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**A SEMANTIC AND FUNCTIONAL
INTERPRETATION OF MODAL VERBS
IN BUSINESS AND LEGAL
ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN**



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to his PhD thesis, a study focused on the modal verbs in PhD theses written in two departments of the University of Reading, Paul Thomson wrote with reference to Sally Burgess's task in writing her own introductory chapter:

In writing my own PhD thesis, I find myself in a similar situation, yet on a broader scale. For the last five years, I have collected, read, reformatted, and then tagged, analysed, given presentations and written about PhD theses, in a range of subject areas. Through these experiences, I have learned much about the ways that PhD theses can be organized, the multiplicity of tasks that are performed in the creation of such large, substantial texts, and the thousands of decisions that have to be made about how best to stage and how best to frame one's argument. (Paul Thompson 2001: 1)

Now it is our turn to write a PhD thesis¹ that integrates the results of our research during three years of study in which we have gathered and analysed data. Two types of motivation have determined the choice of the field and theme of our thesis: firstly, a personal motivation represented by the desire of a vast knowledge of modality, modal verbs, their meaning and interpretation in English and Romanian in two genres, business and legal, and secondly, a scientific motivation based on the knowledge of the achievements already existent of researchers in the field and on the comparison of their results with our own.

1.1 Field of research

The study of modality is a complex undertaking which requires the merger of several domains of linguistics. This combined approach is necessary because of the discursive complexity of modal items. The research conducted in this doctoral thesis involves domains such as **semantics, functional linguistics, pragmatics, applied linguistics and translation studies.**

¹ Prezenta lucrare de doctorat este rezultatul cercetarilor realizate în cadrul proiectului *Creșterea atractivității, calității și eficienței studiilor universitare de doctorat prin acordarea de burse doctorale, POSDRU/6/1.5/S/14, Beneficiar – Universitatea din Craiova*, cofinanțat din Fondul Social European – Investește în Oameni, prin Programul Operațional Sectorial Dezvoltarea Resurselor Umane 2007 – 2013.

Semantics is of particular importance in the analysis of modals, modality because modality is a semantic concept by which speakers express attitudes towards the event contained in the proposition. Modality refers to the broad domain of attitudinal qualifications that convey the speaker's stance towards or the speaker's evaluation of what is being said.

The theories of **functionalism** draw attention to the fact that language is contextually dependent, that it functions as both speaker-generated and context-generated, that modal verbs are functional elements that change the interpretation not by means of their semantic meaning, but through their pragmatic and functional roles.

Pragmatics is essential in the analysis of modals, because besides their core meaning, one has to search for their pragmatic meaning within the discourse unit. Therefore, the tools of analysis that the field of pragmatics provides are very efficient in the discovery of the functions and roles the modals fulfil in discourse. One has to take into consideration not only the visible linguistic mechanisms of modal use, but also other types of personal, social, discursive or pragmatic motivations that participants in the conversational event have when selecting a modal item.

Applied linguistics is a valuable direction of research, its primary concern being the application of linguistic theories and findings to the teaching and learning of modals.

Translation studies provide valuable insights into cross-linguistic aspects of modality. Translation techniques allow us to investigate how translation equivalence works in relation to the original texts. In order to achieve an appropriate translation, a translator must be aware of semantic and formal inadequacies between the source and target language.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Modality is a semantic-grammatical category which is expressed in different ways by different languages, so it would be very interesting to see what English and Romanian have in common concerning the use of modal verbs in two genres, business and legal and what the differences between them are.

This study will deal with the uses of English modal verbs, focusing on the functions and semantics of *shall (should)*, *will (would)* in an attempt to compare their occurrences and functions in two different genres, business and legal, also to establish areas of similarity and contrast between English and Romanian.

Modals are a feature of language that makes it possible for speakers and writers to fit their statements to the style required by particular settings. Words, sentences and phrases acquire content when we utter them on

particular occasions and what that content is may differ from one context to the next one, so it is the task of semantics to describe all those features of the meaning of a linguistic expression that stay invariable in whatever context the expression may be used. This category of verbs needs to be studied and understood by non-native speakers, as their use could be very problematic because they vary in form and type being among the most challenging concepts.

Modals are very important because they involve communication about advice, about obligation or permission and also about our interpretation of events, our judgments about what we think happened or is happening, and modals also help us to express our decisions about what we think, about what we know and how strongly we believe that our knowledge is correct.

The present study will first deal with the semantic, functional and pragmatic aspects of modal verbs in English and second, will analyse and describe the uses of *shall*, *will* and their historically past equivalents (*should*, *would*); it will also compare their meanings with their Romanian counterparts in two genres, characteristic of business and legal texts. Since modal verbs express the writer's/speaker's attitude towards the utterance, in general, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the source language (SL), i.e. English and target language (TL), i.e. Romanian in the deontic and epistemic fields expressed by *shall* and *will*. In English, modal verbs are used to express a variety of meanings, such as 'probability', 'obligation', 'possibility', 'necessity', 'permissibility' etc., but such meanings are not always expressed in Romanian through a modal item, so, quite frequently, their correlations in the target language (Romanian) do not have the same pragmatic meaning, constituting a frequent pitfall in translation.

1.3 Research questions and objectives

1.3.1 Research questions

The goals that we set for our research depart from a set of research questions that systematize the content of our thesis:

1. To what extent is modality influenced by different genres?
2. What types of modality are commonly found in business texts and in legal texts?
3. Are modal verbs similarly distributed in various genres, business and legal?
4. Do modals perform different functions in the two genres, business and legal?

5. What are the areas of similarity and contrast between English (as source language) and Romanian (as target language)?
6. Are there types of modality non-translatable between the two languages?

The answers to the questions will be sought both in the theoretical and in the practical part (in the corpus-based analysis). These questions are to be answered implicitly by the observations that will be made throughout the thesis and a summary of arguments that constitute the answer to the six questions will be provided in chapter 5 where we present the results of our research. As we have already mentioned, the answer that we provide to these questions is both theoretical, but mostly practical, based on the analysis of the corpus of English and Romanian texts.

1.3.2 As regards the questions mentioned before, our research intends to achieve the following objectives:

1. To describe modality as an important conceptual category with reference to semantic, functional and pragmatic perspectives.
2. To analyse texts belonging to two different genres (business vs. legal) in order to identify possible differences/variations in the distribution and use of the modal verbs (*shall*, *should*, *will*, *would*), with particular reference to their deontic and epistemic meanings.
3. To identify the different functions that the four modal verbs have in the two different genres.
4. To carry out a contrastive analysis of the linguistic realizations of modality in English and Romanian pointing out those areas of similarity and contrast between the two languages with particular reference to the translation of samples of business and legal texts.
5. To propose strategies for translating the four modal verbs from English (the source language) into Romanian (the target language).
6. As the exploitation of modality is difficult for translators, an important objective would be to investigate whether the two languages have different means of rendering and realizing the same expressions of modality.

1.4 Significance of the study

The current interest in the study of modality and the necessity of expanding the research of the topic on other languages than English, a language upon which extensive research on the topic has been made, are two of the most general arguments in support of this research proposal

We are carrying out this study with the modest desire of proposing possible ways of interpreting the four modal verbs, “shall”, “should”, “will” and “would” and of identifying points of similarities and differences regarding the meanings and functions of these modal verbs in English and the way they can be rendered in Romanian. We hope that our study will contribute to comparative linguistics and translation studies as it may constitute a point of departure for the researchers who are interested in the category of modality, because, as far as we know, there are a few studies that have been investigated modality from a contrastive point of view.

Our thesis attempts to deal with the way modal verbs are used, especially the verbs *shall*, *should*, *will*, *would* (as modal verbs as well as markers of future time reference) in two genres, representing the language of business and the language of legal documents, in order to contribute to our knowledge regarding how they can be interpreted and to investigate how writers can use them in order to achieve certain meanings. As far as their translation is concerned, this thesis attempts to explore the points of contrast and similarity regarding the modal expressions found in both languages, thus representing a modest contribution to translations of modality in business and legal texts.

1.5 Scope and limitations of the study

The study is intended for specialists in the domains of semantics, pragmatics, functional linguistics in general, and in the study of modality in particular. Students and academics could benefit from the findings presented in this research due to the fact that it touches upon various theories and multiple directions that influence modal use.

This study is restricted to two languages (English and Romanian) in describing, analysing and comparing the occurrences and pragmatic as well as functional values of *shall*, *should*, *will* and *would*.

This is a corpus-based study: the samples of business and legal texts have been selected for the empirical part of the thesis with a view to illustrating the pragmatic and functional uses of the modal verbs.

In the translation analysis English serves as SL while Romanian as TL. The method of analysis and comparison between SL and TL texts has been chosen in the light of the theoretical part of the thesis.

1.6 The structure and organization of the study

In point of structure our thesis is divided into five chapters and several subchapters, each main chapter with its own introduction and conclusions:

Chapter One presents the field of research and statement of the problem, the research questions and objectives, it shows the importance and value of the study and it also defines the scope and limitations of our thesis.

Chapter Two may be regarded as a review of the related literature, the concepts of mood and modality and also a semantic analysis of modality according to some linguists (in particular, F. R. Palmer, J. Coates and M. Perkins). This chapter will also discuss the way modal meanings are realized in English through modal auxiliaries and non-auxiliary modal expressions and last, but not least, it will describe epistemic and deontic modalities in terms of their meanings and also the hypothetical and subjunctive uses of mood markers.

Chapter Three illustrates the scheme of meanings of the four modal verbs, *shall*, *should*, *will* and *would*, which we shall apply later in the thesis and also the genre-based analysis used for the empirical part of our study. Chapter Three also illustrates the framework established for our analysis, the methods used as well as the corpora we have gathered. This chapter also contains the empirical part of our study which tests our assumptions that our research questions. It presents the research conducted into business and legal English by analysing modality according to the scheme of classification established in the preceding chapter involving both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the four modal verbs in the genres we have mentioned above.

Chapter Four describes some theoretical aspects of translation through the functional approach and the notion of equivalence, as well as illustrating the contrastive analysis of the four modal verbs in business and legal texts in both languages, English and Romanian, through empirical data and taking pragmatic aspects into account. The qualitative analysis, in this chapter, will refer to the Romanian equivalents of *shall*, *should*, *will* and *would* in business and legal texts, while the quantitative analysis will outline the number of occurrences of Romanian modal counterparts of the four modal verbs already mentioned.

Chapter Five will include our final conclusions in which we will make a presentation of the results of our research, some recommendations and suggestions and, also, values and possibilities of application of these results, in the fields of general linguistics, applied linguistics and translation studies.

1.7 Research methodology

The qualitative analysis carried out in this study is complemented by a quantitative approach in search of similarities and dissimilarities between the occurrences of the four modal verbs (*shall, should, will, would*) in the business and legal texts as well as between their occurrences in English and their Romanian counterparts. The quantitative approach will prove useful when measuring the preference of different genres for certain modal verbs, which are subjected to a more thorough scrutiny. The tools of analysis that pragmatics, functionalism provide are of utmost importance for the present study. In exploring modality we have drawn up a framework of study containing theoretical issues related to the functions of the four modal verbs by using the suggestions put forward by Paul Thompson (2001, 2002). The tools of analysis that functional grammar and pragmatics provide are also of utmost importance for the present study. Therefore, this study has required patience and seriousness for collecting the texts and compiling the corpus in order to analyse the values of the four modal verbs according to the theoretical framework established. The contrastive analysis is carried out in order to point out the degree of adequacy in which *shall, should, will* and *would* are rendered in Romanian.

1.8 Corpus

Our analysis is based on two types of corpus, representing business and legal texts. We have selected the business texts from the ECB database concerning the European System of Central Banks and the legal texts from the electronic database EUR-lex. The cross-linguistic analysis is based on a bilingual corpus made of the corpora mentioned above and their Romanian business and legal equivalent texts also selected from the ECB and EUR-lex databases. The thesis investigates the use of *shall, should, will* and *would* in English texts and their Romanian translation on the basis of a 30,300 word corpus of business texts and a 29,900 word corpus of legal texts.

CHAPTER TWO

MOOD AND MODALITY IN PRESENT-DAY ENGLISH

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is a review of related literature, concept and definition of mood and modality and also the semantic analysis of modality. This chapter also attempts to render the way modal meanings are realized in English through modal auxiliaries and non-auxiliary modal expressions; it will also describe epistemic and deontic modalities in terms of their meanings as well as the hypothetical and subjunctive uses of mood markers.

We begin our discussion with an overview of definitions of mood and modality in the literature.

Modality is a cover term for a range of semantic notions being generally defined as the grammaticalization of speakers' attitudes and opinions. Scholars who have dealt with modality have used a number of terms and definitions.

According to A Dictionary of Stylistics, **modality**,

as used in logic, semantics and grammar is concerned with speakers' attitudes and perspectives towards the proposition they express. It is essentially a subjective and qualifying process: judging the truth of propositions in terms of degrees of possibility, probability or certainty and expressing also meanings of obligation, necessity, volition, prediction, knowledge and belief (K. Wales 2001: 255-6).

For Bybee and Fleischman (1995: 2), **modality** is

the semantic domain pertaining to elements of meaning that languages express. It covers a broad range of semantic nuances-jussive (grammatical mode expressing command), desiderative, intentive, hypothetical, potential, obligative, dubitative, hortatory, exclamative, etc. whose common denominator is the addition of a supplement or overlay of meaning to the most neutral semantic value of the proposition of an utterance, namely factual and declarative.

The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics, by P.H. Matthews (2008: 246-7) defines the term **modality** as "category covering either a kind of speech act or the degree of certainty with which something is said."

Also, from the perspective of the systemic functional grammar, Halliday views **modality** as part of the interpersonal constituent of language. He defined modality as