

МОДАЛЬНОСТЬ В СОВРЕМЕННОМ АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ

MODALITY IN MODERN ENGLISH

Аннотация. В этой статье рассматриваются вопросы модальности в современном английском языке. Модальные глаголы выражают разное отношение к возможному действию или состоянию. Этот раздел грамматики исключительно важен как для практического овладения разговорным языком, так и для понимания литературы.

Summary. Problems of modality in modern English are considered in this article. Modals express a variety of moods and attitudes towards a possible action or state. This part of grammar is exceptionally important both for practical acquirement and understanding of literature.

Modal verbs express the attitude of the speaker towards the action or state indicated by the infinitive which always followed them. The speaker may want to represent an action or state as necessary or unnecessary, possible or impossible, certain or doubtful etc.

A modal verb in combination with the infinitive forms a modal compound predicate.

Most of the modal verbs have more than one meaning. Each of these meanings is characterized by a specific usage.

Special mention should be made of set phrases containing modal verbs.

As most modal verbs are polysemantic and many of their meanings are synonymous, it will be necessary to draw comparisons between them.

The use of modal verbs is in most cases independent of the structure of the sentence: the use of this or that modal verb is determined by the attitude of the speaker towards the facts contained in his communication. In this case we may speak of free or independent use of modal verbs.

e.g. We **should go** there as soon as possible.

It **may be** true.

But sometimes the use of certain modal verbs depends on the structure of the sentence, mainly on the type of the subordinate clause and occasionally also on the lexical character of the predicate verb in the principal clause. This may be called structurally conditioned or dependent use of modal verbs.

e.g. It is necessary that we **should go** there as soon as possible.

I am afraid he **may get** angry with me.

When the use of modal verbs is structurally conditioned their meaning sometimes becomes weakened. This may be accounted for by the fact that these verbs become rather part of the structure than bearers of individual meaning.

It is important to point out that in this case they serve as one of the forms expressing unreality which have taken the place of the former synthetic Subjunctive Mood. For that reason this use of modal verbs will be treated together with the other forms of unreality.

It is necessary to draw attention to one more feature peculiar to modal verbs. They always express the attitude of the speaker to some actions or states. That means that a certain action or state is represented as necessary, possible, desirable, doubtful, etc. from the point of view of the speaker.

It is noteworthy that modal verbs seem to be in more frequent use in English than in Russian owing to the fact that some of their meanings can be rendered in Russian only by modal words.

The use of **can** and **may** is parallel only in two meanings: possibility due to circumstances and permission. In these meanings, however, they are not always interchangeable.

Thus in the meaning of possibility due to circumstances the use of **may** is restricted only to affirmative sentences, whereas **can** is found in all kinds of sentences.

may
He **may find** this book at the library

can
He **can find** this book at the library.
Can he find this book at the library?
He **can't find** this book at the library.

Their time reference is also different. **May** refers to the present or future, the form **might** is used in past-time contexts only in reported speech; **can (could)** may refer to the present, past or future.

may

He **may find** the book at the library.
I said that he **might find** the book at the library.

can

He **can find** the book at the library.
He **could find** the book at the library yesterday.
He **can find** the book at the library tomorrow.

The modal verb **must** is used in present-time contexts with reference to the present or future and in combination with the perfect infinitive it refers to the past. In past-time contexts this form is used only in reported speech (i.e. the rules of the sequence of tenses are not observed with **must**).

Dare may be used as a regular and as a defective verb. In present-day English it is mainly found in questions beginning with **how** and in negative sentences.

e.g. How **dare** you **talk** to me like that?

He **dared** not **look** at her.

The classification of forms expressing unreality presents great difficulty in English. This becomes clear if we draw a comparison with the Russian language. In Russian we find only one form which serves to express unreality. This form is called in Russian grammar the Subjunctive Mood.

But in English we find a great variety of forms, both synthetical and analytical, as well as modal phrases. This can be accounted for historically.