Unit 4 (b)

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Modality

The area between "yes" and "no"

Print version of the
Exploring English Grammar – the world of clauses
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Goals

The learning goals for today's session are:

1. To understand how modal verbs differ from other verbs in English.
2. To learn which verbs are "in" (or "on the edge of") the system of modal verbs.
3. To understand the difference between the
   "indicative" TYPE of MODALITY
   (either PROBABILITY or USUALITY (a.k.a. "indefinite frequency"))
   and the
   "imperative" TYPE
   (either OBLIGATION or INCLINATION (a.k.a. READINESS/ABILITY)).
4. To understand the various ways in which modality can be expressed (verbs, adverbs, and other structures) and how these encode subjectivity or objectivity.
5. To understand the difference between the two ways in which [negative] POLARITY can be expressed – [direct] and [transferred].
6. To understand the difference between the [median] VALUE of MODALITY ('will') and the [outer] VALUES (either [high] 'must' or [low] 'may'), by studying how they interact with [transferred] [negative] POLARITY.

How do modal verbs differ from other verbs in English?

1. No non-finite forms: no infinitive (**to can*), no '-ing' form (**canning*) – unlike German.
2. No ending on third person singular present (*she can* not **she cans*) – like German.
3. A 'remote' form (e.g. *could*), which is more likely to indicate remoteness in reality (cf. *könnte*) rather than remoteness in time (cf. *konnte*).
4. Combinable with *n't*: (*she can't*; cf. **she walkn't*).
5. Function as finite verbal operators – *she can ...* (indicative) vs. e.g. *can she ... ?* (yes/no interrogative).
6. Function in tags – *she can ..., can't she?*
7. Have I forgotten anything?

1

Which verbs are modal verbs in English?

- The [positive] forms:
  - [high] must, ought to, need, has/had to
  - [median] will, would, (shall??), should, is/was to
  - [low] can, could, may, might, (dare)
- The [negative] forms:
  - [high] mustn't, oughtn't to, can't, couldn't, (mayn't, mightn't, hasn't/hadn't to)
  - [median] won't, wouldn't, shouldn't, (isn't/wasn't to)
  - [low] needn't, doesn't/didn't need to, doesn't/didn't have to

<div align="right">4 (b).4</div>

What about marginal cases?

- You needn't do that [true modal] ('das musst du nicht tun')
- You don't need to do that [marginal] ('das brauchst du nicht zu tun')
- in need – in Not – benötigen
- I dare say! / I daren't do it!
- ich darf sagen! (ich bin so frei; ich erlaube mir) / ich wage es nicht, das zu tun!
- *need* and *dare* are 'on the way out' of the system
- *better* may be 'on the way in' (we better let it in, bettern't we?)
- Even if verbs come in, or go out, or shift around <u>within</u> the system — wenn du ma<u>gst</u> ('wenn du das tun willst'); wenn du ver<u>magst</u>, das zu tun ('wenn du das tun kannst') — the AR<u>CH</u>ITECTURE of the system remains the same, with [high], [median], [low] values.

<div align="right">4 (b).5</div>

The ambiguity on which MODALITY is based:

- 1) She must be very careful.
- 2) She must be very careless.
-
- Example 1) means: She is required to be...
- Example 2) means: I deduce that she is...
-
- All other things being equal (which often they aren't...), there is a phonological difference between the two:

- // .1. ∧ she must be / very */ CAREful//

- // .1. ∧ she / must be / very */ CAREless//

<div align="right">4 (b).6</div>
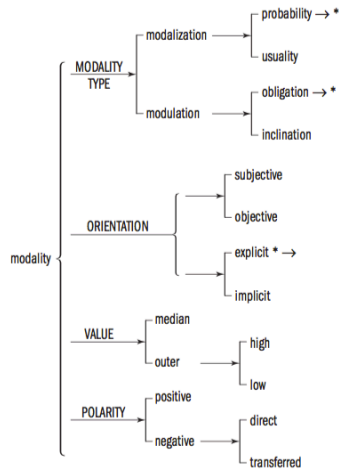
Fig. 4-25   System network of MODALITY

Simultaneous systems, so 4 × 4 × 3 × 3 combinations; in reality (*→ → *) only 12 × 9.

<div align="right">4 (b).7</div>

MODALITY TYPE and VALUE (1) — MODALIZATION (the "indicative" type)
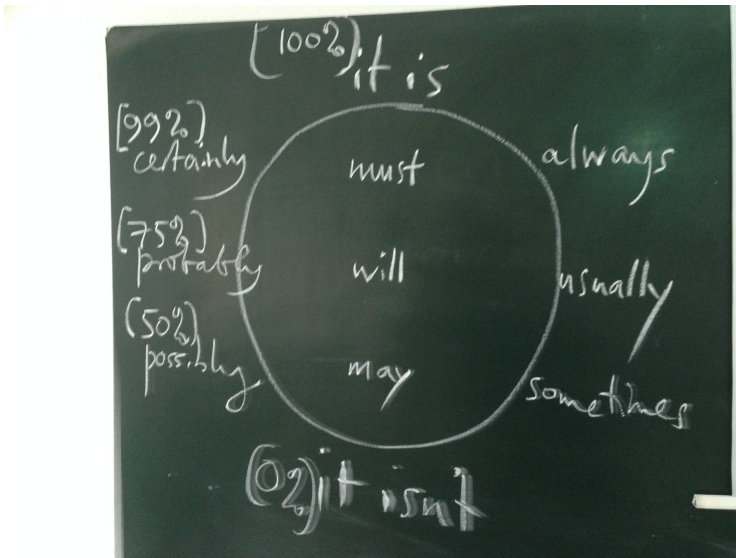
<div align="right">4 (b).8</div>

MODALIZATION: PROBABILITY and USUALITY

- This is MODALIZATION (the "indicative" type of MODALITY).
- It spans the gap between "it is" and "it isn't".
- It is typically expressed by either a modal verb, or a modal adverb, or both together:
- that'll be Professor Steiner at the door ('right now')
- that's probably Professor Steiner at the door
- that'll probably be Professor Steiner at the door
- There are two dimensions:
- PROBABILITY (certainly/probably/possibly) and USUALITY ("indefinite frequency") (always/usually/-sometimes)

<div align="right">4 (b).9</div>

- That'll be Professor Steiner at the door ('that's probably him – not in the future, but right now')
- Oh the students'll lie on the lawn all day in summer ('they usually do that – not next summer, but every summer')
- Probability 75% –> Expectation of 75 / 100 occurrences
- cf. flipping a coin: probability of Heads is 50%, so if you flipped the coin 100 times you would expect to get Heads approx. 50 times and Tails approx. 50 times.
- Two different ways of expressing less-than-certain knowledge: paradigmatically ('either-yes-or-no': how likely?) or syntagmatically ('both-yes-and-no': how often? (how usual?))
- Adverbs expressing usuality are sometimes called 'adverbs of indefinite frequency'; like modal adverbs of probability they are part of the Mood element, just like the Subject and the Finite and the Polarity — because they're not just part of WHAT you're asserting, they're part of the ACT OF ASSERTING it !!

4 (b).10

'Double' modality

- If modalization is expressed doubly (verb AND adverb), then:
- if it's the <u>same</u> VALUE each time, it counts once:
- that probably will be him –> it's probable that it's him (NOT: it's probable that it's probable that it's him)
- if it's a <u>different</u> VALUE each time, it counts twice:
- that certainly might be him –> it's certain that it's possible that it's him
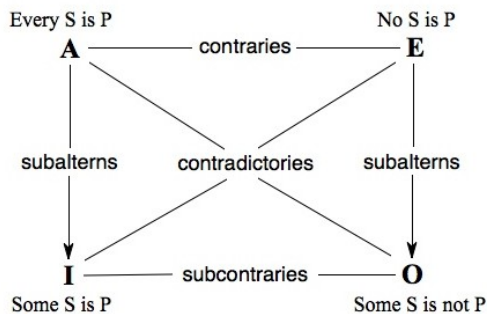
4 (b).11

MODALIZATION compared with Aristotle's Square (1)
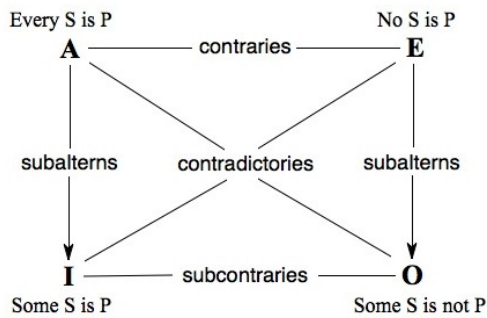
- Term "A" (= universal affirmative): *All Australians are the descendants of convicts* (cf. *Australians are certainly... Australians are always...*)
- Term "I" (= particular affirmative): *Some Australians are...* (cf. *Australians are possibly... Australians are sometimes...*)

4 (b).12

MODALIZATION compared with Aristotle's Square (2)

4

- Two differences from Aristotle (because we're really doing rhetoric, not logic):
- 1) In real life, if we're absolutely certain, we just say "they are"; if we say "they must be", it means that we're slightly less than 100% certain
- 2) We add a term for 'less certain than certain, but more certain than possible': (*they'll be descendants of convicts* etc.)

MODALITY TYPE and VALUE (2) — MODULATION (the "imperative" type)
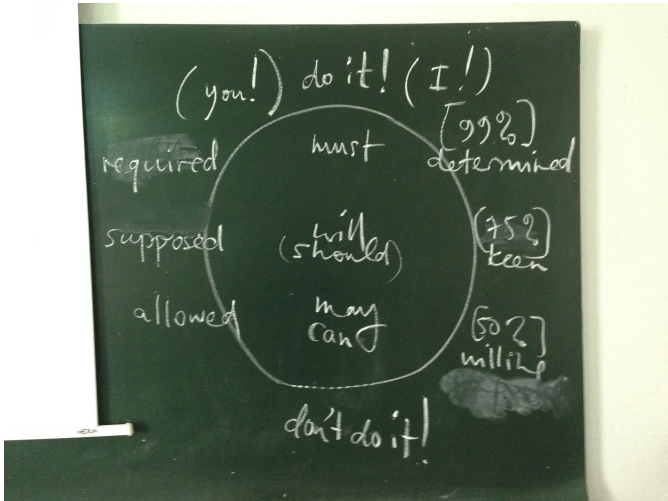
MODULATION: OBLIGATION and INCLINATION (a.k.a. READINESS/ABILITY)

- This is MODULATION (the "imperative" type of MODALITY).
- It spans the gap between "do it!" and "don't do it!"
- It is typically expressed by either a modal verb (1), or by a 'catenative' (hypotactic verbal group complex) structure (2):
- (1) you must do your homework! (1) I must drive you home!
- (2) you're required to do your homework! (2) I'm determined to drive you home!
- Note that, syntactically, the structures are [indicative] structures: Subject before Finite (i.e., [declarative]), reversible for [yes/no interrogative] e.g. Must you do your homework? Must I drive you home?
- There are two dimensions:
- OBLIGATION ('you!') ('are wanted to') (required / supposed [səˈpəʊst] / allowed) and
- INCLINATION (a.k.a. READINESS/ABILITY) ('I!') ('want to') (determined / keen / willing)

Knowledge and Power

- Modality expresses intermediate degrees of knowledge and power.
- Modalization: Probability ('epistemic modality')
- Modulation: Obligation ('deontic modality')
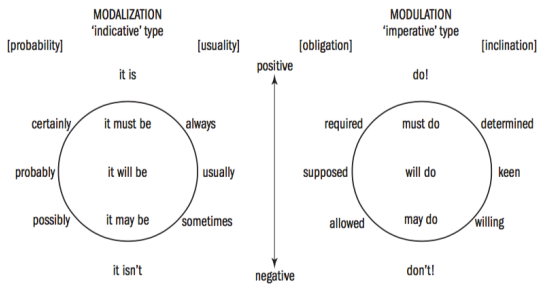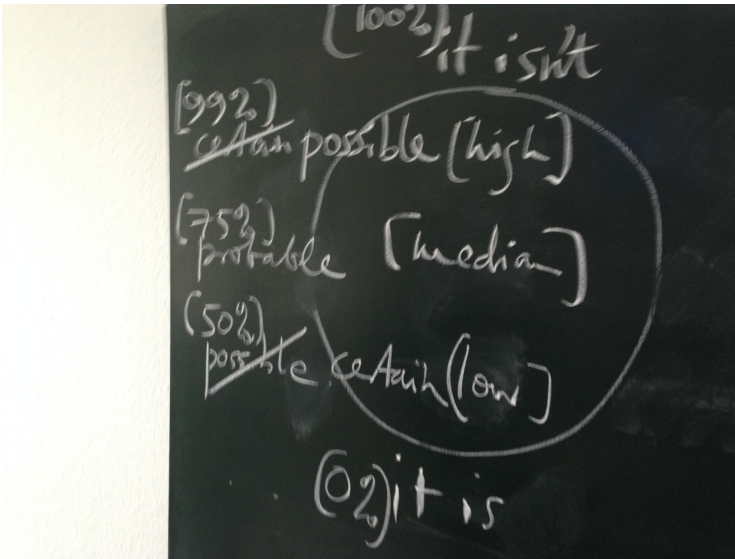
Summary: Modality compared with Polarity and Mood

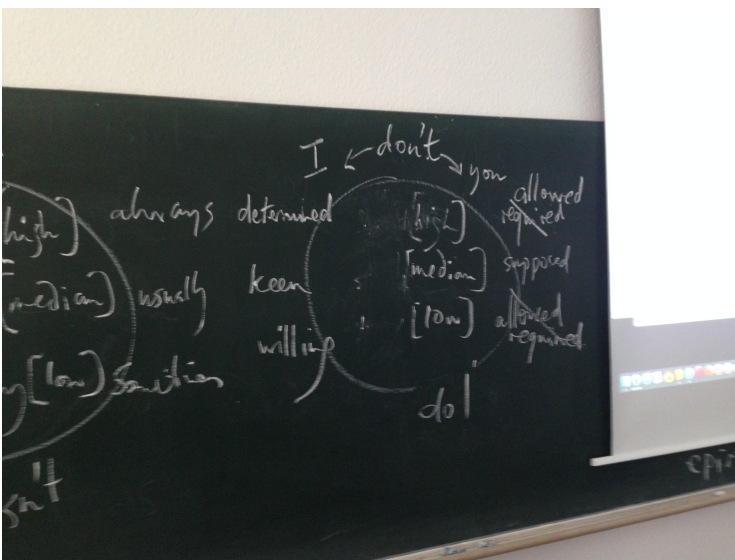Fig. 10-6   Diagram showing relation of modality to polarity and mood

Combining [outer] VALUE and [transferred] [negative] POLARITY (1)

[outer] VALUE and [transferred] [negative] POLARITY (2)

Note that probability, in itself, can only ever be positive, never negative (i.e. it is always somewhere between p 0 (0%) and p 1 (100%)). However, you can 'metaphorically' 'transfer' the <u>negative marker</u> – from the process itself to the Modality on the process. In so doing, you cause something <u>interesting to happen</u>:

[outer:high]
[negative:direct]   [negative:transferred]
it's certain that it is<u>n't</u> him   –   it is<u>n't</u> possible that it's him

[median]
[negative:direct]   [negative:transferred]
it's probable that it is<u>n't</u> him   –   it is<u>n't</u> probable that it's him

[outer:low]
[negative:direct]   [negative:transferred]
it's possible that it is<u>n't</u> him   –   it is<u>n't</u> certain that it's him

Similar things happen with all four types of modality. (Try it!)   4 (b).20

ORIENTATION [subjective] / [objective] and EXPLICITNESS [implicit] / [explicit]

The explicit forms (which are 'grammatical metaphors') are only possible with PROBABILITY and OBLIGATION, not (yet) with USUALITY or INCLINATION.

· 1) I know that he did it (subjective: explicit) MOST SUBJECTIVE
· 2) he must have done it (subjective: implicit)
· 3) he certainly did it (objective: implicit)
· 4) it's certain that he did it (objective: explicit) MOST OBJECTIVE

· 1) I demand that he do it (subjective: explicit) MOST SUBJECTIVE
· 2) he must do it (subjective: implicit)
· 3) he's required to do it (objective: implicit)
· 4) it's required that he do it (objective: explicit) MOST OBJECTIVE

For highschool literary appreciation essays choose explicitly subjective assessments of probability.

For university science essays dress up your assessments of probability by making them explicitly objective.   4 (b).21
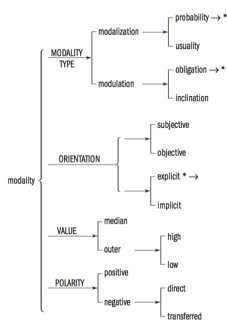
Modality: Overview as Summary

Fig. 4-25   System network of MODALITY

Simultaneous systems, so $4 \times 4 \times 3 \times 3$ combinations; in reality ($* \to \to *$) only 12×9.   4 (b).22

MODALIZATION is always tenseless (although combinable with any tense of the main verb); so the remote form means "remote in REALITY". But MODULATION can have any tense (combining with – basically – a tenseless main verb).

MODALIZATION ("indicative" type): *he may do it* – 'possibly he does it' *he might do it* – 'very possibly he does it' *he may have done it* – 'possibly he did it' *he might have done it* – 'very possibly he did it'

(— the remote form (here: *might*) can mean 'toned down' (weaker), OR 'toned up'(stronger), depending on the tone contour used—)

MODULATION ("imperative" type): *he may do it* – 'I allow him to do it' *he is allowed to do it* – 'someone allows him to do it' *he was allowed to do it* – 'someone allowed him to do it' *she said he might do it* – 'she said someone allowed him to do it' *she thought he might have done it* – 'even though he didn't do it, she believed he was allowed to do it'? 'she considered it very possible that he did it'?

(there's ambiguity here – but often it's very subtle!!)   4 (b).23

Combination of [future] time reference and PROBABILITY

Normally, probability is tenseless (because you've chosen [modal] not [temporal] in the system FINITE-NESS TYPE a.k.a. MODAL DEIXIS).

(KNOCK KNOCK!) *That must be Professor Steiner* = it is certainly him ('present') (Who presided over the meeting?) *It must have been Prof. Steiner* = it was certainly him ('past') (Who will be chairman next year?) *It must be going to be Prof. Steiner* = it will certainly be him ('future')

But if instead of [high] VALUE ('certain') ('99%') you have [low] ('possible') ('50%'), then sometimes the modal verb can refer to the future:

It may rain tomorrow = perhaps it will rain ('future') ('50%')

People disagree about the meaning of "will" in:

It will rain tomorrow

Does it mean ('future') ('100%'), or ('future') ('75%')?

The sun will rise tomorrow at 6:45 a.m. means ('future') ('100%')

Don't be fooled by grammarians pretending to be philosophers! The grammar of a natural human language IS its OWN philosophy, and DOES contain the notion '100% certain knowledge of the future'!!   4 (b).24

Homework

· Your homework for next week is to complete Exercise Sheet 4b, which was handed out in class and which contains a page from last summer semester's exam.

In case you missed the class, the exercise sheet is also available here:

`http://www.spence.saar.de/courses/grammar/questions04b/index.pdf`

                    4 (b).25

Acknowledgements, further reading, other sources

Most of the ideas presented here come from M.A.K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 2nd edition 1994 ("IFG2") or 3rd edition 2004 ("IFG3").

Further reading: Halliday 2004, chapter 4.5 and chapter 10.3 (or Halliday 1994, chapter 4.5 and chapter 10.4).

See also: Annabelle Lukin's "prezi" slide on Modality (on Vimeo): `https://vimeo.com/album/2028694/video/51422776`   4 (b).26