Modality

Lecture 19
Language is not merely used for conveying factual information.

A speaker may wish:
- to indicate a degree of certainty
- to try to influence other people in various ways (authority/submission, permission, make people do things or stop them from doing things).

Modality is a functional semantic category of the verb denoting the attitude of the speaker.
Modality can be expressed by 3 types of means:

- **lexical** – modal adverbs such as perhaps, probably, may be, certainly, etc.

- **syntactic** – modal verb phrases that include modal auxiliaries: may, can, must, etc.

- **morphological** – the verbal category of mood
Apart from adverbs Modality can be expressed lexically also by

- main verbs: conclude, believe, permit, wish, want, demand, order;
- nouns: possibility, necessity, permission;
- adjectives: possible, necessary;
- adverbs: perhaps, certainly, possibly, necessarily.
 Speakers often employ combinations of lexical and syntactical means:

- I will certainly help you.
- I shall probably miss the train.
Modal auxiliaries are a group of words which are marked for the expression of modality.

- They form a small and closed set: can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, must, and ought to.
They have the following formal properties:

- they have no non-finite forms;
- they exhibit no subject-verb agreement;
- with the exception of must and ought to, they have an unmarked form (historically a present tense form) and a remote form (historically a past tense form);
They have the following formal properties:

- the remote form typically indicates **hypotheticality** or **tentativeness**;

- together with **not** most of them can occur in **contracted forms**: can't, couldn't, shan't, shouldn't, won't, wouldn't, mustn't;

- a modal auxiliary is always placed first in the verb phrase where it occurs; two modal auxiliaries cannot occur in the same verb phrase.
The modal auxiliary equivalents are expressions of the type BE (X) TO

- They express some of the meanings of the modal auxiliaries:
  
  be to, be able to, be about to, be going to; be allowed to; be willing to.
Types of modality

- Modality does not represent a unified semantic concept.
- It should be seen as a cover term for two major semantic categories:
  - **epistemic modality**, which is involved in expressions of certainty or uncertainty, and
  - **root modality**, which includes various types of relations to potential events (e.g. authority and submission).
Epistemic modality

- A modal auxiliary is used to express the degree of the speaker's conviction or belief in the truth of the proposition expressed by the clause.

- ‘Proposition’ is a term used to refer to the meaning of a declarative sentence.
Consider the following examples and their interpretations:

- **That must be the teacher** ['I conclude that that is the teacher'].

- **It may be the teacher** ['It is possible that it is the teacher'].

- **Can that be the teacher? That can’t be the teacher:** *can* is typically used in questions or in negative sentences to express epistemic possibility.

- **That’ll be the teacher:** *will* indicates a high degree of confidence in the truth of the proposition.
The use of the Past tense form

- would not affect the time reference but
- would sound more tentatively (less confident):

- *It might be the teacher.*
- *Could that be the teacher?*
- *That would be the teacher.*
**Shall** is not used to express epistemic modality.

Epistemic **should** can be illustrated by the following example:

*The bus **should** be here in five minutes.*

‘If the bus runs on schedule, it will be here in five minutes’.

**Ought to** would be the equivalent of **should** in this situation.
Epistemic modality + tense and aspect

- If a present situation is represented, this is expressed by the **bare infinitive** of the main verb: *He must write it.*
- Past tense VP in the main clause, a modal auxiliary + Perfective aspect to relate the situation to past time:

  *He must have written this letter while he was very young.*
the Past Simple and the Present Perfect

Thus the contrast between the Past Simple and the Present Perfect is neutralized:

- *He may have been here* can mean.
- ‘It is possible that he *was* here’ or
- ‘It is possible that he *has been* here’.
Epistemic modality and negation

- the negation typically applies to the proposition, and not to the modal:
  - *Bill may be there.* ‘It is possible that he is there.’
  - vs. *Bill may not be there.* ‘It is possible that he is not there.’

- Note that *can’t* corresponds to epistemic *must*:
  - *Bill must be there.* ‘I conclude that he is there.’
  - *Bill can’t be there.* ‘I conclude that he is not there.’
Root modality is a cover term for a number of different meanings.

All of them are involved in reference to potential events, rather than actual events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influencing</th>
<th>Descriptive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VOLITION</td>
<td>POSSIBILITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERMISSION</td>
<td>NECESSITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBLIGATION</td>
<td>HABIT/CHARACTERISTIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MORAL DUTY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADVICE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Root vs. epistemic possibility and necessity

- *They may be planning a party.* (epistemic possibility: ‘It is possible that they are planning...’)

- *They can easily make a party.* (root possibility: ‘It is possible for them to make...’)

- *He must be guilty.* (epistemic necessity: ‘It is necessarily the case that he is guilty.’)

- *He must be saved.* (root necessity: ‘It is necessary (for us) to save him.’)
Influencing and descriptive uses

- *Can* and *may* can be used to express the notion of permission;
- *May* indicates personal involvement, whereas *can* is impersonal
- You may borrow my pen (*I permit* you to borrow my pen)
- You can borrow my pen (*It is all right* if you borrow my pen)
- The use of *could* or *might* imply greater politeness: *Might I join you? Could I use your printer?*
A similar personal/impersonal contrast with expressions of **obligation**: *must* and *have to*.

- **You must be in by midnight.** (an obligation on the addressee)
- **I have to be in by midnight.** (a state resulting from the obligation)

  *Have to* denotes **necessity** (due to **circumstances**): *A friend is coming for dinner. I have to prepare the meal.*

  *Be to* denotes **an obligation** (due to **prearrangement**): *Prof. Tyler will be a guest-lecturer next week. I am to meet her at the airport.*
Root possibility

- *can* has the meaning ‘inherent possibility’
- **Ability**: *John can play the piano.*
  *Peter can work hard.*
- **Possibility**: *I can see the Monument from my kitchen window.*
- *May* always implies **positive presumption**: *They may be still at home.* (= it is possible that they should be at home.)
Might and could + Simple infinitive forms denote **vaguer positiveness** with reference to non-past situations:

They might be in Sofia today.

Might and could + Perfect infinitive forms denote **past situations** dependent upon some conditions and circumstances:

You might have caught the train, if you had taken a taxi to the station.

Inherent quality: **He can be very polite.**
‘willingness’ (also called *volition*)

- *Can/Could you pass the salt?* (used as a request)
- *Will/ Would you bring me an ice cream, please?* (used as a request)
- *Will you come to the party tomorrow?* (an invitation)
- *Will you stop that at once!* (an order)
*Shall* can express **the speaker’s determination:** *You shall regret this.***

*Shall* is also used in legal texts to define **rules and regulations:** *This Act shall not apply in relation to a contract entered into before the end of the period of 6 months...***

*Should* and *ought to* are used to express **moral duty** or **advice:**

*We should have studied harder.*

*You ought to stop drinking.*
# Root modality and negation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>I’ll write it.</strong></th>
<th><strong>I won’t write it.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘I am willing to write it’</td>
<td>‘I am <strong>not</strong> willing to write it’, ‘I <strong>refuse</strong> to write it’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>You should have written it.</strong></td>
<td><strong>You shouldn’t have written it.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘It would have been better if you had written it’</td>
<td>‘It would have been better if you had <strong>not</strong> written it’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note that *mustn’t* corresponds to the root *may*, whereas *don’t have to* corresponds to the root *must*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You may write it.</th>
<th>You mustn’t write it.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘I permit you to write it.’</td>
<td>‘I don’t permit you to write it’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You must write it.</td>
<td>You don’t have to write it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘You are obliged to write it.’</td>
<td>‘You are not obliged to write it.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mustn't denotes an obligation **not to do something**, for instance: *You mustn’t do it.*

*Needn’t* implies that there is **no necessity** for the subject to perform the action denoted by the full verb: *‘Must I attend the meeting? ’No, you needn’t.’*

*May* and *can* express **prohibition** in **negative** sentences:

*You may not smoke in my office.*

*You can’t go out tonight.*
The modal in a sentence is often ambiguous between the root and the epistemic sense.

- The subject of a root modal is normally animate. The root sense of a modal specifies what the subject is obliged, permitted, determined or able to do.

- The epistemic senses go well with the perfect (Possibility: He may have gone outside) and progressive (Possibility: He can be singing). The epistemic senses represent the sentence as certain, predictable and possible.
Marginal modal auxiliaries
Dare, need, used to

When they are used as modals, they have some characteristics which other modals do not have.

That's why they are sometimes called *marginal modal auxiliaries* or *semi-modals*. 
When *dare* and *need* are used as modals, they have the same meaning as when they are followed by a to-infinitive clause.

However, they are normally used as modals only in negative sentences and in questions. **Example:** Nobody dare disturb him. We needn’t worry about that.
Normally modals cannot be used with other modals.

- However, **dare** can be used with **will**, **would**, **should** and **might**: I wouldn’t dare go to the principal’s office.

- Unlike other modals **dare** can be used with the auxiliary verb **do**: We do not dare examine it.
Normally modals cannot be used with other modals

- **Used to** cannot be used with other modals. It is used to say that something happened regularly, although it no longer happens.

- **Used to** is similar to **would** when it is used to describe repeated actions in the past. **Ex.**: *I'm not quite as mad as I used to be.*

- **Used to** is not common in negative structures.
Mood - a verbal category expressing modality by morphological means

- Historically, it was a type of verb inflection, with the three forms indicative, subjunctive and imperative.

- Nowadays, most of the formal distinctions have been lost, and the three moods are chiefly recognized on the basis of their functions.
The Indicative Mood

- the ‘standard’ form of the verb
- capable of the full range of tense marking

- e.g. They have been playing football for an hour.
The Subjunctive Mood

- expresses a condition which is doubtful or not factual (hypothetical, or expressing a wish: If I were you, I wouldn’t do that. / They demanded that he do it. / So be it.
- verbs typically followed by clauses that take the subjunctive: ask, demand, determine, insist, move, order, pray, prefer, recommend, regret, request, require, suggest, and wish, e.g. I wish he were able to type faster. His requirement is that everyone be computer literate.
The present subjunctive is identical with the base form of the verb

- it can be distinguished from the present indicative only in 3 p. sg.
- only the verb *be* has a past subjunctive form, namely *were*
- Subjunctive: *I wish he were kinder to me.*
  Conditional: *I wish he would be kinder to me.*
The Imperative Mood

- used in imperative sentences for expressing commands, offers, advice, etc.: Put down your pencils! / Have some more cake! / Hit the ENTER key!

- Negative forms are formed with the auxiliary verb do: Don’t make me crazy! Don’t include this information in your presentation!

- combines with the auxiliaries be and get to express passive voice meaning: Be silent! Get prepared for school!
Special **emphasis** may be achieved by

- the auxiliary **do** *(Do come in!)*
- the personal pronoun **you**: **You stand up!**
- some **indefinite pronouns**: Don’t anyone close that door!
- some **distributive pronouns**: Everybody shut up!
To sum up

- ‘mood’ is a grammatical term
- ‘modality’ is a semantic term relating to the meanings that are usually associated with mood