

MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS AND SEMI-MODALS AND MODAL VERB PHRASE STRUCTURES IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Annotation: The aim of this article is to present findings of modal verbs and semi-modals, modal verb phrase structures.

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According to Biber, modality in English can be expressed by nine central modal auxiliary verbs, i.e. can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, 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.

Further, these modal auxiliary verbs, marginal auxiliary verbs and fixed idiomatic phrases (i.e. modal verbs and semi-modals) “ can be grouped into three major categories according to their main meanings.” Thus, modal auxiliary verbs **can, could, may, might** express permission, possibility and ability; modal auxiliary verbs **must and should**, marginal auxiliary verbs **need to and ought to** and fixed idiomatic phrases **had (better), have (got) to** and **be supposed to** denote **obligation and necessity**, while modal auxiliary verbs **will, would** and **shall** as well as the phrase **be going to** indicate volition and prediction.

Although Biber at all place **shall** into the category of modals which express volition and prediction by stating that in conversation it denotes offers and suggestions, this modal verb also expresses strong obligation in legal texts such as contracts, directives and judgements. Leech and Svartvik state that **shall** in the sense of ‘ obligation’ is normally limited to official regulations and other formal documents. Quirk discuss a “ restricted use of shall with 3rd person subject in legal and quasi-legal discourse, in stimulating regulations or legal requirements.” Quirk further claim that in these contexts “ **shall** is close in meaning to **must**”. According to Swan “ in contracts and other legal documents, **shall** is often used with third-person subjects to refer to obligations and duties”. Similarly, Krois-Lindner and Translegal observe that “ in legal documents, the verb shall is used to indicate obligation, to express a promise or to make a declaration to which the parties are legally bound”. This is consistent with the statement by Brown and Rice who claim that “ the specific use of the modal verb ‘ shall’ in a directory sense” are typical characteristics of legal texts. Also, Trosborg

establishes that “ modal shall typically expresses obligation in legal acts” and that “ shall has been employed to state obligations of the court and of a party of the contract.”

English modal verbs and semi-modals colligate with lexical verbs to express the attitude towards the information and intentions (i.e. towards the actions and states) denoted by lexical verbs. Biber et al. state that modal verbs and semi-modals “ combine with marked aspect and voice”. They can thus be found in verb phrase structures with passive voice, perfect aspect and/ or progressive aspect. Kennedy states the following modal verb phrase structures in the English language:

1. Modal alone
2. Modal+ infinitive
3. Modal+ be + past participle
4. Modal+ be + present participle
5. Modal+ have + past participle
6. Modal+ be + being + past participle
7. Modal+ have+ been+ past participle
8. Modal+ have +been + present participle
9. Modal+ have + been + to+ participle

Apart from these main structures, semi-modal verbs **have to**, **need to** and **be going to** can appear in verb phrases with other modal or semi-modal verbs (i.e. modal + have to, modal + need to, modal + be going to)

Modal auxiliaries, among all other auxiliaries in English are considered the most auxiliaries that cause difficulties to most students learning English as a foreign language. This issue is covered with linguistic features of Modal auxiliaries and their usage in such a field, linguistics, philosophy and so on.

Modality has been intensely studied from a variety of perspectives. Within linguistics, typological studies have traced crosslinguistic variation in the strategies used to mark modality, with a particular focus on its interaction with tense–aspect–mood marking. Theoretical linguists have sought to analyze both the propositional content and discourse effects of modal expressions using formal tools derived from modal logic. Within philosophy, linguistic modality is often seen as a window into broader metaphysical notions of necessity and possibility.

Grammatical expression of modality, Verbal morphology

In many languages modal categories are expressed by verbal morphology- that is, by alterations in the form of the verb. If these verbal markers of modality are obligatory in a language, they are called *mood* markers. Well-known examples of moods in some European languages are referred to as subjunctive, conditional, and indicative as illustrated below with examples from French, all three with the verb *avoir* ‘to have’. As in most Standard European languages, the shape of the verb conveys not only information about modality, but also about other categories such

as person and number of the subject.

An example for a non-European language with a similar encoding of modality is Manam. Here, a verb is prefixed by a morpheme which encodes number and person of the subject. These prefixes come in two versions, *realis* and *irrealis*. Which one is chosen depends on whether the verb refers to an actual past or present event (*realis*), or merely to a possible or imagined event (*irrealis*).

Auxiliaries

Modal auxiliary verbs, such as the English words *may*, *can*, *must*, *ought*, *will*, *shall*, *need*, *dare*, *might*, *could*, *would*, and *should*, are often used to express modality, especially in the Germanic languages.

Ability, desirability, permission, obligation, and probability can all be exemplified by the usage of auxiliary modal verbs in English:

Ability: I **can** ride a bicycle (in the present); I **could** ride a bicycle (in the past)

Desirability: I **should** go; I **ought** to go

Permission: I **may** go

Obligation: I **must** go

Likelihood: He **might** be there; He **may** be there; He **must** be there

Lexical expression

Verbs such as "want," "need," or "belong" can be used to express modality lexically, as can adverbs. (9) It *belongs* in a museum!

In conclude modal auxiliaries part of verb phrases in different kinds of sentences. From syntactic point of view, modal auxiliaries, like all other auxiliaries in English, are important to form negatives, questions, reported speech, etc. Since the syntactic rules to form the above mentioned forms can be easily learned, and applied, most students face little problems in using the modals, under study. On the other hand, the semantics of modal auxiliaries causes difficulties to those students. First, most modals have more than one meaning. Second, the form of modal auxiliary does not necessarily indicate the time of the sentence in which it is used. Third, verb phrases with negated modals do not always express the opposite of affirmative ones. Finally questions with one modal sometimes require answers with another.

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