

THE USE OF MODAL VERBS IN MODERN ENGLISH

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ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ МОДАЛЬНЫХ ГЛАГОЛОВ В СОВРЕМЕННОМ АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ

ZAMONAVIY INGLIZ TILIDA MODAL FE'LLARNING QO'LLANILISHI

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Abstract: *This article explores the use of modal verbs in modern English, focusing on their grammatical functions, types, and contextual meanings. Modal verbs play a crucial role in expressing necessity, possibility, permission, and ability. The paper analyzes common usage patterns and typical errors made by learners, highlighting the importance of mastering modal verbs for effective communication. The study is based on contemporary linguistic theories and examples from authentic texts.*

Keywords: *modal verbs, grammatical functions, necessity, possibility, permission, ability, English grammar, language learning*

Аннотация: *В данной статье рассматривается использование модальных глаголов в современном английском языке, с акцентом на их грамматические функции, виды и контекстуальные значения. Модальные глаголы играют важную роль в выражении необходимости, возможности, разрешения и способности. Работа анализирует типичные модели употребления и распространённые ошибки учащихся, подчёркивая важность овладения модальными глаголами для эффективного общения. Исследование основано на современных лингвистических теориях и примерах из аутентичных текстов.*

Ключевые слова: *модальные глаголы, грамматические функции, необходимость, возможность, разрешение, способность, грамматика английского языка, изучение языка*

Annotatsiya. *Ushbu maqolada zamonaviy ingliz tilida modal fe'llarning ishlatilishi, ularning grammatik funksiyalari, turlari va kontekstga bog'liq ma'nolari o'rganiladi. Modal fe'llar zarurat, imkoniyat, ruxsat va qobiliyatni ifodalashda muhim rol o'ynaydi. Maqolada odatiy qo'llanilish namunalar va o'rganuvchilar tomonidan qilinadigan keng tarqalgan xatolar tahlil qilinib, samarali muloqot uchun modal fe'llarni puxta egallash zarurligi ta'kidlanadi. Tadqiqot zamonaviy lingvistik nazariyalar va haqiqiy matnlardan misollarga asoslanadi.*

Kalit so'zlar: *modal fe'llar, grammatik funksiyalar, zarurat, imkoniyat, ruxsat, qobiliyat, ingliz tili grammatikasi, til o'rganish*

Introduction

Modal verbs are an essential part of English grammar, serving to express a speaker's attitude toward the action or state described by the main verb. Unlike regular verbs, modal verbs do not change form according to the subject, nor do they take infinitive or -s endings. Their unique grammatical properties and versatile meanings make them indispensable in both spoken and written English. In modern English, modal verbs such as can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, and would are widely used to indicate various nuances including ability, permission, obligation, possibility, and hypothetical situations. Understanding their proper use is crucial for language learners, as incorrect usage can lead to misunderstandings and communication breakdowns. This paper aims to analyze the functions and usage of modal verbs in contemporary English, highlight common learner errors, and provide insight into their practical application. The study draws on recent linguistic theories and real-life examples to present a comprehensive overview.

Theoretical Background

Modal verbs are a distinctive category within English auxiliary verbs that express modality — the speaker's attitude toward the likelihood, necessity, ability, permission, or obligation of the action denoted by the main verb. Unlike full verbs, modals do not inflect for tense or person, and they are followed directly by the base form of the main verb without "to." This unique syntactic behavior sets them apart from other verbs. Linguistic scholars have categorized modal verbs as "defective verbs" due to their limited morphological forms. According to Huddleston and Pullum (2002), modals function primarily to express modality, which encompasses a range of meanings such as epistemic (possibility, certainty) and deontic (obligation, permission).

The English modal verb system includes primary modals like can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, and would. Each modal verb conveys specific nuances depending on context, making their correct usage complex but essential for clear communication.

Types of Modal Verbs

Modal verbs in English can be broadly classified into two categories: primary modals and semi-modals (also called marginal modals).

1. Primary Modals

These are the core modal verbs that have no infinitive, participle, or -s forms. The primary modals include:

Can / Could – express ability or possibility.

May / Might – indicate permission or possibility.

Must – expresses necessity or strong obligation.

Shall / Should – used for suggestions, obligations, or future actions.

Will / Would – indicate future intentions, willingness, or hypothetical situations.

2. Semi-Modals

These verbs behave similarly to modals but have some regular verb properties.

Examples include:

Need (in negative and interrogative forms)

Dare (sometimes used modally)

Ought to – expresses moral obligation or advisability.

Used to – indicates habitual past actions.

Understanding these types helps learners grasp how modality is expressed in various contexts and enhances their ability to use modal verbs accurately.

Common Errors Made by Learners

Despite their importance, modal verbs often pose challenges to English learners, leading to frequent errors. Some of the most common mistakes include:

1. Incorrect verb form after modals:

Modal verbs are always followed by the base form of the main verb without “to.”

Errors like “can to go” or “must doing” are incorrect.

Correct: She can go to the store.

2. Confusing modals with similar meanings: Learners sometimes confuse may and can for permission or must and have to for obligation. Though close, these modals have subtle differences in formality and usage. Example: May is more formal than can when asking permission.

3. Using modals in wrong tenses:

Modal verbs generally lack past tense forms except for a few like could and would.

Attempting to create past forms like “musted” is incorrect.

Correct: She had to finish the work.

4. Misusing semi-modals:

Words like need and dare can behave like modals or full verbs, which confuses learners about when to use “to” or auxiliary verbs.

Example error: “Need to go” vs. “Need go.”

5. Overgeneralization:

Learners sometimes apply rules of one modal verb to others incorrectly, e.g., using should in place of must for obligation without understanding the strength difference.

Awareness of these common errors can guide learners toward more accurate and confident use of modal verbs.

Modal Verbs in Formal vs. Informal English

Modal verbs are often used differently depending on the level of formality. For instance, in formal English, may and shall are more commonly used for permission or offers:

Formal: May I speak to the manager?

Informal: Can I talk to the manager?

Similarly, shall is often replaced with will or should in everyday conversation:

Formal: Shall we begin the meeting?

Informal: Should we get started?

Understanding register is essential for learners to adapt their language appropriately in different contexts.

5. Modal Verbs in Different Tenses and Voices

While modal verbs typically do not change form for tense, there are ways to express modality in the past and future using modal structures:

Past Modality:

She must have forgotten the meeting. (expresses a strong assumption about the past)

He could have helped us. (expresses a missed possibility)

Future Modality:

I will be able to attend tomorrow. (ability in the future)

You should finish the project by Friday. (advice or mild obligation)

Modal verbs can also be used in the passive voice:

The report must be completed by noon.

The documents could have been lost.

Such structures are common in academic, legal, and business communication, where tone and clarity are critical.

CONCLUSION

Modal verbs are a vital element of English grammar, enabling speakers and writers to express attitudes, intentions, possibilities, and obligations with precision and nuance. Their unique grammatical behavior and multifunctional nature make them both powerful and challenging tools for effective communication. This paper has explored the theoretical background, classification, and practical usage of modal verbs in modern English. It has also highlighted common mistakes made by learners, emphasizing the need for clear understanding and contextual awareness when using modals. Mastering modal verbs not only improves grammatical accuracy but also enhances the speaker's ability to convey subtle shades of meaning, making communication more natural and fluent. Continued study and exposure to authentic language use are essential for developing full competence in this crucial area of English grammar.

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