	进入
Ni	keyi	jinru
you	MOD	enter

(21) You are making plans for tomorrow night to get together with/see/meet up with your friend. Your friend says:

You can stay overnight and you can go home.

你 可以 过夜 或者 回家
Ni **keyi** guoye huozhe huijia
you **MOD** stay.over or go.home

You can stay overnight. You can also go home.

你 可以 过夜。 你 也 可以 回家
Ni **keyi** guoye. ni ye **keyi** huijia.
you **MOD** stay.over you also **MOD** go.home

(22) Alice fell down the stairs and broke her arm a while ago. She hasn't been lifting her baby while her arm was hurt because the baby is heavy. Finally, she has recovered, and she went to the doctor for a final check-up. The doctor gave her permission to lift her baby. But when she got home after her visit to the doctor, Alice found that she is still too weak to lift her baby... **Alice CAN lift her baby.**

爱丽丝 可以 举起 她的 宝宝
Ailisi **keyi** juqi tade baobao
Alice **MOD** lift her baby

(23) Beth's teacher told her class that it was okay to go swimming, but Beth doesn't want to because she cannot swim! B CAN go swimming.

i.e. **Beth COULD go swimming, Beth is ALLOWED/PERMITTED to go swimming**, but she can't swim.

贝斯 可以 去 游泳
Beisi **keyi** qu youyong
Beth **MOD** go swim

贝斯 可以 允许 去 游泳
Beisi **keyi** yunxu qu youyong
Beth **MOD** allow go swim

Reviewer's comment: this sentence sounds weird.

C. TELEOLOGICAL

C1 Teleological Necessity

(24) There is only one main road from Location A to Location B... If you go from Location A to Location B, **you HAVE TO take this road.**

你	必须	要	走	这条	路
Ni	<i>bixu</i>	<i>yao</i>	<i>zou</i>	<i>zhetiao</i>	<i>lu</i>
you	MOD	MOD	go	this	road

Modal concord between *bixu* and *yao*

(25) Team A are playing in a tournament/competition/championship. In order to advance... **Team A HAS TO beat Team B.**

A	队	必须	要	打赢	B	队
A	<i>dui</i>	<i>bixu</i>	<i>yao</i>	<i>daying</i>	B	<i>dui</i>
A	team	MOD	MOD	win	B	team

Modal concord between *bixu* and *yao*

(26) The best pizza in town is sold at Gino's. You have invited your sister for dinner, and you decide to order pizza. You tell your sister: **We HAVE TO order from Gino's to eat the best pizza.**

我们	必须	要	从	基诺	那里	下单	最好的	披萨
Women	<i>bixu</i>	<i>yao</i>	<i>cong</i>	<i>jinuo</i>	<i>nali</i>	<i>xiadan</i>	<i>zuihaode</i>	<i>pisa</i>
we	MOD	MOD	from	Gino	there	place.order	the.best	pizza

Modal concord between *bixu* and *yao*

C2 Teleological Weak Necessity

(27) There are different ways to get to Location X. You can go by foot, by tram/horse-carriage/truck/train/bus/public van, or drive/motorcycle/bicycle yourself. You are not sure how to go. Person Z advises you to take Y method of transport because it is traditional... **To get to Location X, you SHOULD take Y method of transport.**

你	应该	要	用	交通	Y	去	到达	X	地点
Ni	<i>yinggai</i>	<i>yao</i>	<i>yong</i>	<i>jiaotong</i>	Y	<i>qu</i>	<i>daoda</i>	X	<i>didian</i>
you	MOD	MOD	use	transportation	Y	go	get.to	X	place

Modal concord between *yinggai* and *yao*

(28) There are 3 ways to get to Location C. Person A says that way 3 is very beautiful. According to him, **you SHOULD take way 3.**

你	应该	坐	三	号线
Ni	yinggai	zuo	san	haoxian
you	MOD	travel.by	three	number.line

(29) Your friend wants to buy a new shirt for her job at a reasonable price. There are many nice shops for professional clothes in the area, and you work at one of them and think it offers good prices. You say: **You SHOULD go to my shop to buy a new shirt.**

你	应该	去	我的	店里	买	新的	裙子
Ni	yinggai	qu	wode	dianli	mai	xinde	qunzi
you	MOD	go	my	shop	buy	new	shirt

C3 Teleological Possibility

(30) There are two different ways to get to Location A from Location B. Both take around 7 hours by bus and they are equally beautiful... **You CAN take way 1.**

你	可以	坐	一	号线
Ni	keyi	zuo	yi	haoxian
you	MOD	travel.by	one	line.number

(31) There are two swimming pools in the town with the exact same design and both are equal distance from your house. You plan to go swimming later on but have no specific desire for which pool to go to. You tell your sister... **We CAN go to the swimming pool to the west.**

我们	可以	去	西边的	游泳池
Women	keyi	qu	xibiande	youyongchi
we	MOD	go	west	swimming.pool

(32) Your friend wants to buy a new shirt for her job. Since there are many nice shops for professional clothes in the area, you say... **You CAN go to X's boutique.**

你	可以	去	X的	精品店
Ni	keyi	qu	X de	jingpindian
you	MOD	go	X DE	boutique

D. CIRCUMSTANTIAL

D1 Circumstantial Necessity

(33) You are on a bus to Location A. You have not had a chance to go to the toilet for 4 hours, and your bladder is full. You text your friend... **I HAVE to pee so badly!**

我	一定	要	去	尿尿
Wo	<i>yiding</i>	<i>yao</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>niaoniao</i>
I	MOD	MOD	go	pee

Reviewer's comment: here 必须 *bixu* or 不得不 *budebu* sounds more natural than 一定要 *yiding yao*.

(35) In the middle of a conversation, you feel a sneeze coming on... Excuse me! **I HAVE to sneeze.**

我	不得不	打喷嚏
Wo	<i>budebu</i>	<i>dapenti</i>
I	MOD	sneeze

我	得	打个喷嚏
Wo	<i>dei</i>	<i>da.CL.penti</i>
I	MOD	sneeze

D3 Circumstantial Possibility

(37) Ani came to visit a small island in the Philippines. She noticed that the climate and many of the plants are similar to some places she visited in Indonesia. The temperature is the same, the rainfall is the same, the types of rocks and the soil are the same. But when she looked around, she didn't find any *duku* trees anywhere. But because the temperature, rainfall, and soil are the same, she thinks that... ***duku* trees CAN / #might grow here.**

<i>Duku</i>	树	可以	种	在	这里
<i>Duku</i>	<i>shu</i>	<i>keyi</i>	<i>zhong</i>	<i>zai</i>	<i>zheli</i>
<i>duku</i>	tree	MOD	plant	at	here

(38) X knows how to make Y. Now X is back in the country she lives in, and she wants to make Y, but the right kind of ingredients are not sold where she lives. So, she is unhappy because she wanted to show her parents how to make Y... **X CAN / #might make Y.**

X	可以	做	Y
X	<i>keyi</i>	<i>zuo</i>	Y
X	MOD	make	Y

(39) B was in a motorbike accident 3 weeks ago, and he sprained his ankle. B is able to walk now. However, the doctor told B that he is not allowed to walk until 5 weeks after the accident... **B CAN walk now.**

B 现在 可以 走路 了
 B xianzai **keyi** zoulu le
 B now **MOD** walk SFP

(40) Paul is quite old now, but he is still strong. His children are scared he will hurt his back if he does any intense labour, so they told him that he is forbidden to lift heavy things. But one day, his friend Rob asked to help him in the field, because Rob knows Paul is still strong. So when Rob saw a large rock that had to be moved, he asked Paul straightaway for help (but he didn't tell Paul's children!). Rob knew that... **Paul CAN lift that rock.**

P 可以 举起 那个 石头
 P **keyi** juqi nage shitou
 P **MOD** lift that rock

(41) The travel vans have a limit of 13 people by law. But the drivers don't care, and stop for more than 13 people. Also, the vans are bigger than you think... **Travel vans CAN fit 20 people.**

旅游 巴士 可以 搭载 20 人
 Lvyou bashi **keyi** dazai 20 ren
 travel bus **MOD** carry 20 people

E. BOULETIC

E1 Bouletic Necessity

(42) You love handbags. You see a really nice handbag in a window and you say... **I WANT/NEED TO buy it.**

我 需要 去 买 它
 Wo **xuyao** qu mai ta
 I **MOD** go buy it

我 必须 买到 它
 Wo **bixu** buy.arrive ta
 I **MOD** buy it

我 必须 买下 它

Wo **bixu** buy.down ta
I **MOD** buy it

(43) Your friend asks you what you want to do today since it is a holiday and you both are not required to do any tasks today. You say... **I WANT to go to the cinema.**

我 **想** 去 电影院
Wo **xiang** qu dianyingyuan
I **MOD** go cinema

(44) A daughter tells her parent... **My friend WANTS to come visit me.**

我 的 朋友 **想** 来 拜访 我
Wo de pengyou **xiang** lai baifang wo
I DE friend **MOD** come visit me

Table of Chinese Modals:

MODALS	EPISTEMIC	ROOT/NON-EPISTEMIC			
		PARTICIPANT-EXTERNAL		PARTICIPANT-INTERNAL	
	Epistemic	Deontic	Teleological	Circumstantial	Bouletic
Necessity	<p>yiding (一定)</p> <p>biran (必然; modal adverb)</p> <p>juedui (绝对, adverb, not necessarily modal origin)</p> <p>%bixu (perhaps possible in certain varieties)</p>	<p>bixu (必须)</p> <p>yao (要)</p> <p>dei 得 (colloquial, perhaps dialectal more prevalent in Northern China)</p>	<p>bixu (必须)</p> <p>yao (要)</p> <p>dei 得 (colloquial, perhaps dialectal more prevalent in Northern China)</p>	<p>bixu</p> <p>yao (要)</p> <p>dei 得 (colloquial, perhaps dialectal more prevalent in Northern China)</p> <p>budebu (不得不)</p>	<p>bixu</p> <p>yao (要)</p> <p>dei 得 (colloquial, perhaps dialectal more prevalent in Northern China)</p> <p>yiding yao/yiding dei</p> <p>xuyao (需要)</p> <p>xiang (想)</p>
Weak Necessity	<p>yinggai (应该)</p> <p>Dagai (大概, lit. Big likelihood,</p>	<p>yinggai (应该)</p> <p>yao</p> <p>dei (colloquial,</p>	<p>yinggai (应该)</p> <p>yao</p> <p>dei (colloquial, dialectal)</p>	-	-

	likely/probable)	dialectal)			
Possibility	keneng (可能) yexu (也许 adverb)	keyi (可以) neng (能) (only possible in non-upward entailing context?))	keyi (可以) neng (能) (only possible in non-upward entailing context? E.g., polarQ and negation are fine)	keyi (可以) neng (能)	-

Modal concord

According to Liu (2015), modal concord is possible when two modal elements match in flavors (both epistemic or both non-epistemic), and their forces are compatible.

Here, compatible forces are the following combinations:

- Strong Necessity + SN -> SN
- Weak Necessity + WN -> WN
- SN/WN + Unspecific N -> SN/WN
- Possibility + Possibility -> Possibility

Here, unspecified necessities are *yao* and *dei*.

According to Liu (2015), a concord reading of two possibility modals is available and preferred when both are of the same modal type

References

- Liu, T. 2015. Modal concord in Mandarin. MA thesis [University of British Columbia]