

RECENT MODIFICATIONS OF THE FUNCTIONAL AND COMMUNICATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF ENGLISH MODALS

У статті розглянуто основні тенденції розвитку функціональних та комунікативних властивостей сучасних англійських модальних дієслів у контексті соціально-дискурсивних змін. Відзначено три напрямки соціально-мотивованих змін: специфікація функціональності, розвиток нових комунікативних функцій та зміни в частотності ужитку. Основні поняття: модальне дієслово, дискурс, соціальна мотивація, функціональні і комунікативні характеристики, комунікативний контекст.

The group of present-day English modals is a specific formation marked by semantic, morphological, functional and communicative peculiarities. Though grammatical elements of the language norm are usually relatively stable, the modals are constantly and steadily developing and changing their qualities. This development may concern some reordering (rearrangement) within the group of the modals, or some changes in their semantic, functional and communicative features. The aim of the paper is to show the influence of the changes in socio-linguistic attitudes on the communicative and functional features of the Modern English verbs.

Basically, the modals stand apart from the rest of the English verbs, being an important lexical-grammatical means of expressing modality. Diachronically this modal meaning was the dominant motive in the formation of the group in Middle English and Early New English. Later, the priority in their development lay in the evolution and complication of their semantic and functional characteristics.

In present-day English the usage of the modals is mostly determined not only by their modal meaning, but also by their communicative function in discourse. They can show more precisely logical, social (interactive), emotional aspects of communication and, consequently may be looked on as signals of the speaker's communicative intentions to indicate such elementary speech acts as requests, prohibition, permission, etc. In this case the choice of the verb mostly depends on the social situation and on the components of the communicative context, such as degree of formality, the nature of the relationship between the speaker and the addressee since the linguistic behaviour of individual members of the speech community is individualistic, full of variation of attitudes according to such factors as topic of discourse, social relationship to the addressee, channel of communication, the size and the nature of the audience and such like. In that way all the usages of the modals are communicatively oriented to discourse and their use depends much on the social interrelations in which speakers of English are involved, on their social status, their education and their wish for advancement. Today, when social factors are among of the most powerful determinants of language use, the modals have really become an important vehicle for the socially conscious communication of feelings and emotions, instructions and advice, permission and requests, prohibition, suggestion and offers in the daily interactions of members of the speech community, so that only the individual components of the social situation can help to interpret the message. Accordingly actual functioning of the modals can be subjected to clearly visible changes as it is easily affected by the changeable character of discourse, by the changes in the social-linguistic attitudes of speakers of English. Generally, a linguistic convention in discourse and speech acts reflects the conventions of culture and the changes of the different discursal features shown easily in the changes of the functional characteristics of the language patterns in use. Most vividly the changeable character of discourse is seen in the mobility of the social imperative usages of the modals that rapidly react to the changes of the social-linguistic conventions, such as the relative social tolerance, the wish to more democratic social behaviour, which begin to dominate in the speech community. The passage of time has seen a social revolution in Britain, which affected the linguistic behaviour of speakers of English when a more pragmatic socio-linguistic sense that marked a shift in language attitudes developed. In the meantime, it is the middle class generally that forges ahead, setting the trend linguistically as well as in other domains of social behaviour [1]. The process of establishing new, social attitudes is very slow but nevertheless the results can be visible in the present-day trends in the usage of the modals. The tendency to a less formal, more democratic social behaviour affects the basic language patterns with the modals used in the socio-linguistic interaction, changing or marking more specific and restricted the communicative role of the modals as specifically-fixed signals of the communicative intentions of the speaker in discourse. Thus, for example, the modal verb 'can' has become an active synonym to 'may' to signal such elementary speech acts as permission request, asking for permission, suggestion, reproach [2;3;4;5;6;7;8]. The usage of 'can' to show permission, earlier marked as spoken and informal, is now considered to be the commonest way of giving general and personal permission and is found in standard spoken English and in official situations alike. This usage of 'may' becomes more peripheral as it is mostly restricted to formal situations or is used in formal writing. One reason for this alternation can be named here with some understandable proximity: the usage of 'may' for giving permission carries the authority of the speaker, which is usually avoided in present-day discourse because of the implied idea of domination or personal authority. The use of 'may' in the imperative usages can also signal the class status of the speaker when the voice of authority is admired or respected. It is clear that because of this implication 'may' is preferred in written regulations and rules in which the role of authority becomes socially important.

Almost the same difference in the usages of 'can' and 'may' is observed when these verbs are used for asking permission and requests. 'Can' is acceptable in most forms of spoken and written English and is more common than the structures with 'may'. This use of 'may' is considered very formal and often suggests social respect. So children often use 'may' when speaking to adults. Though 'can' and 'may' can be interchangeable, a discursive restriction is sometimes imposed on the usage of 'may' which, for instance, is usually avoided in asking for general permission, something which is normally allowed. Compare: Can you take your pet mice to school? [9]. The usage of the subjunctive form 'might', marked as British English, is found in tactful, discreet requests for permission, sometimes with strong implication of diffidence, hesitation or exaggerated politeness which is thought obsequious today. This usage is felt as old-fashioned, even outdated by some speakers of English.

Informal requests are usually signalled by the use of 'can', the form 'could' makes the request more polite and tactful. The degree of politeness and formality can be increased by using special patterns with the verb 'can', such as Do you think I can (could); I wonder if you could; Is there any possibility that you could. On the contrary, the informal character of 'can' is intensified in the negative structures which function as rhetorical questions. The form 'may' in interrogative patterns is not usual for requests in today's usage. It becomes quite rare because it is marked by the high degree of formality of the communicative context or sounds most hesitant and respectful. In this case the subjunctive form 'might' is preferred, though this usage appears to be also restricted: grammatically, as it is found mostly in statements; and communicatively, as it often carries a more imperative character of request. Besides, this usage seems to be more British than American. Compare: While you're out you might post the letter for me.

Both verbs are used to make suggestions and offers. 'May' is used only in the subjunctive form in British English in situations when the speaker wants to suggest to other people what they should do, whereas 'can' and its subjunctive form 'could' are more common for making suggestions in the situations when shared activities that include the speaker are suggested. Still, 'could' can be used in the same way as 'might'. Compare: You might like to try a little more basil in the sauce next time; We could go for a drink after work tomorrow, if you like; You could always try painting the wall a paler colour and see if that looks any better [10]. In offers 'may' is rather formal and polite, whereas 'can' has become synonymous to the use of the modal 'shall'. Compare: Shall/can I make you a cup of coffee?

Rather a new development is the usage of 'can' in the subjunctive form 'could' to show the speaker's annoyance, irritation and reproach at somebody else's action. At present it is interchangeable with the subjunctive form of the verb 'may', though 'might' can imply irony and the criticism of other people's actions when the speaker suggests, especially angrily what other people should do to be pleasant, correct and polite. These implications make the use of 'might' restricted because in some communicative contexts it is not considered polite.

So, the general tendency in developing social, interactive usages of 'can' and 'may' shows that the modal verb 'may' tends to become less usual or more formal, more polite and respectful. 'Can' becomes more common in all social usages, acquiring some new communicative functions in the interaction. The modal verb 'can' steadily receives a socially neutral character of functioning and becomes the commonest way of showing the socially conscious behaviour of the speaker. In all the cases the speaker can grade his attitude to the people he is addressing through the usage of these verbs as mild or persistent, categorical or non-categorical, formal or informal, neutral or ironical. The variety of discursive features is the main factor that determines the deepening specification in functioning of all the modals. This is also quite evident in rearranging of other modals, not only 'may' and 'can', in their social usages. Thus the increased specification characterizes the usage of the modals 'can', 'may', 'must', 'to be to', 'shall', 'should', 'ought to', 'will' to express prohibition.

In present-day usage 'can' is one of the most usual ways of expressing prohibition. It is accepted in most forms of English and is thought to be more friendly than 'may' in written regulations. 'May' is preferred in very formal writing such as official instructions, formal regulations (written or oral). 'Must' expresses strong, almost absolute and categorical prohibition, almost a negative command which has the effect of forbidding an action. The speaker himself forbids the action by his own authority or he states a prohibition which he supports or it is a prohibition which reflects external authority (documents, public notices). 'To be to' is another way of showing strong prohibition given by some official authorities. Parents often tell their children not to do things in this way. Negative structures with 'shall' may acquire the meaning strong prohibition in British English. 'Shall' is usually used today to say rather formally that a particular thing is not allowed to. It is rather negative obligation with the general effect of prohibition. Consequently 'shall' is often found in written rules, regulations, laws, and agreements. 'Should' and 'ought to' are used almost interchangeably in all communicative contexts, though they may also be used to show prohibition as a bit of advice not to do a certain thing; to show that action is unacceptable or understandable. This is the widest way of giving prohibition, though this usage is found especially in British English. 'Will' in negative structures shows very firm prohibition involving some authority. Compare: You can't go swimming; The goalkeeper can't handle the ball outside the penalty area; Children can't bathe except in the presence of two lifesavers; Persons under 14 unaccompanied by an adult may not enter; This letter must not be shown to anyone else; Cars must not park in front of the entrance; You are not to speak to strangers, Jimmy; The school rules state that no child shall be allowed out of the school during the day, unless accompanied by an adult; You ought to waste money on smoking; You should not exceed the speed limit; Bad language will not be tolerated; I'll just go upstairs – You will not.

On the whole 'can' for giving prohibition, has become nearly as strong as 'mustn't', carrying the idea that something is prohibited and there is no choice, it is against the law. 'Must' in negative structures is considered to show subjunctive prohibition. It also conveys absolute prohibition which can't be avoided because it is supported by some author-

ity or because there is no choice. Contrary to this, the negative structures with 'can' are preferred in the situations where the severity of prohibition should be avoided or where the implication of a speaker-imposed negative command is not desirable.

Thus, the functional characteristics of the modals used to show prohibition also have become more specialized helping the speaker to actualize her/his communicative intentions in discourse more precisely and to signal them to the listener, to the audience, more effectively.

The influence of the social motivation can also be seen in the changes of the functional and communicative characteristics of the modals 'should' and 'ought to', which have become almost interchangeable in giving advice, prohibition, reproach, though 'should' is more usual. The modal 'to have to' less formal 'to have got to' can now be found in the synonymic usage to 'must' in complaints and in giving advice. Compare: Why must you be always meddling? Why do you always have to put things so crudely? You simply must see this play. It's so wonderful. You simply have to get a new job; You must go and see the new Spielberg movie, the special effects are amazing; You've got to try this recipe it's delicious.

Changes in the functional characteristics of the modals are also observed in their inferential usages, for example, the verbs 'can (could)', 'to have (got) to' and, which is even more significant, in their semantic differentiation, for example, 'must' and 'to have (got) to' in the present-time contexts.

Almost all of these changes go within the literary norm and are accepted by grammarians. So far as the perspective of the further development of the morphological features of the modals is concerned, it is interesting to note the appearance of the perfect form of the infinitive after 'to have to' in American usage. This usage, though occasional, together with increased semantic specification of 'to have to' may signify the acceptance of the modal not only as a grammatical substitute for the deficient forms of 'must', but also as another independent modal verb to express necessity. Compare: You almost had to have been there to understand, she replied (Eddings); Although 'Venus and Adonis' was the first composition to which the name Shakespeare was appended, it had to have been preceded by less mature verse (Charlton Ogburn) [11].

In conclusion, it is quite possible to say that the present-day trends in changing language attitudes result in noticeable changes and modification of the semantic, functional and communicative features of the modals. These changes are manifested mainly in three main directions determined by social motivation: a) semantic differentiation and the specification of the usage; b) the appearance of new communicative functions; c) the changes in the frequency of occurrences. In future it seems to be quite useful to further investigate into the nature of the socio-linguistic changes which determine the development of communicative and functional features of linguistic elements.

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Евченко В.В. Изменение функциональных и коммуникативных характеристик современных английских модальных глаголов.

Предметом статьи является рассмотрение основных параметров изменения функциональных и коммуникативных характеристик модальных глаголов современного английского языка в зависимости от социально обусловленных изменений условий дискурса.

Yevchenko V.V. Recent Modifications of the Functional and Communicative Characteristics of English Modals.

The article deals with the present-day trends in changes and modification of the functional and communicative features of the English modals. These changes are manifested mainly in three main directions which are determined by the changes in social attitudes.