INTRODUCTION While the tense and aspect systems of Vietnamese have been analyzed in the formal literature (e.g. Phan 2013, Duffield 2017), the modal system has received less attention. The goal of this talk is to provide an initial classification of modals in the language, drawing on new data. We show that modals (like other grammatical morphemes in the language) are multifunctional: their meaning depends on where they are merged (Duffield 2017). This multifunctionality allows modals to stack and reinforce other modals.

BACKGROUND Vietnamese is a Mon-Khmer language spoken in Vietnam that has remained largely understudied by formal linguists (but see Cao 1992 and Duffield et al. 2019). The basic word order is SVO and it is an isolating language, with no inflection for tense or phi-features on the verb. We focus on the modal auxiliaries that typically appear in the pre-verbal domain. Deontic modals surface between tense/aspect and the verb (Phan and Duffield (2022:174)). Thus ừ can follow the future tense marker but cannot precede it, as in (1).

(1) Cô ấy thì sẽ được (*sẽ) gặp anh ấy
FEM.SG.DEM TOP FUT CAN FUT meet MASC.SG.DEM
‘Speaking of her, she will be allowed to meet him.’

The modal ừ can also have an abilitative reading when it occurs clause-finally (Duffield 1999).

(2) Cô ấy viết bài hát được.
FEM.SG.DEM write CLF song CAN
‘She is able to write the song.’

Unlike deontic modals, epistemics can occur high, preceding the subject and tense (4).

(4) Có thể anh đã đi lúc 10 giờ
EPIS.POS MASC.SG PST go at 10
‘There is a possibility he left at 10/He could have left at 10.’

Based on the data in the literature and data we have elicited, we propose the following classification of Vietnamese modals:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSSIBILITY</th>
<th>DEONTIC</th>
<th>ABILITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>có thể/có lẽ</td>
<td>được/có thể (ừ)</td>
<td>được (post-verbal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NECESSITY</td>
<td>chắc</td>
<td>STRONG: phải</td>
</tr>
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ANALYSIS What has received less attention in the literature is the combination of different modals. For example, ừ can be used to reinforce the possibility modal có thể (5).

(5) Context: My mom says I will be able to play with my friends once I finish my chores.
Con có thể (ừ) di sau khi quét sàn nhà xong
you DEO.POS (CAN) go after when sweep floor house CMPL
‘You can go after you sweep the floor.’

Similarly, the epistemic necessity modal chắc can be reinforced with the deontic modal phải.

(6) Context: My cat is hiding in only one of three boxes. Having checked the first two and not finding my cat, I conclude he must be in the third box.
Con mèo của tôi chắc (phải) trong hộp thứ ba
CL cat of mine EPIS.NEC DEO.NEC in box three
‘My cat must be in the third box.’

We suggest that Vietnamese modals have limited semantic content (e.g. có thể is simply possibility). If merged high (e.g. as a matrix predicate in (4)), it receives an epistemic reading. When merged
low (below tense), it is deontic. When modals of the same force are combined, as in (5) and (6), the highest modal that determines the modal flavour (epistemic vs. deontic).

References