



We should, we must, or we have to learn modal verbs: new approaches to teaching modals in efl class

Revista Publicando, 5 No 18. (1) 2018, 96-104. ISSN 1390-9304

We should, we must, or we have to learn modal verbs: new approaches to teaching modals in efl class

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ABSTRACT

When communicating with others, people not only exchange information but also express their attitude to it, which is indicated by the category of modality in the language. While speaking or writing, a person makes a proposal and formulates an idea that he wants to transmit to the addressee. He messages his personal vision of the world using various linguistic means in order to create a certain impact on the communicant. Therefore, in our opinion, the study of this language phenomenon should be a must in teaching EFL. In linguistics, there has not been found consensus on the determining of the concept of modality so far. However, the viewpoint that modality is a feature of the language that allows a speaker to express general intentions as well as the speaker's commitment to how believable, obligatory, desirable, or actual an expressed proposition is shared by both linguists and educators. Thorough study of this grammatical phenomenon is of great importance, for the comprehension of the nature of modality guarantees the perception of the speaker or writer's message and provides a window to understanding the target language. The main purpose of our research was to develop new approaches to teaching modals in EFL class aimed at:- mastering the scientific concept of modality by students;- devising teaching tips with the use of creative techniques. The research enabled us to apply elaborated teaching techniques in the English language classroom. The devised teaching tips can be applied at any level of high school students' proficiency in EFL class. The obtained results of the research can be recommended for English teachers of high schools.

Keywords: category of modality, creative teaching technique, feature of the language, grammatical phenomenon, linguistic means.



INTRODUCTION

Why do people from similar backgrounds while communicating with each other on the same topic construct different meanings? They do talk about the same issue but they also express their attitude to it. Communicants message their personal vision of the subject. It might be true, it might be wrong. Anyway, the addressee has to comprehend the message. In the language, a person's attitude to the utterance is indicated by the category of modality. This article addresses the problem such as this and presents theory and research that explores how students can learn and master the concept of modality.

Perhaps there is no other category with so many different and contradictory viewpoints about its linguistic nature like the category of modality. No matter how these viewpoints might differ, both linguists and educators share the opinion that this language phenomenon should 'be present' in the English language classroom. Thorough study of this grammatical phenomenon helps learners to comprehend and transmit information as well as to rightly understand what it implies.

This research provoked us to design learning situations that help learners get the most out of mastering the scientific concept of modality, which allowed applying elaborated teaching techniques in EFL class.

The findings of this study can be recommended for English teachers of high schools to be applied at any level of high school students' proficiency. The findings should be of general interest to all those who need to increase their level of knowledge of the English language for personal, academic, or professional goals.

RESEARCH METHOD AND STUDY MATERIALS

The main purpose of our research let us consider how scholars, linguists and educators, both foreign and Russian, define the category of modality.

In the preface to the book "Modality in Contemporary English (Topics in English Linguistics 44)" by Facchinetti, Krug, and Palmer (as cited in Nurmi, 2006), Palmer claims that the concept of modality can include many different linguistic expressions. Palmer maintains that modality contains both mood and the modal system that is English modal verbs. The author asserts that modality differs from tense and aspect in that it does not refer directly to any characteristic of the event, but simply to the status of the proposition (Nurmi, 2006). Endley (Endley, 2010) suggests that the simplest way to explain modality is to say that it has to do with the stance the speaker adopts toward some situation expressed in an utterance. The researcher is sure that modality reflects the speaker's attitude toward the situation being described. According to Cameron (Cameron, 2007), modality is what makes the difference between a factual assertion, and a more guarded view, or a bolder claim. Modality, then, is a resource speakers and writers use when they are staking claims to knowledge: it allows them to formulate different kinds of claims (e.g., assertions, opinions, hypotheses, speculations) and indicate how committed they are to those claims. In Radden and Dirven's viewpoint (Radden and Dirven, 2007), modality is concerned with the speaker's assessment of, or attitude towards, the



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potentiality of a state of affairs. Akhmanova was the first Russian linguist who defined modality as a conceptual category which describes the speaker's attitude to his own utterance and shows how the utterance correlates to reality. The author classifies different lexical and grammatical means to express modality, modal verbs including (Akhmanova, 2004). The Russian linguist Vinogradov gives a more extended definition of modality. In accordance with his point of view, modality reflects typical characteristics of reality and unreality, but it also expresses either the objective or the subjective attitude of the speaker to what is expressed (Vinogradov, 1975; Ushakov, 1940). defines modality as a category which expresses the degree of certainty of the speaker's judgment, and states that modality can be represented by different grammatical and lexical means such as modal verbs, subjunctive forms and intonation patterns. English grammar textbooks elucidate modality as a semantic category that deals with two types of judgments: 1) those referring to the factuality of what is said (its certainly, probability, or possibility); 2) those referring to human control over the situation (ability, permission, intention, obligation) (Greenbaum, 1996). (Panfilov, 1997) regarded modality as a category of linguistics, but also that of logic. The author traces the immediate connection between modality as a linguistic phenomenon and the logical structure of thinking. As useful as modal verbs are in communication, they are not easy to learn or to use appropriately for non-native speakers of English (Gibbs, 1990). English language learners may have a relatively simple time learning the rules of modal verbs but may have a bigger problem recognizing and using modal verbs properly with respect to their underlying meaning (Cook, 1978). English language learners are often confused by modal verbs because they are used differently than other verbs and in a wide variety of situations. A reasonable question can arise: "How to teach modal verbs?" Some scholars challenge to find a clue to this question (Solnyshkina et al, 2016; Gafiyatova and Solnyshkina, 2015; Subich et al, 2016; Yarmakeev et al, 2016). They assert that studying any linguistic phenomenon might be much more productive via the parallels with the native language.

Thus, literature review helped us to conclude, first, that modality is a category multidimensional by its nature and, second, that no communication is possible without the use of modality due to the variety of the ways of expression of this category. Literature review ensured us to state how important it is to provide students with the opportunity to master the scientific concept of modality and to learn to use modals in the English language classroom.

In this study, new approaches to teaching modals in EFL class were developed with the aim in view to facilitate the assimilation of the concept of modality by high school students. We applied teaching techniques that encouraged students to practice modal verbs in everyday situations. Keeping on mind the purpose of the study, we made an attempt to innovate approaches to teaching modals in EFL class. The research enabled us to devise teaching techniques based on creative problem solving activities.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Practice shows that students are not able to keep in mind all the meanings of the modal verbs. Learning by heart becomes too boring for them. The only solution is to introduce new types of activities which will raise students' interest and encourage them to study this grammar phenomenon with more interest. These are creative problem solving activities described in the following two copyright teaching tips.

TEACHING TIP “YOU MAY LIKE IT”

Levels: Intermediate +

Aims: Help students develop an understanding of modal verbs usage in real life.

Class Time: 45 min.

Preparation Time: 15 min.

Resources: A classroom computer with the Internet access. Audiovisual equipment and handouts.

RATIONALE

Films are enhancing the overall experience and they are offering a sense of immersion. Moreover, children also have the ability to embrace a cultural immersion which is always very important. The student activity receives a major boost here and students are enticed to further engage the stuff they like and enjoy it unlike never before.

PROCEDURE

1. Surf the Internet for video episodes with modals.
2. Play the selected video in class and ask students what they understood it was about.
3. Project the video's scenario on a screen, write it on the board, or hand in a handout for each student.
4. Discuss the meaning of the dialogues and draw students' attention to modals used in the film. Be sure to emphasize that modal verbs create some powerful images.
5. Play the selected episode in class again and ask students to read along.
6. Ask students to think of any equivalents that can be used to express the same meaning of expressions with modals in the film.
7. Model by writing a few lines, e.g.
 - a. What I was thinking was: “What could have happened to this girl to make her think she had no way out?” (“Titanic”)
 - b. Your version: What I was thinking was: “What might (probably) have happened to her that she was trapped (in a deadlock)?”



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8. Split students into groups of three, or ask them to work in pairs, and give them 10-15 minutes to write their own versions using at least one new expression.

CAVEATS AND OPTIONS

1. After students write their versions by replacing original expressions with modal verbs, they can share their work with the rest of the class.
2. Have students vote for the best work.

TEACHING TIP “YOU CAN KILL TWO BIRDS WHILE LEARNING MODALS”

Levels: Intermediate +

Aims: Teach students to use modal verbs and practice traffic rules for pedestrians.

Class time: 45 min.

Resources: A printed copy of the text of a one page article for each student. Worksheets ## 1-2.

RATIONALE

English language learners face up to the challenge of using modal verbs in EFL class. These simple activities are an effective way to teach them to familiarize themselves with this complicated linguistic phenomenon. These activities can also improve students' knowledge on traffic rules for pedestrians.

PROCEDURE

1. Activity # 1. Scan the text to make a list of all modal verbs. Tick all the modal verbs you know. Use WORKSHEET 1.
2. Activity # 2. Read the text and draw a traffic symbol sign describing traffic rules for pedestrians. Create an inscription with a modal verb. Use WORKSHEET 2.
3. Activity # 3. Read the text and say which traffic rules for pedestrians are new for you.

CAVEATS AND OPTIONS

1. To make activity # 1 competitive, the teacher may divide learners into teams. There might be 2 or 3 teams depending on the number of learners. The team that has a longer list of the ticked words wins.
2. Activity # 2. Have students vote for the best work.



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WORKSHEET 1

Scan the text to make a list of all modal verbs. Tick all the modal verbs you know.

You must not loiter on any type of crossing. If you have to step into the road, look both ways first. If there is no pavement, keep to the right-hand side of the road so that you can see oncoming traffic. You should take extra care and be prepared to walk in single file, especially on narrow roads or in poor light keep close to the side of the road. When using any type of crossing you should always check that the traffic has stopped before you start to cross or push a pram onto a crossing always cross between the studs or over the zebra markings. Do not cross at the side of the crossing or on the zig-zag lines, as it can be dangerous.

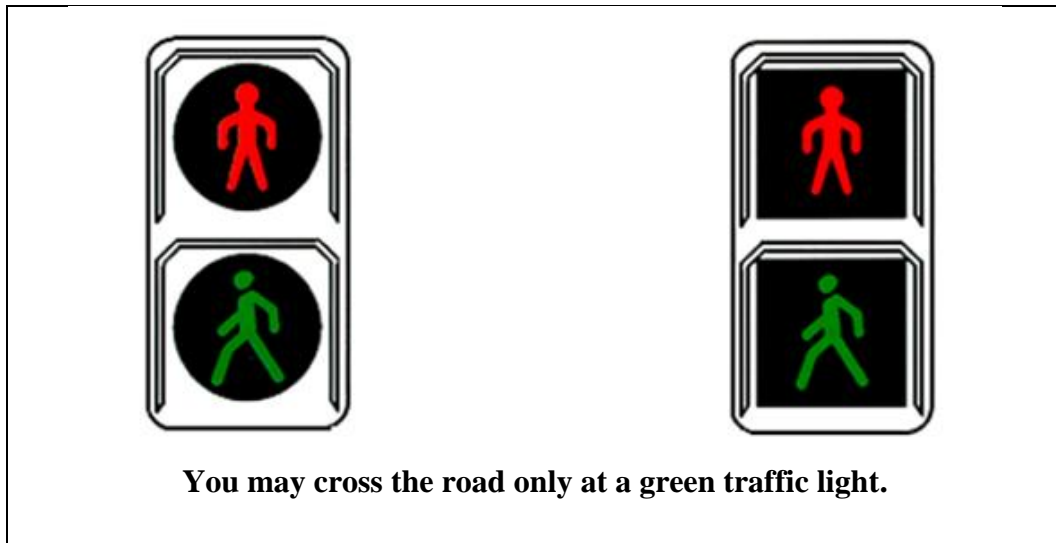
Young children should not be out alone on the pavement or road. Large groups of people walking together should use a pavement if available; if one is not, they should keep to the left. People on the outside of large groups should also carry lights and wear reflective clothing.

Children should be taught the Code and should not be allowed out alone until they can understand and use it properly. The age when they can do this is different for each child. Many children cannot judge how fast vehicles are going or how far away they are. Children learn by example, so parents and carers should always use the Code in full when out with their children. They are responsible for deciding at what age children can use it safely themselves.

#	Modal verbs	
0	must not	√
1		
2		
3		

WORKSHEET 2

Read the text and draw a traffic symbol sign which will describe traffic rules for pedestrians. Create an inscription with a modal verb. For example:



SUMMARY

The role of grammar has always been a disputable issue in linguistics. In the 1950s-1960s, Chomsky's "grammatical competence" dominated in the linguistic field claiming that knowing a language equals to knowing the grammar of that language (Chomsky, 2000). In the 1970s-1980s Hymes' concept "communicative competence" suggested that knowing a language should also include being able to use the language for social and communicative interaction (Hymes, 1972). According to the theory of communicative competence by (Richards and Rodgers, 2001), focusing on meaning rather than form does not mean that grammar can be ignored. Instead, it should mean a balance between language system and competence in its use, with an emphasis on meaning (Shumin, 2002).

Modal verbs, because of their complexity in both syntactical form and semantic meaning as well as of their importance in all communication types, are challenging for non-native speakers to learn and use. From the modal verbs available to him, a speaker has to choose the one which will best fit his communicative intentions in a particular situation. In this respect, the teaching tips, presented in this study, will be especially useful to EFL instructors teaching intermediate grammar. These teaching tips offer students materials they have to actively engage in order to achieve a goal or complete a task. For example, teachers aim to stimulate their learners' ability to understand traffic rules for pedestrians, they should confront them with functional tasks in which the students are asked to produce these rules. With authentic materials, learners make far more rapid progress and are able to use their new foreign language in real-world circumstances with a reasonable level of efficiency.

CONCLUSION

This study has led us to conclude that students are actually able to operate an effective meaning system of modal verbs, that is, to express what they want to say with the help of



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modals, even though their grammar and lexis are often far from perfect. The findings of this study are in line with some researchers like Newmark (Newmark, 1966) who mentioned that grammar teaching interfered with language learning and the language analysis. Moreover, teaching techniques based on creative *problem solving activities* we offer prove the words of Chien (Chien, 2014) who believed that under task-based language teaching learners can learn issues better because the tasks are comparable to the activities in the real world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study was performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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