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# The Use of Modals in Everyday English

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*Eastern Illinois University*

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THE USE OF MODALS IN

---

EVERYDAY ENGLISH

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(TITLE)

BY

HELEN WHITLOCK HOWE

B.A., Eastern Illinois University, 1974

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTERS OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
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1975

YEAR

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for the degree of Master of Arts in English  
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v

Finally to the State of Illinois and their Junior  
College System, which made it possible for me to begin  
my education close to home, I say thanks.

## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I will discuss the use of the modals might, could, should, and would as they are used in everyday English. I will attempt to show the meanings that are conveyed by them and any restrictions or constraints on their usage. There appear to be three types of meanings, or modalities, at work in their usage: Propositional, Logical, and also a Conditional. It is possible to isolate and define the Propositional and Logical Modalities. The Conditional Modality is more difficult to describe and carries a tone of uncertainty that I cannot explain. Although the Conditional will be mentioned from time to time in this thesis, I have been unable to account for it. When broken down into these modalities, some of the ambiguity generated in modal usage is diminished if not erased. An example of this ambiguity would be:

(1) I could do twenty push-ups.

It is possible that I will do twenty push-ups.  
I have the ability to do twenty push-ups.  
It was once possible and still is or isn't.  
I once had the ability and still do or don't.



The modals may, might, can, could, shall, should, will, and would have long been a source for disagreement among linguists.<sup>1</sup> This disagreement has included the category to which modals belong and also what their syntactic structure is. In clauses involving sequence of tense, they appear as modal pairs, present-tense and past-tense forms:

- (2) I think I may be late.  
 I thought I might be late.  
 I think I can help you.  
 I thought I could help you.  
 I think we shall win.  
 I thought we should win.  
 He thinks he will win.  
 He thought he would win.

The meanings of these pairs would remain constant since sequence of tense is a syntactic rule which doesn't affect meaning. In other usages the meanings of these pairs are not identical and they cannot be interchanged at will:

- (3) Mary \*can/could be your twin.<sup>2</sup>  
 \*shall/should

Linguists have tried to account for the modal discrepancies in various ways.

The traditionalists referred to the modal group as modal auxiliaries or helping verbs.<sup>3</sup> Syntactically these words would precede verb stems and give special shades of meaning like futurity, volition, possibility,

probability, permission, and necessity.

- (4) I shall leave tomorrow.  
 He might be reelected.  
 She can read two books a day.

Traditionalists said that modals could not be classified as full verbs because they did not fit three or more of the five slots in the verb paradigm, since at best they had only a stem, or present-tense, and past-tense form.

The generative-transformationalists are split in their treatment of modals. The generative-interpretivists, like Chomsky and Jackendoff, place modals in a separate category and do not consider them to be 'true' verbs. Chomsky (1957) classified modals as part of the Auxiliary, following tense and preceding aspect:

- (5) S-        NP    VP  
 VP-        Aux - MV - (manner) (place) (time) (reason)  
 Aux-        Tense (Modal) (have en) (be ing)

Jackendoff (1972) distinguished between modals and 'true' verbs and continued to classify them as part of the Auxiliary, following tense, while making aspect a part of the Verb Phrase. The four main reasons Jackendoff gave for not classifying modals as verbs were:

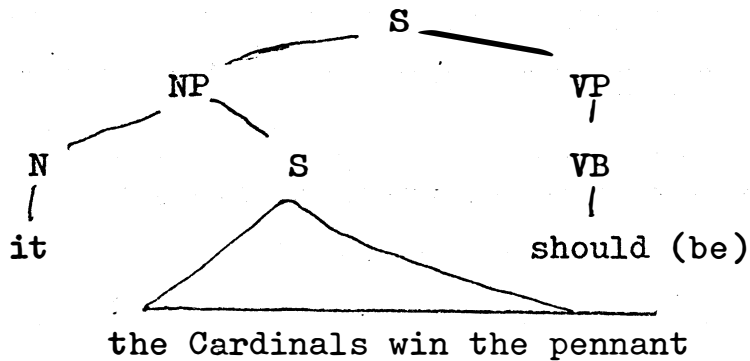
- (6) 1. Modals don't undergo number agreement, though all verbs do.  
 2. Modals don't appear together.  
 3. Modals don't appear in gerunds and infinitives.  
 4. Modals differ from all main verbs but be and some uses of have in that they undergo subject-aux inversion, precede not and block do-support.

The generative semanticists, like McCawley and Ross, consider modals to be 'true' verbs and McCawley (1974) countered the reasoning of Jackendoff with the following arguments:

- (7) 1. Modals can undergo number agreement. Everyone is familiar with combinations like thou canst, thou mayst. Since the term thou is archaic in most dialects, these combinations are no longer used, but when people are exposed to thou, they have no difficulty in placing the agreement marker on a modal. Nothing more is involved than learning that thou takes -st as its agreement marker.
2. Modals are always followed by verbs in the infinitive form. Since modals have no infinitive form, they cannot appear in this construction.
3. This distinction, as well as the preceding one, are the result of the defective paradigm of English modals. Since, at most, modals have only the present and past tense form, these reasons are special cases of generalization which is a matter of morphology rather than syntax. He feels the paradigm of modals need not be accommodated by special treatment in the base rules.
4. Since two 'true' verbs are used to show this difference between modals and 'true' verbs, the irregularity should be settled by a minor rule setting up structural differences to condition the way it is handled, and not be a category distinction.

Both McCawley and Ross (1968) have offered extensive proof that modals are not auxiliaries but are sentential embedding predicates. The surface forms are derived by Extraposition or by Subject Raising. The following is an example of how this would be done.

(8) The Cardinals should win the pennant.



DS: it the Cardinals win the pennant should (be)

Extraposition: it should be the Cardinals win ...

Complementizer: it should be that the Cardinals ...

Subject Raising: The Cardinals should win the pennant.

Subject Raising involves moving the subject of a lower sentence into subject position of a higher sentence:

(9) It could be that Jane bakes cookies.  
Jane could bake cookies.

It should be that the Cardinals win the pennant.  
The Cardinals should win the pennant.

I find myself in agreement with the generative semanticists and modals will be treated as 'true' verbs in this paper instead of auxiliary verbs.

In discussing the meanings (modalities) conveyed by the modals, I will use the framework as set up by Ransom (1974) in her doctoral thesis. This frame divides the Propositional Modality into four constructions:

(10) Truth

President Ford might/could be in Washington today.  
should/would

Future Truth

Ford might/could be a presidential candidate in '76.  
should/would

Occurrence

Ford might/could slip on the wet ramp.  
should/would

Power

The people @might/could reelect Ford as President.<sup>4</sup>  
should/would

The meanings of these modalities are "about" the truth of a proposition, the occurrence of an event, or the control of an act.<sup>5</sup>

The Logical Modality is a part of the Propositional Modality and involves the degree of necessity and possibility present. Many linguists have explained the ambiguity in modal usage as being caused by the epistemic and deontic meanings of possibility and necessity.<sup>6</sup> The epistemic meaning involves knowledge as to the possibility or necessity of something being true or something occurring:

- (11) It must be 3 o'clock.  
It should be 3 o'clock.  
It may be 3 o'clock.

The deontic meaning involves obligation, intention or permission:

- (12) He must leave immediately.  
I should leave immediately.  
You may leave immediately.

The epistemic meaning is reflected in the Truth, Future Truth, and Occurrence constructions, while the deontic

meaning is reflected in the Power construction, which also includes the "abilitive" meaning. The range of meaning of "possibility" and "necessity" could be based on a scale such as:

(13)

might	could	should	would
possible	'strong' possibility	'weak' necessity	necessary

Might and could are the "possibility" modals and would and should are the "necessity" modals as will be shown in the following examples:

(14) Truth and Possibility

He might/could be Jane's brother.

It is possible/strongly possible that he is ...

\*He is permitted to be Jane's brother.

Truth and Necessity

He should/would be Jane's brother because they look alike.

It is "weakly" necessary/necessary that he is ...

\*He is obligated or intends to be Jane's brother.

Future Truth and Possibility

The blue bowl might/could be an antique in twenty years.

It is possible/strongly possible that the blue ...

\*Someone will permit the blue bowl to be ...

Future Truth and Necessity

The blue bowl should/would be an antique in twenty years.

It is weakly necessary/necessary that the blue...

\*It is obligatory that the blue bowl will be ...

Occurrence and Possibility

She might/could receive first prize.

It is possible/strongly possible that she receive...

\*She is permitted to receive first prize.

Occurrence and Necessity

She should/would receive first prize.  
 It is weakly necessary/necessary that she receive ...  
 \*She is obligated to receive first prize.

Power and Possibility

You \*might/could leave at noon and arrive in time.<sup>7</sup>  
 It is possible for you to leave at noon ...  
 You are able to leave at noon...

Power and Necessity

He should/would show respect for his elders.  
 It is weakly necessary/necessary that he show ...  
 He is weakly obligated/intends to show ...

In these examples both might and could can be paraphrased with, "It is possible that..." and both should and would with, "It is necessary that..." Therefore, might and could will be considered the "possibility" modals and should and would will be considered the "necessity" modals.

## CHAPTER II

## MEANINGS OF MODALS

Before comparing the modals, the constructions of the Propositional Modality must be further explained. Only the basic information will be given here and the additional information for individual modals will be given in the separate modal discussions.

The Power modality deals with controllable acts. The embedded verb must be interpretable as controllable and its subject must be capable of doing the controlling:

- (1) That child @ might/could leave.  
                   should/would @  
   @sneeze.  
   @be tall.  
   @be male.

"Leaving" or "staying" can be interpreted as a controllable act, whereas "sneezing," "being tall," or "being male" cannot.

- (2) The pickets could           leave to avoid trouble.  
                                   should/would  
       I could                    confess to avoid prosecution.  
                   should/would

When the "possibility" modal could is used in this construction, the meaning becomes "permission" if control is by another, and "ability" if control is retained by the subject. The "necessity" modals should and would



convey the meaning of someone being responsible for his own or for another's acts.

The Occurrence modality is "about" the occurrence of events or acts and the embedded verb must be interpretable as an event or act.

- (3) That child might/could be taken by surprise.  
       should/would       @sneeze.  
                           @be tall.  
                           @be male.

"Being taken by surprise" and "sneezing" can be interpreted as events or acts, but "being tall" or "being a male" cannot be. Thus the first two would be occurrence while the last two would not.

The Future Truth modality is "about" the truth of events, acts, or changeable states, that they will be true or false in the future.

- (4) That child might/could be tall when it is grown.  
       should/would       sneeze when it is grown.  
                           @leave when it is grown.  
                           @be a male when it is grown.

Again, "being tall," "sneezing," and "leaving" can be interpreted as an event, act, or changeable state, but "being male" cannot be. Might and could both mean "It is possible that child will be tall when he is grown" because his family consists of many tall people or because he is growing at a rapid rate now. Should and would mean "It is weakly necessary or necessary that the child will be tall" because of some reason.

The Truth modality is "about" the truth of states, events, or acts, whether they are true or false.

- (5) That child might/could be a male.  
                   should/would be tall.  
                                   sneeze.  
                                   leave.

Might and could both mean, "It is possible that child is a male," whether he is a male or isn't a male.

Should and would mean, "It is necessary that child is a male," because of the way it is dressed, what it is doing, etc. There is a certain amount of overlapping between Truth, Future Truth, and Occurrence but in most cases the interpretation can be narrowed. For example-- many constructions will fit the requirements for Truth as well as the others, but "be a male" fits only those requirements of Truth. I will attempt to use narrowed examples in my individual modal discussions.

In order to show the modalities of the past-tense modals, it is most interesting to compare them with their present-tense forms. This will be the format of the individual modal discussions. The "possibility" modals, might and could, and the "necessity" modals, should and would, will be discussed separately and then compared within each construction.

## POSSIBILITY MODALS

## POWER MODALITY

## Might vs May

- (6) Jane may/<sup>@</sup>might swim this afternoon.  
John may/<sup>@</sup>might leave.

In both of these examples may will function as "permission" but might will not. A better example would be:

- (7) Citizens may/<sup>@</sup>might register to vote when 18.  
Students may/<sup>@</sup>might keep beer in the dorm.

Only may shows the Power sense of permission. Might shows only that it is possible for the proposition to be true. This is also seen in negated sentences:

- (8) A convicted felon may not/<sup>@</sup>might not vote.

As mentioned earlier, might can be used when sequence of tense is involved:

- (9) Mother said Jane might swim today.

I think even in this situation, could is the modal that is most frequently used.

## Could vs Can

- (10) John can/could leave to avoid trouble.  
Jane can/could swim to regain her strength.

Both can and could clearly show the "ability" sense of Power. In the other examples:

- (11) Citizens can/could register to vote when 18.  
Students can/could keep beer in the dorm.

can clearly shows "ability" as well as "permission" while could conveys the meaning "in the past, but not now." If a phrase is added:

(12) Because of a new law, citizens could register ... the past time connotation is lessened and the time appears to include the present. This clause isn't needed in the negated sentence:

(13) A convicted felon can't/couldn't vote. Could clearly functions in this construction and is used to convey "permission" as frequently as may in most dialects. Because might does not function in this modality, no comparison of the modals is needed.

#### OCCURRENCE MODALITY

##### Might vs May

(14) That child may/might be found by noon.  
Jane may/might be taken by surprise.

Both may and might work in this construction and they could be interchanged with no meaning modification.

The only meaning is "weak possibility."

##### Could vs Can

(15) That child can/could be found by noon.  
Jane can/could be taken by surprise.

Can carries a very definite tone while could seems more conditional. When a conditional clause is added, could becomes as definite as can:

(16) That child can/could be found by noon if we all look for it.

When compared with might, could shows a much stronger sense of "possibility":

- (17) The train might/could arrive on time if the track is repaired.

There is a strange thing going on with could in this modality. In sentences like:

- (18) We might/could hear the music from across the lake.  
open the boxes without any tools.

might remains future occurrence and retains its "possible" meaning, but could can be either past or future occurrence.

The sentences can be passivized and the ambiguity remains:

- (19) The music might/could be heard from across the lake.  
The boxes might/could be opened without any tools.

If a phrase is added to make it future, such as:

- (20) I'll bet the music could be heard...

the ambiguity is erased. I have no explanation for this.

#### FUTURE TRUTH MODALITY

##### Might vs May

- (21) That child may/might be tall next year.  
It may/might be sunny tomorrow.

Again these modals have identical meanings and could be interchanged with no meaning modification. The only reading would be "weakly possible."

##### Could vs Can

- (22) That @child @can/could be tall next year.  
It @can/could be sunny tomorrow.

Can will not function in this modality but can't will.

- (23) That child can't be tall next year.  
It can't be sunny tomorrow.

Could continues to have a meaning of "strong possibility" which is increased with the addition of a clause:

- (24) That child could be tall next year if he takes after his father.  
It could be sunny tomorrow according to the forecast.

Might and could carry the "possibility" meanings when compared, with could showing the stronger "possibility."

Many times in the use of could, there seems to be an implied condition that more information is known than is being given:

- (25) That building might/could be finished by Thursday.  
That dress might/could be altered for a better fit.

#### TRUTH MODALITY

Might vs May

- (26) That child may/might be a male.  
That cake may/might be stale.

These modals have identical meanings in my dialect and could be used interchangeably. Both seem to carry very little conviction that the statement is true.

Could vs Can

- (27) That child<sup>@</sup> can/could be a male.  
That cake<sup>@</sup> can/could be stale.

Can will not function in this modality for the same reason it will not function in Future Truth. Could functions in the usual way showing "strong possibility."

Might and could have the usual comparison.

- (28) That dog might/could be pedigreed.  
That book might/could be a first edition.

In my dialect, might is hardly more than a notion, an idea based on few, if any, facts, while could appears to be an opinion, based on some knowledge or background.

This concludes the discussion and comparison of the "possibility" modals may, might, can, and could. In discussing the "necessity" modals, must will be included with shall, should, will, and would. One further point should be made before beginning the comparison. In most dialects, shall is used in first person while will is used in second and third persons:

- (29) I shall leave at noon.  
       You will leave at noon.  
       He will leave at noon.

When shall is used in any construction other than first person, it traditionally carries an obligation. The same is true of will when used in first person:

- (30) He shall be home by midnight.  
       You shall do as you're told.  
       I will do as I please.

#### NECESSITY MODALS

#### POWER MODALITY

Should vs Shall and Must

- (31) John shall/should/must leave (to avoid trouble).  
       I shall/should/must tell him the answer.

Shall shows "intention" and "obligation" in this construction, dependent on person, while should conveys "weak obligation" and must, "strong obligation." I

am able to interpret these meanings without a clause, but I believe a clause normally is used, at least with shall and should.

#### Will vs Would

- (32) John will/would leave (to avoid trouble.)  
I will/would tell him the answer (to help him.)

Will and would both show "intention" or "volition."

Will seems to imply that the decision is made and the action begun while would suggests a doubtful condition, that it is necessary for the action to be done but no assurance that it will be. Would seems to require a clause for clarity in all constructions.

#### OCCURRENCE MODALITY

##### Should vs Shall and Must

- (33) The child shall/should/must be found by noon.  
The train shall/should/must arrive on time.

Each of these modals has a significantly different meaning in this construction. Shall and must both show "necessity" for the event to happen, although must is much stronger. Should shows the expected meaning of "weak necessity." These modals could not be interchanged without some modification of meaning.

##### Will vs Would

- (34) The child will/would be found by noon.  
The train will/would arrive on time.

Will and would are not interchangeable as will doesn't have any meaning except "necessity" while would has a



sense of condition present in its meaning. With the addition of a clause:

- (35) I know the child will/would be found by noon if everyone looks.  
John will/would sneeze if he looks at the sun.

the meanings become more nearly the same, but still not identical.

In comparison, should shows "weakly necessary" while would shows "necessary." A clause is necessary to compare the modals.

- (36) The train should/would arrive on time if the tracks are fixed.

#### FUTURE TRUTH MODALITY

Should vs Shall and Must

- (37) That child shall/should/@ must be tall next year.  
It shall/should/@ must be sunny tomorrow.

Must will not function in this modality. Shall functions strangely, if at all, since it would require knowledge of the future which isn't normally present. Should has the expected meaning of "weak necessity" which is not present in either must or shall.

Would vs Will

- (38) That child will/would be tall next year.  
It will/would be sunny tomorrow.

Will has the same problem as shall in this construction, which is not surprising. Would will function only with a clause:

- (39) That child would be tall next year if it takes vitamins.

I believe should is the word most frequently used to express necessary future truth without a clause.

(40) He should/would be elected in '76.

#### TRUTH MODALITY

Should vs Shall and Must

(41) That child<sup>@</sup> shall/should/must be a male.  
That cake<sup>@</sup> shall/should/must be stale.

Shall will not function in this modality. Should and must function although must doesn't carry the "necessary" truth meaning as strongly as in the other constructions.

Would vs Will

(42) That child<sup>@</sup> will/would be a male.  
That cake<sup>@</sup> will/would be stale.

Will cannot function in this modality. Would functions if it has a clause for clarity.

(43) That cake would be stale if it was baked Friday.  
That dog would be pedigreed if it cost \$400.

When compared with should, would clearly needs a clause to express this modality:

(44) That child should/would be a male.  
That cake should/would be stale.

As I have mentioned before, would frequently requires a clause. The Conditional meaning which I have been unable to explain is present in sentences containing would more often than those containing the other modals.

## CHAPTER III

## RESTRICTIONS

Tense - Aspect - Time

In the Truth Modality, all times present, past, and future can be expressed.

- (1) Julie might/could bake cookies now/tomorrow.  
should/would

Julie might/could have baked the cookies yesterday./  
should/would today/  
tomorrow

so they would be fresh.

Julie might/could be baking cookies now/tomorrow.  
should/would

Because the Future Truth is restricted to the future time, both aspect and tense must represent the future time.

In the Occurrence Modality, present and future tense give the reading of "capable of happening" and past tense gives the reading of "capable of happening but not happening or hasn't happened yet so far as the speaker knows."

- (2) She might/could be found today/tomorrow.  
should/would

She might/could have been found today/tomorrow/  
should/would yesterday.

He might/could tune his fiddle today/tomorrow.  
should/would  
have tuned his fiddle yesterday/  
today/tomorrow.

Past time constructions either negate the "possibility" or "necessity" readings, or make the event a past occurrence.

The Power Modality will only function with future time since there is no control of an action which is in progress or completed.

(3) He could/ should/ would leave right now/in an hour/@yesterday.

Because of the time restriction, aspect and tense would be restricted to future time.

#### Complementizers

In the Truth, Future Truth and Occurrence Modalities, each of these modals will function with a "that" complementizer except would. All will function with Subject Raising and no complementizer in all four modalities.

(4) Truth

It might/could be that politicians are honest.  
should/would

Politicians might/could be honest.  
should/would

#### Future Truth

It might/could be that Ford will lose in '76.  
should/would

Ford might/could lose in '76.  
should/would

Occurrence

It might/could be that Bob plays the banjo.  
should/@would

Bob might/could play the banjo.  
should/would

Power

It @could/@should/@would be that I will tell  
.him the answer.

I could/would/should tell him the answer.

It is not possible to get a Power reading with a "that"  
complementizer.

## CHAPTER IV

## MODAL USAGE IN NORMAL CONVERSATION

Earlier I mentioned the seeming ambiguity that is found in modal usage. Although more than one meaning can be seen, both the speaker and the hearer usually know what is being conveyed in normal conversation. This is due in part to certain assumptions that are always present in conversation, some dealing with politeness and some with the information being presented. Robin Lakoff (1971) offered some of these assumptions based on her work and also on the work of Grice (1968) and Gordon and Lakoff (1971).<sup>8</sup> Those dealing with information are:

- (1) 1. What is being communicated is true.
2. It is necessary to make the statement: it is not known or utterly obvious to other participants. Everything necessary for the hearer to understand is present.
3. The speaker assumes the hearer will believe what he hears. (Based on 1)
4. With questions, the speaker assumes that he will receive a reply.
5. With orders, he assumes he will be obeyed.

She also offered some assumptions present in conversation that deal with politeness. These are:

- (2) 1. Don't impose; remain aloof.

2. Allow the addressee his options.
3. Act as though you and the addressee are equal.

I believe that in normal conversation, modal usage clearly reflects a combination of these rules.

Since beginning my research for this paper, my ears have become attuned to modals, and I find myself trying to categorize a usage instead of continuing a conversation. This has, on occasion, been embarrassing, but it has also been informative. In order to analyze this usage, it is necessary to know the relationship of the speakers and the context of the statements. I recently spent a few hours with eight women, planning a Summer program for the Girl Scout troop. I found myself making more notes on modal usage than camp. When I reviewed my notes, I found that a previous assumption now appeared to be true. There is often a greater difference in meaning between two uses of a single modal than similar uses of different modals. The following examples are taken from the conversation at this meeting, with only minor changes. I believe they prove my point.

(3) MIGHT:

- a. This might turn out to be the best camp we have ever had.

(This is Possible-Future Truth)

b. The Brownie group might enjoy the cooking more than the cleaning up.

(This is Possible-Future Truth, but facetious usage. Brownies enjoy everything more than they enjoy cleaning up.)

c. You might have given me a chance to refuse.

(This is Possible-Truth, but facetious. It meant "You didn't give me a chance...")

d. You might be sorry you ever got involved in this.

(Again Possible-Truth, but the meaning is the one usually associated with should.)

(4) COULD:

a. The chaos of last year's camp could be due to lack of supervision.

(This is Possible-Truth, but the motive for modal usage was politeness. We all knew the reason for the chaos.)

b. The younger girls could never complete a four mile hike.

(This is Possible-Power, Ability.)

c. Could you speak a little louder please?

(This is Possible-Power, Politeness.)

d. Could you furnish the large pans again?  
Could you lend us your big tent?

(In questions during polite discourse, could usually means will.)

(5) SHOULD:

a. The older girls should accept the responsibility.

(This is Necessary-Power, Obligation.)

b. I should say not!

(This is Necessary-Power, an unequivocal "no".)

c. The participants should all be girls.

(This is Necessary-Truth, but also Power-Obligation, more nearly akin to must.)



d. Should she get the opportunity, she will disagree.

(This is Necessary-Future Truth.)

(6) WOULD:

a. Transportation would be your responsibility.

(This is Necessary-Future Truth.)

b. These are your problems, you would be leader.

(This is Necessary-Power, volition.)

c. Would you supervise the clean up chores?  
Would you please call the other mothers?

(Like could, would also is used as a request.)

Although some of these examples clearly reflect the normal modal usage, the one that is expected, others just as clearly do not. It seems obvious that modals do not always follow the accepted rules, yet any six year old can use them and know what he is saying and what is being said to him.

## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis I have tried to show the meanings conveyed by the modals might, could, should, and would. I have shown that in meaning, they are much more than past-tense forms of may, can, shall, and will. I also believe I have shown that by breaking them down into the Propositional and Logical Modality, the actual meaning in their usage becomes clearer and some of the ambiguity generated in modal usage is erased. I further believe that the reason so little research has been done on modals in the past is because their usage does not always reflect their actual meaning.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>This group might also include the semi-modals like ought to, have to, dare to, need to, etc., but they will not be discussed in this paper.

<sup>2</sup>The asterisk \* will be used to denote an ungrammatical sentence.

<sup>3</sup>These were also called defective verbs, those which lack one or more of their principal parts, and verb markers, because they signal that a verb will follow. This information is from English Grammar and Composition, Rand, McNally & Co., 1898.

<sup>4</sup>This symbol @ will be used to show examples that, while grammatical, do not reflect the meaning that is being presented.

<sup>5</sup>For an explanation of the use of this term "about", see Morgan, 1973.

<sup>6</sup>Extensive work has been done on the deontic and epistemic, or logical, meaning by Horn (1972), Boyd and Thorne (1969), Karttunen (1971), and Huddleston (1971). Karttunen recommended that a distinction should be made between the epistemic and logical meanings in modals since he saw this as frequently a cause of ambiguity. Huddleston found five epistemic meanings for may, based on the range of meaning in "possibility."

<sup>7</sup>Might will only function in this construction when tense agreement is involved.

Mother says I may spend the night.  
Mother said I might spend the night.

All other uses of might show only "possibility".

He might leave to avoid trouble.  
He might confess to avoid prosecution.

<sup>8</sup>Robin Lakoff, Language in Context, p. 12.

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