

STRUCTURE OF MODAL VERBS IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to present the types of modal verbs and modal verb phrase structures. In this article expression of modality with the help of verbs and modal verbs, and their comparison are included.

Key words: *Modal auxiliary verbs, marginal auxiliary verbs, infinitive. ability, obligation, permission, advisability.*

АННОТАЦИЯ

Цель этой статьи состоит в том, чтобы представить типы модальных глаголов и структуры модальных глагольных фраз. В данной статье включены выражение модальности с помощью глаголов и модальных глаголов, а также их сопоставление.

Ключевые слова: *модальные вспомогательные глаголы, маргинальные вспомогательные глаголы, инфинитив. способность, обязанность, разрешение, целесообразность.*

INTRODUCTION

Semi-notional and functional verbs serve as markers of predication in the proper sense, since they show the connection between the nominative content of the sentence and reality in a strictly specialised way. These "predicators" include auxiliary verbs, modal verbs, semi-notional verbid introducer verbs, and link-verbs.

Auxiliary verbs constitute grammatical elements of the categorial forms of the verb. These are the verbs be, have, do, shall, will, should, would, may, might. According to Biber et al.¹, modality in English can be expressed by nine central modal auxiliary verbs, i.e. can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would and must, and a number of semi modals, i.e. marginal auxiliary verbs and fixed idiomatic phrases that function as modals (e.g. need (to), ought (to), dare (to) and used (to) and (had) better, have to, (have) got to, etc.).

Modal verbs are used with the infinitive as predicative markers expressing relational meanings of the subject attitude type, i.e. ability, obligation, permission, advisability, etc. By way of extension of meaning, they also express relational

¹ BIBER, Douglas/Stig JOHANSSON/Geoffrey LEECH/Susan CONRAD/Edward FINEGAN (1999) Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited

probability, serving as probability predicators. These two types of functional semantics can be tested by means of correlating pure modal verb collocations with the corresponding two sets of stative collocations of equivalent functions: on the one hand, the groups be obliged, be permitted, etc.; on the other hand, the groups be likely, be probable, etc.² Compare:

You *may/can* leave now. → You are permitted to leave. They may win by several goals. → They're likely to win by several goals.³

Modal Auxiliary	Meaning	Definition	Example
can	1. permission	evidence of some condition that determines whether an agent is or is not permitted to do something	<i>Can</i> I have an apple please? You <i>can</i> read my book.
	2. possibility	express the degree to which something is possible; inanimate noun/dummy it + can + linking verb + adjective/ noun phrase; or inanimate noun + can + main verb	A brief view of the century as a whole <i>can</i> be useful.
	3. ability	evidence of an animate agent that is capable of doing something	I <i>can</i> hear what she's saying to somebody.
could	1. permission	used in its past tense to refer to permission	And we didn't know we <i>could</i> see her.
	2. possibility	express the degree to which something was possible	That <i>could</i> be her. It <i>could</i> be anything you choose.
	3. ability	evidence of an animate agent that was capable of doing something in the past	I <i>could</i> have danced all night. I <i>could</i> feel the pain in my hand.
must	1. obligation	express an agent's responsibility to do something	We <i>must</i> be careful to avoid several logical pitfalls. We <i>must</i> get up early.
	2. necessity	logically concludes something is likely/ necessary based on evidence available to the speaker/ writer	It <i>must</i> have something to do with the government. She <i>must</i> have left already.
should	1. obligation	the agent is obliged to do something.	You <i>should</i> relax.
	2. necessity	logical concludes something is likely/necessary based on evidence available	That <i>should</i> have been Sydney.

Table 1. Description of modal semantic class (Biber et al., 1999, as cited in Torabiardakani et al., 2015, pp. 52-53).

² Блох М. Я. Теоретическая грамматика английского языка: Учебник. Для студентов филол. фак. унтов и фак. англ. яз. педвузов //М.: Высш. школа. – 1983. – С. 383.

³ Downing A., Locke P. English grammar: A university course. – Routledge, 2006.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The modal verbs can, may, must, shall, will, ought, need, used (to), dare are defective in forms, and are suppletively supplemented by stative groups similar to those shown above. The supplementation is effected both for the lacking finite forms and the lacking non-finite forms. Compare:

The boys can prepare the play-ground themselves. — The boys will be able to prepare the play-ground themselves. — The boys' being able to prepare the play-ground themselves.

The verbs be and have in the modal meanings "be planned", "be obliged" and the like are considered by many modern grammarians as modal verbs and by right are included in the general modal verb list.

The marked infinitive presents just another case of an analytical grammatical form. The use or non-use of the infinitive marker depends on the verbal environment of the infinitive. Namely, the unmarked infinitive is used, besides the various analytical forms, with modal verbs (except the modals *ought* and *used*), with verbs of physical perceptions, with the verbs *let*, *bid*, *make*, *help* (with the latter — optionally), with the verb *know* in the sense of "experience", with a few verbal phrases of modal nature (*had better*, *would rather*, *would have*, etc.), with the relative-inductive *why*. All these uses are detailed in practical grammar books.⁴

In the present tense the expression of the category of person is divided into three peculiar subsystems.

The first subsystem includes the modal verbs that have no personal inflexions: can, may, must, shall, will, ought, need, dare. So, in the formal sense, the category of person is wholly neutralised with these verbs, or, in plainer words, it is left unexpressed.

The combinations of the verbs shall and will with the infinitive have of late become subject of renewed discussion. The controversial point about them is, whether these combinations really constitute, together with the forms of the past and present, the categorial expression of verbal tense, or are just modal phrases, whose expression of the future time does not differ in essence from the general future orientation of other combinations of modal verbs with the infinitive. The view that shall and will retain their modal meanings in all their uses was defended by such a recognised authority on English grammar of the older generation of the twentieth

⁴ Блох М. Я. Теоретическая грамматика английского языка: Учебник. Для студентов филол. фак. унтов и фак. англ. яз. педвузов //М.: Высш. школа. – 1983. – С. 383.

century linguists as O. Jespersen.⁵ In our times, quite a few scholars, among them the successors of Descriptive Linguistics, consider these verbs as part of the general set of modal verbs, "modal auxiliaries", expressing the meanings of capability, probability, permission, obligation, and the like.

With the infinitive, the category of development, naturally, expresses the same meaningful contrast between action in progress and action not in progress as with the finite forms of the verb. Compare:

Kezia and her grandmother were taking their siesta together.----- It was but natural for Kezia and her grandmother to be taking their siesta together. What are you complaining about?—Is there really anything for you to be complaining about?

But in addition to this purely categorial distinction, the form of the continuous infinitive has a tendency to acquire quite a special meaning in combination with modal verbs, namely that of probability. This meaning is aspectual in a broader sense than the "inner character" of action: the aspectuality amounts here to an outer appraisal of the denoted process. Compare:

If you want any more coffee, you *must* make it yourself. You *must* find it flattering having so many fans.⁶

The first of the two sentences expresses your obligation to make coffee yourself, whereas the second sentence renders the speaker's supposition of the fact.

The general meaning of probability is varied by different additional shades depending on the semantic type of the modal verb and the corresponding contextual conditions, such as uncertainty, incredulity, surprise, etc. Compare:

But can she be taking Moyra's words so personally? If the flight went smoothly, they may be approaching the West Coast. You must be losing money over this job.

The action of the continuous infinitive of probability, in accord with the type of the modal verb and the context, may refer not only to the plane of the present, but also to the plane of the future. Cf.: Ann must be coming soon, you'd better have things put in order.

The perfect infinitive of notional verbs used with modal predicators, similar to the continuous, performs the two types of functions. First, it expresses priority and transmission in retrospective coordination, in keeping with its categorial destination. Second, dependent on the concrete function of each modal verb and its equivalent, it helps convey gradations of probabilities in suppositions. For example:

⁵ Jespersen O. The philosophy of grammar. – Routledge, 2013.

⁶ Downing A., Locke P. English grammar: A university course. – Routledge, 2006.

He may have warned Christine, or again, he may not have warned her. Who can tell? Things must have been easier fifty years ago. You needn't worry, Miss Nickolson. The children are sure to have been following our instructions, it can't have been otherwise.⁷

In addition, as its third type of function, also dependent on the individual character of different modal verbs, the perfect can render the idea of non-compliance with certain rule, advice, recommendation, etc. The modal verbs in these cases serve as signals of remonstrance (mostly the verbs ought to and should). Compare:

Mary ought to have thought of the possible consequences. Now the situation can't be mended, I'm afraid.

The modal will used with a perfect in a specific collocation renders a polite, but officially worded statement of the presupposed hearer's knowledge of an indicated fact. Compare:

The wish-subjunctive in independent sentences has the same implication: Oh, that the distress signals had only been heard when we could be in time to rescue the crew! *→ Our hearing the distress signals was a condition for the possibility of our being in time to rescue the crew. We are in despair that it was not so.

CONCLUSION

As is indicated in grammars, modal verbs used in similar constructions display the functional features of the subjunctive, including the verb would which implies some effort of willful activity. Compare:

I wish he could have done — The implication is that, unfortunately, he had no such possibility. I wish he would have done — The implication is that he had not done of his own free will.

In general, modal verbs are used to talk about ability, to ask permission, to make requests, and to give advice. Modal verbs are placed after the subject and before the main verb. The main verb that follows them will be in the base form, with no -s even if the subject is 3rd person singular. Above we discussed how modal verbs can be used to express modality and how can they be replaced with auxiliary verbs or their usage in one sentence.

⁷ Блох М. Я. Теоретическая грамматика английского языка: Учебник. Для студентов филол. фак. унгов и фак. англ. яз. педвузов // М.: Высш. школа. – 1983. – С. 383.

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