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TEACHING ENGLISH MEANS OF MODALITY

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Abstract*:The present article is based with the study of main difficulties encountered by non-native English speakers coming across modality. There have been taken into consideration all the three dimensions of language: discourse function, semantics and discourse pragmatics and have been listed some of the problems with which they deal on comprehension, speaking and writing levels.*
Key-words: *modality, modal logic, verb, category of mood, attitude, realism, non-realism.*

A child learns to express oneself since he is born, as a matter of fact, Grammar – the discipline we know, is been learned day by day, thus acquiring all the necessary language notions which become a valuable tool in correct development of speaking. Therefore, teaching grammar entails helping learners perceive a relationship between grammatical structures and three other dimensions of language:

$$\text{structure/form} \longrightarrow \begin{cases} \text{social function} \\ \text{semantics (meaning)} \\ \text{discourse pragmatics [1]} \end{cases}$$
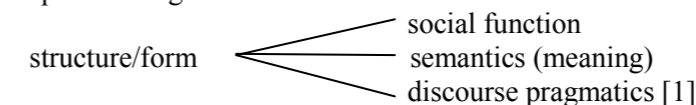
In making these relationships, teachers should use al the necessary techniques and resources, especially when it is meant an issue not present or less dominant in the target language, as modality is.

We will consider this topic from three directions: the notion of "modality", types of în filologie, modal verbs, realism vs irrealism.

In linguistics, **modality** is what allows speakers to attach expressions of belief, attitude and obligation to statements. In standard formal approaches to modality, an utterance expressing modality can always roughly be paraphrased to fit the following template:

(1) According to [a set of rules, wishes, beliefs, etc.] it is [necessary, possible] that [the main proposition] is the case.

The set of propositions which forms the basis of evaluation is called the **modal base**. The result of the evaluation is called the **modal force**. For example the utterance in (2) expresses that, according to what the speaker has observed, it is necessary to conclude that John has a rather high income: (2) John must be earning a lot of money.

The modal base here is the knowledge of the speaker, the modal force is necessity. By contrast, (3) could be paraphrased as 'Given his abilities, the strength of his teeth, etc., it is possible for John to open a beer bottle with his teeth'. Here, the modal base is defined by a subset of John's abilities, the modal force is possibility. (3) John can open a beer bottle with his teeth.

Semantic approaches dealing with modality are traditionally based on the principles of modal logic. **Modal logic** is a type of formal logic primarily developed in the 1960s that extends classical propositional and predicate logic to include operators expressing modality. Modals—words that express modalities—qualify a statement. For example, the statement "John is happy" might be qualified by saying that John is usually happy, in which case the term "usually" is functioning as a modal. The traditional alethic modalities, or modalities of truth, include possibility, ("Possibly, p", "It is possible that p"),

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necessity ("Necessarily, p", "It is necessary that p"), and impossibility ("Impossibly, p", "It is impossible that p"). Other modalities that have been formalized in modal logic include temporal modalities, or modalities of time. In a temporal logic we can then express statements like "I am *always* hungry", "I will *eventually* be hungry", or "I will be hungry *until* I eat something" ((notably, "It was the case that p", "It has always been that p", "It will be that p", "It will always be that p"); deontic modalities concerned with obligation, permission, and related concepts (notably, "It is obligatory that p", and "It is permissible that p"), epistemic modalities, or modalities of knowledge ("It is known that p") and doxastic modalities, or modalities of belief is a modal logic concerned with reasoning about beliefs ("It is believed that p").

We will take into account the epistemic and deontic modalities, the mostly discussed and controversial ones.

Thus, epistemic modality is a sub-type of linguistic modality that deals with a speaker's evaluation/judgment of, degree of confidence in, or belief of the knowledge upon which a proposition is based. In other words, epistemic modality refers to the way speakers communicate their doubts, certainties, and guesses—their "modes of knowing". More technically, epistemic modality may be defined "...as (the linguistic expression of) an evaluation of the chances that a certain hypothetical state of affairs under consideration (or some aspect of it) will occur, is occurring, or has occurred in a possible world which serves as the universe of interpretation for the evaluation process… In other words, epistemic modality concerns an estimation of the likelihood that (some aspect of) a certain state of affairs is/has been/will be true (or false) in the context of the possible world under consideration. This estimation of likelihood is situated on a scale going from certainty that the state of affairs applies, via a neutral or agnostic stance towards its occurrence, to certainty that it does not apply, with intermediary positions on the positive and the negative sides of the scale".

Frank Jackson (an Australian philosopher) argues against the view that accounting for epistemic modalities requires us to think that there is a kind of possibility, conceptual possibility, that is broader than metaphysical possibility. The metaphysical construction requires several assumptions before it matches up with the intuitive notion of epistemic possibility, while the epistemic construction requires a primitive notion of epistemic possibility [2].

It may be realized in speech:
a. *grammatically*: through
- modal verbs (e.g., English: *may*, *might*, *must*; "He is said to be a good chess player"),
- particular grammatical moods on verbs, the **epistemic moods**, or
- a specific grammatical element, such as an affix ("reasonable to assume") or particle; or
b. *non-grammatically* (often lexically): through
- adverbials (e.g., English: *perhaps*, *possibly*), or
- through a certain intonational pattern.

Deontic modality (abbreviated **DEO**) is a linguistic modality that indicates how the world ought to be, according to certain norms, expectations, speaker desire, etc. In other words, a deontic expression indicates that the state of the world (where 'world' is loosely defined here in terms of the surrounding circumstances) does not meet some standard or ideal, whether that standard be social (such as laws), personal (desires), etc. The sentence containing the deontic modal generally indicates some action that would change the world so that it becomes closer to the standard or ideal.

This category includes the following subcategories:
▪ Commissive modality (the speaker's commitment to do something, like a promise or threat): "I shall help you."
▪ Directive modality (commands, requests, etc.): "Come!", "Let's go!", "You've got to taste this curry!"
▪ Volitive modality (wishes, desires, etc.): "If only I were rich!"

A related type of modality is **dynamic modality**, which indicates a subject's internal capabilities or willingness as opposed to external factors such as permission or orders given.

It may be realized in speech:
- An example for a deontic mood is the imperative ("Come!").
- However, many languages (like English) have additional ways to express deontic modality, like modal verbs ("I *shall* help you.") and other verbs ("I *hope* to come soon."), as well as adverbials (*hopefully*) and other constructions.

The next step of the investigation is a category called the verb, to which the notion of modality is applied primarily, and which, traditionally, is defined as the part of speech naming "doing" or "action" words, a description which has been criticized in linguistics on the grounds that many verbs do not "act" in any sense, e.g.: *be, seem, etc.* [3] or which expresses an action, an activity or an process and has the following grammatical categories: time, aspect, number, voice, mood and number [4].

Grammatically, the verb is the most complex part of speech. This is due to the central role it performs in the expression of the predicative functions of the sentence, i.e. the functions establishing the connection between the situations (situational event) named in the utterance and reality. The complexity of the verb is inherent not only in the intricate structure of its grammatical categories, but also in its various subclass divisions, which distinguish by different semantic and lexico-grammatical features [11].

There are three classes of verbs which can't be defined according to the way they form interrogation, negation, question tags or if they can or cannot act as "pro-forms" (i.e. if they can or cannot replace the whole verb phrase): auxiliary verbs, semi-auxiliary verbs and lexical verbs (also called notional verbs in some grammars).

Lexical verbs are the verbs that suffer definite changes, i.e. they undergo transformations according to the grammatical categories of the verb.

Semi-auxiliary verbs are made up of verbs containing "BE" and "HAVE and form inversion and interrogation as the auxiliary verbs, e.g.: to be to, to be bound to, to be about to, to be going to, to be likely to, had better, to have (got) to) [3].

Auxiliary verbs are divided into:
• Primary auxiliaries: to be, to do, to have, which can be used both as predicative as well as auxiliaries; [6]
• Modal auxiliaries, also called non-finite verbs, verbids or defective, as they do not have all the moods and times typical for other classes of verbs, but only one form for Present and Past. [7]

Modal auxiliary verbs have the same characteristics as primary auxiliary verbs, that is:
1. They form interrogation by inversion, e.g.: *May I come in?*
2. They form negation by adding *not* after the first verb, e.g.: *he couldn't have been to her party, he's been abroad for two weeks*;
3. They can be used in question-tags, e.g.: *He can't ski, can't he?*
4. They can be used as "pro-forms", e.g.: *You should work harder and your boy friend should too.*
Besides that, they have other morphological and syntactical characteristics:
5. They have no infinitives or participles;
6. They can be followed only by verbs in the infinitive, e.g.: *She must be ill. It might have been raining.*
7. They are not inflected for the third person singular, e.g.: *She can speak English*;
8. They cannot occur with the modal auxiliary verbs *shall, should, will, would* [3].

Unlike notional verbs modal verbs do not denote events (actions or states), they express the modality of the event denoted by the notional verb. The modality expressed by modal verbs may be of two types:
1. The modal verbs indicates **the relation of the speaker (writer) to the event** denoted by the notional verb – the speaker (writer) may present events as possible ("can, "may"), necessary ("must", "should", "ought", "be", "have") or desirable ("shall", "will", "would") without indicating whether the event really takes, took or will take place.
2. The modal verb indicates **the relation of the event** deonoted by the notional verb **to reality** – the speaker (writer) may present events as realizable, attainable, indicating that they possibly, probably take, took or will take place in actual reality.

Modal verbs as distinct from notional verbs cannot form a separate part of the sentence – a simple verbal predicate. They always combine with a notional verb to form a **compound modal verbal** predicate or with a link-verb and a predicative to form a **compound modal nominal** predicate [8].

Learners often consider modal verbs to be a particularly "problematic" area of English grammar. They have problems:
• in choosing when to use them.
• in choosing which ones to use.
• in constructing questions and negative statements involving modal verbs.

At lower levels, learners often prefer to concentrate on only one meaning or function of a particular modal verb at one time. They sometimes find it confusing that one modal verb may have several meanings or

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functions. Therefore, if we define modal verbs for our students, we need to bear in mind that it is usually only the cotext which makes clear which of them is intended.

Occasionally we use intonation and "tone of voice" to help us make the meaning clear, especially when a particular meaning or function may be expressed by more than one modal verb.

(Future) possibility	Advice
It **may** rain.	We **should** go now.
It **might** rain.	We **ought to** go now.
It **could** rain.	We'**d better** go now.

The most typical difficulties for learners are:

✓ **Comprehension**

In most contexts modal verbs are pronounced in a very weakened form and learners may fail to hear or identify them. This doesn't always stop the learner from understanding the essential message, but it may do. For example, if the learner doesn't hear **can** in the following, she may interpret the statement as a promise rather than as an offer (*I can collect the children from school for you*).

A particular problem is sometimes posed by the use of **should** to give advice. *If I were you…, I should…* is often abbreviated to *I should … * and learners may understand an offer or promise where what is intended is advice (*I should ask your landlady to lend you an alarm clock).*

✓ **Speaking and writing:**

- **Avoidance**

Many learners find other ways of expressing what they want to say, even when they understand the meaning of modal verbs and can use them appropriately and accurately in controlled exercises.

If the verb is in an appropriate tense, the result may be acceptable.

E.g. *It is possible that it'll rain tomorrow.*

E.g. *It is possible that they are back home already.*

However, if the learner frequently uses constructions like this in place of modal verb, the style will seem odd, and if an incorrect tense is used, unacceptable.

E.g. *It is possible that it rains tomorrow.*

E.g. *It is likely that he comes tomorrow.*

This problem is common among speakers of Latin-based languages, where a special form of the verb (subjunctive) is sometimes used in equivalent contexts.

Learners sometimes use constructions to express modal meaning which are grammatically possible but not used.

E.g. *In this club I have the possibility to dance.*

- **Using the full infinitive**

Learners often use full infinitives after pure modal verbs instead of bare infinitives. We tend to notice mistakes, but they generally don't lead to confusion or breakdown in communication. They may be caused by over-generalization from the many other instances in which the infinitive needs to be accompanied by **to** (e.g. *I want to go*)

E.g. *You must to do it.*

E.g. *I can't to swim.*

- **Questions and negative forms**

Learners may over-generalize the rules for forming questions and negative statements which involve adding **do** or **did**.

E.g. *Do you can swim?*

E.g. *She doesn't must finish it.*

- **Past forms**

Some modal verbs have different past forms depending on their meaning in a particular context. Learners may choose the wrong form.

E.g. *There was ice on the windows. There had to be a frost.*

They may also "invent" a form which is simply incorrect.

E.g. *We had not to pay for our accommodation.*

E.g. *You could had avoid it.*

- **Future in the past**

Learners often use a present form instead of a past form.

E.g. *I knew you will pass your exam.*

- **Different forms with very similar meanings**

Examples are:

Have to/must	needn't/don't need/don't have to
May/might/could	can/be able to

Typically, learners adopt one form and over-use it in cases where it would be more natural to vary the use for stylistic reasons (e.g. they may use **may** to express probability, and never use **might/can/could** in contexts where they would be acceptable alternatives).

- **Pronunciation**

Learners may over-emphasize modal verbs in contexts where they would normally not be stressed. This may give the impression that they are contradicting something that has already been said and can lead to people misinterpreting their attitude.

In many contexts stress is the most important feature we use to distinguish between a **can** (generally not stressed) and **can't** (generally stressed). If learners inappropriately stress **can**, people may understand that they have said **can't**.

In order to bring light into this issue we should answer some questions, such as:

▪ **What do modal verbs do**?

We use modal verbs to make an assessment, judgment or interpretation of what we are speaking or writing about, or to express our attitude to this.

*She **can** swim.* (ability)
*You **ought to** be more polite.* (obligation)
*You **must** try to stand up and walk.* (necessity)
*It **could** rain tomorrow.* (possibility)
*The family **should** be home soon.* (logical deduction)
*They **will** try to do things before they have learned how to.* (disapproval)

▪ **What do they look like?**

For teaching purposes, a number of verbs and expressions are grouped together as modal verbs because they have a broadly similar meaning or function. In fact, the form of these verbs varies, and it is helpful to consider modal verbs in private by taking into consideration each modal verb.

▪ **Where do they come in sentences?**

Modal verbs come immediately before the main verb in affirmative and negative statements (e.g. *can do, shouldn't matter*). In questions, modal verbs come before the subject (e.g. *May I go?)*[9].

Nonetheless, this is not the full list of errors or misunderstandings when coming across the term of "modality" which implies much more consideration.

At the level of linguistic manifestation, modal verbs represent one of the two basic sets of expressing modality along with the verb category of mood.

Mood is a grammatical form assumed by a verb to show the different ways in which the action is thought of by the speaker [10].

These generalized expressions of attitudes may be classed into the following three groups.

The first construction type of attitude series is formed by the combination *may/might*+Infinitive. It is used to express wish, desire, hope in the contextual syntactic conditions similar to those of the morphemic (native) spective forms. E.g.: *May* it *be* as you wish! *May* it all *happen* as you desire!

The second construction type of attitude series is formed by the combination *should*+Infinitive. It is used in various subordinate predicative units to express supposition, speculation, suggestion, recommendation, inducements of different kinds and degrees of intensity. E.g.: Whatever they *should say* of the project, it must be considered seriously. It has been arranged that the delegation *should be received* by the President of the Federation.

The third construction type of the same series is formed by the combination *let*+Objective Substantive+Infinitive. It is used to express inducement (i.e. an appeal to commit an action) in relation to all the persons, but preferably to the first person plural and third person both numbers. The notional homonym *let*,

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naturally, is taken into account. E.g.: *Let's agree* to end this wait-and-see policy. Now *don't let's be* hearing any more of this.

All the three types of constructions are characterized by a high frequency occurrence, by uniformity of structure, by regularity of correspondence to the "pure", native morphemic spective form of the verb [5].

The speaker may wish to represent an action as a real fact or as a command (a request) or as something unreal, something that does not exist in reality.

Actions represented as real facts are expressed by the **Indicative Mood**, while unreality is expressed in present-day English by the following means:

a. By two different moods: the Conditional Mood which represents an action as contradicting reality, and the Subjunctive Mood which shows an action as problematic;

b. By the shifting of tenses: the use of the Past Indefinite to express actions contradicting reality in the present or future, and the Past Perfect – with reference to the past;

c. By modal phrases which generally represent actions as problematic [12].

In contrast to the Indicative Mood which is a "fact mood", the Subjunctive and Conditional Moods are a "thought mood". They deal with non-facts, i.e. something supposed, or imaginary, which may take the form of a condition, a supposition, a purpose, a wish; e.g. *Suppose electric light went on, what should we do? We put electric lights in houses that we may light them up and heat them. I wish there were not a single house without electric light* [10].

The use of various forms of unreality depends on the factors which determine their choice, i.e.:

1. Sometimes the choice between the Indicative Mood and this or that particular form of unreality depends on the structure of the sentence, mainly on the type of the subordinate clause in which this form occurs, and in certain cases even on the lexical character of the predicate verb in the principal clause. This may be termed as *the structurally dependent use of forms expressing unreality*.

2. In other cases the choice is independent of the structure of the sentence and is determined by meaning, by the attitude of the speaker towards the actions expressed in the sentence. This may be termed as *the independent (or free) use of forms expressing unreality*.

3. In a limited number of cases the use of forms expressing unreality has become a matter of tradition and is to be treated as set phrases, as other sentences cannot be built up on their patterns. This may be termed as *the traditional use of forms expressing unreality* [12].

Counterfactuals refer to things that are contrary to the actual situation. In English, counterfactuals are expressed in "if"-clauses by using a tense form that normally refers to a time prior to the time actually semantically referred to in the *if*-clause. For example, *If I knew that, I wouldn't have to ask* contains the counterfactual *If I knew*, which refers to the present tense despite the form of the verb, and which denies the proposition "I know that". This contrasts with the construction *If I know that,...*, which is not a counterfactual because it means that maybe I know it and maybe I don't (or maybe I will know it, and maybe I will not). Likewise, *If I had known that, I would have gone there* contains the counterfactual *If I had known*, denying the proposition that I knew; despite the pluperfect (past perfect) verbal construction, the time referred to is the past, not the past-of-the-past.[1]

A condition or supposition in Modern English may be expressed by:

Present Time	*Past Time*	*Future Time*
If he were	If he had been	If he were
If he be		If he should be
		If he were to be

In general terms we can say that, at the beginner level, we would expect to do quite a lot of structure (and function) teaching and practice and less really free communicative activity – although we would place heavy emphasis on reading and listening. The teaching of grammar at this stage is likely to be fairly covert since the main aim is to get students to practice and use the language as much as possible. As the students learn more, however, the balance would change, and at intermediate levels the students would be involved in more communicative activities and would have less grammar teaching. The teaching of grammar at this stage, however, would probably be more overt and as students get more advanced they can actively study grammar in more overt ways.

At any level, though, we would expect students to be faced at various points with input that is above their own language ability. This would not only help students to acquire language subconsciously, but it could also preview language that will later form the basis for grammar teaching [13].

Although our purpose was to discuss the teaching of modal verbs, we could not neglect facts about the language.

We have emphasized the importance of teaching all aspects of grammar in context. Appropriate contextualization can only be achieved if a teacher finds or creates realistic social situations, language texts, and visual stimuli that are interesting and meaningful to students.

Regardless of how well prepared a teacher is, how carefully she follows the plan of the lesson, and how skilfull she is at error correction, she may still be unsuccessful if she cannot relate to students on a human level or understand their needs, interests, attitudes, and motivations. The ability to "read" students – to get beneath the surface and grasp the extent to which they are disposed to learn English – and to plan activities accordingly sometimes makes all the difference between a good class and a bad one.

Teachers who assume a highly professional attitude toward their students are the most effective. By demonstrating their concern for the process, they create the conditions for real communication, the most impostant aspect for practicing grammar and acquired knowledge, which is, in fact, the main aim of any course [1].

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