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The problem of modality and the modals

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Проблема модальности и модали

Аннотация: Статья посвящена проблеме модальности и модали. Различают различные возможные связи между модальностью и модалностями. Подчеркивается, что характеристика системы модальности является производной от модальной логики.

Annotation: The article deals with the problem of modality and modals. It is distinguished the various possible relationships between modality and modals. It is emphasized that the characterisation of the system of modality is derived from modal logic.

Ключевые слова: модальность, модалные глаголы, разные синтаксические и морфологические модальные глаголы.

Key words: modality, modal, modal auxiliary, various relationships, syntactic and morphological grounds, alternative view..

Even without any preconceived notions about the concept of modality or the meanings of the modals, it is evident that some sort of relationship between the two is assumed to exist. This is indicated by the choice of premodifying adjective (viz modal auxiliary 6) and by the fact that the majority of studies of modality all focus upon this particular subcategory of verbs. Hermeren makes the qualified assertion that "it is perhaps the modals that first come to mind when the term modality is mentioned" (1978:12). Additionally, Perkins (1980:162) provides a number of reasons for the centrality of the modal auxiliaries within the system: they are the least formally explicit, or marked (ie least specific), of all modal expressions, thereby constituting the most straightforward means of expressing modality; and they conform to the generalisation that "the more fully something is grammaticalised rather than lexicalised ... the more central it is in the system". However, the preeminent position of the modal auxiliaries within the range of possible

expressions of modality in English is not being disputed. Rather, it is the precise nature of the link between the modals and modality that is of interest here. It is possible to distinguish two broadly alternative views of this relationship:

1. Modality = the meanings expressed by the modal auxiliaries. 1.i The modal auxiliaries express ALL possible modal meanings and are the ONLY expression of these meanings. i.ii The modal auxiliaries express ALL possible modal meanings, which can also be expressed by nonauxiliary forms.

2. Modality = a concept that can be characterised independently of the modal auxiliaries.

2.i The modal auxiliaries express ONLY but not necessarily ALL modal meanings. 2.ii The modal auxiliaries express neither ALL nor ONLY modal meanings. While this is, of course, merely a schematic presentation of various possible relationships Which may be seen as obtaining between the concept of modality and the set of modals, it

is possible to relate 1. and 2. to formally based, and to semantically based, studies of modality respectively.

The former type of analysis tends to be both inflexible - failing to allow for the fact that the semantics of a closed set of verbs isolated on syntactic and morphological grounds might not exhaust all modal meanings - and arbitrary, as observed by Palmer: A formally defined category will contain some semantically heterogeneous items. If we ... define modality in English in terms of the modal auxiliaries, we shall, by including WILL, have to include within the system of modality both futurity, which seems to belong more to the system of tense, and volition, which has little in common with the more obvious modal concepts of possibility and necessity. (1979:2) Both these defects, of inflexibility and arbitrariness, derive from the fact that, in a narrow formal analysis, little or no consideration is given to modality as a conceptual system⁸. Any sense of system tends to emerge only indirectly, insofar as it can be abstracted from the 31 relationships between the notions associated with the traditional labels for the meanings of the modals - permission, possibility, ability, volition, obligation, necessity, probability and prediction.

The main problem associated with semantically based studies of modality, on the other hand, is that of indeterminacy. In the absence of any formally definable limits, an ever-expanding and syntactically heterogeneous class of modal expressions will be the result, with the consequent loss of any single, unifying element to give cohesion to the class⁹. These two approaches need not, of course, be pursued independently. Palmer (1979:17) explicitly acknowledges 'two starting points', the one formal, the other semantic, and appears to hold a view similar to that expressed in 2.ii. above, in that he recognises that not all of the meanings expressed by the modal auxiliaries are obviously related to the central modal concepts of possibility and necessity (eg futurity and volition), and that certain other

verbs (eg BE ABLE TO and HAVE (GOT) TO) must be discussed in order to "complete the semantic systems into which the modal auxiliaries fit". In other words, the modal auxiliaries alone do not express all or only modal meanings. This is the conclusion I also draw. This study is predicated on the assumption that modality is a concept independent, in principle, of its expression through the medium of the set of modal auxiliaries and, in accordance with this view, adopt a Characterisation of the system of modality that is derived from modal logic. However, for reasons of space and in the interests of closer analysis, my central argument - that modality is fundamentally nonfactive - will be explored in relation to only those aspects of the system of modality that are manifested in the semantics of the modal auxiliaries. I shall argue that the modal auxiliaries are least modal when they occur in contexts of determinate factual status, that is when they bear either a factive or a contrafactive interpretation.

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