



THE NEED TO LEARN MODAL VERBS IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

*The article deals with the stylistic and
lexicographic analysis of modal verbs in
English, their use, analysis.*

Modal verbs show possibility, intent, ability, or necessity. Common examples of modal verbs include can, should, and must. Because they're a type of auxiliary verb (helper verb), they're used alongside the infinitive form of the main verb of a sentence.

Modal verbs are used to express certain hypothetical conditions, such as advisability, capability, or requests (there's a full list in the next section). They're used alongside a main verb to inflect its meaning.

Modal verbs are quite common in English; you've seen them in action hundreds of times even if you didn't know what they were called. The most frequently used ones are:

- can
- may
- might
- could
- should
- would
- will
- must

There are other, less common modal verbs. Some—like shall and ought—are rarely used any longer. There are also verbs that can function either as main verbs or as modal auxiliaries depending on the context; got, need, and have all behave like modal verbs in the common colloquial expressions got to, need to, and have to. Some modal verbs express very specific conditions that don't come up often, like dare in its modal form in "Dare I ask?" The word used in the idiomatic phrase used to, as in "I used to be an English student too," behaves like a modal verb with only a past tense form.

At present, some new trends can be observed in the formal-structural approach to the study of modal verbs. Thus, the use of the particle to after the verb ought in affirmative sentences remains unchanged, while in interrogative, negative, interrogative-negative sentences and short answers, the use of to becomes optional:

He oughtn't (to) have left for USA.

Oughtn't I (to) invite my brother?

Yes, I think you ought (to).

There are certain changes in the forms of the verbs need and dare, which are increasingly likened to the forms of most English verbs, used with the auxiliary verb do:¹

We don't need much bread. / "What do you need to build it?" he asked.

In interrogative and negative sentences with the verb dare, where it is understood as non-modal, and the auxiliary verb do, the particle to may be absent:

Does he dare (to) tell her what he thinks about her?

She didn't dare object to his claim.

If the modal verbs need and dare are in the past tense or present tense with the subject in the third person singular, they usually attach the infinitive with the particle to:

The president of the World Health Organisation Cancer Unit said USA needed to change its bad habits in the battle against cancer.

Thus, the formal-structural approach implies the study of modal verbs from the point of view of their "defectiveness" using a limited set of grammatical rules.

Semantic approach to the study of modal verbs. The semantic approach is based on the separation of semi-auxiliary (modal) verbs from auxiliary ones. The difficulty arose due to the fact that the verb can be used in various functions - from a strongly pronounced modal to a purely auxiliary one. With the development of semantics, the main attention was focused on the meanings of modal verbs. This aspect has become dominant not by chance. The meanings of modal verbs are extremely important for understanding how they function.

Often the choice of a modal verb to express a particular action becomes quite difficult, because the gradation of shades of one meaning can be expressed by several verbs:

We might / should / I'd rather / 'd better you (saw) / will / must / see the film.

The verb will is used in the sense of absolute certainty, such examples are quite rare. In this case, one can observe a gradual increase in shades of perseverance from advice to order. A similar situation occurs when conveying different shades of the probability value (from the least degree to absolute certainty) by modal verbs might, could, may, should, must, will:

That might / should / must / could / may will / be Phil phoning at this hour.

Among the new trends within the framework of the semantic approach, the development of the meanings of necessity and desire should be noted. After the verb need, it is possible to use not only a gerund, but also a complex object (gerundial construction):

I need my car servicing. / you need your report checking

Another important issue is the consideration of factors influencing the interpretation of the meanings of modal verbs. The most significant of them is, of course, the context.

It is the context that helps to accurately determine the meaning of a particular modal verb. If there is not enough context, there is a chance that the listener will not understand the meaning of the sentence or regard it as ambiguous. So, for example, the statement

'You must speak Spanish' can be interpreted in different ways:

'You may be speak French' or

'You must speak French, do you?'

The study of modal verbs at the semantic level paved the way for a closer and more detailed study of the style differences between them, which allows us to consider and understand how one or another modal verb or one of its meanings is chosen depending on the style of narration.²

¹ Collins, Peter and Carmella Hollo (2000), English Grammar An Introduction, London, MacMillan Press Ltd.

² Akmajian, Adrian and Frank Henry (1976). An introduction to the principles of Transformational Syntax. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT press.

Currently, a number of stylistic features can be observed in the system of modal verbs. For example, there is a tendency to use the verb *can* instead of *may* in the sense of permission and its expansion from the colloquial to the neutral style:

*Here you **can** order magazines with or without card.*

In negative and negative-interrogative sentences, the use of the verb *can* is preferable in all styles:

***Why can't** I call my friend right now?*

Some stylistic features are also present in the field of the use of equivalents of modal verbs. Thus, the use of the modal equivalent *have to* without the auxiliary verb *do* gives the interrogative sentence stylistic features of archaism:

Have we to bring the books on Monday?

The newspaper-journalistic style is characterized by the use of the modal equivalent *be to*, which expresses the meaning of the decision made, followed by the use of the auxiliary verb *will* to form the future tense:

The price of sugar is to rise during next month.

Thus, within the framework of the stylistic approach to the study of modal verbs, the stylistic features of their use and functioning are considered.

Thus, the problem of classification of modal verbs becomes even more urgent. Obviously, traditional views on this issue do not cover the entirety of the content of teaching modal verbs. Therefore, in addition to the formal grammatical, semantic criteria, the criterion of frequency of use in authentic texts, one should take into account such grounds for classification as stylistic, idiomatic, phrasal, textual modalities, and also take into account the latest trends associated with the globalization of the English language.

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